This is an interview with Mr. Horace Sheffield in Detroit, Michigan, July 24, 1968. The interviewer is Herbert Hill.

H: Mr. Sheffield I should like to begin by asking you when you were born, where you were born, how old you were when you first came to Detroit, and your early experiences as an auto worker and your first days of involvment with trade union activity in the Detroit auto industry.

S: I was born in Vienna, Georgia, and my parents brought me to Detroit when I was just about one year old. Most all of my schooling was in Detroit and I first entered the plant -- I went to work at Midland Steel when I was approximately 17 years of age. I got laid off there and went to work at Ford Motor Company on December 23, 1934.

H: Which plant?

S: At the Rouge Plant which means that I as of this day have thirty-four years seniority. Of course, I worked at Ford's and went to school too at night.

H: What school did you go to?

S: I went to Wayne University, I went to D.I.T., and subsequently I went to -

H: Would you tell us what D.I.T. is?

S: Detroit Institute of Technology. And subsequently I went to the University of California at Los Angeles - I lacked about 30 hours or so, I guess, to graduate. I became immersed in the labor movement at the time; as a matter of fact I joined the UAW about the summer or early fall of 1940 and I became a volunteer organizer and I participated actively in the campaign. At the time of the strike I was one of those who was instrumental in bringing Walter White of the NAACP here because at the time of the strike there were some differences that broke out between Negroes and whites. There was a handful of Negroes who remained in the plant. The company utilized the strikebreakers and of course the whites did too. But this precipitated -

H: But there were white strikebreakers?

S: There were white strikebreakers also.

H: Were Negroes predominantly among the strikebreakers or was there a significant number of white strikebreakers?

S: The great bulk of Negroes did not - were not strikebreakers. I couldn't tell you what the comparative numbers were between the two groups, but I know there were white strikebreakers and there were

Negro strikebreakers. Ford Motor Company paid some fabulous wages to the strikebreakers. But, at any rate, we were instrumental in getting Walter White here. We got hold of Dr. J.J. McClendon who at that time was president of the NAACP and we induced -- I never will forget that night -- we went out to J.J.'s house (he lived on the corner of Alger and John R.) and he got on the phone; we had to convince Walter White to come here. But immediately prior to that I was acting as president of the West Side Council, of the Youth Council, of the NAACP. We went to 212 and borrowed a sound truck and we had a sign made up that said "The West Side Youth Council of the NAACP supports the strike." And on a P.A. system we urged the Negro workers and the white workers to come out and join the strike.

H: What year was this?

S: That was in 1941.

H: What proportion of the employees of the River Rouge Plant were Negroes at this date?

S: Well it was difficult to say but I would say that there were a significant number of Negroes in the total employment at Ford's -- far more than any other plant -- in the Rouge Plant -- far more than any other company rather.

H: Why do you think Ford is different than the other major auto manufacturers in the terms of the employment of Negroes?

S: Well, it's difficult to say. I'm reluctant to impugn the motives of anyone. I'm more concerned about the results, that these workers, black workers were employed there, but I think.....

H: Were they limited mainly to the foundry and to other tough jobs at low pay?

S: Well, primarily the great bulk of them, or a large percentage of them, were in the foundry. But I would have to say also there was a good dispersal throughout the whole Rouge Plant. Negroes were in the trade schools, they were in the skills. I often tell people now, who talk about Negroes' reluctance to get into skills, where they had an opportunity there was always a backlog of Negroes at the Ford trade school. Negroes worked all over the plant. You had at that time a man by the name of Price who was a superintendant of the Abrasive Department.

H: A Negro?

S: He was a Negro, he was a star man, a star man in Ford parlance - in Ford he was a pretty big man. You had a Negro in the employment office, Don Marshall, back in those days. So, whatever his policy was, I don't know whether it was designed to forestall the entry of

the union, I don't know. But, at least by having such a large mixture of people it helped along with Ford Motor Company's policy of kind of a planned paternalism. He supported - Ford Motor Company supported some of the churches, bought coal and that sort of thing; and Negro workers, many of them went to the ministers to get jobs and the same thing was done with the other groups out there, the Poles, the Italians and what have you. And so what it meant was that at the time of the advent of the union there were kind of mixed loyalties toward the establishment in these various ethnic groups. And by and large these ethnic groups, and particularly the Negro community, sided with Ford Motor Company. Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

H: Now you gave us an explanation for Negro strikebreakers a moment ago, Horace, the fact that Ford paid good wages to the strikebreakers. Do you think that another factor might have been the fact that Negro workers generally looked upon unions with hostility because of the discriminatory practices of the AF of L unions?

S: Well, I would say that this may - might have been a reason but I would have to also say that the fact is the great overwhelming majority of Negroes did not strikebreak. So this does not give a lot of credence to that point, you see.

H: In many labor -

S: You must keep in mind that when we were organizing Ford's, Negroes were involved in all levels of its organization, you see.

H: Now isn't it true that there were some disagreements, rather sharp disagreements within the Detroit branch of the NAACP regarding the policy to pursue? Weren't you in some opposition, perhaps, to Dr. McClendon and some others and -

S: No, it wasn't so much Dr. McClendon. In other words, in the very outset the NAACP, the Board itself, was obviously as I indicated -

H: The Board of the local branch?

S: The local branch sided with, in other words if they didn't outright side with Ford Motor Company, they certainly were not in favor of the organization of Ford's. And as I pointed out, I mean I think this had been contrived, so to speak, as a result, or had come about -- let me delete the word contrived because I don't want to place any judgement values on what Ford did -- but I think it had come about as a result of the very substantial, in a relative sense, contributions that Ford Motor -- Henry Ford, the old man, made to many of the institutions in the Black community, in the Ukranian community, in the Polish community, and so on, you see.

H: Well, when you first proposed the idea of bringing Walter White to Detroit, and of the sound truck and urging Negro workers to leave

the plant and to support the UAW organizing efforts at 600, what was the initial response of the local NAACP Board?

S: Well, of course this matter did not go to the Board. When we went to McClendon there was a clear urgency, it was fairly obvious that we were going into a situation where anything could happen; and we were able to convince McClendon of the clear danger in the situation. But the posture of the Board, of most the members of the Board, had been manifested long before that at the inception of Ford organization in its last stage - they frowned on our involvement in it, the Youth Council's involvement in it. As a matter of fact they frowned on the Youth Council's involvement in the Neisner. There used to be a five and ten store chain here by name, Neisner's. Negro workers there tried to organize (that was back in '40 or maybe early '40 or '39) tried to organize the Neisner's ten cent store over on Hastings and Brewster. They frowned on that. They were generally opposed, and it may well be that in this instance it was a matter of, there were some memories about the treatment of Negroes in the trade union movement. But I think as much, it was also the fact that as a part of the black establishment they tended to react, or rather to share the general views of the white establishment at that time. But, at least at any rate, they frowned on it, they made that perfectly clear.

H: Well, how did you manage to get Walter White in here?

S: We managed to get -

H: There was a close relationship between McClendon and Walter?

S: Well, we managed to prevail upon McClendon. We went to McClendon's house, and made McClendon understand that we had trouble on our hands. We went to his house one evening. Now, Horace White was another factor, Horace White, who was close to the NAACP - I don't recall whether he was on the Board or not - Horace White took a position foursquare in favor of the organization in force.

H: How about Glouster Current?

S: I don't know -

H: Was he the Executive Director? No?

S: No.

H: He was with the Youth Council?

S: I believe Glouster Current was away at West Virginia State at that time.

H: Right.

S: But the thing is that we were able to prevail upon J.J. McClendon. Talking about Eugene Hall, I don't recall where -- Eugene Hall was working at the plant. He is now an attorney out on the west coast. We just sat down and told him, "Now look, we've got trouble. This town is going - now look, we are really going to have bloodshed out there." And so he got on the phone and called Walt White right then.

H: Roberta McBride

Mc: I had a question I wanted to ask earlier, but it's almost bypassed now. Your father was telling Jesse and me, Jesse Dillard, once when we interviewed him, that he always wanted Horace to go to Harvard Law School but you wouldn't have anything of it. You felt your role was here in Detroit?

S: I had just enrolled, I was getting ready to enroll in the Detroit College of Law when the real organizational drive broke that spring. I was getting ready to go into the Detroit College of Law in February of that year and, but at that point -- it seems to me I'd had some activity around liberal groups and I think I had considerable political awareness, and it seemed to me that the UAW was the vehicle for social change that I thought I ought to be a part of. With all the idealism of youth, I said, "Here really we have an opportunity now!"

H: What year was this?

S: This was - the strike really hit its high point and I guess it was fairly evident that we were going to suceed around February, you know in the last part of '40 and in the beginning of '41. And, so, then I didn't go to school, you see. I mean I got right in to the drive and there was really a lot of excitement, things developing and I got into the movement.

Mc: Did the fact that your father was a foreman out there limit you in any way?

S: Not in the least, not in the least because my father and I came to a parting of ways. I had moved from the house. See, because my father - my father had this deep commitment to Henry Ford and you can understand it. He had been a foreman there for 25 years or -

H: Your father did not support the organizing?

S: No, no, my father did not support the drive. No, no, my father was opposed to the drive. And I tried to show him -

H: Your father was a foreman in the plant?

S: My father was a foreman.

H: In what department?

S: The Salvage Department, I never will forget because I worked in the Salvage Department. He just couldn't see it. I can, I appreciate it because he had a memory of the things that happened to Negroes in the trade union movement but I tried to convince him. When I couldn't convince him he and I came to a parting of ways. And that is when I first came to leave the house. I moved.

H: How old were you then?

S: Ah, I must have been 24,25 years old.

H: Now, if I may get back to the Walter White incident, isn't it true that Paul Robeson came in earlier, appeared in Detroit, and urged support for the UAW movement?

S: I may say this. You know I've had an awareness of Paul Robeson for many, many years. Paul Robeson may have come in, but if Paul Robeson did come in, it did not have the significant impact that Walter White had. My recollection is, as I think back between the summer of '40, the fall of 1940 and April of 1941, Paul Robeson may have come in but it really did not have the kind of impact, you know, so that it lives in my mind. But the crucial phase of the Ford organizing drive was the second day of the strike.

H: Now, did you ride around the sound truck with Walter White?

S: Oh, well no. Walter White came and he spoke at Gate 4. Now riding around in the sound truck, you know, I had with me some of the Youth Council members.

H: Did Walter get on the sound truck?

S: He did, he did. We had a sound truck out there and he spoke, he pleaded with the Negro workers to come out of the plant and join the union, support the union.

H: Now after the victory at Ford, after there was a strike, and a historic battle, and eventually the United Automobile Workers did get a contract at Ford and became, and still are, the collective bargaining agent. Tell us about your professional trade union career at the conclusion of the Ford Strike.

S: Well, at the conclusion of the Ford strike I was first - I don't know whether I was appointed or elected - a committeman, but I mean at that time they were trying to get a structure in there, but subsequently I was elected a committeeman.

H: What department?

S: Covering the Salvage Department -

H: You were not in the foundry?

S: Yeah! I was in the foundry. I was in the Salvage Department in the foundry. Yeah! I was an inspector. Then I was appointed, made Educational Director of the foundry. I then subsequently was made

a defense employment committeeman and assigned to the Ford employment office, one of the first. And at that time my responsibility was to act in a surveillance capacity. We were then converting from civilian production to defense production and my job was to see that it was done with a minimal amount of discrimination. We were concerned about discrimination.

H: Was the foundry predominantly or wholely Negro?

S: Oh no, the foundry was, the majority of the workers in the foundry were Negro but -

H: A majority were Negro?

S: Yeah! But, we had many other ethnic groups, Poles, Italians, what have you.

H: You remained in the shop for some time afterwards. Now this was a period from 1940--1940, 1942. Is that right?

S: Ah, Yeah! This was the, the plant was organized, actually organized in 1941.

H: The first contract at 600 and throughout the Ford empire, right?

S: Yeah.

H: Now at this time the auto workers union was split into two major caucuses. There were some smaller groups but for all practical purposes in terms of serious contention for leadership there was the Addes-Thomas caucus, generally regarded as a left-wing caucus; and then there was the emerging Reuther caucus.

S: Right-wing caucus.

H: Right-wing caucus. Do you think it would be correct to say the majority of Negroes at this period supported the Addes-Thomas caucus?

S: Absolutely. That would be a correct statement - the majority of Negroes supported the left-wing caucus.

H: Why?

S: Well, I think you have to keep in mind that the left-wing played a real role in the development of the CIO. They were best able to articulate the Negroes' problems, the Negroes' aspirations, you see. And consequently when we organized, they had been a real factor in the organization of Ford's. Just about four years earlier, '37 as a matter of fact, the left-wing - Harry Bennett battled out in front of the Rouge and some years earlier. So they had played a real role - the left-wing - and I'm not suggesting they were all

Communists - I want to make that clear - but they played a real role. And of course they had an expertise. They developed an expertise in proselytizing Negroes, in getting to the Negroes. Because of this ability they had to articulate the Negro man and identify with him it was relatively easy, far easier for them - let me put it that way - to get the feel of Negroes than others who -

H: Well, evidently the great majority of Negroes felt that the left-wing caucus provided a more favorable atmosphere to press the Negro demand. There was a significant Negro leadership group which had a Negro caucus within the Addes-Thomas group and evidently there was feeling that the atmosphere, if not the program, was more favorable to Negro demands and that Negro workers might be in a more favorable position to press for their demands both within the union and within the shops within the Addes-Thomas caucus. Now significantly you appeared to be one of the very, very few Negro leaders of this period who was not in the Addes-Thomas caucus. Would you like to explain that, Mr. Sheffield?

S: Well, I can explain that simply on the basis that when I came into the UAW I did not have the naivete that many of the Negro trade unionists had. Because I had been exposed to political groups -

H: Would you please tell us something about the nature of that exposure to political groups? What were your own political involvements at that time?

S: Well, actually I wouldn't say that I had definitely formed any set point of view ideologically-wise, but I had been associated with Tucker Smith.

H: Who was Tucker Smith?

S: Tucker Smith was a socialist in this town.

H: Was he in the Socialist Party?

S: No, he had been involved in the trade union movement.

H: Was he a Negro?

S: No, white. A group of us had a Keep America Out of War committee and these kinds of things. But I also had been exposed to the left-wing. I remember in '39 when we had the peace mobilization in Chicago -

H: The American Peace Mobilization.

S: Representative Lundeen was killed coming there. Marcantonio spoke there. Now this obviously was the left, you know, the left in the ideological sense. So I had at least, I enough exposure and I had enough information about various groups that I could make what were

to me relative, I mean relevant, alternatives, I mean relevant decisions.

H: What you're saying is that you had a political or an ideological base to make a judgment, to make a political judgment, regarding the nature of Communist influence in the left-wing caucus, and the significance of that influence. Is that what you are saying?

S: I'm saying that in part, because I don't think that really I was quite as savvy, as politically savvy, as what you suggest. But I think that I had had enough exposure that I had some insights into some of the manipulations of the left-wing - the party people.

H: Now in the course of doing this research, Horace, I have now interviewed a fairly significant number of Negroes who were active in the UAW in this period and I would like to get your response to the following assumption: It is my assumption now on the basis of my interviews that the overwhelming majority of Negroes in various positions of importance in the Addes-Thomas faction had no illusions regarding the political nature or the ideological quality of the leadership of the left-wing caucus, but that they were using the left-wing caucus, they were using the Communists to put it simply, to press for Negro demands, that is to say the overwhelming majority of Negroes, I think that there were some rare exceptions, were not in that caucus because of any ideological agreement with the Soviet Union or the American Communist Party, or Marxism, they really had no interest in this question. Their interest, their fundamental, their overriding interest was in advancing Negro interest. And that they were in that caucus because in terms of their reading of the situation, they determined that they could best advance the interests of Negroes in the left-wing caucus. It was not an ideological question. If the Communists thought that they were using them, then the Negroes were also using the Communists to advance the cause of Negro rights. Now would you agree or disagree with that assumption that Negroes were in the left-wing caucus not because of ideological agreement with Marxism or the Soviet Union or the Communist Party but the overriding issue was that of Negro rights, Negro gains - that they were in that caucus for that major purpose?

S: Well, let me say that if you're making -that assumption, then you're making a false assumption. Now there may well have been a handful of important trade union leaders who, just as you have outlined, felt this way - that this was a vehicle by which they could bring more leverage to bear on the Negro question. But let me say this to you: The Communist Party used them - it wasn't the other way around. All I would do is suggest that you go over some of the convention journals of the UAW, on the question of opening a second front; on a large number of issues -

H: There is no question that they followed the CP line, but this does not invalidate my -

S: But it does invalidate it for the simple reason that those of us who at that time said we have to have victory at home as well as abroad were called black fascists by these people. Why doesn't it invalidate your point? Those of us who insisted that it was just as important to have victory at home over discrimination - we were called fascists. Look, every twist and turn that the Communist Party made, they made it too. It just so happens that the night that Hitler marched into the Soviet Union, I was out at Pop Edelen's house - he used to be president of the Plymouth Local. Up to that time the line was, "We won't send our boys."

H: The Yanks are not coming -

S: That's right. And obviously, this was something I could go along with. I have some pictures of a parade down John R showing many of these same people - many of whom you know, and whom I am sure you have interviewed, saying it. But on that night I happened to be out at Grosse Isle - we were having a party - and it came through that Hitler had attacked the Soviet Union, and it wasn't even an hour until it came out, "Let's win the war." It was no longer an imperialist war, and those of us who had had some rapport - you know, fellows who like me were insisting we get Negroes in these plants - who were participating in demonstrations - they also opposed war bonds, things like that - but as soon as the Communist Party line changed, they were all for buying bonds.

H: They became superpatriots?

S: That's what I'm saying. So they were used.

H: Are you suggesting that during the period before the Soviet Union was attacked, that the Negroes in the Addes-Thomas caucus, the left-wing caucus, did not press for Negro advancement in the shops?

S: No, I did not say they did not press. I am sure they were just as concerned about the Negro problem as I was. But the advantage that I had was that I did not have any kind of yoke. In other words, they were so tied in to this element - and look, let me make it clear also that neither Thomas or Addes was Communist, but there was certainly a sizeable caucus which supported them.

H: The Nat Ganleys -

S: Nat Ganley, and I could name many others with whom these Negroes were aligned - this was their central support.

H: You're saying, Horace, that you made a political judgment, and weighing all things in the balance, the question of Negro rights, and the political implications, you were an anti-Stalinist, you had some experience in the Socialist movement, you made a political judgment.

S: I made a political judgment, yes.

H: Now, in addition to yourself, could you mention some other Negroes who were in the Reuther caucus?

S: Jimmy Watts, Buddy Battle - no, Jimmy came in later - Danny Carter, there were a number of Negroes. What I am saying is that there were exceptions to the general statement you made - about the bulk of Negroes. There were some notable exceptions, some very able guys, Negroes who held a pretty important position in the trade-union movement.

H: But you would not disagree with my general formulation that the majority -

S: Yes, there's no question of that!

H: Do you think they held the majority of the Negro rank and file workers?

S: I would say that by and large that they did. But I would say that on the other hand, that in Local 600 which was the whole heart of their movement, I could get elected. I was elected on the basis of the issues, the president over the opposition; and I was elected delegate every time that I ran by a very top vote. And that certainly suggests that what loyalty the black workers had to them wasn't based on any ideological issue. It could very well have been based on a statement of some problem in that shop, because I certainly was pointed out, on the basis of my disagreement with them, as a Fascist, and all these other things.

H: When did the issue of Negro representation on the UAW International Executive Board first arise as a major question?

S: As far as my involvement in the trade union movement is concerned, it first arose around the time of the proposed 1941 convention in St. Louis. When there was the question of the UAW going there, Negroes had to stay in Jim Crow hotels.

H: How was that issue resolved?

S: That issue was resolved on the basis of the UAW moving - leaving that hotel and going to another hotel. So then we began discussing this whole question.

H: Now, what was the respective positions of the left and the right wings on the question of Negro representation on the Board prior to the 1943 convention?

S: Well, the left-wing certainly articulated the question. They were most responsive to it. I think the 1943 convention was the Buffalo convention, and my recollection is that this was the only time,

coming into that convention, that it was a matter of any serious consideration.

H: How about the 1942 convention?

S: In the 1942 convention I ran for the Regional Director, for the position of Regional Director.

H: On the Reuther caucus?

S: At that time, I can't quite recall. The Reuther caucus wasn't then that much of a major factor, because the president of Local 155, who belonged to the left-wing group, supported me. Now in my judgement, that is a tactical thing. His name was John Anderson - not the John Anderson who is the S.W.P., but the other one, the tall one. At that convention, they encouraged me to run, so I ran. Really, it was after that convention, coming into the 1943 convention that the matter of a Negro on the Board became a meaningful thing.

H: By the time of the 1943 convention you were already an international representative?

S: That's right. I became one in November, 1942.

H: Who appointed you in November, 1942?

S: Richard Leonard, in Region 1-A, the equivalent of 1-A. Richard Leonard, at that time was close to, was in the Reuther caucus.

H: How many other Negroes were on the international staff at this time, when you became an international representative?

S: In 1942 there were perhaps a half dozen, four or five, or something like that. There were John Conyers, Oscar Noble, Walter Hardin, myself, Arturo Johnson, and I think William Bowman. These were all in Detroit. Oh, yes, there was one other - out of 212. What was his name? He went down to Indiana to work there - Leon Bates.

H: How about outside Detroit? Weren't there some Negro staff members in other states?

S: No. We were assigned, and worked around in various parts of the country.

H: Increasingly, my investigations show that a Negro caucus began to emerge, especially around Detroit, but beyond Detroit, some contacts in Saginaw and Flint, Grand Rapids and Muskegon. There was a loose, rather amorphous Negro group concerned with advancing the interests of the Negro within the union. At this stage I think it wasn't rigidly left or right, but generally, with some exceptions, yourself being the major example -

S: Of course, you had the National Negro Congress which obviously became a left-wing apparatus. There were quite a number of Negroes here involved in the National Congress. My recollection is that Coleman Young, Joe Billups, certainly, -I can't name them right off - this was many years ago -

H: How about Shelton Tappes? Was he involved with the National Negro Congress?

S: I wouldn't want to say until I went back and checked my own material.

H: At the time of the 1943 convention you told me, as well as others, before the convention Negroes got together and planned to make Negro representation on the Board a fundamental question. Would you tell us something of the preconvention activity and your role in it, your relationship to Shelton Tappes and to the left-wing leadership?

S: Well, generally, we were all agreed that we ought to have a Negro on the Board. We were in two different caucuses, and of course we had communication between the two, even though we became estranged at one time or another on some local political issue in the local union. But by and large we had communication. However, overshadowing this, and really affecting it was the fight between Addes and Dick Leonard. Richard T. Leonard ran for secretary-treasurer of the union that year, and this tended to create some cleavage between the two factions of Negroes, but we all generally supported a Negro Board Member - we wanted a Negro on the Board. This was where we were. Now in terms of respective groups, R.J. Thomas' position was that he was not going to attach any Jim Crow box car on this union. In reality, I don't think the major forces in either caucus became enthusiastic about it.

H: Now the Michigan Chronicle, dated 9/25/43, carried a front-page story, "Addes-Frankensteen to support Negro Board Member", and the report refers to a conference which was held at the Fort Shelby Hotel and that the Addes-Thomas people announced through Shelton Tappes that their faction definitely supports a Negro for the Executive Board. Now, there is silence on the question from the Reuther caucus until there is a statement from you on this matter, a statement that the Reuther caucus also supports this demand, and then there is vast confusion and vast contradictions which I would now like to ask you to clarify. It seems that Reuther and the right-wing group does not indicate that you were authorized to make that statement - I'm putting the harshest interpretation on it, and I want to give you the opportunity to respond. The Michigan Chronicle of 10/16/43 says that you are under attack. The story is datelined, Buffalo, and says that you had to reverse yourself, and that you retreated on the issue of whether you were authorized to make that statement by Reuther, or make it on your own authority. What indeed were the facts, so that, once and for all, we can clarify it?

S: Well, the facts are as I indicated. What happened was that the Addes-Leonard thing really overshadowed everything else. My recollection of this thing from the very outset is that a group of Negroes in the Reuther caucus demanded the support of a Negro Board Member, and we got an understanding that the Reuther caucus - we got it from the leadership of the Reuther caucus - Leonard, who was running for secretary-treasurer at that time - and my recollection is that we met with Walter.

H: And did Walter give you a commitment?

S: The commitment that he would support a Board Member - not a Board Member at Large; he didn't think it should be done on a Jim Crow basis, but that he would support a Board Member. Now, when we get to the convention - and it seems to me that this is the substantive question - the reversal, and what have you - the issue, when it hit the floor, hinged, on the one hand, on a Negro Board Member at Large who would have a vote, one vote, as opposed to the lowest vote which any Board Member carried, ten or twelve votes. That was the issue. And this is where I opposed this. I will never forget the meeting at the Vendome Hotel following this issue - a very bloody issue. There were quite a number of Negroes who, on the basis of the watered down proposal, weren't in favor of a Board Member at Large. We were in favor of a Board Member at Large carrying the same number of votes which the least member on the Board carried. Now that was the issue, and this is where we opposed it, because we thought it was out and out Jim Crow.

H: Where was Oscar Noble on all this?

S: Oscar Noble was on the staff. My recollection is that Oscar Noble was more or less supportive of the Tappes forces.

H: "Oscar Noble declares for the candidacy of Shelton Tappes" it states on the front page of the Chronicle of 9/4/43, and evidently Tappes was running for the Executive Board. The issue, frankly, is not clear in my mind. I would like to go over it one more time, if I may.

S: Well, actually you can look at the Convention Journal of that period. It's spelled out very well - I spoke on the issue.

H: Well, the Convention Proceedings would indicate that you were inconsistant, or at least, the public statements in the Michigan Chronicle, contrasted with your statements at the convention, would suggest some inconsistency or a change in position. The only question here, which I'm trying to clarify at this point is, "Were you authorized (you say you were - you had a meeting with Walter in Detroit before you went to the convention) and at that stage Walter, in person, authorized you to make a statement?

S: Walter stated, they stated they would support a Negro for the Board,

a Negro Board member.

H: And you stated that publicly?

S: Yes. I don't recall whether I was interviewed, or whether I had an article in the Chronicle. Let me clear you on this point. On the convention floor there was no inconsistency. I stated that I was for a Board member, but that I was opposed to putting a Negro on who carried only one vote, and the least votes carried by any other member was ten or twelve. That was my position. I stated that on the floor of the convention.

H: Was Willoughby Abner from Chicago involved in 1942?

S: No. Willoughby Abner really became involved, he became a prominent person when he nominated Walter Reuther - my recollection is, or at least he served as Chairman of the Resolutions Committee in the 1947 convention in Atlantic City.

H: What happened after the Buffalo convention? My assumption is that there emerges an almost nationwide Negro caucus to continue pressing for these demands. What happened after the 1943 convention, because the issue comes up again in the 1944 convention and later conventions?

S: After the 1943 convention there did not emerge any nationwide Negro caucus, really. We got in a lot of fratricidal conflict back in the local union here in Detroit. But you say that the consciousness of Negroes on this question certainly was stimulated, and there were expressions from time to time. As a matter of fact, if you check through the convention journals you will find that Negroes were nominated for vice-president, and for other offices, through the years, coming into the 1959 convention. But the only serious attempt - well, there were sub-caucuses organized; we organized, what is it, Workers Advancement Council, and later we organized the TULC.

H: Now, first - there is the Metroplitan Labor Council. Tell us a little about that.

S: The Metropolitan Labor Council - I can't tell you an awful lot about that, I really can't. I don't think I got very much involved in it, so I couldn't tell you much about it.

Mc: Did it exist at the same time as the Workers Council for Metropolitan Development?

S: I really couldn't tell you that, either.

H: In the Michigan Chronicle of 10/23/43 there is an article by "Horace L. Sheffield, member of Local 600". The headline reads, "Sheffield explains position on UAW issues," and here you state, "The statement has been made that I switched my position, that although I was

in favor of a Board Member at Large before the convention, I was against such a proposition when it came on the floor of the convention. Admittedly, I did switch my position, and for which I have no regrets, because events which occured at the convention not only indicated the vulnerability of our original proposal, but also made me seriously question the sincerity of some heterogenous groups who were its advocates." Now what is it that happened at the convention which made you sharply reevaluate your position?

S: Well, the principal thing was the dilution of the proposal.

H: Who diluted the proposal?

S: Nat Ganley. I don't know who diluted it in the Committee, but Nat Ganley was the spokesman for the proposition as it finally came out. Again, it also appeared at that convention, that this became a rallying issue, this whole issue of a Negro Board Member at Large became a rallying issue, the fulcrum, so to speak, for the battle over the Secretary-Treasurership, and it was a matter which really just engaged the Negro delegates, to try to get the Negro delegates lined up one way or another, but the real issue was the proposed Negro Board member having only one vote.

Mc: And did that Negro group stay with that proposition, once it was so diluted?

S: The other group did, but some supported the same position I did.

H: Where was Bill Oliver in all this?

S: Bill Oliver, in all this? I don't even recall Bill Oliver. I don't think Bill Oliver was really involved at that time.

H: When does Bill Oliver start to emerge as a figure in the union?

S: Bill Oliver began to emerge - he was Recording Secretary of Local 400 - and after the 1946 convention when Walter Reuther first gained election as President, Walter Reuther then appointed him assistant director of - I don't know, we didn't call it Fair Practices, maybe Anti-Discrimination Committee, to replace George Crockett. That was the emergence of Bill Oliver, out of Local 400 - my first awareness of him.

H: In the 50's, the late 1950's, the issue again emerges very strongly on the question of a Negro on the Board. In the 1959 convention, as I recall, you and Willoughby Abner, were very active in the struggle for a Negro board member. Tell us about the 1959 convention. I have here before me a front-page headline from the Michigan Chronicle dated 10/24/59. "Why Negro delegates took walk during UAW national conflab," by my old friend Charley Wartmen - it states that 45 Negro delegates walked out of the UAW convention Friday because they felt there had been deliberate stalling on the consideration

of the Civil Rights Resolution by the convention. In 1959 there was a national Negro caucus operating in the UAW, wasn't there?

S: Well, only to the extent - and I wouldn't say it was national - we pretty well had communications with key Negroes in most parts of the country, but if you will recall, the TULC was organized in 1957, and it stimulated some movement in Chicago - Willoughby Abner. I guess through this we began to maintain some kind of contact. We just made up our mind that this was an issue that had to be met.

H: Now, why did you organize the TULC?

S: We organized TULC for a number of reasons, I guess, chiefly because we realized this was the only way we were going to secure our full equity within the UAW and the trade union movement generally. You know, there were workers from all aspects of the trade union movement. We were also concerned with doing things in the community. We thought that since the overwhelming majority of the black community were workers, we had a kind of expertise, leadership-wise, which we could give.

H: You are suggesting that the Negro workers, certainly the Negro leadership in the union, on the secondary level were dissatisfied with the status of Negroes in the union. There was still no Negro -

S: ...es are still dissatisfied.

H: ...LC was the development of a black caucus. ...ty in other cities, particularly Chicago. ..., what happens at the 1959 convention?

S: ...n, we had talked this thing out, and ...ere concerned, and it was a matter of ...t. Everybody agreed it had to be done. ...tion knowing this had to be a highly ...ade our plans - either Abner or myself ...As it turned out, I happened to be a ...on the staff, I happened to be elected

H: ...'t it?

S: ... Abner wasn't. So Abner couldn't nom- ...r.

H: ... a meeting the night before the con-

S: ...ucus, the administration caucus.

H: ... Wasn't there a meeting of all the ...ore?

TRANSMITTAL SLIP

TO: Roberta McBride

FROM: Horace Sheffield

.....**For your information**

.....**Note and return to me**

.....**Per your request**

.....**For your action**

Comments: I have made a few changes in dates. Other than that it seems fairly accurate.

oeiu42

William Sheffield?

S: No, oh no! The administration caucus met, and Buddy Battle pushed the issue there, and scored the union for not having moved on this problem. You know, we had quite a to-do there.

H: This was the night before the convention opened?

S: Yes, the one that is always held, and of course the usual things were said.

H: Did you ask Reuther for a commitment, for a response?

S: I don't recall now. I was there, but my recollection is that George Burt, the Canadian Regional Director - I'm sure of it - chaired the caucus. But Burt talked about this thing of the Pole on the Board - this kind of thing. And it was evident we weren't getting anywhere.

H: Did you get a response from the leadership of the administration caucus, namely Walter Reuther? or Emil Mazey, or Roy Reuther?

S: You wouldn't have got one from Roy Reuther, because he wasn't on the Board. The general sentiment was, you know, "When there is a qualified Negro who comes along " - I don't recall who said that but that was the substance of what was said.

H: Now it was your position that there were qualified Negroes who had come along?

S: That's right. As a matter of fact you could read the convention journal where I pointed out about the Board, that there were no Rhodes scholars up here. Then we decided - there were only five of us - we went in total secrecy. We knew we had to keep this to ourselves, because if we got a large group - we didn't have any Negro caucus. If it had come out what we planned to do, it wouldn't have come off. There were only five who were privy to this.

H: Who were those five?

S: I don't know - well, yes I can say, it was Buddy Battle, Jack Edwards, Willoughby Abner, Ted Morgan and myself.

H: Well, what happened at the actual convention?

S: Well, at the actual convention I took the floor, and, contrary to all the caucus rules - and I was part of the caucus - I made a speech nominating Bill Abner for Vice President.

H: What happened?

S: What happened? Well, you can imagine what happened. This was unheard of. I understand, in fact, I know, that one officer said I should have been fired right then. Of course, I was just about in

a mood, that, if he had said anything they wouldn't have had to fire me. I was going to walk down that plank. I had made up my mind that this was it. If Jesus himself had said, "Don't do it, Shef!" I would have ignored Jesus. I figured I had had enough. You know, all the years we had waited, that this was the time to unplug the thing. On the other hand, there were those that, when I walked off the platform, came up and walked off with me. Guy Nunn was one of those fellows. Some of the fellows came up to me and said, "Look, I know it's a bitter, a diffucult thing, but, morally, you are right." Roy Reuther was one -

H: What happened after you nominated Willoughby Abner?

S: Well, Willoughby Abner declined. They wouldn't permit him to make a speech, as he had planned to do. He declined, but I don't recall now what he said, but that he identified with the remarks of his esteemed brother, Horace Sheffield. It was just like a bomb-shell had hit the place. Then immediately following that, Buddy Battle and the rest of them grabbed the bit and if you recall, this was following the San Francisco AFL-CIO convention where Meany had told Phil Randolph, "Who the hell told you that you represented all the Negroes?" And Buddy never got a chance to discuss the issue; consequently Buddy and them, they walked out, but they served notice that this was it, they were going for broke.

H: Why did the Negroes walk out?

S: They walked out because they had insisted on having this issue brought to the floor, the question of Phil Randolph, and Friday, they thought it wasn't ever going to come up, that they were being given the business, and they walked out.

H: You mean, Reuther held the issue of the treatment of Phil Randolph, the denunciation of Randolph by Meany at the 1959 San Francisco AFL-CIO convention till the end of the UAW convention, and the entire civil rights resolution, as I recall, until the very end, until the resolution was sort of dissipated.

S: They went to the Resolutions Committee and they asked the Committee to bring it out early at the convention, which they didn't do. They promised they were going to bring it out on Thursday, which they didn't do. So on Friday when they didn't bring it out, after a number of representations to the Resolutions Committee, they decided to walk out.

H: The Negroes walked out because of the failure of the Resolutions Committee to bring out -

S: Yes. There was no Civil Rights Resolution presented by that Committee, and it was at that time Battle and the rest of them wanted to join the issue of what happened at the AFL-CIO convention in reference to Phil Randolph.

H: Why do you think Reuther refused to permit the issue to come up?

S: I really don't know. Bill Oliver, as the head of the Civil Rights Commission would be the best guy to answer that one. I don't know what happened.

H: This concludes the first reel of this interview. I should like to ask you, Horace, why do you think the administration was very careful to prevent any discussion, at the 1959 convention, of any internal participation of the Negro within the leadership and the decision-making? (It is obvious this was the fundamental question involving the Negro delegates) And, secondly, what was the response of the Negro delegates, after the convention, to this state of affairs?

S: Well, let me say, first of all, that coming into the convention, Buddy, and quite a number of other Negro leaders in the UAW, had been really incensed over Meany's attack on A. Philip Randolph. There had been many press releases, and everything else. Coming into the convention, the very first night, the Board member issue was raised, and raised very heatedly. Then subsequent to that, a couple of days later, I took the floor, contrary to caucus rules, and I was a part of the caucus, because I felt it had to be done, and nominated a Negro, Willoughby Abner, for Vice President. Now I know that Buddy and other leaders went to the Resolutions Committee many times, trying to find out when the Civil Rights Resolution was going to come up on the floor. Now the only reason, I suspect (and I am giving you my own judgment) is that it was clear that the mood of the Negro delegates at tht convention was such that it would have tipped off a real bitter, acrimonious debate. Now, that's the only reason I can give you. But I know what happened on Friday, and I know Battle went to the Resolutions Committee again - I don't know whether or not they went to the officers - when it didn't come up on Friday, they walked off the floor. Buddy Battle and a large number of the Negro delegates walked off the floor. I'm not sure at what point this took place, but at some point Buddy had some conversation with Walter, and Walter agreed to set up a meeting as soon as they got back to Detroit, to discuss this thing. And I know that that meeting took place with Leonard Woodcock. At that meeting the groundwork was to be laid - it was to be discussed in a very exploratory manner with a number of key Negro delegates from some of the larger locals in Detroit in order to work toward the next convention and to insure that a Negro member be elected. Buddy had made it sure, beyond any doubt, that if it didn't happen there was going to be an explosion.

H: Now, let's examine the chronology of events which lead up to the next convention. Now, during this period your TULC, of which you were the Executive Vice President, and Buddy was the President, grows in influence and importance. You have had a number of significant public disagreements with the UAW leadership on a variety of community matters involving Negroes, including some political questions. You had some public confrontations with the UAW leadership on this question, and now, once again, a Negro caucus prepares for

the 1962 convention, and prepares to make a real fight for a Negro Board member. I'd like to have as many details of this development as possible. You and Willoughby, and Buddy were the leaders, were you not?

S: Yes, and Jack Edwards. The four of us.

H: Now, what happens in the period immediately preceding the 1962 convention? One final word: I gather at this stage you have rejected the earlier formulation that when a Negro is ready we will put him on the Board. Your position is that Negroes have come and gone and are still not on the Board. Now let me know - I'd like you to take as much time as you like - I'd like you to go on as extensively as you want to, to give us all the events, all the details which led up to the '62 convention, and what actually happened at the convention.

S: Well, first of all there was agreement among the four of us - Willoughby Abner, Buddy Battle, Jack Edwards and myself, that we're going to press for a Negro on the Board, and that we'd not get in the business of naming candidates. We're going to press for the issue. Coming down to, getting close to the convention, the International Executive Board decided to interview all the Negro aspirants. They held this interview with the officers and one or two Board members.

H: Is it customary to hold interviews with people who are going to run for office to determine their qualifications?

S: Not to my knowledge. I had not heard of that before. This was done in this instance. And of course a number of people had their own fellow they were pushing. But, ostensibly, this is the way it was supposed to have been. It became evident that Willoughby Abner and myself were persona non grata, because we had gotten out in the middle of the thing and precipitated the fight. At that stage, just three or four weeks before the convention, the Regional Director of 1-A and another officer began to make a move for Edwards.

H: Can you tell me something about the preparations of the Negro caucus before the convention? I'm especially interested in this point.

S: All right. You see, in other words, we had a Negro caucus here.

H: It was not just a Detroit caucus?

S: No, but you see, you had two principle groups, Chicago and Detroit. Now, obviously, the Negroes in Chicago supported Abner, the Negro caucus in Detroit supported me. Again, this was a tactical move, to show what Negroes were concerned that we had support. The upshot of the thing was, though, that Edwards began to pick up support - McCusker, and -

H: Wasn't there an agreement, however, that when you got to the convention, someone would nominate someone else, wasn't there an agreement that certain things would happen at the convention?

S: No, no. We're talking about '62 now, not '59; and in '62, no. Because it was evident that the Board was going to pick the Negro, so that wasn't even a consideration.

H: How was it evident that the Board was going to pick the Negro?

S: It had been stated.

H: You had gotten a commitment from the leadership?

S: Yes, the Board was going to make the selection and recommend him to the caucus. And the Negro would run at large before the whole convention.

H: So what you're saying is that the white leadership chose the Negro and not the Negro caucus? They made the choice?

S: They made the choice.

H: And they did not choose you? They chose Edwards instead?

S: They chose Edwards.

H: Wasn't Abner the first choice? Or were you?

S: No, I think that as far as Abner and myself were concerned, I think we both recognized that we had about as much chance as a snowball on the proverbial hotplate.

H: Why?

S: Well, because, number one, in the minds of so many people, we had committed the unforgivable sin. We had antagonized the leadership.

H: But, at the same time, Abner and Sneffield are recognized as the two most prominent leaders in the UAW.

S: But that meant nothing there, you see. Now, when you get right down to the show-down, the Board, or the leadership apparently was going in one direction. Abner and I insisted on a meeting with Walter Reuther. We took the position it had to be some fellow who would stand up, who at least had some guts, and if it became some other fellow who we knew didn't have any, we were prepared to give him our resignation, and go back to the shop.

H: Abner and you both said that to Walter at a private meeting?

S: That's right, just preceding the convention.

H: You actually tendered your resignation?

S: We put it this way; we knew that as far as we were concerned we were out, but that we, in terms of the struggle we had made, we wanted a Negro who would, you know, stand up. So we then swung our support to Jack Edwards, because at that time the fellow who really had the inside track - I won't name him - whether rightly or wrongly, as I now look back - we didn't think he was the guy, and this is the way we went. On the basis of what it appeared to Abner at that time, and to me, we -

H: Were you and Abner in agreement on this?

S: Oh, yes, we were in agreement; we met with Walter, because the other candidate - it looked as if he had the inside track.

H: Who was the other candidate?

S: I don't want to name him, because it imputes to him something that maybe we weren't entirely justified in feeling, at that time. I wouldn't want to do that. But at least that is the way we felt at that time. Well, after that was done, the Board decided to agree on Jack Edwards. Jack Edwards got the endorsement and Jack Edwards was elected.

H: Now at the convention who nominated Jack?

S: My recollection is that Sam Fishman nominated him, if I am not mistaken. Now, the unfortunate thing about it is, and I think this is one of the tragedies, of this whole thing, it did create some division in TULC. Tragically, we got in a four or five-year rivalry that -

H: What was the basis of it?

S: I don't know. I guess there were those who gravitated to Jack, who felt the best way to enhance their own position was to precipitate a vendetta between the two groups. Subsequently MDELCO was set up and we had this sort of thing going for another year.

H: There are many of us who felt in 1957, '58, '59 that the Trade Union Leadership Council had a tremendous potential for growth and development under your leadership, you and Buddy. Under you, it had the potential for revolutionizing the status of the Negro in Detroit by filling a leadership vacuum which no other group was prepared to fill. For awhile you were doing this; you were also involved in all sorts of innovative programs. I was always pleased to come and speak whenever you invited me, and we used to have some great meetings, very vigorous discussions; really, it was a major center for the exchange of ideas in Detroit. Among whites and Negroes there was the kind of discussion, the critical examination of issues. You were growing, you were setting up apprenticeship

training programs, you had bold and ambitious plans, you engaged in independent political action, you broke with the UAW in Cavanagh's first campaign, you won your fight. Why was the potential for that kind of development never realized? Why is TULC in a period of acute decline now? Why was the hope never realized?

S: Well, first of all let me say, unfortunately we, rather than expanding into a national organization ourselves -

H: You were affiliated to a national organization?

S: As a matter of fact, we were responsible for the national organization. We financed it and everything else. But in going into the national organization, I think we found more Negro union functionaries who were business-minded, much more business-minded than we were: they didn't have the same drive - perhaps the same convictions, but they weren't prepared to act them out. And they depended so much on A. Philip Randolph - they thought he would enable us to build a national organization. Of course, this never materialized. And at that time we had the kind of drive that if we had gone on and done it ourselves -

H: Why didn't you?

S: I think it was just natural. After Randolph came out of this fight with Meany, and we had had contact with trade unions around the country, we wanted to build a truly national trade union movement. It would inevitably follow that you would get hold of fellows like Brown out of the AFL-CIO, and the Robinsons and the guys around the country. I think we lost valuable time, and resources, involved in that. But then, that surely isn't the whole reason. I guess the other reason was that we got in this conflict between MDELCO and TULC. Unfortunately, it split the movement, and we had white leadership in the trade union movement who exploited it.

H: In 1962 - just about that time - at the December, 1962 convention of the Negro-American Labor Council, Randolph makes his peace with Meany. This was when he attacked me.

S: I remember that so well, because I got opposition - I put a resolution on the floor in support of you. I got bloodied.

H: I know.

S: And even people in the UAW, by the way, wanted to know what the hell was wrong with me, and I had to tell them what was wrong -

H: Perhaps I should belatedly at this point thank you for your support.

S: Of course, it is the first time you did it!

H: I thought it wasn't necessary - since you and I were in the same

ideological bag, it wasn't necessary. It was like thanking myself. It would never occur to me to thank you. But to be serious again, since the time was ripe for the emergence of a real national Negro caucus in the labor movement, and since all the things you say, your analysis of why the Negro American Labor Council never realized its potential, (of course, you are absolutely correct; it became an organization of Negro bureaucrats) why didn't you go over the heads of these Negro bureaucrats? Why not go to the Negro rank and file, and try to develop an authentic Negro caucus in each of the major international unions with a big Negro concentration and do the things nationally you had begun to achieve in Detroit?

S: Well, I can tell you - for the simple reason that anything that I did or said which was at variance, it was always made to appear that I was in opposition to A. Philip Randolph. I was attacking A. Philip Randolph, a man I esteem and love very much. I knew that if I did, it would be interpreted as an attack on A. Philip Randolph. Now, this was the kind of hang-up they created, and this was the problem.

H: I think you are right. There was an almost godlike aura about Phil. I remember when Phil walked down the room it was like Jesus. One felt one was in a supernatural presence. Nevertheless, at the New York meeting in 1962, you and Willoughby had serious differences about supporting me in the decertification of unions. Phil disagreed with me in this. You introduced a resolution attacking Meany. You did have differences, you did fight along a principled position -

S: And subsequently we put out a pamphlet on it.

H: Subsequently you put out a pamphlet on it. That's right. What happened - first, I'd like to put a question to you, what is your explanation for why Phil caved in?

S: Well, it's difficult for me to say, not being privy to what goes on at that level of the AFL-CIO. I would think that Phil, at that time a man in his mid-seventies, who had enough problems in his own union in an industry that was also dying. I suspect also, well, obviously, it follows that the union, financially, wasn't the best. I'm saying this not to impugn the man's integrity, but I just think the man had so many problems on his hands - what I could see of the Brotherhood, I just didn't see any young, virile leadership coming to the fore to support him, really, to back him up.

H: Did you and Abner at any time discuss the possibility of taking the leadership in the development of a national trade union movement, a caucus group within the established unions?

S: No, I think Abner felt something like I did. We were aware, A. Philip Randolph made it clear several times that he was going to step down, and we were hoping we could get some militant, perceptive leadership in his place, and we could go on with the job of organizing a real movement. But you see, this thing, this federation

became so autnoritarian. This Board - you think some of the Boards of the international unions were authoritarian - it just killed itself. I just gave up hope.

H: Horace, if one studies the history of Negro caucuses within the union for, say, the last forty years - there have been Negro caucuses for that long, or longer - one finds a kind of rhythm; they rise and they fall, every few years. Certainly it's true in Detroit and in Chicago, and in many different international unions. My research indicates that there is a historical continuity.

S: You know why? I'll tell you why. Because the man, you know, the white power structure in these trade unions is always able to split them. Now you have to keep in mind one thing. Now we talk about the white bureaucrat. Well, I got news for you, friend. You have the black labor bureaucrat, too. The historic fight, with a few notable exceptions, is just about as absent among the black functionaries, too, plus the fact that the international union has all this massive power, and you've got all these fellows who are vying for these jobs - they're just able to manipulate a split. There's no question about it - I see it, pitting one against the other.

H: Now, the historical record indicates what while none of these caucuses ever really achieved their full goals, they did make a significant advance for Negroes within the union. They never win their full demands, but they make half a step, and then it quiets down, and you say the leadership buys them off - the leadership gives them a few jobs, buys them off with a couple of black bureaucrats, but another three years later, five years later, almost inexorably, among a group of Negroes, people start all over again.

S: Let me tell you something. Also they show by example. Now, look! I'm a fellow, if I remain in the UAW thirty years, I will never get any further, in terms of - look, I will just throw out the window anything in the way of advances. And the advances I made came through the one black member. Now Negroes see this. We talk of why there are no more militants among the whites. Well, you know, really, the white militant would be crucified in the trade union movement, believe me, in spite of all the fine speeches. And you know what happens to the black militant, to one who was only trying to uphold and fight for what the union movement says it believes in.

H: Right!

S: So that is understandable. And I want to tell you, it's happening again, for we have a movement already started. A bunch of Negroes just shut down a plant. And they're advocating paying no dues. And what dues are collected are to go to further the black community.

H: Right. This is precisely the point. We are obviously entering into a period which is going to see a very rapid radicalization of Negro

demands and caucuses, new black caucuses which I see springing up all over - in the most unlikely unions - the events in Chicago with the Amalgamated Transit Union, and many other places - the ILGWU, and many other unions. Now, I would like to ask you, first, what do you see as the next stage for TULC? Will TULC just die? Disintegrate?

S: It doesn't have to. TULC doesn't have to die. It's really a matter of pulling our forces back together. There's just such a wealth of ability and resources that the TULC would have if we pull our forces together. Our problem is that they have kept us divided. Efforts have been made - it's been rather difficult - but I believe that TULC can still make a very meaningful contribution. As a matter of fact, I think it would be difficult for any other organization to attain, in the city of Detroit, the level it had unless someway, TULC was fused into it.

H: But there is now a very acute leadership problem in TULC. Do you plan to become active again?

S: I plan to become active, and will become active, if we can bring the forces together. This is what I've been working on, trying to bring the forces together again.

H: Tell me something about your current job. Would you describe it?

S: I'm administrative assistant to Nelson Edwards, Board-Member-at-Large. I participate in contract negotiations: we have small and large parts suppliers, like Budd Wheel, Alco, Kelsey-Hayes, Allen Industries. I also administer a staff of international representatives, Negro and white, and assistant department heads, and clerical help. This is fundamentally what I do.

H: Would I be right in concluding that you are now engaged in straight, routine union work?

S: That's right, but that has not precluded my maintaining some involvement in civil rights activities around the country.

H: Now you must surely be aware of the fact that there are Negroes in Detroit and in other cities who expressed two emotions about you: 1) a serious regret that you are not playing the vigorous, independent black protest role that you previously played in the organization and within the black community generally, and 2) there are some who even make harsher judgments which I am sure you are aware of.

S: That's right.

H: Would you like to comment on that?

S: Well, let me say this. I've always felt that whatever I did, it

ought to be relevant, to be meaningful. In the face of the division which took place in this town in the trade union movement, it was virtually impossible - you know, you were just bucking up against a brick wall. But that hasn't deterred me - that matter of "selling out" when I went to work for Jack Edwards. I think I've been able to make a real contribution, I think I've continued to make a contribution as far as civil rights, in the South, and elsewhere. But the thing is - I know how important it is to have a base. Unless we can bring Negroes together -

H: But can we, again, in Detroit, bring Negroes together, as you did in the earlier days of TULC?

S: I think we can; I think we have a good possibility.

H: Do you anticipate a realistic possibility of bringing a new black leadership together? On the TULC base?

S: I think it's possible. One of the heartening things, to me, is that I have been able to sit down, as I did just last Sunday, with the perhaps most extreme element in the trade union movement - these militants, and talk with them. I mean the DRUM group. Most of the people, I find, who do all the talking, and who are so critical - I don't find them doing a damn thing themselves. Now, I tried my best, over the years, to get fellows over the country together, to get them to join together. In the whole struggle of the NALC look what kind of a futile battle I had.

H: But now it needn't be futile, because the whole atmosphere has changed. In a certain sense, you anticipated the events which were to take place six or seven years later. I remember when you were organizing in the Laborers' Caucus - you brought me into Detroit, and we met, and succeeded at that time in laying some plans to have Negroes take over that local. We won the election -

S: And then they turned right around and gave it back, though!

H: But the fact of the matter is, it was a successful experiment, and it indicated the fact - now I see this as the wave of the future. I think we're entering into a period when it becomes more realistic than ever before - in fact, even if you or I do nothing, it's still going to happen. The whole point is that if they're going to be meaningful, if they are going to succeed, there must be a conscious, systematic leadership. There is, unfortunately, a great dearth of experience, competence, and sophistication of black trade union leadership to perform this role. Do you see it emerging around the country?

S: I don't really see enough of it, and I suspect what's happening to the black trade unionists is the same thing that is happening to the white. First of all, the working class itself is far more affluent -

H: But there is a large section of the black working class which is not.

S: I know, but what I'm saying to you is that the leadership, the black leadership which ascends up the ladder is. And one of the significant things that I have observed, over the years - and I have one case in mind; he just demonstrates so well, a fellow I have known for forty years - this fellow was a revolutionist - if he didn't have a bomb in his hand you expected to find one if he were searched. He just wanted "Down with the system." He became a trade union functionary, and I don't know anybody who is as passive as he now is. So what I'm saying to you is that it is a phenomonen which is not peculiar to Negroes. It's a part of the system. There is the exceptional guy who maintains his commitment and sense of dedication, but that's what you have to fight against. The very ones who are out there now ready to throw a brick - as soon as they make it, they become a part of the system too.

H: But isn't that a little bit of an oversimplification, though?

S: No, it's a statement of a general condition which I see!

H: You may be right - I don't think there's any point in arguing over the abstract idea - but at the same time isn't it also realistic, unless you've given up the perspective, of organizing within organized labor, black workers to realize the potential of their power, in leadership positions, so that the labor movement can begin to serve the whole black community? I think you would agree with me that at the present time not even the best of unions - and that includes your own union - is really fulfilling its own convention resolutions, its moral, high-sounding pledges on civil rights - and I assume you agree with me to a certain degree that even the best of the unions, not even the UAW is fulfilling its potential in the struggle for Negro rights.

S: Either to the black workers or to the whites.

H: Right!

S: In terms of bringing about, of effecting a fundamental social change, no!

H: All right! Now, what is your perspective? Let us say that everything you say about philistinism and bureaucracy and corruption and buying people off is true - what is Horace Sheffield's perspective for the period?

S: My perspective is what it always has been. I joined the trade union movement because I thought it was a vehicle for social change. I fought unrelentingly and consistently to make it that, and I will continue - I will continue. And wherever I can influence black

workers, and liberal white workers that they ought to join together to make the trade union more responsive to the needs of people, I'm going to do it. And I guess in terms of TULC and NALC and black workers, I'm hopeful. I pray that we can overcome the schism that has developed in this town. Because here, where we have just an abundance of good leadership and ability, we can begin here, we can do so much here to galvanize black workers across the country. But the task isn't easy, it isn't easy. As soon as you win one goal - especially if it involves the advancement of a Negro worker, or something like that, the movement itself loses a little steam; but then immediately the power structure sets up a whole divisive kind of operation, pitting one against the other.

H: It seems to me that the major indicator of the sophistication of the - of any group - is that it does not permit the enemy to divide it. Are you suggesting that the Negro leadership of the UAW, or of Detroit generally, is arriving at this situation when Mr. Charlie can no longer divide it? And I also want to ask you one other question in relationship to this: Are you prepared to just let TULC disintegrate? Are you - do you have any plans afoot to prevent the disintegration of TULC?

S: I have the feeling that organizations come into being for a special need, and it has happened so many times in history that when that need is fulfilled, the organization begins generally to deteriorate. We have on the drawing boards another group, which would draw on both forces.

H: What is the breach about? I never understood -

S: As I said, it grew out of that convention, the 1962 convention, it began after that. You know, rival organizations were set up - there are those who felt they had a lot to gain, hangers on and what have you, by creating as much division as they could between Jack and Buddy and myself, as well as others in power who saw this as a means. After all, you know, the fact that TULC could do what it did, politically, in 1961, has never set well, and since that time the trade union movement has not packed the wallop it did before then - after that point, it could not just tell Negroes how to vote.

H: What you did in that first Cavanagh campaign was to declare the political independence of the Negro community from the labor movement - you made it clear that now Negroes would make the decision on whom Negroes would support.

S: Or we would join together, and make it jointly.

H: Right, but that no white organization, not even the UAW, would tell the Negro communtiy whom they are to support. It was a declaration of independence in the Negro community.

S: You see, there is no question that there is not a need. The problem now has taken on a new dimension - there are more subtleties to

it. And I think, really, TULC and MDELCO can pull together, and that really, you just have to frame a new apparatus.

H: Tell us a little about MDELCO and this new apparatus.

S: MDELCO has been in existence four or five years, the Metropolitan Detroit Labor and Community Council.

H: Who belongs to it, what does it consist of?

S: Trade unionists, and community leaders just like TULC. It's another TULC, although it never reached the prominence of TULC. It's been in existence about five years.

H: Are you in it?

S: I'm in it, I've joined it now. I've been talking to them, trying to get them -

H: Who is head of it?

S: A fellow by the name of Rudy McCullough. It's not all Negro - it's interracial.

H: Does it limit its membership to trade unionists?

S: No, it's labor and communtiy.

H: Does it have any significant mass base?

S: Never anything like TULC had - somewhere about a thousand members, thereabouts.

Mc: Do they have any action programs? I never heard of anything they did.

S: I haven't seen any action program they have been engaged in. My recollection is that they got active around election time. They may have done some things - I don't recall. TULC hasn't done a thing in about two and one half years, either.

H: You said that there is a new organization on the drawing board?

S: Yes, we've got one on the board, and we're just waiting to see what we can pull together. We've got a good nucleus of fellows, there's no question. We can bring in some of the younger fellows, fellows who have not been, as yet, in a union position.

H: You said you have been in contact with the DRUM organization in the Dodge Hamtramck, plant? I'm curious to know your reaction to that group.

S: I don't have any question about their sincerity. Like most young people, they don't really have the background to draw on, so in making decisions, many times they aren't the most relevant ones. For instance, one of their demands was that a black man be appointed the chairman of the Board of Directors of Chrysler Corporation. And, of course, the language in some of the papers they put out would alienate black workers, let alone white workers. I discussed this type of thing with them. They're not very knowledgable about the trade union movement. They're young. I talked to them Sunday - you know, they go on about Mao Tse Tung, Ho Chi Minh. I tell them, you know, you've got a totally different situation. I have a high regard for them though - they're sincere, and really militant but the thing is - just like the NAACP with the young Turks. The young Turks didn't understand that much of this is about arithmetic - how many people you can get to join your cause. They jump that many more fellows and start calling them Uncle Tom, they immediately lessen their chance for what could have been a victory!

H: Recent data indicates a very significant increase in Negro participation in the Detroit auto industry labor force. As a matter of fact, if we take a look at the Chrysler 7 plant, we see that in a 20-year period, the rate of increase has been almost doubled, and if the current rate of increase of Negroes continues this will be primarily a black labor force in the auto industry. First, why do you think this is taking place, and what do you think will be the consequences?

S: Well, even before the riot the rate of employment of Negroes in these plants in the inner city had accelerated considerably. Following the riot, the corporations made an all-out effort, particularly Ford and Chrysler.

H: GM still lags behind, doesn't it?

S: Yes.

H: This was their contribution to the easing of tensions?

S: Well, the information I get is, surprisingly, that the staying power of these people they are taking on, in the inner city, without an examination, is greater than the walkins. Now, again, this is certainly no solution to the problem, because the overall employment just hasn't increased that much. We're going to have to do something much more fundamental than just Chrysler and Ford picking up, you know, five or six thousand.

H: I wasn't just referring to these developments after the riot. I was referring to something much more fundamental, I think. The white workers seem not to be going into the industry, as a result of attrition, and Negroes are -

S: I don't know that white workers are not going into the industry. I was out to the Ford employment office the other day, and white workers were certainly out there. I think we had a great increase as a

result - and I think this certainly has some significant bearing - as a result of July 23, a year ago. You know, when the corporations cease hiring at the gates, and put their employment offices down in the inner city, at the NAACP office, and at the TAP office, and the Urban League, you're bound to have, with the rate of attrition being what it is, as white and black workers die and quit, and that sort of thing, a steady inflow of Negroes is bound to make a difference. The change is bound to have an impact, particularly, on the UAW. It is already making the UAW conscious of the political power of these Negroes.

H: Is this happening in other cities besides Detroit?

S: Not to my knowledge. If it is, I'm not aware of it. That's something I should make an effort to ascertain. But I would imagine, all over, that more Negroes are being employed by these corporations, Chrysler, Ford, GM, in the urban areas. I would doubt seriously it's being done at the rate it is being done here in Detroit. But it's bound to have impact. Just as we mentioned, the Negroes met and served notice that they didn't like the business of about seventy Negro International Representatives out of about a thousand. I would imagine there are about seventy-five. The percent figure is about 7.5%. I would believe that the Negro membership ought to be about 22 or 23% - roughly, about a quarter.

H: Do you have any idea what it is in the Steelworkers?

S: The Steelworkers have a higher percent than the UAW, considerably more.

H: How would you compare the status of Negroes in the Steelworkers Union and the UAW?

S: The Negroes in the Steelworkers haven't even arrived.

H: Are you aware of the Ad Hoc Committee, which is the euphemism for the new black caucus which has emerged in the Steelworkers? For the first time they have a black caucus with representation from Birmingham, Gary, Detroit, Chicago, which has been holding meetings and serving demands on the international union, and threatened to put a picket line around the forthcoming Steelworkers convention unless their demands are met.

S: No, I wasn't aware of it. I'm glad to hear it.

H: There is a whole new leadership -

S: You see, conditions exist in the Steelworkers Union which we wouldn't tolerate in the UAW.

H: Up till eight or nine years ago you did.

S: You tell me one that we were aware that we tolerated - tell me one.

H: The situation wasn't that much different -

S: No, no. Now, look! Let me tell you something. If what I'm told by my friend in the U.S. Civil Rights Commission - he's left now - you know, in the NAACP out of Wichita, I don't recall his name now - anyway, the story he tells me.....No, we revolted fifteen years ago about that!

H: You have some pretty bad situations in the UAW. How about the skilled trades?

S: Let me tell you something. The skilled trades - that isn't quite the same as that situation. Let's face it! Make no mistake about it - we've kept the heat on in that situation.

H: My information is that there are about 300 Negroes in the apprenticeship trades of the UAW in Detroit, in the greater Detroit metropolitan area.

S: I couldn't tell you that, but I could tell you that I just presented a paper to the Division of Vocational Education. I'm on the Advisory Committee, and the Detroit Tooling Association. From what I've seen, and this involves the two UAW skilled trades locals, it's far less than that. But, of course, you have to take into consideration Ford's and Chrysler. Chrysler, you know, has done quite a job - I don't know how many -

H: I'm told by Negro rank and file workers - I have no way of certifying the validity of these figures, that there are still grave problems in becoming machine mechanics, in terms of maintenance, of electricians, in terms of getting in the parts plants - you know, the parts warehouses - in terms of the whole matter of the skilled crafts. They say the union has not used its power to make a fundamental break with the past in this area.

S: Let me say this, beyond a doubt, the skilled trades of the UAW is an unresolved problem. I make no bones about that. What I was saying to you - we know some of the complexities involved in the skilled trades problem. But the situation in steel at Birmingham -

H: Also at Bethlehem in New York State. It's a question of degree.

S: Well, let me tell you. I've actively worked to get Negroes to go into the skilled trades, and I know all about the testing irrelevancy, and all that, but here, what I'm talking about is just raw black workers, where this is no consideration at all, and it can't even be raised. I'm saying that we wouldn't tolerate that. And you know that I'm most unhappy with the condition which exists in the skilled trades of the UAW. Do you know what my position is?

I'm attacking the institution. I've called on the Board of Education, the Commission on Community Relations, - I've got all the statistics for the last ten years. I've said that we need to change the institution. There's no reason why any private group should have a monopoly on who can be an electrician, a plumber, or a janitor. Here we've got the situation where we've got the schools applying the pressure - so they're pulling out of the schools, setting up their own schools, going out to Macomb County - that sort of thing.

H: May I see the data on this, also a copy of the paper you just referred to? I'd like very much to see it.

S: I've got it all included. I'm on the Advisory Council on Vocational Education of the Michigan Department of Education.

H: I would really like to have a copy of that.

S: You see, I'm taking another approach on this thing. I wouldn't waste - TULC has a $97,000 grant. It's a joke.

H: For what purpose?

S: You know, so-called recruiting, and getting these Negroes in the trades.

H: It isn't working?

S: It's a sham. It turns out to be a collusive kind of thing!

H: You're referring to the pre-apprenticeship thing - the Workers Defense League approach?

S: I really don't know about the Workers Defense League, but I know Slaiman and - they've got some kind of program going on in different places around the country. I know that if they're working like this one here -

H: Why is it a sham?

S: Let me say this: To have a program (and I'm not attacking Buddy, or anything like that) a program that may get fifteen people in it for $97,000 in a year and a half - that's got to be a joke. I say we just can't wait.

H: My guess is that since most of these apprenticeship programs are for three to five years, most of the Negroes will drop out.

S: That's right. And then the other thing is that you have these skilled tradesmen involved in these programs at $10 or $12 per hour, and they are doing nothing in their own union to facilitate, or to back-up -

H: They're not taking them in as journeymen -

S: No. So I've come to the conclusion that really, the only way you're going to succeed is to attack the system. If there's any justification for their having a monopoly, why don't the lawyers have a monopoly?

H: Has there been any fundamental change in the status of Negroes in the building trades, in the skilled crafts of the building trades in the last five years?

S: No fundamental change. The plumbers have taken in a few, but at the rate we're going, I'll be dead, and my grandchildren will be dead before any fundamental change comes - and this is what concerns me. I just don't think that any institution, I don't care whether it's the UAW, or what it is, ought to have that kind of monopoly over skills our society so sorely needs. What right do they have to say who should be an electrician? The school's function is to teach, so they can create the kind of situation where they can get the related training, and then get the practical training, too. Let's turn them loose and try it.

H: Do you have a situation in Detroit such as exists in Chicago at the Washburn Technical Trades High School where the trade unionists use one particular technical high school, and they control it, and who gets in, and it's really an adjunct of the trade union?

S: Yes, we have it here. We have two, the Trombley Apprentice School, and the Manufacturing and Industrial Trades, but look, we changed all that. The IBEW has a class out now, it's been out for over a year - the class is not run as lily-white. We made the Board of Education, we persuaded the Board of Education to adopt a policy that they weren't taking in any lily-white classes there - that every effort had to be made to make the class known throughout the Negro community. We're in our second class now. See, they're not going to use the Board of Education for that kind of sham. Plus now we have another pincer on them where we have the city government not awarding any contracts. And surprisingly, they can go out and find one - you know, a million dollar contract, and that sort of thing.

H: Now, may I ask you one final question about the withdrawal of the UAW from the AFL, and the new pact between the Autoworkers and the Teamsters to provide the basis, perhaps, for a second labor federation. What do you think are the implications for Negro workers of this development?

S: Well, to be very candid with you, I received in the mail about two weeks ago a list of particulars - some problems Negroes were having out on the West coast - and I'm telling you, it's a voluminous list. I really don't know enough about the Teamsters Union as a whole to know - of course, I know Ernie Calloway in St. Louis, and some of

the guys out on the West coast, even though they have not resolved most of their problems. But beyond that, I don't know. I really am unaware of the Teamsters having any role in this whole struggle. This is what would bother me inasfar as your question is concerned.

H: Beyond this - I wasn't thinking so much of that as the anticipation that there will be formed a new labor federation and the effect it will have on the continuing discriminatory practices of the AFL.

S: Well, I would think that if in fact the new federation - that is some time off, I believe - became a very militant vehicle in this general area, I think, it would be bound to have some effect on the AFL-CIO; it would have to. Plus, by its very posture, by what it did, it would generate within the international unions in the AFL-CIO where you have Negroes - it would be bound to have an effect.

H: Horace, thank you very much.

S: It's been my pleasure.