

Joe Bidinger, telephone, notes 9/27/75

Black preacher: Howard Martin

more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of blacks illiterate

paint mach operated first shift only

HiLo Drivers black

Nelson Merrill, NAACP member

1920: quite a few blacks in shop (in paint mach., pickle)

14-15 women at time of sitdown. nurse got them together and sent them out (but check this figure)

Tom Morehouse, super in Assembly in 34

few supervisors hired as such; came up from ranks, also to p execs came up from ranks; but the office force was oppsed to the union

about 50-70% of foremen sympathetic to union

too many big companies dependent on ~~midland~~ midland (/?)

Bennet goons try to take dies during sitdown

workers resist, clubs, iron knock-out pins

2 or 3 days later strike settled

- Oden not militant

most of blacks religious

oden never spoke in religious frame

a few of older blacks would say "Mr. Joe" (later)

skilled men jealous of production wages

Oscar leadoff--high pay (C1, C2, side rails)

- toolmakers losing status, wanted to maintain gap

competitors of midland: A.O. Ross, Budd, Murray

Ross main competitor, highly automated, couldn't change model rapidly, Midland could, could clear lines rapidly

Dyer English (75% sure)

Welding: began in 34/35

36: half and half, riveters welders; 39 similar after 36 began training more welders

Bill Smith, welding engineer ~~xxxxxx~~

non-prod workers (stock chasers, crane hookers) hostile to thomas anderson, claimed sellout (later George revised this, it was assemblers, but check) knife incident

non-production workers on line: handling stock, genl labor

blacks

p.m.
Blacks
vs
Beaver

Blacks

Mr Joe

welding

clash

clash

Podgorski telephone

pf: I want idea of where you participated, where worked?

started afternoon in ass, operated Hannifin. A H. is a machine that encloses rivets, when you put two pieces of steel together and ~~xxxx~~ rivet them, a H. is a mach that squeezes them. went on days after about a year or so; they had union there, an AFL union at the time, which wasnt doing anybody any good, they later found out it was a payoff by the company.

pf: was this the mesa?

no, I think it was afl. they were affiliated with the afl

pf: do you remember when the mesa was in the shop?

no, but John Anderson was there, remember that, but he tried to org, but never did, never was successful.

pf: right, there were some indications of some things in Nov 35, but I cant make much sense out of them. Anderson doesnt remember them

cp well he come down there several times trying to organize, that was against the afl . . . and somehow or other I remember Martin

pf: Martin is summer 37 to March 39 two conventions. so was this an old afl craft union that was in before anything else, like a machinists union?

I believe it was. anyhow, we finally got to where we were ^{allowed} able to have a labor board election, and the cio won the election.

pf: yeah, that was the end of 39.

yeah I would suppose, shortly after we had the sitdown strike.

pf: the sitdown was end of Nov 36.

36? hm!

pf: gotta track down that election. you had an election before the sitdown strike, you say?

yes.

pf: I wonder? that might have been an NLRB election

I dont know.

pf: that was before the NLRB elections. but you were on the day shift when the sitdown strike took place?

yes.

so were you in any way involved in actively organizing that strike?

no.

pf: were you involved in the union at that time?

I got into the union after it was all straightened out, and after this election was over--you see it was so long ago I cant even remember. I first ran for--let's see, I was chmn of comm, I was rec secy--this was after the ~~skidoo~~ labor bd election. I was first rec secy.

pf: this must have been after the fight with Martin.

what is my name listed out there? Chester Hill?

the first mention I have of it is as Podgorski. Now here, the

temporary chief shop stews you are listed as Hill.

Chester Hill was name I was working under.

pf: you are nowhere as oficer or on bargaining comm in 38.

who was on it then?

pf: Pres Boll.

oh, this was the guys we threw out, Frank Carr and Boll.? that was the faction we was fighting against. that was before my time.

After we threw them out, then I was rec secy and pres.

pf: the sitdown strike occurred before these guys became officers, I guess.

I think so too.

little knowledge of
NLRB

poor memory
of factionalism

not active

1940

Pres

?

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pf: so what I'm intersted in is why these group of men should become officers if they didnt really reflect opinion in the shop. well, I think the govt found out some were getting paid off by co, and few lost jobs, others thrown out, etc.
pf: yeah, Howe was one.
Jim Howe. thats right.

telephone:
Joe Biginger
Process

steel comes in on trucks and on flatcars and they would take it and unload it into the yard. and then orders would come from the production dept/and the steel for thatpart would be put on for a specific part
coveyor roller and rolled into the shop, and there would be men unolad that steel into a rack, standing it up on edge, and put spacers in between it, and when they get the rack filled pick it up with a crane and set it down into a pickla tank which was phosporic acid to remove the rust and scale. after it was set in there at a controlled temp for a certain legnth of time it was then taken out and put into a rinse tank, dip into rinse tank, pick up into another--three rinse ops--and then final one would go into an oil coating, a preservative, to keep it from rusting again. then they would pick up the rack and set it onto a platform. sheets stacked vertically in a metal frame, made out of bronze, acid in tank would have eaten steel frames. and then they were taken out and set onto a platform, and the men took and unloaded the steel back down onto a conveyor roller. each sheet weight: depends. would run upwards to a 1000 pounds. dimension, varied: leng, wid, guage: one would be say a 9/32 by 45 wide and probably 280 to 300 inches long. then they would go into thepress room, set at the press for this particular job that they were going to run, and set on a table, this whole lift of steel, it might ~~wax~~ weight maybe 8, 9, 10,000 lbs. the men would drag these sheeets down of of there into a die, they had guages on the die, youd push the steel up against the guages, youd come down and youd make your hit. pf guys who pulled steel off rack same as who operated press. It was in the hydraulic bay, but these were mechanical presses, air clutch presses. when we talk about a small press we are talk ng about a 14 1/2 Toledo, which would be a small punch press. and then you would go into a, lets say about a 75 ton press, they had those, they were a Hamilton, or a Toledo, or a Min????
pf: refering to press in Aetna: Joe: that press there was a small press compred to the ones that were stamping out frames. when you get into presses stamping out frames, we had one over there that was a 2000ton press, thats 2000tones pressure per sq inch. No, they had then all the way from a 5 ton to a 2000 ton press. they had a lot of obsolete machinery at the time that I was there, but they were still in operation making parts. and then they got newer machinery in that was right up to the best that they had at that time. and then you had your--and these ~~ix~~ sheets would probably make 4 blanks. the blanks would be shaped something ~~ixix~~ like this (diagram) Its a lot different than this because you are folding up flanges ~~omx~~ here; and this would be all with perforated holes all over in it for your components that would beassembled to it. the sheet, when it come in therewould be straight like this. and this is all scrap here, which would have to be disposed of. some of it would be thrown into a sheet? and chopped into small parts, others, just the end would be trimmed off of it and they

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then, would save the salvage out of that to make other smaller parts. after they would go through the blanking op, theyd go into a stack of--this is heavy truck steel I'm talking about now-- now theyd have about a 150 to 200 blanks in a lift, then that lift would be taken out with a crane and set into storage, until they were ready for the form op. then they take it up and set it onto a table. there again, the men would take them and pull them down off of the pile, slide them into the die into guages, and then there would be 4 people on the press, one at each corner. each one would have to hit a button before the press wold make a cycle. 2 men on each side. 2 to position it and 2 to take it out. 2 put it in, all 4 hit button in order to make cycle. after make cycle, one man on each corner afk on the backside pf press, would have hooks that they grab ahold of it with, lift it out of the press, drag it up a skid, and drop it into a rack. definitely heavy work. blanking and forming about the hardest jobs that they had in the whole plant. Of course in the pickle room where they are taking these sheets ~~xxx~~ down and putting them into the racks, that was a rough jobtoo. Paint mach dirtiest job. . . . down in ass line on pasenger car frames, there would be pits below ground, where men would have to be down in these pits, welding, with a closed helmet over their face, with all that overhead

smoke from the flux on the welding wire and the oil that might be on the frame. and in summer, when tem would be around 90, they were carrying those guys out of there likes flies. they dropped from heat exhaustiion. in exteme hot weather men would drop everyday.(welding both on top and bottom) later years, after union then they had a turnover operation, wherer they would lift the frame up and turn it over and weld it. this was a result of union pressure.

pressroom ops dangerous, people getting hurt quite often because it was a piecework shop, high standards set, and of course it was an incentive pay. some guys would get over anxious trying to get more. would get fingers caught in die, cut off, etc.

As they were trying to org union, when they first started it was cloak and dagger, co definitely against it. anybody caught on co property or co time, they were gone, if they were trying to org.

pf: did you know jim Howe? he was a spy, no?

I never beleived that.

pf on frank and LaPollete

from knowing him personally I could never beleive that it was true; swell guy, good union man.

pf serious and consciencious?

yes?

pf on Robertson, contrast with Howe.

Howe had good union sense. My impression is that Howe was set up by cobecause of good work he did. railroaded by co.

pf: . . . (section on Howe)

Bidinger no only one who had feeling about Howe. there was a good many of the people at the time who felt that way. a good many of them wanted to go on strike when they relased him.

working conditions

in union

on Howe

he was one of those soliciting for membership (contrary to Robertson) How did. he was in a spot where he came into contact with a good many people in the tool crib. (pf: main and tool r?) no, your factory tools, shop tools. Like if a man working on press needs a hammer he take his tool check and hed go up to crib and get a hammer. (Carr also in crib?) can't remember. I know he was later. after Jim was gone carr was in there. Howe was in his 40's, close to 40. that just about killed him (exp. from plant). heard about him from others who had seen him. havng rough time, lost his home, just about broke up his family. it just wrecked him completely. he still insisted he was innocent. He was blackballed from every place by the union.

...

pf: would you say he was most active organizer in plant? no, I couldnt say that for a fact.

pf: who were the other active organizers?

I know my brother was one who went around and helped to solidit.

pf: how come you know prod proc so well, even though you didnt play an active role?

I was a union memb, but I never held any office.

...

I tell you, they (ziggy and brad) were set onto a job, and they stayed right on that same job practically their whole career that they worked at the shop. I went in there, I had never seen the inside of a shop when I started there in Jan 34. was hired in as press helper. never even got to a press, sent out into frame yard to repair frames in the winter time. then later on I came back into the shop and started as a helper, went from helper to operator, from op to die setter, from die sett to foreman. became die setter about 38 or 39. became foreman of press in he he vy stamping. I worked in heavy machinery all the time. smallest guy in the shop around the big est machinery, they always used to say.

pf: who else active that you remember before the strike?

tony boll, frank carr, and jim howe. se they were in a real good spot in the tool crib, and they solicited people would come there for tools and they solicited for the union. but this union was a farce. these are the guys that the lafollete comm found out that this jim howe was being paid by the co. (bidinger vs podgorski on howe.)

bidinger: anderson, I wouldnt have trusted him ...

podgorski: but you didnt know the man well enough. Anderson was one of the finest union leaders that I ever met.

pf: why not trust?

bidinger: i think he was a rabble rouser. Cp probably thing that stuck in my craw.

pf on anderson)

" on mesa, afl, cio, aiwa, aawa

pf: do you remember oden?

bidinger: yeah. he worked on ass. couldt say what he was doing in terms of union. I knew him as worker, thats all. ...

I knew him from when he got up ans speak at union meet.

podgorski: what made people at midland so militant was the working conditions. they had a super there tha was just a villain.

the fellow that didnt come over to his house and treat him real good and put the chicken on the table or give him a bottle of

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Jan 34!

Podgorski

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whiskey and even as far as sleeping with some of their wives. he'd kick them out. super of ass dept. when men standing around to be hired he would just pick em out. it wasnt unusal for him to kick em right in the butt. now these are the things that brought the union really strong.

I(P) was a Hannifin operator. it was a cold riveting process where you hydraulically press a rivet.

pf: basically on the presses you are forming rails, xbars, and flanges and brackets?

bidinger: theyd all be formed in a diff location. they might be stamped in one section of press, formed in other, subass in other, and then go to the subass bench in the ass dept.

Pod: when plant closed down I was asst super in Press room: pickel room where steel was processed; shears, shear dept; blanking dept; body bracket dept; hydraulic bay we called where they blanked the side rails. over where joe worked the 54 bldg was heavy stampings where we formed as much as 3/16 stock. we had 3000 ton clearings? there. so there was quite a variety of operations. but getting back to the union, the transition when the union took over. It went from...it was real bad on the co's part?, I'll never forget when I sat on comm and went to one of the vps of co who was plant mgmner, and told him about super he had out there and told him that he was a little bit off his rocker. he couldnt believe it, that things like this were going on in the sop. this guy was ed turner, he was ok(mgmner).

chief honcho of whole ass dept. super of whole ass dept. pf: so these guys would operate on their own, this genl formena was on his own in doing this kind of stuff, it was not co policy, and if co knew about it they would do something about it?

bidinger: well at that time, as long as prod flowing, the office didnt know what was going on down in the shop.

pod: as far as I'm concerned they were not aware of these conditions, up in the front office, because nobody had ever presented them to them, and they had naturally never seen them themselves.

bid: this guy was such a son of a gun, that if he ever found out that anybody had complained about him they be out of a job and there would be ten guys out in the street looking for a job.

pf: so you didnt have an empl office or personal off?

pod: no, they would open the window, there would be a group of people standing out there, they would say you, you you, the rest of you go home.

pf: did he tend to rehire the same basic group all the time. over the long haul did you have a lot of turnover, or a little gux turnover?

pod: very little turnover. because it was a steady place, worked steady.

pf: probably not even yone in ass dept involved in this kind of graft and corruption.

pod: well, it would be very hard for him to get to everyone. let's say certain one's were. George Brazen.

bid: he had a man working for him named whitey. well liked, well respected, I guess at that time he was a straw boss,

pod: now I think you may understand--I gotta bring this up, and its a fact, when midland closed they were one of the very few cos that I know of that closed in the black. they never lost any money, there wasnt one year where they lost any money.

check.

ed turner, mgr

on policy making

turnover + cycles

MC

George Brazen

whitey

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and I attribute their closing mostly to union activities after it went the other way. they had six or seven people, the committee men, pres, ch stew, that did nothing that sit in the room (bid; the blue room) wouldn't go out and do not one bit of work. this developed after the war, 45, 46.

bid: in transition from war prod to civil prod.

pod: and they never could bust this gang up. I was on supervision on the time, I was asst super in press room, and I had people come to me with tears in their eyes, say Chester, you used to be in u, pres of u, comm man, go to the mgmt and tell them we were willing to take a cut.

pf

why close down?

bidinger: wildcat strikes.

pod: just would put up with taking orders from union. not unusual for ch stew to go up and shut a press down.

PF

why?

bid: someone complained of some little thing or other and without an investigation . . .

pod: they would never go through the grievance procedure whatsoever. so they got fed up with it, eleven plant went people out here, watched the op, took several years, and decided this plant is done.

pf: who were these people?

one is dead now, but they used to have a fellow that was ch stew, was for years, Fred Cini, he was just ornery.

pf: was Cini too left wing or just ornery.

bid: no, he wasn't left wing.

pf: did he have any kind of union idea of militancy, he was just being super militant?

bid: no, I don't think he was militant. he had one idea in mind, the union man was right, and that was it.

uni afl; is this some
nd of folk work class
itude (Irish communal)

pd: there was one guy just before we closed down that had guts enough to tell a guy that he was wrong. other than that all they was looking from was the vote so they could sit back in that room and play cards. that guy was Pete Borovich. whose brother was very very active, when they had the factional fight, geo was the head of it. he was the fin secy, they come and audit the books and they was short some much money that they come and got rid of him. his brother never was even active in the union until he left there.

.....

pf: what about ziggy mize?

pod: he was pretty good, but he had to go along with the program.

bid: he had to go along with the slate.

pf: so there was like a clique of these comm men, you're saying.

pod: in a way, yes. It's not a prominent as in Chrysler where you have the blue slate and the green slate, because it's not that big, but a few of them would get together and they would conspire (unintelligible) so that's why I say there was quite a transition from when the union started, to after the war the union went to fix it went the other way. when people come to you and tell you to go and approach the co and tell them they were willing to take a cut, they realized what they were losing, but it was too late.

pf: who were the main people that we were involved in this thing, the comm men, do you remember their names?

pod: Frank Correy(?) Bradfield, Pete Borovich, ~~and~~ Fred Cini, Jim Dinkel, Pete Bodner, ~~new~~ as one of the decent fellow there too.

bid

end side 1

side 2

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blacks: indiscipline
at meetings; role
of warfield; bible
quoting (two diff
groups)?

pod: on post war union arrogance.
claims midland went out because of attitude of u, not because
of unitized body. Older people upset by situation.
pf: problem of leadership?
pod: definitely, not only labor, but management. we had management
that didnt have enough guts to say hey, you get out there and do
this. etc. story of abuse of piecework system, fantastic wages.

pf: who was ch stew in your dept? (going down list)
pf: ---
pod: in ass dept welders would be the key men. the foreigners at
midland were the backbone of this union, but it certainly was never
their intention for the union going the way it did. in the final
stages before it closed down. they were very ? people and they
listened to their leaders, even if wrong. the foreign born backbn
of union. they were disgusted with what happened, had seniority, JM
had nowhere to go for job.
pf: org of strike, my guess would that 2nd gen stuck necks out.
pod: second gen were the leaders.
bid: couldnt hardly get any of the oldtimers to take any lead
pod: a lot of for. and colored, never had the schooling, couldnt
present (petitions?). In many cases i got up at meetings and spok
polish. *MM*
pf: on anderson and black pr acher. who?
pod: Merrill
bid: no, pop warfield. Warfield is the one that he is refering
to, because he would get up ther and would explain all of it to
these colored people. he would have a steadying effect on some
of those guys at the meeting, and the chair would tell them they
were out of order, and pop warfield would get up there and settle
them down. W an assembler. dont know if he was actually a preacher.
pod: meril, I'm pretty sure he had a congregation of his own.
bid: whenever he'd get up to speak in front of the body he was al
always quoting the bible
pf: who?
pod: a lot of colored people can do that
pf: who?
pod: warfield
pf: anderson got intouch with black preacerh inside plant, was
pretty conservative, but important in bringing over many blacks
to support the union.
bid: i would say that was warfield.
pod: could have been.
bid: not still around, he was an old grey haired man then.
pod: merill more of a conservative colored person. he didnt hang
around with this lower class, lower grade negroes. he was a little
higher class, didnt have too much to do with . . . merill was
an assembler. *MM*
pf: you were at work when strike began?
pod: yes, ~~wasnt~~
pf: how did word get to you that there would be a strike?
pod: word of mouth, there was a time limit, and that was it, if there
wasnt any action by 10 in morning (bid) . . .
pf: at that time you had ass and weld in your dept. did welders
carry the ball in that strike?
pod: no way, no way. for one to be more aggressive than the other
no, no, they were all aggressive, whether they were welders, or

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assemblers or press ops, what have you. You had a very militant bunch of people that were out to get what they had coming to them. working conditions: summer, welders dropping like flies. pf: anderson on difficulty of organizing blacks.

bid: at that time the black people were more timid than they are today, the white supremacy, and all of the supervision at that time was all white. due to this one main super in ass dept they were afraid to even turn around and talk sideways.

pf: as people sign up into u a few weeks before the strikes... my guess would be that a lot higher % of welders were in the union before the strike than the black assemblers.

pod: that may well be true, because they were the ones who were after more money, and they certainly deserved it. because of working conditions, exhaust fans, no break periods, etc.

pod: I wouldn't say necessarily 2nd gen poles, 2nd gen, a mixture of nationalities. (pf on native american yanks) no, they were mostly 2nd gen. very few germans.

pf: what % of assemblers black on your shift?

pod: about 50 50.

pf: I would guess a lot of whites 1st gen.

pod: correct. 2nd gen ...25% 1st gen, 25% 2nd gen, 50% blacks.

bid: when you get up into the press room then you had the 2nd gen more.

pod: also very few colored were arc welders to begin with. after war more got into it.