

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

General Motors - Lordstown Strike of 1972

Personal Experience

O H 1015

MARLIN D FORD

Interviewed

by

Robin Schuler

on

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S This is an interview with Marlin Ford for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on G M Lordstown Strike of 1972, by Rob Schuler, on March 6, 1981, at 2 00 p m

We are going to talk about labor problems at the General Motors plant and more specifically those problems that were going on in 1971 to 1972 Mr. Ford, could you give me a little bit about your own personal background?

F: I was born in Wood, Pennsylvania on February 28, 1942. My dad was a coal miner all of his life He was the youngest of seven children. I was born and raised around that area My mother and dad separated when I was very young. So, I moved around from place to place living with aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, or whatever I finally graduated from Roberstdale High School which was just three miles from Wood, where I was born

In 1960, I went into the service. I did a hitch in the Army and came back out and went to work at the Altoona Shoe Factory. It was where I got involved and started in union I ran for and was elected shop steward there. I was there for a couple of years I came to Lordstown in 1966. The same year I married my present wife. My son and daughter, Eddy and Marilyn, were to her. I came here in 1966 and was hired in on May 16, 1966 for \$3.00 an hour

S: Pretty big change.

F: Yes. I put in my 90 days. Of course, we were laid off right after I got in. We had six or seven weeks there where we were laid off right after we were hired on a multi change-over We came back to work and they put a second shift on In November of that year, I went the second shift with the startup crew. I went second shift with the committeeman. That is when I got involved with the union in Lordstown. An appointed committeeman, then had to run in an election a couple of months after that and won the election. I served as committeeman and shop committee man for 1966 through 1970. That is when they, Chevy Fisher Body, became GMAD Due to that I lost my job as supplemental employment committeeman, because we lost the contract We had one for each, one for Fisher and one for Chevrolets and Fords. One for Chevy's and one for Fishers Under new agreement, we only had one. That was a different unit, so it saved GM some money It cost me a job, so I ran for committee man and was elected. That was in the later part of 1970, I think in somewhere in November. That was when the war started, or so-called war. Basically, I did not see it. There were many stories written on it by different people and different items and different thoughts and different philosophies. Basically, I saw it as a money-saving, cost cutting management coming in to knock down those young punks at Lordstown. The average age at that time was 24 A lot of stories were true about guys not coming to work on Fridays The only reason they came four days was because

you could not live on three A lot of us were married or were just getting married. We did not have any responsibilities, the house, the car and stuff. It ties you down and makes you a slave to the system. So, they had quite a Donnybrook. The real factor in it was just GM management Somebody made a managerial decision somewhere to cut costs. While they were cutting costs, it was doing away with jobs, eliminating man power, knocking down some of the quality items on cars, appearance items not really items that would make it not run better or anything, but the appearance items. I speak of those primarily because I am more familiar with then in the paint shop. I was in the paint shop department at that time

For instance, what we call the beauty line on a car on the belt line, it is about half way down the door from there down The upper portion is called the beauty line. We used to always hand sear. We would sand the bottom portion off to make it smooth, so when it was painted, it did not have that sandy effect like lots of sand in it They just quit sanding the bottom of the car, quit worrying about the bottom of the car as far as sanding was concerned, and it eliminated people. It cut the cost savings, but it did not make the car look better, but it did not hurt the car It was a process of eight people for that and there was no way to get those things back.

Through the years in 1966-1969, those were formative years for us. As union reps, we fought pretty hard and were pretty lucky by the fact we had a brand new plant and one of the biggest in the world. Some of the assembly lines were old and so on and so forth Somebody admitted the items we were able to gain as a union. As a union, union reps were things that were unheard of in plants 20 or 30 years seniority that had been down there down the road. Many things that we had were things that a lot of people never even thought of being able to get, but we were able to get them primarily because of our position. Our plant, the car we were building, the economy was good. The sales were good and they really could not afford it if the show place went down. In 1970, they made a decision to let it roll down one way or the other. We struggled like hell in 1970 just to keep what we had gained through the years. We were not really worried about getting anything new at that point, just to hang onto what we had.

There was a picture side of the house which I was on and was proud of. Our local contract was far better than any contract within the system. We took the best parts out of every contract that we had and we had it incorporated and added our own to it So, we had the best grievance in the world as far as the auto industry is concerned, and local grievance

- S: Before GMAD came in, there were two separate contracts between Fisher Body and General Motors?
- F. Yes, Fisher Body and General Motors had contracts. Fisher Division of General Motors and Chevrolet Division of General Motors. Fisher Body built the body.

The body shop fabricated it. We did the trim part of it and the painting in the Fisher side. Then it went from there to get the outside trim and the engine and the tires and those types of things put on it. We were all in the same plant, the same building, but it was like rolling calls down your D2 or whatever it is. That separated Fisher from Chevrolet, as far as the two parting units were concerned.

We had two shop chairmen, two shop committees, but we only had one executive board. We had one local union, but we had two separate entities as far as bargaining was concerned. Of course, that all changed when they became GMAD. It only had one parting unit at that point, one shop chairman, one shop committee. That did away with seven jobs. That was a cost item real quick right there. Then it also leads to a political struggle in the local, too.

S: Do you think that it looks like the trouble started after GMAD came in?

F: There is no doubt about it, sure. They were very cost conscious, with a really different type of management. You had the same people there. The same foremen, the same general foremen, the same superintendent. They were just told that they better cut costs, and they did.

S: The people at the top there in Lordstown were the same? Is that right?

F: Yes, it was the same management. We had a new plant manager, or did we? No, we had the same plant manager. Of course, they had their own struggle going on between the old Fisher management and the old Chevrolet management. Who is going to come out top dog as far as general foremen and superintendents are concerned, those types of things. They had a struggle going too. Their own political struggle. Their politics are sometimes worse than ours. It was who was going to make superintendent, who was going to make general foreman.

Using the type of criteria that was laid down by Detroit, they are Detroit people. Who could save the cost money, who could cut the most costs was cut. It was very ruling up there on the shoulder. It led for a lively time. Of course, our people, they were still fairly young at that time. The average age was probably 26.

S: Do you think that had a lot to do with the militancy of the work force was the age, the younger people?

F: I think it had quite a bit to do with it, yes. I know I was a lot more militant then than I am now. Not that I am still militant, but there was a lot more script to jump off the gun and fall off the handle in those years than I would now, take a look at things first. It had quite a bit to do with it. It was a cross section. We are and were a cross section of people all over the country, Pennsylvania, West Virginia,

Ohio, Illinois, Texas, California they came in from. A majority of them Ohioans and quite a few Pennsylvanians. There were a lot of young ones and it was just that they would not take any shit. A lot of them had never worked in a factory before and had never worked in an assembly line. They were not used to being tied down to the line and you had to follow it perfectly when they started cutting costs in 1970. Probably cutting costs and doing away with what we call FT replacement operators and relief men, people who relieve you to go to the bathroom, an hour or two hours to go to the medical, you know. Sometimes you did not get to go at all.

We had incidents of guys going back in the corners and taking a leak just because the foremen would not give him a relief. They did not have any manpower. It still goes on by the way, not nearly as much as it used to, but it still goes on. Certainly not as much as it did at that time.

They eliminated jobs, which we won through grievance procedures and, through time, we made a job. I will give you, for instance, a job I started out on the plant. I started out on a wet standing deck. The job I started on, I did with the air power wheel. I did the hood, front fender, door, the rear quarter of the car. That was my job. I had to sand that all. The only time the car went by was at 60 an hour, 60 seconds that car was going by me. That job, after I became committeeman and we got the union in and got it going, that job from a two-man job, turned into a six-man job. It would be done without killing you. Then when GMAD came in, they went down to a four-man job. They cut two people off of it. A lot of it was our own fault. A lot of it was our guys in the plant who had learned through repetition and doing the job over and over again that they way to cut down on it short cuts in the job, where it might be set up time study-wise for 59 second they could do it in 40 or 30. Then we got a lot of doubling up. You might do two jobs at once and the other guy will take one hour on and one hour off and do both jobs. Of course, when management saw that, that was just like waving a red flag, so they cut a lot of people because of that.

S: Do you think a lot of it was due to them cutting people back? How about the line speed? They went from 60 cars to 100 cars in an hour. Did that have a lot to do with problems with the workers? Did that put the workers out?

F: Yes, from 60 to 100. If you are building 60 and your are used to that pace on a bogger car, and we are building the Vega, that makes 100 or 105 jobs an hour, it goes faster. You have less time to work on the car. Of course, theoretically, you should have less to do on the car. Quite often, it did not work out that way. You are talking about a forty percent line speed increase. Quite often it increased the work load by sixty percent. Somewhere along the line, there is twenty percent that is not getting done, or you are just not going to do it. You got the foreman there pushing to try and make you do it. If you do not do it, they throw you out. Just the nearest system that they came down. If they say you missed the job,

you missed the job. The foreman who put you under suspension for 1,000 shifts for one day, 1,000 a week, 1,000 two weeks, 1,000 30 days and discharge him. We had many people who worked their way up until that said they just could not do the job. The foreman would assume that if they speared it, and they did that for spear tactics also, they would throw you up or they would just come down and fire you. Instead of going and following the normal disciplinary procedure, they might come down and give you two weeks where you are only supposed to be up for a balance of a day. Or they give you 30 days, instead of the normal one and a half days that you should have been thrown out. They did that to scare the other people on line to make them work harder. Of course, people rebelled. They were not going to put up with it, you know. If I worked the line for 5, 10 years, I would have become friends with you. If I see a man deliberately throw you up 30 days for something you did not do or that you know is wrong, then I am going to try and help you. Somewhere in the wrong we will get back at him. That is what happened in life classes, but they used a philosophy. They thought we would get scared and start working harder. It did not work that way.

S: About the directors. Was that not a big thing back then, they could lay anything on you in a direct order and you had to do it?

F: Yes, that was one of their problems, one of their cliches, one of the big things that they did. They tell you to do something. You say, "I am not my job. I am not doing it." They say, "That is a direct order. You do it." You say, "No." That is where they have to discipline you. You got a direct order, you go over there and do the job. I had just about every job in the department up to about the 78. That is what we call it, the terminology we use. It is paragraphing the contractor. Such a job has too much work on it and it has to be adjusted. Just about every job in the department was 78. Under our contract, there was not supposed to be any discipline on a 78 job, but they did not care anyhow. They just put in. They still do, but I mean then it was really bad.

I had days I would go in there as a committeeman and did not even get into the department. I would just report directly to labor relations and they would just bring you guys down and throw them out the door. I never got them. I just sit down all night with interviews and write grievances for the guys. They had to let me, to get the committeeman off the floor. If the committeeman was not on the floor to give his men moral support, and they do not see that union rep walking around, then they get a little shaky, too. I developed the system I used. I would go up on the floor the first hour, which we are not supposed to do theoretically answer calls under the contract unless it is a 78, then I would make sure I took a walk through all of the departments so everybody would know I was there. Before I would give a labor relations, I refused a labor relations.

On many cases, I refused to go to labor relations. They would say report

to labor relations, and so and so is down there for you to get an interview. You can throw that at us, okay I continued to answer normal committee calls so the people would see me on the floor I would sneak downstairs and the newspaper guy would say, "Here, read this " I would tell him what I was doing and go back upstairs and answer calls and write more grievances. The more grievances you wrote, the more problems you gave them and the more money it cost them. It was a cat and mouse game, who develops more dealers, you know.

S: How about the politics that you were saying went on in the union at the time GMAD took over, what did that entail?

F: There were two shop committees The shop committee does the bargaining for the plant The president and the executive board runs the administrative end. The bargaining committee takes care of all the grievances, answers calls, so on and so forth There were two shop committees, one for Fisher and one for Chevrolet When they merged into GMAD, there was only one shop committee. You had the Fisher body shop chairman, Ryan Price, and then the Chevrolet shop chairman, Paul Cabo at the time. Both running against each other for shop chairman, plus the six shop zone committees as we call them from Chevrolet and six from Fisher Twelve were cut down to six. They were all vying for those jobs, so politics are pretty hot and heavy

S: For both?

F: Well, no. It was kind of tit for tat They were out numbered almost two to one, manpowerwise. Chevrolet had a lot more people working than Fisher did, but we had a better reputation on the Fisher side for being better negotiators and being more militant Almost all of the Fisher body people won elections and the Chevrolet people lost

S: You mentioned some of the tactics that GMAD used when they came in. Could you elaborate on that? What were some of the scare tactics they used at that time to increase productivity, something other than laying people off?

F: Well, they transferred people from different jobs. I might have been a painter for the last three or four years and they all of a sudden transferred me to sand. Of course, when you reduce the group, you transfer people around and when you make all those types of changes, people get a little bit of insecurity. We came into the plant, then we really got into the hot and heavy. Of course, you would come into the plant and they would say the yard is full. Your repair yard is full. We are not going to run a plant with the repair yard full. We cannot put any more cars in the repair yard Or they would send us home and go in six minutes. Go in there for six minutes and then they send you home. They would pay you for

the six minutes and then refuse to pay you the automatic short week which you had coming on the contract, saying it was a labor dispute and they never paid you. Some weeks you would get a couple hours of work. Some weeks you would not get any. You know, you would go in there for six minutes and they would send you home and scare the hell out of you, and bite you in the pocketbook

S: They would not lay people off, they would send them home and you could not collect your unemployment?

F: They would send the whole plant home. No, you cannot collect unemployment, you cannot collect anything. Under our contract we should have gotten short week, 80 percent of any hours we did not work, but they refused to pay it. There was a big long court battle on that one that we finally ended up losing. That went on for years. But that was one of their other tactics. If you did not come to work, they would call you at home and ask your wife where you were at. Sometimes they would shut the plant down, then call you at home and ask your wife where you were at.

S: Really?

F: Oh yes

S: A little agitation there?

F: A little agitation there, for sure

S: What can you say about people taking off for mental stress? You know, how would you relate mental stress to stress on the line? It has got to be there.

F: Oh, it is. There is no doubt about it. There is a portion of it. I do not see the fight. The president then was Gary Reiner. The newspapers and the press played up the blue car blues, the boredom syndrome quite a bit. I was not really. I did not see that fight being a very active participant. I did not see that as that type of fight. It sold papers and they enjoyed doing it and Gary enjoyed seeing his name in the press, The Wall Street Journal, and what have you. They played that one pretty good

I did not see it that way. I just saw it as heavy-handed management come in and cut costs and to show these young punks at Lordstown that they can do it. Of course, the young punks at Lordstown fought right back. They said, "Go to hell." We were not going to put up with that type of shit, and we did not. In the final analysis, I do not think that anybody was a winner or a loser. We ended up with the same grievances that we had always had. GM (General Motors) ended

up losing the Vega because of adverse publicity They ended up losing millions of dollars in lost down time and what you have. Our people, of course, ended up losing many, many dollars We lost some people on discharge. They were charged with sabotage They brought supervisors in from all over the country and they put them in the work force Of course, if somebody strange goes in, you do not it. It is a big plant There are 8,000 people there.

S: Just to keep an eye on the sabotage?

F: Sure, just to watch out for sabotage or even in some cases, I believe very firmly, they set people up for sabotages They said that they did it. , And they did not do it The troublemaker they wanted to get rid of, and we had no way of getting rid of the ones that set him up. I am sure of that. I cannot prove it, I am sure and certain in my mind as I am sitting here right now that it happened in many cases We had hourly people, guys that were on salary that came back out and told us those stories They were told by the general foreman, "Go down and fire that guy " "Well, what do I fire him for?" "I do not care." "You find a reason." It happens. It still happens today, of course not as much.

S: Were there a lot of people actually fired back then?

F: Yes, we lost tons of them. I do not know how many number-wise. I know I had fifteen or twenty discharges out of my area of 300 people. I am sure each committeeman had that many themselves. Some of them more than that because of bigger areas and different things going on. Yes, we had many discharges

We had a couple of sabotage cases that went up to the umpire. We lost a couple of them You never win them all A lot of casualties on both sides. Of course, the car was a casualty for GM We lost many hours and guys

S: Do you think the problems back then had a lot to do with the Vega which turned out an inferior car?

F: It certainly did not help it because you know you had the plant manager. The guy who was plant manager was on 60 Minutes one time, he was complaining about the guys sabotaging the cars and destroying the automobile product going down the line That was seen all over the country People say, "Hey, I am not going to buy something that is going to be sabotaged " They would not buy and I do not blame them Would you buy one when you get that kind of story? Certainly it helped to demise the thing

One of the biggest problems was the engineering problem. They had not designed the car properly There were too many flaws in design, too much rust, a lot of problems with the engine, and the fenders rusted off. We replaced a lot

of them, sure. They did a lot of work toward the latter part 1976 was the last year we built them One hell of a good little car They had done a lot of work, but it was too late Now people just would not buy it. They were afraid of the word Vega They saw too many of them running around with the rust blown out and things stuck in your mind Alleged sabotage or not, I am certain it happened.

I better not say that, they can still get me for it. We would get into it with the general foreman over something, or some of the guys, they wanted something They refused to give it to us You will have some problems before the night is over, I guarantee you Well, it just so happened somehow or another, water got on top of the paint book Just as Carl let the paint into the oven, the water was dripping on the paint the whole way down the side of the car Well, when it came out of the other end of the oven, all you have got is this big water spot there and the whole thing has got to be repainted. The oven was almost two hours long, so you are talking 200 cars that had to be repaired. They were all repair jobs Somehow or another that happened.

S: The sabotage, it looks like it was necessary to a great degree?

F: Yes, a lot of it was, and a lot of it was not A lot of it was just simply that people did not have enough time to do the damn jobs Then, when the cars go out and you are supposed to put six bolts on a hubcap and you have only got time to put three on because you are doing four or five other things on that car Well, it gets down to the other end, it might fall off, and then they call it sabotage. They say you deliberately did not put those three on there, so the tire fell apart. In some cases it was true, but in many, many cases it was not true.

Of course, you know we had a lot of trouble in the division. We had a lot trouble with replacement or cushion or motor line, the body shop. A lot of it was just the fact that the guys, they had too much manpower in order to make themselves look like heroes and the job just physically could not be done. It was just impossible So, Joe Deck could not do it. I was considered one of the best. Some of them we could do We made it look like we could not because we were going to help the guy across the line There was a lot of that, a lot of trouble on both sides of the fence

S: The doubling up, one of the things that was management's main complaint, a lot of workers I know claim that that was necessary just to keep your head together through the day You work your ass off for so long and then you have so much time off Somebody does the same for you.

F: You psyche yourself up into being able to work really fast and hustle. You are in some cases running order to get the job done You get just an hour off. You go over to sit down and play cards or read a book or whatever you do I do not

know, I was never over there I just waved a red flag at management, but they say if you can do that for an hour, you can do it for eight or ten hours, whatever the case may be. Of course, nobody can stand to work at that pace with a ten-hour day They just cannot do it Say you are shoveling snow. You just ran like hell to shovel it. You get the thing done, but you are done in ten minutes so you are able to do that If you tired doing that for eight hours, you would drop over dead This is the same type of thing you are looking at on a doubled up. That poor guy just runs his butt off to get the job done He gets two jobs done knowing that he is going to get an hour off to go play cards or read or whatever the hell he wants to do. It would be impossible to do all day. He could not do it in eight hours He could not keep up that pace for eight hours.

They took the philosophy if you do it for one, you could do it for eight hours In most cases, it was a half hour on and a half hour off. Mostly doubling up cases Some of them would be an hour on and an hour off. The majority of them is a half hour on and a half hour off You know if you psyche your mind up you could do both jobs for a half hour. Well, after that half hour is over, you are ready to sit down for a half hour You cannot keep that up very long. It is just impossible You could not do it Thereby, a lot of shit went down the line not done, thereby creating so-called sabotage

S. I talked to a guy from management who said he thought that it was just a very minute part of the work force out there were troublemakers or people who wanted to see things change out there. Everybody else just went along. Do you see it that way or do you think more people actively wanted to see things change?

F: Then or now?

S: Back then

F: Back then Trouble makers, there was a very small, minute portion of what I would call troublemakers. At that point in time, I had grievances for almost everybody in the department. I can say just about the same for every committeeman I worked with. It was not just a small portion of the work force who was having troubles at that time It was almost universal. You have got 5,000 people in the car plant and we had over 20,000 grievances. That averages out to four per man or woman, whichever the case may be. There were not too many women in there then They decided to hire women then, so there were not too many women in there. That leaves you to believe that the strike means a hell of a lot more than a small, minute portion It was involved in that process

Now, a small percentage were activists, who were really out there pushing and fighting hard. Okay, you will stand up and say, "God damn it. I cannot do it.

I am not going to do it." Well, it was a direct order. "I cannot do it." Boom, you are out the door. We had thousands and thousands of DLO's in those 20,000 people with lay off slips. That means that somewhere along the line there was more than a small portion involved in a disciplinary procedure. When you have got more than a small portion involved in disciplinary procedure, then there is more than a few out there doing the hassling.

In many cases, we had guys in my department that I might get one trade card bureau, but during this time they were heavy and they were hassling everybody, the good and the bad workers. It seemed like they wanted to create problems. It may have been that they wanted to create a confrontation, a showdown type thing to eventually break the backs, because they have got other space. They have got a bundle of money over there and if they allow the union to control it, the people to control that plant for years and years to come, why that money is not going to last. It will cost them more and more to run it. It was a deliberate confrontation. It had to be. It happened not only in our plant, but in other GMAD's. I think there were six other plants that were in GMAD at the same time. We did help the trouble because we received the most notoriety. We had the best plant and the youngest work force. We had a young president, 30 years old, who was very articulate, good looking young guy who loved the press. He was not afraid to go out and say his piece, give raw speeches and what have you. It was all equal. All things being equal.

S: Was not one of the big questions back then also the shift? Like inner plant transfers and shift transfers? I think that was one of the issues?

F: Okay, one of the issues, I think you are probably relating to transfer between the car and van plant?

S: Yes.

F: Shift preference is if I am in the car plant and I have got 66 seniority and there is somebody in the van plant who is a member of the same union as I am and the same unit, than I cannot go over there and bump him. If I am on the night shift, I cannot bump him off to day turn to get the shift I desire. That was one of the big questions, yes. We won to that degree. A limited amount each week is allowed to transfer back and forth, about eight or ten people. It seems fairly adequate. We occasionally up that temporarily just to get everybody satisfied.

S: It seems like management was really stiff on that. Were they afraid of a mass excess of workers going from one part of the plant to the other?

F: Yes, because anytime they move, if I am moving from the car plant running 100 hour and I am going to the van plant where the van is running 30 an hour, it is

just like night and day. There is a hell of a difference. Of course, you are doing a lot more work on the van 30 an hour than you are on the car 100 an hour. It just seemed like night and day in different if you go in there and see the two lines speed. It is hard to believe. I go to the van plant after being in the car plant it is like the line is not moving. What the heck you are doing? How come there is no car?

Then they have a retraining thing at that point. Say at any given week, 100 people would decide they are going from second shift, they want to go first shift and the only people they can bump seniority wise is over in the van plant. It becomes a hell of a training problem. They now have to break 100 people in on jobs. People who never worked on vans maybe before in their life.

S: Then you can see their point?

F: Oh, you can see their point up to a degree. That is why you end up with a compromise settlement of so many per week, so that they cannot get benefits all at once. Of course, they still do occasionally on a reduction. Anybody in the car plant has the right to bump anybody off the van plant who has got more seniority or vice versa. We have had occasions where you 1,000 people from the van plant come to the car plant, so you had 1,000 people to train. You would not want to go through that every week. That does not happen every week, of course. I can see the point. They had a point there.

They also should not as I said, be willing to look at if I have got 20 years with the company I deserve my turn on day turn. If there is somebody there with a year that we call new hire at that point, hell yes. I should have a right to bump him, no doubt about it. It is one of the things they resisted. They resisted hard, not only the shift preference but the safety 63-B or 63-A, which is inner department transfer from one job to another.

Another means of transferring which is a shift preference is from one job to another rather than one shift to another. They resisted that. We have through the years eroded that to where we can move just about anywhere we want to in the plant through a series if you have the seniority and the openings. You cannot bump or move except for shift preference. Through the years, we have got it to where you can move just about anywhere you want to if you have the push power, the seniority. Unions are protected on seniority and they should be. You know, the more seniority you have the better the job you should have or you think you should have anyway or choice of it.

S: What are the most years out there now? Is it 1965?

F: Oh, I think we had one guy who came in the latter part of 1965, one or two. Most of them, the majority, the oldest would probably be 1965.

Came in 1965 The majority of us came in 1966 when they opened up. January, February, and March of 1966 to be considered really high on the seniority list I did not come in until May, so I am still high but I am not high enough to really kick a good job down and hold it. I can hold anything on second shift.

S: Does General Motors pay you salary?

F: No, I am paid by the union I am a full-time officer I get 40 hours a week plus the highest hourly rate in the plant, which is currently \$13.13 an hour.

S: Yes, that is not much in this day and age

F: The officers, we have an administrative assistant shop chairman who is paid by the union and we have a financial secretary paid by the local union We have workman's compensation rep who is paid by the union and three full-time secretaries who are paid by the union. The rest of the officers are paid by General Motors The company pays all of the committeemen, the shop committeemen, unless they are out of the plant working full union. Then we have to pay them

S: Oh, I see.

F: When they are in the plant, they are paid by General Motors which is kind of a slap in the face. You guys pay me to fight you, but it works. Now I am sure they love that

S: They spend all of their time working for the union when they are a committeeman?

F: Almost every day.

S: How about automation back then? Do you think that ate any of the jobs when they started with the rolled offs? Were there any other forms of automation?

F: Well, we did not really have that much automation back in 1966 when we started. Then they brought in the robots from the body shop for the body shop and replaced about 50 or 60 people down there on that orie line. That is going to come. That is the thing of the future for us, for the American industry

The overseas competitors, the Japanese and so on, have done and been doing it for years They are way ahead of the American industry in that category.

Just on this change over here they brought 40 or 50 pieces of new different types of automative equipment which will replace a lot of things which we do by hand. I do not know We have just started getting into it, taking a look at it. I do not know how many jobs we are going to lose off of it, but we are going to lose some jobs off of it

S Really?

F: Sure

S: How long do you think it will be before that really starts biting into the labor forces? Where you are really going to see people hurt? Five years?

F: About five to ten years We are going to see more and more and more of it. It is going to happen. I sit here in 1974 and said within ten years you will not be able to buy a big car That ten years is not up yet unless you are a millionaire All these small cars I am just about coming true on that one

S. How about the strike itself? Can you remember anything about it that might make it seem different than any other strike out there?

F: Yes, there was a lot of bitterness on both sides because you had been through several months of in-plant fighting Getting sent home early, getting disciplinary laws, guys going two or three months without a pay check. There was just a lot of bitterness It was a deep hatred. Now, you can walk in a bar with a foreman and sit down and have a drink. You still do not bowsi wowsi Back then, if a foreman walked in a bar full of guys he got his beer and got the hell out of there. We had incidents where a foreman lived had been shot at I visited a foreman's home a couple of years afterwards and he showed me the bullet holes that were still in the walls I know a couple of foreman that happened to

We had a lock-in a couple of times with them, kept management in and would not let them out Some cars were over turned on the picket line and set on fire We had some guys arrested for carrying guns on the picket line. That state hoopies worked a couple of guys over. It was a bad strike. It really was. It had all that penned up frustration

When you have a contract and you have to live by that contract, we had to live by it and we said that management had to live by it. They say when we break it, they will discipline us When they break a contract, the only thing they really get out of it is the money damages in some cases There is no physical or mental damage that they can get out of it in most cases. If we violate the contract or violate one of the shop rules, we get banged by virtually either losing

the job or losing time off of work and losing money. That becomes very frustrating because you cannot hit back. Your only means of hitting back is with a grievance or sabotage. Not saying that it was done, but I am sure somewhere along the lines somebody dropped something when they might not have dropped it, or leaned against the car when it was wet paint when they maybe should not have leaned against the car.

S. How big is the union membership now?

F: Right now, we are running, not counting the temporary lay off, about 8,300. Peak production, we were running about 9,600 between just this local. Now the factories next door, also UAW, they run about 14,000. Our local is the biggest and I would say we run about 8,000 to 8,200 on average.

S: As far as the national is concerned, how big is the UAW compared to the other big unions now?

F: We are the biggest industrial union. Teamsters have more members than we do. We are about 1,400,000. We were 1,600,000. Lay offs and troubling auto industry have cut us down. Now we are about 1,200,000. We were at a peak at 1,600,000. We were down almost 400,000 membership wise across the country. Steel of course, is bigger. I guess they are. I do not know any more.

S: Do you think that people back then the workers throughout that the UAW was doing a good job of representing them as fine?

F: Yes

S: I asked you about the representation of the people, if they felt that you were doing a pretty good job?

F: Oh, I think so, yes. Basically, you always have malcontent in any organization that does not agree with what you are doing or do not think what you are doing is right. The majority of them seemed to back us up to the whole way along. 1972 we had an election and basically the same guys were re-elected without too much change, which kind of tells you that yes, they are basically satisfied. You know the majority of them are.

In 1974, we had a radical change when I became president. If they were not really satisfied during that period of time with the way they were being represented and what was going on they would have probably made a big change in 1972. Well, they did not do that. They made the change in 1974,

because there was a lot of aftermath of Kim Atool in front of it, the chairman at that point Our present chairman at that point was still on discharge and did not get reinstated until 1974 when I became president We had a meeting in Detroit, that is when he got reinstated. Basically, they kind of agreed with us. We were the only ones defending them We were out there fighting for them. Of course, the company was sticking it to them

S One last thing I want to ask you With the decline of the American auto industry, they usually blame it on the unions and worker productivity. Not too long ago I read that the union is now going to keep an eye on company productivity out of the plant to make sure they do not come up with any major problems like with the Vega.

F: You mean quality?

S: Yes.

F We have aspired, and I have made a proposal to them, that we set up a joint union-management committee to monitor quality Quite often you will get a foreman, an overzealous young man who wants to become a general foreman or a superintendent and he is getting production quota out of his area The cars are going through his area, that there is no reason why the line stopped or repairs go out in the yard from his area. He may shyster a job, tell you to put on a wrong part on a car even though it does not change the appearance or what you have It just does not look right Some item that you cannot see as a customer in order to make sure there is no hiccups in his area. He may tell somebody to do something that is totally wrong. If the guy refuses, he is refusing a direct order. Then he may get into a hassle and screaming and shouting match. The guy may or may not get thrown out, depending on how good of a case we have got. Rather than have the guy say, "No, I am not putting it on," or say, "Foreman, that is wrong." Many people are afraid or do not want to say to their foreman or they do not want to rat They do not want to know who is ratting, who ratted on the foreman

What I suggested theoretically is my crew can come to and say, "Hey Whitey, foreman so and so on such and such a date this hour, this time, told me to put this part of a car on the back screw number seven goes in and screws this number up one seven eight One seven eight being it maybe an inch shorter. It may hold, but it would not hold as long as the other one was." Then, we would go down and check that If that is in fact true, we have got a piece of the foreman's ass Management has told us we will not tolerate any of our supervision doing that I said, "Okay, it is beautiful to sit here and tell me you will not tolerate them doing it, but what are you going to do when we in fact bring you

in somebody that is doing that?" Well, we will take care of it. Yes, you will take care of it like you did in 1971, 1972, 1974, and 1975. You will say, "Hey, Mr. Foreman, you did a nice job. You saved us money." Now, bullshit, you make sure it is a quality built product or you are going to scrap the damn thing. They had not given me an answer. They would give me an answer in a round about way saying no, but they do not want to come right out front just up and say no because I have made an issue of it. I know what is going to happen. If that is not going to work, if they do not want to have a joint committee to do it, I just may set one up on my own and say, "Hey guys, come to the hall or let me know what is going on."

Boredom, there is a certain amount of boredom built into an assembly line job. There is a certain amount of boredom built into every job. I am sure it can become boring to you at times when you sit and ask dumb people like me stupid questions. You know you feel like you have something better to do. It is a boring occupation at times. Sometimes it is enjoyable for you.

In the blue collar blues syndrome, the boredom syndrome that was so loudly aspired in 1970 and 1971 it was a part of it certainly, but it was mainly the fight. The war then was mainly a hard-knock management coming into our costs. They did not care how they did it. It was a young work force. They were all educated people who said, "Hey we are not going to put up with that shit," and it developed into a war between the two of us. Things have gotten quite a bit better since then. There is certainly no utopia, but they have gotten quite a bit better since then. Our grievance load now generally runs 1,000 or 2,000 grievances. We used to run 15,000 to 20,000 grievances, so that speaks for itself. It is getting better. Of course, our people are getting older. Their home, the house, cars, mortgage, kids, you know, college it saved the system. Cannot afford to take a week off. It changes quite a bit.

S. Thank you very much Mr. Ford

F: It has been a pleasure Mr. Schuer. Sorry my head was not quite up to par today.

S. It is all right. It is Friday.

End of Interview