

IM - Irene Young Marinovich
SH - Sue Hartmann
LH - Lucy Haessler

SH. This is an interview with Irene Young Marinovich on March 9, 1974. I wonder if you would start out by telling about your background. I know you were raised in southern Illinois.

IM. Mhm. Yes, I was born in Marion, Illinois which is the, was a hotbed of the organizational period of the miners back in the 1800's. And my father told of, they had trenches, where they laid behind trenches, you know, and shot at the company stoolpa^{ies}, the spies you know, and the scabs that were working there. So I grew up in this atmosphere. And I'll never forget, I was about 7 years old, bringing home a loaf of bread that-my mother/^{had}made bread but on this particular, once and awhile she'd run out, you know. And she sent me to the store to get a loaf of bread and I got home and my father looked at it and said we don't eat no scab bread in this house. My mother said oh, Jess don't make her go back to the store for that - it's about a mile. He said, oh, she'll know know next time. I carried that loaf of bread back to the store. And I of course, I think us kids grew up like the kids of today who's parents organized the union. I wasn't fully aware of what it meant until I came to Michigan. I know that we didn't have picket lines because on the first of April when the strike was called nobody went to work. That was the end of it. We would plan for these things about three or four months ahead. My mother would start buying beans and bacon and lard and flour and all the stuff, corn meal and things that she needed, basic things, you know, coffee and this kind of stuff. So when there was a strike it lasted six months - from April to September. Or else there was a layoff many times during the summer because in those days there was not the demand

for coal you know. And that was about the only thing that I really understood about the union except I sort of realized, my father was an old Deb's Socialist. And I can remember one of the first books I ever read was ~~the~~ Jack London's Iron Heel. And my father was a man that didn't like any trash literature in the house. You read good books or you didn't read - period, you know. And I read the Iron Heel and it made a lasting impression on me. And it was a...so when we came to Michigan when I got a job and my first run-in was at Briggs, Mack Avenue. The most horrible conditions that you can imagine.

SH. Was that your first job?

IM. That was my first job.

SH. Let me test this.

IM. OK.

SH. We're ready to start again. Did your mother work...

IM. No.

SH. ...in southern Illinois?

IM. No, she didn't. That was my first job at Briggs. And I went in, hired in as a press operator which I'd never been close to, you know.

SH. And excuse me, what year?

IM. This was in 19.., oh about 1933 maybe '34. Because I spent about two years or three before I came to Ternsted^t. And on Mack Avenue I worked in the press room and at Briggs at that time didn't have not on one press, there was not one press there that had what you call a... (tape turned off)

SH. All right you were talking about your first job at Briggs.

IM. There was no safety devices on any of their presses. In other words, the press came down, there should be something there to keep you from getting your hand under it, you know, or they repeated. And these Briggs^x

presses were noted for that, repeating. Very few people in there didn't have two or three fingers off or half a hand or whole hands when I went in there. And I was only about 21 or 22 years old. And I worked there for about 6 months, well, I worked there when Roosevelt was elected. I can trace it back to that. Because I worked there when there was no down pay of no kind - it was strictly piece work. And you went in and you stood and waited at the foreman's desk until he gave you a job. Now you might wait 2 or 3 hours, you know. And if he liked you or felt there was a chance of taking you out or something he got you a job. And if he didn't you could wait half the night without any, getting any pay at all. And I'd worked there for about 4 months and I was ready to quit because I'd had run-ins with him two or three times. He'd tried to pinch me one day and I'd threatened to wrap a piece of steel around his neck if he ever done it again. And I went to check out and the guy in the office said - Now look the, what was the key men with Roosevelt - two hours and wages and things like that?

Chorus. NRA's.

IM. The NRA's. The NRA's coming in. You see, at that time I was working on two timecards, one with my name on it, and one with a number which I had no control over. I could be, I might work 5 or 6 hours overtime and I got no record for that. If I got paid all of it fine, if I didn't I had no recourse because Michigan has a 54 hour law for women. It did at that time. So I had to depend on their honesty as to whether I got paid or not for that extra time. And he said this was coming out right away. And he says you'll only have to work 54 hours a week and all - there's a lot of things going to be changed, there's going to be a wage increase and so forth. So I stayed, I guess, for another 6 months. In the meantime

my husband had came back from the Soviet Union. Tony went in 1931 as a, to work in the coal mines there. He was a, what they call a machine operator, for, he cut the coal, a cutting machine operator. He cut the coal for the miners to load. And he went there because the things were so bad here. He'd got a job at Ford in '31 but it was not, he didn't have no, you know he didn't know how long you were going to work or the day you went in whether you'd get fired or not. So this opportunity came by and we thought it was wonderful. He'd have a chance to go, you know. And he had just come back when I, I'd worked at Allen Industries for awhile, I quit Ford, Briggs and went to Allen Industries where I worked for 12¢ an hour making leg cushions. And I developed a condition in my lungs which I never got completely over. I got to the point where I couldn't hardly speak because the dust would rise out of these jute pads, you know. And there was nothing there to catch the dust or anything. And when Tony came back he went back to Fords and, but while he was gone I worked at Briggs for awhile, and at Allen Industries for, I worked both jobs, work nights one, days at the other while he was gone. He was gone about 4 months. And the conditions today, if you think about it, I think about it sometimes and I don't believe it myself that it existed. It seems just like a bad dream, you know, the things that you had to put up with in order to hold a job in those days. Especially women. You had to, I worked at Mack Avenue for a woman foreman who if anything was worse than the men formen I've worked for. Because her you had to bring stuff in to her. You had to bring her a bottle of liquor or you had to bring a cake in. And if you didn't you didn't get anything either. And that was on sewing machines. And you could sit there also for half a day. And that was my first experience. All I could think of was - my god, do they need a union in these places, you know. And then the old auto workers union came into existence, I think in 1933. 1933. And I

attended the meetings, Tony and I down on Woodward Avenue. I believe it was an old dance hall. A dance place during the night but it was, I remember meeting, well, many of the people who are around today. And Phil Raymond was very active at that time. That was his, he helped to develop that, organize that, you know. And they struck Briggs Highland Park. And that was my first encounter with the Detroit Police Department. And they were strike breaking. Because they hit people that was, I missed gettin my head knocked off by a quarter of an inch. Because he swung at me and I ducked, you know. The club went over. It would have killed me.

SH. You were on the picket line?

IM. On the picket line. Yeah, that was at Highland Park.

SH. And that, was that when you were working there?

IM. No, I had been working there and I quit. You know, in those days you didn't work long. I'd work long enough to get kids the clothes, kids at school, for school. And then around Christmas I'd work for a couple of months in order to get things for Christmas for the kids and things like that. I never attempted to work steady. There was no steady jobs really. You were subject to being fired any minute. There was no such a thing as a steady job. So I'd work for a period and then quit and then go back and get a job for awhile and work someplace else. I worked at Murray Body for a short time, both of the Briggs plants, Allen Industries for over a year. I worked there while Tony was in the Soviet Union and at Briggs. So it was the old Auto Workers Union lost, you know. They couldn't get the American people to, I don't think the American workers were ready for it yet here in Detroit or else it was not a union that they, it was, they began "Red Baiting," they began Red baiting it and a lot of people began to get scared, you know, during that period. And, although it was alive for a couple more years. But they were never able to win any kind of a, any kind of a victory. So it was, people gradually dropped out of it, you know. So...

SH. So then when did you, when did you become involved in UAW activities, organizing activities?

IM. Well, I went to Ternstedt not knowing that they employed married women.

SH. This was about when?

IM. 1936. October 1936. And I had to have a job. We'd bought this car and I got fired from Ford Hospital because I was married. And I went to Ternstedt¹ and I got hired. And I naturally hired under my maiden name - Irene Young. And I wasn't, I don't think I was there but about two weeks when I met Stanley Nowak, who was organizing for Ternstedt² at the time, passing out leaflets. And I come by and I said well, boy it's about time somebody tried to organize this damn place. And although it wasn't the worst plant I've worked in by any means, you know (laugh). And so I asked him where the meeting was gonna be and he told me at Pringley Hall. And Tony and I went there that night or the night after, I forget which, and the 174 Office was then on Michigan Avenue at Junction in the back. You had to go around to the side on Junction and go up the stairs and Reuther was the president. And so I went there the next day and then learned where the meeting was going to be and Tony and I went. And we signed up, that was on January, I had my original receipt. I've all my union receipts (laugh) except when it was a check-off, you know. Worked at Ford it was a check-off. And we signed up in the union and Tody^w stayed in 174 because there was no Local 600 at that time. In fact...

SH. He was still working at Ford then?

IM. Yes. _____ Ford was completely unorganized and...I got a bunch of buttons and cards to sign up. And went in, I passed out buttons, you know, and signed, getting the signatures for joining the union, and I was called in the Office and I was fired for falsifying company records. So...

SH. Do you mean by using your maiden name?

IM. Yes. So it was an excuse, you know, to get rid of me. So I went down to the local and I reported it and I didn't have seniority. They did have a sort of a company union there at that time and they had seniority of a type, I mean you couldn't enforce it but they recognized it to some extent. I think it was a 30, 90 day probation period. And I wasn't in there 9 months see, I came in October, the end of October and I was just under the probationary period. So, I told Walter and Stanley, I said, I don't think you ought to fight for me because if you do and lose, you're going to lose, you won't organize that plant because there's too many women there, there was about 50%. And I said, I think you'd be better off dropping me and trying to win on a case that you have more chance of winning. And they both said no, if we don't win Irene we won't organize it either, because women will get scared. And women were scared. They were afraid to join the union because they were afraid that if they did they would hire men rather than hire women. You know they didn't have confidence that they were able to hold down a job on their own. Where Ternsted was a place that had many small parts. They did hardware for General Motors. And there was many little things, you know, that women could do so much better and so much faster than men. But you couldn't get them to understand this. It was really/^ajob organizing that place.

SH. So you were really unusual then in being one of the women employees that was interested in the union and and trying to organize.

IM. Yes. And they got me back to work and I was a probationary employee. So it gave the women there...they thought well, if she wasn't, if they could get her back to work and she didn't have seniority, then there's a chance for us. But really, we didn't organize that plant until the Flint Sit-Down Strikes came and we were still unable to organize Ternsted. And it was a big headache. And Reuther didn't think it would ever be organized. That was his opinion.

SH. Do you think the fact that it was about 50% women retarded organization?

IM. I think, I think so or had a lot to do with it. So what Stanley Nowak had an idea that he had read about from Europe about a slow-down strike. And we met together with a few of the stewards and the committeemen and decided how we could do this and keep it from the company, you know. And I'll tell you it was one of the best kept secrets there was. Cause the company was really taken by surprise. And I told certain girls on the line and certain men, that I knew I could trust, you know, that on a certain morning that we'd go to work but we'd cut down the first day half, you know, second day, cut that half in half until you were doing practically nothing. But I said it's very important you can't take any breaks, you can't be caught sitting down, you have to be right in front of your machine, you have to work all day. Because if you don't then you'll get fired. I said but the important thing is to stay there and work but cut that production down to nothing. It lasted I think 10 days. And it was one of the most magnificent things you've ever seen. Girls who'd never joined the union, who didn't intend to join the union and a lot of men too. This thing really caught on fire. It was something, you know, they weren't losing any wages, they were working, they came in every day. And finally it got to be a contest as to who could be the slowest. And after it was all over our superintendent was telling me one day, he said, well I was just talking to the superintendent of Plant 14 and I told him, he was telling me how slow their girls worked, and I told him, boy, you haven't saw anything. We have the slowest ones here at Fleetwood. (laughter). And I said well, I never thought I'd live to see the day that the company would be bragging about who was the slowest employees they had. But it was magnificent. And these girls cut it down to where the foreman come around and say - look, what the hell's going on here. I want to see some work out of you - We're working.

And they were. And you know that's much harder than walking a picket line. You stand there and you try to cut say 500 an hour down to 250 and to 150 and then to 25 and they got it down to where they was doing 10 an hour, where they were supposed to be doing 500. It was just something else. It's something I've, I don't, and you know there's nothing in any of the books about this, about anything about the slowdown at Ternsted.

SH. No, I haven't seen that.

IM. Now, Stanley could tell you about it. But the girls at, well, we couldn't handle the applications after that. Girls would come up and they'd hand me a dollar and their name and I'd have my pockets stuffed full, my purse stuffed full. And go home at night and try to, hope that the dollars and the names, you know, added up. And write out receipts and give them. By the time that 10 days was over Ternsted was organized. We called for an election and we won it. I don't know the exact figures today, but it was practically the 90% we organized.

SH. Could you tell me something about these girls. Were they, were most of them unmarried, or...

IM. No, most of them were married.

SH. Married.

IM. You see Ternsted^r did hire married women but I didn't know that. I'd had two bad experiences and I didn't know anything about Ternsted^r either.

SH. You'd been fired twice for being married?

IM. Yes. From ^{Ke}~~Ca~~lvinator and from Ford Hospital, for being married. So I didn't know the circumstances. I found out after I went in. But I wasn't about to go in and confess to something, you know. I didn't think anything about it until I was fired. But most of them were married women. You had a large colony, it was close to Del^r Ray. A lot of Hungarian women, a lot of Polish women, and a lot of Southern women. That was the, predominantly the three large groups at that time that were there.

SH.

SH. Were they mostly pretty young?

IM. Oh yes, in around 30. They're retiring now. They're at my age you know, I'm 58, 68 and they've been retiring now for the last 10 years. Most of them retired at 62. I met several of them lately who worked with me through that period.

SH. Were there any facilities for their children at this time?

IM. No, no. There was no such a thing as that in Detroit.

SH. So they would either have to rely on relatives or...

IM. Or, usually...

SH. ...older...

IM. Or maybe their husbands worked one shift at Ford's or some place and they worked another shift, you know, and between them they would, or else some of them had children big enough they could take care of the other small ones. It was a very bad situation because, talk about, you know, these places for people, women to leave their children - day centers - this was a completely unknown thing in the United States, I think. At least around _____ Michigan it was. I never heard of it. This was something in Europe, the countries in Europe, but now here.

SH. What about pay for women. Well, first of all did they tend to work in different shops from men or did they do the same jobs as men?

IM. Same jobs.

SH. Did they get the same pay?

IM. No. That was one of my gripes from the day that I joined the union to the day I left. At every convention I raised it. Equal pay for women. And a woman and man could be working on the same identical piece of stock, one worked on one machine, he worked on another, she handled it and handed it to him and he handed to another man or another woman, what have you, and she would get anywhere from 10 to 30 cents less than he did an hour. And brought this up at every negotiation. I brought it up at every convention. I

wanted it included in all contracts. But it was never done. Ford, when I went into Ford in 1942, I got a defense leave from Ternsted and went into Fords, Ford did pay equal pay. There was never any question about it.

SH. Wasn't it unusual for Ford to hire married women?

IM. Well, they didn't hire them before the war. They didn't hire them before the union. The only women they had were widows of men who had got killed at Fords. And they were very few. I don't think there was over 75, a hundred women who worked there. And they were in a place by themselves, you know. I don't know what they did even. But they were widows of men who had been kelled at Fords. And of course there were plenty of widows of men who were killed at Fords who didn't work at Fords, you know. These were picked women. Women that had some connections or their husband had some connections or something. But they started hiring women at Fords in 1942. And...

SH. And at equal pay.

IM. Yes, at equal pay. There was never any question about it. They got the same pay.

SH. Do you think this was because of the union or was it because of the federal, the law labor boards...

IM. No, old Ford was a screwy old guy, but you know, he paid as I was telling you, I got paid \$5 a day at Ford Hospital and in 1931 or '32 no '33 and that was unheard of for a laundry. Course this was a laundry for the hospital. But \$5. That was his wage, you know, \$5 a day. So it extended to the hospital, all his employees. And I don't know whether he was...

LH. It kept the union out.

IM. Yes. And it was a perverse thing too. When the union did come in, when he did accept it, he accepted it with check-off and everything, you know, which no other plant did except fighting for it. And I think that he

felt that this was something that was going to happen anyway because the fight for equal pay for women. It's not in all plants today, you know, General Motors and Chrysler, there's still a differential. I don't know how much it is. I'm not in contact that much with them, but I know there still is a differential in pay.

SH. In the 30's how did the, how did the male workers feel about the women who were working in the shipb? Did this vary from place to place?

IM. I suppose it did. I didn't ever feel any, have any, feel any animosity in Ternsted. As a matter of fact, I got full cooperation in Ternsted from male employees, the men employees of my plant. They trusted me and they felt I was honest and sincere. And I think the last time I ran for election there I wouldn't have been elected if it hadn't been for the men. The women were, we had an election booth across the street, but all of them were so anxious to get home at night, and of course women had, you know, triple jobs, you know, they held a job during the day, they had to get home and cook and they had to clean house, they had to wash nights, Saturday and Sunday. But they all were so confident that I was going to be re-elected, you know. So the next day some of them asked me and I said, yes, I was elected. I said but not because you voted, because you didn't. And, but the men turned out and voted for me. And now I think in some plants, I have heard that there was men, you know, didn't like the idea. But this, you didn't really get this until during the war. When the war was over, then there was quite a drive on to drive women back into the home, you know. To make them go back because they was taking jobs from the soldiers and so forth, you know.

SH. I want to get into this in a lot more detail in a few minutes. I wonder if you could, sort of, describe your, your activities in the union. It seems to me that you were an extraordinary person for the union positions that you held. I mean very few women, it seems to me held these positions. I think

at the 1940 Convention I counted, Oh, a handful, less than 10 women delegates, and you were one of them.

IM. Yes, that's right.

SH. Wonder if you could describe from when you started organizing the women at the workers at Ternsted^k and the kinds of union positions that you held.

IM. Well, I took a lot of positions that weren't just exactly union positions too. They were international positions, you know, national, on national policy and international policy. Where most of, most women didn't do this, you see, they were strictly on the local issues and the plant, what was going on in the plant. But I realized that these issues also depended on what was done nationally, and internationally not just nationally, not just locally, and...

SH. What sort of jobs did you have in the union, what offices did you hold in the union?

IM. Well, I was the Plant Committeeman and for the entire time after the union came in I was the, I represented my plant on the bargaining committee with management. And I was...

SH. And you were the only woman, I suppose.

IM. Yes, for awhile, no there was a woman for awhile and then she dropped out. And I was recording secretary when Reuther was president, and Frank Manfred was the financial secretary.

LH. That was Local 174.

IM. Local 174. Local 174 which was Reuther's home local. And for about, I think about a year. And then I was one of those that was kicked out after the Cleveland Convention when he cleaned house, (laugh) the people who didn't support him, you know.

SH. This convention was in 193...

IM. 1939, wasn't it?

LH. Cleveland?

IM. I'll check on that. (tape turned off) ...his local union to vote for him, all the delegates,

SH. And you were a delegate in 1939?

IM. Yes. And there was several of us - Tony Zimbo, Micky Matson, Rudy Kraft, myself, there was, I think two or three others who didn't vote for him. And not because we knew he wasn't going to be elected. We knew he was. But this was a protest against this whole activity at that convention. Cause this was his start. To kick out everybody. He came and told me, Tony, Matson, all of us.

SH. I'm not sure we got Walter Reuther's name on the tape right there. I just wanted to make sure...

IM. Well, this was Walter Reuther.

SH...We knew who you ~~were~~^{he} talking about.

IM. And he said Irene, you will not be recording secretary next year and neither will you, Frank be financial secretary. And I said that's OK.

SH. But you were still, you were re-elected as a delegate in 1940.

IM. Oh yes, I was re-elected as a delegate. And in '41. Well, every convention after that until I left there and went to Ford's.

SH. Did you ever try when you were on the negotiating committee to get an equal pay clause? Or was that just much too early in negotiations?

IM. No, you couldn't get it on a local basis. This had to be in, General Motors had to do this, you know. These were some of the things that the, at the plant level you could not get agreement on. They wouldn't even discuss it with you. We brought it up time and time again. But they were not allowed to discuss it even with you because this was something had to be GM policy. If they did it in one plant then naturally we was going to let every other plant know. And because we had the biggest group of women

in Ternsted^x that there was in any other GM plant, why they just wouldn't even discuss it. There were several subjects that you couldn't talk about. They refused to discuss it - that's all. And that was one of them.

SH. And that was one of them.

LH. Non- negotiable.

IM. Yes, that's right, it was non-negotiable.

SH. I notice that, as early as 1940, you were beginning to raise at conventions issues of equal pay and discrimination against women. I don't know if you remember that Local 165 and I'm not sure which local this was...

LH. 165?

SH. ...offered a resolution against employing married women.

IM. Yes.

SH. This was in 1940.

IM. 165, Paul Coach, it don't even say which plant it was. 159 is Pontiac,

LH. Yeah.

IM. 165 is Detroit, Well there was, there was, there was many who opposed women working. But was that in '39?

SH. That was in 1940.

IM. Well, let's see if that's it or if I have it in another one (fade out) ...'41. Let's see what he has to say. Local 190...

LH. 190 was Packard, wasn't it?

IM. That's right, that's where she was from. So he spoke ahead of this? He's the one who introduced the resolution?

SH. I believe the resolution was just read.

IM. Oh yes.

SH. That married women, that the union...

IM. Yes, yes, yes, uh huh. And Helen Gage spoke. "I would agree wholeheartedly with this resolution if it could be proven that women, that the women who were married, divorced, separated, single or probably widowed by

this, I mean, Mr. Chairman, I definitely know that married women would get divorced or separated in order to hold their job. I for one would not give up my job to another woman but I will give up my job to a man if the man has more responsibilities than a woman. And I know until we organize the unorganized with a resolution that such a resolution is danterous at this time. I understand there are approximately 80,000 women in the automobile industry and by taking the women out/^{of}the plants it would not solve the unemployment of 12 million." And then I said "As a married women working in General Motors plant where we have, I think I can safely say 90% of the ^{who work the} women working in/General Motors plant married, I certainly would hate to see this resolution passed. Not because I'm against the spirit of the resolution. I know most of the married women working in the plant would be darn gläd to get out of it. However, we do have a problem, and that is why we are in the plant working. Until the government can give the women some security so that the women can stay home and so that the men are guaranteed a sufficient hourly wage to enable the women to raise their children in accordance with a decent living standards to which they are entitled, they will have a hard time solving the problem. They won't have a hard time keeping us out when they do as I've just suggested. I've worked in plenty of shops in Detroit and I've lied to get into them and I've lied to stay in there. I worked at Fords 10 months and got by them by saying I was a single woman. If a resolution like this passes I would not be above doing it again. I am raising children and on the income my husband's been able to make in the auto industry we have not been able to give these children the advantages they are entitled to. The women, these women are wholeheartedly in favor of going back home and taking care of their families. But they don't intend doing it at the expense of having their children without proper food and shoes, and a decent standard of living. As Miss Gage of Packard just mentioned, this will not

help out and take the burden out of unemployment because you would have women lying and misstating facts and everything else in order to hold their jobs. Let us have this convention prove by some constructive work here that the government can show us that the men are going to be given a yearly wage and they won't have to pass resolutions for married women to stop. The married woman will be glad to step out of the shops." But I must say that I changed my mind after that, considerable.

SH. Tell me how you, how and why you changed your mind.

IM. Well, I changed my mind because I felt women have as much damn right to work as a man does.

SH. When did you decide that?

LH. Besides as much need to.

IM. That's right - as much need. And I know there's nobody who can say, when I worked at Ford's at the hospital there was women living with men. They had been for years. Now the Ford Motor Company was making these women...

SH. Immoral.

IM. ...immoral, you know, by living, at that time it was, you know. Just like they did Maurice Sugar's wife.

SH. They were afraid to get married.

IM. Yes.

SH. So they just lived with...

IM. That's right. And so I decided that I had as much damn right to work as a man did.

LH. Sure.

IM. Not because I needed to, but because I wanted to.

LH. It's part and parcel of the same thing of women on welfare.

IM. Yes.

LH. Who can't have a man in the house.

IM. That's right.

LH. It's part and parcel of a woman who loses her husband's Social Security if she remarries.

IM. Yes.

LH. And you've got women who, in Florida...

IM. All kinds of them.

LH. ...living with men who, that they're married to in everything but the...

IM. That's right.

LH. ...the ceremony, because they can't afford to give up that Social Security.

IM. That's right.

LH. And why should you lose it when you marry?

IM. That's right.

LH. Your husband earned it.

IM. That's right. He earned it and you're entitled to it from the years that you lived with him and you helped do a lot in order to contribute to the Social Security.

LH. Sure.

SH. Well, let me ask you next - what World War II meant immediately, say in 1942 and 1943. Well, starting with the fact that it made you change jobs in 1942.

IM. Well, I went because I was very unhappy at Ternsted^t for some personal reasons, and with some people who like Jack _____, for example, who had me very upset. Because he was, act like a little commissar, you know, and started giving me orders which I didn't accept.

LH. He was a bully.

IM. And so I let it get the best of me. I shouldn't have cause I left poor Micky on, Micky Matson, on the shop committee, who felt he had been deserted, you know. And I felt later that I had made a mistake. But he really got to

me. And he didn't feel that I was, the position that the party took at that time, that I was in a union rut. And that I should, whether this is important to you or not, that I should take part in the League of Women Voters, and some other women's organizations. Now Martha Strong was very good for this sort of thing, you know. She was a, was a girl who at that time who could, she was a good union person, she was a committeeman, committeeman in her plant, but she also...

SH. Was that Ternsted¹ also?

IM. Yes.

SH. OK.

IM. Her name is Wisman (?) today but it was Martha Strong then. And Martha was able to go^{to} these organizations and do very well. I wasn't. I was strictly a trade union person. It was very awkward for me to talk to, especially these middle class women, you know. And I disagreed on the Equal Rights Amendment at that time. And I never forget the storm that rolled down on my head, you know. And I objected because I felt this was taking away from married, from married, from working women, something that we had fought like hell to get here, you know. And you couldn't work over 54 hours a week. We had schools that we had fought hard to get. And I wasn't in favor of just women having schools, I wanted to get schools for men too. But you could get them first for women because on the basis they were weaker and so forth.

SH. You said you took a lot of flack from, over the Equal Rights Amendment?

Who, who criticized you?

IM. From these women you know.

SH. From these middle class women?

IM. Well, you know, today the union has taken a class, a position on the Equal Rights Amendment - for it, haven't they?

LH. Well, because they've changed it. You see the problem of the ^{ERA}~~era~~

at the time you're talking about was that it removed all the protection, would remove all the protective...

IM. All the protective

LH. ...legislation which women badly needed. But the whole picture has changed now.

IM. And this I objected to.

LH. And it's been rewritten.

IM. Oh, yes I know it's been rewritten several times. I don't think Martha Griffiths ~~(*)~~ would ever have come out for it, if it hadn't of been, you know.

LH. I hope not.

IM. And...

SH. So you refused to do this kind of speaking then.

IM. I refused. I said that this is not my cup of tea. I just don't fit in with these, my language for one thing, that was very hard for me to control. I worked in the shop and it was, I swore quite a bit. (laughter) And poor Martha got up one time at a union meeting and started to swear and some guy got up and said - I object to your swearing. And she said well, Irene Young does it all the time and nobody says anything to her about it. (laughter) But it seemed to come natural for me. Whether that's a compliment or not, I don't know. But I wasn't at ease with these women And they sure wasn't, as hell, wasn't at ease with me. Because there was many things about shop women that they had a completely different interpretation of. I never was embarrassed at work in a factory. That was where the money was, as far as I was concerned. And there wasn't to being a waitress or something like that. And I was always very proud of the fact that I was a working woman and some of these women seemed to think that you ought to come down there looking like a, you know, with no shoes on, or something like this, you know. And the League of Women Voters at that time, I don't know what

they are now, but then they were all middle class women. There was no working women among them. So this got to be such an issue that he came and told me one day that he, this was what I was going to have to do, and I said well, you can go to hell too, you know, I don't have to do anything. So I stopped at Fords and got a job. And I was sorry about it later. I felt I had done it on an impulse, that I shouldn't have done. Because I think really my place was in Ternsted. Because I think there was where the most women were, where there was the most work could be done. And when I left, it, a girl picked up off of it who had never been in the union before, didn't even join the union. And so I thought I'd made a mistake in that respect. You know, I should have stayed there.

SH. Did you ever go back to Ternsted?

IM. Yes, I went back when the war was over. I was laid off and I was on a leave, so I went back. But Tony was in Ipsilanti at the time and I was, I had to go up there a couple of times a week and my mind wasn't on on my work. I was very upset. And I just couldn't, I just couldn't work and do it at the same time. So I left and then right away there was pressure to accept to run for job, you know, for office. And I didn't want it because I fell, felt that I wasn't, wouldn't be able to do what I should do, give what I should do. And two or three girls came up and said, oh we're so glad you're over here at 18, Irene, _____ and get you in here. And I knew I wasn't capable of doing it at that time. Because with Tony there, I'd go up and see him every two weeks and see him in very bad conditions and heart wasn't in it, I just couldn't do it. So then I quit Ternsted completely and went to work for Metal Moulding for awhile. A little plant, a 174 plant also. I think on West Chicago, if I'm not mistaken. I worked there for awhile and then I went back to Ford local and worked for awhile on the Portal to Portal Pay issue. Cause I took and went to school, took typing up and went and did work on that for, I guess about 2 years and

when I was called back to Fords, I went back to work there until I quit. Well, both the children were married and they couldn't understand why I wanted to continue to work and the Ford situation was very bad and the politics there were such, something else.

SH. Let's, can we go back to Ford in 1942 or to 1942 in general. What do you think was, were the major effects of the war in terms of women workers and in terms of the union?

IM. Well, I worked at Fords when they brought the first Negro women in, for example. We picketed the place, we picketed the employment office, a large number of us to get Negro women brought into work.

SH. This was in '42 or '43 or was it later?

IM. Well, about '4...well, I went there in '42. I hadn't worked there too long. I would say in '43 maybe. Not later than that for sure. And so the first Black woman who came in, I happened to be in the rest room, facing the mirror and the woman sitting, standing next to me was combing her hair, you know. And I saw this woman in the mirror walk through the door. And this lady was standing next to me, this girl was standing next to me. She said well, look who we've got here. So I said, well, and what's your objection to her? And she said I don't want no Black so and so in here, you know. And I said well, what do you want her to do while her husband's away fighting? You want her to go out and sell her ass on the street, you know, in order to make a living for her kids. She's got the same damn right to work here as you have. And she said, well, I thought, I would have expected that from you, Irene. And I said you were right. You were right. I picketed this plant to get that woman to have a job, to get this woman to have a job in here. And I'll fight like hell to keep her in here. And if I hear anybody like you, we're going to organize to get you out, any of you who have that opinion. Well, you know, there was very little flack about it. There was some in the

beginning, you know, objected to having, wanted to have separate wash rooms for them. I said, we're not going to have any separate wash rooms. No separate toilets. No separate facilities. We're going to work together, and we're going to eat together and we're going to the bathroom together.

SH. This was the Rouge Plant?

IM. Mhm. This was the Rouge, ⁱⁿthe Aircraft Plant, in the Aircraft Plant during the war.

SH. What percentage of the women were Black ultimately do you remember?

IM. Oh, I don't know, I think there's a greater percentage of Black today, women at Fords than there is white. I know several black women who still work there. And, I think I, I couldn't be sure, it's very difficult for me to say, but there was a great percentage of black women there.

SH. How do you explain your rather, well, very progressive attitudes at that time, also in terms of your fairly southern background? I don't know how, whether southern Illinois is considered south.

IM. No, it's not considered to be south. (laughter)but...

LH. But it's awful close.

IM. It's awful close. But I think it was because of the organizations of the miners. And everything was organized where I was born. The stroes, everyone was in the union. To not be, to not be a union was to be, you know, you were out in the pail, that was out, you know.

SH. What about Negroes and equal job opportunities for them?

IM. They worked in the mines. They was in with the miners. And they lived, we had a Negro neighbor.

SH. So you just sort of grew up...

IM. So I grew up with that. Now my father, although he was a Deb's socialist, was not very good on the Negro thing, or the Jewish thing either. I could call him anti-Negro and anti-Semetic. But I fought with him from the time

I was 12 or 13 years old, we argued about this. Because I never accepted this this attitude on his part. But it was from, my father was one of these guys who read so much that he never really found himself where he belonged, you know. And, he was a very confused guy. He used to read good books and he read lousy books. And, but he never discriminated against anyone. The lady who lived behind us used to come to our house and Mom and her visited back and forth and gave one another pies and things that they baked, you know. My father never had this feeling against Negroes. But I think he was probably more against intermarriage and this kind of thing, like the average, like the average white person is, you know. They're, that's what they're afraid of - intermarriage thing is what gets them and the social, socializing.

SH. Did you switch to Local 600 then when you...

IM. Mhm.

SH. ...when you...

IM. Oh yes, I transferred to Local 600.

SH. And was it as 600's delegate that you went to the '42 convention or were you still representing 174?

IM. Now, wait a minute. That's right. That's the year that John Anderson made such a wonderful speech. I was very upset about some of the people, young people here who, you know that this, this labor business, you know, what was it they held in the,

LH. At U of D?

IM. Yeah, they had a very false conception of some of these people.

LH. I know.

IM. And I, they came out here and I read her John Anderson's speech. And I said if you think that guy is a renegade you've got another guess coming. He isn't a renegade. And...

SH. At that convention you, do you remember heading a delegation...

IM. I got in jail at that convention.

End Tape 1, Side A.

Begin Tape 1, Side B.

IM. I said - "In the next few months we're going to have thousands, upon thousands of women brought into the industry. These women will come from bakeries, beauty shops, restaurants, and all other kinds of employment where rates are very, very low. If these women were brought into the industry at 80 and 90¢ rates they will feel pretty well satisfied with them. And I think this question has to be settled, and settled before this influx of women. Because once you get these women in at 40-45¢ higher pay than they had been used to they will think it's a lot. We women who have been in the industry 10 or 15 years have battled for an awfully long time. And we have been discriminated against in the matter of wages. And these cases where these, where the women can see they're doing exactly the same jobs that men are, there always has been a feeling among the women that they have not been getting a square deal in this thing. And I think if we're ever going to get it, now is the time. I think a clause should be inserted in this resolution that no contract can be signed so long as there's a wage differential between men and women. And I feel in connection with the same thing that there are other problems to be solved. In the past where women were brought in on jobs where the rates were equal to those given the men they had a feeling among men that women were taking their work away from them. This feeling has been manifested at every convention I've attended. The feeling that women were taking man's jobs away from them. And the men wanted to have the women kicked out of the plant. I think this is another point where we are going to have to convince men that we are not trying to take their jobs away from them. We have a definite job to play. We are part of this democracy, we do all we can in order to build a union, we have a place in this union, not only at the bottom of it but in the leadership

of the union. We do not want to discriminate, you to discriminate against the men and take their jobs away from them by permitting women to scab for lower pay. Let us get a clause in this thing whereas, whereby any contract will not be signed that does not have a clause inserted that there will be no differential in wages between male and female." Yes, I remember this now. And then there were several women delegates who spoke right after that, Luella Robinson, from 785 and, and then a question, "what is" - Victor Reuther wanted to know - "what is equal pay, you know, and what is equal work?" "In order to describe that and eliminate the loopholes one has to go into great lengthy descriptions. Even the Michigan State law, as long as it is, has loopholes in it. So we thought the best thing, ^{the} best we could do was to put ourselves on record favoring equal work pay for equal work and see that the unions are kept strong and militant and fight to keep that in effect." Which was saying nothing. (Microphone fell over - very hard to hear)

SH. Well, do you feel then that the leadership in the unions gave equal pay a very low priority?

IM. Oh, I certainly will. I don't think they gave it any priority. I don't think they ever, I don't think they ever thought of women, really.

SH. Do you think...

IM. You know the only women that was brought into the leadership of the union came from outside of the union, they never came, except Olga Madar and that was a job that was given her for work that she did for Reuther. But the other women who was in here, all came in from New York or some place else. They never had a women who worked from the bottom, in the shops, you know.

SH. Did you know Mildred Jeffries?

IM. I knew her very little.

SH. Did she come in from outside of the union too?

IM. Oh yes, oh yes. I think she was a qualified woman, a capable woman but she didn't ever do anything about trying to get anything for women either, on equal pay for equal work. At least, now I haven't read proceedings in a number of years but this woman was a paid UAW person, you know, she was...but there certainly they from REuther on down, Thomas and none of them, none of them ever gave any consideration to women.

LH. That's right.

SH. So it wasn't until you and other women sort of forced these things that, that you even got resolutions at conventions to...

IM. Yes,
/That's right.

SH. Were there any paid women organizers in those years?

IM. Not one.

SH. Even when thousand and thousands of women were going into...

IM. Not one.

SH. ... the plant.

IM. Not one.

SH. They were all men.

IM. That's right.

SH. Were many of the women at the Ford Plant concerned with the day care issue during the war?

IM. Yes, that came up during the war but, I don't remember too much about it because that was a, I think the government promised day care centers, the union asked for them and the government promised them. But did we ever have any, Lucy, in Detroit?

LH. You had a few because I was on that OCE Day Care Committee as a representative from the CIO Auxiliaries, in a very minor capacity, because they were all professionals. Yes, there were funds, there were Lannum Act funds for day care centers. But it was very hard to get them implemented.

And I think Susan has found some material on that in some UAW files.

IM. I know there was none connected with Local 600.

LH. There were a few. But it was just like pulling teeth. The war was almost over before anything was really...

IM. I'll tell you, those women they had to manage themselves, you know. They had to make their own. They had to get someone...

LH. Even when there were these federal funds available, cause I remember the Lannum Act was an enabling act for this purpose. And I don't remember how much funds were available but a lot of it was just never used.

IM. Well, I don't think, I don't think the UAW leadership ever tried to do anything about it.

LH. Oh no, certainly not the UAW leadership.

IM. No, they didn't. And they were, they were, it was them who would have been possible for them to get something done.

SH. Let me introduce the third person on this tape, Lucy Haessler, who was on that Day Care Committee in Detroit during the war. It seemed to me from some of the materials that I've been going through that that was the, that was the issue concerning women that took most of the attention of the union leadership. Now it wasn't very much attention, granted, at all, but it seemed to me that they did spend more time on that than equal pay and getting clauses in contracts that would really protect women.

IM. They didn't. I don't remember/any ^{of} contract that ever had any clause in it protecting women. As a matter of fact, up until during the war, there was really a lot of opposition to women being in the plants. Not from Ternsted very much but from some of the other big plants. Lot of opposition to women working.

SH. Is this from union men or...

IM. I think it was from, from the depression, where they felt that a woman and a man were married are holding two jobs, you know. Where a lot of people

were out of work. I think that was a holdover from the depression way of thinking. And of course during the depression they had, you could maybe say they had a legitimate right to gripe about it. But certainly not afterwards.

LH. And certainly not in war time.

IM. No, but when wartime came you had, you had some complaints about it. As far as seniority, they felt women should be fired first. You know, there should be separate seniority lists and women should go before any man went. And we had to fight that in Local 600. I can remember very well being bumped off of a job on a milling machine in Ford in the aircraft. And the man who bumped me had more seniority but he didn't have, there was less, there was a lot of people who had less seniority in that department as a milling machine operator. And my position was that he should bump off the youngest person, not that particular milling machine. Cause you didn't have job seniority, you had seniority by classification and he came on that shift and he proceeded to work, so I sat down beside him.

SH. Oh, you did.

IM. And the foreman came up and told me I had to go to work. And I said well, this guy's not bumping me, he's going to bump the youngest milling machine operator. I don't care where in the hell they are in this plant. And so then he called the committeeman over and the committeeman said Irene, you're wrong, you'll have to leave and I said well, I'm not going. I'll be right here. And I sat there for three days.

SH. What year, do you remember what year this was?

IM. About '44. And they had the shop, they had the shop chairman. And I said now all of you better read your, your, the union contract. And you better read and find out if there's any such a thing as job seniority. Cause that's what this man wants. He wants to work on this particular job.

Now if you want job seniority, you better think about it a little bit, what this means. Cause this man could be laid off of this job. This job could be eliminated tomorrow, he'd be out on the street. And all I'm trying to do is protect him. Well, I had women and men come up while I was sitting there for three days and say, boy you're a no good so and so. You're trying to take a job away from a man. I'd say no, I'm trying to protect his seniority and yours, as well as mine. And finally, I mean, they brought, I forget who it was from the local union came over and he said well, Irene's right. He's got to bump somebody else off. So they bumped him off and...

SH. So you kept your job.

IM. So I kept the job. And I caught a lot of flack from that. From my brothers and sisters...

LH. Yes, she did.

IM. ...working around me. And I tried to make them understand. And I said would you want to be laid off if your job went out of production tomorrow? Cause that's what you're asking. I said I want, I said we have seniority by classification. I'm a milling machine operator. If I was the youngest milling machine operator he had the right to bump me off. But there's younger milling machine operators here. So that's who he had to bump off. I said that's not the kind of seniority you want, I don't think. Well, he got, he was mad but he finally came around and told me, he says, well, you were right, I was thinking of it...

SH. I suspect that most women wouldn't have had the courage to stand up to that.

IM. Well, once, once the foreman come over and told me I had to move because, and I knew I was right, you know. All hell wouldn't have moved me. I'd have stayed there for a month if necessary. And I'd sit right there and at lunch hour I'd go take my lunch and come back and sit down.

Bring me a book and sit and read. (laughter)

SH. That's wonderful.

IM. But I was right, see, I knew I was right.

LH. Sure you were right. You were always right.

IM. Well, I was right about that. I knew damn well we didn't have job seniority, you know. I'd been committeeman too long and had to handle too many grievances to know that. But, this was just part of the anti-women sentiment. But a lot of women went along with that too, Lucy. A lot of women thought that ahh, we shouldn't hold a job if there's men who are unemployed. And I tried to tell them you are working because you need the money equally as much as a man does. You have a right^{to}/work, you know. You have a right to work.

SH. And you were saying this in the early 40's.

IM. Yes, I was saying it in local union meetings, you know, because these things came up in local union meetings, about women, women should go home. Like down in Florida they say "Yankees Go Home" because of the gas situation. I said this is not the answer. The answer is not to kick women out of the shops. That's not the answer to it.

SH. Could you...excuse me.

LH. Irene, I'd like to ask you a question here. Was there any difference in the way women's grievances were processed through the grievance procedure and the way men's grievances were processed?

IM. Sure.

LH. Do you have any recollection of that?

IM. Not by me. But I'm sure guys like Ed Cooley, who was on our shop committee, thought that women were simply something that, you know, you flirted around with them and that's it, you know, that's about all they were good for. But, and he didn't take them seriously. And there was a lot of other committeemen who didn't take them seriously. And then

there was a lot of committeemen who did take them very seriously. But most of them were left-wing guys, you know, who knew the position of equality of women and who accepted this and worked hard for it. But the average worker, the average committeeman didn't take women's jobs... I know that also when I went back to work at Fords and Pressed Steel the first thing I was asked to do was pick up something and you know we had 25 pounds load and I said let's get some scales and weigh it, you know. Foreman said we're not going to bother with that and I said oh yes, er're going to bother with it. So we called the committeeman and he called me a troublemaker. The committeeman, our committeeman. I said well, I may be a troublemaker but I tell you one thing I'm not lifting that up and no other woman's going to lift that up until we get some scales and weight it. And he says well, what if it weighs over 25? And I said well, get a man to pick it up.

SH. Was that the law then, 25 pounds.

IM. Yes, 25 pounds. And then I instituted, put in a grievance for stools. There was no stools in the Ford Plant. I instituted a grievance to get stools. And I said I'd like to have it for everybody. But I want one first for storemen because we need it the worst, you know. And, but this thing, I was called a troublemaker by our own committeeman, several times. But I knew what the law was and I knew what the procedure was. And I knew whether I was right or wrong, you know. And I wasn't going to do something that I knew was contrary to the contract. I wasn't interested in that. But I did try to get the things in there. And we did get stools. We got stools in less than 30 days. And I don't know what they have today. Some of the girls at Ternsted have told me that things got worse in the last 10 years. That plant conditions were worse than they were 20 years ago.

LH. They're getting worse all the time.

IM. Yeah. The speed-up is worse. There's a girl that works in the, that came to my anniversary party, the girl from Temsted^t retired about 10 years ago. And she said she couldn't take it any more. She said of course I'm getting older, I realize that. But she said, Irene, the speed-up is something terrible.

LH. Well, the young people can't stand it today.

IM. Look at Lordsville and all these places where they've had, where they've fought. And...

LH. Lordsville is a Vega plant in...

SH. Lordstown

LH. ...Lordstown, Ohio.

IM. And I also feel, this has nothing to do with this probably, but I also feel that this talk among a lot of, I heard this at Margaret Nowaks, she had several women there to talk to them about this thing at the U of D. And these women were all complaining about the young people, and we built the union and they don't know anything about it. And I said well, I disagree with you. I don't accept this view that the young people don't know anything about the union. And I don't think that we, because we build it, we ought to sit back on our fat behinds and say well, we've done something and now nobody else can do any better. And I said I think Lordsville and this other place in Ohio shows that. I think these young people are fighting. And fighting a lot better than a lot of the people have done for the last 20 years. Cause I think some, once the plants was organized it was a tendency to let everything slide, you know.

LH. Oh sure.

IM. And I know this happened in Fords^d because I was there.

LH. It happened with the skilled trades, it happened with a lot of places.

IM. Yes. Fords, I mean these men were elected committeemen and they stayed there. They were there for 25 years, as committeemen. They didn't do one days work.

LH. That's right.

IM. They had the same contract that General Motors where you had to work the first four hours a day. But Fords didn't enforce it and there was a reason why. They got these guys on their side because they didn't have to do anything all day. So they walked around and my contention has always been that the union should pay for lost time not the company. I thing this was a big mistake. The biggest mistake the union made was letting the union, letting the company pay for lost time. And the first four hours, you know, should be paid by the union. Cause all you do is turn these people toward management. And Ford especially, he was able to prostitute these people by this. They knew that they were supposed to work 4 hours a day, but they didn't. And they had all day long to walk around the plant and politic, you know, and that's all they did. Handle grievances, they didn't. If you wanted them you'd have to go down to the committee room and find them playing cards.

LH. Well, I know that because the last 15 years of his life, one of the major projects that my husband was engaged in was helping individual auto workers process their grievances.

IM. Yes.

LH. And he would go down to the labor, and he would go down to the Public Review Board with some of these guys. Because they couldn't, they couldn't get it out of, they couldn't get it out of the shop.

IM. That's right.

LH. And they were legitimate, perfectly legitimate grievances, violations of the contract. Particularly among the skilled men in Fisher Body, Fisher 23. He knew a lot of those guys from the old tool and die days.

And if you could find the backlog of unprocessed grievances that have never even reached the Public Review Board.

IM. I believe it. Well see, a lot of these grievances...

LH. See this is a big issue and this is one of the reasons that many of the oldtimers feel that conditions are gradually going back to where they were in the 30's. The speedup, the lack of safety devices, they had a big strike in Chrysler-Dodge last summer over this.

IM. That's right. Over unsafe working conditions.

LH. Guys are getting killed in the shops again.

IM. That's right.

LH. Compulsory overtime, all this stuff.

IM. That's right.

SH. Do you remember approximately the percentage of women in, at the Rouge plant during the war?

IM. No, that's very hard to try to figure out because you had so many buildings, you know. And some buildings women didn't work in at all, like the foundry and the, and, but...

SH. What was your work exactly? You were working a milling machine.

IM. I worked on a lot of things you know. I worked, I was a heavy press operator for years and milling machine operator, drill press operator. You know, you work around, you work wherever they send you and you, none of these jobs are hard to do. It takes you a couple of hours to catch on to them. But act like it's a big deal but they really aren't, you know.

SH. And do you usually work integrated with men?

IM. Oh yes.

SH. Side by side.

IM. Yes, that's right. Work side by side.

SH. Could you describe how the lay-offs developed, as the war came to an end and the plants are losing government contracts.

IM. Well, at the Aircraft it was quite dramatic. It was almost overnight. Just as soon as the war ended you know they made the prathoot and the engine there. And it was almost an overnight thing. They laid off, oh, I'd say a third, you know, and then the next week another third. And that plant went completely down in very short order. They switched over, that's the old motor building, used to be the motor building, now that's the motor building now. But, there was a, and of course women had the least seniority, not the least but there was men, but generally speaking women had the least seniority because they were brought in, in around '43, you know. So they had to go first. And...

SH. Was there any indication that Ford wanted to return to its prewar policy of not hiring married women?

IM. No, the union was there and it was, and when I was called back I was called back according to seniority.

SH. And what year were you called back?

IM. '43, about '47, I think.

SH. And you were laid off in '45.

IM. '44 or '45 about '45. Yes, wait a minute, I still worked, I was working at Fords in '45. I was called back in '44 I guess. Cause Tony came out of the hospital in '45. And I was working at Fords then. I was out I guess about two years. And I was called back strictly because of seniority, you know. There was no separate list - men and women, you were called back...

SH. Were you out during the war?

IM.. No, this was after the war.

LH. The war ended in '45.

IM. The war ended in '45. Well, I was out, it was over, I was layed off and I worked at Motor Products for awhile and I went, went back to Ternsted after the war was over. Then I worked a very short time there, maybe 3 months, then I got a job at Metal Molding, worked there/a short time. Then I went to the local, Local 600, and worked. And then I was called back to Fords. So maybe it was, it's hard for me to remember these dates anymore, you know, '47 maybe. About '47, I suppose. But I was working at Fords when Tony got, came home, had been in the hospital. He got sick a little later than that I suppose, then I remember.

SH. How could, could you, do you have any genrral impressions about how you were accepted at union meetings. Well, not so much union meetings, conventions, bargaining, I mean were you taken as seriously since you were probably one of the very few women, maybe the only at a particular convention or bargaining meeting.

IM. I think so.

SH. I mean were you taken really seriously and just like anybody else.

IM. I think so.

LH. Yes, she was.

IM. At the shop committee and on our bargaining committee at Ternsted, E was taken very seriously and at, after all I had to get elected, you know. You weren't appointed. And I ran, and I got elected. And Reuther was always against me so...

LH.. They had a lot of respect for you, Irene.

IM. And I had, I didn't ever put out any handbills or anything. I'd write my name and the ones that we were supporting, our slate, you know, so called. And we'd pass out the slate. And there were two or three times that by plant got all of our slate elected. And it was simply by the girls would, I'd give one girl a name, the names of the slate

and she'd write out three or four and she'd give them to other girls, you know. And I'd give a man our slate and so forth. And I think I was respected and I was respected at conventions.

SH. So you were able to overcome the general, I don't think that you went so far as to say hostility, but lack of attention to women.

IM. Oh no, no, I don't think so. Oh, you run into hostility, but it was usually a political hostility, that's what it was you know.

SH. It was more of an apathy about taking care of women equal, equal pay and equal rights and things like that.

IM. Yes, that's right. Well, I always felt these things weren't being taken care of and I thought it was because they didn't take women seriously. And actually I think there was people on the shop committee at Ternsted that didn't want women to have equal pay. And I accused them of this. There was people in the local union who didn't want women to have equal pay. People in the International didn't want women to have equal pay.

LH. That's right.

IM. That's why it wasn't handled. It wasn't really given any attention. And I think women could have got, they are getting equal pay now, aren't they Lucy, in most plants?

LH. They're beginning to, yeah.

IM. But I think it was because, you know, over the years management itself gave in on these things. Not because the union fought for it that much. Cause they didn't. That was one of my pet peeves all of those years. They wouldn't put it in a contract and they could've, they could've gotten it in a contract.

LH. Well, then there was federal pressure too, in recent years.

IM. That's right. There was a lot of federal pressure.

LH. In recent years.

(Tape turned Off)

LH. ...auxiliary?

IM. I was never too active in auxiliary. But I'd go to a meeting occasionally and when during, let's see in '42, the year Ford was organized, I'd had an operation and I wasn't able to go out to work. I was on Sick Leave. And I went to Fords in the strike kitchen, you know, and made sandwiches and I wasn't able to do any picket line duty at the time. But I made sandwiches and helped in that kind of stuff. But in the local, Local 600 Auxiliary, I would go mostly when they needed a vote, you know. (laugh) When our side was up against it for votes or something. I didn't take that much of an actual part. And I did go picketing many times with the Auxiliary, wearing an Auxiliary cap. I think I still have one here. And was part of it. But, that wasn't my main function at all. I was strictly in the plant, you know, as an auto worker.

SH. In fact I think that the Executive Board a couple of times rules that a women couldn't be both a union member and a auxiliary member. This came up...

IM. Maybe it came up later.

SH. ...again and again and I was unable to understand why they wouldn't allow it.

IM. I don't know why the reason would be either.

SH. I suspect that it had to do with politics and the political...

IM. Probably, cause that's the reason why I attended Local 600. I'd be, somebody would let me know, Miss Joy (?) would let me know that they needed some votes, you know, and, or what's her name, her husband died three or four years ago, I, I got a Christmas card back from her, Rose Billips, she'd call, she'd let me know that they needed a vote, you know. And

I'd go. But that was about all, you know. And I knew what the, what the discussion was about, I knew what the issues were. And I was willing to go out, you know. Take time off and go over to vote, you know, and participate in the discussion and so forth. But this really was when you got to the really right and left wing thing where it degenerated into the auxiliary also you know. It was the local politics, and then in auxiliary politics also. Where it really should never have been, I don't think. I don't think the auxiliary should ever have been...it was a wonderful thing. And these auxiliary women really did tremendous jobs, you know. They went to Flint and they worked and they cooked and they carried food to the strikers in those plants and things and I, but it finally degenerated into nothing. I don't think it's anything now.

LH. Well, one of the things that Susan and I discussed the other night and that was what brought her to see me was the virtual disillusionment of the auxiliaries as soon as Reuther got control of the union.

IM. That's right.

LH. And I was telling her the same things happened in my husband's union because the - the American Newspaper Guild - as soon as the so called right wing got control of the Guild that was the end of the unions. As soon as Phil Murray got control of the CIO that was the end of the Congress of Women's Auxiliary of the CIO.

IM. That's right. That's right.

LH. Which was a very, very active militant supportive group.

IM. Certainly, certainly.

LH. Wonderful group.

End of recording. Side B Tape 1.