

“Made in St. Paul: Stories from the Ford plant”

Elvin (Al) Hendricks

TCAP retiree, ca. 1949-1985

Interviewed by Peter Myers, Sept. 7, 2017

QUESTION

When did you first get hired at the Twin cities plant and how did it happen?

HENDRICKS

I was working at Seeger’s Refrigeration that would later become Whirlpool in East St. Paul. And I got laid off and I had a friend that got hired into Ford and he said they’re hiring. He said why don’t you come down. I had 23 dollars left. So, I came down and the HR Manager at that time was doing the interviewing. Jensen was his name. And there were quite a few people signed up for the job. And in my interview, he said have you ever heard of Hendricks, Minnesota? And I said no, no I haven’t. I said I came from Briarville and he said well, Hendricks, Minnesota is where I came from and my dad was a country doctor and he talked about how they used to take the horses out and deliver babies and all that stuff. And I think yet today that’s why I—I ended up being hired because of my name. the General Foreman from he called the General Foreman was Chassis line and the guy come and asked me to come outside. And he asked to look at my hands. Well, I come from a farm community and I worked at other places and I had calluses. And he says do you think you can work in here? And I had an attitude thing about me back in those days I guess and I said I can do any job you have in there. So, and then, they hired me and I started out in the frame line. And then later down on Chassis and then ended up over in Trim. When—I’d been on transferring lineup it gave another nickel an hour increase.

QUESTION

Describe working conditions for folks like you during your first year or two there.

HENDRICKS

Well it was tough. You didn’t have much space to work in and they were very rigid, the management, back in those days. They wore hats and neckties the foreman and all that stuff. And there was a lot of pressure, a lot of conflict. But it just their way of discipline, the way of handling things. And we had a plant manager and I wished I knew his name. When he talked, he’d say, “I got my education behind a mule down in Texas.” You know. And he had an attitude. The management structure was of the old thing that “We’re in control, you know, and we’ve got power over you.” And there was no way of not feeling that. And they let you know that loud and clear. When I got over at the trim line, we had an assistant production manager. He would come and point to a person and go and talk to a foreman and he gets home, sent home for a day and a half. Really for minor things. I was at that time pulling the bodies on number one trim. And you had to set that thing so many inches apart, but once that body set down, you couldn’t move it. But one day he came with a ruler and went about three cars and talked to the foreman. And sent me home for a day and half for not spacing ‘em right. In later years they had a thing that set in there that you hit that and it stopped. But you did that throughout the different times and then I can’t give you an exact thing in the early fifties, Don Gilbert worked across from me later become a foreman. And Doug Keith was a headliner tuckup and tackup guy setting on a little stool inside there. And tucking the headliners up around the cars and he took a bite of a pear and Willard Tu saw him and went and talked to the foreman and they sent Doug Keith home. For a day and half for eating on the job. And so Gilbert and I talked and we said let’s shut this

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son of a bitch down. Excuse the language. But, that’s the term we used. And Ray Busch, the local President, come by and I told Ray, I said at 11 o’clock, we’re gonna shut this place down. He looked at me, smiled and said, ‘It’s about time you guys do something.’ I thought you don’t even believe me. So he walked by and so at 11 o’clock, I reached down and I shut the line off. And Gilbert got on one side and I got on the other side. And we went down number two trim and back down number one. And everybody circled around the dolly and stuff down there. And George Ways who came from West 7th I think he was with some motorcycle groups and that day he come up and he said ‘Don’t say anything to anybody.’ So, we stood there and pretty quick here come the union and management. The production manager, Willard Tu, all of them were there. And they told us we had to go back to work. And we just stood there and Jensen said who’s the spokesman and everybody kept quiet, nobody said anything.

And so then the union and management huddled and by the way, to go back just a little bit on those sending ya home, taking a day and a half wages, we were mad both at the union and the company ‘cause we didn’t know any rules. And but anyhow, they huddled and they come back and Jensen said we’ll give ya fifteen minutes to either go back to work or go home. Well we all went and grabbed our coats and went home and shut the plant down. And that was the first wildcat that they had ever had there. But it was just and then we got three days they worked out with the union everybody that was involved. There was three days that didn’t—wasn’t involved—that wouldn’t get off the job, they made them foremen by the way. But we each got three days off as discipline. And talk about talking at the wrong time. Ray Corpi was holding the hearings at that time. And he told me he said you get three days off. I says “Good, that’ll give me five days to go fishing.” And he said it’ll be Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and if you’re not here Monday and Friday you won’t have a job so. [chuckles] I thought, you talk at the wrong time sometime, so. But basically after a lot of labor strife and body build they had another work stoppage. And pretty quick, there was Willard Tu there was a meeting in Detroit. Ray Busch kept records of all of this stuff. And a meeting in Detroit in Bannon’s basement with Bob Killeen and—Bob Killeen, Ray Busch, and Bannon, I imagine his AA was there. And some people from Ford they went through all this stuff. [coughs] Excuse me. And but after that they fired Willard II. I understand that he later was selling shoes on Lake Street. And the Production Manager was really a jackass, they transferred him to Wicksom. They forced the Plant Manager to retire. And brought in a different team and that started the transition of

HENDRICKS

That started a transition for of improvement and then as we went on we had to work standard problems all the time. You know they would—if they wanted to cut out manpower then you had work standard fights, so. As the committeemen, we had to learn the work standards and they had time study guides there all the time, but you had to understand the work standards because they had rating factors, they had cutouts where they thought you were screwing up. So they wouldn’t count that, you know, and you had to get to know all of that if you were going to know where to put the pressure on. And so it was really an education became the part of the leadership and stuff. But I was it took I wasn’t elected right away, some three guys in body build they said they were going to nominate me and I better accept. And I says I don’t know anything about unions, you know, come from the country up north here and stuff. But once I accepted I think it was ‘57 if I remember right is when I was elected. And got to know the contract and I’ve gotta say this man Seckler who was when you went there, he’s the one that set the discipline. We were always mad at him. And I think everybody was ‘cause he was liberalation [sic] rep. But I looked back after years later, he was probably the best thing a committeeman had. Because

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they made ya study. You had to know what the hell you were talking about. And without him, he just loved to put ya in a box in a grievance meeting, well you know, blah blah blah, and you don't understand the contract. Well, he made you study so when you sat down for a meeting, you were prepped, you know. So, all of that stuff was such a great part of it.

QUESTION

Back to the time after the wildcat strike....the company sometimes had people spying on workers on the line.

HENDRICKS

They had steps going up to the toilets. And I forgot his name, but he was up there at the top of the steps watching us on chassis line. And that's how he let the management know that somebody was screwing' up or playing games or doing something wrong. But we'd be working' down there and he'd be up there looking around. [chuckles] And we'd kinda laugh to ourselves 'cause it looked like a crow on a branch waiting for something to happen. But they had all kinds of those things and like I said, Willard Tu walking' up and down the line and Trim and each department had somebody similar to that doing different functions.

QUESTION

So back at that time, what were the main issues you wanted management to address?

HENDRICKS

Well, it was the attitude. You know, if you come to work, and our wages weren't that much, but again our rent was not like it is now—80 dollars a month for a nice apartment. But a day and a half wages was tough. And to think that that by doing what you considered nothing wrong, that you could be disciplined, you could lose some wages—and it was just the attitude on the line where like Jack Lesserson on Trim told me one day “as long as I'm here, the day is going to come when I'm going to get rid of you.” And I don't imagine I was the only one. Different people up and down the lines had similar experiences. But he died before he fired me so I guess I come out ahead. But you know it was that type of situation. And then you know it just—different management had different foremen had and the superintendents let 'em get by with it became part of it, it was their department. And those days they were interesting to look back at, but it wasn't a pleasant place to walk into work for most people. Because there was always that tension there. And back in those days, before they forced the plant manager into retirement, the guys' true bitterness and you could see it. I remember the days when somebody slashed the headliners on the cars on the lines. And there were a lot of destructive things. And it was a rebellion against the management style. And that I remember the headliners that one time they hung 'em up across the repair hole and then they put “Sabotage” underneath of it, you know, and stuff. But they didn't catch who did the slicing of the headliners. But it was that kind of attitude within the plant that a lot of us made up our mind we were going to change. And we did. We brought a lot of change about. I don't know if we were militant. I was disgusted when I got was elected committeeman and got to understand the contract and read it under legitimate rules for Ford 723 under the work standard and health and safety. You could've built cases real easy and shut the plant down. You coulda struck the plant to stop some of that stuff. Use that many times at the bargaining table, well, we've settled it but we haven't settled the thing under the table leg. We're gonna get rid of that before you have an agreement, you know. It was that type of thing that coulda been used. In my opinion, in a lot of people's opinion.

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So, we became more rigid in a lot of areas and maybe they were rigid before they went through a lot of hellish years. When the unions first come before they set the rules if the stock wasn't in or something they sent the guys used to have to go stand out in the lawn. And then when they come back in, they would punch in and that part where they shut it down they didn't get paid for, and these were days before the union came about.

QUESTION

Is it fair to say you started to see a little bit of improvement in management attitude throughout that strike?

HENDRICKS

Yes, when we changed management. Once they got that old management out of there, they brought in a Floyd Fayson from Texas as plant manager. Jensen was there, they kept him. You could tell when you got into hostile meetings with him, when he pretty much agreed with you and didn't dare to say it he'd start coughing and go [makes coughing noises] like that you know and he—but he had to disagree with you but he didn't like the way management was doing things. You know. But Fayson brought a different attitude in. And I know when Bob Killeen went on the regional staff and a lot of 'em thought I was a little bit on the radical side and maybe I was. I really I had my way of operating the things that were acceptable. But Fayson and Jensen—Jensen called and said Mr. Fayson wants to meet with you. And so I went over there and Fayson said 'Now that you're taken over as Chairman, what do you want?' and I said, 'I want things settled with the Superintendent, Committeeman, and the Departments.' And any time our grievance procedure I don't know today where I got the figure I says anytime we got 28 grievances in the procedure then I wanna meet with you. And he says okay and then he says I have guts enough to run my Superintendents, you have guts enough to run your committeemen I said you're damn right I do. So we pushed the responsibility there and then we had very open discussions, not lied to each other anything, if there's a problem we could sit down and talk about it. And that attitude of that Fayson brought in on the management side just made a ton of difference. 'Cause that old management had to go. That attitude had to go. That old guy that got his education behind a mule in Texas. I was impressed with that.

QUESTION

Talk about two key people very instrumental in some of the progress: first Ray Busch

HENDRICKS

Ray Busch was a great president. I think the members liked him. He had an ulcer and he told about during the war when they built tanks here or whatever they built. But he said they couldn't smoke but he said I always had a ring in my back pocket from my Copenhagen can in his back pocket. And he said his wife didn't know I was chewing and he said so she washed my clothes and saw that ring in my pocket he says. And but no, Ray was very good and he did a great job as President. And the strange thing about our structure now—different Ford plants have it different. Here they had a president and building chairman. Well, the President was a committeeman working' under the chairman under our structure. And he was President of the local—chaired the meetings, signed the checks, you know did the business end of it. But in the plant, he was a committeeman. The chairman assigned him to this department just like you had assigned different elected representatives to represent different departments. But he was very honest, he took things quite deeply, problem areas, and I think that's probably where his ulcer came from. But he was straightforward and he wasn't afraid to take on an issue. And he I think I

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use the term Van Sickler making’ us educate ourselves—Ray Busch was a good educator on the contract. He grew up, he lived with it, he was in national negotiations in Detroit during the ’58 contract but I never could find anything bad to say about Ray because the union, the members, and UAW members meant the world to him and he did everything possible. In our union hall by the way, Ray Busch and Bob Killeen were in St. Louis and our union hall was designed after the St. Louis union hall. And they come back and that’s when they bought that little piece of land and built our union hall.

QUESTION

And incorporate Busch’s name on it?

HENDRICKS

That came later, near the tail end. But it was he and Bob Killeen. They came back and they were instrumental to bring that about, takin’ it to the Board, takin’ the membership and that type of thing.

QUESTION

Now talk about Bob Killeen.

HENDRICKS

Bob Killeen came out of Gray Eagle. His dad was a Ford dealer. In Gray Eagle. And he knew the old Plant Manager and he would—his uncle who owned the Ford dealership would come and tour the plant and order his cars, whatever he did. He liked to be recognized. And Bob came into work, he worked on the Trim line, and the Building Chairman we had later we beat him out of office, we didn’t know Bob from anybody. But we just wanted that other guy out. And I can’t think of his name right now. But anyhow, he was elected as building chairman. And then he was deeply involved in subcouncils and worked real close to Ray. And again, Ray was a good educator. For him and the rest of us. And I don’t know, he just fit into it and until they vote him out of office that one time as building chairman. The guy who run against him was the name of Krause. And the campaign slogan that they had for Krause was “Oust the louse, vote for Krause!” [laughs] That come out of somebody and in the skilled trades end of it. But that was a great slogan. And Bob was quite argumentative with some of the people on the line. On difference opinions on different things. And I think it built a negative towards him at that time. But Ray Busch and I said, when Bob comes up, let’s support him, we got him back in. And then then he at Bernan the regional rep who was our first President by the way retired and then Bob went on to regional directors. He went to the regional staff at that time. But he had a good history here. And he created leadership and I don’t know if he how—if he knew work standards and some of the things ‘cause he was never a committeeman. But he was there for your support anytime you needed it.

QUESTION

All this activity in the fifties happening during the McCarthy era.....did some people accuse you and your fellow workers of being Communist?

HENDRICKS

I think that a lot of people used that against Walter Reuther. And I think part of it came out of the CIO by the way. But anyhow, we had to once you had elected back in those days, the McCarthy years, and I wish we had kept copies—we had to sign an Anti-Communist Pledge

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before we could be sworn into office. Under those McCarthy years. It was just so ridiculous. And it just it just was talk about radical, some people even I'll use Ray Busch and Ed Bernan and George Bolin was a committeeman. They wrote a letter to Ken Bannon to see if I had to be sworn into office. Well, Ken Bannon was vice president of the UAW national Ford department in Detroit. And Ken Bannon sent me a copy of their letter. And his letter to them which told him I was properly elected and I had to be sworn in. So I gave that letter to Willy Hudima and some of the people on the Trim line. And so we came to the union meeting and I was sworn in, nothing was ever said about it after that. But you know with the wildcat, and maybe I was—or maybe I never left that kind of a thing that I—in Detroit I had some conflict there with some of the union officials because the treatment of people and a lot of people that didn't come out of assembly plant didn't know how we lived in the assembly plant and understand the assembly line. And I just—I felt that when you walked into that plant door it should be a comfortable place to come and go to work. And it shouldn't be a thing that you had to be watched over and bossed around. But I guess if you talk to my dad maybe I was that way as a kid too. But who knows.

QUESTION

When and how were you elected to the National Subcouncil?

HENDRICKS

Well, we had subcouncil meetings I can't even tell ya how many times a year with all the assembly plants. Well you deeply got involved with people we—like I mentioned different people from the outlying plants. we worked together real good. 'Cause you know we understood assembly plants and then we compared to how the rouge was treated, the number of committeemen to represent 250 employees you know, that type of thing. And we brought that forward. And then as the years went on, , they elected me as Vice President to subcouncil. And then I was elected President of the subcouncil. the other plants musta saw some leadership in me. And then in 1967, I was elected negotiator along with Sam Carr from Lorraine because of the amount of members we had. We were allowed two negotiators out of the that. And then we was into negotiations. Then I went through with the different unions like I said the rubber workers, they were going to lose their cost of living. Walter wanted me to hang on till he was done but they didn't. And then the steel workers I think worked out some agreement with top seniority people et cetera would get something. And the Teamsters were the four-cent cap, four-cent cap, and nothing the third year. And we negotiated that after the long, bitter strike. We negotiated the 8 cents. And then a pickup letter for the third year. And we researched it out. And never before did it ever hit 8 cents a year. But because of the economy because of different things, inflation it jumped beyond the 8 cents. So there had to be a pickup thing. And so it was just the transition into different functions that you got elected to and served those areas. And during that period of time, I got to know Walter Reuther very good 'cause he would come into the bargaining table every once in a while. And I was a little bit of rebellious because I wanted certain things out of the contract for the assembly plants. And Ken Bannon's AA come up to me and he said you've hurt yourself or getting' an international job and I said you tell Bannon I don't give a damn if I even fly over Michigan after I get out of here. And I ended up years later working' for Ken Bannon. So but he appreciated but it came—you could feel that the gels were there that they were going to close out negotiations. They basically came to agreement. And I rebelled at the bargaining tables so Reuther said let's recess this. And so then Bannon and I talked and I told him that the amount of relief et cetera then some changes in that 723 letter.

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But anyhow, he went upstairs and met with the vice president of labor regulations and come back and he says they're willing to give so many more minutes relief in the morning, so many minutes in the afternoon. And he said Al, that's not enough. Let's hit him for more. And he you know got right in with me. So he went up and I think we ended up with an extra 8 minutes' relief in the morning and the afternoon. And I could be off of that figure a little bit, but I'm goin' from memory. I'm 87 years old, so. But anyhow then I fully agreed with it and then we went forward and settled the contract. But Reuther had a thing that you don't have that today in the unions and I'm disappointed in. But and I think this is where a lot of things have been hurting them. Reuther said if we could not deliver a message to our members and to our community, we were expected to be part of our community. We spoke at universities, we did all sorts of different things. And I think it was very essential. And years later you don't wanna get into that now, but we used that as in the re-training and job placement programs, all kinds of things bringing' the community into it. And that was all very essential for all times.

QUESTION

1967 strike and new contract—set the scene and the major issues UAW wanted.

HENDRICKS

Well, the cost of living and then the other thing was the guaranteed annual wage. Before that, they had part of the guaranteed annual wage, I think about two-thirds. And what they would do you'd work three days and they'd shut the plant down for two days and you didn't get anything. So, we were rebellious on that end of it. And then the cost of living factor was key. And then of course I think at that time, we brought in the dental plan. We expanded each contract on the dental and different portions of the contract that we increased with the hospital, surgical, medical, drug and dental, you know. And that was part of it. But there was a number of things but the cost of living and the guaranteed annual wage and wages are always a factor. And—and that cost of living was one of the key battles.

QUESTION

So was there no cost of living clause in the contract prior to '67?

HENDRICKS

Prior to that there was no cap on it. Yeah. There was and cap is we put an 8-cent cap. If it went up to 10 cents you didn't get the additional 2 cents. That's where the word cap was. But before '67 there was no cap. And after these and then the next negotiations, they removed the cap and so the cost of living you would get what the cost of living went up. But because of all that with all these other unions and stuff we were in that kind of a box and—and like I said the history was there that it never went up to 8 percent you know. 8 cents or you know 8 percent type things. So.

QUESTION

Talk about the very beginning of the strike, couple days leading up to it

HENDRICKS

It first of all, before the '67 negotiations, they'd come to a deadline and extend it another couple weeks to work on it. And again, we as the elected negotiators, we said right up front there'd be no extension. We'd you know you'd build up that the deadline is X and then you'd get there and they'd say oh well, we're gonna go two more weeks. So all of us negotiators got together and

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we said when the deadline is here, you're either on strike or we have an agreement. So, we really set that deadline ourselves. Well then, as you lead up to it, you could feel it comin' on because there wasn't the energy lookin' for an agreement. In other words, everybody knew there was a complete disagreement. And it ended up that you notified the by telegram back in those days the locals to be by their telephone at such and such a time 'cause you would let 'em know when to strike. Then you'd pull your members out, set up your picket lines, and you sent these out prepared because basically it said it's coming, get your local prepared for it et cetera. And but it's just a way and then the strike we—we pulled the strike and shut down nationwide. There's some areas in GM, Chrysler, and Ford that they had to keep running. And I can't even tell you which units they were vendors. that fed into GM and Chrysler. And so, but they interacted on certain items. So but other than that, basically, it was pretty much everything went down. And then we would visit the locations and I came back here and at that time, , we had the gate I pointed the gate isn't here. But the gate that the truck drivers used to haul the vehicles in that were transferred in by train. We had that picketed and the Teamsters came over and met with us and to see if we could let them go ahead and and haul those out so Bob Killeen, myself, committee met. And we thought why picket the damn thing? Once those things are out, it's empty. So anyhow, I called the assistant plant manager and told him that we were pulling that picket line off from this. And to notify the Teamsters to come with their trucks and could haul those tru—cars out 'cause they had no impact one way or the other. And it kept us from having more manpower out there. So. They were able to clean out all the cars and haul 'em out to the Ford dealers.

QUESTION

How long was that strike?

HENDRICKS

47 days I think it was. Yeah, it was a long one and it was quite bitter and we had the strike assistance program and each location saw that their house had somebody out here to help out. And again the community and other unions helped out like we always helped other unions out.

QUESTION

Your role in those negotiations for those 47 days?

HENDRICKS

Really I was around Detroit and we would meet amongst ourselves. But it was really a pretty dull time until all of a sudden things started breaking and you set up committee meetings, you did this or that, and starting to put things together where things would fit. And to put those issues together that you could put together, and then like the cost of living and that guaranteed annual wage and stuff this things that were hard issues, you got all the other stuff out. So when that you worked on those hard issues and when they broke, then you could call conclusion to it.

QUESTION

What were the major achievements of that new contract?

14:36:12 HENDRICKS

Well as far as the guaranteed annual wage, we got 85 percent minus 12.50. Which is it was set up under the theory—now that supplemented the State unemployment. To make it up to this number. And by doing that, you figured how much it would cost ya to eat, how much to gas, you

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know, and stuff and that's where to come to 85 percent minus 12.50. And then the cost of living we come to an agreement on that. And then the changes and the amount of relief for assembly plant and different things if we put it all together. And it—it was a good contract. And people would say different ones say well look how you lost. But you look all the way through the history. There were sacrifices but every time there were sacrifices, somebody gained something. Like the '58 contract, they tried to force you out on strike. And Ford had three months' supply of cars. So and I was on the committee, Killeen, Busch, and we went into Detroit, we had a meeting. And so we the national Ford department we voted to work without a union. They called it had a name I can't remember but we had to go back to work. And that was I forget how many how many days that was. And the only way we could get off the job is if somebody had a problem they would call us. It was and then we'd ask as the committee men during that time. But it the I think that lasted for I wanna say 58 days but I'm not sure. But then the '58 contract came about and that's when the hell the hospital surgical medical came in. and we paid half of which was 3.75 and then in '61, the company paid all 1.64. It included a spouse and a retirement and as you go through each step, it improved the standard of living and for the worker, the security, and the family as it went through. So at the point that a person retired, if you signed the paper and take 5 percent off your pension, your supposed be covered for some pension, you know, that type of stuff that still exists today. But they were all step by step and even with the strike, it when you look back, it was something that had to be done. It was part of history, it was part of building the future.

QUESTION

So it was about cost of living, benefits.

HENDRICKS

Yeah, that was really the key. And then after that we had to go into the locals each local the international reps I wasn't one at that time had to go and make sure all the local agreements had passed et cetera. 'Cause we still had some locals out on strike that did not have their local agreements tied up. So they had to be tied up. But it was very few. And they folded in real quick.

QUESTION

How would you compare management attitude in late sixties to fifties?

HENDRICKS

I think it became looking' for solutions. And you had pretty much a change of management throughout the whole Ford system. And I think they started looking for solutions instead of somebody to blame I guess. That's the term I like to use on that. 'Cause it and even in later years after we started later programs the supervisors you know they'd have a problem with say some stock that would come in that wasn't right. And if they would tell the general foreman then it would look like he wasn't doing his job and the general foreman looking back the term I use is afraid to talk to the superintendent the next one et cetera. So it impacted the quality it impacted the atmosphere in the workplace by somebody looking' for somebody to blame instead of looking' for solutions.

QUESTION

Briefly explain how the relief system works for people who don't know

HENDRICKS

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Back in the old days they didn't have doors on the bathrooms—and sometimes they'd go up there and have a guy stand up and see if there was something in the stool. But that was in the earlier days but no, how the relief works is you had a relief man it was we called him group 3 or whatever. Because it was a fifteen-cent increase if you were a group 3 utility. And then you were assigned so many workers and you went from one to another. And they would have X amount of relief in the morning and in the afternoon. And then if they had to hit a bathroom even after they had the relief, somebody had to fill in while they run to the bathroom. But it was set up to get your off the line. Where you could set and had some free time. And have a bite to eat or something like that.

QUESTION

Didn't you work as a utility for a while?

HENDRICKS

I was utility all the way through. In body build I worked as a utility group 3. And I was temporary. They called it temporary because I—somebody was gone and they gave me a temporary group 3. So I relieved guys on the door fitting lines and different places in body build. And once then when I was elected committeeman, Bob Killeen says Van Sickler wants to see you. And under our contract when you're elected that's your classification. Back in those days you couldn't do—you stayed if you were elected for 20 years, you stayed at that rate. Well, got in there and Van Sickler said, you're a utility group 3 you're really not entitled to that. And I says well, I understand the contract says I stay where I am. Well he said if you stay where you are how do you feel. I said I feel I'm not getting' paid enough. So he looked at me and then that ended the meeting. So I always was utility group 3 until I was laid off from the international. And went back to body build for a short period of time. And then I—I was changed to utility, permanent utility group 3. And I worked there for a short period of time and they asked me union was having some problems, and they ask if I would work for them as their international representative. I contacted Bannon in Detroit and he said I'll put you on leave of absence. From Ford. Go ahead and work for them. So I worked for them and I was assigned different areas. In Minnesota and then I was assigned to Iowa. And in the paper down there, I got tangled up with some of their politicians and I was organizing the county employees and holding meetings. And I got close to a newspaper guy. And he started giving me information about how they would force for fundraising for their people they elected, they would lay a thing on their desk and say you either--they—you either sell it or buy it. In other words, if I put that on your desk and it was 50 dollars you had to raise, if you didn't get volunteers to give you money, you had to use it out of your check. Well the newspaper guy let me know that. And a lot of other things that he fed me. And so I started using that. And I used it as organizing. And then we got into the bargaining session. I brought that onto the table. And the I'm jumpin' around but anyhow I brought that into the bargaining table about them forcing people to spend money, et cetera. And they one county guy in the newspaper called me an out of state labor goon. I thought that was I didn't know if it was a compliment or not.

But anyhow to get negotiations going after I had so many members signed up the top guy the county commissioners I guess—they had another title management dealing with the Teamsters had worked there and stuff. So I had a good friend down there from the UAW. And I found out who got funds for politicians, which politicians got 'em. Well three out of the four did. So I invited 'em out to dinner and I said eat what you want, drink, we sat there having a good time. And I said now ask me how different international reps got down here. And you guys met with

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him, you were very polite. Now I wanna tell ya something—if you don’t end up if we don’t end up working together putting an agreement together down here, I’m gonna cut off all your labor funds. I said I know the and I named the guy’s name and I said I’ll go to every union down here. ‘Cause all you’ve done is blocked the unions for these people and it’s not fair to ‘em. So, the one guy said I don’t like to be threatened. And the other guy said you better listen. So but anyhow they ate good and they had good cocktails and we had kind of an understanding when we left. So after we got the agreements after we got going on the on the organizing and all this and started getting and they said well we can’t deal with it five you know the putting the things on the desk and the employees have to pay and stuff. So I said well let’s call a meeting with all of ‘em. So we did and I told ‘em what they were doing and I said they and I had the newspaper guy and another guy outside the car. And I said and I listed the names of different things they were doing to their employees, threatening them, et cetera. And I said if we get rid of that, if you guys want them to volunteer to give you money that’s one thing. But then and some other things the county commissioners were doing and so they got real arrogant. So I told the one of the committee I was working with go and open that door, bring the newspaper guy in here and stuff. So God they looked like they were going to faint, some of ‘em. But the newspaper guy came in and I went through all of these issues. And the newspaper guy told me he said we first met he said now Al I’ll give you information, but I wanna be the first. I don’t want you know if there’s something I want it first. Okay.

But anyhow, we went through that and one of the guys set there and he said I’m so pure I could spread my wings and fly over the courthouse. Well that was the headline in the Des Moines paper the next morning. And imagine in the archives that all that stuff is probably there including that when they called me an out of state labor goon. . Anyhow we put together the first contract. And what I told them when I left now I said you’re gonna negotiate with the Teamsters and if you give them one damn thing I didn’t get, then I’m comin’ back. So they— Teamsters come in and I don’t call it real brilliant on their part. These guys handed the contract to ‘em you know it more vacation time, more of this, more of that. Handed it to ‘em and they said this is your contract. So they took our contract and presented a membership and got ratified. Well later years I understand after I was pulled out of there and sent into the New York prisons, that that they that all of that stuff kinda you know circulated in. So.

QUESTION

Talk about employee involvement.

HENDRICKS

Yeah that’s the name that Ernie Savoy and I gave it. Okay. I was working for Bannon in Detroit at that time. He was vice president over at GM. Had some programs going to better communication better problem-solving better working together to improve the quality with the workers being involved. And Bannon sent me with some other people from other unions. We went to England, Germany, and Sweden to study new approaches on the workday. Work time and the workday. And went to different places workplaces met with different union leaders in England. And went to Germany and met with them. And toured the Mercedes Benz plant with their union rep and they had an interpreter with. And by the way they had beer in the cafeteria there. They had at the Mercedes Benz plant. And went through parts of their contract. There was one thing that later became part of the Ford contract I brought it back is the freeze on the work standard under 120 days after changeover. But then came back and we negotiated the

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employee involvement under the contract. It may have been worker participation, I don't remember the exact name but I'm gonna say it was employee involvement. And Bannon assigned me to it. And the company my counterpart was a guy by the name of Ernie Savoy. And we met Bannon and myself, Ernie Savoy, and the head of labor relations at one at that time. We met. And I wanted to think the guy's name but he was a real bastard across the bargaining table. Company guy. He said I don't believe in it but I guess we gotta at least start something. So, and Ernie Savoy's parents came outta the Northeast under the old mills and stuff and worked and were treated awful. But he ended up in management. Educated guy, very honest. And Bannon had worked with him. He said you can trust him. And they basically it was a free line to set up educational programs to get the workers involved in problem-solving techniques. And opening communication with the management to management. And management to union to instead of always discipline instead of this and that, if there's a problem let's find a solution to it.

And in cases we had where if they people that made the product that we used in assembly if there was a flaw in it, , send a worker and a member of management to that plant to show 'em what was wrong. And it was quite successful. And it was left up to each plant whether you want to do it. But we would go in there and we'd set up meetings and some of those plant managers were oh god that was cutting into their great authority you know set behind a desk and I'm God, you set over there, you know. And some of 'em had a good attitude, some of 'em didn't. But it was kinda fun to challenge 'em and to I remember one meeting the we were setting there with their management team and the plant manager was there and I said, 'You know, the thing that puzzles me every time you smile everybody around me smiles, all your management people. Do they have to smile or can they communicate with you if they have a problem?' god he got madder than hell. But ya—you could just feel it in the room they were afraid to say anything. Well through those training programs and through opening communication, and especially it where a foreman could talk about a problem to the general foreman or to the superintendent and say you know, the employee's having this you know this sock is wrong or there's problems. it opened that communication thing and one of the speeches I gave and I had several that let's plan for to how to improve this for a month kinda look for three months. And what would you like this to look at three years from now. And if we're doing this thing right, the guy that don't believe in this don't want anything to do with it three years from now comes in and says you know this is a better place to come to work than it used to be. I said that's how we'll know improvement. So it was opening communication and you know and the whole structure and changing management's attitude and from the divisions and we met with division people and went into different plants and set up new structures. In a couple of cases they put the plant manager on retirement and brought in new plant manager to make things work. So Pete Postello that replaced he was the head of labor relations at Ford Motor Company. And if when they forced the other guy out I use the word force—retirement is a better term. But they brought Pete Postello in and then Don Eflen took over from Ken Bannon. And we put together literature books and training we brought in outsider trainers. And different things. And it was real quiet when Eflen took over. Finally I went in and I talked to him and I said you've just taken over and we're working on this employee involvement and I've got a new brochure that we're gonna approve and put out. I says what approach do you want on this. He said you do your job he said if you make a mistake we can correct it. He said but if you have to come in here and ask what to do each time, he said then, that's not gonna get the job done. So. I had total support from him on it. So nationwide San Jose, just about every plant nationwide, we had good programs going.

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QUESTION

When you started to have more employee involvement, how did most of the people on the shop floor react to that?

HENDRICKS

Well some of ‘em and some of ‘em the local union some of ‘em politically they—they wanted to be traditionalists and stuff but a lot of—most of them got involved too. And it—it just made it easier—the employees once they were involved, it was it really worked out good. It was complementary and when they found out like I said in some plants they sent ‘em to these vendors where they were sending bad stuff into us. And to have a say to look at this and say this is a problem I’m having on the line. And then we’d have those meetings and one thing that I found was real interesting when they had these group meetings, , we had a lot of blacks, a lot of Hispanics, and different things, they’d set across from each other and talk about their background, where they come out of. And it ended up being friendships where it was cool before. And it opened communications. And the management when they—you could feel the relief in a lot of them where they could feel free to say you know things aren’t goin’ right, this damn stuff isn’t working right, you know. And they didn’t dare to say that type of thing before. And so, the opening of communications and looking at the problem as a problem solving to take a good look, here’s a problem, let’s get together and try to solve it. And sometime if there was no answer, that was the answer. But at least you had good faith goin’ into the thing. And to open that type of communication was essential. And I noticed it even into negotiations, where before ya verbal language and ‘Ah this is bullshit,’ blah blah blah, in the national negotiations they—you look for answers more. You’d look for instead of you know the old approach is you know here’s my strength, either you do it or blah blah blah. But a lot of times you had meetings like we had meetings with all Chrysler GM and Ford in solidarity. I was there to review the coming negotiations. And then that stuff would be fed to the vice presidents and the president which we were the part of the educational thing ‘cause we were dealing in the plants, the locals, and all that stuff. So and then the company and the union would do some research on different avenues and stuff. So to me it opened communication all the way through. And it was very essential and what I picked up like in the—they wouldn’t let me use things that I picked up like flex time. But they did let me use it in a parts [inaudible] in San Francisco.

And then there was the four 10-hour days, some of ‘em were using that. And they wouldn’t touch that because the overtime. Later years they went to the four 10-hour days, you know. But not at that time, they wouldn’t let me touch that type of stuff. But I’ve gotta give the company or the UAW both they gave Ernie Savoy and myself open latitude just build a program. And but we had meetings, we had to you know go through everything, the direction we’re heading and stuff. It wasn’t like they gave us control of everything. We had control to do anything we wanted but to keep them for—thoroughly invised [sic] and if they were—if they felt we were stepping overboard, they’d let us know that, yeah.

QUESTION

Talk about the big flood of 1965.

HENDRICKS

I was building chairman. Most of the things that Ray Busch and myself were concerned of was the safety, the safety of people. And those people worked so damn hard down there 12 hours a day and making sandbags and the hydro plant and the—which the hydro’s the one that makes

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the electricity am I right? In the steam plant there's a big basement. And there was water shooting in like this. And they wanted to reinforce it. So we were down there when they were doing that but each employee that was working down there had a rope tied to 'em with somebody on top. In case the walls would give in. A lot of dangerous stuff. And so went spent a lot of time down there. And like I told you that it just happened Ray Busch and I was down there and Doug Keith was the foreman come in with us. 4 or 5 I'm gonna say 5 employees and started walking across in front of that big back up of ice walking across. And God only knows to this day what they were supposed to do on the other end. But they just started out and probably got about 20 feet. And I told 'em I said you guys get off from there. I said Doug, bring them off from there. And they looked at me and Doug looked at me and didn't move and I said god damn it Doug if you wanna stay here, you stay there, but you guys get up here. And ray Busch yeah he says we gotta he agreed with me let me put it that way. And so then they come off and it wasn't three minutes later the ice took that whole walk out. They woulda all been dead and Doug Keith was talking to them up there and he come back and he said Al, he shook my hand he said thank you. You know. But it just happened we were there at the right time. But it—there was —there wasn't and then the other thing—

The one that Al and I were talking about where we had all those guys the (?) from carbon monoxide. They were getting sand in the tunnel and there was a motor running and the carbon monoxide went in there and the guys started dropping. Well they were carrying stuff we were there and I didn't help carry but I remember the assistant plant manager was on a stretcher carrying a guy up and you could tell he was winded and stuff. Yurzik was a committeeman he run up and he took over his place and pushed him out of the way, helped carry the guy the rest of the way up to the ambulances. Nobody died but it was just lucky. But who would ever think things like that would happen. That tunnel acted like a chimney and brought that right in. so.

QUESTION

Did you do much work in the tunnels?

HENDRICKS

I worked in the sand mine. We had the glass plant here and for two weeks during the changeover I went down it was a hundred and ten feet. Down below the temperature was 52 degrees year-round. And the guys that were down there was two of 'em. They come up and said now if you have to go to the bathroom, either take a leak or the other thing you take that elevator up because a—a smell down here lasts forever. The humidity was real heavy. And they said don't work too hard. You gotta set a pace. And so it h—it was felt a little dumpster cars that you shoveled that sand into. And took—to cut those tunnels they did it by air. You would go down so far and then they would take these the air pipes and make a big arc like that and that sand would fall and then they would keep adding on to these—there's miles of tunnels down there. And then you would shovel into those carts and they would go up and there was a conveyor belt and you'd dump these in this box and then the conveyor belt would take it up to where the it was silica sand. What you need for glass. And that would go into the heated are and I don't know what all they added to it. But and then that would churn into a juice and it would run out flat. And then on the other end of it you had the glasscutters and stuff making all different types of glass and things. But at that that was a job that was there for years. And then they needed more room for assembly so they built the glass plant in Nashville Tennessee and then they closed this one down. But they—you sweat my god if you work hard at all but the humidity and like I said 52 degrees. but it was a great experience. To see how things were done.

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QUESTION

This plant was always recognized for the high quality of its work. Why do you think that was?

HENDRICKS

With that work environment and we always the union here and always the quality was job security. The quality of the product. You know we had we had tough times there's no doubt about it. And a lot of the damage was done to some of the units. But if you looked at that book hanging number one flag out there, number one quality in the nation, between twin city and Norfolk we were always the two top quality. But the workforce here Minnesota workforce historically has always been a great workforce. And we didn't get into the black/white issue.

HENDRICKS

Yeah the quality of the product and this is where employee involvement came in. And that quality of the product and it did improve during that period of time. We the warranty time got cut down for Ford motor company a lot of benefits all the way through. Which if you're in negotiation, those benefits help the cash box and you know it helps in that end of it. But the whole structure changed from those early days and you could feel it. Not saying you didn't have your problems not saying that you weren't militant you were gonna do your job if it was a challenge, you would take it on you know. So it didn't never change that part of it. But the work environment was the improvement on the quality of the product, making a better day to come into work, where you didn't have all that hostility. And another thing I think that improved the attitude in the plant and Al knows this as well as I do, you probably had 16 feet to do your job. If it was that long sometimes. And you were in '67 we had 204,000 members in the UAW in Ford. So you can imagine those plants how crowded those assembly lines were. But as new technology came I you know right now they're probably building with less plants with probably not even a quarter of the workforce turning out the same number of units. But a lot of it is so automated and things like that. And as it's changed a lot of things have changed.

QUESTION

What about racial diversity in the workforce?

HENDRICKS

We had 11 blacks in the plant and you wouldn't even see a black come and apply for jobs. Because they just never hired 'em. And there was a couple Native Americans from reservations and but . Then this black movement to improve the life of the blacks and Walter Reuther was very strong on this. And he and Michigan they had a years back they had a bowling alley just for whites and Reuther went there with some blacks and bowled you know. And stuff. And that became part of our job. And we had a guy by the name of Eddie Miles. he was here as production manager came outta Kentucky and stuff. We would set across the bargaining table and talk to him about we've gotta get some black people in here. And I never forgot this statement he made. And he again he had hat and necktie and stuff, but he would say how would you like to have one of those black guys put that dick in your daughter, you know? That's the type of language you got from him. And that's his attitude in a lot of places. And they [sic] discrimination wasn't only in the south. It was up here but you'd never recognize it 'cause you didn't talk about it, you didn't have the Klan hangin' people et cetera.

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But we used to have Martin Luther King come to our conventions he spoke. The UAW donated money to there and in Atlanta Georgia you had the black white toilet in the union hall. And Bannon went down and made ‘em close that. And turned that into a storage room. And it was a struggle nationwide. Well it gradually opened up and there was I wished I could find the guy’s name he was a black Bob Winn was his name. He was vice president of Core. And I imagine I was trying to think what the Core combinations were. But he was vice president of that. And we worked together and I didn’t know that he was but he was working there and they had this Million Man March. In Washington. And he asked me he says Al can the UAW pay my expense? And I said well I don’t know, I said we can find out. And so I went to the union board we had a board meeting before union meetings. And I said I wanna make a motion that we pay Bob Winn’s expenses for the Million Man March. Well and it wasn’t members but a different one said well if you want that paid you take it up to the membership. Well Al remembers. Then I went to the membership meeting when new business come. I made a motion that we pay Bob Winn’s expenses for his trip to Washington and the Million Man March. And it passed by about 85 percent. So I went to bob Winn and the next day on he was working on the assembly line and I said we took it up with the membership and I said you and go over and work out the details with Frank Fedursky he’s real fair. And then Bob Winn kinda tested me we used to have a bowling league real big bowling league and I—I guess I was secretary I got stuck with all the work. But he says can I bowl with you guys. I said sure come on and bowl with us, I never gave it another thought you know that it was a black/white thing. And by that time, Ford was hiring more blacks and this and that. And so he came and bowled and I’ll never forget we had a bowling party at the end of every season. And he walked around and visited with different people. He come up I said they’re shooting crap over there. And I says I won 26 dollars here take that and go and win some money. So he took that 26 dollars pretty quick he was standing back by me I said how much ya make, he said I lost it all. I started laughing. But he was really a good guy, good-natured guy. And but he was always there and he did his job you know.

I had discrimination filed against me by a Jewish guy that he didn’t get a job he wanted. But he was number three on the list he was upset. And so Ed Bernan the regional representative come over and he was hey discrimination blah blah he was all upset. And I said I said just go back to your office like don’t worry about the damn thing. And he says your guys always answer that way. And bob was over in the office but Ed was still hadn’t left yet and so Bob Winn found out about that and he said get me off the job. So he went and called somebody I never heard any more about it. But the guy had no case anyhow he wasn’t—he was third from the bottom on the job that he wanted, but he was just---

END – HENDRICKS INTERVIEW

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