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Casimir Obuchowski

Machine Rep

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OBUCHOWSKI

Interview with Casimir Obuchowski
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Begin Tape 1, Side 1

This is Pat Pilling. It is June 29, 1982. I'm talking with Mr. Casimir Obuchowski of 241 St. Louis, Ferndale, Michigan. Mr. Obuchowski is Machine at Chevy Gear and Axle and a member of Local 235. Repairman

PP: Mr. Obuchowski can you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

Obuc: I was born in Hamtramck in New Grace Hospital on December 4, 1944.

PP: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Obuc: I have two brothers and one sister.

PP: Do they live in this area?

Obuc: My sister and my older brother live in this area and my younger brother lives in Florida right now.

PP: Was your mother Polish or part Polish?

Obuc: Polish.

PP: Both your parents Polish?

Obuc: Yes

PP: All four grandparents Polish?

Obuc: Yes

PP: Were your mother and father born here in the States?

Obuc: My father was born here; my mother was born in Poland.

PP: How old was she when she emigrated?

Obuc: About 15.

PP: When your mother's parents came to this area, did they come right to Detroit when they came to the States?

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Obuc No, my grandfather came over first and found a job and then sent for my *mother,* grandmother and my uncle.

PP: So they came right from Poland to the Detroit area?

Obuc Yes.

PP: What part of Poland were they from?

Obuc I don't know, I'd have to ask.

PP: Did your father's parents come directly from Poland to Detroit?

Obuc I think so.

PP: Was your father born in this area?

Obuc Yes, he was born in this area.

PP: Was he born in Hamtramck?

Obuc I don't know if he was born in Hamtramck because my grandparents on my father's side used to live up ^{near} in Mitchell and Nevada which is Corpus Christi Church now. I don't know if he was born in that area or someplace else.

PP: Mitchell being the name of a street?

Obuc Yes, Mitchell and Nevada in Detroit.

PP: Is your wife Polish or part Polish?

Obuc Yes. (to wife) Dear, what was your original name. Pinkose. Changed to Pinkos. Both parents were Polish.

PP: Do you have any children?

Obuc No.

PP: If you had any children, or a niece or nephew; eighteen years from now, when they were grown up, how would you feel about them working in a auto factory?

Obuc Right now, I can see there's a change in the auto factories. Getting an unskilled job in an auto plant I think is going to be ^{almost} nonexistent - it's going to be mainly robots and automation. The best thing I would say is to do what I did and try to pick up a trade somehow. Steer them in that direction or toward a trade.

*Chiv
Pinkos*

PP: Did your father, uncle or other relative work in an auto plant.

Obuc My father worked for Dodge Main and my uncle worked for Dodge Main.

PP: How is it you didn't work for Dodge Main?

Obuc They turned me down, they were on a decline then.

PP: Do you identify with Poland, feel close to Poland?

Obuc Not close but I do feel....

PP: Do you have relatives over there still that you correspond with?

Obuc Yes. My wife does. ^{and corresponds with the} But I'm not sure of the exact area.

PP: Do you speak Polish?

Obuc Very little.

PP: Does your wife speak Polish?

Obuc About the same

PP: Do you consider yourself a Polish American or an American?

Obuc American with Polish background

PP You mentioned being born in Hamtramck, how long did you live in Hamtramck?

Obuc About 24 years

PP: So you lived a good part of your life there

Obuc Yes. I lived there when I was younger, then I went in the service and I came back.

PP: What schools did you go to?

Obuc St. ^{dis}~~L~~laus (spelling?)

PP Do you attend a Polish parish now

Obuc No, not really

PP Do you belong to any Polish organizations?

Obuc No.

PP When you were growing up did your parents own the house you lived in in Hamtramck?

Obuc Yes

PP What street?

Obuc Called Nadel

PP Is this house your first home?

Obuc No. I was married before. This is my second home.

PP How many years have you been in this house.

Obuc About four years

PP Do you have a boat or a cottage.

Obuc Boat. 14 foot runabout.

PP Where do you take it?

Obuc My brother-in-law owns a cottage in St. Helens, that's where we have the boat at.

PP Where is St. Helens?

Obuc Ten miles the other side of West Branch.

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

Obuc NO

PP You mentioned two brothers. Do either or them work at Gear and Axle?

Obuc No. My older brother works at the Tech Center and my other brother lives down in Florida and the last I heard he was working for the Telephone Company.

PP Your brother at the Tech Center is working for GM?

Obuc Yes, he's an electronic technician so he's on a different scale - where I would work more with the production because of the piece work.

PP Have you ever worked in another auto ~~plant~~? plant?

Obuc Never worked in an auto plant

PP Let me ask about how you got to work at Gear and Axle, let's start with high school, at St. Lad's for example, what kind of jobs did you do on the side?

Obuc I had a Free Press route. My brother was an electronics technician. He went to a radio and television school called Rets and I went to the same school. Upon graduating from the Rets school I worked for a company called Robatron Electronics on Eight Mile and then I was drafted.

PP This is for the war in Vietnam?

Obuc Yes. 1965 November to 1967 November. Coming out of the Army I went back to Robotrons and worked there about six months and I heard there were openings at Chevrolet in their skilled trades department. I took the test and think I scored second in Machine Repair.

PP You were hired in from off the street?

Obuc Yes.

PP Because I know that GM had a policy of using an apprentice program and hiring two people from inside and one from outside - they may be doing it differently now. So you went in as a machine repairman, where did you go to school? Where did you do your training?

Obuc We started at Washington Trade School but there was an incident where someone was shot so they transferred ^{us} ~~me~~ down to Cass to finish that semester. And starting next semester everybody on the east side went to Macomb and everybody on the west side went to Henry Ford Trade School.

PP At what date do you date your seniority from?

Obuc May 28, 1968

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

Obuc Three and a half years later. ^{Feb-} 1971

PP How old are you now?

Obuc 37

PP Have you ever considered a different kind of job other than machine repairman?

Obuc I tried to be a foreman for a year and a half.

PP But in the same type of work

Obuc Yes. They start you off as a production foreman and move you up to skilled trades classifications

PP What happened?

Obuc It was 1974 and that's when we had a big cutback. I was going thru divorce at the same time, too. So when they called me back I just said no I don't need the aggravation at this time and place.

PP Have you ever considered any other kind of job? Basically, a different kind of job?

Obuc I always thought it would be fun to be an engineer.

PP What kind of engineer?

Obuc Mechanical engineer. I'd have to go back to school for a few years.

PP Have you ever thought of going back to school?

Obuc I've toyed with the idea. Seems the longer I stay away the less chance I have of going back and trying something like that.

PP Have you ever considered relocating in another state?

Obuc No, not really.

PP If you were laid off?

Obuc Yes, I probably would move *if there were no jobs around here.*

PP What would you miss most if you did move to another state.

Obuc Probably my friends and family

PP Does your wife work?

Obuc Yes, she does

PP What kind of work does she do?

Obuc She works in a small engraving shop engraving show pieces. She does machine engraving

PP Do you know of any of your friends who are of Polish background who are in the auto industry, specifically in Gear and Axle, who have gone to find work in another state?

Obuc No, I can't think of any.

PP You don't know of any Polish workers who have gone to another state or have gone and returned?

Obuc No. I know people who have left but they only _____ in Michigan. Co-workers who wanted to get out of this area.

PP In addition to your apprentice schooling have you had any other years beyond highschool?

Obuc Yes, I went to radio electronics college for two years. I hadn't taken any other courses except when I went to Robotron Electronics. So, that's basically all the knowledge I have.

CK. { PP At Gear and Axle, you have held no jobs then except as an apprentice or repairman. You've not been on production?

Obuc No

PP The reason I ask is so many people go on production first and then go to the apprentice program.

Obuc That's what they asked me when I first got there but I was working for Robotron Electronics at that time and we were working a lot of overtime too and I said no, I don't need a job right now, if I pass the test tell me.

PP I know this is a strange question to ask you at your age, but have you ever thought at what age you plan to retire?

Obuc 52, I'll have my 30 years in at Chevrolet.

PP So you're not going to stay any longer than that

Obuc I'll then have everything paid off for and enjoy a few years then

PP At 52 you'll be a relatively young man, any idea what you might do?

Obuc I have a lot of hunting equipment, ^{Camping} fishing equipment, golf clubs, bowling balls, baseball glove...

PP Would you just end up doing sports?

Obuc No, I'd probably work part time someplace, small shop work, ^{that} wouldn't interfere with the pension plan - it would just be a part time job.

PP In other words, you want to enjoy life?

Obuc Well, right now we're working six days a week, seven.

PP How many hours of overtime are you doing?

Obuc At least eight hours a week. At least a Saturday and sometimes a Sunday. Eight hours - with Sunday 16 hours. And if you get up early at five o'clock that's another hour and a half. So there seems to be more than enough overtime.

PP How many times have you been laid off?

Obuc Temporary layoff?

PP Well, or any kind of layoff?

Obuc Only once.

PP For how long?

Obuc For three weeks. Back when I was an apprentice. My last year of apprentice. The highest apprentice seniority got three weeks and the lowest two weeks. Inverse seniority system.

PP Isn't that somewhat unusual?

Obuc Inverse seniority system at Chevrolet. On a temporary layoff not a permanent. You know it's going to be three weeks or two weeks. It's ⁱⁿ the contract. A regular layoff they go the other way. You don't know, they call it indefinite or temporary type layoff where you don't know ^{how long it is} ...the lower scale employees first. So right now I'm in the middle of the seniority pack. I'm not high seniority, I'm not low seniority, I'm right in the middle.

PP So there are quite a number of people that would have to be laid off before they got to you?

Obuc Yes

PP So you feel pretty secure?

Obuc I don't worry about layoffs

PP How many weeks a year do you get vacation?

Obuc Three weeks. I ususally take about 3½ though

PP What if you were laid off. Say if some unforeseeable thing happened and they had to close Gear and Axle. It's possible, they're closing other plants. I don't know what GM would do without the products of Gear and Axle because I've been told it is a key plant, ^{Obuc.} a major supplier. They would be hard put to close it but then on the other hand they could always retrench.

Obuc They could phase it out in a number of years if they really wanted to.

PP What I'm trying to find out from everyone I talk to on this project is what they would do if they were in skilled trades and had a journeyman's card and had a certain number of years of seniority but they were laid off. Would you try to get another job as a machine repairman or would you try and get some retraining in something else?

Obuc Like I said, I'd get a year's seniority, a year's layoff with pay. I do think I could go back to tool repair - retraining, maybe get some skill in engineering of something like that. Or try it that way. I imagine somebody could _____ still be valid, especially the basic math course.

PP You mean the ones you took at the apprentice course, you could apply those to something else? Is that how they do it?

Obuc Yes. The basic math course should be good for mech? engineer....

PP So you would go back

Obuc I would go back for the first year. (I would n't just go hunting.) I'd take about a week of it. It depends when you got laid off and when ^{the semester was} dismissed ~~and when you~~ ^{going to} start and things like that. I figure in about a year I'd try to get some kind of retraining in, it'd be the best time to do it

PP How do you feel about men these days taking an early retirement. Even though they're still very young, just finishing their 30 years instead of continuing on. Do you think it's a good idea?

Obuc Yes, thirty years in the same job in the same place would qualify somebody to do something different, let's put it that way - another job or do something else

PP Do you believe then in a person doing something different?

Obuc Yes. Make statues even or something different. After thirty years I imagine.....

PP Affirmative action, has that had anything to do with job layoffs? Or is it still based on seniority?

Obuc No, I don't see where it effects it, it's based on seniority at our place.

PP Have you been active in the union at all?

Obuc Occasionally

PP Like what

Obuc I go down to most of the meetings. The skilled trades meetings and I've been to a few of the regular meetings. I was appointed as alternate committeeman for a couple of time, I do go to the meetings.

PP Did you perform any work as alternate committeeman?

Obuc Yes. It seemed that any time I went to the meeting they were penalizing someone ^{body} and I managed to get with the person and write down his side of the story and management's side and go into the office or 76 room as they call it and go through the procedure and find out what the penalty is or if they're going to give him a penalty. And if they're going to give him a penalty use your right agreements back and try to get it stricken from the record.

PP So actually how long were you doing that?

Obuc It was a Thursday and a Friday one time and a Wednesday another time and a Thursday and a Friday another time, here ^{and} there, spots.

PP When was that?

Obuc Two years ago

PP You haven't done anything since?

Obuc No. They've kind of changed things around, they have new alternates now.

PP You think you'll go back to something active and meaningful? ~~(or in the meeting thou~~

Obuc No, I'll support the unit and the people I think should run but I won't run myself. There were thoughts at one time

PP What about education classes that the union has, have you attended any of those at all?

Obuc No

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Obuc Educational classes, the ones I like to see are the ones the company sponsors.

For *p*numatics or something to do with my job)

PP You're not interested in collective bargaining?

Obuc No.

PP *stress* Management?

Obuc No. Nothing like that.

PP Do you think the union should have education classes or that it's a good idea?

Obuc There are probably people who are interested in it, for the basic knowledge, let's put it that way

PP You say you're interested in *p*numatics, have you taken a class in that?

Obuc No but when you're an apprentice they kind of let you do everything - hydraulics, *p*numatics ____ Now, what Chevrolet has been doing is bringing in an instructor from a company and they'll show us the system and how and why it works. And they did that for tube bending, *p*numatics, hydraulics. We're setting one up for the new machine in plant eight now. It's got a conical drive and we'll run through that with the electricians and see what kind of hydraulics and see what's on the inside, *adjust it +* stuff like that.

PP What plant do you work in?

Obuc I work in plant eight.

PP What plants have you worked in?

Obuc. All of them. I started off in plant four as an apprentice, then I went to plant three as a journeyman - plant seven too, plant six on occasion and worked in plant one at least a number of times.

PP Any preference?

Obuc The new plant we're working in now - it's all new machinery - just had a new *job* put in.

PP What do you think of robotics?

*Public
Educ* *Robotics*

- Obuc It's the future. I'd like to take a course in that too if they ever get enough into Chevrolets because it has to be either mechanical or hydraulically *operated*.
- PP Did you know that Macomb now has a whole program on robotic technology. They haven't started it yet. They're starting it in the fall.
- Obuc No I didn't
- PP I just found out today
- Obuc I imagine somebody will have to pick up a course because it's the new technology
- PP They used to have one or two course in it but now it's a whole program in it
- Obuc What is it a two or three year course?
- PP I'm not sure, but I could show you the little brochure afterwards. If you knew a few years ago about our current economic conditions and inflation and so on would you try it a different kind of way, I mean would you try something outside the auto industry *say in* the electronic field you're in? *was a*
- Obuc Getting back to electronics....the electronic field around here isn't very big field. There is some electronics around here. But even my brother after he got through with *grad* school in New York worked for General Electric for three years before or four years before he came back here. The only way they'll hire you around here is if you have prior experience. So he got his prior experience working for General Electric. And I had a chance if I wanted to to go to Massachusetts for a digital computer. It was a toss up between digital computer and robotron electronics. Since robotron electronics was here I decided to stay here
- PP Do you feel sort of attached to the Detroit area?
- Obuc Well, like I say the family is here. I'd wouldn't have minded going to Digital but I probably would have only stayed there a year or two,
- PP Where are they in Massachusetts?

PP What's going to happen to all these people?

Obuc You've either got to get some skills or training some place along the line

PP What happens to people who have great difficulty in school or can't get training too easily?

Obuc That's a tough question. I don't know if there would be anything open in the service industries, work other jobs or what. The thing with the auto company is that it is a fair, decent paying job, let's put it that way. Life's going to be tough for unskilled people, yes. How they would cope with that, I never ^{ever} gave it that much thought.

PP Because there will be young people growing up who will need job and perhaps if they don't have the capacity, coordination or mental capacity to do a lot of extra school work, or the coordination to do the work in the trade necessary, they'll have to do some kind of work

Obuc Well it will be ^{a certain amount of} unskilled. Like I say in the auto industry I see it not going down but leveling off because of most of the new machinery we've been getting in are what you call big transfers ^{machine} where you need an operator and a ^{setter} and a man on the other end to unload it.

PP How do you feel about Japanese and foreign cars?

Obuc ^{I never owned one} Well I can't make a judgement on that - people I know say they are of good quality. Don't think I'd buy one. Even though I know I'll have trouble with American cars, I still buy American cars.

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PP Even more than the quality, I was interested in how you feel about so many of these cars coming in and being sold in the U.S. which of course has caused an problem in the American

Obuc Yes, well then you get to whether you put a tariff on them or limit their numbers or do this or do that. You're starting to talk about big politics, big business now and actually while we're in this recession I could see a temporary restriction

PP ~~Um hum~~

*Four
important*

Obuc Just a temporary one. Not for a long period. (What we have to do is get our technology up to their standards - do as good a work as they do that's all)

PP Oh you think the problem is our technology

Obuc No. We're doing something wrong and I can't really put my finger on it - you really can't blame the workers because it's management's duty to see the workers work

PP What do you think then is the cause of the problem that so many people buy Japanese, French cars, British?

Obuc (I think the American auto industry has got a bad name for poor quality and people just aren't buying poor quality and especially with the price and the interest rates on cars right now. If I'm going to pay \$10,000 for a car I want it right. I've run into a problem with mine, I've taken it back to the dealer a few times - Citation 1981)

PP What kind of problems

Obuc Well, we had an electrical problem, and we had a paint problem and we had a transmission problem. It kind of ^{urked}, I did write a letter. They sent a little ^{sample} thing where you X it out and my wife wrote a little letter with it. *we supposed to write down how you feel everything*

PP Did you get a reply?

Obuc No, we didn't get a reply. I'm thinking about writing another letter.

PP Who did you write to when you wrote

Obuc I don't know, it was the service department where they had a little note about how did you like your service, stuff like that. *postcard this feel that*

PP Would you feel different about foreign cars if they were assembled in the U.S.

Obuc Well probably. Would you consider Canada a foreign country? We ship parts back and forth between Canada and the U.S. Some of the trucks and

Obuc cars are built in Canada.

PP Some people have mentioned to me that ^{some of} the engines for the Luv Truck was built in Japan. In other words, many of our American cars have had foreign parts

Obuc That's surprising but I can't see how they can build a motor over there and pay shipping costs to ^{bring} send it here. Don't see how they can make it cheaper than we can over here. ^{get} Getting back to the point where I don't know ~~if it's true~~ if it's true or not where the steel industry in Japan is subsidized by the government and stuff like this, is it or isn't it - you can never get a really straight answer. If it is then why doesn't the United States subsidize the steel industry here ^{so that wd. lower} or the steel prices here and then we can do the same thing. We've got basically the same kind of machines. The one axle I seen from Japan was basically like our T car axle. Nothing really different about it.

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for

PP So the axle was very similar?

Obuc The one I seen, yes. Very similar

PP But the way that they are made is different

Obuc I can't see where it would be. I think they buy basically the same type of machinery, the same manufacturers. We've only had a few manufacturers make the big transfer - their cost _____ stay on land _____ they're a roll-away operationm they've got factories in other countries

PP Where are their headquarters, do you know?

Obuc Cross⁽²⁾ I think is headquartered up here on Fraser - 13 or 14 mile road in that big plant. _____ I don't know if they're basically in Canada or if they've got other factories

PP And you mentioned one other one

Obuc LaSalle, I don't know where they're from. I know we've got a few machines *from them*.

PP You mentioned your had an interest in engineering - if you did decide to go back to school, where would you go?

Obuc Well, living in Oakland Country, I'd probably have to go to Oakland Community College. It'd probably be kinda rough getting started, getting back to school, though we do work with a lot of numbers there especially now since we are like a half way conversion with metric

PP Oh, you are converting to metric?

Obuc Yah all our new machinery and parts coming in are ^{strictly} metric

PP Is that hard or easy for you?

Obuc Well, confusing

PP I would imagine

Obuc When you're used to one set of numbers and once your're drilling you're always converting back to one set on inches and all (mumble) _____ but you get used to it

PP What do you think about young people these days being trained to say do more than one kind of job?

Obuc I don't see any problem with it

PP I mean do you think it's a good idea or a waste of time

Obuc I can't say it's a waste of time, I went to electronics school and ended up being a machine repairman. No electronics training never hurt me. I don't let on to it but I know how to read electrical prints

PP Why don't you let on to it?

Obuc Well, just something I'd like to know, you know. I've talked to a couple of electricians and ^{gone thru} machines ^{me and} made him. I like to read it myself so I know what's going on. So I can go up to a machines and say to myself is it electrical or machine repair?

Obuc Do I have to get an electrician or can I figure this thing out by myself, it helps sometimes.

PP Even though they don't know that you can read these prints is it possible that you can do the electrical part of the repair but union-wise can you do it, you can't do it?

Obuc Can't touch it

PP Can't touch it

Obuc Even if it's a very, very simple thing

PP Even if it's a very, very simple thing?

Obuc I can't say that I haven't done it but I have, yes I have with drew a circuit breaker and boxed it, restarted a motor a couple of times, yes I've done that. Circuit breaker I used those on a lubrication network - I know where the fuses are - most electricians keep a little box _____ mumble _____

PP So basically what you're going against are company or union rules?

Obuc Union. The company would love you. You can get rid of somebody that way. But like I say the electrical part is getting a lot more complicated - there used to be relays, circuit breakers - stuff like that but to make it safe now - new system - I'm kind of watching them but I haven't really got into it yet. We'll see how it works

PP You're involved in these Quality of work Life circles?

Obuc Not yet, we haven't got our group organized yet - mumble

PP Do you know anything about them?

Obuc No, just what people told me

PP Do you have any attitudes or feelings one way or the other about?

Obuc If it helps the job I'm all for it.

PP Do you think it will, from what you've heard?

Obuc In a way it does, *QWL* it kind of gets the people together - it gets the gripes out in the air and management can get a grip or handle on what's really bothering the people maybe. Maybe try to get a positive attitude. Sometimes a minor problem can be a major problem. The water fountain down here hasn't worked in six months. You've got to walk all the way to the other side of the plant to get a drink of water. A little thing like that can turn a guy sour on the job. *Mumble*_____.

PP Do you think these circles have a long range use or do you think they're for short term *things*

Obuc Well, hopefully there'll be a long range type - not only improved quality of work but improved quality of your work place - make it a more pleasant place to work. Some areas are very, very hot, muggy and not very pleasant to work in.

PP What about where you work now, do you have that problem?

Obuc No. It's older type plant that gets hot in the summer and cold in the winter. Basically they don't have *the* machines they used to have. It will be a little cooler -

PP How important do you think a man's job is to a man? Rate it say against his family or other interests?

Obuc Well, it seems like I've been working all my life anyway - from one job to the next. Four years before high school, I had a paper route - stuff like that. I think, like I said the only lay off I had was three weeks, so I don't think

I'm qualified to say if I'd enjoy a longer layoff, or I wouldn't be effected by a longer layoff or indefinite lay off. If I would have had an indefinite layoff I'd ^{try}~~have~~ to do something. And I think the major thing I would do is go back to school ^{for} retraining. Possibly go into computers because I do have an electronics background. I do have a little electronics and I can type so ^{there's} another skill I picked up along the way, too. But I imagine I'd try to find something though, I'd read ahead, let's put it that way. And right now, so they say, computers are the field. I know that there are a lot of them out there but I don't know if I could get into a field like that. I would probably need more training than one year would ^{probably} give me.

PP Well, thank you very much .