

Danny  
Lack  
Pipefitter

This is Pat Pilling. Today is June the 15th,  
1982. I am talking with Mr. Danny Lack who lives  
at 13148 Churchill, Sterling Heights. Mr. Lack is  
Vice-President of Local 235 and a pipefitter at  
Chevy Gear and Axle.

Interview with Danny Lack, Interview 1  
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Interviewer: Pat Pilling  
Transcriber: Diane Roth  
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PP: Mr. Lack, perhaps you would tell me where and when you were born?

Lack: I was born on August 21, 1942.

PP: Where were you born?

Lack: Detroit Michigan at St. Joseph's Hospital.

PP: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Lack: I have one sister.

PP: Is she living in this area?

Lack: She is living in Warren. Her name is Camille Lack.

PP: She's not married?

Lack: No, I mean <sup>Marva(?)</sup> Camille I should say.

PP: Is your mother Polish or part Polish?

Lack: She is Polish.

PP: Where was she born?

Lack: She was born <sup>in Michigan,</sup> in Detroit.

PP: And what about your father?

Lack: My father is also Polish. He was born in Detroit.

PP: Do you know how they met?

Lack: I think playing tennis.



PP: Did your grandparents emigrate from Poland?

Lack: Both grandparents, mother and father. Both sides.

PP: Is your wife Polish or part Polish?

Lack: No, she's Italian. A hundred percent Italian.

PP: How many children do you have?

Lack: I have three step-children. I have Dean, Steve, and John.

PP: Would you want them to work in a plant when they grow up?

*Ch. in plant*

Lack: Would I want them to work in a plant when they grow up? If they felt they could make a good living. I would much rather see them go to a much better job as far as the surroundings. But I would still like them to be in the engineering or trade field. ~~Which~~ ~~my~~ middle boy Steve is going to be a welder, and Dean just graduated and is going on to college to be an engineer. And Johnny, ~~well, he~~ has no plans yet.

PP: Well, how old are the boys?

Lack: Dean will just be eighteen, Steve is sixteen and John is fifteen.

PP: So Dean is the one who is going to college.

PP: What college is he going to start at?

Lack: He's going to start at South Macomb and then go to Lawrence Tech.

PP: Did your father or any other close relative work in any of the plants?

Lack: My dad worked at L.A. Young at one time. He also worked at ~~the~~ Dodge Main. Then he went into business with his father.

PP: Can you elaborate on that at all?

Lack: When my dad worked at Dodge Main, he worked in the paint shop. Then he went to L.A. Young and assembled springs or something. And he got into my grandfather's trade, which is a furniture finisher and upholsterer. He is presently employed at <sup>Gorman</sup> ~~Gourmand~~ Galleries.

PP: Doing upholstery work?

Lack: Doing their service work, touch up or whatever.

PP: Do you identify at all with Poland? I mean do you have an <sup>re</sup>interest in what's going on there?

Lack: I am very concerned because I figure it's my nationality. And I'm not too pleased with what is going down there. I feel these people are being very persecuted. My dad's parents still have cousins and relations there. My mother has some friends there.

*Polish ID*



Lack: Two years ago, they took a trip to Warsaw and visited our family. So, there're still some close ties.

PP: Have you any interest in visiting?

Lack: I would like to sometime. Under different circumstances, I think, than now. But I'd like to go back and see what it was like.

PP: Have you any particular interest in reading about the Solidarity movement?

Lack: I read some about it. I've met some people from Solidarity that came over from Poland and came to the Local. We were introduced and listened to various representatives talk about their movement and how they were being persecuted by the government over there. (Footsteps)

PP: Is there any particular part of Poland that your family's close to?

Lack: I think Warsaw, Krakow. The cousins, ~~are~~, one is a doctor there and the other ones are in farming, agriculture.

PP: Did you live as a young person in a Polish community?

Lack: Before grade school, I was brought up in Hamtramck, on Edwin, ~~right in Hamtramck~~.



Lack: (footsteps) Then we moved from Hamtramck to 7 Mile and Orleans area. I went to elementary school and junior high there and graduated from Pershing High School.

PP: Did you go to a parish school?

Lack: I did go to St. Regis for a while and I did go to St. <sup>Lad's</sup> ~~Lad's~~ for a while.

PP: The first one was St. Regis?

Lack: St. Regis, ~~yeah~~.

PP: Where is St. Regis?

Lack: St. Regis is on 7 Mile and Lance.

PP: Then you went down back into Hamtramck to St. Lad's.

Lack: No, I went to St. Lad's first. For kindergarten.

PP: So, after you left the 7 Mile-Orleans area, where did you live next?

Lack: Then we moved out to Royal Oak. Twelve Mile.

PP: This is your father's family. I'm curious about something <sup>there</sup>. Why did you move ~~really~~ away from a Polish community?

*then*  
Lack: I think it was a step up for my parents as far as housing, as far as job opportunities. We lived upstairs in a two-family flat. I



Lack: think my parents wanted a bigger place.

I think the home originally belonged to my grandfather. So, they were ~~maybe~~, probably renting at the time. And they decided to get a house of their own.

PP: So, when did they get a house of their own?  
How old were you?

Lack: I would say, when we moved, maybe ten or eleven.

PP: Would you call this area now, a fairly heavily Polish area?

Lack: I would say it's mixed. It's Polish, Italian, Southern. We have some people from India across the street. We have some Philippine people. It's pretty much a melting pot.

PP: It's interesting that your father would have moved from the Hamtramck area <sup>to 7 Mile and then</sup> to Royal Oak, because most people seem to move from Hamtramck, <sup>to</sup> Warren and Sterling Heights.

Lack: Well, I think the 7 Mile-State Fair area was dominantly Polish and Yugoslavian. When we moved to Royal Oak we were going to Shrine of Little Flower parish. The organist there was from Poland. Quite a few of the friends that they met at Shrine were of Polish decent. <sup>(his parents)</sup>

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PP: Was Father *Cezdzin* there?

Lack: Yes, he was still there when we were there.  
A very delightful person.

PP: Do you go to a Polish parish now?

Lack: I would say it's mixed. It's right here on  
19 Mile between Clinton River and *Shoener*  
~~Shainer~~.

PP: Do you belong to any Polish organizations?

Lack: Presently no.

PP: But you did at one time?

Lack: I was going to get into the Knights of  
Columbus and then I went into the Service.  
Knights of Columbus is Catholic and dominantly  
Polish, I would say.

PP: You mean in this area?

Lack: Yeah.

PP: How long were you in the Service?

Lack: Three years and eight months.

PP: What Service?

Lack: Air Force.

PP: Were you overseas?

Lack: I was in Vietnam. I was in Thailand, Philippines,  
Taiwan, California. ~~I had been stationed.~~  
Saw pretty much of the world.

PP: ~~Now,~~ *Is* this your first home?



Lack: This is my first, ~~yeah~~. We rented awhile not too far from here. The property was on twenty-nine acres. It was a farmhouse.

PP: How many years have you been here?

Lack: We've been in this house six years.

PP: Do you have a boat or a cottage?

Lack: No, my parents live on Union Lake now.

And ~~he~~ <sup>(father)</sup> my dad has a boat. We use the neighbor's aluminum boat. She's retired and ~~the~~ <sup>her</sup> husband's just passed away. But if the kids want to use anything for fishing they ~~just~~ <sup>usually</sup> use that. My dad's boat is a Crisscraft which is mainly for pleasure riding and skiing. It's not too practical for fishing.

PP: Have you ever had a parent or a parent-in-law live with you?

Lack: No, never have.

PP: Maybe I've asked you this before. What about your siblings working in an auto plant or even <sup>at</sup> Gear and Axle?

Lack: When I first got out of high school I kind of *work* ( told my dad I thought it was a disgrace or a put-down to work in a factory. My feelings since then have changed. I feel you make

work |  
Lack: an honest living there and you make decent money and you work hard. I mean there's some people ~~that~~ don't. You work hard for what you earn. I think the blue-collar worker has come a long way from when I started to what he is now. And I'm not ashamed to say that I work in a auto plant.

PP: When you were in high school, did you have any kind of jobs?

Lack: I had a paper route. I worked in a party store, ~~as far as~~ sweeping, <sup>and</sup> cleaning up.

PP: When did you actually start working in the plant? How old were you?

Lack: I would say, in my early twenties.

PP: Which plant did you work in first?

Lack: I started in Plant 4.

PP: Oh, you started at Gear and Axle?

Lack: Yeah, I started at Gear and Axle. Prior to graduation, I worked in gas stations. I worked in a bagel bakery. I worked on a Tastee Bread route with a man. I worked for a vending company ~~with~~ another man. So, I was just jumping from job to job, but there was nothing really steady. And then my uncle,



Lack: who has since retired, got me into Chevy.

PP: What was he doing?

Lack: He was a leader in the <sup>tool and</sup> dye shop.

PP: ~~So,~~ <sup>wh</sup> when you went in, did you go on to production?

Lack: I went in to production.

PP: And what did you do in production?

Lack: I worked on the assembly line first, and then I transferred from assembly line to a big press that ~~w~~ punched out parts. Then I put in an application for skilled trades. Came on skilled trades as a laborer. In other words, laborer does various cleaning up holes, and jackhammering, and digging, and whatever.

PP: Was there any pre-apprentice course at that time?

Lack: Yeah. There was a E.I.T. program which I went through, which is a eight year course. And there was the apprentice course which is a four year course.

PP: Why did you decide on the E.I.T. rather than the apprentice course?

Lack: At the time, the E.I.T. program was not avail-

?

Lack: able. I had a choice to either take what was available or wait 'til the next opportunity. I felt it could be six months, a year. So, rather than work production or work in the labor gang, I figured this was a good opportunity to take.

PP: You said the E.I.T. wasn't available.

Lack: The <sup>4-year</sup> apprenticeship was not available.

PP: I see, so you took the E.I.T. So, when does your seniority actually date from?

Lack: 1964.

PP: What's the exact date?

Lack: I would say, 1/2/64.

PP: So, tell me a little <sup>bit</sup> about your E.I.T. program.

Lack: We had to go to certain courses. We had to put so much time in school.

PP: Where did you go?

Lack: I went to South Macomb, ~~I went~~ to Henry Ford, for a while, ~~but~~ mainly South Macomb. You take Math, Blueprint Reading, ~~Plan~~ Layout, and Building ~~Closing~~ <sup>des</sup>, and Building Restriction.

PP: Now, this was to be a <sup>pipefitter</sup> ? Did you have any other choice or were you just definitely deciding?



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Lack: It was either going to be a pipe-fitter or a millwright. Whatever came first.

PP: So, you didn't really have any particular preference?

Lack: No, just something to get a trade in.

PP: Is there a great push among the men even today to get a trade?

Lack: I think so. Because I think today without a trade or without a good college education, in the right field, there is no job. Just to be a common laborer or just be a common production worker, those days are just going to phase right out, due to all the robotics in the industry and all the mechanical *handling* systems. If you're not skilled somewhat, you will not have a job.)

*Current Educ*

PP: Have you worked at different plants? Which ones have you worked at?

Lack: I've worked in just about all of them.

PP: Did they move you around periodically?

Lack: You get there in the morning, we punch in at 6:30, we go up, <sup>to</sup> which the pipe shop ~~is~~ located on the second floor of Plant 72, and you are assigned a job. It could be *in anyone of* the



Lack: nine plants.

PP: You're a plant-wide type of job.

Lack: Right. They have certain pipefitters who are assigned to certain floors. In other words, certain plants, and that's the only plant *that* you ~~is~~ work in. *Which, the gang I am in,* does mainly ~~t~~ construction work and major repairs.

PP: When you say gang, how many people does that mean? ~~do?~~

Lack: Anywhere from two to four. The millwright gangs are even bigger. Could be eight to ten *men*.

PP: Do you stay with that particular gang?

Lack: You usually work with one particular partner. My partner who I was working with, just retired ~~here~~, as of last month. I worked with him for quite a while, ~~a~~ couple of years.

PP: So, now you work with somebody new?

Lack: Somebody else.

PP: Tell me, are they still taking apprentices in pipefitting?

Lack: No. Not as of now because we have some E.I.T.s who were sent back to production.



Lack: We have people who are laid off. And they will not take any until these people are called back.

PP: Actually, how old is your youngest pipefitter now? Journeyman.

Lack: Journeyman pipefitter would be Mark, (146) . He's got to be in his early twenties.

PP: When did you actually get your journeyman's card?

Lack: I got it in '70, I think it was. Because I went in the Service and my Service time counted towards ~~the~~ E.I.T. program because I was doing basically <sup>similar</sup> ~~the same amount of~~ stuff in ~~the~~ Service.

PP: So, what years were you actually in the Service?

Lack: The latter part of '67, '68, '69 ~~and~~ I got discharged in '70.

PP: Would you say you liked your work now?

Lack: I like it. I think it's a good trade.

It's a very interesting trade. Right now, it's even becoming more demanding with this new technology. There's so many new things coming. ~~Like~~ Before we used to use the old

Sister

Jack: soil and pipe and now we are using this  
 new vinyl, which is in this house. New  
 copper and vinyl. We still use galvanized  
 and black pipe but now we are into this  
 which is all lined together.

FP: You mean like that white type over there?  
 Is that vinyl?

Jack: That's vinyl.  
 FP: Have you ever considered going into any other  
 different kind of work?

Jack: It seems crazy but I would still like to  
 have a little delicatessen.

FP: It doesn't sound crazy at all! (laughter)

Jack: I've often talked to my wife about it. Just  
 having a little party store. Just having  
 lunch meats and whatever and your liquor  
 license.

FP: In this area?

Jack: In this area or somewhere even maybe close to  
 a factory, in a populated area.

FP: So, really, you want to go into business for  
 yourself.

Jack: I would like to, yes.

FP: In a small business that you can control.



PP: Have you ever considered relocating in another state?

Lack: If it came down to it, yeah.

PP: How would your wife feel?

Lack: Oh, I think we would have our disagreements, but if it came to a better promotion or a better job, <sup>and</sup> a better future for my kids, I think I'd do it.

PP: What would you miss most if you did move?

Lack: My family. My parents and my cousins and relations.

PP: Would you miss Michigan itself?

Lack: I don't think so, ~~no~~. I used to love Michigan, but after this past winter and the weather, I'm not really that fond of it anymore.

PP: Does your wife work at all?

Lack: She works part time at Sears. ~~She works~~ in the boy's department.

PP: Do you know of any Polish auto workers who have gone to find work in another state?

Lack: A few who went to Texas. A couple got laid off and went down there for work.

PP: Were they in the skilled trades?

Lack: Yes, they were skilled tradesmen.

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PP: Were they pipefitters?

Lack: An electrician and a couple millwrights.

PP: Did they stay down there?

Lack: Three of them, yeah. One came back and I haven't been in touch with him.

PP: You don't know why he came back?

*Kenton*  
Lack: I think the family. They just couldn't cope with leaving his <sup>family</sup> Cause he had quite a big family, from what I understand. They just couldn't cope with going down there and leaving everybody.

PP: Was he married and did he take his wife and kids?

Lack: He was married and he took his wife and children and they all came back.

PP: Is his wife Polish too?

Lack: I don't think so. I think she was Hungarian.

PP: But the other three are still down there. Do they have jobs?

Lack: They are working. They don't make as much money or have near the benefits but they have steady work.

PP: So, they're very content to be down there. In addition to your E.I.T. training, have you



PP: had any more schooling?

Lack: I've gone on to taking some refrigeration stuff. I've taken some personal improvement courses, ~~I've taken~~ <sup>and</sup> some union courses.

PP: Let's talk about the refrigeration courses first. Now you took those where? . .

Lack: At Oakland University, ~~out there~~.

PP: Was there any special reason why you took the refrigeration?

Lack: Job betterment, <sup>t</sup> to better my job.

PP: It had some connection with your job? What did you take for enrichment courses?

Lack: As far as dealing with people, As far as management-labor relations, ~~a~~ health and safety course, Grievance procedure courses.

PP: Were some of these with the union?

~~Lack: Yeah,~~

PP: Because you mentioned grievance procedure and the union does offer certain courses like that. So how many courses actually have you taken sponsored by <sup>the</sup> union?

Lack: By the union? I would say at least four or five by the union.

PP: Where were these courses?

Lack: Spent one week up at Black Lake for like  
 a seminar. Went to six weeks to Region 1,  
 which is on 12 Mile for <sup>a</sup>Parliamentary Procedure  
 course. Some <sup>courses</sup>were even given at the Local.

PP: How many people would come to a class <sup>when it was</sup> at the  
 Local?

Lack: We've had twenty-thirty in a class. This would  
 be after working hours.

PP: But would it be on Collective Bargaining?

Lack: Collective Bargaining, Grievance Procedure,  
 Health and Safety. They're having some  
 coming up now on this new First Aid pro-  
 cedure. Some <sup>courses</sup>for retirees, ~~some courses.~~  
 How to prepare yourself to retire.

PP: I was going to ask you about that. They do  
 give pre-retirement <sup>courses</sup>. Were you planning to  
 take them?

*win classes*  
 Lack: The only reason I would take such a course  
 is to better my knowledge of what's actually  
 involved in preparation for retirement. <sup>such as</sup>  
 What procedures to go through. And to better  
 myself as far as ~~what~~ actual benefits ~~will~~  
~~they have to see to benefit themselves.~~

PP: Actually, how old will you be when you have



PP: your thirty years in?

Lack: I'm forty this August so I'll be in my early fifties. (52?)

PP: Do you plan on retiring at that age?

Lack: Definitely. If I can financially afford it, which I think I will be able to. I definitely will retire in thirty years.

PP: Do you have any great plans of what you want to do after you retire?

Lack: I would like to travel a bit. I think by then I'll probably have some grandchildren. My stepsons may have moved out of state or wherever. I think I might go visit them, spend a couple weeks or months. Just kind of enjoy life.

PP: Do you have any special hobbies?

Lack: I like building things. I like fishing. I like snowmobiling.

PP: How many times have you been laid off since you've worked at Gear and Axle?

Lack: ~~One~~.

PP: When was that?

Lack: It was in about '65 I would say.



PP: For how long?

Lack: For less than a week.

PP: How do you view the lay-offs now? Have you thought much about that?

*Why?*  
Lack: To be very honest, with my lifestyle, I don't think I could last very long, ~~as far as if~~ I was laid off (Laughing).

PP: Why? End Side 1, Begin Side 2

Lack: I think like anybody, I'd like to live comfortably. Not ritzy-ritzy but just live comfortably. And I'd like to do a little traveling. I'd like to do things and not be afraid from one week to the next if I could do it.

PP: How many cars do you have?

Lack: I own two cars right now.

PP: What year and make are they?

Lack: I have a '79 Chrysler LeBaron and I have a '73 Pontiac Ventura.

PP: Let's go back to talking about being laid off. If for some reason, you were laid off, and ~~ld~~ you thought it might be a permanent lay-off, would you try and get a job in your same field or would you try and retrain ~~for~~ something



PP: else?

Lack: I would, first of all, try in my own field and then I would probably retrain into something.

PP: How do you think your wife would feel about that? going into something completely different?

Lack: I don't think she'd have any objections.

PP: What about your parents?

Lack: My parents either, because I think we're very free-minded, as far as, if it would take a change, I would have to take a change.

PP: What about your friends who are pipefitters? Are any of them dedicated enough to the trade that they would feel one should certainly try and get a job in the same trade?

Lack: I think many of them feel that way. I think it's a problem. I don't know, maybe it's like you say, tradition. (Once you're a pipefitter you have a certain pride in your work.)

PP: What do you think would happen if they got laid off?

Lack: I think they would try. The younger ones I

Work



Lack: think would go into a new field (because  
 with all this new technology, you have to  
 go back to school to get the knowledge.)

PP: But you don't think the older ones would?

Lack: I don't think so. I think they would just get  
 by on what they could find. And if they  
 could find a pipefitters job or plumbing job,  
 they would probably stick to it.

PP: What do you think about a man taking early  
 retirement if he is laid off alot? I mean  
 taking it before the thirty years are up.

Lack: I don't think he benefits by it. I think he  
 loses too much by it. As far as the age factor  
 and as far as the benefits.

PP: What is the actual point where a man, if he  
 has so many years of seniority, really should  
 continue on? In other words, is there a  
 sort of cut off point where if he gets up  
 to that point it's to his real benefit to stay  
 at the plant?

Lack: I feel if he's in good health, ~~I would say~~  
~~65.~~ It's been extended to 70 but I've seen  
 some 75 year old people that amazed me.

Working in the environment we work in, I  
 would say 65. Because I've seen some retirees



Lack: that look like they found the Fountain of Youth after they left, and then I've seen some who don't have any hobbies or all they know is Chevrolet Gear and Axle, and have lived maybe a year or two after retirement.

PP: What do you think makes a man do that, be so dependent on his work?

Lack: I think after certain many years, you just get in a lifestyle. Maybe some people live way <sup>and</sup> ~~above~~ their means and they get in a rut and they feel they could not survive. There's some people I've talked to who have the years and have the age and just are making less money by working than if they were retired.

PP: If you knew a few years ago what you know now about economic conditions, inflation, conditions in the plant, <sup>(contract)</sup> concessions, all the things that are affecting the workers now, do you think you might not have gone into the plant, ~~or you would~~ <sup>you</sup> have tried something else? completely different?

Lack: Could have seen the future? I think I would still may have stayed in the same trade, but maybe not in the plant.



PP: How do you feel about Japanese and other foreign cars.

Lack: I feel that there is no way we can compare our lifestyle with theirs, for one.

PP: Why do you *say* that?

Lack: Cause they are brought up entirely different.

PP: Were you in Japan? Did you visit?

Lack: In Taiwan, yes. Their lifestyle is entirely different. Their upbringing is entirely different.

PP: *But* Taiwan is Chinese.

Lack: But still, it's similar. Their dedication to their job is preached into them from *(being)*. little on. As far as what I've seen. Your father's worked here for so many years, and like you said, it reminded me of the old coal town *in* Pennsylvania, where the company store was owned by the company. *we* Housing was owned by the company, *that's* their way of life.

PP: You think this affects the actual auto industry in Japan?

Lack: Yes, Their housing is paid for by Japanese auto companies. They have recreation areas



Lack: right in the plant. They have like saunas and steamrooms and whatever. (Their training is entirely different than ours, as far as they have it's more dedication to the job and the company.)

PP: How do you think this affects the actual production of an automobile?

Lack: I feel it has a great affect on it. (I think they take more pride in their work than an American. If there was a comparison from today's auto worker to <sup>the</sup> Japanese auto worker. Their machinery is better. Although it's made by the same company, it's maintained better than our machinery.)

PP: How do you mean it's better machinery?

Lack: It's newer. We are trying to catch up right now, as far as machinery. Their preventive maintenance program is much better than ours. Chevrolet's <sup>way</sup> is you let it run until it stops and then <sup>we</sup> you try to fix it and make it run some more. I could tell you machines, a couple years ago, where they took a hammer for a fine adjustment. A foreman had a set goal to get his production out, he didn't

Japan  
Imports



Lack: care if it was scrap or not. He had a hundred pieces to get out from that machine, and that's all he wanted. But now, they've introduced this Quality of Work Life into the plant. They were having some problems with it. It's a good idea, I think, because they're treating us on an equal basis. *QWL* with Management feels threatened by it, I think. But ~~I think~~ they've gained a lot by it. But then you have certain people from management and <sup>the</sup> union who tend to dominate these circles. They run them the way they want them and it's not going to work that way.

PP: Do you think they have a long range value?

Lack: I think the long range value is they want to find out from the actual job sitter or the actual man that builds the parts, and maintains the machines, <sup>if he has any problems.</sup> We've had great problems as far as some of our engineering, and some of our tool and dye designing. Because said engineers learned from a book and didn't have any practical knowledge. I think that's hurt them quite a bit.



PP: What about the actual parts? I've heard comments on the problem of deviance in the parts. Have you noticed that problem?

*Outsourcing*  
Lack: They have cheapened the parts. They have gone into many different materials that, I feel, are not practical. But yet, they feel that they can benefit by it and they are doing still a lot of job outsourcing, which I *think* hurts us.

PP: Do you feel they're going to continue with this outsourcing?

Lack: Definitely, because of the price.

PP: Is it cheaper?

Lack: Yes, very much cheaper.

PP: When they do outsourcing are the parts gained in Michigan?

Lack: No, they're going to all overseas. I think I have a local paper upstairs I can give you to actually show you how many countries they have, in the last two <sup>three</sup> years, gone into. Just for the cheap labor.

PP: How do you feel about the import system of foreign cars into the U.S.?

Lack: I feel that they should put a <sup>m</sup> tariff, ~~er~~



Lack: ~~anything.~~ ~~Like~~ I know when we ship to Japan, they have to pay 40% or 100% Japanese made. Or 50% Japanese parts, where the United States doesn't do that. It's imported in and it comes in, I would say, almost tariff-free. That's where we are really taking a beating.

PP: Would you feel differently if the cars were assembled in the U.S.?

Lack: Yeah, if Toyota or Mitsubishi or any one of them. Like Volkswagen, I have nothing against Volkswagen because Volkswagen has come here and built a plant right in Sterling Heights. To me it's an American made car, because it's being made in America.

PP: Isn't GM supposed to be having some kind of an arrangement now?

Lack: They are talking with Toyota. They own 53% of Mitsubishi. What they are doing is they are having the cars built there and imported to our dealerships. I have often asked, <sup>my higher</sup> why hire bosses? How can you justify telling us to buy American and then you go to a Chevrolet dealership and he sells Chevrolet, Datsun, and Toyota?



Lack: So, I said, "How can you justify it?" Well, they said each dealer can set his own stipulations. ~~and~~ If I was in Smith's position, I would ~~run~~ it much differently. If you want to sell my product, you sell my product only.

PP: So in other words, the GM dealers are actually selling foreign cars.

Lack: Let's just say for instance, Key Oldsmobile sells Datsuns and Toyotas. Now say you are interested in an Olds. It's happened to me just pricing a car. He says, here I can sell you this nice <sup>Celica</sup> ~~Selleca~~ GT for \$1500 less than this Oldsmobile Cutlass. So I just told him, well, I am a GM worker so you just lost a customer as far as I am concerned.

PP: Do you think any men in the plant own a foreign car?

Lack: Yes, there are several.

PP: ~~Because I~~ haven't seen any around.

Lack: There's even a few tradesmen over there (at our plant). ~~Which we~~ <sup>FN</sup> frown upon it and we let them know that we are unhappy. I can see owning a Ford or Chrysler, an American

*Yaps  
Impuls*



Lack: made car from another company. But I can't see driving a Toyota or a Datsun or a Ferrari, or whatever, because to me it's just taking your job security.

PP: And yet, we know so many of the American cars have so many parts from Japanese, primarily.

Lack: They're going into what they call a world car now.

PP: I've never heard that. How would you describe a world car?

Lack: Parts made all over the world and assembled in one basic place.

PP: If the parts are made all over the world and say they're assembled here, in the Detroit area, how much of that would you consider to be an American car? (Laughter)

Lack: If it was made by Americans overseas, I wouldn't care.

PP: Say it isn't.

Lack: I would have very mixed feelings.

PP: This is what I wondered. If an American worker looking at a car that had parts from everywhere, which you say, a world car, which is a term I hadn't heard before.

✓  
jap  
-  
import



PP: How long does it take to put a car together?

Lack: On a modern assembly line, I think they can do it within twenty-four hours.

PP: Actually, when you consider the number of parts in a car, and there are a lot of parts, and the number of hours that it's taken to make those parts, and you compare that to the twenty-four hours of American work time going into the assembly, you might actually be getting a car that was more foreign-made than American-made.

Lack: I think a lot of Americans do not know how many parts are imported in their own car, until they actually maybe have a repair bill, and see some of these parts. You have the Chevrolet Luv truck ~~and the engine~~ <sup>which</sup> comes from Japan.

PP: How do the workers feel about that?

Lack: It's job threatening. That's why this contract was a very bitter one. It was a very bitter pill to swallow because we knew what was basically going on.

PP: Do you think it's going to get more bitter?

Lack: It has to get more because I think the <sup>big</sup> auto



Lack: companies do not want to pay the price. They are stating that we are making twenty dollars an hour, which to me is pure malarkey. Because you can not compare. Our lifestyle and their lifestyle *which is two* different things, for one. They could compete on a better basis, like I said *with* The newer machinery, *the new* technology. That's where Japan has the jump on us, I think. They have some plants, *where* the third shift is run strictly by robots. The people are home, and these machines are restocking and refilling the bins, and whatever. They come in on the day shift, and they're ready to roll. It's amazing!

PP: Do you have any robots at Gear and Axle?

Lack: Yes, we have some.

PP: What do they do?

Lack: We have a robot painter. We have a robot stacker system where there's a little train that's not manned by any driver - it's programmed. It goes into a designated area. The fork-truck driver loads the material on to the pallets. A man pushes the buttons and it



Lack: goes on a little monorail that you can't even see because it's a little piece of wire in the concrete. This train follows this little secret railroad track. Say you step in front of it, it has a little shield and it will stop. It will wait like five seconds before it proceeds. ~~What I'm saying,~~ they're getting into more mechanical handling systems, more robotics than I can imagine. General Motors itself has a tech center, is in to robotics, Making robots and designing them. It's very frightening to see what these things can do, <sup>at its</sup> We have a machine <sup>a little crystal that programmed.</sup> right now that came from Italy. It's called a multi-assembler. It can be reprogrammed in fifteen seconds to assemble any part you want.)

PP: So, something like that can really take jobs away.

Lack: Non-skilled workers can really lose their jobs.

PP: How important do you think a job is to a man as far as his self-image?

Lack: I think it's very important. I think if you

Image of job to man.

Robots.



( Lack: take a man's job away from him and you belittle him, I think you'd just see he's no longer a man. He has certain pride and certain standards. I feel if you take those away, you just belittle him. /

*Image of job to man*

PP: So what happens to the man who's laid off now? Say a production worker and he has a family and he probably can't get work.

Lack: He goes to whatever it takes. It's happening. You can just read the papers. The killings, the muggings, the break-ins, the shootings, whatever.

PP: Have you heard of anybody getting ill from this kind of thing?

Lack: Yes.

PP: What kind of illnesses?

Lack: Mental depression. I don't know how true it is, but some, even suicidal. It builds, it just piles up and there's nothing coming in. I know Rufus started a canned food program at the Local for laid-off workers. /

*Image of job to man*

PP: Has it affected ~~the~~ marital problems?

Lack: Yes, I think it's broken families.

PP: What happens though if the wife is working



PP: and bringing in some money? Does that affect the man's feeling of self-worth?

Lack: I think it hurts his pride. There's a couple people I work with, <sup>where</sup> their wife makes more than they do in certain jobs. They don't admit that it hurts but even if they weren't working, I think they feel they're being degraded by the wife. The way it is right now, women have maybe more opportunities as far as certain jobs than men do right now.

PP: <sup>Are</sup> These men that you're mentioning, ~~are they~~ Polish?

Lack: Other nationalities other than Polish.

PP: Are they European nationalities?

Lack: No.

PP: I just wondered if there was any difference. How do you think people feel in the Polish community about that?

Lack: I think they have a certain pride.

PP: How do you think that the men feel in the Polish community about the fact that the wife might be earning more or they might not be earning much at all because of being laid off? Do you think it's more pronounced now?

Image of job man



*Family Cohesion* ( Lack: I think it's more pronounced cause I think there's a unity and a closeness, in a Polish family or an Italian family, ~~or whatever.~~ )

PP: Let's talk a little bit now about your Union activity. When did you actually get involved in Union activities?

Lack: About six years ago.

PP: What made you decide to get involved?

Lack: I just got fed up with what I had. (laughter)

PP: So, what did you do?

Lack: I ran for the job and the first time nobody wanted me.

PP: What job?

Lack: It was the district committeeman. I got defeated as district committeeman the first time around, so I ran for alternate. At that time, nobody wanted the alternate job so I got it by acclamation. Then, as far as becoming Vice-President, I felt the way the times were and the situation <sup>at</sup> of the plant, and everything, it was a good opportunity to run. ~~to~~ It was like a shot in the dark. If I lost, I wouldn't have felt hurt, cause



Lack: this wasn't<sup>in</sup> the first time I did ~~run~~<sup>run</sup> for Vice-President. So, on the second go around I beat a very strong incumbent and I felt very overjoyed that the membership had that much confidence in me.

I like the Union movement. It has it's good points and it's bad points like anything else. I've met a lot of people and made a lot of friends.

PP: Have you much of a relationship with your counterpart in other Locals nearby? Does the executive board meet?

Lack: Yeah. We have what they call Regional Leadership meetings monthly. And then we ~~have~~ every three months, <sup>we have such as one in</sup> ~~one, like you go to Canada and meet.~~ A matter of fact, tomorrow there's some meetings downtown at the Cadillac <sup>(Hotel)</sup>

PP: That's <sup>Region</sup> 9, isn't it?

Lack: Yeah. There's meetings also tomorrow in Tennessee that Rufus is probably going to attend. And I have some meetings down at <sup>the Book</sup> Cadillac tomorrow.

PP: These are what? In connection with the region?

Lack: <sup>CAP</sup> The one I'm going to is in <sup>CAP</sup> doings with



*they are*  
 Lack: Presented to management by labor. And then in turn, management comes back and presents what they want or what they are going for. And we are in for a uphill battle, this contract.

PP: In other words, you might have to give some concessions.

Lack: We might have to, but I think we gave up enough already, as far as my personal feelings. Because I think we were betrayed <sup>not</sup> by Douglas Frazer *Douglas Frazer* ~~as far as~~ <sup>but</sup> ~~by~~ what Smith had promised and what he had said. And then before the ink was dry, he was already giving the higher supervision bonuses and outsourcing. So it was to me like we really got took. And I think Frazer and Owen ~~Beaver~~ <sup>Beaver</sup> did a hell of a job for what the times demanded.

PP: What do you think about the future though, given the very difficult situation? Economically, people not buying cars.

*Econ*  
 Lack: I think what is really hurting us now is the high interest rate. People have the money but I think they are afraid to separate



Lack: with it to the high interest rate, and the state of the economy. I would like to buy a new car now but there's just no way that I would want to risk that much and pay that much interest on a new car. It's just ridiculous.

PP: Really, I suppose, one of the problems with the American auto industry is that people just don't have the money, even <sup>though</sup> they may want to buy the car.

Lack: That's right. I fear for my three boys upstairs if they ~~don't~~ <sup>ever</sup> own their own home.

PP: You mean if they ever can own a home?

Lack: That's right. That's what I meant.

PP: So, what do you think's going to happen twenty years down the line to people if they want to get certain things?

Lack: I think it's going to be like "can they have it?"

*Lack*  
You're going to see more condominium living.

To own your own house you really have to be financially set, I think, down the road.

Or very well educated with a secure job.

PP: What do you see as the future at Gear and Axle?

*Lack*  
Lack: I think Gear and Axle has a future, if we can compete with the competitors. *which*



Lack: Right now, there are four outstanding companies  
that make gears and axles, <sup>including</sup> ~~which is~~ Dana  
corporation, Canada . . .

End of Tape.