

Interview with George Merrelli, Interview 1
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This is Pat Pilling. The date is September 30, 1982. I'm talking with Mr. George Merrelli, who formerly worked at Chevy Gear and Axle and was a member of Local 235. He then went into work with the UAW and became very active in Region 1. He lives at 23301 Middlesex, St. Clair Shores.

PP: Mr. Merrelli, perhaps you could tell me first, where you were born and when you were born?

Merr: I was born in a coal mining community in Ramsey Ohio in 1911. My parents were immigrants from Italy and came to the United States in 1904.

PP: What was the exact date of your birth?

Merr: February 9th, 1911.

PP: What part of Italy did they come from?

Merr: They come from the middle part of Italy. The province is called *Marche (?)* (8); the marks. The location would be approximately seventy, eighty miles north of Rome, but over towards the Mediterranean sea. Dad's home town was on top of one of the *Appennine* (10) mountains. My mother lived down in the valley. I might add a very lovely country. They came over to the United States in 1904.

PP: Now, they were married before they came?

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Merr: Yes, they were married.

PP: Were you born here?

Merr: All the children were born here.

PP: How many children?

Merr: There were six.

PP: You said you went to what state?

Merr: Ohio. Ramsey Ohio. All of the children were born in Ohio.

PP: Were you raised in Ohio?

Merr: I was raised in Ohio until I was eighteen. Then I came to the city of Detroit.

PP: Why did you happen to come to Detroit?

Merr: The coal fields were rather depressed at the time. Had gone through ^{a lengthy} the strike in 1929 and '30. The coal union was defeated. It was destroyed. I was going to high school. Didn't seem to be ^{any} future there. My older brothers, I'm the youngest of four sons, were all in Detroit. They were working in the auto industry. I decided mid-term my junior year that I'd go to the big city.

PP: Did you ever finish high school?

Merr: No, I didn't. I came to Detroit in 1928. Went to work at ^{Murray} (20) Bodies. Didn't like the conditions and quit.

PP: What kind of work did you do?

Merr: I was unskilled. I took anything that came along. Before I came to Detroit, I drove

Merr: over-the-road steel trucks for a steel company.

Played baseball for the steel team. And of course, we got jobs right along with it. But these were in the Depression years. I came to Detroit. That was unskilled. My first job was a metal finisher. Which was very hard, *and dusty* (25) . I didn't like the pay schedule either because we were paid on the basis of piece-work. And you couldn't make much money.

PP: Well, this was a long time before the Union.

Merr: This was 1928. Before the Union began.

PP: Now, what about your brothers at this time?

Where were they working?

Merr: One was working at Dodge and ^{two at} Chevrolet.

PP: At Gear and Axle?

Merr: Two worked at Chevy Gear and Axle, and the other brother worked at Dodge Main. One brother was supervisor and the other worked in a trench shop as an assistant supervisor.

PP: So, this was not only just before the Unions came in but also, before the Crash and before the Depression.

Merr: Before the Crash and they were laid off just like every ~~body~~ else was. So was I.

PP: When you were laid off, you were very young, of course, and you hadn't been working very much. What did you do to eat?

Merr: I went back home.

PP: Did they go back home, your brothers?

Merr: Well, no. Three of them remained working.

They were older and I was the comparably new one on the job. They struggled. Yes, the one brother was laid off. Went back also for a while. But he was first called back in 1930. I was off work a little over a year.

PP: Did you work when you went back home, in Ohio?

Merr: Before I went back home, I was working at Ford's ~~and~~ I got laid off.

PP: Which plant? Rouge?

Merr: I worked at Rouge. Began in Highland Park and was transferred to Rouge. Almost went to Russia. A reciprocal trade deal that they had worked out with Russia in 1929, '30. For some reason the others told me not to go. I'm quite happy that I didn't.

PP: Is this the time when the Reuther brothers went ?

Merr: No, they were in Europe after that. Although they participated in part of that program that went on for four years.

PP: Then what happened?

Merr: I went back to Ohio. I was there for approximately a year. Then my brother got hired at Chevy Gear and Axle. And was able to get assurance that if I came to Detroit, I would probably get a job.

Merr: GM, yes. And then when L.A. Young got recognition they broke off. Champion Spark Plug got recognition, they broke off. But all of us belonged to Local 3.

PP: I'm very interested because I have not really talked to anybody who was really in on the beginning of Local 235. How did Gear and Axle get organized?

Work background
Merr: The background of many of the Chevy Gear and Axle employees were coal mine unions. Either they had worked in the coal mines or their parents had. They come, primarily, from four states: Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois.

PP: About how many people of this group, roughly, were of Polish background? Because I know there were a lot of Polish people working in the coal mines.

Work background
Merr: In the '37 era through the Second World War, I would assume that approximately 35 to 40% were of Polish decent. There were a large segment of Italians there. But the biggest group was Polish. And they pretty much dominated activities at that time; leadership elections and so forth.

PP: Who was the first president of Local 235?

Merr: Joe Sewicki. Nice congenial type of person.

PP: Was there much problem in organizing?

Merr: Yes, there was a problem organizing. And the

Merr: company device, they tried to keep the UAW out.]

Including, some people call them 'goon squad'.

But they call them loyal employees who were organized that whenever the union people would come out on Holbrook to pass out literature,

*Work
background*
they ~~we~~ would be on the roof with high-powered water hoses to try to repel them if they

attempted to come in and sit down. What the company didn't realize, there were many of us

who were loyal unionists who wormed ~~our~~

way into key spots for peace ~~committees~~ . And

they never would have been successful if (they

had wanted to.)]

PP: When you wormed your way into key spots . . .

Merr: We became part of the 'loyal group'.

PP: Oh, I see. You became part of the loyal group of the union people.

Merr: No, part of the so-called 'loyal group' who were going to defend the company property against the outside agitators.]

PP: So, what happened when members of this group who were real unionists and yet were pseudo-members of the loyal group were told to repel the . . .

Merr: We never were faced with it. We had our plan laid. They had broken down into groups of six. We had one or two people in each group. I can say ^{right now,} our objective was if anything happened, we

Merr: were going to sabotage it. But, we were never faced with that decision.

PP: And of course, there were many other plants where this was done. This was strategy that was planned by various people in various plants.

Merr: But, we thank the Lord that we were never faced with the decision to exercise our objective. It would have probably been pretty bloody.

PP: How long did it take, actually, from the time that you really started earnestly to try and organize until you were recognized?

Merr: With the advent of President Roosevelt, ^{ie put} without the program they call the American Labor Relations Act, the NRA which set voluntary organization. This began '34 but it was dominated by the ^{employers} (100), that we had the right to choose people of our own. So, we were really dissatisfied with that. The latter part of '35-'36 when John Lewis said ^{Sidney Allen} (102) broke away from the ^{AFL formed the CIO} (102). We began to talk about union (103). 1936 when they struck at GM in Flint, the momentum picked up at Gear and Axle. However, they didn't have sufficient strength to begin with, so we remained working. But, we worked very closely with the UAW. We got our charter in February 1937. That's when we broke away from Local 3. And we got recognition.

Work
background

PP: When you got your charter and you were re-
cognized, did everyone join?

Merr: No, it was an open shop. We had to conduct
organizational and dues riots. We were very
fortunate through the (111) . The Polish
group played a great part. We used to, about
every three or four months, have ^{to have} membership
drives, or dues drives, whatever it was. We
had pickets outside. (113) .

At that period, with this non-union shop,
and voluntary payment of dues collected monthly,
we were able to maintain 85 to 90% of the people
of the union members who had paid up. We had
a small hard core of about three hundred. But,
when the heat went on to them, they would join.
They'd pay one month and then they'd slip back
off again.

PP: When you mean the heat, the heat from the Union
you're talking about?

Merr: Yes. The picket lines outside. And the tactics
used was we put pressure on the line. And if
that didn't work with some of the real hard-cores,
we were able to organize the silent treatment.
No one would talk to them. The most effective
weapon I'd say there is.

PP: In England, where I was raised, that is known
as "sending someone to Coventry". It is very
effective. Do you know why ~~this~~ hard-core held

*Part
played by
Poles in
Union*

PP: out like that? Was it that they objected to the dues or scared of the company?

Merr: There ^{were} two good reasons, I think for most of them. The first reason, and I would say about 80 or 90% of them fell into that category also. They thought that by exhibiting anti-union attitudes, it would enhance their position to getting the better jobs. And also, they just didn't want to pay the dollar. The additional 10% strictly didn't want to pay the dollar a month. Despite the benefits that that got. It was those two major things. There was a third group, but there was only about a half a dozen ~~that~~ claimed that it was against their religious ~~den~~omination to join an organization.

PP: Were you on the first negotiating ^{Committee?} ~~plea~~?

Merr: No, I was an alternate committeeman. In 1937, I was elected an officer of the Union. Like the chairman of the trustees. I was an alternate committeeman. I was on the educational committee in 1937 and 1938.

PP: When did you actually get to the point where you were no longer physically working in the plant but just working for the Union?

Merr: 1940. I worked as an lternate committeeman on the formation of the wage schedule, seniority schedule that we were starting from scratch. I was active in the Union right from the

Merr: beginning.

PP: The only papers that I've seen that are currently at the Reuther Library at Wayne State, are papers that were put in by John On~~e~~ka. I looked at some of these papers because most of them are shop committee reports. It's interesting to see things that now people take for granted were very, very strongly fought for. Every step was just one little step along the way.

Merr: Yes. Establishing the seniority agreement required a great many hours of debate among ourselves because of different opinions. It was not unusual for us to start at nine o'clock in the morning and wind up at eleven o'clock at night. Trying to put together a seniority agreement that would be acceptable to the majority. It was not easy because we had no direction at all. We had to work from the seat of our pants, you might call it. So, it required a lot of discussion to come around to an understanding of what people were talking about. I ^{had gone} ~~was going~~ to a labor school 1937.

*Background
of early
plant*

PP: Where was that?

Merr: It was put on by the UAW with some semi-professionals. Two who were part of the Communist party who were seeding that to try and gain control. We studied parliamentary

Merr: law, collective law, seniority, and a number of other things. It was a three night a week plus Saturday program.

PP: What happened when there was a grievance in those early days? Because you really didn't have any procedures set up, did you?

Merr: No, it began with just arguing about it in the plant. And we were able at the time to use the walk-out. That would get so difficult we'd call an officer in. *Several* of them were just inexperienced. Although they were good trade unionists, we needed some experience. It was primarily brute force. When I say brute force, I'm not talking about physical. I'm talking about the threat of shutting you down. We had no arbitration at that time. When you look back on it, it was a rather haphazard way of doing it. But this came up because there was no experience, on either side.

PP: When did Gear and Axle actually become 100% unionized?

Merr: That came in the 1950s, before we got the 100%. We had got the union shop for our members, we got the representation for our members the latter part of '40.

PP: At this time, was there a *Region*?

Merr: Yes. Michigan was divided and elected seven regional directors. They were all elected as

Background.

Background:

Merr: one in 1937. And there were seven regional directors in Michigan. It was divided in 1942 into areas. In the Metropolitan Detroit area there were two regions; the West side and the East side. With two directors on each side. Then in the early '60s, the Detroit groups were divided up into four. There was a Region 1 right ^{from} _^ the beginning, which encompassed over 200,000 people.

PP: Where was it located?

Merr: The first offices were in the (176) *Storefronts*
Then the official offices were in the Penobscot building. I think the Wayne State area, but I'm not sure.

PP: You mean the Macabees building, maybe.

Merr: The Macabees building. (179) *near the Library.*
The regional office was there.

PP: Was it in 1940 or 1941 you became an international rep?

Merr: 1940. Prior to that, I worked as part-time international rep for Walter Reuther. Let me give you this background, you'll understand it. I was active in formation of the Local and the seniority agreement. In 1938, when our union split, and our president ^{*Hammer*} ~~Paul (196)~~ Martin, who was making a deal with Ford on the insurance end, and the union divided, I remained with the CIO group. He had signed a

Merrill: contract with General Motors in 1938 to cut the fundamental and basic parts of ^{the} collective bargaining outline. Reduced our collective bargaining time to two hours a day with no carry-over for five hundred people per committee-man. And some other changes. We felt ^{it} pretty much at Gear and Axle. And we were determined that if we reorganized, ~~that~~ that would never happen again. Ernie Bennet and I are the architects of the General Motors Council Complex which now affects all of the major corporations in the Union. We put it together. We submitted it to the 1939 convention. And I had the job from my Local to direct it's adoption at the convention. I had the job of putting together all ^{of} the GM people. And we were determined that this Council be set up to be representative for all the plants. And we particularly were determined that no president or anyone else would have the right to get in our way; negotiate a contract. That agreements would require a referendum vote of the membership. Secondly, we were determined that the negotiating committee in large corporation would be made up of people ^{from} the plant, rather than an international union representative. We finally were successful in 1939. We had a struggle with the leader-

background

Merr: ship of the union over that one provision.
Formation of the Council they accepted. But,
the question of the composition of the bargaining
committees . . .

(stop in tape)

PP: You were talking about the composition of the
bargaining committees.

Merr: Yes. With the acceptance of the principle of
the rank and file membership on the bargaining
committee in corporations, we had it adopted
and it gradually became part of the constitution.

When the convention concluded and we
returned back home, Walter Reuther was elected
Regional Director and also was selected by the
International Executive Board as the director
of the General Motors department. I worked
with him as a part-time representative because
the Union just didn't have any money for staff.
He had one member on his staff at all. So,
I would be paid by my local union for lost
time. I had an international representative's
card representing Walter and General Motors
plants, ⁱⁿ Detroit, Pontiac, Ohio, and Grand Rapids.
He selected me to work on it because of my
knowledge of the General Motors set-up and the
fact that I had been very active in negotiating
the seniority agreement and wage schedule. So,
from April of 1939 until October the 1st, 1940,

Merr: I worked as an international representative on a part-time basis; paid by my local union. Because the Union didn't have no money to pay it's representatives.

PP: How did Gear and Axle feel about this time you took away from work?

Merr: I was not on what ~~was~~ would ^{be} considered a key job, so they could replace me. They weren't too happy about it, but they were reluctant to make an issue of it because they didn't know what our reaction would be. (laughing)

PP: In fact, that was a period really when the company, although in one way they were in control, on the other hand they were feeling the water, so to speak. They didn't know what powers the Union had. They'd seen the Flint sit-down. They'd seen some of these other big strikes: Kelsey-Hayes. They weren't quite sure what was going to happen.

Merr: Those were long ones. What they weren't sure and did not know how to handle was the quicky strikes. Where you got angry and you couldn't solve the problem and you walked the people out. There were no (no-strike) provisions, at the time. There were no laws that forbade us from doing it. We had the power to shut them down. And unfortunately, sometimes we shut them down for reasons that didn't justify it.

Merr: But, ~~this~~ was the period we were going through.

And this is why, while I'm sure they were not happy with the role that I was playing, that being an employee working four hours and then leaving the plant for four, they were not in a position to take us on. Because they knew that we would immediately react. Including shutting the plant down if we had to. *Because* they would be tampering with Union representation. That's when we'd gotten very jealous. So, they did not do it. They were not happy but they suffered along with it.

PP: Where were members of 235 meeting at this time?

Merr: Our first series of meetings in 1937, after we got our charter, was in a hall on Edwin in Hamtramck. When we walked into that hall, facing us was a picture of ~~Joseph~~ Stalin. This was the Communist influence before we found out what happened. But, we had two meetings there. And then we were not impressed by Joe Stalin and his program. Forced to change to another hall. And then we met at Carpenter Hall on Carpenter Avenue just east of *Joseph Clingman* (260).

End Side 1, Begin Side 2

Carpenter Hall which was big enough to hold our monthly meetings, which usually it's three, four hundred people; five hundred people. If we had a serious strike problem or a new

Merr: contract, we would have to rent high school gyms and use those.

PP: Now, about what year was this?

Merr: This would be the '39, '40, '41 years. The formative years.

PP: Did you ever have any women work in the plant during World War II?

Merr: Yes. It was an all male plant. And then during the Second World War we had to work out special seniority provisions. In manufacturing plants like Chevy Gear and Axle were male employees. Were asked and agreed. We worked out a provision, to give up their easier job that they had worked to get on to, particularly when they were lighter jobs, so that women could be placed on those jobs for the duration of the war. Following the war, the agreement was expired and everybody went back to their original place in the game. The first time women went to work at Gear and Axle was during the Second World War. They're still working there now.

PP: Did some of them stay on at all?

Merr: Oh yes. They had sufficient seniority to stay on. Not very many because a lot of the ^{fellows} (170) came back from the Service to take jobs first. And, they stayed on. If they didn't stay on they had recall rights. They had to have three, four

Merr: years service, then recall rights. And came back.

PP: What kind of jobs did they have at that time?

Merr: At Gear and Axle you had to do the heavy axle operation. But there would be a lot of light jobs like press line assembly. And everybody worked to get on those jobs. (273) *When vacancies occurred*
(274) *They did*. There were a lot of jobs that were just too heavy for the ordinary female, the average female. So, we had to work out this special provision. And they did it very willingly. There were very few objections to it.

PP: Did any women later go in to the apprentice programs or E.I.T. programs?

Merr: Yes, they did. Later on, but that was way afterwards. I was active in establishing the E.I.T. program ~~at~~ GM. In 1939, following the convention, when we elected our first officers of the General Motors Council, I was the *Secretary* of that council.

PP: Who was the president then?

Merr: It was Jack *Livingston*. And they elected from the council, nationwide, five members on the national negotiating committee. I was one of them. So, I was on negotiation in 1939 when the tool and die strike occurred. I was on the committee as secretary. 1940.

PP: The tool and die strike was where?

Merr: 1939.

PP: No, but where was it?

Merr: We struck seven plants. It was a tactical strike under the disguise of skilled trades. Because skilled trades, in all the years, they were lucky to work six months a year. So, we used that period and we shut them down just before the change of the models. So, they couldn't get the ^{new} models out. Our tactics was to close down the skilled trades but leave the production workers with work. They could only work an 'x' number of days before they had to lay them off. But the tactics there was they were eligible for unemployment compensation.

Well, that was the first and last time, of course, because immediately following that, they changed the law. (laughing)

PP: Who was eligible for unemployment at that time?
The skilled trades?

Merr: No, all production. We struck the tool and die and the maintenance workers; all the skilled workers. And production workers go back to work. They'd go into work two or three days. But, machines would break down; nobody repair them. So, then they were eligible for unemployment compensation. Which was new at that time, also. Of course, after that, they then changed the law.

PP: Which meant what? They had to be working so many days?

Merr: No, they changed the law that if a plant was struck, everybody was affected. With each
(292) being on strike.

PP: Well now, let me ask you this. At that time, which was what year?

Merr: '39.

PP: Was there any kind of strike fund?

Merr: No, no strike fund whatsoever. In fact, the union had just reorganized. And I was still working part-time with my Local thing ~~but~~ they had no funds. How did we survive in 1939? Tool and die? Well, we had a crew that went out and ~~settled with some farmers~~ *solicited food from the*. We struck in August. We'd get cabbages and stuff from farmers. Donations from bakeries; day old, two day old bread and cakes and things like that. We set up soup kitchens. Some of the time, after two, three weeks, their big meals was the bread and soup that they got at the union hall. But that's how we did it. Farmers would donate chicken, geese, cabbage; go out in the field, take what you need.

PP: How long was that strike?

Merr: Strike lasted five weeks, six weeks. We had no unemployment compensation, no strike fund. Whatever funds you had in the bank you were stuck with.

PP: So, then after that, what was the next step in your career?

Merr: In 1939, ~~Alan~~ Martin then began to set up dual committees, bargaining committees in the plants when we split. GM seized upon that. And we were convinced that it was part of GM's tactics. They then claimed that they didn't know who represented the majority of the workers. So there would be no recognition of anybody. So, we worked for a long time without recognition. That's what the tool and die strike was all about. Because they were putting dual committees into plants that we had control of. And with that, GM would claim neutrality and would take away our recognition. So, we had to devise tactics on how we were going to stop that. It came to tool and die strike. Out of that tool and die strike, somewhere we got a few cents increase in wages, a commitment, very important commitment, that they would study tool and die needs. On the basis of trying to come up with a format that would give the people more work, longer time. We took the best that came out of that, because they did eventually work it out. The tradesmen were able to work twelve months a year. We came out with recognition that there would be no more dual committees. And we had got an

Merr: agreement from them that they would not sabotage or attempt to stop an election by the NLRB. Recognition election. We then had that election in April of 1940. Which out of forty-four plants, the CIO won forty. And the AFL, four.

With that, came the new contract negotiating, which we negotiated in 1940. I was on that committee. There ~~were~~ five of us. Jack Livingston was chairman or vice-chairman. Bill Stevenson was one of the officers. A fellow by the name of Geiger from Flint, represented that area. And we had a person from Indiana,

(319) *Medespan?* That was the original first five on that committee. And then I was on the committee again in 1940 despite the fact I was working for the (320) *International* Union at that time. I worked on a temporary basis at the Local *with* *paying* thing until October 1st, 1940, after the convention in St. Louis. Then I appointed the staff *member* ~~person~~ to work in Saginaw Michigan, *for* Linwood Smith.

PP: Well, then did you live and work down here?

Merr: No, my family stayed here and I worked up there. Stayed there in a room there.

PP: What year did you get married, by the way?

Merr: Got married in 1934.

PP: I believe you mentioned that your wife is Polish. Is she Polish from this area?

Merr: Hamtramck. She was born and raised in Hamtramck.

PP: Did you meet her as a result of working at Gear and Axle?

Merr: No, I met her at the dance at ~~Gray~~stone Ballroom. Then the romance started up. This was before the unions ever (328). She stayed behind with the two girls. She practically raised them 'cause I was gone. I worked there from October the 1st to January. I didn't like the conditions I had to work with. That I won't go in to. I notified Walter Reuther who was the one who suggested my appointment 'cause he was GM director. That I go up there and handle that 'cause there was nobody experienced up there at all. The first job I had was to reorganize the union. Out of the whole city there ~~was~~ five GM plants. We had approximately 1000 members out of 11,000 workers. So the job was to reorganize. We were moving along pretty good, but I had some conditions which developed that I just felt that I couldn't work out. Notified Walter that I was turning my resignation in as a rep. And he said well, just hold off. He had just got approval to get his second staff member. Jack Livingston was his staff member. So, he said, I want you to come here to Detroit, work for me in the department itself. So, I transferred from

*where?
Saginaw?*

Saginaw
Merr: ~~to~~ Region ~~to~~ General Motors department.

I was still secretary of the Council and on the bargaining committee. And also, did the same thing in '41. And then I had this ~~personal~~ personal decision. I felt that the fight that ~~Bennett and I~~ and our Local put on to make sure that the bargaining committee was not ~~comprised~~ comprised of reps, I felt that I could not remain on that committee (laughing). So, I resigned.

PP: Well, you stuck by your principles.

Merr: I stuck by the principle. They tried to talk me out of it, the guys on the Council. Because I was in the formative stage.

PP: Did you actually have to resign from the Local, itself?

Merr: No, I just resigned ~~as~~ secretary of the Council and from the national negotiating committee. They wanted me to stay on.

PP: What was Walter's reaction to that?

Merr: He never did express any feelings on it. He knew that they wouldn't have done much good anyway. 'Cause I was a free thinker of my own. I think he approved of what I did because of the principle fight. Because I was the one that led the fight in Cleveland. I'm sure he approved of it. We never discussed it. The question of my resigning, he never approached.

PP: I was just interested because you had proposed it and fought for it. And then when it came ~~to the point~~, you, yourself, followed your precepts.

Merr: And I was the first guy that there was really a conflict with. It was a decision I made on my own because of the principle. And I worked for Walter ^{within} the GM department from there until 1947. All this time we had this vicious political fight in our Union. In 1947, when we finally gained control, we, I'm talking about Walter's forces, I was working with an individual assistant GM director who disliked me considerably and went out of his way to make things difficult for me. We had to have many clashes and wind up in a [?] (350) mawler. I then notified Walter that I was quitting and going back to the plant. The fellows in the Local wanted me to come back and be president of the Local Union. And he knew that this had been going on. I just couldn't work under those conditions. I was just wasting my time and (260). Because what I was doing, he would then go around and try to undercut. And I was spending a lot of energy for nothing. And I told him I was going back into the plant. I wasn't going to work under that.

Merr: We had elected new Regional Directors on each side of Detroit, *and the President of my Home Local.* And I was the liaison fellow for Walter's forces in ~~the~~ Region 1.

PP: Who was the president at that time?

Merr: Mike Lacy. And I was the liaison and coordinator of political acts ⁱⁿ in Region 1. It was the first time that Walter's forces captured Region 1 politically, in 1947. I was chairman of the caucus in 1946, and laid that groundwork. We captured ^{it} in '46. We elected Emil Masey while he was still in the Services. I was chairman of the steering committee for Walter; contact. Then in '47 when we cleaned out (369), Emil moved up to Secretary-Treasurer. Left a vacancy at the Region and Mike Lacy was elected. By then I was assistant director to Mike Lacy in December of '47. And I moved from GM department as his assistant.

PP: To the Region?

Merr: Yeah, in the Region.

PP: So, that you actually were never president of the Local?

Merr: No. And I worked as his assistant until 1954, when he passed away. And I was elected Regional Director in '55. I was director until I retired in '77.

PP: Let's talk about some of the changes that took

PP: place. Particularly in connection with 235. of
~~Court~~, that was just one of several Locals that you
 had under your jurisdiction, I realize. I'm
 very interested in the Polish component in the
 Local and how the Local, itself, evolved to
 the present building ^{that} it's in now.

Merr: The Local, itself, in it's formative days,
 Polish people played a very critical and key
 part of the programming. In fact, they were
 the real background of the Union. There were
 some very fine Polish people who worked day and
 night. And of course, the first president was
 Joe SeWicki who was a hale, hearty, nice fellow;
 let's have a beer (laughing) type of president.
 Had a very ^{turbulent} (306) terms of office. We had yearly
 elections for three years. Had a very (307) ^{turbulent}
 time. He then was prevailed upon to run for
 the city council in Hamtramck. Everybody in the
 Local Union worked 1000% to get him elected
 councilman. Some because they liked him, others
 because they wanted to get rid of him. Get him
 out of the Local. And they did.

And the Local played a very strong role
 in the reorganization of the **I**nternational
 Union. In 1939, when the Union reorganized
 they had no money. The membership dues way
 down. They were open shop. Several small
 companies had a union shop but everything.

Polish
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Merr: else was over there. And with the division, most of the Locals represented in the Cleveland convention represented very few members, although they got the credit for it. My Local was one of the few half dozen who kept a high membership. St. Louis kept a high membership. Atlanta Georgia kept a high membership. We loaned the International Union \$30,000 to buy a building on W. Grand Blvd, to use as the UAW/CIO headquarters. We had the money, so we loaned them ~~that~~ money.

PP: How did you happen to have the money?

Merr: Well, we kept a high membership and we didn't squander our money. There were sufficient tightwads in there. And some of them were Polish. That whenever some false, foolish matters came up, ^{they} blocked it. And so, we had money. We had over \$100,000. So we loaned them, I think, twenty-six or twenty-^{eight}~~seven~~ thousand dollars.

PP: A hundred thousand was a lot of money in those days.

Merr: Yes. And we also had 8000 members. So, we loaned them the money. We then looked around for a building. And this was before '39; this was 1938. The bank building across the street was one of those buildings ~~that~~ the insurance companies took over. It was up for sale for

Merr: \$5000. And I was chairman of the trustees. And the board said why don't you check it in and see where we're at. So the three trustees went downtown, talked to the insurance officials. There was another customer, at least they told us there was. I don't think they had one, but they were putting the pressure on us. And wanted us to give them an answer by the following week. Well, we had no membership approval. So the three trustees pooled our finances together and we put down a \$50 deposit. And then had to go back and get approval from the membership at the membership meeting three weeks later to purchase it for \$5000. Well, they agreed to it, although political rumors were around; bribery charges all over the place. I was to get \$2000, the Polish ante grew \$1500 and the Black followed with \$1000. This \$5000 price (laughing). But that was politics. We bought the building. Stayed in that building for about ten, twelve years. Finally bought the lots across the street and GM bought the building. And the city then bought the building. They (421) through. That's how we came about.

PP: And then that building was built, was it then?

Merr: Yeah, the present building was built in the 60s. It stayed in the bank for a number of years. Early 1939 (424) building was built.

Polish Union

Merr: It's been there ever since. When you talk about the role of the Polish people, they were the backbone of that Local Union. Many of the leaders reflected that they were of Polish decent. The first president was Sewicki and we've had others.

PP: Can you remember any particular Polish presidents and any particular problems they had to deal with? That stand out in your mind.

Merr: Well, we had a group of people in there, there was a small handful of members of the Communist party, who seized every opportunity to shut the plant down. And it was very easy to shut a plant down. Just start a rumor.

PP: This was about what year?

Merr: This was 1938 and '39. Just before World War II. Sewicki was not qualified to handle it. He was one of these happy-go-lucky guys. Whenever trouble developed, he somehow or other was always called away on business someplace downtown. We had to then have meetings with some of the Polish leaders.

PP: In Hamtramck, itself, you mean?

Merr: Hamtramck, and North Detroit. They lived all over.

PP: Oh I see, so in other words, not just people who were working in Gear and Axle but people in the Polish community.

Merr: No, Gear and Axle first. We got these so-called leaders who we knew had some following. We began to sit down (439) and talk about it because our people were losing time.

PP: Let me ask you one thing about the leaders. When you say these leaders, what type of individuals were these?

Merr: There were three types. There were people who were elected to the top positions in the Local. There was Sewicki, there was Eddie Gruse, there was Eddie ^{Bob}Balski. Joe Pocko was the front end (444) secretary. Dessie was the recording secretary. Ed Gruse was the trustee. Bobalski was the sergeant-at-arms. These were the elected top. We then had some Polish people who were committeemen. We had other Polish who were alternate committeemen. Then we had other Polish people who were active; participate in Local Union meetings; would express opinions on issues. And were leaders in their department. But, many of them didn't take the trouble to run for office; would have been elected but didn't want it. Loyal leaders and had influence.

We began to sit down with them on how to get a hold of this because our people were losing their time and they couldn't afford it in those days. Through that, we then expanded that group and brought in some Italians. We brought in some

Polish in Union

Merr: Blacks. And we began to do *educational* work by talking to people. Getting up at the meeting when people tried to stampede us. By this time we also received training on the Communist tactics and how to combat them. And this is how we began to get a handle on it.

And then also the Corporation began to have seminars on how to handle wildcat strikes, etc. We then got the law passed. And then we got the contract that said no strike. That was in → 1941. No-strike clause in which they had *toed* to enforce it.

PP: Why was there a no-strike clause? I mean, what would that mean then?

Merr: Well, the contract was that the contract was in effect and there would be no strike during the duration of the contract, unless it was authorized by the International Union. And they began to enforce it. And we also, in 1941, adopted an umpire system. Because in 1940, after we reorganized we found that our final step of the grievance procedure with the committee meeting of the international General Motors ^{*departmental*} representative and a corporate representative in Detroit. And if these minor grievances that were legitimate grievances but they were not of the nature that you would shut a plant down over. Sometimes it's six hours pay or } 3

Merr: something like that. And we had no way to solve those. So in 1941 we accepted the concept of ~~the~~ impartial umpire. And with the impartial umpire there was no unauthorized walk-outs. They would have had the right to penalize.

PP: What happened to these people then who were pro-Communist? Did they stay in the plant or did they move elsewhere when they found ^{that} they couldn't do it?

Merr: The Jimmy Higginses, and these are fellows who follow along, stayed. Two or three of the top leaders who were sent in there, eventually disappeared; went somewhere else. There were some very good people who were taken. Only because you had no place to turn during the Depression. And of course, the Communist propaganda was very encouraging.

PP: Well, then did these people direct their energies to (483)

Merr: They would direct their energy but by this time we had been doing educational work. And we were able to focus a spotlight on them and what their objective was. And we began to slowly but surely, eliminate them in elections. One of the best educational issues that we used on them, which finally brought up very clearly what their objective was, was the experience that we had in Local 51 which was dominated completely by

Merr: the Communist party.

With the break of the war in Europe, in the 1939 all to 1940, when Germany and Russia were allies, Communist leaders, the real ones, were going around talking to the various Local Unions about, ~~and they call it~~ the Imperial Blood Bath. No support for England and France. Imperial Blood Bath, America should not be involved at all. In 1941 or '40, the thing that brought it out, Plymouth Local always had these resolutions of the Imperial Blood Bath. And they sent their officers around *speaking* to the local unions: the allies are not coming, and all that stuff. that went along with it. They passed a resolution on Saturday. We used to meet on Saturday at the Local. So Local 51, on ^{that} Saturday afternoon they passed the resolution. Sent it to the *Wayne* County Council, which comprised up all the AFL-CIO unions of *Wayne* County. *(500) being* the allies in Europe and the United States for sending, at that time we were sending material to the allies. And urging cease sending any more ^{war} material to the warmongers in the Imperialist Blood Bath, and so forth.

Saturday night, Germany attacked Russia. Our council met on Monday night, Wayne County Council. A second resolution came in from Local 51. It was delivered Sunday afternoon.

Merr: Because the People's war opened a Second Front, all out war effort until . . . Tracy Dahl, who was president of the Council, on Monday night when we got into new business, picked up these two resolutions, said I have a problem here. He named the president of the Local 51 who was very vocal. He said would you please tell us which one of these two resolutions you want us to act upon. And he read them both. Of course the meeting broke up in hilarity. But, that was the most effective weapon to expose the Communists, what they were up to. That all their 'being hurt' talks about the working people meant nothing. It was a question of the political aspirations and program of . . .

End Tape 1./ Begin Tape 2, Side 1.

PP: I'm talking with Mr. George Merrelli and we are on tape number 2 now. He is talking about some of the problems that occurred with the Communists. And the role of the Polish people in solving some of these problems.

Merr: In the early days of the UAW, most people who joined the union were not familiar with parliamentary law or tactics. They were not trained for that. They were good citizens. The Communists were able to control a number of local unions. But it's just a small handful.

Early days of the UAW

Merr: of people 'cause they were trained in public speaking. They were trained and they devised a tactic to put one or two persons in each section of the halls to make it seem that this was a majority thing. The third tactic that they used, while they were very small, half of them were able to ^{control} the meetings. Was they would drag the meeting out. And of course, people would leave, get fed up. Until they could count and realize they had the majority. And then they would pass their resolution very quickly.

Well, we who were at the Communists, realized that we were being outsmarted in our meetings. Because we did not have the experience. Being boxed in. And we had to have some training. Fortunately, there were a few Catholic priests in the area who were concerned about what was happening. And then set up classes on Parliamentary Law, Communist tactics.

PP: These were done in the church? In Hamtramck?

Merr: No. In fact, it was outside Hamtramck. Father Clancy was one. I remember there were three or four priests who worked with us.

PP: Was there any in Hamtramck?

Merr: Yes, there was one in Hamtramck.

PP: Which church?

Merr: They formed a organization called the Active

Political background by Union.

Merr: Catholic Trade Unionists, ACTU, in which we went in and got the information out. I had background in parliamentary law because I (15) in the early days because of my one year of education in tactics. Our basic group were the Polish people who were Catholics.

PP: What church in Hamtramck?

Merr: St. Florence. We had a priest from downtown who was in the chancellory. There were four priests who decided to work with us.

PP: Do you remember the name of the priest at St. Florence at that time?

Merr: No, it was a Polish name about that long. And he was not one of the educators.

PP: What year was this?

Merr: 1938, '39. Particularly in 1939. In which we had to begin to try to take the union away from the left wing. And the backbone of this organization was the Polish people. There were some Italians involved, but the background was Polish. In which they sat down for the first time begin to see the tactics, explain the tactics and the strategies that were used. From that, the leadership began to spread out. The Polish people in the Hamtramck area and around there in Dodge Local 236, 235, 262, had a major role in wrestling those Locals away from the Communist influence. Officers

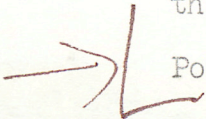
Polish background w/union

Merr: were not Communists. But, they were under the influence only because these people knew what they were doing and they had no way to counteract it. And it was through this educational effort of the Catholic group, educating the Polish leadership, and others of these tactics, that they began to form effective organization within these Local unions to wrest control away from them. So, in those early days, the Polish group in Dodge Local, Gear and Axle, Chevy Forge, Champion Spark Plug and Murray Body, played a very effective role in stabilizing the union and getting it away from the Communist control; Communist force in the union. This, I think, was their most important role.

PP: What other classes did they have besides parliamentary law?

Merr: Collective bargaining, public speaking, and tactics. And also, very much on how to spot a Commie by the familiar phrases that they use. And if this phrase popped up, you knew who he was right away and you could then expose him for what he was. That was, perhaps, the most important thing, was the phrases that would be used by them. And they still use the same thing. It was this kind of education that began to break the background. And the Polish people in the Detroit area played a

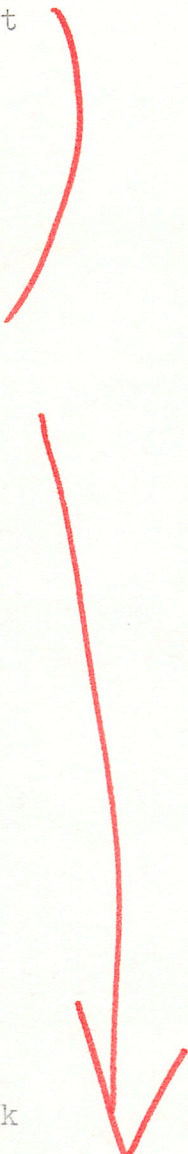
*Polish
background
of union*



Merr: tremendous role in that. Without them, I don't think we could have wrested the control away. That's the early history and the big role they played. At Gear and Axle they played a very big role, because as I said, they were a very large percentage.

The other most important thing was they were able to gain an understanding of what the union was about. They exhibited their loyalty that no matter what it was, if it was the union position, it was a good position. And they would accept positions without question. Even though personally they might have disagreed or wondered if this was any good, their loyalty to the union was the background. They played a terrific role in the '39 strike. They played a terrific role in the 1946 strike at GM. They were the bulk work of holding the union together during the war years. In which the Communists, with all their efforts to sabotage, and they were efforts in America. With the attack of Russia by Germany, they were prepared to give the union away. They were prepared to give an absolute, no-holds-barred, no-strike pledge with the provision that anyone who violated the no-strike pledge would be immediately discharged and put in jail. The Reuther forces ^{fight} against that policy. Went on

*Polish
background
w/union*



Merr: the basis of voluntary no-strike pledge with a guarantee that we would not tolerate unauthorized strikes. It was the Polish people ~~who~~ stood with the union.

They trusted Walter, trusted his forces. By this time, because of the educational work. And, I think, protected the UAW^{trade} union being placed in the ~~category of the type~~ of trade union that they have in Russia; dominated by the government completely.

PP: How much do you think the effort put forth by the Polish people, here in Detroit, was possibly influenced by the fact that so many of them came out of the coal mining areas of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, where the conditions were so bad?

Merr: I think there were three factors that brought them in tightly. Not only that there were many Polish ~~who~~ had coal mine background. Their religious background: anti-Communist. A third group were people who they were considered the lowest^{step} on the totem pole; that dumb Polack. They were discriminated against very much. Even more so than the Italians. I think it was Polish first and Italian second on the discriminatory thing. It was that. And they gained respect in the union. And this, I think, was the motivating

*Polish
background
w/ union*

Merr: factor behind their loyalty: that they got a degree of respect with it.

And when I say they played a terrific role on the generality, let me give you a very good example of the role ^{that} they played. In 1938, when Reeding got elected mayor of Detroit, he went throughout the nation boasting that he was going to drive the CIO out of the city. And he meant it. There were more pitched battles with the police, strikes. One of the most vicious strikes was at the plant on the West side. Not a very big plant, but a brass plant. They were running battle with the police because the company was running scabs in the plant. Now (66) and the Michigan area in which the houses were on top of one another. And they would split heads at the slightest provocation. And, of course, we had to run for our lives. Our escape was between the houses. And of course, the police would chase us behind with the damn clubs. It's a Polish neighborhood. The third day of the strike and the fights with the police, the fight started in the morning. The police started, we go between the houses. And without any real organization, although there was some, it so happened that on the back porch of the

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Merr: house, and they were close. There was only about four feet between the houses there. There happened to be a mop pail there full of dirty water and mop. The police came through. We run down. And when the police would be after us, the women would ⁽⁷³⁾ (laughing) with this mop. ^{catch them} right in the face! That dampened their spirits considerably. This went on for two days. Then the police gave up because they were on ~~our~~ property and had no business, no right to get into it with the Polish women.

PP: They just left those dirty pails in the way.

Merr: They just put those pails right on that back porch. And as the police fight starts they'd be back there. ~~And as the~~ guy come running through they knew the police would follow him. It saved that situation. There are many of these kind of ^{little} incidents in which they played this role. Most of the Polish women were from Poland. Could barely speak English. Could understand less. Yet, their heart was there. Because they got the respect and the recognition. This was their recognition.

So, when they talk to you about Polish and it's role in the early days, it was a very significant role they played. Many of them were leaders. But, it was that combination

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Merr: of being discriminated against, their religion, and the thing that gained their loyalty. A very important role in the early days of the union.

PP: How about the value of hard work to the Polish male? How did that affect the work of the Polish male in Chevy Gear and Axle?

Merr: Well, Chevrolet at Gear and Axle was a heavy goods industry. Most of the work was heavy. Maybe ten or fifteen percent was light work. Most of the others were heavy. With their foreign backgrounds, and you're talking now mostly ^{of} foreign backgrounds, and whether they came from ^a coal mine, and the background also which was hard, back breaking work. They were able to do the work and tolerate the work without harmful effects on their body ^{and all}. And work very hard. They were taken advantage of by the corporation. Because skills were very limited, and all you had was your brawn and your sweat to give for sale.

PP: Did you notice any difference between a pride in their work that the Polish people had as opposed to others that were non-Polish?

Merr: Yes. The pride in the work. The pride in the work went to all ethnic groups. Whether it was Germans and Italians and Ukrainians, Russians. They took great pride in their work. And if you

*Polish Work
Background*

Merr: wanted to find that out, just go to the bar they stopped after work and hear them talk. They took great pride, particularly if they were from Europe. That they were able to accomplish with limited background, with practically no experience with productive methods at all. Come to the United States and be able to handle these jobs. They had great pride in their work. They were responsible to many successful changes once they were organized and listened to, to quality of work.

*Image of
man
work*

PP: Do you think this pride has stayed with ^{the} succeeding generations of descendants from European groups?

Merr: Yes. I can't speak about the last five years because I've been out of the plant. Yes, the pride is there. Why do I say that? As regional director I wasn't very observant work things and saved a lot of companies with their advice on what to do; small companies.

One of the best examples of why the pride is still there with the younger generation: Bud was having difficulties in the late '60s early '70s. And there are many reasons why. They were completely demoralized; the workers, management and all. And had got the reputation that nobody at Bud's cared about anything. A

Merr: lazy bunch of people. And everybody was pointing the finger ^{at the} person. Bud took some drastic steps. They were also beginning to hire, under the law, Blacks. The president of the company of Bud came to me. I was the regional director and had participated in a series of negotiations which almost resulted in a strike, and was able to get an agreement without the strike. He had talked to some other people; management people. And asked that they have lunch with Norm Matthews and I, who was the director of the Bud council. He wanted to talk about the situation at Bud's, where everything had gone completely to pot. And wanted to know if we had any thoughts on it.

And we had. We pointed out what we thought were some of the weaknesses. He accepted a number of our suggestions. After making an investigation, found out what we were telling him were true. He began to tighten up ^{on} his organization, which is management people. About a year later, he wanted to talk to us. He wanted to do something about lifting the morale of the people in the plant. We suggested to him, and the suggestion came because he said they seem to have no pride in their work at all. They didn't care. Which we challenged

Merr: him on. Said he was wrong. The problem was no recognition of their pride. And so they eventually gave up. Said what's the use.

Suggested to him a thing to do and your going to find out. I said before you do it, because I had experience on this before, that he spend some money and clean the plant up, and have a family day. Have the employees bring their families to the plant. "Ah", he says. "Nobody will come." I says, you're wrong. They have great pride in their work. And I said if you don't think they have pride in their work, why don't you stop in the bar across the street after work. Go in and just sit there and listen. And you'll hear them talk about their work and what their doing. You'll hear them, I said. And I don't know who's there. But, he did send somebody into the bar to listen. And sure enough, the guys were talking about their work. Having their beer after ~~w~~ork, relaxing, and talking about their work and what they were able to do, and how they did it. Of course, he also heard some uncomplimentary things about the dumb foreman. (laughing) He then called us and we suggested, have an open house with the families. I said, spend \$50,000, clean up the plant. Have a tent, have some prizes for them after they come through.

Merr: He reluctantly did that. And I said, when you have that open house, I want you to go down into that plant and watch the guy with his family come walking through there and then they stop. He'll be talking, he'll be pointing. You can bet your last dollar, that's where he works. And he's explaining what he does to his family. He did. And they had a dinner for the leaders later on. And he says, George, you were right. And he said, time and time, and (146) , and all of a sudden he would stop. And he'd be there explaining and talking about it and pointing to it. And he was talking about his job. He was proud of what he was doing. He was explaining to his family what he was doing.

PP: This happened at Bud. Did they ever do anything like that at Gear and Axle?

Merr: Oh yes. They've had open houses right along. That's where I got the idea. They had had open houses in the early part. They then ~~had~~ gave them up and they now have open houses again every year.

PP: I want to talk a moment now about the educational programs at 235. When did they actually start? Of course, I consider there are two types of classes, really. There are the classes ^{that are} pertaining to Union things. And then the other type.

Merr: The first educational thing that we got into was we had a educational director by the name of Shiff. (155) Shiff, a Jewish fellow, who was interested in education. When the International Union had their educational program for the winter months of 1938 and '39, he selected six of us from our Local. There was a quota for Local Unions selected. And he asked me to be one of them. And the objective of that session was, and I said this was three nights a week plus four hours on Saturday, which is a lot of time. Because I'd just leave work, clean up and beat it. They trained us in parliamentary law, public speaking so that we wouldn't get tongue-tied, grievance procedure, contracts construction, and some seniority. Although these fellows weren't too familiar with seniority. The objective was to train us so that we could then go into the Local Unions and teach. Particularly, the interest was on parliamentary law so that they could effectively run a Local Union. Not (166) , but for running the Union the proper way.

So, I taught parliamentary law in 1940, latter part of '39, 1940. This was the original beginning. Then they started educational courses in Local Unions. And so, we

Union
course.

Merr: participated in that. From that grew this whole thing of voluntary work.

PP: The more recent courses ^{that} they've had in pre-retirement, did they have those type of courses when you were director?

Merr: Yes. I was involved in pre-retirement programs that we had. I'm surprised that they don't have them now. Although, a lot of the majority of people don't care about it. But ^{there are} a lot of them ^{who} do.

PP: I think they still have them. I just don't think that a large number of workers take advantage of them.

Merr: That's true, unfortunately, they don't. Because they think they have the answers. And then they find out they don't.

Well, the educational features began with that little start of training forty or forty-four of us to go out into the fields. And this is mostly the metropolitan Detroit area because that's where the membership was. And then going to the Local Unions to train them to run the Local Unions and how to handle grievance, and things like that. That's how our educational program started.

From that, of course, we expanded into a big operation.

PP: Let's talk a moment about some of the new

PP: technology. Like use of computers and robotics, use of robots in automation at ^(heavy) Gear and Axle.

Merr: The robotics now, is another term. There's been a half a dozen terms.

PP: Let's talk about automation first.

Merr: The first automatic equipment that I experienced myself, personally. And I had this privilege when I was working at Ford's. In 1929, they brought in a machine from Germany that did seven operations. I was one of the four young men selected to run it. It was a privilege. I don't know why I was selected to run it, but it was just a privilege. And we worked with the German engineers. That was my first open experience to it.

GM introduced automatic equipment. We used to call it automatic or mechanical handling. In the '30s. At Gear and Axle, they brought in one year, during the ambulatory thing, a punch press that did six operations. Which was all mechanically handled. They had different names for it, but it's all the same thing.

PP: What was the effect on the person working in the plant who had been used to doing individual operations? How did he react?

Merr: The first reaction was he was concerned that it might take my job away. But they did it on such a small scale. The individual reaction?

Merr: The guy who was put on that job had the best job in the world. 'Cause it took all ^{of} the physical effort out of it. I was put on this press in Gear and Axle that came in with six operations. I used to work a punch press on wheels. There would be six of us working on it in six different operations. It all came under one. I was given that job. The toughest job I had was staying awake. All of the physical effort was out of it. The job was to watch that it kept working; that the arm pushed it through, that the dies didn't stick. The best job in the world. There was not the concern about it until they began to use it more and more and more. It's not new. The automatic equipment, and that's really what it is, has been way back since the '30s.

PP: Now with this new technology they call robotics, which is actually the use of robot equipment. When did that really come into Gear and Axle?

Merr: In the '30s.

PP: In other words, a progression from the automation type.

Merr: All of this automatic stuff has to have high volume. It's so expensive, you have to have a high volume. You can't use it on small

(217) . But, I saw the advent of

Merr: automatic welders. Saw the advent of automatic sprayers. The large volume of changes, I think has been in the last ten, twelve years.

And this came about because Japan was rebuilt. They started from scratch. They didn't have the old equipment that you don't go out and buy new. And they started all new. So, all of the modern ideas were there. So, when they bought equipment, they bought new automated equipment. In the United States, to buy new automated equipment came about through attrition. When the old stuff wore out, they had to buy a new one so ^{then} they brought in new modern ideas; modern equipment. I'll bet if you talk to the industrialists, you'll find that was the, well, (229) . Was the fact that they wouldn't put out the money 'cause they still had all the equipment that could do the job. But they bought new equipment as they went along. Automatic spraying came in to being in the 1950s. Mechanical handling of roofs and stuff at GM and other plants came in the '50s.

We call this mechanical handling. Now they call it robotics. They had another name here about two, three years ago. What ^{the heck} was it? It's all the same principle.

PP: What about the use of computers?

Merr: Computers again are another mechanical operation. They first began to talk about computer tapes at GM Tech Center. This was fifteen, twenty years ago. But, then again, it does the same thing. It does it by tape. The original (240) equipment did it by a wheel that went around in a circle. With advanced engineering, you were able to put all this stuff where it operated the machinery from tape with holes punched in it, and so forth. So that's the advanced computer thing. And of course, the last ten, fifteen years, they've gone sky high with the thing, completely. More and more people wanted it. But the ideas ^{were} not new.

I mentioned to you the first robot, the Rizzo brothers in the '30s. They exhibited it at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1933. Well, it wasn't a (250) but a (251) who could take a straight walk if there was a (251) there, it would come over. And they had a (251).

PP: Now, you said this was the Rizzo brothers.

How do you spell Rizzo?

Merr: R-I-Z-Z-O. I don't know what happened to them.

PP: And they were from Gear and Axle?

Merr: They were tool makers at Gear and Axle. And they came up with this thing. And they then had their own plant on the West side. I don't

Merr: know if it's still in operation or not. Never got the recognition because they didn't have the (256) . They had this mechanical man in 1933. The names have changed, but what we're doing now, we're just improving upon old ideas that came along.

And Japan did more of the automatic because they were building new plants. Whole new plants, new equipment. They had the advantage over us because they didn't have the old equipment (263) .

PP: How do you feel about Japanese and other foreign cars being imported into the United States and it's effect on the auto industry?

Merr: There's been a great deal of talk about the percentage has been moved up. The percentage does move up because of the reduction in the volume. And nobody was concerned when we were selling ten million cars (269) . They weren't concerned about Japan selling a million and a half cars in the United States. Because they were selling everything they could build. Japan, they have no master of technology or anything else on a certain thing. GM painted Japan as having a reputation of putting out junk.

End Side 1, Begin Side 2

The younger Japanese leaders, particularly the

Merr: post-war, Second World War leaders, very sensitive about this reputation of putting out junk. So, they established a course to train their young people in engineering and others to get away from this thing. To pay very close attention to quality. Because of this (277) from the junk, very closely. They contrast that to the American Auto builders. And they're not happy about this, even though they do agree to it occasionally.

The United States was on an incline; selling everything they could put out. Quality meant nothing. This happened about fifteen years ago. Maybe a little longer. 'Cause we had strikes of grievance of this kind with our people protesting inferior stuff that they had to put on the cars. But, they sold everything they could put out. And they didn't care. Well, the end result of that is, when Japan began to put the good car out; the small car being very successful as far as riding quality and stuff on the West coast because there was no ditches and ^{no} chuck holes and stuff like that to ride. So, you could ride very comfortably. Well, now the good car began to get a reputation as a good automobile. And the U.S. customers were griping more and more about this damn piece of junk.

Merr: And the huge joke used to be about you buy a Chrysler and the first thing you have to do is put the door back on. And then the other thing, and this is true of all of them. My daughter has a Chevy Nova, a 1976. I checked it out. And on the panel inside that holds the windshield, (286) . On the left side, it fits very good down to the column. But the right side is (287) .

It raised my curiosity because we were beginning to feel Japanese competition. This was in '76. But when I went to ~~the~~ ~~super~~ market out there, every Nova I saw, well, I'll take a look. Everyone had that gap in it on the right side. Instead of taking the time to correct it when they made the mistake on their die, (289-290) .

End result, they lost the confidence of the United States buyer.

That's one of your biggest problems today. They are beginning to put out a good automobile. In my opinion, it's going to take five years to gain the confidence back

(292) . Secondly, they didn't go into the small car because they were making a lot of money on the big one. It was only when gasoline prices doubled and tripled in 1973 ~~that~~ they became conscious of the low mileage. But,

Merr: here Ford again made a (294) statement that they wouldn't. That's why Ford's in so much trouble.

The competition of Japan, nobody was concerned when we were building ten million, because it was only ten percent of our sales. The figures, percentage is very high now. But, it isn't any more cars. In fact, they're selling less cars than they did three years ago. Japan's worried about their cars piling up in the United States, and not selling. They sold 1,600,000 cars. Well, 1,600,000 cars over eleven, twelve^{million} sale years plus 13%, I think it was, they still sell a million and a half cars in the United States. But, a million and a half in a six million sales year gives you 23, 24%. They're really not selling any more cars. But, they're selling a higher percentage. And I (301) what all of these people are talking about. I don't see that figure being reduced, significantly until two things happen. One, increase in auto sales. Where we get a higher percentage. And they convince the American public that they've got a good car. This is my personal opinion. And I can't see anything on the horizon that should change it.

PP: Well, thank you. That's a very nice note to stop at.

End of Interview.