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Taylor Blair, Rep. for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, 1968

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Tom Beckner- This is an interview with Mr. Taylor Blair. Tom Beckner and David Yellin on September the 13th, 1968. Interview took place at 4707 Lakeridge drive the home and office of Mr. Blair, who is the international representative for the international brotherhood of electrical workers. Did you ever see this, I am sure you saw this an interim report that was put out..

David Yellin- In southern regional council...yes.

Taylor Blair- In southern regional council...

David Yellin- It is excellent.

Taylor Blair- I read this and I think it is a very excellent outline of what led up to..

David Yellin- Well actually that is true you put a good word on it , it is an outline sort of thing. Well to be frank though both Tom and I have been involved in this a good deal we have just found some fascinating bits of information. We don't usually say what somebody else says, but I found out yesterday that Chief McDonalds daughter was in that macing march up until 2 minutes before it happened. Kind of amazing isn't it. But her boyfriend saw her and said hey you have an appointment and she left. This is where we can do a service to history. We always say if this had been done in Philadelphia in 1775 and they were making the constitution or when they were declaring the declaration or later when they were making the constitution or in Dallas or some where.

Taylor Blair- Well as a little background before you are taking anything down there.

David Yellin- We already started but...

Taylor Blair- I was in Columbia South Carolina when the whole Shabang started.

David Yellin- February 12th.

Taylor Blair- Yeah I had come down there on business and we began to get some news reports on the happenings in Memphis and I knew from the attitude of the city and the way these sanitation people had the run around for so long that it would quickly turn into a racial issue and I made this judgment based on my work with War on Poverty Committee. Because we felt like we had been sitting on a powdercake since August 1967 there and it wasn't going to take much to explode it. It was a little early in the year for it to get going, but I didn't want to see anything happen, I think all of us on the board were concerned.

David Yellin- Now what board is this?

Taylor Blair- War and Poverty Committee.

David Yellin- War on Poverty, now you mean the 67' in August...

Taylor Blair- In 1967 there had almost been a rent strike in south Memphis and we had taken a lot of measures to cool the situation day. Anything that had this many negro people involved in it, I was quite certain that it would quite quickly unless there was some quick action taken on the part of the city officials, I was quite certain they would be some sentiment about...So I telephoned Gerald Moore, whom I had worked with in church circles.

David Yellin- Just to identify him, he's

Taylor Blair- He's the mayor's administrative assistant. I asked Gerald for some of the facts and he said, well, from what I had said to him on the telephone I had about as much as he did. He said, I am in a real embarrassing position being the mayor's assistant and I don't know a lot about it. He said he hasn't seen it fit to call me and I would like to get in it.

David Yellin- This was February 12th this was the first day?

Taylor Blair- No this was on Wednesday...

David Yellin- That would be the 14th, I see.

Taylor Blair- So I said Gerald I would like to make what's there and see if there is anything we can do to bring this thing to a quick head, can you arrange a meeting with me if I get back in the city. He said, I will sure try. So I came on back to Memphis immediately and called Gerald and some other people that I thought we could work through. I don't know to who all, but I made several telephone calls. Frank McRay for one who is metropolitan minister for the Methodist church, and some others, starting some things going and actually talked to the mayor himself.

David Yellin- Why did you do this Mr. Blair, why did you call...

Taylor Blair- Well I had a little past experience with the Mayor and I knew he was a right stubborn individual and he needed to get the message from several sources.

Tom Beckner- You knew Frank? You were a good friend of his?

Taylor Blair- Yes. In fact, Frank had told me one time that he felt as a minister, he was closer to the mayor than any other minister in the city. Since there was a moral issue involved here and I thought that Frank would certainly be interested in it and he would want to get into it. And he said he would. But anyway that night, finally I am meeting...the mayor put me off for 2 or 3 hours, after I first talked to him.

David Yellin- You spoke to him on the phone?

Taylor Blair- Yes. I kept on trying until about 9 that night and arranged a meeting at his home. Tommy Powell who is president of FLCO Labor Council and H.P. Griffin the vice president of the labor council and myself and a man by the name of Talerico. He is with one of the unions I don't remember which but he went along with us out to mayor Lobe's home that night and we pretty near stayed all night.

David Yellin- Do you mind if I ask you a few questions.

Taylor Blair- Go ahead.

David Yellin- So that you are thrust in this was from the union point of view?

Taylor Blair- At this, it wasn't intended that way but Mr. Talerico had gotten into the act and he was also wanting a meeting and when I finally did get to the mayor he said these other people have asked for a meeting would I come out with him and this threw us all together. Actually it wasn't my intention to make it in front of a union thrust although this is...

David Yellin- Why did you feel that you ought to enter into this?

Taylor Blair- I just had some strong feelings about background knowledge of what was happening in the community, that this thing ought not to become an open confrontation and it ought to be stopped as quick as possible. But after this meeting at the mayor's home that night it definitely took a labor slam and the mayor took an anti-labor attitude. This is what I was hoping wouldn't happen.

David Yellin- Can you tell us a little about the meeting?

Taylor Blair- Really nothing much happened. We tried to discuss the issues with the mayor and he wouldn't really get down to the issues. I guess we spent maybe 6 hours with him, and he took one continual line, these people were on an illegal strike and he wasn't going to talk to them, he wasn't going to do anything about it until they got off their illegal strike and went back to work. I kept pressing the mayor for myself, what made the strike illegal? I never did get an answer out of really, except by his own terminology it was an illegal strike. It was just really an inconclusive meeting that night and I thought perhaps the next day mulling over all that had been said during the night, that maybe there was an avenue of face saving needed. I went to the union the next day, I hadn't even contacted the union up to this point. And I asked them would they be willing to bide by the results of a secret ballot election. Go back to work pending the outcome of the secret ballot election if we could get an agreement from the city that if a majority voted for the union that the city would give them official recognition and they would go back to work. The union said they would...Mr. Champa and T.O. Jones.

David Yellin- Jerry Worth wasn't here yet?

Taylor Blair- No he wasn't. They were quite skeptical of me because they never except for Jones they never knew who I was, I just came in out of the blue and made a proposition to them and I think they actually thought I might be working for the mayor.

David Yellin- Well just real quick and not quickly but right here can you tell us your position with the union and name the union, I am doing it for the microphone...

Taylor Blair- My own union. I am an international representative for the international brotherhood of electrical workers.

David Yellin- Right and are you a member of any of the councils?

Taylor Blair- No, not locally I am not. I am a member of the Christian community relations committee of the Presbyterian church, Memphis Presbytery. I had an interest for this direction, I had an interest from being a member on a executive committee on the War on Poverty committee. I had an interest just as a plain citizen who knew this town was sitting on dynamite.

David Yellin- Well now you are at the union and...

Taylor Blair- They agreed to this so I called the mayor and arranged an appointment and went to him and presented the proposal to him and he just flat turned it down, he wouldn't buy any part of it. I think the same day, I am not sure, he had made a statement in the newspaper, or maybe the day before. Anyways, he had offered a 5%, or 5 cent increase. I had told the mayor that I thought he misjudged the situation that the people were not wanting money but they were trying to get some recognition and dignity that they had never had before. And I didn't believe if he offered them 25 cents that this would get the people back to work. The city was in bad financial condition according to the statements the mayor had made the evening before. He had backed this up on Thursday by giving me a complete balance sheet of the city which was supposed to be confidential. I was going over this thing...

David Yellin- I Have been to talk to the mayor...

Taylor Blair- Sir.

David Yellin- I have been to talk to the mayor...

Taylor Blair- So I saw some things on the balance sheet that just didn't quite, they were capital improvements that wasn't going to run the city into the red 4 and a half million dollars like he was coming. I said well why did you offer a 5 cent raise, well we got into this circle argument, then I told him I said, here is a way out for you, you can have a secret ballot election. I think at this point I can go back to the union and get them to forego any wage increase if you give them a check off that they want, that they need to hold their organization together. If you will give them recognition after a secret ballot election and give them an accurate grievance procedure. I said, I think they will have to have a grievance procedure that doesn't end in your lap because they don't trust you. I was just as candid with him as I could be. He said that the whole proposition that I made to him was unacceptable and that is just about the way it stood. Did he elaborate anymore...

Taylor Blair- Oh yes we went into examined all these things at length but the mayor seemed to have a record running in his brain that kept coming out the same way.

Tom Beckner- Was the dues check off his big stumbling block you think?

Taylor Blair- He didn't want the union to have any official standing period. He kept repeating the phrase I will give these people the same recognition that we give any other union in the city and I said but mayor you don't give any other union recognition in the city, and I tried to get him off the double talk proposition he was on. He kept insisting that other unions did get recognition that they did cooperate with other unions, mine included. I told him when, show me facts tell me when. I backed him clear down into a corner on these issues and he just kept repeating he couldn't, wouldn't give these people any recognition that he didn't give anyone else. They were on an illegal strike and might as well forget the whole issue until they quit and go back to work.

David Yellin- Do you recall...ok go ahead.

Taylor Blair- I pointed out to him that aside from all these considerations that I thought this situation could quickly turn into a racial strike and this was my primary interest. He had, in that conversation said he knew that I had been working on organization of Memphis light gas water, and that I was interested in this thing period to open the door for our people and I tried my best to assure him that this was not the case. That I realized I was in a fairly vulnerable position here, but I tried to convince him that as a citizen in having some knowledge on the (muffled) committee and other areas we had worked in that this wasn't my objective. In fact, I even promised if we could get this issue settled I would keep the light water gas issue a dead one for at least a year. To prove to him this wasn't it. I said, if the people themselves take the bull by the horns of course there isn't anything I can do about it but as far as our union is concerned I will get this on in the closet and keep it there, it didn't work. I went back and reviewed what happened in south Memphis in august of last year. Which he seemed to be ignorant of and could care less about hearing. He insisted there was no racial problem in Memphis, he was the mayor of all the people and he was going to represent all the people. I pointed out to him he wasn't elected by all the people. Labor didn't vote for him the negros didn't vote for him and that he was kidding himself if he thought he was the mayor of all the people to begin with. You had trouble with these same people when you were commissioner over there and now they want it in writing. But this time it could start burning.

David Yellin- Did it seem to you it was the very first time he had heard this from somebody?

Taylor Blair- Yes in fact I said to him, I could tell by the expression on his face that there was a little shock in the statements I had made to him and disbelief too. I told him, well you really shocked me because I would think that a mayor, the city the size of Memphis would have enough arms into the community and listening posts to know what is going on. It is obvious to me that you don't know what is going on. I think this was my front to him but after I left that meeting I began to call some other people that worked with him politically that could maybe say the same thing in a more unbiased way than I could and one of these people is Frank Miles, personnel director for the E.L. Brucie company. So I talked to Frank several times that night,

told him what I had been up to, told him I needed help. I knew Mr. D.A. Noah had served as mayor on some committees and through their news department they had an inkling of what was going on and I called Mr. Nolan and asked would he get into it.

David Yellin- The mayor had once worked for him.

Taylor Blair- Yeah.

David Yellin- More or less.

Taylor Blair- To have this kind of relationship, D.A. agreed to it, he said I don't know if I can do any good but I will try. He said I do think we are sitting on a powder keg. Everyone I talked to seemed to think this way. I talked again to Frank McRate, Bill Aurich...

David Yellin- That's who told us you have all these tapes....he's the culprit. He is a wonderful guy.

Taylor Blair- I called Bill and I said Bill I think it is time for a community relations committee to move and bring any pressure we can because I see something forming. By this time I had seen a movement on the part of the black ministers beginning to form here without any whites at all involved in it and to me this spelled racial trouble any way you looked at it. When it was an all black movement. Through McRate I am not just sure the mechanics of what happened because I wasn't in on some of the conversations, but Miles said if his company would agree to let him get involved he would be glad to. And he would call me back. He called me back on Friday and said he could become involved as long as the company name was kept out of it. Now Frank was a supported of mayor Lobe, he was a friend of those. He had labor experience. He had been with the federal government with the federal mediation conciliation service and had a lot of praise from the newspapers and all. He was a sort of balancing factor in these sort of disputes. I felt with that sort of background that he would be the number one man if anybody could do it to get to the mayor and talk. So Friday afternoon at 3:00, Frank and I went to see the mayor. I sat back and said nothing hardly and he pretty well said the same things to the mayor about the possibility of racial trouble that I had said. He said, here we are sitting out here with a large stockpile of hardwood lumber in a predominantly negro neighborhood. He said, I think the town is on edge. He gave the reaction of his own people out there when the strike first began. He said, they first came to him they said, Mr. Frank what are those people striking for? They make more money than we do with a union contract. There had been some information in the papers but he said, there attitude had changed, they found out this isn't quite so. He said, they are on edge and they are likely to walk out at any minute, so as company we are concerned with their attitude. He said, we are concerned about somebody coming out there and throwing a Molotov cocktail across the fence and burning up our lumber and as a citizen I don't want to see this town burn and I don't think you should either. Mr. Lobe said there wasn't any bit of danger in any of this happening.

He thought we were both real nice guys and he would like to sit and talk with us all night but that we are both full of shit.

(Laughs)

David Yellin- That's funny you just started to sound like him.

Taylor Blair- So we met about 8:00 at night having accomplished nothing I don't think.

Tom Beckner- At his office?

Taylor Blair- Yes. Saturday more of the same.

David Yellin- Now you went back Saturday on your own, or at his invitation?

Taylor Blair- No but Frank and I both went back on Saturday. And when we came out, or when we got up there the ministers had arranged a meeting with him and they were in talking to him at the time we got there.

David Yellin- This is the black ministers?

Taylor Blair- No.

David Yellin- White ministers?

Taylor Blair- Memphis Ministers Association.

David Yellin- Oh.

Taylor Blair- Several of those people were in there, I don't know....Frank McRae was one...

David Yellin- Rabbi Wax

Taylor Blair- Rabbi Wax, Father Demick and some others came out. They had arranged for a meeting on Sunday which I didn't attend but on Monday I was asked to come back into the meeting and I stayed with it until Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, until those meetings broke up again.

David Yellin- Now these are the minister meetings. The sequence there is that Sunday night was the all night meeting.

Taylor Blair- Yes.

Tom Beckner- The 18th I believe.

David Yellin- Yes. And then they kept meeting after that?

Taylor Blair- They met on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and they had a meeting scheduled for Thursday.

David Yellin- Was this a meeting among themselves or with the mayor?

Taylor Blair- This was with the mayor attorney Gianatti and city attorney Marian Halle, Halle I think it is. Another meeting was scheduled for 3:00 pm on Thursday afternoon. I had to make a trip to Little Rock overnight and came in late. Went to the cathedral was supposed to take place and where the other St. Mary's, not St. Mary's but the church there at 3rd and what Washington? Catholic church there.

Tom Beckner- Oh yeah, I cant remember the name of it.

David Yellin- I don't know.

Tom Beckner- I can't remember the name but I know what you are talking about.

Taylor Blair- St. Mary's is Episcopal.

Tom Beckner- Yes.

David Yellin- Yes.

Taylor Blair- Anyway I went to the meeting where we had been meeting Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and when I got there only the city was there, and the ministers were there. And I said where is everybody? Because the union was usually the first ones there and the city came in later. They said they didn't know that they were waiting on them. A telephone call came in and Fred Davis, councilmen Fred Davis had summoned the union to a council meeting and the union was being delayed at the council meeting and announced they would come as soon as that meeting is over. The mayor seemed to be rather gleeful about this, he wanted to break up this meeting and he didn't want to wait. He started charging the union with breaking off the meetings. I took issue with it and I don't remember the minister that took the telephone call, one of the ministers took the telephone call from the union and stated what happened. I tried to bring the thing back into perspective that the union hasn't broken off anything, they said they would be here as soon as they are out of the council meeting. But he didn't want to wait for this it was quite obvious and within minutes he left there.

David Yellin- Now what was the essence of those meetings starting with Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. What is talked about all this time?

Taylor Blair- The primary issues of the, at first the ministers wanted to be filled in on what had led up to the strike withholding your services. I think this took place on Monday. Sunday night's meeting I understand it was a fairly one sided proposition, with some of the ministers making accusations without having knowledge. Tudor Jones for one, Presbyterian church, I understand really blistered the union without any background of what had happened in the past. This was still going on Monday when I got back in the thing, they were reviewing background. The mayor every time the thing would come back to his side for talk he would say, all these things are real nice and all but we was all wasting our time because he

wasn't going to talk about these issues until the people got off the illegal strike and went back to work. Father Demic I will say is a real first class diplomat. He would always try to get it back on the dime and get his fitting again. Frank Gianatti began to, some of the ministers finally woke up and began to ask some technical questions, what is illegal about it, the matter? So Gianatti read from the Tennessee Supreme Court decision between the electrical workers union and the city of Alcoa, he only read part of it. When he finished reading part of it, I asked him would he kindly read the rest of it. That these ministers were seeking the truth with just half of it coming out. And he said, well if you want them to have the rest of it you give it to them. And so I did. I didn't give it to them verbatim, I didn't have the decision in front of me like he did, but I was familiar with the case and knew the background of it. But the judge in that case stated that why those people could not strike to compel the city of Alcoa to sign a contract, he rather recommended that they could peacefully settle an issue and collectively enter into a collective bargaining agreement. He didn't forbid it. And Mr. Gianatti affirmed that what I had said, really the other part of the decision that he hadn't given. Well this seemed to agitate the ministers a little bit, because the city seemed to withhold part of their story.

David Yellin- Was the mayor there then?

Taylor Blair- The mayor was there and mayor just said this was a violation of the city charter and it isn't a law of the state of Tennessee. He wasn't going to have any part of meeting with these people, the union people, although some union people were there, he wasn't going to talk any settlement until they quit their illegal strike. Jerry Worth I believe was at this meeting, Jones, most all of the union committee were present. Again I took measure with the mayor when he said it was against the law in the state of Tennessee, because I reminded all the people present that the state and various cities and municipalities in the state had some 17 union contracts that we could put our fingers on, including the state of Tennessee and if the state, if it was a violation of the law then all these other cities as well as the state of Tennessee was violating the law. I didn't know all about the charter of Memphis but I thought I knew enough of it that I didn't see anything in the city charter that would prohibit the city from entering into a volunteer settlement. This was just about as far as those sort of talks had gotten, I mean this was about the nuts of it, there was an awful lot of talk but I think there was some mention that...by this time the union, the 5 cent raise had been (muffled by phone) Now the council had I believe at this point had began to offer a 10 cent additional increase somewhere in this period, I am not real clear on the times, the sequence of it. But anyway, we tried to impress on the city that money wasn't the big issue. Money certainly was an issue, but the union wanted official recognition, they had resolved some grievances with commissioner Sisner. They had established a sort of grievance system under the old commission, mayor commission form of government. This rainy day problem that had really provoked this strike, some people in the sewer department, negro people were sent home while the white people were allowed to stay on the job. This was an old thing that had happened many times with the city. These things had been resolved under commissioner Sesner. If the present administration and recognize

that agreements had been made by the previous commissioner. This would be a start towards getting it settled. The union was very adamant about it's dues check off. It was very adamant about the recognition, it no longer had any faith whatsoever on an informal settlement., They were being pretty tough along the line that they wanted it in writing now. And now that the 5 cent raise was on the table and the 10 cent was on at this particular time they wanted this plus more too. Of course the mayor was putting the city's case across about the bad financial condition of the city and so on. That is just about where these meetings wound up really.

David Yellin- Now I would like to discuss something with you and see if I can make it clear. I may be wrong but I think even the mayor said that Taylor Blair and Frank Miles were there when I believe Champa said to him and Worth later said to him you give me the check off and you can write your ticket.

Taylor Blair- No, this was never said to my knowledge.

David Yellin- Oh I am not certain of this.

Taylor Blair- Not this one item.

David Yellin- This I know the mayor said, as I say I am not sure if he said you were present, I think he said Frank Miles was present and heard this. In any case this is what I would like to discuss regardless of whether it was said in your presence or not. The interpretation of this, there could be a couple of interpretations of this statement. What we are interested in are the dues check off. Obviously it could be taken, all we want is the dues check off so that our union can get on its feet, and we get ours...

Taylor Blair- Now there had been one of these meetings at the church there had been some discussion of this. The mayor had accused the union that all it wanted, all its concern was to soak these people for dues. (Tape Break) This discussion came up in an accusation, and president Worth of the union made quite a statement in an answer to mayor Lobe about this and then he even told the mayor that if that is what he thought he said, I am sure there are some worthy charities around Memphis that could need the money. He said, we have been subsidizing this local union for a long time anyway, it won't hurt us to subsidize it a little longer until they get on their feet. He said we will take every cent of dues that we collect, I believe for the first year and we will send this back to some charitable organization that you name here in the city for one year.

David Yellin- Is that so? Never reported?

Taylor Blair- It wasn't no.

Tom Beckner- We heard it to from one of the city councilmen, the statement that it was in a private conversation. Worth had told hi, or he had said, Worth had said, you give me the check off and I will fire T.O. Jones and you can have anything else you want.

David Yellin- This has constantly been alluded to this whole...of course with the implication that that's all they were concerned about was to get the money from these poor people.

Taylor Blair- There is one statement that the made in front of all these ministers, 7 or 8 of them should have been enough convention this wasn't what they wanted.

David Yellin- Well we were particularly anxious to get somebody else, somebody to say this we hope to talk to Mr. Champa and we haven't been able to locate Mr. Worth yet. There are a few strikes around the country...

Tom Beckner- He was in the city last Sunday, Worth was. Champa was supposed to be here instead of Baltimore.

Taylor Blair- They had an installation of officers down at the auditorium and they had asked me to be there, and I couldn't, and Jerry had called me that afternoon and asked me if I had a word on it. I told him I had but I couldn't get there I had another commitment.

David Yellin- I wish we had known he was here. Well then of course that was the day of the Fred Davis committee and the union people sat in and had their picnic.

Taylor Blair- Fred said he wanted to see some bodies and they delivered bodies to them.

David Yellin- Yes, how did he do that?

Taylor Blair- Well the people everyday had assembled at noon at the firestone hall for a union meeting. So that the union could bring them up to date on what was happening. So they were still assembled at the firestone hall when Fred Davis made this request. They telephoned out there and said he wants to see some bodies bring them up here.

David Yellin- Do you know who telephoned and request...

Taylor Blair- No I don't.

David Yellin- Yeah that's right. Then that day if you can recall anything, then the next day was the day of the macing.

Taylor Blair- Well, I think what happened at that particular council meeting...

David Yellin- That is the 22nd?

Taylor Blair- Yeah it was pretty well reported. The next day there were additional meetings with the council that turned into the first (frakus?) there on main street. I wasn't present that day, I was tied up in another meeting and didn't go down there.

David Yellin- What was your reaction when you heard about this?

Taylor Blair- That all the fears I had were coming true. That we were right at the beginning of the lid popping off. In fact, about 2 or 3 o'clock somewhere in there when I first heard about it I telephoned the mayor and I guess I was a little angry that things had gone this far and I reminded him, I told him I hate to say this but I told you so. And I said, I think it is about time we get down on our knees and say a prayer that this whole town doesn't burn. He said he was on top of the situation and Frank Harmlem was on top of it and was calling him in pretty regularly. For your information I have said a little prayer here in my office. And I said, well you better say a big prayer because you are going to need to.

Tom Beckner- Did he ever tell you the statistics on the telegrams and letters coming in at this point.

Taylor Blair- Well he didn't have to tell me, I actually sit there and saw them and heard them. I saw the telegrams and telephone calls come in there. In fact, at one point I must have examined a couple hundred of them. Went through them and went through the names to see who they were. I know one that my ears kind of perked up on was Bill Ingram. I just didn't notice the initials. I don't think there was any initials on the...most of these things said mayor we are supporting you 100% give them hell or something like this. I took this one to mean for the mayor and I made something about it and I said I was surprised he had gotten a call from (muffled) Of course he quickly corrected me, that was not...

David Yellin- The guy across the river...

Taylor Blair- He actually did get all of his support a good 2 or 3 days that I guess I was around his office a good bit of the time. All this was running heavy in his support. I know this because the first time because I saw it and heard it.

David Yellin- Do you think it would have made any difference if he had that much support? Or if the support would have been...

Taylor Blair- I don't think really it would have made two cents worth a difference if it had all been negative, I just don't think this man was going to change his mind.

Tom Beckner- He really had his mind made up when he first heard about it didn't he in a way?

Taylor Blair- Yeah. I don't know that this ought to go into the record really because it involves a dead person, but at one point I was just trying to see how his mind worked, to see why he was so stubborn, why he would not...couldn't give me any kind of reason. I probed him everywhere I could I punched at him pretty hard and I really mad him a little mad which I was really trying to do. Trying to get some response out of him that would make some sense. He said that his daddy would turn over in his grave if he knew that he had recognized a damn union. This was the only time it ever came up, and that was what was said.

David Yellin- But he never did say a nigger union?

Taylor Blair- No.

David Yellin- He never even said a negro or....

Taylor Blair- No.

David Yellin- He just said a union.

Taylor Blair- Yeah, his daddy would turn over in his grave if he ever knew his son recognized a damn union. That he ran that laundry and had good relationships without any union getting involved and he would expect him to uphold his (muffled). I knew there wasn't much point in arguing with a fellow like that, because he was trying to uphold what his daddy had said.

David Yellin- Can we kind of, if you want to go ahead please do, right here might be a point. Here you were so involved and almost as independent of your union, Obviously you were always associated with it particularly in the mayor's mind but you were acting as a citizen as anything else in your other capacities.

Taylor Blair- Entirely so.

David Yellin- Yes. Now what was your relationship with your union and say the council in Memphis.

Taylor Blair- Well I never had any relationship with the Memphis AF of L council except that I did talk with Tommy Powell a time or two about the matter and not more than that. During the whole time. H.B. Griffin I saw every few days because they were meeting down at the firestone hall and there were very few of those new meetings after 2 weeks that I didn't go to. After about 2 weeks I felt like all the efforts I had made to try and mediate the thing were fruitless. That these people needed encouragement from the white community. So I started a little campaign to try and get as many whites to go to the meetings as I could.

David Yellin- Were you successful?

Taylor Blair- Yes I was.

David Yellin- What did you do when you went out there?

Taylor Blair- Anybody who walked in there well they would give them the floor to say a few words they were just happy some white people would come around.

David Yellin- Of course we have some fine stories the same thing happened down at the temple, in fact one of our girls came in and everyone stood up and applauded, she cried naturally.

Taylor Blair- We had some women that came out, some people from Memphis state, ministers just plain citizens.

David Yellin- What did they do? They just mingled and just showed up?

Taylor Blair- They just showed up and when they would show up they wanted them on the platform and they invariably insisted they say a word or two. It didn't matter what they say...

(Laughs)

David Yellin- Geez I would have sent the speech class out there. Yeah it is kind of touching.

Taylor Blair- There were about three or four white fellows of the sanitation group that I noticed in the crowd two or three times.

David Yellin- Oh really.

Taylor Blair- They toward the end disappeared and I don't know what position they had and never did really meet the fellows either. They always sat way back in the back of the room and I asked who they were, and I was told they were part of the pushcart.

David Yellin- Oh yes. Yeah they were there for years.

Taylor Blair- Street sweepers.

David Yellin- And those people are all white.

Taylor Blair- Yes they are all white and they would sit in the back of the room.

David Yellin- Well what happened with the white unions and what happened at firestone?

Taylor Blair- Well the firestone union was very generous in its use, let those people use their place out there. Actually as far as the other unions in town were concerned, I think they gave very poor support to the strike. It was more lip service than it was the real thing,.

David Yellin- Would you say...

Taylor Blair- I think that I can say that some of this was because these were black people primarily. The council representation was made up of white people. Outside of Tommy Powell and some of the officers they seemed to take the same attitude that was prevalent in the whole city.

David Yellin- You mean in the council.

Taylor Blair- Yeah.

David Yellin- I was about to say in some cases perhaps the leadership of the union might have been more amenable to cooperating.

Taylor Blair- Well I personally called on the building trades groups here which is separate from the council. I think except for two or three men in the group there they meet every Wednesday. I found nothing but a racist attitude really. Two or three of those people had made their own special deals with the city and they were just so happy to have any kind of a foothold that they weren't about to get involved.

David Yellin- I see you mean if they had shown any outward signs of cooperation...

Tom Beckner- Some of the building trade unions have, do they not, more educated groups, is this the laborers union?

Taylor Blair- Actually it is the other way around, some of your more highly skilled people are in the building trades. Now you did have the laborers at the low end but your bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, steam fitters...

Tom Beckner- I didn't think about that.

Taylor Blair- Operating engineers. These are the groups that make up the building trades.

David Yellin- Weren't you aware of this? I am not questioning you...

Taylor Blair- Yes, to a degree I was, I was a little bit shocked, here was a labor union in trouble that they couldn't come to the help of a fellow union people anyway. On one occasion I actually took Jerry Worth out to one of their meetings and I was really embarrassed at the treatment he got. And it snowed the night before.

David Yellin- Oh that was the night of the big snow when Dr. King was supposed to be here.

Taylor Blair- I don't know but we had a snow the night before this meeting on, regular Wednesday meeting.

David Yellin- This is the building trades?

Taylor Blair- Yeah building trades meeting and any union gathering that I have ever been around the international president of the union is sort of an honored person and you treat them as an honored guest. He was just some joe that wanted in off the street as far as these people were concerned. They didn't recognize him, they were going about their routine business when he came in, they didn't stop. They knew who he was. Pictures that had already been in the paper. Finally I handed a note to the secretary, just in case they didn't know who he was and said this is the man I told you I wanted to bring over here. One of the first remarks that was made to him was that he could do this city a favor if he would order those people back to work and take a half page ad in the newspaper apologizing to the people for the inconvenience they had caused that morning. Because some of their people hadn't been able to get to work with no cinders on the streets. This was a real selfish and sickening attitude as far as I was concerned. Mr. Worth didn't put any pressure on him of any kind. He told him he was there to answer any questions they wanted to

ask of him, they would not ask, and in fact he was given instructions about the ad and to apologize to the city and that was just about it. It was sort of one of those nasty affairs, you run into...

David Yellin- Now kind of get back just chronologically, you said you decided you had done all you could and you never went back to the mayor thereafter or?

Taylor Blair- No I didn't go back to him in person but I had numerous telephone conversations with him both in his office and in his home.

David Yellin- And in his car?

Taylor Blair- No. I never talked to him in his car.

David Yellin- I did.

Taylor Blair- He was either home or at the office. This was when I thought maybe I could pitch something in that would help a little bit.

David Yellin- So what was your activity, or your posture, what did you do after this, you went to the union?

Taylor Blair- Well after I finally became convinced that it was hopeless dealing with the mayor, I had talked to several councilmen too without any better luck. On one occasion I found that I had an appointment with the supervisor of the sanitation department one night to talk with him. I found out when I got there the mayor and Donny Prior were due just any minute.

David Yellin- Was this Charlie Blackburn?

Taylor Blair- No I would rather not name this person, he has remained unnamed until now and I do not want to jeopardize his position. But they felt that this fellow as in a position to sway, he is negro, so that much. They thought that he had maintained a good relationship with the employees and they might use him as a judas goat to get the people back to work and he told me he even offered him money he told me to use his influence. In fact, I left as soon as he told me they were on their way out and came on home and two or three times during the meeting he would run off to his telephone and call me and tell me this is what has been said what do I do next. So I tried to keep his foot out of the bear trap that evening and he was finally able to stay out of the mess.

Tom Beckner- Who offered him the money? Was it the mayor and Prior?

Taylor Blair- I think they were both present when this took place. And the fellow, he didn't know how to pronounce his name to begin with Marion Halle, seemed to be the other fellow that was present there was three of them. He didn't know him.

David Yellin- So in essence the mayor was trying to resolve this but he was trying to buy the people off, this seemed to be every effort, every time anything stuck its head

up he seemed to be trying to do it with money and this sort of thing. Never really facing up to the real issues of it.

David Yellin- On a theory that's what they....

Taylor Blair- I got out of the thing of trying to work between the union and the city. I worked with church groups and other civic groups where I thought I might have a little influence in trying to get them to talk to the mayor. Almost invariably they all came back and said it didn't work. Baxton Bryant, Tennessee Council of Human Relations came on down and he went to see the mayor and he talked to the president of the chamber of commerce and he talked to a couple ex-presidents of the chamber of commerce.

Tom Beckner- Bryant was here almost the entire time...

Taylor Blair- Yeah Baxton came in on Wednesday or Thursday of that week.

Tom Beckner- Yeah we talked to him.

Taylor Blair- Baxton did everything he could to put pressure on them from this direction and just make them see what was about to happen. The situation was deteriorating pretty rapidly. These churches began to have meetings at first I went out of curiosity to some of these colored churches to see what was going on.

David Yellin- Were these to the COME meetings or just churches.

Taylor Blair- COME hadn't actually been..

David Yellin- I see you are talking earlier before the 24th.

Taylor Blair- I am talking about before COME became an organization. Ezekiel Bell is one of our Presbyterian ministers and Ezekiel had taken a right active part in this almost from the very beginning and had made some very rash statements I thought.

David Yellin- So did the council.

Taylor Blair- In the presbytery of Memphis we have been trying to move in some certain directions there and I felt that some of the things that Zeke was saying would be harmful to those efforts. He said he was just telling it like it was.

David Yellin- You mean you tried to talk to him...

Taylor Blair- Yeah.

David Yellin- He is going to be on television tonight incidentally. The 40% speak and others.

Taylor Blair- Well Zeke and I were good friends even before this, we worked a lot of church together. But I felt that the statement he had made over at the auditorium, the statement he made in the council chambers about the seal and urinating on the

beautiful red rug. Of course some of that was taken out of context it wasn't reported like he actually said it. I was there at the council chamber when he said what he did, I wasn't at the auditorium but the mayor had detective in the meeting over there recorded and made a transcript over it and I read the actual transcript.

Tom Beckner- This was at the union hall?

Taylor Blair- No this was at the, he said the auditorium.

Tom Beckner- Where you at the union hall the say the policemen was discovered, the plain clothes policemen?

Taylor Blair- Yeah, I think I saved his life.

David Yellin- How is that? Can you tell that story?

Taylor Blair- Well I was speaking to the group when there was quite a shuffling began to happen out the door, it had been a rather peaceful meeting. All of a sudden there was some disturbance back at the entrance door and looked like a fight had started best I could see, so many people had gotten up and gathered around that I couldn't tell what was going on. I began to ask the people to sit down and let's have some order and it seemed to get worse. Somebody told me that they had found a policemen in plainclothes back there and I began to shout at the people to sit down let's have some order and try and get some order. Finally I told them, there was a lady there I think he name is Carpenter. Colored lady.

David Yellin- Yes Mrs. Ethel Carpenter.

Taylor Blair- I told her I said, I am coming back there I want the man brought up here. I said, if you hurt him you are going to have to hurt me. I started back through the crowd pushing and shoving, she wrapped herself around one side of him and I wrapped myself around the other side. We got him up to the platform and I didn't know who the guy was. Finally he mentioned he was there on instructions, I thin as we stepped up on the platform and I asked him on w hose instructions and he said the mayor's instructions. I asked him was he a policemen and he denied it. I had already seen a holster that he had and I begun to be fearful that a gun had gotten loose in the crowd back there. And I began to ask for his gun and the gun was handed to me, I unloaded the gun, put the bullets in one pocket and stuck the gun in my belt.

David Yellin- You mean the gun had been taken from him?

Taylor Blair- Yeah the gun had been taken.

Tom Beckner- Didn't he also have a can of mace?

Taylor Blair- He had a can of mace and so this came up through the crowd and was handed to me also. So I kept the gun the bullets and the mace and they were asking if he wanted to tell the people what he was there for. So he mumbled something

into the microphone that he was there on instructions. I thought we were going to lose control of the crowd again at that point. This is Mrs. Carpenter and myself, and someone else I don't recall who, I had promised them if they would let me get him out of there that I would take him to the jail and I would throw him in. As we got outside the place there was a traffic police car came back. I flagged him and then I noticed there were several policemen around in the area. So I had him by the back of the belt like they normally handle prisoners, and I had his arm up his back going out. I didn't know he was a policeman. I jabbed him in his back a few times tow or three times like I might have his gun pointed in his back, he knew I had his gun, so he wouldn't give me any trouble. He was a right husky feeling fellow.

Tom Beckner- Was he a negro?

Taylor Blair- Yeah. Reddick.

David Yellin- Oh yeah, human relations.

Taylor Blair- I asked him if he would pull his wallet out and identify himself, but he refused to do it. So when the police car came by, I told him I thought I had one of theirs but I wasn't sure he denied it. They said, we will take care of it and they started to put him in the car. I said, I want to confer charges of night riding against this man. Coming in and near starting a riot in this place, I intend personally to file charges on him. They took down what I wanted to say about it and two or three news reporters had mics stuck up my nose at this time making some pictures of it and I remember Don Stevens for one being out there. I was accusing the fellow of being a policemen and the police were denying it, Until they got him situated in the automobile and then they wanted his gun. I said you are not going to get the gun, he has denied he is a policemen and you have denied he is a policemen I am going to keep the gun, I'll turn it in to proper authorities. Well they was proper authorities and I turned it into them. NI kept the bullets and they insisted I give them the bullets and finally they asked for the mace. I wouldn't give them the mace. I said, I ought to keep this and use it on you guys like you are suing it on everybody else. We got into a little argument about.

David Yellin- Did they ask you your name? Oh you had to give your name...yes.

Taylor Blair- Then they finally before I would turn the mace over to them they identified him as a policemen. Because I strictly didn't contend, I was going to make an issue over this mace. I felt strongly the guy was a policemen and...

David Yellin- They identified him, did he hear the identification?

Taylor Blair- No he was sitting in the back seat of the patrol car at this point. But through this friendly supervisor that continued to work all the way through that I mentioned a while ago, I knew that the fellow named Aretic and two others were working those meetings and had even warned the people about it. I knew them by

name but I didn't know them by face. As soon as I found out his name was I found out what the score was.

David Yellin- How was he dressed.

Taylor Blair- He was dressed in plain clothes.

David Yellin- I mean was he dressed the way the other workers were?

Taylor Blair- Well he was dressed a little nicer than the workers. He had on a nicely pressed suit.

David Yellin- He made no attempt to look like a worker...

Taylor Blair- No he didn't but the workers come there dressed nice too each day so this really didn't...

David Yellin- Do you believe that the mayor sent him?

Taylor Blair- Yes he said he did.

David Yellin- Not Mr. Holloman?

Taylor Blair- Well I don't know that, he was on instructions from the city. I do know he is the same one that, and I know this from the mayor by name, because the mayor let me see the transcript that Redick had made in the auditorium. When Zeke Bell had made some fairly rash statements over there.

David Yellin- And he was in the auditorium?

Taylor Blair- Yeah he was there with a tape recorder and recorded that whole meeting.

David Yellin- Yeah.

Taylor Blair- The mayor has said something to me about very critical of Zeke Bell and I attempted to defend Zeke and he handed me this transcript and I read the whole thing.

David Yellin- I just kind of wonder it sounds so much like an FBI ploy?

Taylor Blair- They rarely work those meetings and they nearly had some trouble down at the Cleveland temple or the Mason's temple I am not sure which. Mason temple I think. Some other plain clothes negro policemen were recognized in the audience and they put them out. It was a closed meeting the police weren't invited in and they weren't having them in.

David Yellin- Well now in your doing all of this have you had any repercussions as a result of this?

Taylor Blair- No. I never was able to get my charges pressed against Redick.

David Yellin- How come Taylor Blair is Taylor Blair? How come you come by this attitude and this approach? Were you always this way?

Taylor Blair- Gosh I don't know.

David Yellin- I mean I am getting a little personal but I think this is very significant. You are from Tennessee you have been here, I am not saying that you were at any time a racist but you weren't certainly as active as you seem to be now.

Taylor Blair- Well I think it has something to do with basic inside beliefs. Worth of the individual.

David Yellin- But you sit in an auditorium or a church with several people who are here and supposedly feel the same way, and I am not being irreverent and don't come out the same way.

Taylor Blair- That is because they don't, maybe they wanted to make a social club out of the church.

Taylor Blair- Did you always have this feeling?

Taylor Blair- I think so.

David Yellin- So this just gave you a chance to direct what were your inner feelings rather than kind of a discovery...

Taylor Blair- I have been working here in this area ever since I have been in Memphis since..

David Yellin- That is true you were the war on poverty.

Taylor Blair- I have been active in many community affairs church affairs and political area, I have been president of the Whitehaven Democrats almost since I moved to Memphis. I had a little luck with a fellow named Estes Keithorgill winning an election that he was supposed to lose...

David Yellin- Of course you know you don't look unlike him? Kind of interesting. Do you see any resemblance Bill of am I just?

Taylor Blair- He was a law partner of a brother of mine and I had helped Estes from the day he got into politics and I came to Memphis in 1958 when his campaign was in trouble over in west Tennessee, and we tried to help him pull it out and won it. I got some sort of a little reputation I guess.

David Yellin- When did you come to Memphis 58', and did you stay?

Taylor Blair- I stayed.

David Yellin- Were you in union affairs your whole life?

Taylor Blair- Well no. I worked 21 years full time for the international brotherhood of electric workers in the same job I am in. Prior to this I was a radio engineer.

David Yellin- For a station?

Taylor Blair- Got me a broadcasting system and a number of smaller stations around the country.

David Yellin- Were you in New York?

Taylor Blair- Well I was last station I worked with was CBS before I went in service for WPBM in Chicago. I took a leap from WPBM and went to work full time with the union. My home is Chattanooga. There I worked for WDOD, but WDFB on air.

David Yellin- Well you ought to have all these tapes now you are supposed to have.

Taylor Blair- Well really I wasn't, the thing about this thing down the road it is like a firemen trying to put out some fires.

David Yellin- No I think it is kind of interesting , I don't know how you feel Tom but I have a feeling here where somebody did really see the thing very early and the fact that you told it to the mayor and told it to other people and, I think it is kind of fascinating. I am sure you are representing this is your feelings then and not as an afterthought you know now we all can look back and say hey they should have done this, and should have done that.

Taylor Blair- So many people didn't feel that this was racial at all until say after the macing or at some particular point, and well I suppose I didn't like the average citizen, so I just went to church and moved around the community, but I had some experiences in White Haven when I was working impact club over there. We would run into quite a bit of John Birch activity and some real vicious activity when we were trying to campaign over there. A nice pretty little community like that, and I knew there was something rotten under the whole thing.

Tom Beckner- I understand they had quite a bit of grudge activity going on there.

Taylor Blair- There was a lot of it going around there and we had even on occasion been bothered by the ku klux a little bit. I don't want to call his name but he was from an insurance company and he lives in white haven.

Tom Beckner- Is he with investors diversity? Is that the one?

Taylor Blair- I am not sure he lives on Elpington St. I don't recall his name, I have it in one of my files around here, but they had made some threats a few times matter of fact some of the tips I had gotten into I would have a number of threats made. I don't let this stuff bother me too much.

David Yellin- I don't know it would kind of scare me.

Taylor Blair- well it's, I am not all that brave but I believe a fellow if he doesn't stand up for what he believes in he is not giving it much a right to live anyway. He isn't doing humanity and good.

David Yellin- You said you went to the churches down with the negro ministers. Were you around when Dr., King was called into town? What was your reaction to that? Did you think it was a good idea?

Taylor Blair- Dr. King came about, came into Memphis through a different avenue really. Barry Ruston I think could be the man that had more influence than anyone else. Jerry Worth and Barry Ruston are very good friends. Jerry quickly saw when he got into Memphis what the situation was and he didn't want it to get any worse. Jerry was sort of caught between a rock and a hard place. The ministers had sort of taken over and had control of the situation and actually Jerry in some way wanted to without offending the colored ministers wanted to break this kind of relationship.

David Yellin- Did you think that he accepted it?

Taylor Blair- Oh I was listening to some conversations that were made so I know he wanted to do this. He asked Barry to come in here and the date that he wanted him he couldn't come, he had just been here the Monday or so before. Maybe an ACLO function or whatever.

David Yellin- This was Barry Ruston?

Taylor Blair- His schedule wouldn't permit him to come in when Worth wanted to but he said he would get to work and try to get King to come in and get the southern leadership conference to exercise a little leadership over this lose organization that had been formed here.

David Yellin- Now I am trying to put the two things together. I thought you said that Worth was kind of would have liked to take the ministers out of the situation?

Taylor Blair- This is right. The local ministers.

David Yellin- The local ministers, why then would he call on the SCLC?

Taylor Blair- Well I think this really, this came about as a suggestion I think from Ruston that this was a way of getting around the thing.

David Yellin- I see, he took his situation to Ruston and said I have got these ministers in there what can I do?

Taylor Blair- Yeah. He did come in, he didn't make any public appearance I think the following week. Monday or Tuesday of next week and just came in for an evening and a night and morning,

David Yellin- This is Barry Ruston?

Taylor Blair- Yeah he met with Jerry. Jerry, I was present at breakfast and we discussed it quite candidly and openly by this time Jerry and I had become really good friends where Champa had sort of refused to accept me to begin with since I just walked in cold off the street and made some proposition there in the early stages, Jerry had investigated my background and had talked to the people in Washington, and he was ready to accept me at face value and was taking me into his confidence. I was present when this conversation took place.

David Yellin- Can you give us the context with Barry Ruston?

Taylor Blair- Well this was just about it. He was saying this is what the situation is here it has gotten out of hand as far as we are concerned. God bless these colored ministers I couldn't live without them right now but really I can't allow them to run my union for me. If I wanted to make a settlement right now I am not in a position too. And this was really the truth of the matter.

David Yellin- Right.

Taylor Blair- He was trying to get the control back in the hands of the union, Then he came on up to the first meetings you know the reverend Jackson sat in on these final settlement meetings, and that was almost a have to, to represent the colored ministers.

David Yellin- Yes and he was the one reverend Jackson who held out in the situation about the way recognition, is that correct.

Taylor Blair- Because he didn't understand some of the words being used there. Not because he, well he wasn't familiar with labor problems.

David Yellin- He wanted to settle it the way that the folks could understand it.

Taylor Blair- Well it wasn't having the same meaning to him that it was having to people who had some experience in labor background.

Tom Beckner- Who was this, I am not really...briefly?

(Tape Break)

Taylor Blair- Implementing the decisions of the meeting.

David Yellin- Now you are reading from notes you took on the phone?

Taylor Blair- This was after the negotiations had started between the city of Memphis and a local 1733 of the AFSCME. This was one of the first hurdles to get passed was the recognition clause. I had taken the resolution passed by the city council on the 22nd and tried to work from it, and working behind the scenes with Frank Miles. Frank had asked me to develop some language so they would be ready to move on and want to kill it just a minute and let me get it back in....(Tape Break)

David Yellin- Recognize all over the place now.

Tom Beckner- Jackson didn't want the word recognize?

Taylor Blair- No Jackson wanted it.

David Yellin- He wanted it and (muffled)

Taylor Blair- They were trying to say here they were meeting for the purpose of, with the designated representative of the employees, meeting for the purpose of resolving problems to work out problems relating to wages hours and conditions of employment. Establishment of policy that the union would meet with the union now and in the future on these particular issues. This came, these three points here were the three points that were made right here in the resolution.

David Yellin- In the resolution, That is the early resolution.

Taylor Blair- And I was trying to stay around this center here because it had some legal background.

David Yellin- And recognize, oh yeah it is all over the place, first three steps.

Taylor Blair- Well that made a point there the right of employees, so the department of sanitation to form a union and be recognized. The right to elect union officers of their own choosing and that they be recognize and the right to select representatives to negotiate for them with the city of Memphis be recognized by the city on their behalf. All those points were in there and we knew that there was a hang up on the word recognize and we were trying to develop language to get around it. Actually what came out was language that did get around it.

David Yellin- I have taken this, is this alright?

Taylor Blair- Yeah, and the city finally did use the word recognize in it though it said the city of Memphis recognizes the American federation of state and county municipal employees as the designated representative for certain employees and so on.

Tom Beckner- But they called it memorandum?

Taylor Blair- Yeah called it memorandum. Well the memorandum route is not uncommon in field of municipal governments. Is this for public relations or public opinions?

Taylor Blair- No most cities take a position that no third party can have exclusive representation for the people because this is the duty of the elected officials. We have the, in the electrical workers, we have 99% of all the utility industry in America organized. I would say the majority of all the contracts we have start off as a memorandum agreement.

David Yellin- Instead of a contract?

Taylor Blair- It is just semantics.

David Yellin- Why don't they get off of it sometimes.

Taylor Blair- I know.

David Yellin- Did you ever meet Dr. King?

Taylor Blair- Yes.

Taylor Blair- When?

Taylor Blair- I met it when he was here the first time.

David Yellin- The 18th? You were at the at meeting.

Taylor Blair- Sorry I wasn't at the second one.

David Yellin- Can you recall that first meeting where you sitting on the platform or..

Taylor Blair- Yes I was, Ratt and I both went and well actually we sat on the platform part of the time and I moved around and sat around in the press section because he was back and I wanted to see this guy in operation. That meeting was about 4 hours long but I swear it didn't seem like it was hardly an hour.

David Yellin- Really?

Taylor Blair- He is such a dynamic, did you ever sit through one of his meetings?

David Yellin- Yes.

Taylor Blair- He is tremendous.

David Yellin- I did once. I think, I am trying to remember, well I will tell it this way because it is better for him. I think he followed Sammy Davis Jr. Of course now that I rethink that I think it was the other way around.

Taylor Blair- Where was this?

David Yellin- In white plains new york. They had a big rally and I know forget what it was about but I know Sammy Davis, is was the first time I ever saw Sammy Davis Jr. and of course he is a dynamic entertained but I would suspect that Dr. King spoke first. Because it would be awfully hard to follow an entertainer who has loosened up the crowd.

Taylor Blair- Well I had seen Dr. King's name in the newspaper and I had seen articles and papers and magazines about him from time to time but it was until the early part 1967 that I really began to pay some attention to his movement. The reason I did our church has a curriculum of studies and Sunday school that is uniform throughout the general assembly. One of these points of study we had a some text on the christian's role in race relations. Prior to coming to this I am a

teacher in the one of the adult classes in our church and preparing ahead I had come across a telegram from some white ministers to Dr. King while he was in jail to Birmingham and his reply.

Tom Beckner- Letters?

Taylor Blair- Yeah, and I thought this thing was tremendous and I brought this in to the class. And it wasn't very favorably received,

David Yellin- Oh really.

Taylor Blair- In fact, I had a secretary who worked for me at that time who was a member of our church and she quit because I insisted she mimeograph this thing. She was felt that strong about it that we were going to bring something like this into our church.

David Yellin- You know something, interesting was it Dean Demick, one of the ministers he wrote the letter too?

Taylor Blair- Sure enough.

David Yellin- Yeah in Birmingham.

Taylor Blair- I began to really pay attention.

David Yellin- It was either...no no it was Dean Demick.

Taylor Blair- Well I really began to follow this fellow after this because I didn't really know what the southern leadership conference was really all about and when I was in Atlanta one time I know right off (muffled) down there.

David Yellin- That is a good guy to know...oh boy, oh boy.

Taylor Blair- Well Raf tried to get me active in the southern Christian leadership conference and I don't like to get into something that I can't put some time in and I don't know that much about it, my time was pretty well taken anyway and I just let it go by the board. But when it came here this was the first time I had ever had an opportunity to meet him personally, and it was just like you meet anybody else in a crowd we didn't get to become very personal friends or anything like this.

David Yellin- But you felt something that night.

Taylor Blair- Very definitely and I think my wife would say the same thing.

David Yellin- Where is your wife in all this? Does she follow you in all this obviously she does if she went...that was rather brave when you look back on it for her to go. I mean...

Taylor Blair- Well my wife had a longer history of working with these sanitation people than I had. She used to be the office manager for the retail's clerk union.

David Yellin- So your union was a real union of unions wasn't it.

Taylor Blair- So she had come in contact with them early. And the struggles up there in fact, she wrote many of their names before they could even write their names for application of membership. And without really knowing the people we even loaned them money from time to time. Oliver Jones on several occasions when he was down on his luck. He was one of the people who was fired in the beginning 8 years again.

David Yellin- Is that T.O.? You call him Oliver?

Taylor Blair- Tomas Oliver yes. So we had some personal interest in this guy and some of the sanitation people we had met. I took her out to the firestone hall one day, and some of those people cried when she walked in.

David Yellin- It is easy to say now and I don't say this lightly about having gone to that meeting it really is true that at that time it was unusual let's put it that way. I say brave almost I think it is quite right to think so.

Taylor Blair- Yeah you had a little uneasy feeling when you went back to and found they was trying to...(Tape Cuts)

%On Saturday and (muffled) told me he just wanted me to go out and see this people because I knew a lot of them because I helped them in the beginning when they were organizing. So we go in and I want to sit back in the back with everybody else and Taylor says no we are supposed to sit up on the stage. I don't know why we are supposed to sit up on the stage, then we go all the way up to the stage and immediately they ask Mr. Blair to get up and say something, he said, I brought my wife here today I think I will just let her get up and make a speech for me. There must have been 500 people out there. And he was throwing me like he was throwing me to the lions but these people get up and gave me a standing ovation and just clapped and clapped and clapped, and I don't know, I was just breathless I couldn't even think.

David Yellin- What did you say?

%I don't know what I said. They were all real nice.

David Yellin- Well it was quite a thing to go and just show.

%Sure it was because I knew most of these people or a lot of them because I worked for a retail (muffled) and they sued our union hall. Gosh that was two years.

David Yellin- What did you think of Mason's Temple....

%Well I was quite sympathetic with the people and the cause. It was really a heart breaking thing to hear their please because these people seemed more religious

wise than anybody I know really. I guess they are at a point in their life where they had to be. To me it was a sad thing.

David Yellin- Even when Dr. King spoke?

%Oh yeah this was the most impressive speech I think I have ever heard. Of course we didn't hear the speech the night before his last speech before he was assassinated the one I heard was about two weeks prior. And it, we had a seat, some people had a seat to sit down, and we didn't sit we stood the whole time he was speaking which must have been 45 minutes, but it didn't seem like no time. You couldn't take your eyes off the man.

Taylor Blair- He was very impressive, he had a way of revealing just like the talk he gave of I have a dream, he kept coming back to it, you couldn't forget it, it stuck. You know they had a way of recounting, of going back to the days of Israelite in bondage. The way this guy talked and with the events that unfolded right before your eyes you were almost re living the same kind of thing over and over again.

David Yellin- I guess that was the one where he said if I had a chance to go back I would go back to Greece?

Tom Beckner- That was the mountain top speech but he referred to this several times.

Taylor Blair- You just get some sort of a feeling that here is a modern day prophet that people aren't really listening to but history is going to point to.

Tom Beckner- I think he was the best leader in that field that we have had in this generation.

Taylor Blair- I think he was just grossly misunderstood. I think the whole cause was grossly misunderstood. This guy didn't come here to lead any march as he was accused in the newspapers by he had already finished speaking and had left the stand and gone back and sat down or was shaking hands with some people and they began to chant they wanted him to lead this march they were gong on. Abernathy came up and tried to say a few words to them and they wanted King back. Abernathy that they couldn't lead a march that they were due in Batesville or wherever they were going. He had thanked them for them wanting him and all this but he said it is just impossible we have a commitment to keep we can't do it. By this time the whole 12 or 13 thousand people whatever was there the place was jam packed even the aisles were packed. They were demanding that they come back so King finally came back and said if you really want us to do it if you will promise me you will be there I will come back on a Saturday or some thing and I will lead you, or whenever it was.

David Yellin- Friday the 22nd.

Tom Beckner- We had a meeting in Atlanta he was at one time before he was assassinated. It appeared to me at that time like his biggest worry was that Ratt Brown and Dr, Carmichael and those sorts were taking the ball this way and he wanted to take the ball this way and that seemed to bug him more than...

Taylor Blair- All of this summer that he preached up there at Clayborne Temple, or Mason Temple that night it was totally nonviolent that this was not the way to get the job done and people could take and read into it anything they wanted to but if you listen to what the man said and follow the text that he said it was totally opposite of what the newspapers were reporting.

David Yellin- Someone said he was the best friend that white men had in this regard in that he sure did not want violence. They were saying he was misunderstood.

Taylor Blair- I think a lot of people probably like I was they just didn't know anything about the man hadn't taken the time to learn anything about him until I was telling him we had used it in our Christian covenant life curriculum series, during that lessons that we had on christians place in race relations work. I had sued his reply to the ministers in Birmingham while he was in the Birmingham jail, I had used this in the class for St. Andrews and it wasn't very well received. People just didn't even want to believe what they read...(Tape Ends)