

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Auto Industry - Lordstown

Personal Experience

O H 1022

RAYMOND LEWIS

Interviewed

by

Rob Schuller

on

May 16, 1981

Raymond A Lewis

Raymond Lewis was born in Youngstown, Ohio on May 30, 1919. He is the son of John and Latner Lewis. Lewis graduated from South High and attended Youngstown College for three years, majoring in accounting. Serving with the U S Marine Corps during World War II, he was discharged in 1946. Mr. Lewis has been active with labor problems starting with the A F L -C I O , and later at General Motors, Lordstown. Ray currently serves as a Zone Representative for the U A W at Lordstown.

Ray and Bernetha Lewis were married May 14, 1939 and have two children, Barbara now married and Ray Jr , currently serving in the Air Force.

S This is an interview with Ray Lewis for the Youngstown State university Oral History Program, by Rob Schuller, on May 16, 1981, at 442 Marion Street, Youngstown, Ohio, at 5 30pm

Okay, we are going to talk about labor problems at General Motors' Lordstown Plant and more specifically the problems around 1971 and 1972 Mr. Lewis, can you give me a little bit about your personal background?

L My name is Raymond A Lewis I was born here in Youngstown on May 30, 1919 I went to school here, Monroe School, Grant Junior High, South High, and I attended Youngstown University for about three years My major was accounting

I was in World War II in the United States Marine Corps as a corporal I came out in 1946 I have been working ever since in labor problems, CIO-AFL I am not as active in the union as when I got involved in the UAW when I was hired on June 20, 1966 at the Chevrolet Plant at that time. At that time it was the Chevrolet and Fisher Body

S You have two children, right?

L I have two children, a boy and a girl, Barbara Ray Brown and Raymond A Lewis Jr My daughter is 37 and my boy is 25 He is in the Air Corp in Illinois at Scott Air Base with his family and two sons

S What did you do at GM when you first started there?

L I started out working on the production line as an assembler That was on June 20, 1966 I got promoted to relief and utility, which is top classification when you got on the production line. Then in 1967, I was appointed to the shop committee for the local 1112 UAW union

S You are a zone representative now?

L Right now I am a zone representative. As I said, I was appointed in 1967 I was elected again to a shop committee in 1969, 1970 After the truck plant was built, the Chevrolet side of the plant had six zone men. I was elected as one of the zone men which has five districts under him, five district committeemen and alternates In 1971, Fisher Body and Chevrolet were merged into General Motors Assembly Plant We had another election which I was re-elected to my position and I have been there ever since

S A zone man would be in charge of a certain number of committeemen?

L Five district committeemen There are approximately fourteen hundred people in his district They are divided into five districts and there would be five district committeemen and their alternates

S The committeemen are paid by the company and you are paid by the company, but you work full time for the union, correct?

L Right

S In 1972, around the merger when some of the trouble started happening, this is what I have mostly been looking at What are your ideas about what was going on back then before the strike?

L You want to know what led up to the strike?

S Yes Actually, what did you think the conditions were? Were things really as bad as I have seen from other people? There have been a lot of articles and publicity

L I imagine that is when Lordstown really became popular throughout the country and some spots of Canada, where we had UAW plants In 1972, we had just merged One part of that plant was Chevrolet and the other part was Fisher Body It was one of the first plants to have those two divisions under one roof We had two shop committees, one for Fisher Body and one for Chevrolet. They negotiated with management in their separate fashion with their separate divisions When the GMAD came in, the union on both sides was pretty strong They had pretty good agreements in management Everything was going smooth They had a very good work pace The product quality audit was up We had been building the B body then with the Firebird It was the first plant to build the Firebird which from there went to Norwood and Cincinnati The GMAD company was just getting ready to make a vast amount of change for the Vega

GMAD came in with the intent to cut the line speed They are an efficient division that is more or less made up to manage Chevrolet and Fisher Body plants They do not own the plants Chevrolet still has their equity there as far as Fisher Body, but GMAD is the managing division They came in and, of course, they wanted to match the GMAD efficiency program in where they would cut the line speed or cycle work pace, which would be maybe adding more work to each individual on the job We termed it as coming in with a big stick

In order to administer this and execute and enforce it upon people, they have a progressive pattern of discipline where as if they add work to your job with the new model, which was at the time the Vega, they could throw you out of the plant on which we used to call a disciplinary lay off Starting with the balance of shifts, the balance of one, the balance of three days, balance of a week, a balance of two weeks, thirty days and discharge Of course, we had to go through the grievance procedure where before 1978 was over, jobs and discipline could be settled Why, quite a few people got up where

they were disciplined to the effect where it was effective financially. It caused quite a hatred between management and the union for trying to press people so far before they intended to take any parts or elements off their work. This made a pretty bitter fight and as I said we had a very strong union. So, we began to go at each other in various ways.

Now of course, the union was accused many times of sabotage, but that was not true. If they could look back in the history of that time, we do not find that they had one sabotage case in that whole plant that ever went to arbitration, that we lost, or that anyone was ever accused of. There is a way that you can fight management in the plant, in holding up and restricting output, or causing progress to be slow, or being produced until management bows down to coming on with some type of settlement on the jobs that cannot be produced in good quality fashion. We had inspectors who would not pass jobs that we felt were not ready to go to the streets or that management would order in the past, and we were disciplined for not doing it. At the same time, the same inspectors were trained by that same management as to what to pass and what not to pass.

The news media is what killed the Vega. The plant manager who is now, I understand, not a member of General Motors Corporation, named Charlie Anderson. We used to call him Crazy Andy. He went to the news media and began to down rate his own product by accusing the union of a sabotage. We felt that this was a very stupid thing to do. This really killed the Vega. It was a good car. We had a serious labor dispute in that plant, but we still put out a product. It could have been a good product if management would not have went to the media. We had a strike as a result of that.

By 1974 the Vega was at its peak, where it was a good product, but I think the public was afraid to trust it because the 1971-1972 model, through the media, had ruined their confidence in automobiles, so they had to do away with it.

S When you say they were sending guys home back then, I think it was my understanding that they had so many cars backed up in the repair yard that they would just shut the line down or send people home?

L Well, that is what they would say. Let me give you an idea, a little simple way that the assembly line runs and the way management tries to put out a product as cheap as they can for the best they can get. Let us say we have ten people on the line that are building a certain part of a car. Maybe the engineers or General Motors have set that line up for twenty people. Local management would set it up with ten, which means each man would have more work than he could possibly do a certain line speed an hour. Let us say sixty or seventy or eighty an hour. They would press that man by trying to force him to do as much as he could do on his particular job, to the extent of where if he missed a screw or a bolt or could not finish that job, they would assess discipline on him for the balance of a day or throw him out of the plant for the balance of the day. Naturally that discipline would affect his financial income.

Now, we would have a 78 smoozel, we would call them, which is the only strikable offense the UAW has on health and safety. They have nothing else they can strike on, unless it is a national agreement of the local agreement and that comes about at

the time of the national agreements and negotiations.

S. What did you refer to that as, that first item?

L. A 78, that is overworked jobs. An overworked job or a health and safety is the only thing that we can strike on in between contracts, nothing else. Anything else has to go through the grievance procedure. So anything, like overworked jobs, would have to go through a possible fifteen days before we could settle that job, if management wanted to hold up. We would have the international down. They would look over the job to see if we had a valid claim of jobs overworked. That might take anywhere from two to three weeks. Then, the international might permit us to strike. We cannot strike locally by ourselves. We have to get permission from the international. They send their representative down to go around with us and look at the same job we are claiming overworked. If that takes two or three weeks, then they decide we need a five day letter, which goes into a period of time to settle those 78's. In the mean time, that same individual is still on that line doing those overworked jobs or maybe getting thrown out of the plant. By that time, he might be up to a balance of two weeks and he has lost or thirty days and sometimes discharged. Then, we have to negotiate and we settle that job as overworked. They take on what is off of it and naturally get that person back with pay.

Now somebody would think, well, why would management go through all of that to produce that product? The reason for it is by disciplining one man on that job, maybe then they could make twelve or thirteen people afraid that they are going to lose their job or lose time on a pay. They run themselves to death on a job trying to get it done.

S. Just make an example of people.

L. That is right. So, they know we might at the end of that, set that job up at ten jobs an hour. I suspect that we might, I do not think we ever beat them. I suspect that we might get fifteen people on that line additional to those that they maybe fired or laid off, paid and cleared for their discipline, their records cleared. We might get fifteen people on that line or maybe sixteen. They have still made out for four or five people which is as far as they are concerned dollars and cents up to twenty thousand some a year in benefits and everything else. So, they usually overcome, but while they are doing all of this, the product is going down with parts not there. When it gets to the final process where they have to go over that car, they have to redo it so it stacks up in the yard. That is the reason we get a lot of repairs.

S. But, they were blaming the repairs on sabotage?

L. They were blaming the repairs on sabotage. Sabotage is when you are damaging the cars or breaking up something or you are destroying something. But, no car usually goes out of the plant unless it is looked over pretty good. Of course at times you might have production supervisors trying to get a star in his crown. He may ship something or order

something shipped to get something through the plant and it gets to the dealer and is not adequate. Of course, a lot of them usually in the long run fade away. They never tell us they are discharged, but they disappear. Just like Anderson. They shipped him out to California somewhere. I understand now that he is no longer with them.

But in the mean time, that caused the union to go through a very heated section of management. Negotiations caused a lot of hard feelings. It has taken quite a few years for that wound to heal.

At the present time, it seemed like through on or two plant managers, two or three personnel directors, a rotation of change of supervision has been brought from Pontiac, Flint, and various parts of the UAW circuit. Feelings have slowly changed. It is getting back on the helm now.

That is about the best I can give without going into details. I do not think you could really understand unless you were there. A lot of people outside say we make a lot of money and we should be satisfied, but some of those people who did not work with us then are there now and they understand it. If you come into General Motors, it is a very vicious company. That is why they are so rich.

S Would you say it is still that way with them?

L They are still vicious. They were a vicious company. They believe in that product. They are trying to change their ways and go into what they call a quality work line where they were recognizing the needs of people. This generation today worked with the big stick. They have got to treat him right. If they treat him right, they can get a job. That seems to be where they are mellowing down to now.

S Do you think they believe in the product as much as they do in the profit?

L That is a hard question to answer. I do not want to down it. We used to accuse them of quantity instead of quality. This new model, they have taken more time than I have seen on any model to try to get it right. I seem to think that is from the pressure of the competition. In a way, I believe it is good thing it happened to them. Of course, they always blame that guy that is on the line. But if people would just realize one thing nothing is shipped out of that plant unless management ships it. We build it and management ships it. If we do not build it right, they should not ship it. There is no way we can ship it out of there ourselves.

So, I think they have come down to a place where they realize that and, of course, when they did not have the competition they were more or less a monopoly. You buy what I sell or else that is it. I think now they realize that people will buy elsewhere. It is not wages or the cost that hurts. It is just that they have got to build a quality product that the American man will buy if it is good. But he will not want to buy it and pay maybe seven, eight or ten or twelve or fifteen thousand dollars for a car and have to bring it back every three or four months when something is falling off of it because it was not put on right.

- S Do you think it is right that they are cutting down the Japanese imports?
- L No, I do not think that has anything to do with it. I do not think that we should run from competition. If we say the Japs or Germans or whoever cannot sell anymore in this country, we are telling the American people you buy what I make or else. You wear what I say or else. But if they put the quality out there, they will make it. That is all they have to do. They ask any dealer that you go to and that is all he is saying. Give me the quality and we will run off the market. We build a better car. Performance-wise it will out last any foreign car. The only thing that people really have objections to is the cosmetics, paint, chrome, the little gadgets in it like the latches that bend the seat down.
- S I used to work at a Chevrolet dealership. I was a warranty man.
- L See, when you get the Jap car, the guy buys it and he does not come back. They are selling a Toyota for eighty-five hundred dollars. The cheapest is seven thousand. This car is going to beat that or be at least as good. It is going to be a better car. Because for the first time the top management, personnel director, and plant manager come to the union and we go out to the dealer and ask him what he thinks about his car sales. We check it ourselves to see if it is hitting him like we want it to. That has never been done before. They are going to have to do that with their big cars around the circuit. They will sell them. The dealer is telling us that the American buyer is not hollering price, is not hollering mileage. We have got to compete with mileage that is natural. But, the main thing is if he wants quality. If he buys them, he wants them to be right and you cannot blame him. I have bought some myself and gone back and raise Cain. That is the main thing about it. The only way they are going to get it is not trying to run eighty jobs an hour, where a job will pass a man at that time about every forty-two seconds, and want that guy to do forty-two seconds, one hundred percent worth of work. It cannot be done. You are going to have to cut it down where you can do seventy or seventy-five percent of that forty-two seconds. You will be surprised what can be done in twenty-five or thirty seconds.
- S One of the issues that GMAD was trying to do away with back then was the concept of doubling up, was it not?
- L We did have a line pace at that time. They doubled up because management allowed them. Union officials were the first ones hollering about it, not allowing them to double up, because we knew that if the efficiency experts of General Motors walked through that plant, those fellows do not even know who they are. We do not even know. They have all kinds of guys going through their plant. He walks through there and he starts studying those jobs. He knows there are two men on that job and he sees one working for half a day and then the other one going back and working. Pretty soon that guy is going. He is going to be a lay-off somewhere. You cannot blame him. He is going to do that job by himself.

We told them many times that we wanted to stop that. Make them jobs so the guys would do it and stop the doubling up. They let it go on for six or seven years. Then after a guy does something for six or seven years, all of the sudden you want to turn around and discipline him because he is doing it. You have problems. But this new model may be the best thing that has happened to them in order to do away with that. I do not think you have got a job in there now where a guy can double up on it. We do not want neither the union or management. Our membership knows we do not want it, because it only costs people their jobs by laying them off.

S I read a piece that said some jobs people could not keep up with during the day mentally unless they doubled up. You know, unless they had a break, a long break to look forward to.

L There was a reason for a lot of the doubling up. A lot of times they would sat well. When a guy gets on that line he is like a robot. He is shooting a bolt and a screw and putting on a clip, fastening the harness eight hours a day. He is doing that same thing everyday. He does not see anything but cars coming at him all the time. It gets monotonous. It will play with the mind. You have to be a certain breed of cat to work on that line or it will play with you.

So, a lot of times he would hurry up. He would hustle and do it fast just to get that extra fifteen minutes, twenty minutes. Maybe if you were working right next to me and we were doing the same thing, you would hustle and do mine and yours too, and mine and yours too, for maybe an hour. Then I would come on for an hour and let you go and take a break. This was done, but there is no way that that job could have been done. That one guy could have done all that job all day like that. He is doing it just to get that break. If he did not get that break, he could not stay there. Of course, you have to look down the line where, if you set up a work pace with people not on the line, not building cars or anything else, and he is trying to make thirty years. He might handle it until he is about thirty. But, he will not stay there another thirty years. He will not stay there three. He will quit first or he is going to end up in some psychiatrist's office or have a nervous breakdown or whatever. You would be surprised the people out there, including management, that are going to a psychiatrist, go in the hospitals, and put in psych wards. Their nerves are shot. That is because of the constant grind, see?

S Right

L Now, you could walk through that plant on a tour and you walk and see those people working. It looks like a guy just walks up to the job, does something, and walks back. He does not know if he is doing it wrong or not. He does not know if he is doing it all or if he got it all or not. Then if he did, he may be in a habit of doing that and he can get it. But if you start on it yourself you will see sometimes things look a lot easier than what they are. So, he is accustomed to that. He knows just about how to tie them himself and all of his tools are working right. His parts are fitting, the holes are lining up and they are

not off center, nothing is cross-threading. If it does, if he shoots it and it stops, why he does not have time to fix it anyway, so he lets it go to repairmen. You have got repairmen and inspectors all along the line that get it out and put the right one in. So, that is the way those jobs usually go. Still, if he starts missing things too much, even on a good job, he is going to pay for it by some type of discipline.

S: I think that same source I read said that it looked like management was trying deliberately to make things miserable back then to make younger people quit before they reached the age where they would be collecting. I think after ten years out there you get some kind of pension or a cut down on vacations after people have had more years there. They keep a constant turn over of people.

L: Well, we suspect now they are not tickled by anybody making that thirty years. They may be a little harder on a guy with ten years than they would a guy with six. After ten years, he is getting a good piece of that pension. He is going to have to walk the chalk line for awhile, at least until they see there is no use in bothering with him. We suspect that they might be doing this, but we have no proof of knowing that.

We have some employees who have been out there all through the strikes since 1966, that nobody even heard of as far as discipline or anything else. Somebody has got to be lucky to slide by. But, there were a few who took on the fight to try to keep that work pace. Now, we managed to keep our part of it, but we lost a lot, too.

S: You think?

L: Oh yes, we both lost. Management lost money and we lost a lot.

S: Do you think you gained prestige in those tough times?

L: Well, we gained a reputation that we did not particularly like. Now, I do not think that prestige was gained. I do not think that we particularly liked it.

S: But, I do not mean in the public's eye. Maybe in labor's eye.

L: In labor's eye, we gained prestige in labor's eye. Our union local 1112 is pretty well respected around the country. In the UAW world, you would say it is pretty well respected around the country. Management pretty well respects it. I do not think that they thought that we were so way out that we were as bad as we were put up to be from the outsiders or they damn sure would not have bought this new car and that plant.

S: Right. That is something to be considered.

L: They would not have bought that new car plant.

S That is something to be considered.

L They had worked with us in more ways than one to try to get it together. We have been waiting that for a long time. We are not in love right now. We still have problems. We still have disagreements out there, but they are normal. They do not amount to anything like what existed then. What they are doing now we expect.

S The same old games?

L Yes, we expect they are doing that.

S I imagine they would want to keep things as quiet as possible with this new car?

L We expect that they would want certain things. That is normal. But, we will over-ride that without any big problems. I do not think we will have anything near to what we had then, because it is a different ball field. Labor realizes as well as management that we have to maintain a job in the plant. We have always been willing to go with quality because we want that customer to be proud to drive what we make, the dealer proud to sell what we build. That is where it is at. It is no good to come out in the street and have somebody tell us we are building scrap.

S That is true. Now, you said that they were sending people home when they got so many cars in the repair yard. Was that actually legal for them to do that back then, like send somebody home for a couple of weeks or lay them off?

L Well, they would not be home for a month. They would never send anybody home for over a half day or day. The production guy on the line he would push a little more down there. Just like you have a lot of cars coming down here you have a bottle there with the mouth to it. That mouth builds up so you just have to shut it down until you can get it out of there. Down to the final process where the repairman and then a lot of the inspectors went down there from up on the production line. The line repairman went down there from up on the production line. The line repairman went down there. Then, they had their regular auto general repairman, heavy mechanics. They went down there and a lot of those guys are working six or seven days a week, ten to twelve hours a day, getting that stuff ready so it can go out, so they can come back to work the next day or the next week. For instance, right now we are getting some wrinkles out of the car that we see. We worked today. Tomorrow will be the first or second Sunday we have had off since they started up.

S Like old times.

L Yes, because they stopped that car down there and they checked it out good. If they find something the matter, they get it out. We do not want this unit coming back with a recall.

Fifteen thousand or one hundred thousand of this or that, see? So, they are trying to get it right before it goes

At that time though, with the jobs running like they were and the repair lot filled up, they had to get those jobs repaired. Why, they would maybe have to cut down to four hours. The repairman and everybody, as I told you, would go down there and get those cars straightened out, so they could ship and get some of them out of the way. They could come back the next day and work three, four, five or six hours, so you would go down again.

Well, they blamed it on us because they said we were not building the car. We blamed it on them, because we said they had too much work on one guy. He cannot get it all. That is just about what it was. Of course, discipline was jumping all over the place at that time trying to make the guy do it anyway. That caused a lot of animosity between the immediate foreman and his own crew, the general foreman and everybody. They should not throw guys out of that plant for anything. So, they got it taken care of, but you still cannot get over how they did it.

S How much of the management that you had to deal with everyday, say the foreman and at that level, are still there at that level dealing with you now?

L Most of the top management is still there, as far as the floor, the production, superintendents, a lot of the general foremen. Some of them are general foremen now that were foremen in those times. Some of the foremen left. As I said, General Motors has a way of easing them off of the scene. But most of the personnel that was there then is still there. We are coming along good. Of course, we have a lot of new foremen too. One thing about General Motors is they promote from within. They promote and we appreciate that. They promote from within. They promote their foremen right from the line.

S How does it feel to be dealing with people who were your co-union fellows?

L Well, some union representatives, as I say, they kind of resent it. I feel that this is more or less an advancement to the assembler. He comes in there as an assembler and he has a chance to promote to relief or absentee replacement operator or utility. After utility prior to the production line, that is it. His next shot is foreman. It is a matter of bettering yourself. I know a lot of supervisors even in that time that his credibility with me was number one. A lot of them I would not believe a thing he said. Now, because you become a member of supervision, does not mean that you have to be a no-good-bastard.

S But, you think it is a pretty good thing though, they have pretty good incentive?

L I mean I have worked in steel mills and so forth. I have worked in plants where bosses come from somewhere you did not even know him. You can talk to a guy you know better than you can a guy you do not.

- S Yes, I can see what you mean
- L You can talk to him You know him and you know what he will do The same guy goes over that line he will do the same thing where he is at or you know he will not be any good He was not any good where he was
- S When I was talking to Whitey Ford, he said that once again there is no proof, but they thought back then that when there were these sabotage accusations that they were trying to nab people by bringing in management from other plants all over the country and having them work on the line watching people Do you think so, too?
- L Yes, sure As I told you they have a vicious company
- S That is really a strange thing because the expense
- L Well, they have got the money to spend
- S Yes, that is true.
- L They write it off They have the money to spend If they want to get you, they will get you They are a vicious company If they want you, they will spend money to get you just like Uncle Sam If he wants you, he will spend money to get you and he will get you He will set you up if he wants to get you.
- S So, would you say General Motors, the power of that company is really something to be feared?
- L That General Motors has a lot of power in this country other than those plants They have power politically They have the money and they do their thing They do not have to broadcast it, because it just gets done They do not have to say they are backing this or backing that They can do it through other individuals You would never suspect anything behind that. They have the money. You have to deal with them It was a great experience for me I have learned a lot. They taught me. Although I was on the union side of the fence, I learned a lot and they taught me
I say they are a vicious company You can see it and I will say the way they do things
- S It is subtle, but vicious
- L They believe in that almighty buck and they will do anything to make that buck and they will spend a buck to get you if they want
- S Do you think they could actually get anybody in the plant they want if they wanted to, if

they really set their mind to it?

L Oh, yes Oh, yes There is no doubt if they get me, they can get anybody they want

S No kidding

L Oh, yes

S: Do you think there are people in the union they actually fear though?

L I do not think they fear them, but they respect them because there are certain people that they know if they did try to get, knowing the procedure might put a little better fight They could lose They do not want to get exposed. They do not fear anybody They might respect them, but they do not fear them

Just trace back to Walter Reuther and his days His brother lost an eye and he lost an arm They hired goon squads to break the union in at that time They do not fear anybody They respect them They will bend when they have to

S In the name of the dollar

L That is right They will bend if they have to It is always going to be if he is going to gain or lose. They do not fear anybody When you say you beat them, I do not think we ever beat them we just made an equitable settlement But they had a loss They will break the agreements they want to They will make an agreement with you Our biggest point is we have full time committeemen on the job every day, because they break the agreement They will break it They believe contracts are made to break If you catch me I will pay, if you do not I will not pay You have to prove I broke it

S The one thing I wanted to ask you, the work force itself back then I guess it is common knowledge that there was a pretty young work force out there. What bearing do you think that had on militancy of the workers?

L I think it had a very good bearing. They were young They were militant, They had been handled You see when you get hired there you are on a ninety day probation period before you gain seniority I think everybody goes into that plant pro-management from the get go, because they take them through an orientation where they tell them all of the good things they have got coming to them, the benefits and everything They never tell them anything about the union or how many times you have to pound the bricks to get those things They tell them all the good things management has for them and they are able to promote in there. It is a possibility some of them could be in supervision and so forth after that

So, I think that everybody that really comes in the plant is pro-management The first thirty days they do not want to have much to do with the union They do not even

want to talk to us. You know, walk silently. But before that ninety days is over, they push them in on us, because they harass and they put the pressure on them to make them do work. They had a hard job. Say we have a job over there where the 78's were overworked. They will take that individual off of that job and put that new guy on there and he has got to hustle, because he does not have any progressive pattern behind him. He does not have any seniority. Once he makes a mistake, he is fired automatically. That is it. Where if he had seniority, you would probably get a reprimand.

So, we are able to grieve those things, but very seldom can we go too far with them, because that man has seniority. That national agreement and local agreement always stresses seniority. So, by the time they get through with that person after the ninety days, why they pretty well come to the union side, at least for protection. That is the reason I think in those times they hired young fellows. I think the average age out there then was, say around 1972, must have been around twenty-six to thirty years old. When they first started in 1966, they were around twenty-three. As I said, we had a strong union, a very militant union. We have accomplished a lot of things. We have come farther in many ways than some plants have that have been in existence for thirty years. The young man of today is just not going to work like the old man. He is not going to take what his father took because he does not have to. He is just not going to do it.

S He is not going to put up with as much.

L He has seen his father come home broken or deaf or his hands cracked up and get hurt with no benefits and all of that sort of thing. He has seen this thing happen. He has seen his old man work pretty hard, and possibly his mother. He just is not going to go with that. They are going to have to do him better or he is not going to hack it. They have to learn to cope with that situation. In other words, the big stick is no more. You have to treat a man like a man and recognize him as a human being before you can make him like you and do a job for you. If he does not put his heart in that job, you are not going to get a good product. Where he might start a screw and cross thread, if you have got time to back it up and put another one in. If you do not treat him right, then the hell with it. You are not doing anything for me. Why should I do anything for them? That is the way they feel. It is human nature.

S Since we are talking about the work force, one other thing that I think is probably of real interest, being I am interviewing you, is what was it actually like for a black man to start out at General Motors back in the 1960's?

L Well, when I went in there in 1966, my first choice was supervision and then production, but they were not making any black supervisors. They did not tell me that, but they were not making any. There were not any there. I think they started making blacks supervisors around 1967 or 1968. Of course, by that time, I was tied up with the union, so first, come first serve. I saw they way they pressured their foremen, and I have been in

steel mills where I worked under a foreman. I saw a general foreman and he was just coming through the place I took over for my foreman He did not excuse me for being absent He told me he was going to lay me off for the day for being absent or what Why, he was boss But I did not have to put up with the general foreman or the superintendent I had the foreman tell me, "Well I will let you go today, but watch yourself " Then, he has to turn around the same day and throw me out because the general foreman said to throw me out So, you lose your respect for your foreman He is not worth a damn

I have seen in that time, but I have not seen it in the last several years, when I was on the line, I saw a general foreman come up and just shop a foreman out in front of his men I had a foreman that I did not particularly like, but I did not appreciate the general foreman coming up and making him look bad That just did not rub right He should have taken him outside for whatever he did You do not want to embarrass a leader in front of his people or whatever So that made you lose a little respect him I do not think I would have been there if I had been the foreman.

S What percentage was black working out at General Motors back in those earlier days?

L Oh about five to one or something like that I was two years trying to get out of there Of course at that time, blacks had to have a high school education before they would even consider you

S To get in out at General Motors? But they would accept whites without a high school education?

L Oh, yes I know they did because after I got to be committeeman, I went around and there were a lot of white foremen who did not know how to answer a grievance So, I know that they were hired They were hiring them out of the mountains So, they were hired, but we had to have some kind of education. Of course, I cannot prove that, but I know that every black guy knew that he was a high school graduate before he could get in there That could be some of the cases, but most of them, had they gone to high school, that is the first thing they would tell me "I graduated from high school," blah blah blah

Of course, when you come to that type of thing, I am sixty-two years old I have faced a lot of things, all they way down the line This town is my hometown, but I guess you get a little numb

S. Yes, yes you get used to it

L. Some guys back off of it and do not try They only make me fight a little harder, that is all I just was determined I would survive, one way or the other

S You were elected zone representative?

L Yes, I was elected since the election in 1969, 1972, 1974, 1976, and 1979 I was

unopposed three times, and opposed three times I was unopposed in, well I was appointed in 1967 I was opposed in 1969 I was unopposed in 1970, I was unopposed in 1972, I was opposed in 1974, I was unopposed in 1976, and I was opposed this last election I went out as the assistant to the shop chairman in this last election, and then I went back into the plant I was running against the incumbent this time, so I went back in He was really posed and I was not

S There is obviously a lot of people out there that probably have pretty primitive views when it comes to race With you being elected, it seems pretty strange for a black man to be elected so many times

L I must say, you knew that there were some out there that did not like blacks, but I never had a big problem with them. I have answered many calls for certain guys I knew them well enough to answer their call, but I would not act as if I even detected them But when you produce, they change

S You must obviously be producing to be reelected so many times

L I guess so I guess education had a lot to do with it I have a gift of gab You cannot show your militancy as far as black is concerned You have to be able to be a diplomat I have been around some fellows, quite a few, that I feel did not particularly care about blacks I guess that after awhile, I may have wore off on them or something They accepted it

So, I can understand why some of them do not They do not know There are just as many militant blacks as there are militant whites You have got some blacks that do not like whites I think they are just as bad as whites who do not like blacks You have got something like that in there There was one committeeman that was really anti-white He became a committeeman After he got to associate with whites quite a bit, he changed That is one thing I think is the matter with the school system

For instance, my boy I went to South High, which is predominately black now You would hardly see over two or three blacks in any class at that time Maybe two or three blacks, three at the most on any football team, and they had three strings then They did not have a change in the defense or offense Man, you played the whole game

My boy, I used to tell him that I kind of pitied him because he was going to a predominately black school He had no contact with whites too much All he knew is what he read or what he heard. In his teenage days or early days, he was hearing the black nationalists, the Black Panthers and all of this other stuff So it was kind of hard to steer him away He would not go in the service Finally, through using what I guess you would call a little psychology, he finally joined the Air Corps himself

He wanted to read the Black Nationalist paper that came out of New York I did not know what they were about. I have talked against them a lot of times It is hard to talk about something and you do not know what the hell it is about So, I got him the paper We used to pick it apart He did not quite like what they were talking At the

same time, I kept a one inch fish screw right up on my books and stuff for him, so he could read encyclopedias and all sorts of things, Time Magazine, Buckley's Magazine, The National Geographic Boy, he is a stone conservative

S You have to look at both sides

L Both sides still That will do it

S Boy, that is strange, from Black Nationalists papers to Buckley's National You cannot get much else

L So, I just bought those for him He finally would not bother reading them himself, so he would just cut them off I wanted to know what they were about myself, to see if I was right.

Just to show you what the first contact he actually came into with whites, where he would talk and fraternize and socialize, I guess, was when he went up to Youngstown University Then, in the service, of course But outside of that, he did not come in much contact with them. That can happen the same to whites

S I believe that bussing would be a good thing as far as that is concerned

L For that, I do not agree with the bussing all the way around I do not think that a white or a black kid needs it I think the school system should change For instance, I think my biggest thought is if they have the same, we get back to quality The same quality and qualified education in black schools as they do in whites, regardless where the hell they are at, and discipline. You will have an intelligent person coming out of school If you teach him, you can have maybe some types of fairs or an all together type I think it is very convenient for a white or black kid to have a school a block from him He has got to go all the way out to Chaney somewhere to go to school

S It is really inconvenient

L If a kid gets sick it is no good Just to say, well, we want to integrate They found other means to integrate I think one of the best ways to integrate would be to sit in the class or play ball on the same team or joint picnics

S Social events

L Social events, because the kids sit down and talk to each other He gets friends with him Hell, he might not see him two weeks and he wants to see him again They learn from each other

Force, I do not think accomplishes anything If I force a white boy to come to this black school he does not want to go to, he is not going to get along He is not in the right

frame of mind in the first place. But if you have a type of social event or something that they could get together at times at various playgrounds or concerts or musicals or whatever, they would get together easy as far as understanding each other.

I do not know. Hell, I went to a mixed school. I do not even remember half of the guys going to school, except for those I played ball with. I remember them. But, the guy I passed in the hallway or was in class with, I do not remember all of them. I do not remember anybody I graduated with and I guess we only had about five or six blacks in the whole class of one hundred sixty or one hundred seventy. I know Doc Brown. We played ball together and we were in the same math class. But come and go, that used to be very stupid, even when they were talking integration in the south.

If you were going to college, they used the excuse where maybe a black and a white girl would get married. I went to school with white girls all of my life and never even thought about it. We were good friends.

S The one last question I want to ask you. I saw something about the AFL-CIO and the UAW merging in certain ways. I guess there is a question of a merger out at Lordstown.

L Local unions do not want it, because it is a little complex for our local 1112 to merge with the AFL-CIO here, because they are more or less a separate entity. Their political organizations are different. They have different officers. They work together in elections and they usually get together on who they want to back.

But, nationally it would be a good thing. It is a good thing if they did it now. They were together once before. Walter Reuther and the union could not get along. One factor was a personality clash. Two men struggled for the power of the seat. Then again, Meany was more conservative than Reuther was as far as going along with the social changes.

The biggest party who is the board was not in accord, so Reuther dropped out. Meany now is dead. There is only about two on the executive board who are left under his board. Most of the guys are younger and they have more modern views on political changes. They have come to UAW. The UAW has the answer of differences. They work with them and they feel it is necessary for labor forces to join together, predominately for political power sources.

S This is really what I wanted to ask you. When we talk about General Motors and the indescribable power of General Motors, what power do you think organized labor could reach? You know the potential of power with the merger of certain unions?

L Politically, it would be a power, as far as nationally is concerned. If they did get together locally all over the country, which I do not think they ever will, it would be a hell of a power. But, their problem would be working together with ideas or just little different procedures.

Internationally, they could get together on that council and do a lot of things in the government, as far as lobbying. The AFL-CIO is a much stronger lobbyist than we are,

because they have more people, more money and trade unions, machinists, and so forth. They have a very vast membership and very capable men and more money to lobby with. We need their help and they need ours in several of our aspects. But politically, that is the reason for the merger mostly.

S Do you see this as a trend at a national level of the merger of the larger unions? Do you think this is what we will be seeing in the future?

L I hope so.

S Do you think that it could reach the power of actually dominating a political party like the Democratic Party?

L For instance, with the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, I guess you might say was sliding pretty well in this last administration. The working man is really disappointed. I do not think that everybody voted so much for Reagan, they just voted against Carter. So if the Republicans in there now do not satisfy the people, there is a pretty damn good chance there is going to be another party coming into being. I imagine it would be predominately some kind of labor force.

S That would really be something.

L I think it is going to change. Not only that, I do not know if that would be predominately the fact or not, but the young man of today is not completely satisfied with either party.

S That is right. I agree with that.

L He is not completely satisfied with either party and he is not completely satisfied with the way the government is run. It is a possibility that there will be another party one way or the other. You are going to see anyway and one is going to disappear. I believe that. I would like to see it. I would like to live to see it.

S I would like to see that as well.

L I think that it would be a fair deal for everybody, rather than the loop holes for those that have it and no homes for those who do not. But I am not one to say, "Let us overthrow the rich." I am not for that. I do think that the chances for the employment rate should be better than what they are, more equal and better. The young cats should have at least a chance. They should have a chance to exhibit skills or qualities or whatever they are.

S The quality of opportunity for everybody.

L A lot of times, when you go to get a job, they ask what experience do you have? What

the hell? A lot of people come out of school and do not have experience. They did not work or never had a job. So you are going to have to give them a shot.

S Agreed

L I think that is why we have got a lot of crime, why you have got a lot of dope addicts, that is why you have got a lot of psychological problems. A young guy now, the first thing he thinks of is, "Hell, I am going to end up in a war and never have a chance to make a living." He is worried about if he is ever going to get back or not. There are a lot of things bothering him now.

I guess the pressures of the various things going on now are not as great. They did not have as many. Transportation, life is faster, everything is faster. It is a hell of a day. It is a good day.

S It could be

L It is a hell of a day

S Well, unless you have anything to add I guess that we could close it here.

L Yes, I guess that is all

S Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Raymond Lewis

End of Interview