

CHESTER  
MIENALTOWSKI  
*Paperfitter  
Hobart (R-30)*

Chester Mienaltowski  
11651 Dwyer  
Detroit, MI 48212

(Interview: June 1, 1982 at Local 235)

PP: I am <sup>Mr</sup> talking with Chester Mienaltowski. He's a very active retired worker, Local 235. Mr. Mienaltowski, when were you born?

CM: November 19, 1912.

PP: Where were you born?

CM: West <sup>Rutland</sup>hampton, Vermont.

PP: Oh were you. You're not from this area then?

CM: No I'm not.

PP: Are you second generation?

CM: No, my dad brought me over when I wasn't even on the boat. I was born in this country though.

PP: Oh. So your mother was pregnant?

CM: *"Seeded there, born here"*  
Right.

PP: They went right to <sup>Vermont</sup> ~~Detroit~~, your parents?

CM: No, to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland I think it was, and from there they went to West <sup>Rutland</sup> Vermont.

PP: What made them decide to come over here?

CM: Well, they figured this country was ripe and ready and rich and all its goodness they heard in Europe so they came from Poland and my <sup>Dad</sup> ~~father~~ worked in the marble quarries in Danbury, Vermont. At that time, the company had company homes and this is where he worked and received a <sup>company</sup> ~~ticket~~ <sup>certificate</sup> to buy his food and stuff like that. And the wages were very small.

PP: So they finally decided to come <sup>here</sup>.

CM: Well, my dad came <sup>first</sup> here and the rest of us, my mother and

the three of us, my sister, brother and I, stayed back there <sup>in Venice</sup>  
And my dad came here and he found a job at the Ford Motor  
Company at the River Rouge and he was there working in ~~the~~ <sup>a</sup>  
foundry. Later he brought us over here.

PP: Do you remember what year that was?

CM: I would say when I was <sup>about</sup> six years old, seven, six years old.

PP: Did you speak English then, when you were six years old or  
just Polish?

CM: I learned the English language from these children here <sup>when</sup> ~~on~~  
<sup>we lived on Grayling</sup> and then I went to kindergarten at the Holbrook  
School on <sup>street</sup> ~~I think it's~~ Alice. I learned to speak English  
there.

PP: Is <sup>Grayling</sup> in Hamtramck?

CM: Yes, it's in Hamtramck.

PP: I suppose in those days, Hamtramck was very Polish?

CM: Ah yes. Hamtramck was predominantly Polish and German at  
that time. ~~Of course~~ I was educated at the St. Florian  
School and I went to high school at ~~the~~ Hamtramck High  
School. Part time, ~~of course~~, because I had to work.

PP: What kind of <sup>job</sup> ~~work~~ did you start at?

CM: Well, when I was twelve years old, I worked in the Kroger  
Store and the A&P Store, <sup>part</sup> time for a friend of ours  
who was a manager at that time. And, of course, the  
years went by and I became one of the youngest relief  
managers <sup>for the State of Michigan</sup> in the Kroger Company. And, of course, times  
were slow and I did seek employment. But living in  
Hamtramck, politics were great at that time, <sup>and</sup> I was in-  
volved in politics. When Mayor Levandowski became the mayor <sup>of</sup>

he took three of us down to Plymouth and <sup>immediately</sup> we filled out applications and lo and behold I had a job already waiting for me. <sup>But when I</sup> Came down to Chevrolet Gear and Axle in <sup>December</sup> January 1934, <sup>they were not hiring anybody I came back later I was</sup> and ~~my starting date was~~ January 8, 1934. Actually, my <sup>during</sup> ~~starting~~ seniority date was moved up to January 11, 1934.

After that portion, I was involved more or less in the union because I helped in the organization of Emile Mazey's group, <sup>(the Bridge Butty P)</sup> that was ~~local 3~~, Dodge Local 3, and then local 212. And, of course, from that point on I <sup>got</sup> ~~became~~ interested.

PP: Can you describe the conditions at the plant before the union came in?

CM: The conditions in the plant? They made us work from 6 to 6, <sup>I worked it</sup> the graveyard shift <sup>was</sup> you might say, from 6 to 6. <sup>carried a</sup> And it was in plant 3, ~~dirty~~ housings, dirty jobs, they rushed you, ~~it was no...as far as assurance of your job...~~ if the foreman liked you you had a job, if he didn't like you, you stayed home. <sup>you</sup> Might say this, ~~Many times we went into work when we were scheduled to work,~~ <sup>whenever</sup> in the morning or in the evening <sup>like</sup> I was scheduled from 6 to 6 <sup>shift</sup> I'd go in there to work at 6:00 in the evening and I'd sit in the lunchroom until they called me to work. If there was no work, they'd send me home. You'd go home and come back tomorrow. And there was no pay for it. It was just two or three days per week in that area. So...

PP: So how did <sup>you</sup> ~~they~~ eat in that area?

CM: Well actually they had someways and means I suppose. My father was working at that time, <sup>not</sup> so I stayed with my father.

Hstory

So actually it wasn't so hard on some people. A lot of people lost their homes during the depression though. My dad I ~~guess~~ he was just fortunate enough I imagine <sup>maybe</sup> because he had a steady job over at Ford, and he <sup>was mean less</sup> became a leader once he got used to the work over there. But he worked hard, <sup>10 a</sup> and twelve hours a day. But, going back to myself, of course I was young and whatever I made I gave ~~back~~ to my parents. I was given so much allowance each week. And you might say if I needed any money I'd get it from them. Things were not what a lot of people think in the plant in say, 1934, 1935. In 1936 it started getting a little rough because you had no seniority; they could lay you off any time they wanted to. They could put you out in the street. But if <sup>whoever</sup> a worker brought a chicken to the boss, or <sup>painted</sup> mended his barn or <sup>painted</sup> repaired his garage, you kept your job. And this is a true fact. <sup>any bracket</sup> Any guys my age or ~~back~~ who worked during those same years would tell you the same thing I'm telling you. That it was rough. But I ~~could have~~ never had to of course... I'd just tell them, the many times I was asked, that's just for anybody, I couldn't do that. <sup>anybody</sup> Still, I held onto my job. But when the union <sup>started into</sup> got widely involved in June 1936, <sup>we</sup> they started to sign up a lot of working <sup>in</sup> men here, <sup>underground you might say, by</sup> and there. They were talking to young fellows, we were all young then, and one by one they would sign each other up. And ~~we'd say this is going to be the time...~~

PP: Were most people Polish in this plant?

CM: Well there <sup>was</sup> Polish, Lithuanian, there was a mixture of ethnic groups you know. At that time in the Gear and Axle Plant, I would say that they had a majority of 50, 40, 35... Poles were hired predominantly because they <sup>company</sup> knew they could

be ~~relied on to~~ do the hard, manual work. That's what they used them for. And when the word went out that we were supposed to strike, well how could you strike because you didn't have <sup>a</sup> no contract or anything. Eventually they signed an agreement, a one-page document, with General Motors Corporation, and that was the living document that recognized the union at that particular time. Then, ~~be that it~~ may <sup>as</sup> that I was of course one of the guys that did a lot of signing up of members, ~~and~~ at Dodge Local 3, the fellows made me the first Chief Shop Steward. At that time I was a job setter <sup>on</sup> at a radius rod job in Plant number 3 and of course the bosses didn't know about it.

PP: Did you know anything about collective bargaining then or grievance procedures?

CM: Well, I did know something about collective bargaining and I knew about the rights of <sup>the</sup> workers. ~~Look at it that way.~~ I knew that if somebody was aggrieved he called it to the committeeman. At that time, if somebody had a grievance, you had <sup>could not get</sup> a committeeman on the job. You had to wait until after work to get the committeeman.

PP: That was in the contract?

CM: That was in the contract. <sup>But</sup> I can remember Stanley Grinsky's father <sup>who</sup> at that time was one of the great organizers and union man. Of course he was involved in the great <sup>Sit Down</sup> in plant number 2. <sup>But</sup> Going back to the <sup>crap</sup> structure of the <sup>whole</sup> thing, when we were given the notification to put our badges on, well we did put our union buttons on. Everybody put their union buttons on. Here I had a great big glaring white

badge with ~~great~~ big black letters, Chief Shop Steward.

~~They all came running over to me,~~ the Superintendent... *and they*

PP: How old were you at the time?

CM: I was about 23 or 24.

PP: What happened when the superintendent...

CM: Well, they came around and they asked me how come I got ~~this~~ badge on. And I said I was representing all these people here on the line on these drill presses and reamers.

And if they have any problems, they'll come over to me and ~~then~~ I'll come over to you and <sup>tell you</sup> talk about them and see what you can do about them. ~~Well you don't have to do that.~~ *they said*

before that I might tell you that this is how sly the company was. They knew that we were going to ask for more money.

So everybody we hired in at 58¢ an hour at that time, <sup>50¢, 55¢ or 58¢</sup> ~~most of the~~

Well they came down to us and said you're a job setter on these big drills, we're going to give you 15¢ an hour more.

~~to them~~ I was getting 73¢ an hour and that was big money. So the other fellows, <sup>got a medal on a line & it kept</sup> going down the line ~~they were getting a nickel or a dime and the fellow said he wouldn't join the union.~~ *so they*

~~He wanted to hold back.~~ As it was, they were all dumb- <sup>to cause I'd done</sup> founded because they all knew me and I knew them. ~~different~~ jobs in the plant. Then of course there was the thing

about seniority. And back in '37 it was pretty hard at the time; they were laying off people. They could not lay off a committeeman. They could move him from one plant to another plant. So ~~it was~~ in 1938 I was moved into the heat treat and that's the dirtiest job you can get. First of all,

~~I~~ was plant 1 on the ring gear job, Truck ring gear job.

~~And~~ I was a young guy ~~and~~ I didn't weigh much at the time.

I went on that job and from there to the heat treat. Of course, I didn't lose my status because I was still a committeeman. You didn't have the zoning at that time, only ~~for~~ representation purposes. When I went into the heat treat, I was a straightener in the heat treat, and all during that time I gave up the stewardship. <sup>So</sup> I gave it up during the heat treat and stayed ~~that way, the whole time, the status quo.~~ <sup>Statu quo</sup> ~~And~~ during the war, I was deferred because of the job I had on the furnaces. Every six months they would come to me and say I was deferred because you were essential to the national <sup>W</sup>artime <sup>A</sup>ct. Back then of course we did have a big strike, a skilled trades strike, in 1939. We had picket lines and milled around...

PP: You were still in the heat treat plant?

CM: I was in the heat treat, right. But I was involved because I was involved in the very beginning of it. During the strike, we kept all the bosses from going in. We didn't stop them with the exception of the superintendent and plant managers. I might tell you though <sup>that</sup> we had a big strike here at the Gear and Axle where we had <sup>no</sup> <sup>mayor</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>R</sup> reading at that time. and they went after us with the mounted police. As long as we were on this side of St. Aubin, we were in Hamtramck. And when we <sup>would</sup> <sup>go</sup> <sup>across</sup>, we were in Detroit, and they would back the horses up against us. Get us back. The company was taking pictures of all the <sup>workers</sup> <sup>who</sup> were marching. We had a good circle of marchers all around. They were taking pictures of everybody and when we got into the plants they wanted to get even with us. By the dirtiest jobs in

History

8

We fought them on the basis of seniority the place. <sup>^</sup> But we figured we had the right of seniority. Then we did succeed in holding them down so they wouldn't fire anybody, lay off anybody. But I do know one thing that the union did great for me because at the time when I was in plant 3 I was hurt on the job. It was a radius rod job and it hit me right in the groin and they carried me in to the first aid and <sup>wound up in the hospital</sup> had the shop committeeman ~~and~~ <sup>also</sup> ~~at that time we had~~ Kingsley and Gallagher. They helped me, because if it hadn't been for them the company wouldn't have given me the operation <sup>that</sup> ~~for what I had had~~ <sup>to have</sup>. So I know one thing the union did for me and from that <sup>day</sup> ~~time~~ on I became a great union activist and I still am <sup>call today</sup>.

PP: What other kind of jobs did you have?

CM: In 1947 I became an alternate committeeman in the maintenance department. I ~~went~~ <sup>got</sup> into the maintenance department <sup>because I put in an application as a pipefitter helper.</sup>

I became an alternate committeeman because the guys knew my background. In 1950 they elected me as a district committeeman to represent the maintenance department. That was <sup>to</sup> represent the second shift <sup>(in the hall)</sup>. I stayed in <sup>that</sup> capacity until late in 1953. <sup>when</sup> I was <sup>at</sup> large to be a shop committeeman. I was a shop committeeman all the way until 1967. Representing all the people in all the plants. My record speaks for itself. Most of the people knew what I was, what I did for them, ~~my background~~. I won hundreds of cases against the company ~~for them~~.

PP: Was the union primarily Polish at that time?

CM: Well, at that time I would say it was in the realm... well

at that time it was about 10,000 people here and I would say it was about a 50/50 basis. Later it ~~went in different~~ <sup>it dropped off because</sup> directions ~~because people got layed off...~~ <sup>were being</sup>

PP: It wasn't as Polish as Local 3?

CM: No. Dodge Local 3 was the heart of Hamtramck. Local 3 had the nucleus of all the Poles in Hamtramck at that time. But I did live in Hamtramck until...

PP: In ~~those~~ <sup>the early</sup> days when there were a lot of Polish men in the local, did the Polish ~~workers~~ <sup>workers</sup> tend to vote the Polish men for committeemen?

CM: No. I would say they voted their conscience. They voted not only the Poles, but French people were elected, Germans were elected as delegates to the conventions. <sup>and Black people were elected</sup> When you had a slate come out and there was a leader in the group, they voted for the slate. They didn't care if a guy was Black, white or indifferent. They voted for the slate.

PP: Tell me now, how do you feel about the Solidarity ~~issue~~ <sup>struggle</sup>. Do you identify with that? Do you feel pretty closely with what the workers are doing in Poland. There's been a lot of publicity about that lately.

CM: Well I was in Poland in 1975.

PP: Oh you've been...was that your first trip back?

CM: Oh yeah...the first time I went up there, with my wife, in 1975. And I might say at that time when I was there, there had been rumors that there would be a movement, a <sup>great</sup> big movement, ~~that would stand~~ in the years to come, That the Poles would rise up and demand their freedom. I ~~guess I~~ identify with the movement. But I wasn't involved with any

circle or group. I was there with my wife to visit...

PP: Since...oh she's Polish too isn't she.

CM: Oh yes, my wife's Polish.

PP: Since you hear so much in the television and newspaper of what Solidarity is doing or did last year, because they're not doing much this year because of the rules and regulations, do you follow...

CM: That's right!

PP: Do you follow that?

CM: I follow it every day. In fact I've got buttons for Solidarity (said in Polish) at home. I feel for those people because they're our kind of people, <sup>my</sup> kinfolk you might say, and they deserve ~~the~~ right to be free. This is an important thing in this country and we should help them because they need our help.

PP: Do you belong to any Polish organizations?

CM: I belong to one of the largest groups in the State of Michigan. Polish-American Senior Retirees of Michigan. We have a membership of almost 1,000, and we have meetings every Wednesday, at the Transfiguration Parish activities building.

PP: Is that your parish?

CM: That's right. And I'm a trustee of the organization.

And I audit the books. And of course I'm a member of the <sup>Dash</sup> ~~Vets~~ club, the Holy Name Society, and the <sup>U</sup>sher's Club and I'm a precinct delegate. I'm the <sup>oldest</sup> ~~earliest~~ precinct delegate in the 14th district, for about 40 years.

PP: What party?

CM: Democratic!!

PP: I thought so.

CM: I'm a Democrat. I wouldn't vote for Reaganomics. No doubt about it.

PP: How many kids do you have by the way?

CM: I had two boys and a girl. One boy, Tommy, died at 25 years <sup>(he worked for)</sup> in Gear and Axle of a heart attack in bed. I got one boy who's an engineer for Michigan Bell and a girl who's on the staff at Michigan Bell.

PP: Did they ever work in the plants at all?

CM: My son did. He worked in the plants at Plant 1 and then he went in to <sup>plant protection</sup> ~~architecture~~. He went to college at Lawrence Tech and then enlisted in the service and went to Korea. He spent 3½ years in Korea and then came back here and went to work at Chevrolet <sup>as</sup> ~~as a~~ plant detective. In the meantime he went back to school finishing out his degree in engineering. After he did get his <sup>engineering</sup> degree, he was an <sup>plant</sup> ~~architect~~. As a matter of fact he was an activist in the union too. When he asked for a job in engineering, they said they didn't have any jobs open then. So he told them he had to make applications elsewhere because he had this schooling. He worked for Cunningham and <sup>some</sup> ~~him~~ as an engineering. Saved them quite a bit of money on the projects they <sup>made but</sup> ~~did~~. They were only paying for 50% of his Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and he was a young man with a family. So when he asked for a raise in the benefits they wouldn't give it to him. So he said I'll take a chance somewhere else. He went to Michigan Bell and he's doing very well.

Ch - College

CM

*McDonald*  
12.

PP: How many grandkids do you have?

CM: Three. Twins.

PP: Twins?

CM: Yeah. Michael and Andy.

PP: They're his children?

CM: Yeah. My son's children. My daughter is not married.

PP: She's not married?

CM: No. The oldest one is Christopher. He's <sup>years</sup> 10 and plays soccer for Our Lady of Refuge.

PP: ~~Tell me did you...~~ People are talking now about changing jobs, not because they're laid off but because they're fed up. Did you when you were 35, 40, 45 ever think of changing jobs? Of going into another field?

CM: No. See when I went in there I was ~~28 years old~~ married when I was 28 years old. I was married in 1940. And in 1942 my daughter was born. I didn't think at that time of anyplace else but Chevrolet. Chevrolet was a good place to work, it was a steady place to work. A lot of people say no. But I say if you wanted a job and a steady job, Chevrolet was <sup>the</sup> ~~a~~ good place to work.

PP: How do you feel now about the people who decide, not because they're laid off, but because they just decide they want to change jobs, in midstream so to speak? What do you as a father and a grandfather feel about that?

CM: If they can better themselves, then it's more power to them. But if they have the security, security <sup>on</sup> one hand is better than two in the bush. So you have to weigh it that way.

PP: Let's talk a little bit about laid off workers now. There's big problems for them and big problems for Michigan too.

*Change jobs  
salin*

Can you tell me how you feel about these tremendous layoffs. Obviously, you don't like it.

CM: Well I don't like the layoffs because actually what happens is the country...well it puts itself out of business you might say. Even the union. When you ask <sup>for</sup> so much and get so much, then the company has to double the amounts so it can pay its stockholders. And then of course when it gets so high you can't get any more, then you can't go any further. That's why right now at the present time when all the imports have been coming in from Europe and I'd say California is the worse offender of all of them...because they have practically two to one of European cars on the road instead of having their own. Because maybe you see it's an aeronautics area where they make <sup>aerospace co and ag.</sup> implements and such out in that area, it doesn't necessarily mean that they have to buy foreign made cars.

PP: Well <sup>they have</sup> plants ~~in~~ that area, ~~they do have a~~ ...

CM: I'm aware <sup>they have</sup> they have a Chevrolet plant in that area.

But if you took a look at the Chevrolet plant, you'd find two cars to one would be foreign made to an American car. Why? I couldn't say. Maybe they would say because they are cheaper, or maybe because of the gas mileage. But you have to understand this. That these companies ~~here~~ moved there and made those jobs there. And then they started shipping things here, taking jobs away from people that belonged over here <sup>center hand</sup>

SIDE TWO <sup>re number of that</sup> PP: Do you remember that law? (does not follow end of side A)

CM: Oh, I have it upstairs.

PP: It was something like HR 5133. ~~Oh I can find it.~~

CM: You can find it. I just remember checking...I just ran across it in the paper this morning.

PP: What's going to happen to these men when their benefits run out?

CM: A lot of these people that have been here are going back to where they came from actually. A lot of jobs that they're advertising down in Texas, they're not as sweet as they think they are because ~~a lot of~~ <sup>some</sup> people <sup>who</sup> went down there, ~~and~~ came back.

PP: Do you know any Polish workers who went down there?

CM: No, not off hand. But I do know a ~~lot of~~ <sup>but a couple of families</sup> fellows at the ~~plant~~ who went down there and came back.

PP: These are non-Polish, right.

CM: Non-Polish.

PP: Came back because they couldn't find...

CM: They couldn't find jobs they were suited for, no.

PP: What do you think of some of these laid off workers getting some retraining, or learning new skills or something like that?

CM: I would ~~think~~ <sup>say</sup> that the best thing for these laid off workers is that the government would have some subsidy of some kind, so that they could go to school and learn the modern technology.

PP: What do you mean modern technology?

CM: Like programming. Well, IBM <sup>(calls)</sup> it the same thing. Space industry. This is ~~the wave of~~ the future.

PP: What about robotics?

CM: Robotics is another thing. There's a friend of mine's

son-in-law, he'd been laid off from Chrysler, He's in robotics and says it's the thing of the future. And he's the ~~only~~ one that I know is involved with it. He told me that he's doing very well and he's going to continue because that is the thing of the future. You might say that I've seen a ~~lot~~ of these one-eyed monsters and they do things that human hands don't do.

PP: <sup>Reby</sup> They also have to be oiled and maintained.

CM: Yes, somebody has to push the buttons. They just don't go by themselves, someone has to push the button. They got some here in Chevrolet Gear and Axle.

PP: What about these <sup>Q</sup> quality of <sup>W</sup> work circles. What do you think about those?

CM: <sup>you</sup> Quality of <sup>work</sup> life. That's where management and employee ~~they~~ have ~~to let you~~ get together and believe in doing good work because poor quality work gets you bad business. Good work, good material and that stuff you only get the business you expect to get. We <sup>used to</sup> ~~prided~~ ourselves with our work. When we went into the plant to work, we made damn sure that every piece was good. If it was a bad piece, we wouldn't put it in because it was a bad piece. Sometimes the machines would operate and knock them out that way. Now, if you went in, and this is honestly telling you something that I know, the fellows have got it real good, I mean they have got relief <sup>periods</sup> ~~time~~, wash up time, they have everything that we never had. And yet I might say that they don't appreciate it, because if you take a look at why we have so much absen-  
teeism, ...

PP: Why do they?

gent  
salid  
QW

Work  
Pride

CM: Well, actually, it's the person himself who takes it upon himself to take a day off whenever he feels like it. I'd say on payday, the next day he might not show up if he's got money in his pocket to spend. It's the truth and they should be doing something about it. Even the union should be doing something about it <sup>these things</sup> because it hurts <sup>another</sup> every man's job. Because you're taking a job away from somebody else. <sup>And so the company</sup> This is really getting rough. This is why this quality of work life is ... they're straightening out a lot of things in the plant and <sup>doing a lot of</sup> this is good. And I'm sure because <sup>they're</sup> you're getting a lot closer together. You're working together. It's not dog-eat-dog anymore.

PP: What about the Polish worker who gets laid off and he's the man of the family and his wife's working or maybe she isn't, maybe his kids are working and contributing to the house...

CM: The upkeep, yeah.

PP: Here's this man who's been working all his life. He's good and been a <sup>stable</sup> steady worker and suddenly he's laid off and his benefits are running out. How do you think this man feels? Do you know anyone in that spot. How do you feel as a family man?

CM: <sup>Work</sup> As a family man, well the stress and he'd feel an injustice had been done to him because of the labor he'd put in. But you have to deal with the times and there is a resource for such people. And I would say that the State of Michigan is <sup>about</sup> not the most liberal state in all the 50 states. <sup>always</sup> That's the truth. <sup>But history, really,</sup>

PP: Do you think that so far the Polish families have not wanted

CM

to take welfare.

CM: No! They're on their own.

PP: Yes.

CM: But sometimes you have to swallow your pride.

PP: Yes, but this is what I want to know. What happens now to the Polish man who does not want to take welfare and suddenly his benefits are running out?

CM: He may not have an alternative. He has to seek help somewhere in order to keep his family going. Now he just can't go out and rob a bank, he can't go out and shoot somebody or stick somebody up because he's the type of person who is going to have to go out and do something to benefit his family, even if he has to take any type of job. These people will take any type of job in order to save his family.

*Imp of job to man*

*do something to adjust to*

*that benefit to*

*(Polish)*

PP: Do you personally know any laid off workers. I mean do you know any who are laid off now?

CM: Well, I'm more involved with the retired workers. I'm not in the plant. If I were in the plant I would know more about the..

*man*

PP: Well, I thought you'd know some fellows around you...

CM: Not necessarily. I do know a couple of fellows who would take any job they could get.

PP: They're laid off?

CM: They're laid off, from Plymouth. But I'll tell you one good thing. My neighbor next door, they're Polish. This young lad's been laid off; he had 18 years seniority. He's got a family. Of course his wife's a teacher and that's good for her, keeping up the family, with what little she gets.

*been*

*if it had not*

I think she's only a teacher's aid. He talked to me yesterday. He says, "Chester, I'm finally going back to work after..."

PP: What plant does he work in?

CM: Over at Chrysler on Jefferson. The Jefferson Plant.

Finally, they called me back to work after 14 months of unemployment. See, his benefits run out and all, so he's glad to go back to work.

PP: People like him, did they try to get any kind of new training...

CM: All I know is that he has skills of some sort. He putters around the garage a lot. He's got electric motors, electric drill motors and such. He has some carpentry skills, I suppose, he makes fences and stuff like that. He just happened to be one of the unfortunate ones, that's all.

PP: Well, what about, they had this TRA for awhile that people were taking advantage of and getting some training?

CM: Well, they were taking advantage of it. After all, they would say why should I work when I can get just as much staying home? That's the truth. Not to say it's not, because it is.

PP: How many times were you actually laid off?

CM: How many times was I actually laid off? One time.

PP: Oh, just once. When was that?/ <sup>(CM:)</sup> Back in 1935. So you see, I was a good worker. I was a good union man too.

PP: If you knew back then, oh if you knew say 40 years ago what you know now about the plants and so forth do you think you would still have gone into the plants? Or would you perhaps find something else?

CM: It's hard to say. Now actually, I did learn a trade while I worked for Chevrolet.

PP: Which was the trade?

CM: Pipefitter. See, I learned the trade, I was a job setter, I was a relief man, everything that you could think about until I reached a skilled trades job. I did all the <sup>dirty</sup> ~~bully~~ work as you might say. Like anything else, as you go along you climb the ladder. Finally, when I did climb the ladder, back in 1948 I believe it was, I received my journeyman's card from the UAW.

PP: You drive a Chevrolet yourself.

CM: I drive an '81 Citation. I've had a Chevrolet all my life. Ever since 1936 I've had a Chevrolet all my life. My brother's the same way. He worked for McClouth, no McLaughlin Steel, that one on Eight Mile Road...Jones & McLaughlin. He's always had a Chevrolet. Matter of fact, he drives a brand new one now. My son, he just bought one for his wife.

PP: What do you see as the future of the auto industry now?

CM: It'll bounce back. I'm looking forward to it bouncing back. There's no question about it. If we stop the import of too many foreign cars into this country. There's got to be some imports, I'll grant you that. But not to exceed a certain percentage so it ~~doesn't~~ take away the jobs of our people. And parts too, because parts are one of the most important things now.

PP: And yet some of the American cars that are assembled here do have parts made overseas.

CM: That's right. They have parts that are made in foreign factories. But I want to also say this. An American car

*Future of  
Auto industry*

that is made here and shipped to foreign countries, it costs you maybe three or four times as much as it would cost you here. So you see the volume of sales on American cars is very small. Only the rich in foreign countries can afford to buy American made cars.

PP: How can we keep things competitive if so many of the foreign cars are lower than ours?

CM: Well, say you have to match them in gas consumption...you have to match them...prices are lower in foreign cars. They have to be lower. But you have to match them in consumption of gas mileage. You have to get a certain percentage of miles per gallon of gas. This is what the people are going for. Now since the gas problem spiraled down, people are going into big cars. And now that the gas is going up again, you know it's just like an up and down deal. *An elevation, up* We keep going up and keep going down. This is how the industry works. You buy a big car you *have to* pay the price. You buy a small car, you still have to pay the price.

PP: What do you think about that new GM plant in the Poletown area? Do you think that will ever get built?

CM: I'm looking forward to seeing it built. But I'll tell you what. It may not be what many people think it's going to be. I have my doubts. They predicted 6,000-7,000 people that would be employed. You know I honestly believe if they had 2,000 to 3,000 people there, they would be very lucky.

PP: Why do you say that?

CM: I think the companies, *has* ~~they have~~ too much money and they have to do something to stop the union from making them stay the

way they were. They have to promise them something.

~~Hand~~  
Promise them the pie in the sky. And I think they're going to get just the shell, not the pie. I honestly believe that. I mean I hope not, I hope not for-the sake of ~~the~~ unemployment.

PP: What is the amount of seniority you have to have in the plant now to keep a job? What happens to young people coming up?

CM: I have to blame that on the government. See, the government says you can work now till you're 70 or 75 ~~till you can~~ retire. And I'll tell you, the best a person can do is retire when he's <sup>falls</sup> secure. And this is when I retired.

PP: How old were you when you retired?

CM: I was 59½ years old. I had 39½ years seniority. And I was happy. It was the happiest day of my life when I retired at that age. I've been all over the country, Europe. And I still travel.

PP: So, in othre words, you have your pension, social...

CM: Right. I had a good wife, a good provider and she saved.

PP: You didn't save?

CM: She saved. I gave her the check, everypayday. I wouldnt' cash a check. after I got married. Now some people might say I'm crazy, but I'm not. I figured if I had it in my hand, I would spend it too fast. I figured if I didn't have it, I would n't spend it. But I knew where it was at. If I needed it, I could go down and get it.

PP: What do you see as the future...given the fact that the young men today were not part of the struggles with the union you were in...how do you see the future of the local ten years down the line, 20 years down the line, when there

will be none of the old men around who were very active, who knew the union as it was?

CM: You ~~really~~<sup>will</sup> have the top echelon who will continue to guide this union in the tradition of the union itself. ~~At~~<sup>to us</sup> the present time you do have leadership there that will continue, <sup>that will pass on the general framework to the other</sup> The union will never go away, be dissolved.

There'll be a union...the first union that came about, the bootmakers...and they started the ball rolling. <sup>We</sup> give a lot of credit to <sup>one</sup> the man who <sup>saved</sup> ~~started~~ our union, John L. Lewis.

PP: The coal miner.

CM: That's right. He's the guy who saved our union. When we boosted out <sup>Homer</sup> ~~Emmet~~ Martin, that was the best thing we ever did. Well, I have to leave. I'm due back. I'm late. I have to call my wife, <sup>call my Region.</sup>

PP: Thank you very, very much anyway.