

Oral History Interview of Mr. George F. Addes by Jack W. Skeels.  
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I was born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin on August 26, 1910. In the '20's, our family moved to Toledo, Ohio, where we remained for three or four years. We then moved to Flint, Michigan, where work was more plentiful and my dad worked at the Buick plant for about four years. By this time, economic conditions had improved in Toledo and we returned there to make our permanent home, as most of our relatives and friends lived in Toledo.

I was educated in Catholic schools and attended Central Catholic High in Toledo. Several years after high school, during the early days of organization of the labor movement, I felt the need of more education and enrolled in some night courses. I completed one year of law, a course in public speaking and human relations, as well as the Dale Carnegie course, which I later taught for about two years.

During my boyhood days, I sold newspapers and shined shoes. After leaving school, I worked with my brother, John, who operated a garage. I learned something about an automobile and wanted to become a mechanic and build my own racing car. I applied for a job at the Willys Overland and worked as a polisher, pending an opening in the test driving department. My brother closed his garage and also went to work in the same department. After a period of time, both my brother and I were discharged because we refused to work for straight time pay after  $9\frac{1}{2}$  hours work.



Later, I was hired by the same plant as a body finisher. The 1929 crash hit and I found myself out of a job along with several thousand other Overland employees. The Willys Overland closed its doors and they remained closed until some time during 1932. My folks were in business and I would help them from time to time. Late in 1930 or early 1931, I accepted a job with the John Hancock Life Insurance Company as an agent. I worked a debit and earned about \$30 a week. Very occasionally, I would earn as much as \$75 to \$100 per week, but unfortunately, this did not occur frequently enough. On this job, I learned something about human starvation. The majority of the families I called on could not pay their insurance premiums because of unemployment. Many could not even buy food, and what savings some of them had were frozen in the banks as a consequence of the crash. It was during this time that my folks lost their business, as their savings were tied up in the banks also and they could not meet the monthly payments on their business. As a result of the prolonged unemployment, the insurance business did not afford me sufficient remuneration to make a living and I finally quit and went to work in a garage repairing wrecked cars. In 1932, or thereabouts after the election of President Roosevelt, the Willys Overland opened and I returned to work.

Following the enactment of the NIRA, we began to organize our department. This new law gave us what we thought was the "right to organize" without the fear of being discharged.

Skeels: Was there much ferment for unionism in those early days right after the NIRA?



Addes: Yes, even before the NIRA came into existence there was much talk about the need for developing an organization. One of the company practices which provoked this feeling, among other things, was the following:

We began work at 7 a.m. and quit at 4 p.m., at which time we had to punch our time cards out and return to work for another two to three hours, without pay. The workers resented this practice and were well on their way mentally to do something about this abuse. Two or three of us were so incensed about this practice that we called on the Central Labor Union in Toledo and discussed the possibilities of organizing under the AFL banner. We did not receive much satisfaction and were quite discouraged, to say the least. I recall, we used to pray for the election of Mr. Roosevelt. We somehow felt, from his campaign speeches, that something would be done to help workers in general. We felt that a law would be passed by the Congress to protect workers who became involved in organizing a given plant.

You will recall that it was not too long after Mr. Roosevelt was elected that the NIRA came into existence. This was the protective law we had been waiting for and we immediately began the organization in the body department of the Overland, where I happened to be working. The AFL in Toledo provided a few of us with applications and we began to sign up members on and off the assembly line. Membership applications were passed up and down the line and workers were asked to fill them out and return with a dollar. The



AFL also printed handbills for us. A few of us would arrive early and stand at the entrance gates and pass out to the employees the handbills as well as application cards and envelopes. The handbills urged that the cards be completed and a dollar bill placed in the envelope provided, which would then be collected after working hours as the employees left the plant. By this time, we had a working committee which was held responsible for this organizational activity. For some reason or other, everyone used to turn the money over to me for safekeeping.

During the noon hour, we would move around from department to department, making speeches, urging the workers to join this new labor organization. Many times during the lunch period, we would sit down with them, holding a sandwich in one hand and an application in the other, and talk about the power of a union if they would but join. We informed them about NIRA, that it was a law giving the workers an opportunity to end all evils taking place in the plants. We were quite successful in this initial organizational attempt and as soon as we had what we thought at the time was a substantial number of members, we formed a "demand committee," charged with the responsibility of writing up the demands and presenting them on behalf of the union to management.

We did not take our demands to the front office; we went to the superintendent of the division. I recall the demands were typewritten on a narrow writing tablet sheet. There were ten demands in all. The most important was a wage increase from 35 cents an hour to 65 cents. Another was the right to smoke in the plant during



the lunch period. I served on this committee, and I recall that surprisingly all ten demands were granted during one discussion after work. The so-called contract was signed and the next day our wages were increased to 65 cents per hour. We no longer had to punch out at 4 p.m. and return to work without pay. At that time, we did not ask for time and a half for overtime work, we merely demanded that the practice of no pay at all for overtime be discontinued. This achievement for at least being paid at regular rates for any overtime contributed more to the union's growth than anything else. The union literally mushroomed overnight and the applications and money started to roll in.

While the Willys Overland was being organized, we were in contact with other auto plants such as City Auto Stamping, Electric Auto Lite, Bingham Stamping, and many others. The City Auto Stamping employed metal finishers and since we were metal finishers, we contacted them first and soon the union flourished in this plant. Workers at the Electric Auto Lite then became interested and through the AFL in Toledo, we got together and discussed the formation of a union at their plant. Here again, the union began to grow. These were the first three plants organized, however, the City Auto Stamping was the most completely organized of the three. It was most difficult to organize the Auto Lite because it employed many women. Women seemed to feel that a union was an organization for men, consequently, it was hard to bring them into the fold.

We soon elected officers. I was elected financial secretary-treasurer, and had the responsibility of setting up the books.



The AFL books were inadequate for our use. They were designed for a very small organization. We rented headquarters, and were open for business every night as well as Saturday, and even Sunday. From work I would go home, clean up, eat my dinner, and then go to the office to collect dues and accept applications. Committeemen and women would bring in applications and money. We held meetings of all descriptions rather frequently.

Shortly after the election of officers, we found it necessary to employ the services of a business agent. We voted and elected a man by the name of Floyd Bossler. Both he and I were placed on the payroll at \$125 per month. I then began to put in full time at the office. The growth was rapid and I soon found it necessary to employ the services of a secretary.

We again encountered difficulty at Auto Lite. Management fought the union organization every inch of the way. The usual tactics were used, firing, demoting, etc. Our business agent spent most of his time trying to organize this plant. Finally we reached a point where we believed we had enough power to effect an agreement. A meeting was called and demands were proposed, recognition, security, wages, etc. These demands were sent to management, with a request for a meeting. At first, management refused to meet with us. After several calls, they agreed to negotiate, but nothing was accomplished, as management refused to recognize the union. This was followed by a strike -- the first major test in the industry.



The strike was most effective in that most of the people, including those who were not members, refrained from entering the plant during the first three or four days. Mass picketing was the technique used. Shortly thereafter, the company obtained an injunction -- pickets were limited and outside labor was hired and brought into the plant. Many of those who remained at home soon returned to work and the strike was on the verge of being lost. In retaliation, mass picketing was intensified in defiance of the injunction. This obviously resulted in Governor White's ordering the National Guard Troops to Toledo to keep peace and order at the site of the strike-bound Auto Lite plant.

The workers, as well as the citizens in the community, resented the troops. Their presence appeared to help the company's position, and then the battle really began. Tear gas, guns and bayonets were used -- two people were killed. The troops were ordered to fire above the heads of the crowd, but someone miscalculated and struck two innocent bystanders. During this period, I was behind the lines conferring with the pickets.

About three or four days after the troops were called, a Mr. Royce Martin came into the picture. He was appointed acting president and given the specific responsibility of handling the union negotiations for management. Mr. Martin was a liberal and while I would not say he was in agreement with unionization, he, nevertheless, realized that the union had to be recognized and he would have to negotiate with the employees. This he did, and a reasonable agreement was worked out to the satisfaction of the



membership. The strike was settled and the workers returned to work. There was much unhappiness during the early stages. The grievance procedure was new to both sides and, I am certain, both sides from time to time took advantage of the situation.

Skeels: In the middle of 1934, Mr. Green called a national council of automobile workers to set up their executive council. Was there a demand for an international union among the delegates?

Addes: Yes, the demand was great. Auto plants were being organized throughout the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Before this move on the part of Green, many other conferences were held by the several Federal Labor Unions. All felt the need of an international union to embrace all segments under one union. Inasmuch as our problems were mutual, we felt that we could be much more effective in the event of a strike. Further, because our work was similar, we needed a uniform wage structure. At one of our conferences, we sent a wire to Mr. Green urging that he call a conference for the purpose of formulating and establishing a national automotive union within the confines of the AFL.

The president of the Central Labor Union in Toledo also urged Mr. Green to set up a national union of auto workers. Yes, the growth of these unions required a national union. I believe that Mr. Green realized something had to be done lest the workers pull out of the Federation. Consequently, Mr. Green called a conference. However, I believe, it was the Federation's thinking that this conference would be used to separate the organization into the craft unions, as there was no single union within the Federation that could



really embrace these new federated unions.

After calling the conference, Mr. Green appointed an executive council. There was a feeling among those attending the conference that a national union was imperative if the union was to be successful in completely organizing the industry. However, it was not until 1935 that the International Automobile Union was formed.

The officers were appointed by Mr. Green and Mr. Collins of the Federation and were placed in charge of the organization.

Skeels: Could you go back just a minute to February, 1934. There was a demand for a wage increase by Mr. Green and this led to the creation of a Wolman Board. Was there a great deal of demand for action at that time by the union people?

Addes: Yes, definitely. For example, in Toledo, we had nothing more than working agreements with one or two plants. Workers were restless and felt the need for more wages and recognition.

It was my thinking in those days that a single wage agreement must be attained from the industry due to the similarity of the work in all the automobile plants. AFL President Green sent letters to the federated unions asking them to indicate their desires relative to a general wage increase for all workers. It was during this period that the Briggs plant in Detroit was on strike. Mr. Green's message about more wages created greater enthusiasm among the workers and helped to stimulate the organizational work.

Skeels: The upshot of it was the Wolman Board. Now, how did that Board sit with the employees as you saw it from Toledo or wasn't there much of an opinion at the time?



Addes: There was not much enthusiasm for the Wolman Board. It was created by the Government to police discriminating practices by management and to enforce the right of the worker to organize. However, companies used it as a tool to promote company unions within a plant. Fortunately, leaders such as those at Chrysler refused to go along with the company or the Wolman Board in these independent groups. Richard Frankenstein was president of the Chrysler group and was most unhappy with the setup and finally joined the forces of the International Union. The Hudson local, also an independent led by Mr. Greer, likewise joined our forces. Skeels: In August, 1935, the UAW held its first convention which Mr. Green had called. What do you think might have prompted him to call such a conference -- to give you at least some form of international union?

Addes: Primarily growth, and the demand of the leadership. Unions began to grow in Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan, and we wanted to be together in order to work out our mutual problems. No doubt Mr. Green was sincere, plus the fact that he wanted to increase the membership of the Federation. During the period another union had started. It was called the Mechanical Education Society (MESA). This basically was born as an independent union within the crafts such as Tool and Die and Machinist. We continued to hold conferences as Federal Labor Unions and within this group the demand for a National Auto Union was great. Mr. Green could see the handwriting on the wall and he finally called a convention



of the auto workers federal labor unions. He refused the convention the right to elect its officers and appointed the following: Francis Dillon, president, who was a Federation organizer; Homer Martin, vice-president, who was a member of a Federal Local Union in Kansas; and Ed Hall, secretary-treasurer, who was a member of a Federal Local Union from Wisconsin. At this first convention it was understood that the appointed officers were temporary and another convention would be called at a later date, at which time full autonomy would be granted.

Skeels: There was quite a bit of opposition, wasn't there, to William Green's appointing the officers?

Addes: Yes. The demand was for an autonomous union with the right to elect our own officers. The dissatisfaction and mistrust of the Federation was great. We felt the Federation was not aggressive in organizing the mass productive industry. We knew they did not like vertical type unions. They were craft minded. We, of course, had no choice but to go along with Green's action and the Federation. About a year later Mr. Green kept his word and another convention was called and held in South Bend, Indiana. At this convention we were granted full autonomy and we elected the following officers: Homer Martin, president; Ed Hall, vice-president as well as Mortimer; and George F. Addes, secretary-treasurer.

Skeels: Was there actually much talk at the time that the AFL was thinking of splitting up the locals into craft unions?

Addes: Yes, there was a great deal of talk. The Federation sent men to Toledo and elsewhere with this thought in mind. They were



not successful, however, as the workers wanted to remain together.<sup>48</sup> The skilled workers felt that they would be lost in the shuffle. They were also fearful that by joining the craft unions, they would lose the support of the production workers who were by far the greater in number.

Skeels: Were there any other concrete examples of this that you came across, that is, evidence of their trying to actually divide up locals?

Addes: Yes. Throughout this period, many of the skilled people rejoined their craft union and remained members of the auto union as well. This happened at the Overland, Auto Lite and elsewhere. Many of these people at one time or another worked as building tradesmen and machinists. When the building industry was shut down, they came into the auto plants and remained there as work was more regular. The machinists by and large came to the auto industry from union machine shops. Many of them were working on regular production jobs and were among the first to join the new auto union.

Skeels: Was there any feeling, do you think, of resentment among the auto workers against the fact that the AFL had sent in craft organizers? In fact, William Collins and Francis Dillon were both craftsmen for many years.

Addes: I do not think there was any resentment as such. We appreciated their help and experience and know-how. We were, however, afraid that if we remained in a federal union and did not form an international union that they would soon penetrate the ranks and split the union. We believed a federal union was designed to



start a union and then place the workers into their respective trade classification.

Skeels: Actually, the UAW didn't make much progress membershipwise in 1935-1936. It was pretty much the same.

Addes: This is true. There was a lack of interest on the part of the Federation. They were unwilling to make any financial investment. They did not employ the services of organizers. What few AFL organizers they had were not the kind of people who were interested enough to go to the shops to urge workers to join a union. The few men they had would only advise the local leadership on how the job was to be done. It is my opinion that the AFL was afraid to organize the auto workers for fear that they would have to expend money and manpower to do the job. Also, they were aware that the auto workers leadership and members as well were opposed to craft type unions. Further, the craft unions throughout the country were trying to organize the already organized by contacting the craftsmen and urging them to join or return to their union. It could be that they exerted some pressure to halt Mr. Green in his possible efforts to organize the auto industry.

Skeels: The AFL had a UAW executive board before 1936. To me, it looked like none of the board members really represented the auto workers.

Addes: The board members did come from the ranks. It is safe to say, however, that most of them were brainwashed into the idea of a craft setup. Mr. Ramsey, for example, who represented the Toledo group appeared to have lost his enthusiasm after a session or two with the board. We were not sure whom he represented after that.



Skeels: But he did not have a lot of support.

Addes: True, he did not. What little he may have had was completely lost because of his shenanigans. We became most suspicious of his actions and began to wonder if he were on the payroll of some employer. In any event, we released him from the payroll.

Skeels: What role did Francis Dillon play in the 1936 convention?

Addes: He played no role at all. He just passed on in a good way to put it. He knew that there was nothing he could say or do to change the minds of the delegates.

Skeels: Here you have a brand new union. New officers have been elected. You have got a problem that most of the industry is unorganized. Was General Motors selected or did it just happen to fall before any of the others?

Addes: It happened to fall before any of the others, I would say. There were organizations already established here and there. We had a nucleus in a lot of these plants, and where we had this nucleus, we proceeded to expand and develop it. This was the easiest possible group to expand. At Chrysler, we had organization, true, and we had a great number of smaller plants, such as Kelsey-Hayes, Briggs, Murray Body, etc. We really did not pass up the development of these other organizations, but General Motors grew a little bit faster and reached the point where we felt we could do something with it.

Skeels: Do you think there was any concentration of effort? Here is the reason I say this. Mortimer, the first vice-president, was sent up to Flint after his election. This looked like you were going to take on General Motors.



Addes: Flint was a natural. We had a concentration of workers in a relatively small city. These workers represented a good chunk of GM. Cleveland, Toledo, and Detroit also represented a great number of auto workers. The potential was great, and we felt that Flint was the easiest to organize as we had many contacts with workers at Buick, Fisher Body, and Chevrolet. It may have looked like we concentrated on GM. Frankly, we worked just as hard in Cleveland, Detroit, and in Wisconsin, but things moved faster in Flint.

Skeels: When it started growing, however, then it did look like there really was a plan.

Addes: Yes, when it began to move, we did concentrate harder and put on more help.

Skeels: Had they really planned on having a sit-down strike in Flint or did that just pop up?

Addes: There was no plan, that is, an early plan. It could have been worked out on a local basis, but there was no overall long-range program.

Skeels: Would you say the force of example in Midland Steel, Kelsey-Hayes, and a few others contributed?

Addes: It no doubt did contribute.

Skeels: Now the strike really occurred just before the beginning of 1937. Had you people any plans as to when you were going to strike General Motors?

Addes: We certainly did not plan to strike it at that time because, if I am correct, it came during the holiday season right before or



after Christmas. We actually had no choice in the matter, it just developed rapidly.

Skeels: Had there been some feelings that the things were getting ripe now?

Addes: A lot of discussion about it, but nothing definite. Plans were made only a few hours before it actually took place. It was one of those fast decisions because it was deemed that the propitious moment had arrived.

Skeels: Now on the other side, you find that the General Motors strike brought in a lot of new members. You had taken over the job of secretary-treasurer. What did you have to go on when you went into office?

Addes: When I went into office, I had one office girl doing all of the bookkeeping and serving as my secretary as well. As soon as the union began to show growth, I began to think in terms of an up-to-date accounting system. The present system was antiquated and designed for anything but a big union. I was deeply aware of one thing -- keep the records and money in good order and no one can ever point the finger of suspicion. I felt that every member had the privilege to inspect the records at any time. This was their money and union. I was merely the custodian. A new and modern system was established. Forms for the collection of dues and initiation fees were printed and sent to the locals. Financial officers of every local union were bonded. In fact, any one who had a receipt book was bonded. In short, I had to start from scratch. Up until the time I left, I was always investigating and installing new methods and systems to make the office more efficient



and at the same time keeping it simple so that any local or member could readily understand it. It was a big job, but I was fortunate in selecting competent help who made it run smoothly and consequently made my job easier.

Skeels: I suppose there was an additional problem in that you set up an office for about thirty thousand members, and you grew to well over three hundred thousand.

Addes: Quarters were not large enough. We rented more office space in the building. We just about had the top floor, right across from the Detroit Hotel, and had to expand to another floor. We established a mailing list, purchased an addressograph machine and plate cutter, and asked all of the local unions to send in names and addresses of members so that we could develop a complete membership mailing list. We purchased accounting machines and other equipment for the accounting division and, of course, hired competent and confidential help. We had to be particularly careful in screening help to make certain that we did not employ someone who would be passing along information to the employers.

Skeels: Here you are setting up an organization. Where did you get the experience? Where did you get information on how to go about doing this? Who were the people who were helpful at the time?

Addes: For two years, I was financial secretary-treasurer of the Toledo union. I did a great deal of studying and had some good friends who were accountants. These friends counseled me regarding various systems of efficient record keeping. I also employed



experienced bookkeepers who helped me install the initial system used. Later, I hired a good friend, Albert Abood, a graduate accountant, who was most competent. Together, we revised and reorganized to keep pace with the growth of the union, constantly striving to achieve greater efficiency.

Skeels: In other words, the CIO did not send in people to help you out on something like this.

Addes: No. In the early stages, one of the big things that concerned me, especially during membership drives, was the matter of assuring that every dollar collected was turned in and credited to the new member. I used to issue receipt books with 50 receipts in each book, triplicate copies, and each committeeman soliciting memberships was required to turn in each receipt book and account for every receipt in it. We wanted to know from whom every dollar came. I was intent on making certain that no blunders were committed with respect to finances. This could destroy confidence and consequently the union. Therefore, I was doubly cautious about recording every dollar that was turned in and every dollar that was expended, as there was a lot of talk in those days about racketeers. As a consequence, we set up a system that was quite fool-proof.

Skeels: Your first annual report was probably about the most complete financial report in union history.

Addes: Yes. A copy was mailed to every Congressman and Government official. It was complete to minutest detail. Everyone laughed at it for many years thereafter. However, I think that the integrity reflected by this report did a great deal to combat and



and block the efforts of those trying to issue propaganda that the union was exploiting dues money, and that the officers were getting away with millions, etc. I think it alleviated suspicion in the mind of the individual who worked in the shop. There was the matter, too, of pride in my work. I was most conscientious about the manner in which I discharged my duties. I considered it a privileged trust. It was easy for me to operate in this manner as I was reared in a home where early in life I was taught that integrity, character and reputation were the most priceless possessions in life. I must give recognition at this point to Mrs. Collyer, Mr. Dillon's former secretary. We were fortunate in having her services and experienced background in those early days. When I first assumed my duties, she was a bit reluctant to volunteer any extra help or to even be cooperative. She was fearful that her position was in jeopardy. Finally she realized that with our regime there was a place for anyone truly dedicated to the cause at hand and she became most helpful. As I entered the picture, she was handling the whole works, just one simple set of books and that was it. Of course, this all had to be changed to accommodate the new growth.

Skeels: Now on the other side of the picture, there were disturbing elements developing. Right after General Motors strike, you began to find that President Martin found himself at odds with some of the union leaders at the time. What do you think brought that about?

Addes: I think Martin's association with the Lovestone group had a lot to do with it as well as his own weakness. I think he was aware of his own weakness and for this reason took out after some



of the officers. He had only one speech and used it over and over again. I think he felt insecure and perhaps knew that as the organization grew, he would find himself on the outside, unless he did something that would cause the membership to look to him. I really think he had a feeling of inadequacy. His intentions may have been good or he could have been dishonest, I do not know which, but his connections with H. Bennett of the Ford Motor Company did him no good. This was not good unionism as far as we were concerned. What he was trying to do and this is only a conclusion on my part, was to get an agreement with Bennett without the benefit of an organization. He may have thought this would give him added strength and make him look like a hero or he may have been thinking of forming a private union in which he could serve as its head without anyone telling him what to do. In any event this aroused the leadership who was concerned and loyal to the membership. To be sure, Martin was unhappy with Mortimer, Hall, and Reuther and their friends. They were too aggressive and had much of the membership behind them. For example, one day Allan Haywood, Martin and I went to lunch. Martin told us he was worried about these three leaders in that they had so much support and that they were playing politics. I frankly believed that he felt he was slipping. He had charged me with the added responsibility of handling the organizers in the field, who had to send weekly reports to me of their progress, etc. I could shift them from one area to another depending on the need. Suddenly, Martin suggested that this assignment be returned to him. He wanted to become more involved. I was happy to give up the



assignment and so told him, as I was too busy with other responsibilities. His feeling of insecurity was becoming even more apparent by this time. I frankly did not think that he could comprehend or keep pace with what was happening to the union or understand its growth and power. However, I did regard him as a friend. Many times he would come to my office and tell me what Mr. Hall and Mr. Mortimer were doing behind his back, etc. Much of this was not necessarily true at this period.

At this point, the Flint situation began to really develop. Again Martin demonstrated his lack of understanding. On the other hand, Mortimer and Hall were very aggressive and could move into a situation and pretty much be in control. I think he feared this, and I think that is where the cleavage developed. Martin worked individually. He did not desire teamwork. On the other hand, the Reuther brothers, Mortimer, Hall, George Edwards, and others were holding caucuses from time to time. This group met and discussed union policy, as well as world policies. During this period, I was in the middle -- friendly to both sides. These group meetings surely did not help the situation. They only added fuel to the fire as far as Martin was concerned. This group did not think at that time that Martin was dishonest but rather that his scope was limited and consequently they had no confidence in him as a leader.

Mr. Martin was not a product of the labor movement. He was a preacher. I think this factor, plus all the other manifestations of Mr. Martin's inadequacy resulted in a split in the organization.



Before we went to the convention in Milwaukee, Dick Frankenstein was lined up with Mr. Martin. I do not think that Frankenstein had any likes or dislikes. He had just become a board member and Martin was the president, and I think that Dick more or less looked up to the president. When the caucuses became more frequent and the bitterness intensified, the anti-Martin group began talking about the need to remove him from office -- at some future date and not at this convention. However, at this convention, Dick Frankenstein joined forces with Martin and attended his caucuses. I stayed away from all caucuses. The leaflets which were distributed by the anti-Martin group and the pro-Martin group endorsed me as secretary-treasurer. However, when the Martin group hung a banner high from the stage in the convention auditorium, my name did not appear with that of Martin and Dick Frankenstein. When Martin was asked why my name did not appear, he had no answer. To me it indicated a lack of trust, even though we were friends prior to the convention. He may have concluded that inasmuch as the anti-Martin group listed me as a candidate, that I was against him and his group.

Skeels: How was it that Martin retained some of the officers? You were on his list. The ones he really did not want on at the time were Mortimer and Hall.

Addes: That is correct. They were the ones he really was after since they were officers. Following the convention, that is, the Milwaukee convention, both groups felt the need of keeping their groups solidly organized. Frequent caucuses were held by both groups. Many times I would talk to Martin and try to impress him



with the importance of setting the pace as president and discontinuing his caucuses, that this could very well contribute to a split in the union. However, his intense dislike for Hall, Mortimer and Reuther was too great. He said he would continue these caucuses until they were removed from the union. By this time, the anti-Martin caucuses were speaking openly against Martin and his policies. Fortunately, I was close to the anti-Martin caucus. I refused to participate publicly in their caucus. As secretary-treasurer, I thought it was necessary for me to remain outside of either group. I was quite concerned about a split in the union. I sincerely felt that the anti-Martin forces put the union's interests first and theirs second, consequently they would not try to split the union by pulling their locals away and start a new union. On the other hand, I knew Martin quite well because of my close association with him since the inception of the union. As a consequence of my understanding his thinking and what motivated his action, I felt that he would not hesitate to split the union to gain his personal ends. This is exactly what he did at a later date.

The anti-Martin forces were made up of many people with many thoughts. While I did not attend any of their caucuses, I did meet, from time to time, with Mortimer, Reuther, Edwards, and Hall and discuss union policies and the part they should play as a caucus group. This group looked to me for help and direction. The anti-Martin forces had their problems too. The principal issue during this period, among others, was the question of collective security. This issue was about to split the caucus into two groups



for and against collective security. It was agreed by the leaders of this caucus to resolve the issue through arbitration. Because of my sympathy and closeness to this caucus, I was asked to act as arbiter. Mortimer, Hall, and W. Reuther favored collective security while G. Edwards and Vic Reuther were opposed. Each side had a group within the anti-Martin caucus. After listening to their arguments, that is the arguments of G. Edwards and W. Mortimer who were selected to present the two points of view, I rendered a decision. While this decision was pending, I had many visitors from both sides of this caucus, each urging me to rule in favor of his respective point of view. The decision was as follows: Forget international collective security. Channel your energies along collective security lines within the union. Extraneous matters such as collective security were unimportant insofar as the caucus was concerned. Matters effecting the union should only be the issues discussed in the caucus. The decision was accepted without any hesitation, and, as far as I know, it was never again raised in the caucus.

Skeels: The thing that really got things rolling toward the end, I suppose, is when you and four other officers were suspended by Martin. What do you think led up to that actually, or would that be hard to say?

Addes: Well, it was really an accumulation of many things, the caucuses, for example. Martin was being, by this time, accused of selling out to Harry Bennett and one by the name of John Gillespie who, as I understand, arranged these Bennett meetings.



Of course Martin's group was incensed at this accusation. The leaders of his caucus organized a large group and made their way to the Griswold Building office quarters and attempted to take over the headquarters. They threatened some of the anti-Martin officers. I was still getting along with Martin quite well even at this point. I talked with Martin and suggested that this demonstration by his supporters was not good for the union. He replied, "Not good for the union," and accused me of being sympathetic to the anti-Martin group. I continued to appeal to him that no good could come from these tactics, that adverse publicity would break up the union and nullify all the efforts and gains made to date, etc. This was to no avail, as the next day we all received a notice that we were all suspended. The Martin group likewise was made up of many persons with many minds and ideas. One of these was the Lovestone group. I understood they were an offshoot of a left-wing group. This element was advising Martin with respect to union policy and how to handle those who may be opposed to him within the top leadership. The Lovestone group was aware of Reuther, Mortimer, Hall and others who were opposed to Martin. They also knew this group had a large following within the union and were very capable people who in a short time could depose Martin. It was my understanding, Lovestone himself would meet with Martin from time to time and tell him what to do with respect to the opposing group. It was felt that whoever took over would be certain to clean out those who favored Lovestone. Following our suspension, we established an office in other quarters and then toured the country, talking with many locals, explaining



what was happening to the union. Per capita tax was withheld and much of it was sent to me. Pursuant to legal advice, I did not cash any of the checks, but held them pending outcome of this controversy. The pressure from local unions against Martin was tremendous. Income had stopped to a great extent and soon we were all reinstated. Skeels: When the final split came, I suppose that it really caused a lot of disruption, especially in your department.

Addes: It did. We had to reorganize from scratch. We did not have any money -- it was impounded. The CIO sent us money to set up offices. We did have one tremendous advantage, however. Shortly before the split, I moved the membership mailing list out of the office at union headquarters and placed it in the building owned by the printer who published the Auto Worker. When the split occurred, I sold the printer on the idea of working along with our CIO group. This he was happy to do. This mailing list afforded us the opportunity of winning the membership over to our point of view, which was the CIO's point of view. When a dispute arose and there was a question as to which faction the employer should bargain with, the NLRB stepped in and conducted an election. Practically all of these elections were won by the CIO. We won because we were speaking the CIO philosophy and John L. Lewis was in our corner. All Martin and his group could do was spread propaganda that the communists had taken over the union. Everybody opposed to him was a communist. This became his theme, but it was so obviously false that it fell on deaf ears. Skeels: You people certainly pulled in most of the large locals.



Addes: That is correct. This obviously affected Martin's income picture. There was speculation as to who was supplying him with funds -- Dubinsky or the AFL. It was concluded that the AFL did as what was left of his union ended up with the AFL. This financial support, however, did not last too long as Martin was not winning any NLRB elections.

For our group it was an uphill struggle. We had to start from scratch again. We did not really know where we were going and we did not know what locals we would have. We purchased a three-story building on Outer Drive and then bought an additional vacant building next to the GM Building on Milwaukee Street. We took a great number of our original office force with us, which was a tremendous asset because they knew the work and knew what had to be done. The office staff, under the direction of Mr. Al Abood, went to work and we were back in business again within a week. Skeels: I suppose things were pretty bad in 1939 during the split. This was the time when the companies would not recognize either Martin or the other faction. This probably greatly reduced income during most of this time.

Addes: To some extent the income was reduced. However, after the NLRB held the election and we emerged victorious, the money started to flow. Unfortunately, during these times many legal issues popped up which would tie up the income. Our working capital came from the CIO and for weeks the officers worked without pay. We did pay the office help and the field men.



Skeels: I suppose the CIO's greatest help, in addition to money then, was people sent in.

Addes: Yes, a lot of people came in to help.

Skeels: Who do you think made the big contribution in those days to help you get your strength back? Was it the big men or the little men that were sent in from the CIO.

Addes: Well, that is pretty hard to assess accurately. John L. Lewis obviously contributed by the very fact that he was the head of the CIO. He assigned Murray and Sidney Hillman the task of counseling and guiding us. Allan Haywood was on the scene a great many times, too. Several of their representatives in various parts of the country for that matter were spending time with the auto workers.

Skeels: Was Adolph Germer around?

Addes: Adolph Germer came in during the early part of the story.

I do not think that he was quite as active in the second part, at least I do not recall any of his contributions after the split. On the other hand, the good publicity and support that we received from Hillman, Murray and their various representatives in the field, contributed greatly to getting us back on our feet. It is pretty hard to single out anyone individually -- Lewis, Haywood, Murray, etc.

The prestige of the CIO as a whole was the biggest factor.

Skeels: I suppose you were about the only one of the top UAW leadership that ever declined to run for presidency when you had a pretty good chance. That was the way the thing shaped up in 1939, wasn't it?



Addes: Yes. I declined because I thought it would be best for the organization. There was no question that I could have been elected by an overwhelming majority. My reason for this decision was based on the following important factors, which I felt had to be considered if we were to accomplish the task of reuniting all factions under one banner. There were several locals outside the fold which we wanted to affiliate with our newly reorganized group. By this time, I was identified as part of the anti-Martin forces. Thomas, who finally left Martin of his own accord, was not yet identified with our group. He still had friends in the Martin group and at this point he could be referred to as a neutral. To win over to the CIO union some of the Martin group, I felt it required a neutral such as Thomas, and I therefore declined to run for president.

Skeels: Did you feel that little by little your people needed less and less help and advice from the CIO?

Addes: I think it only fair to say that we always welcomed their advice. It just was not required as frequently as during the early days of our organization. As our need for their men became less, they merely pulled this manpower and channeled it to other organizations who did need their help. There was always an amicable feeling between us, and their advice was always welcome.

Skeels: In 1940, you had one of the early conventions where there were a few issues that came up. I had the feeling in looking over the convention proceedings that there really was not anything that could be called caucuses as you had them in later days.



Addes: No, I do not think that there was anything of any importance in the 1940 convention. I cannot remember any particular issues, though there may have been some political issues.

Skeels: Now, in 1941 something of interest came up. One of them was the North American strike, another was Local 248. Now, how much was this an issue in Christoffel's local? Wasn't this fairly common to have some irregularities occur?

Addes: Actually, not many irregularities prevailed in local unions, though it was pretty difficult to keep close tabs on all of them. The thing about this one was the fact that it was pinpointed and the politics involved were exposed. By this time, if I remember correctly at that convention, Reuther had developed his own group within the union and he was aspiring to a higher position as Reuther never accepted Thomas as president. Reuther believed that Thomas was only temporary. The fact of the matter is in Cleveland, Ohio, Reuther was all for me to run for the presidency until a day or two before the convention was ready to elect its officers. He saw the importance of Thomas becoming president. The CIO was pretty much in the picture. They knew that the delegates wanted me for president. Murray and Sidney Hillman were there. They had meetings with convention leaders. Reuther's name came up from his crowd. Frankenstein's name occasionally would be mentioned, but by and large the convention was pretty solid behind me. Another meeting was held at which time Murray and Hillman both said that they thought the convention was a good convention, but that the thing we had to do was to iron out the political situations and it was their thinking that a fellow like Thomas, who was recently won over from the Martin group, ought



to head the organization. I agreed wholeheartedly with this theory. Reuther and I talked about it afterward and he said, "George, I know you have got this convention. I will go along with you if you choose to run for president." I said, "No, they have a good idea that Thomas could be the individual who could weld the union together and bring in the lost sheep." To this we both agreed. By virtue of my stepping aside, I knew that my backers would go along with this recommendation, as would Reuther's backers. However, from here on in, Reuther began thinking in terms of a temporary setup as far as Thomas was concerned. This became even more apparent a year or two later. Any issue that Reuther could get to strengthen his position, he would grab it. I think the issue of Christoffel was a pretty good one, plus the fact that Thomas made a good number of blunders with respect to Local 248. Reuther felt that Christoffel was a "lefty." By this time, Reuther changed his tactics. When a local union failed to support him he would take out after the local union, even if only a slight violation was apparent. The same tactics were used by Reuther at North American, where Reuther disliked Michener of that local. In this manner, he would try to keep such delegates from being seated.

There were some irregularities, I would say, but by and large only minor ones. At this point, Reuther was not concerned about his election because he had no opposition that could win. He was interested, however, in electing a board member from these two districts. With the North American and AC delegates seated, his chances to elect a board member from each district, favorable to him,



were rather remote.

Skeels: The only other thing of real interest in that convention was that Dick Leonard ran against you.

Addes: There was a big difference in totals the first time. The second time it came out closer.

Skeels: What happened? Had Leonard built up a head of steam after getting the Ford workers in?

Addes: That helped a great deal. Also, it was a political move on their part. I really do not think that they thought they had a chance. I knew just about what the votes would be as I counted them in advance of the convention. It was an effort to get my thinking lined up to their point of view. This is a method of exerting pressure on an officer to change his course of thinking and action and perhaps reduce him to a puppet. Later, Dick Leonard and I found ourselves in the same camp. He knew he did not have a chance, but his object was to put his name forward and eventually there might be an office for him. Bark long enough and hit it long enough and maybe somebody might open the door. That is the whole idea. Of course, the second time he came a little bit closer, I would say.

Skeels: But actually in 1942, you had the unity. In fact, you nominated Walter Reuther for the vice-presidency, I believe.

Addes: That is right. I did it purposely to develop unity. The organization required it. As a matter of fact, I was at loggerheads with Reuther several times prior to the convention. Despite this, I thought that it was good for the union that I nominate him for vice-president. At that time, I did not think that Walter Reuther



should be eliminated. He had made a contribution to the labor movement and had earned his position.

Skeels: Now, when they talked about factionalism and all that, there were a lot of things upon which practically everyone was agreed on.

Addes: Factionalism within the organization was based on personalities by and large. It was a fight for leadership, either within the board or administrative offices. There was complete agreement on the "victory through equality of sacrifice war program." We had a war to win -- a production job to accomplish. There were some individuals who wanted to maintain the time and half rate for work performed on Saturday and Sunday without regard for the 40-hour workweek stipulated in most contracts. We knew to win the war there was need for continued production around the clock and around the weekends. There was a need for a swing-shift operation and Saturdays and Sundays had to be counted as any other day in the week. Actually, we did not have too many problems and it was a reasonably popular program. Everybody wanted to win the war and we had an important part to play. I did not think there were too many big issues in the union at the time -- a few personalities involved -- a few petty squabbles here and there, but mostly of a minor nature.

After the war, the issues became more pronounced, though not too numerous nor too serious. As I read the papers today, I find that they have as many issues today as the union had during my time. There was the Taft-Hartley incident, whether to go along with the Taft-Hartley Act or whether to take the position against



signing the affidavits. This was created as an issue for the purpose of defeating some of the leadership. If you refused to sign the affidavits, you would look like a red. This issue was made for Reuther since he had changed his tone and thinking when you compare his earlier years in the union. I took my position with Phil Murray against signing an affidavit. Phil never signed one. Actually, there were no real basic issues, the difference was about leadership and jobs.

I think the subject of dues increase was an issue at this convention as it was at one or two other conventions. Increasing dues was not a popular issue at any time. It required a united leadership. This was most difficult to attain because of its unpopularity. I usually had to fight for a dues increase with no support from top leaders. What support I did receive was rather weak in presentation.

Skeels: How about the incentive pay issue?

Addes: Yes, this was an issue.

Skeels: Even on something like the incentive pay, the differences between your position and the position that Reuther took were not that great.

Addes: That is correct. There were a lot of issues that could have come up at the convention, however, the differences were resolved prior to the convention. The big battles generally were about board members. The placement of the incentive pay issue before the convention was good for the convention. It contributed to developing a more alert leadership and an alert membership -- and a more colorful and interesting convention.



Skeels: Why did you people feel at the time that there should be two vice-presidents?

Addes: I do not know. I believe it was one of those compromise decisions. Reuther and Frankenstein represented different groups in the union and each had to be satisfied. Also, there was a great deal of work to be done and two vice-presidents could help to do a better job. That was the year when there was an exchange of nominations. It made for a happy situation.

Skeels: Of course, it did not last very long because in 1943 there was the incentive pay issue.

Addes: Correct.

Skeels: Now what was interesting was the 1944 Grand Rapids convention you people had Reuther to the wall.

Addes: That is right. Reuther could have been defeated that year, but I refused to go along with the idea of defeating him because I felt that he had ability and had contributed a great deal to the union. You just do not remove people merely because they disagree with you. That is the way I felt about it. I was criticized severely by my group because I refused to defeat him.

Skeels: Actually then Leonard really was not with you people at the time yet.

Addes: No.

Skeels: He and Thomas were still becoming partisan. They had a lot of motion, but not much steam yet.

Addes: They had not developed enough strength. Thomas always felt that he had the votes and was especially confident the year



that Reuther defeated him. He did not have a chance against Reuther. He was finished as president. I could not help him as my support disliked him more than they disliked Reuther. He refused to accept this thinking and was defeated by a large majority. Following his defeat, I suggested that he run for vice-president. This he did not wish to do for fear of being defeated again. I assured him of my support, that I was certain my support would vote for him as vice-president. Hillman and Haywood of the CIO also prevailed upon him to heed my judgment. He finally agreed to run, and was elected as a vice-president.

Prior to the convention, Reuther and I had several talks about the coming convention. We were both involved in negotiations with GM, which lasted for about 30 days. Practically every morning, noon, and night as we concluded the day's negotiations, we would sit in my office and discuss the coming convention. He proposed a three-corner race for president -- Thomas, Reuther and Addes. If I should win, he would run for secretary-treasurer. If he should win, he would support me for secretary-treasurer. I refused to go along on the basis that I had worked with and felt morally obligated to support Thomas. Reuther continued to send his supporters to talk with me about a three-cornered race. They suggested that I would be president and Reuther, secretary-treasurer. I held to the position of going along with Thomas, even though I agreed that Reuther would defeat Thomas. My prediction that Thomas would be defeated for president was correct. I perhaps could have been elected over both Thomas and Reuther. The fact that we elected Thomas as vice-



president is conclusive evidence that we had enough votes to elect a president. Several of my own people, who were leaders of large locals, told me if I did not run for president, they would vote for Reuther over Thomas and they did. I have always been a man of my word -- once I make a promise to someone, I keep it. I had made a commitment to Thomas and I did not want to let him down. Undoubtedly, this type of loyalty can be detrimental to one, as it proved to be in my own situation later.

Skeels: It was a lot harder to transfer votes to Thomas as president, I suppose.

Addes: That is right. We could transfer our votes, but my votes in the convention would not go to Thomas, even though I begged them at a caucus to vote for Thomas. It was not that they liked Reuther, but they hated Thomas more than they disliked Reuther. The record shows that Reuther trounced Thomas in the presidential race. For vice-president, my supporters voted for Thomas, and he won.

Skeels: One of the things that amazed me is why Thomas ever gave and let Reuther keep the General Motors Department. This gave him a lot of strength or didn't he give it?

Addes: Yes, he gave it to him. The only answer I can give to this question is that Thomas wanted the Reuther support in return. By giving Reuther this plum, Thomas hoped to win his support. Reuther at that time was playing it carefully. At the Cleveland convention he and his small group of followers were not fighting anyone as such. They refused, however, to go along with the idea of suggesting to the CIO the need for vice-presidents. It was Hillman and Murray's



position that we should have no V.P.'s. I think Thomas was in hopes of winning Reuther's support by placing him in charge of the GM Department. Reuther was a board member. Ed Hall, whom some of the board members were trying to get Thomas to appoint, was not on the board. Thomas argued the appointment should go to a board member. Thomas needed political help and Reuther was the most likely person to assist. This is the way Thomas must have felt. In any event he later regretted his action.

Skeels: Your people had control of the board actually.

Addes: This is correct.

Skeels: Why didn't you say, "Well, we will have Reisinger or someone else"?

Addes: Frankly, I was not too much opposed to the idea. Walter Reuther knew the GM setup and I thought he could do a good job. Some of our board members discussed the matter with me and thought I should fight the idea of having Reuther head the GM Department. I suggested we go along and not fight the appointment. I felt the need for unification as leaders, since the big job ahead was to bring into the fold several locals which were going along with Martin and the AFL. The board finally approved the appointment.

Skeels: Looking back over it again, if you had to do it over, what would you do differently?

Addes: Of course, I learned a great deal, it was a liberal education in all areas, especially in human relations. There are some things that I would or might do differently, but the basic and fundamental things I would repeat again. I would not become a



puppet nor would I deal nor engage in compromises at the expense of others to save my job. I had a chance to remain as the secretary-treasurer of the union. All I had to do was to denounce Thomas and Leonard and go along with Walter Reuther and follow, blindly, his policies -- become a Yes man. Here is what happened: Phil Murray called a breakfast meeting of Walter Reuther and myself on the morning of the day of the election of officers. It was Murray's wish to work out an understanding between Reuther and myself. Murray told Reuther that I should be re-elected as secretary-treasurer. Reuther agreed with the idea. He said he always liked me and that I was doing a good job for the union. He thought we could get along if it were not for two people, among others. The two were Thomas and Leonard and a couple of board members. Pull away from them, drop them and he would ask Mazey to step aside. I argued that this was not justice, that they had earned their spurs and were entitled to offices of leadership. The thing we had to do following the convention was to work out our differences and become unified. Phil suggested that he would take care of Thomas and Leonard, since he needs men with their experience on the CIO payroll. I refused to go along and the meeting broke up. I am sure Murray was concerned since I was the leader of the anti-Reuther caucus. Moreover he was sincere in that I frequently discussed with him the difficulty within the union and the actions and feud between Thomas and Reuther. Murray always indicated unhappiness with Thomas' blunders but suggested I work with him. He was by no means fond of Reuther and the role he was playing in the



labor movement.

Skeels: In looking back over your record, what would you say are the things with which you look at with the greatest amount of satisfaction?

Addes: When I look back at the prenatal days of the auto union where I, with a few hopefuls, dared to initiate the organizational steps that were to remedy the abuses imposed upon the auto worker of that day, and reminisce about the struggles, sacrifices, hard work and effort expended and then look at the standard of living and security ultimately attained to give the working man the dignity due every human being, I cannot help but feel a sense of accomplishment. I was right on the firing line from the inception. However, despite my rise to high office in the union, I never lost sight of the rank and file member, and shall always treasure the wonderful relationship which I enjoyed with this membership throughout my tenure as an officer. They always accorded me the highest respect and consideration whenever I appeared before them to speak, despite any difference in opinion on various issues. It did not matter whether they agreed with me or not, as many times I championed unpopular issues both at conventions or the strike lines -- they always heard me out and never booed. Another leader could get up and say the same thing and he would be booed into silence. This, to me, was a manifestation of confidence and trust. This meant more to me than any other glory and gave me a feeling that all my efforts were worth while and appreciated. Moreover, I can point with a great deal of satisfaction to the sound record keeping



systems which I instituted to safeguard the finances of the union from the early days (where the slightest hint of irregularities could have destroyed the union) to the time I left office when it had grown to the proportions of a gigantic business.

Skeels: How was it that you never got more into collective bargaining?

Addes: I was pretty much tied up with the administrative end of it. I handled both the Auto Lite and Bendix departments and was in charge of all collective bargaining. I sat in many other labor and management conferences. I participated in the early GM bargaining sessions as well as many later ones. I suppose one can say I was rather backwards when it came to publicity. Really, it was not the duty of the secretary-treasurer to sit in on and handle negotiations, unless he was handling a department such as Auto Lite and Bendix. I would participate when requested by the president or the department head. There was more than enough detail to be concerned with the administration of the affairs of the union. When you consider the size of the organization, you can realize that this was "big business" that was being administered through my office. This was the "nerve center" of over a million people.