

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

G.M. Lordstown Strike of 1972

Personal Experience

O.H. 1016

KENNETH P. FROST

Interviewed

by

Robin L. Schuler

on

February 7, 1981

KENNETH PAUL FROST

Kenneth Frost was born on May 20, 1953, in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Andrew and Rita Frost. The Frosts lived on the East Side of Youngstown, but later moved to Austintown, Ohio where Ken graduated from Austintown in 1971.

The summer after graduation Ken started work for General Motors in Lordstown, Ohio, joining three brothers already employed there. Ken soon became unhappy with G.M. but lasted there four years until another brother got him involved in a gasoline dealership. Outside of the gasoline dealership Ken also drove school buses for the Austintown school district until 1981.

Ken was married in November, 1973 to Darlene Pollock, they have one daughter Kristy. He was recently promoted to supervisor for the Beaver Gasoline Company and presently lives in Austintown, Ohio.

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INTERVIEWEE: Kenneth P. Frost
INTERVIEWER: Robin L. Schuler
SUBJECT: General Motors strike of 1972
DATE: February 7, 1981

S: This is an interview with Ken Frost for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Robin Schuler, at 458 South Edgehill, Austintown, Ohio, on February 7, 1981, at 8:30 p.m.

We are going to talk about radical labor unrest out at the General Motors Lordstown plant from September of 1971 going into 1972. Ken, can you give me a little bit of your own background?

F: Okay. I was born in Youngstown on May 20, 1953. I lived on the East Side of Youngstown until 1961. I've lived in Austintown ever since. I graduated from Fitch High School in 1971. I worked at GM from 1971 until 1975. I got married in 1973 and had a daughter in 1979. I am currently working at Beaver Gasoline Company as a supervisor.

S: Can you give me some of your family background at the plant? Did you have any other people work out there?

F: Yes, I had three brothers that worked out there.

S: Why did you first start working out at GM?

F: It was the thing to do. I was a lucky person getting in at GM right out of high school. I started there three days after I graduated, and I was really lucky. That's what everybody wanted.

S: Right after you started working out there, could you tell me about a typical work day?

F: Yes, it was terrible. I was on afternoons the whole time--all but a few weeks that I worked out there. You go in, walk in the plant, the guards are standing at the door as you walk in. The other times, you punch in and go to your line and wait for the whistle to blow. The whistle blows, the line starts moving. I had a job to do that is very simple. For example, one time I was putting a leather radiator hose on the motor with a clamp and tightening it up. That was all my job was, I did one job every 33 seconds. I had a 23 minute break before lunch, half hour lunch, 23 minute break after lunch.

In eight hours you expect to go home. Line time was a big thing at GM. Line time is how long you work. If you worked eight hours, line time was 8.5. It could be eight hours, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, and it was broken down to tenths of an hour. So, 8.1 would be eight hours and six minutes, 8.2 would be eight hours and twelve minutes. You could be expecting to go home through your scheduled eight hours. It would be ten minutes before it was time to go home, the foreman would come down the line and call line time nine and a half hours, which means instead of going home in 10 minutes you will be going home in an hour and 40 minutes. That would be the kind of days you would have.

Every day was a drudge going to work, because you go in and you don't know when you are getting out. It was doing the same job every 33 seconds and you don't make a mistake, depending on what kind of mood they are in. Some days if you made a mistake they'd have three or four repairmen at the end of each line anyway. You have repairmen to correct, to make repairs on something that is messed up, but that was their job, they were there to repair things like that. You don't need repairman if somebody doesn't make a mistake. If everybody did everything 100 percent correct, you wouldn't need a repairman. I think it is kind of obvious doing the same job for eight hours at least every 33 seconds. It could be easy to make a mistake or tightening a clamp too tight and breaking it. That is why they need repairmen. Most of the time it was okay if you made a mistake, a repairman fixed it, depending on the mood they were in up there and how things were going with the foreman.

S: Would you say that there was any kind of novelty when you first started working there? Did things get worse as it went on? Did you just start hating the plant more as it went on?

F: Oh yes, it was a novelty at first because I went in there and I was so amazed that that's where they made cars. To walk around on my breaks each day for awhile was really amazing. In spite of the little job you did, that's the place where cars came from. But it doesn't take long to hate it.

S: As I understand, the management out at General Motors was consolidated in late 1971 under General Motors Assembly Division, better known as GMAD. They took over right as the trouble erupted. What can you tell me about them? Could you see a difference in management then?

F: Yes, they came on kind of strong. I don't know if they came in when the trouble started or if they came in and started trouble. That was the biggest labor problem out there, but I don't know why it happened.

If you have a line, say there are 25 jobs on a line, there are 25 guys doing it. Well, for some reason I guess management maybe was paying too much out or whatever the case may be. Say there are 25 jobs and there are 25 guys doing it. For some reason they are to cut it down to 23 jobs. Well, that is two jobs you pass off on the 25 guys, which if you do a job every 33 seconds, it gets really monotonous and some jobs are a little more involved than other ones.

This is just a pretty far fetched example with 23 and 25 because I don't know if there is any kind of count. It just stands to reason when they take somebody away, something in that job still has to be done and somebody else has to do it. What it really amounts to is you are adding more work to the guys that are there than what they have been doing. That just changes the whole job scene and job classification, and of course, it causes labor problems. If your are doing a job this way and now they are adding more work on you, but not pay. . . . It probably doesn't sound like much, but like I said, ever since I started up there, you have to be there to see it. It probably doesn't sound like a whole lot, but that's just how it is.

S: I think the company claimed when they first started laying people off that technology of robots would be taking up the slack. What do you think about that? Could you see any of that?

F: Not any more than the first day I got there. I never saw anything new come in. They just changed the jobs around.

S: Did it seem like the company policies were rather childish, say authority being exercised for its own sake?

F: Well, they wanted it to. One thing I always got a kick out of, maybe it is military, but it was a direct order. If you had a direct order from a foreman you had to do it. There were no questions asked, it was a direct order. Now what is a direct order, my God. There were adults out there getting direct orders from somebody. Yes, that was very childish in my opinion right there. That is always on thing that always kind of hung with me. I've been away from there for a while, so I've kind of forgotten some of this stuff, but a direct order was a real classic and they still have it out there. The foreman is just next to God, I guess. He says he is giving you a direct order to do anything he sees fit, and it you refuse it. . . .

Another thing was you didn't swear at a foreman. You couldn't swear at a foreman, you could be put out for that. I'm not saying that it is right to go swearing at people, but you know when you get into a plant that employs 9,000 people you don't have 9,000 saints in there that never swear. You know what common talk would be but not to a foreman, they could put you out for that. I think that the guy is no different than anybody else. Yes, he can talk like that. If he is in a good mood and things are going good, it is nothing for everybody to talk the same. It could be labor problems, get fired up and swear, but that is put as verbal abuse. You can be put out of the plant for verbal abuse.

S: In reference to that direct order, as I recall wasn't there a man killed out there from the roof, or something fell on him and killed him? Instead of remedying or slowing things up to see what the problem was, didn't they just stick somebody else right in there and keep things rolling?

F: I don't know about that. I remember one time when I was working and a guy was working on a job up from me. He's a good guy. You work with these guys on the line and you know everybody. It's just like a baseball team. You all know each other and you are different from everybody else. You know everybody and everybody is friends. I remember a guy in the line was working and it was super hot this night. I don't remember what the reason was that he fell. He just laid down, he was on the ground. His partner that he worked with went over and stopped the line. The foreman came down and saw this guy laying down on the floor and, of course, he called the ambulance down. I don't remember what order it was done in. He also went nuts on his partner who stopped the line. He said, "You never stop the line. You walk around this guy, you step over him. Do the job, but never stop the line." Here is his partner laying on the floor, but you never stop that line.

I don't remember what happened to him, if he was put on notice or whatever, but I remember he really got GI'd for that. You never stopped the line, even if your partner falls down, you step over him. That is inhuman. I can't do that, I wouldn't do it. I'd probably be out of the plant because I would stop the line.

S: It seems obvious that management wants absolute authority. What can you tell me of some of the tactics they used to roll back, say union contract protection? You know, any tactics in general just to break the will of the people to stick together or written agreements between the company and the union. How did they get around those things?

F: I don't know. I can't think of anything right off hand in the tactics they used. I don't think there are a lot.

S: Okay, I can understand.

F: Maybe later on something will come to me. Right now I just can't drop a line on that.

S: What about the situation of grievances against the management? Do you think that worked out pretty well or do you think the company and management were scratching each others backs as far as grievances work?

F: The company and the union you mean?

S: Yes, I'm sorry.

F: You know, the bargaining is really something that I don't totally understand. There have been times when they would put people out of the plant for missing a day and not having a doctor's excuse. Well he is DLO'd. The first time you are DLO'd, you go out for the balance of the ship. The second time, miss a day, or a balance of a day, or a balance of three days, and then a balance of thirty days. I think that's how the procedure went. I'm not positive on that, that's probably different now anyway. But let's say they would put somebody out for absenteeism. What was that question again? I got off track.

S: About grievances in general, if they worked out for the union.

F: Okay. They put somebody out for the balance of the day or the balance of three days. That was without pay. Come bargaining time, the union is going to try to get this guy's record cleared and paid for his balancing day. Well in the meantime, you have other petty grievances that come up and there are some petty grievances that do come up. I've actually seen

committeemen tell some guys they are being petty, but that happens because some people are just like that. Most of the things are really legitimate, but you always got the few that make trouble. As far as grievancing goes, my feelings on bargaining would be that they use these lighter things to say, "Well let's forget about, say, three light grievances." For example, somebody wrote a grievance because the water fountain out by the job was filthy and nobody would drink out of it. A guy wrote a grievance on it and it did get cleaned. Let's say they would pass that grievance off and throw away a few grievances like that to clear this guy and pay him because he got put off for a balance of three days. I think that would be bargaining anywhere if that's what you are looking for. I don't know. I've never been involved with any bargaining and I don't know anything about that for sure.

S: In other words, there was grievance bartering, just like plea bargaining?

F: Sure, certainly. I think that would be with any union.

S: What did you think of their hiring practices? How do they seem to you in reference to young people being hired? Did it seem like there was a great deal of young people being hired in comparison to older people?

F: Older people as in authorities?

S: Yes. I think I read somewhere the median age was 28 years old.

F: I just can't imagine that. Yes, I would have to agree with that. Most of the people I worked with that got hired when I did were [younger]. When I got hired I was the youngest guy. [I was] right out of high school.

S: How old was that?

F: Eighteen. I remember working with a guy that was 27 years old and I used to rank on him about being old. I would say yes, between 18 and 28 would probably be the majority. Although, there were some older guys out there, but the majority I would say would be under 30.

S: How about blacks?

F: There were quite a few. If you are asking for percentage. . . .

S: I mean, were there a lot of blacks?

F: Yes.

S: Really?

F: Yes.

S: How about women at that time?

F: Not at that time. When I started, I remember seeing a few women in 1971. When I quit in 1975 there were a lot of women in there then. The women seemed to come in while I was there. Now there are probably more there now than there since I quit.

S: How about people from southern Ohio, and even farther south, what people would call hillbillies?

F: Were there a lot of hillbillies?

S: Yes.

F: That's what you are asking me? I can't really say there were a lot of hillbillies. Everybody is different, and I worked on a few lines when I was out there. Actually I worked quite a few places out there. The majority of the people seemed to be from Warren or Youngstown at that time. Where they were from originally. I couldn't say that they were hillbillies. Everyone's different, I wouldn't want to say that.

S: How about the atmosphere of tension? Would you say there was a great deal of tension on the job?

F: It all depends. I remember one time when they added all kinds of work on to my job and I was having a bad time doing it. It got to the point where I couldn't do it, it was just too much. I was trying my hardest to do it but the line kept going down. I was hanging engines on the line. I was taking engines from an overhead hoist and putting them on the line. There were two of us doing this job. I was having a bad time and I would have to say I was having the worse time than the guy I was working with. They added a lot of work on to this job. I had one of the white shirts down there watching me. The union guys were there various times. It ended up where I was put off of that job temporarily. Yes, there was a lot of tension down there, a whole lot of tension right there. When you get on to a job and get used to it, and don't mess with it and they let you do it the way it should be done and do it every 33 seconds, you can do it. If you get used to it then you can do it, you know how to handle it. But when they added work on, like this job which I had to go a ways with this overhead hoist, pull it, pick up the engines, and take them up the line. You don't want to get behind.

Anyway, I went off the line and was what they called a floater. That means that I did not have a steady job. It was kind of like there is an ARO out there, absentee relief operator. When somebody doesn't come to work the ARO does his job. When you are floating, it is basically the same thing. The reason I wasn't an ARO was because I didn't have seniority to hold that job. I remember being sent out to other lines because there was nothing to do on my line that had open jobs. Going to a new job, I remember going to the next line over with a foreman being there, and it was a bad job. It takes a while to get used to a job sometimes. This guy kept coming down and telling me how to ship our repairs. I told him there was nothing I could do. Talk about a miserable night. You know it was probably a ten hour night that night, too. You can only do so much and he is down there telling me to ship our repairs. What can you do? If they would have just left my job alone in the first place I would have done fine every 33 seconds. It ended up there were a lot of problems with that job. While we are on this, can I get off a little bit?

S: Oh yes, go anywhere you want.

F: I bought this, I agreed because they took me off the job and it went on for quite awhile. Eventually I got this job back with a different foreman. Well, they settled it and it was pretty much back to where it was before they changed it. Do you follow me?

S: Yes.

F: When they settled this grievance and I had the job, they put it back pretty much. One thing they added, though, was you had to check the sequence numbers on every sheet. There was a broadcast sheet that you had to put on the rack that used a one-type engine and you had to hang the engine on the line and everybody else down the line would look at this broadcast and all the sequence from one to 9,999. That's how they would do it. Well, they added that on the job to check the sequence numbers, and we didn't use to do that when I was on the line the first time. When I went back to the job, the foreman knew when I came back that I had done it before so he said, "Well, just go ahead and do it." I went back on this job. I was hanging engines one night and he came down and he was just going nuts on us. He said that there were 100 broadcasts missing, exactly 100 broadcasts were missing. That means that from probably like 9,800 to 9,901 instead of 9,801. I didn't know how to check them anyway. Whoever did probably would have missed it anyhow. This guy came down and here it was my side of the line. Like I said, two of us did it. It was my

engine, so I was the one that missed it. Well, he told me I was on notice, which means that you will soon be going to labor relations and hash this out and see whether anybody found the thing.

He put me on notice and that was all fine. The next day he came down with the utility man, who is an extra guy on the line who fills in if you have to go to the bathroom. You have to call the foreman and tell him that you have to go to the bathroom so he can send somebody down to let you go to the bathroom. He came down and told me I was to go up to labor relations and he would work my job until somebody came back. I said, "All right." So, the foreman was there and I started up and he said, "No, bring your lunch and cigarettes, you aren't coming back." I said, "All right." I picked up my stuff and we started walking up to the labor relations. It was super hot this night and we went up to labor relations. Well, on the way up the guys were just howling and carrying on because it was one of the teammates going up to labor relations. We were there for about two hours and it was air conditioned, really nice, I really enjoyed that, I could have stayed there. We talked to the labor representative, the committee man that was up there with me, and the foreman was in there and we were talking for awhile. He was writing everything down and taking a whole report of everything that I said and what the foreman said. I told him, I said, "You know, if I would have known I had to check these broadcasts, I probably would have just done it and there wouldn't have been any problems." The labor representative said, "You mean you didn't know you had to check the broadcasts?" I said, "No, we didn't do that when I was on this job before." The foreman just kind of looked at the labor representative and the labor representative looked at the foreman and said, "Did you give him a complete job description before you put him back on this job?" He said, "No." The labor representative said, "Go back to work." I went back to work, the foreman was hot, his face was beat red. He was ready to throw me out of the plant, I wasn't coming back to work. He screwed up, but there are 100 jobs missing and who is going to pay for that? Somebody has to, you know, but it is easier to pass that on to me than for him to have to fake it. You know what I mean?

Right now I am a supervisor with this job that I have, but I am 100 percent with my guys. I am their direct connection to the company and I am going to do what I can to help them out along with the company. You know, that works both ways. You can be in between, you don't have to be like that. Yes, if you made a mistake, say I make a mistake, everybody makes mistakes. Here he never told me about it. I just wanted to let you know about that.

S: What can you say about the mental illness out at the plant?

F: The what?

S: Mental illness. Did you notice a great deal of it? Did you know people that carried it, did people fake it? Do you really believe there was mental illness from a whole lot of tension on the job?

F: No, I can't say anything about that.

S: Really?

F: Yes. I worked with a kid who was a little jumpy from Vietnam. That probably didn't help him out a whole lot up there. It's really sad because he was a great family man. His wife and his kids were just great. I really felt bad because I ran into him a couple weeks ago and he told me they put on sick leave out there and they are going to let him know when he can come back. Yes, he had a run-in with the foreman and knocked his desk over and that is when they put him on sick leave. I don't know, that happened recently. It's too bad because when I worked with him he was a good guy. You know, that is a bad thing there. That is all I directly know about mental illness.

S: What can you say about the problems in the plant relating with the younger work force. Do you think that since the majority of the people out there were young? Do you think that had something to do with the radical attitude of the workers out there?

F: No.

S: Do you think they were less likely to take a lot of the crap from the company than the older people were?

F: No, it doesn't matter. You back a dog in the corner, he is going to bite you. It doesn't matter who you are or what you are or where you are from. You know when they get down, you can only take so much. You are going to just get disgusted and what's the use. No, I don't think that was it.

S: I seems that after some of this friction between the company and the union, the workers fought back with sabotage. Can you tell me anything about that?

F: Yes. Sabotage is a real easy way for a company to come out real rosy. In the papers where you saw sabotage, remember reading in the paper about sabotage and shoddy workmanship. That was a classic. Here is the thing, you have a job that takes five people to do it and you take two of them away, what kind of job are you going to get? Let's say you have to paint this house in one day and you have four guys here to do it.

You take two away. There are four guys that could do a fine job painting this house in a day. If you take two of them away and it has to be painted this day, what kind of job is that going to turn out to be? It is not going to turn out at all, right? Sabotage, you are talking about that also. I don't know if you remember or not, but I was laid off at this time when it came on Sixty Minutes. GM Lordstown hit Sixty Minutes.

S: Yes, I remember that.

F: Sabotage was the big thing. There was a guy they interviewed that I thought was really good because he brought it out on national TV. They interviewed him about sabotage and he was a guy that was driving the cars off the line in the back. The cars come off the line and they go into the repair lots because things don't always fit right, just different things. You might have a little dent in the metal that they aren't going to send to the dealer that way, so they bring it into metal finish and refinish. That just can't be done on the line, it is something that has to be done with more time because there are faults in the presses and stuff like that.

This guy they interviewed on Sixty Minutes drove the cars out in the back. They were asking him about sabotage. He said that he didn't see it. He said what really made him mad was when he would drive a car that would come in from repairs, say maybe there was a break line that maybe wasn't tightened up. He drove the car from the brake pedal when it went to the floor and you had to pump it up. The brakes aren't good on the car. He would want to bring it back in. He probably was an inspector because this was quite awhile ago, I think in 1972, so I don't remember exactly. He said he would send a car back in to be repaired and the foreman would tell him we have to get these cars out. Here goes a car with breaks that are no good that is going to the dealer. What kind of shoddy workmanship is that? How does that look when a dealer gets a car with no brakes? Whose fault is that? That is probably the guy on the line that didn't do his job right. Maybe that is something that he didn't have a chance to do, tighten that line up, maybe the repairman didn't catch it. It got all the way down to final repair, that's where it should have been caught, but it was ordered to be sent out. So who looks bad? Management wouldn't send a car out like that, would they? Of course no, that is shoddy workmanship from the employees.

Yes, I was so glad to see that on TV because it looked so real. You know the stuff you read in the paper just isn't true, shoddy workmanship. They tell you about the job not being know right, but they don't tell you how many people they took off the job. There is not way you can do it, I don't care what you do.

S: You know when they got a lot these cars that needed repairs, you know they have to stick them in the repair yard? They close the plant, or not close the plant down, but lay a lot of people off as a result, because everything is backed up, right?

F: No, no, no. There is a full crew that works out back just on final repair.

S: What about when the yard would get full?

F: The yard doesn't get full. It is constantly moving. There is overtime out there, there is a lot of driving overtime.

S: I see.

F: Let me drift off on to something else while we are talking about driving overtime. I remember one time, this just brings out a point about how miserable is could be to work there, okay?

S: Okay.

F: Overtime, you know everybody always wants overtime. Overtime is forced on you so much out there. I remember when I was going with my wife and we would have a long weekend. We had been working Saturdays and I was going to get two or three days off. It was going to be like a three week vacation to me. I was looking forward to it for weeks, you know. Well, about a half an hour or 45 minutes before we were supposed to go home, a foreman came down to me and said, "You are working the weekend out back driving." I told him, "No, I don't want to work overtime, I've been looking for this weekend off." He said, "No, I'm sorry, but you are working the weekend out back driving."

S: Direct order?

F: No, it wasn't a direct order, well it would have amounted to it because I told him, "But I want the weekend off. You know, I am 18 years old, I don't need to work seven days a week 10 hours a day. I don't need that kind of money. I mean, give it to a guy that needs it." Well, nobody else wanted it. I was the young guy on the line, everybody else turned it down, the whole line, everybody turned a weekend down, overtime, time and a half. I was forced to work a weekend, can you believe that? That is hard to believe. Everybody turned down a whole three days. Everybody turned it down though, nobody wanted it. I was the youngest guy on the line, I was forced to work the weekend overtime.

S: No good, no good. Okay, those people that were laid off for

whatever reason during the labor friction, would the company actually send them home rather than laying off so they couldn't get unemployment benefits? Was that any type of tactics?

F: Oh, I see what you mean, like putting them out of the plant?

S: Yes.

F: Yes. I wish I could get into more detail on that. You know, I've been away for awhile. It is kind of hard to bring all of this back. Yes, there were times when everyone was convinced that just because a lot of guys were back from vacation and still had the summer help there--GM hires every year for summer help and still have the summer help there--there was an excess of people. There would be times when we felt they would actually look for reasons to throw people out, to put them out. I never could understand that because if they would have asked me if I wanted to go home, I would have went, you know, without pay, I would have just went home.

S: Well, I mean for any period of time, say a two, three, or four week lay off.

F: No, I don't think. You mean throw people out for a few weeks rather than lay them off and have everything be hunky-dory after three weeks off?

S: Yes.

F: No.

S: Okay, so we have all these problems amounting up. Then you know the strike came [in] March of 1972. I know that you were laid off for part of it and worked part of it, but can you tell me anything at all about it?

F: I can say December of 1971 I was laid off. I don't remember if it was after the first of the year. I think it was in February I was called back to work midnight turn. This is when I said I worked afternoon all but a short time. I worked this midnight turn for a few weeks and the reason I was called out was because they were having a lot of labor problems at tri-level. That is where they drive cars and trucks up on the train cars to load them up there. They were having a lot of problems out there but I really don't know exactly what they were. I got called back and that is where they sent me, the tri-level. I got this little pep talk from the foreman when I first went in, "You do what you are told and you work a normal pace and forget about what everybody else tells you and you won't have any troubles around here." It was kind of tough. I was six months out of high school, I was 18 years

old. I really didn't know what he was talking about because I had no idea then. I knew union/company negotiations and so on and so forth, but I guess I didn't totally understand. This guy gave me this little pep talk about just doing what I was told and working at a normal pace. Of course I am going to, what else can you do? I didn't know what he was talking about. I was a few weeks working out there. There was a whole lot of friction because that was a real seniority job working up there. You have a lot of time and there were a lot of guys with a lot of working time. Here I am, a new hire--I was still considered a new hire--I only had a few months in and laid off. I didn't know what was going on. I was out there with all these seniority guys and there were all kind of labor problems and we were probably right in the middle of it. I did that for a few weeks and I was laid off again. Either the strike came or I was laid off, I don't really remember that. Then I was called back that summer, I think it was the middle of June.

S: As I understand, the main problems that brought the strike about were the speed-up of the line and the laying off of workers at the same time. I think they laid off 750 workers, you were probably one of them. That was one of the main complaints and also people were really put out about inter-plant transfers. The company wouldn't give people mobility to go to another job at a different part of the plant to a better job or even inter-shift transfers, going from afternoons to day turns or something like that. Can you remember any of that?

F: They are called AVOs, avoid verbal orders. To put in like a shift transfer. I don't recall a whole lot about that because I was at such low seniority that I couldn't go anywhere but where they told me. I wasn't directly involved with that so I really couldn't get to, I couldn't tell you a whole lot about that.

S: You don't remember any type of trouble or violence of any kind during the strikes?

F: At that time?

S: Yes.

F: No, not at that time.

S: You mentioned a couple of things like the one situation where you didn't know your job duties and where repairmen would tell foremen of particular problems but the foremen would overlook them or those problems. It seems like management would turn their backs on a lot of things. With the current decline of car sales in the United States, it seems like it is always

blamed on the unions and productivity of the workers. But what you are adding and what a lot of people are saying right now, it seems like it is the company's fault, particularly since I think there was an article not too long ago that said that the union is starting to oversee what's going on out at Lordstown now. They want to make sure the company is really trying to make a better product so that it doesn't result in a crustier American car that people will later blame the unions and the workers for. What do you think about that?

F: First of all, let's back up to what I said, okay? I didn't say that the repairmen told the foremen about what repairs came down. That was obvious, that was there for him to fix, for him to watch the inspectors who inspect and find problems and see what comes down and needs repaired. I just wanted to clarify that. It is not like they would run and tell anything like that, that was part of his job to see it.

As far as the union overlooking, the company is not making money, okay? People make up the union. The employees are the union, right? They are still making money, the company's not making money.

S: You're talking about now or back then?

F: No, I'm talking about now.

S: Back then they were making a hell of a lot of money.

F: They were making a ton back then, sure.

S: The reason they aren't making the money now is because people aren't buying the cars because the cars don't meet the standards that other countries can meet. These standards reflect on the productivity of the workers in the United States, where it might be the company's fault.

F: Oh yes. If you buy a puzzle and put all the pieces together, you come out with a finished product, right? If the puzzle turns out to be a crappy picture is the fault of the person who put it together or the people who made the puzzle? You know what I mean?

If you do your job the way they tell you to do it, just like the Vegas when I was working out there. Boy, Vegas bombed, 1971 through 1973. They were going so strong and we were producing over 100 an hour. There would be 1,600 jobs a day, that's 1,600 cars a day going out of that plant. That was just a straight eight hour shift. I remember one summer we worked like 11 and a half hours almost a whole summer. I remember going in at six o'clock at night and getting out at six o'clock in the morning. I remember going in when the sun

was shining and coming out when the sun was shining. Anyway, those cars just didn't hold up, they were just really a bad product. Now how can you blame the auto workers for the front fenders rusting off? That was the biggest problem with Vegas. The second biggest problem was the engines didn't hold up because General Motors came out with a 50,000 mile guarantee on the motor and it didn't hold up. How can you blame the auto worker for the engine not holding up, you can't blame them. How can you get blamed for the fenders rusting out?

S: Yes, I know myself. I worked eight years at a Chevy dealership. I saw it.

F: You saw it all. Now how can you blame an auto worker for that? How could people blame your dealership for their fenders rusting off? Where does it come back to you? Who designed this car? Well, just a little off beat maybe, but look at Fords or the Cutlasses. GM in 1972 and 1973 came out with their Oldsmobiles that had the plastic inner fender. That really saved a whole lot.

The Vegas were built so cheap that they didn't work and they put out at 100 an hour. They were a hot item, they just built them cheap and sent them out. That's what they did and they didn't hold up. It is easy to say show your workmanship and stuff like that. It is kind of weak, but people buy it. People listen, you know? Oil companies talk now. If somebody would cut on an oil company, everybody hates the oil companies now. Any time somebody will cut on one everybody loves to hear it. They hear what they want to hear. They buy a Vega and it is a scrap product and blame the auto workers, they love it. Yes, that's good, the auto workers, GM couldn't make any mistakes, of course not.

S: Can you think of anything you would do? I know you may not be able to think of anything, but something that you would do to change a situation like that where you could make a better product?

F: This absenteeism is a big problem out there. Absenteeism was the biggest. They were so down on that. If you took a day off, you had to have a doctor's excuse like you were in high school. You had to take a day off now and then. When you are working 10 or 11 hours a day when it's 80 degrees outside and probably 20 degrees hotter in the plant and you're working one job every 33 seconds. It just gets to where you're overheated. You're being worked to death. Overtime every day and you take a day off. One thing I would have done when I was out there, they put in a compressed air system where they

had vents every so often on every line and air blew out of them. It was pretty nice if you were standing right in front of it, you could feel this force of warm air blowing on you. It helped a little.

One thing I always said that would have cured their absentee problem 100 percent is air conditioning. I hate the heat, I hate it. I would like to work if they put air conditioning in there. I would have went just to get out of the heat. They spent I forget how much money on this forced air system. Why didn't they just make it air conditioned? It's a big plant, but my God, General Motors has money, they were making a ton. That would have cured the absentee problem 100 percent right there.

S: Like in Sweden and I even think Japan, they are starting to add this thing where they gave a group of say a half a dozen guys working one car, that's their car. They put it together, they do their best, they try to out do the other people. What do you think of that compared to line working? On the line, you really don't identify with your product. You just do that one job and let it slide by, you don't see the outcome.

F: It's nice to see a finished product, I like to see that. There was a commercial on TV a while ago that I thought was really neat. If you had to sign your name to every job you did, how would you do it? You might be able to take more pride. First of all, when you are doing a job ever thirty seconds, the same job for 11 and a half hours, it is hard. I remember working on the line and thinking, "Boy, I wonder if I did the last car, the last three cars." I went down and I would see that my job was done. That was without even thinking about it. That was just so routine. You just do it and it is there. Everything is done so mechanical. When you do a finished product, you probably would take more pride because you will be able to see what you did. Yes, I think that would be a whole lot better.

S: It seems like that is the major problem in modern technology, people being alienated from their product.

F: Yes.

S: As a final question, how did your career conclude? Why do you think it was the right move to get out?

F: I took a station. My brother was working around the gas station as a dealer making twice the money I was working six to one, five days a week. I was so bummed out. I would stop at his gas station to get gas on my way to work and he had already been off for three hours. If I started at four or I

would have gone in there at four, he'd been off for three hours. He is already out at the lake in his boat when I would be going out to General Motors to work. The best year I had at GM, by the way, was \$9,800 I think.

S: In what year?

F: That was the last year I worked.

S: What particular year?

F: It was 1974 or 1975, something like that. Anyway, I remember mentioning to him one time that if I could get a gas station like yours and do what you are doing, I would quit GM in a minute because everybody that I talked to out there. . . .I never talked to one person the whole time I was out there that like this job, everybody wanted out. Well, He helped me get a station and I quit GM. Yes, it was the right move to make.

I have three brothers that still work out there that worked out there before I did. They probably always will because they've been there for so long that they are already past their 10 year retirement thing. They can't go anywhere now, they are hung there. I got out in time.

Anyway, I quit GM and took this other job. Every year that I had this other job, I mad more money than they did at GM. Doing this other job, it was working. It doesn't look like a real great job, having a gas station, but the money was there. Now I got into this supervisor's job, which is better than doing the station. Yes, I made a good move. I just have to say that I was really one of the lucky ones that could escape, a great escape.

S: So, looking back at it all, do you feel that working there gave you any type of experience in life or are you glad you worked there?

F: It is kind of like somebody that is in the service. The whole time that they were there they hated every minute of it, and then after they get out they can look back four or five years later and say, "I'm glad I did it anyway because it is easier for me to see what other kinds of work are like."

My one brother that did the job at the station has another job now. He has never worked in a factory or a plant or a mill or anything like that. He has no idea what it is. It is hard for him. A job to him that he thinks would be tough compared to out there would be nothing. He has no idea and I'm glad I

was there because I have an idea and I know what it is like to work like an animal and to be treated like one. It was the best move I ever made. I don't regret it. I don't see why I ever would.

S: Even if there was nothing else offered, do you think you would ever go back there or would you take unemployment?

F: I wasn't going to get into this again, but I'm glad I thought of this. No, I quit there in good standings and, believe it or not, I have never been thrown out of there. I never got any time off. I went to labor relations one time and they were wrong, I wasn't. I've never been fired from a job. I quit there on good standings. If there was absolutely nothing else around, I'm glad that I probably could go back there. I would do it because I'm not the kind of person that just would not work. I would go back and do it if that is what I had to do. I would do it, but I would hate every minute of it just like I hated every minute of it for four years.

What I want to say is, when I went to quit I started at 4:30 so I got there at 4:00. I went to personnel and there was this girl there that said, "Could I help you?" I told her, "Yes, I want to quit." She couldn't understand. I said, "Maybe I better put it right. I'm done, I'm not going to work here any more." I explained to her and she said, "I'll tell you what, I can't help you with that and there is no one here that can. You have to wait until line time." I said, "Are you telling me that I can't quit now?" She said, "Yes, you have to wait until the line starts, that's when personnel starts and then you'll be able to quit." I went up to the line where I was working. I drank coffee with all the guys that I worked with. The whistle blew and the line started and they went to work and I told them bye. I went up to personnel to quit.

That wasn't it. I quit in good standings. I did it the right way and I know I could go back because I never really had any problems there in comparison with some things that went on. I really feel very confident that I could go back if I had to, but I hope I never have to work like that again.

S: Let's hope you don't. Thank you, Ken.

F: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW