

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

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Interviewers: Don Bouzek

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Index: Calgary Transit worker - German immigrant - working conditions - Amalgamated Transit Union Local 583 – 1961 Calgary transit strike – union solidarity – local officer’s life – union organizing - ‘House of Labour’ – Western and Canadian Conferences – union education - international unions

I was born in Germany. My father was a union member before 1933, before Hitler came to power, and was always a strong supporter of working people. I grew up in Germany. In 1945, when the war ended, we had to move out of our home. That's the first time I really got to know about the union movement and democracy, because we ended up in a house with a number of former prisoners of war from France. They told me what democracy was all about, including the union movement, responsibility and privileges. It must have had an impact on me.

At the end of the war, there was a shortage of food and I apprenticed at a flour mill in Germany from '45 to '49. I didn't see any future in East Germany, so I snuck across the border into West Germany where I again worked in a flour mill until 1952, when I applied to immigrate to Canada. My intention at that time wasn't necessarily to stay in Canada, just to get to know it. In '52 the impression was that the streets in Canada were paved with gold, so we would do well there. When I came to Canada we landed in Quebec City and they asked me where I wanted to go. I said, as far as I could into Canada. I ended up going east to Prince Edward Island where I committed myself to work on a farm for a year.

I couldn't speak English at the time, so most of the conversations that I had with the farmer and his wife were by hand and whatever you could get across. This was a small farm with no power, no electricity. The farmer had an awful lot of cows to milk cows, which was quite the job with about 12-15 cows that I had to milk every morning and night. One incident I remember was that the farmer had to go away for a weekend. His wife never had anybody she could boss around. So he was trying to convey to me every time a few minutes, you have to do this and that, go from there. In the evening she came to me and said she wanted me to get some chips. I didn't know what chips were, so I said, I don't understand. So she pointed to me to cow manure and she says, 'chips.' She pointed out to me little pieces of cow manure, but I cheated a little, took a big basket and any cow manure I put in there, and brought it into the house. She looked at me and I thought at first she was going to slap me. Then she started to laugh and finally explained that she

wanted chips for stoking the fire in the morning. Instead of explaining to me wood, she explained to me the difference between big and small in terms of cow manure. So it was quite an experience to learn the language and get to know the people.

The first 4 months they took me to the Catholic church, and I couldn't explain that I wasn't Catholic; I was Lutheran. Until finally I got it across to them, and they had somebody who was Lutheran pick me up and take me to church. I stayed there for a year, until somebody I knew from Germany who lived in Calgary wrote to me and said that there were lots of jobs in Calgary. So I jumped on the train, came to Calgary, and lived in a boarding house for a while, starting working for Keith Construction. But with Construction, when it rains and the weather is miserable, you stay home. So I got myself a job in the Independent Biscuit Company, which was not unionized at the time. A bunch of us got together and we organized a union at the Independent Biscuit Company. I became executive board member and shop steward, and that was my first experience in participating in the union movement.

The expression was 'DP', displaced person. Quite often I was called that, I have to say, and I always felt that I was an immigrant, that I had to prove myself to make people recognize that I'm a Canadian. I was born in Germany, but I'm Canadian and proud of it. I'm very grateful to the people in this country that have support me in the labour movement. I did not really have all that much problems. Maybe one of the reasons was I wanted to learn the language. Because of that, my association with immigrants of German heritage was almost non-existent. When we were in the boarding house, there was another German. He came from PEI as well, and he had committed himself to a year of farm work too. We committed ourselves to speak English only. There were days when I would say good morning and good night, because that's the only conversation we could have. I remember going to work to IBC. Every morning when I went to work, I would try to think of one word that I mispronounced. It was about 15 blocks, and all the way I would repeat that one word to pronounce it properly. I have a daughter and a son, and they often say, dad, you should've taught us German. It would be nice if we could speak German. I keep telling them, but I wanted to be Canadian, I wanted to learn English. If I would've taught you German, it would've maybe taken longer for me to become more proficient in the language. But in retrospect I wish I had. I think to speak more than one language is a plus in how educated you become.

1961 Calgary Transit Strike

That was the confectionary workers union. We negotiated our first agreement and we were quite happy with the way things were going, until 1957 when IBC closed down, and I was without a job. In the meantime I also got married to a young lady from Lethbridge. When I lost my job, my brother-in-law told me about the job opportunities with Calgary Transit. So I started there as a cleaner, then became serviceman and trolley repairman. In '61 I participated in the first strike there. This was when I met a great union personality, Leo Newman, who was the president at that time. At that time it was an international union, but it had a different name, a real long name. Consequently it was changed to Amalgamated Transit Union.

The 1961 Calgary Transit strike was an experience. Strikes in general shouldn't be necessary, but it really creates solidarity between members when you're all in the same

boat, when you have to look out for each other. The wives also became involved. We had demonstrations in front of City Hall, and the late Senator Hayes, who was Mayor of Calgary then was not one to respect unions. One of his favourite expressions was, "You should all be rickshaw drivers in China, then you'd know what it would be like to have a job and be happy".

Our strike was not as successful as it should've been, but it created a union that was stronger than before. I always remember that retired members were real strong supporters of the members on the picket lines. They used to come out and walk the picket lines, and donated what little they had. The strike was strongly supported by the unions in Calgary, because everybody was in the same boat. Unions all had to fight City Hall and especially Harry Hayes, who was strongly anti-union.

The Calgary Labour Council was very active. We had special rallies where various union presidents or board members came to speak to us and rally us. The donations we received from unions were tremendous. Obviously we had to make arrangements so that bank loans were taken care of, but we had great committees that made sure nobody had to go hungry and nobody had financial problems.

It was the longest strike ever, until just a few years ago – some 60 days. It started during Stampede weekend and ended just before school started, all of July and August. What we ended up with was a 2 cent tool allowance and 2 cents service pay. It doesn't sound like much, but in the '60s when wages weren't all that great, everything helped. Again I say that I think the most important thing to me was the solidarity of the membership, the helping out. The people who had been working there for 20, 30 years, making sure that the younger people understood that we all had to stick together. It was an experience I'll never forget. It really showed that when the working people have a problem, they stick together to help each other and to achieve what they set out to achieve.

It just came back to me that nobody actually lost their job in this strike, but because the trolleys were discontinued and a lot of streets converted into one way streets, there were less jobs available. Some of the junior operators on the spare board for anywhere up to 6 weeks were without a job. We could've gone back to work 2 weeks before the strike finally ended, but not all the trolley lines had been taken down, and Hayes needed that extra time. A lot of people don't know that, but it's a fact. There's a lot of people who have respect for Harry Hayes, but I don't have any respect for him at all. He was not interested in the people who worked for the city, or in the working people whatsoever. His ideas of what working people or transit drivers should be doing, as I said before, 'pulling rickshaws in China'. I want to make sure that this is remembered.

The Transit Union consisted of office workers, maintenance workers, and drivers, so there were female office staff. They were totally supportive of the union. There was only one member who crossed the picket line, and nobody spoke to him except to say 'hi and bye.' The membership never forgave him, and he became involved in management after that. Actually, he didn't really cross the picket line, he got a promotion while we were on strike that made him management. But the membership never forgot.

Strikes sometimes makes parties realize that we may be angry at each other, but that we have to talk to each other once again. In order for the transit to operate properly, you have to have the cooperation of the employees and the employer. Every once in a while, there's

hard feelings, but the final consequence of it is that everything usually relaxes a bit and you get a better relationship again.

An official role in the Union

When the strike ended, the City applied to the Labour Board to have maintenance work, that was done by 583 members transferred to the civic garage. The garage was IBEW, and so they had a vote the garage became part of the Amalgamated Transit Union. It took a while before the former membership of IBEW and the membership of the Transit Union became one. There were some hard feelings because IBEW had represented them well. That eventually changed, however, because the president and executive of the transit union made a strong effort to convince the membership of the civic garage that they were just as interested in representing them well as they were in representing the former members of the transit union. Also at that time, trolley buses were phased out and Calgary Transit converted to diesel buses. Since I was a trolley repairman, there was no job, so the management of the civic garage initiated an apprentice program which I applied and was successful. At that time I was involved in a number of endeavours; labour management committee, and I was interested in various projects. I was successful in obtaining the 'suggestion award' for the city of Calgary, which at that time was a pen. Now they give you money, but at that time it was a pen, and I still have it.

At that time, I wasn't holding positions in the union. I was approached to run for the position of executive board member while I was apprenticing. But I told them that I was trying to get my mechanics ticket, and it wasn't that easy. We had to go to the technical school and work 26 hrs a week besides, in order to get full pay. That meant we had to work Saturday and Sunday for 16 hours, plus another 10 hours during the week, plus we had to study. So there wasn't much time to become involved in other things. But when I completed my apprenticeship, the fellows I worked with urged me to become involved in the union. In '69, I ran for the position of executive board member and shop steward, and was successful. The first function I attended was at Banff School that the Alberta Federation of Labour put on. I remember Bill Paterson, Frank Bodie, John Cocklin, and a lot of other people that eventually rose through the ranks and became totally committed to the labour movement in Calgary. The next event I remember was the AFL convention in Lethbridge in 1970, while Ray Jamha was still President

When I became involved with the union, I sat on the negotiation committee during my 2nd year. It was quite an experience, negotiating with the City of Calgary. I recall that when we were successful in getting a collective agreement, we would meet at the secretary's home and figure out all the rates. There were no computers; we didn't even have a calculator. There were 7 of us, and everybody had one job position to figure out the rates, as well as the different steps, especially in the office. The highlight was always when the wife of the secretary made us sandwiches. We didn't have money to treat ourselves to a meal, because at that time the union wasn't all that well off, especially after we had been out on strike. It was quite the experience. I always remember that a good friend of mine, Bill Simpson, who later on became president of a local, used to say that to be a union officer you had to have 'verbal diarrhoea'. That expression always stayed with me. Just like another one: to be a financial secretary, you have to have short arms and deep pockets.

We had one agreement that we settled on New Years Eve, at about 10 o'clock. I had tickets to go to the community New Years Eve party, and when we got home, everybody was feeling good. I was still high from getting the agreement, the best we ever got. We negotiated a 7-1/2 hr day with equal pay. We didn't lose any money for operators; eight hrs pay for 7-1/2 hrs, plus an increase. We negotiated a shorter work week for maintenance employees, and established the evaluation of office staff that should be done. We managed to get an upgrading for all the office staff. That was just before Trudeau put in the wage and price controls. I always felt the office staff, whether it was in our local or other locals, were underpaid, because at one time office employees were women.

One time they hired a payroll clerk. She was on probation and called in, and they said, she just wasn't working out. I said, 'Don't let her go; isn't there another job for her?' They gave her a job as a janitor, where she got more pay than she did as a payroll clerk. We took the proposals to the membership, and even though it was the best agreement, with the highest rate in North America, the membership were upset with us. We just had a new president, Phil Brown. After the meeting he wondered, what did he let myself in for? How could they turn down the best agreement ever? They got up and talked against it and just felt it wasn't good enough. But the cost of living was tremendous before that, and they felt we should've gotten more. Two months later, nobody could get anything close to what we got, and half a year later, there were people coming sheepishly into the office all the time. They would shake my hand and say, "Gunter, you must've known something that we didn't know. What I said in the meeting, forget it. I shouldn't have said that." Another thing we negotiated for was coffee money. That sounds trivial, but operators don't have any breaks, and full time operator could drive 9 or 10 hours without a break. If he was lucky he'd get a few minutes to stop and have a coffee somewhere. The Alberta Labour Code states that there has to be a coffee break. When we split shifts, work 4 hrs and get off, we actually got a break, but it wasn't paid. We felt that if we get coffee money in lieu of a coffee break, we should get it for all. So the first year we got the 40 hour paid break in lieu of a break which was paid in December. The good part was that we never had to negotiate it again. It went up every time wages went up, and is worth quite a bit now. We were the first transit union to negotiate this. Eventually everyone got it, but some had to give it up. Every time I go to the union office I tell them, if you ever give up that coffee money I'm going to come down after I kick the bucket and I'm gonna haunt you until the day you die. Never ever give up that coffee money.

Sven Sorenson was the president who was elected with me. He was served as president of the Labour Council at one time. The next contract we negotiated was under price controls of 8%. We sat down and compared wages in various industries. The city agreed to 10% but they didn't think it was going to be approved. We made out realms of material and sent it in, and lo and behold, we got 10%. Firefighters, everybody came to us and said, how the heck did you do that? I don't think anybody else ever got it, we did fairly well.

We didn't have staff. We had an international vice president who assisted and advised us. That's been the policy in the Transit Union. Smaller locals would avail themselves of the international vice president as a negotiator, but we always felt that we were quite capable of doing our own negotiations. That doesn't mean that the advice that the international vice president gave wasn't welcome, because he was familiar with the contracts of other

unions, and helped us get benefits that we might not have known about. The union at that time didn't have the communication with other transit unions across the country, as we had in later years when we formed the Western Canadian Conference of the ATU. We developed a close relationship with the Edmonton local and Lethbridge. We would meet once a year, either in Edmonton, Red Deer, or Calgary, to determine what our problems were and what we were attempting to negotiate the following year.

So I got elected in '67 and re-elected in '79; at that time it was for 2-year terms. In '71, I was approached to let my name stand for Recording Secretary, which I wasn't all that convinced I should. After all, it was a drivers' union, and I was maintenance. The people that I worked with in maintenance tried to talk me out of it, saying that they needed me as an executive member, and to negotiate on their behalf. However, the people that convinced me that I should run were operators themselves and lo and behold, I got elected as a maintenance man in the position where I would say about 4/5ths of the membership consisted of operators and office staff. When I got elected, we did not have full time offices. The position of secretary meant that you got all the files and a typewriter to take home. If your wife didn't know how to type, you were in trouble, because that was a prerequisite. All the correspondence and minutes were typed by my wife. My days off were Tuesday and Wednesdays; therefore, all the grievances were done on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The honorarium was \$5 a month, which didn't even pay for gas. But it was something that you wanted to do, and the money really wasn't the important thing.

I then got elected as Secretary for the Western Canadian Conference, and became involved in instructing the maintenance section, because we always had educational sessions at those events. At that time, the locals across Canada felt that we needed more than just a western and an eastern conference. We needed a national conference that could represent all ATU locals in Canada. We had a meeting in Winnipeg where I was elected to a steering committee that met in Winnipeg, Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver, Hamilton, Halifax, Calgary, and established a Canadian conference to really become involved on the national area in subjects that were truly Canadian. We wanted to represent the Canadian locals and achieve that through the international, because up to that point in time, we didn't have any representation on CLC or various bodies. We had been involved in various committees – the AFL and the CLC and resolution committees, but we felt there were truly Canadian issues that we would like to address ourselves.

Also in '77, we decided to appoint a General Secretary position, because we wanted to establish an office for the Canadian council called the National Canadian Regional Consulate - finally changed to the Canadian Council. At that time the total executive of the Canadian Council, except for Phil Hielen and me were defeated. We went to the International and got them to agree to pay for the Office and the wages. The two of us got to appoint the General Secretary. Sometimes you just make the right decision. In this case, a fellow by the name of Ken Foster, who came from Winnipeg, became the General Secretary. He's still there, even though they've changed the bylaws to have that position elected. He's done just a great job and is a strong believer in the union movement. He sits on the executive committee of the CLC. He's another one of those union members that really proved that a lot can be done if you put your mind to it. In the meantime I also was appointed to the trade certification and apprenticeship board, which I sat on for 4 years. I

really enjoyed that job, because it had to do with my position as a mechanic. Unfortunately, you could only be appointed for 2 terms, which was 4 years. In 1979 I was approached by the Canadian Consul to let my name stand as a Canadian representative on the general executive board of the International. We had an election in the Canadian Consul, and I was successful. At the international convention in Miami I was elected to the position on the General Executive Board. I wouldn't say it was a highlight, but it allowed me to represent the Canadian locals. As representative of the Canadian locals, I attended a senate investigation committee in Washington, just before the LRT was implemented in Calgary. The subject was crime and transit industry, what we saw in the subways in New York where they have a subway police force. We went into an office there that they had. All along the walls there were pictures of people that were killed by people on the trains. I came back knowing that this was one thing Calgary Transit had to be made aware of, so that we don't run into that same problem. I made representation to the Canadian Consul and the City of Calgary of this matter..

Belonging to an 'International'

The main concerns about the American International came from the Vancouver local whose membership felt that their concerns weren't addressed. I have never had any qualms about belonging to an international union. I'm a Canadian, but I don't care if there's a border or not, the problems in the labour movement are not Canadian or US – they are the problems of working people. Especially in the transit industry, when there is a problem in Spokane or in Portland, or management attempt to take something away from the membership, it affects us, because it transfers to Canada as soon as they have established it down there. So I have never had any problems. I often hear that money going down to the States. But, there's no money going down to the States. Money is deposited in a bank in Winnipeg; we've been doing it over the years. We've been recognized as a fully autonomous section of the Amalgamated Transit Union to represent Canadian interests, with a full time officer who sits on the CLC and who makes representation on behalf of the ATU. He sits also as a general executive board member in the national, and his wages and office are paid for by the international.

We had applied at the international convention 2 years before they had the international convention in Calgary, where we established the first meeting of the Canadian council, elected officers and set goals as the basis for bylaws. This was followed by a meeting in eastern Canada where we established that there would be a dues structure paid to the Canadian council that would pay for delegates from smaller locals that couldn't attend the annual meeting of the Council. We established that there should be a president, vice president, secretary, and equal representation from the east and west, then approached the international to say that they had to come across with some money. The international wasn't opposed to us having a more autonomous body in Canada, but there was obviously a little arm twisting that took place to get various financial donations from them. At the international convention in Calgary, I was elected to sit on the committee that won the international convention here. That was one of the first conventions in the Calgary convention centre, and Local 1374 of the ATU and 583 were hosts.

The president of 583 at that time, Bill Simpson, who knew that he was going to retire, appointed me to represent the Local on that committee. It was a huge success, especially since it was the most beautiful Chinook winter in Calgary, and when you had people

coming from Florida with winter coats and underwear, they couldn't believe we had weather like that here. I got to meet people that in later years became good friends. At that time we committed ourselves to a full time office, as we had shared an office with local 1374 at the Labourers' office on 12th Ave. - they eventually sold it to CUPE. Setting up an office is not an easy job. Hiring a secretary isn't easy. All at once you're the boss, whether you like it or not. I have to say, I was very lucky. The secretary from 1374 took me aside and said that there were some good looking secretaries that I interviewed; but that I had to remember that I wanted a secretary, not a centrepiece.

I was their first full time officer. I was financial secretary business agent. That was a position that existed in an awful lot of unions that first started an office. We got that from the Edmonton local, who also had a financial secretary business agent. We talked to them and they convinced us that that would be the way to go. The strange part is, as long as I was full time officer, which was from '75 to '87, that position existed and that position was the top officer. Not the president, the business agent. Eventually in the national changed their bylaws and determined it would be best if the president would be the top officer, because there was always confusion. Except for locals who at the present time had a financial secretary treasurer as the offices. It was strange when some of the members would say, how come the president isn't the top officer? You had to explain to them that it was established that way. I always felt I could've run for president and changed it. But I felt comfortable. And I had deep pockets and short arms, meaning that I felt the money, the dues we collect are the member's. They belong to the members. You have to make sure you spend it in the best interest of the members.

I was still recording secretary in 1975 when it also became clear that our Local could not truly represent membership without a full time officer. The president was Bill Simpson, who wasn't well, he had several heart attacks. The executive and the international vice president at that time, Stu Snowdon, approached me and wanted me to run for that position. We decided that the full time position should be the financial secretary treasurer business agent, not the president. It was felt that a full time officer, should be able to handle the money, otherwise every time you had a financial transaction you would have to call in somebody. I find out how it affected him, the different situations when grievances came up or arbitrations came up and he wasn't as successful as he felt he was. He took it personal. It's a shame that he never did manage to retire. He passed away with cancer before his retirement age. I will always remember him. He set an example for an awful lot of people that I think we should follow.

The funny thing was that they didn't increase the union dues, and after a year, we found out we had to have our executive board meetings at night, because we didn't have enough money. We changed our dues structure and made it a percentage of the wages and convinced members it was in their best interest. If we want union dues to be increased, we have to increase your wages. The argument was accepted. One of the other things I'm really proud of is that without increasing the union dues, I set aside a building fund that allowed us eventually to buy our own building. We felt that, if for any reason at all this union felt they weren't well served within the International, that the building should not belong to the International. We created a separate society so that the building doesn't belong to the union, it belongs to a society. We didn't have to approach the membership for extra money, it was all set aside. I would have to say that I have to be one of the

luckiest people in the world to have people working with me that have the same interests at heart; Sven Sorensen, Phil Brown, Lenny Champaign, Al Singer, Ed Tremblay, and others. I remember one day Phil Brown and I didn't agree on something and Ed Tremblay, who was the secretary, didn't agree with me. They were going at me and Phil Brown asked afterwards, how Ed be your buddy, when he just took a strip off you. I told him that it was because he cares and I care; we both want what's in the best interest of the membership. I should also say that before I retired I served on the Local Authorities Pension Board as a representative of the AFL. My concern was that one of these days, with the government handling the money, we would find ourselves in a position where employees wouldn't have any pension benefits at all. Along with the other representatives of the AFL, we convinced the rest of the board members that we should become independent of the Alberta government. The Alberta government also owed us money because when there was no separate pension fund, all proceeds went into the General Fund that was used to pave streets and other government work. When the Heritage Trust Fund was established, they also established the pension fund into which they originally paid an amount, but never contributed the remainder. We approached the Treasurer, at that time in Lethbridge, and started discussions with him to have the Local Authorities Pension independent of the government. The government finally agreed that they would put the additional money in if we increased the premiums _ a percent. Then we would create a pension board that would in fact be responsible for the investment and the running of the board.

Members of the pension board today might not really appreciate the work that was done by the pension board at that time in removing that money from the hands of the Alberta government. One of our arguments was that the credit rating of the Alberta government was so low because there was a shortfall in the pension fund. We convinced them that if they removed the pension fund from the Alberta government, that the credit rating would go up. It did go up because of it. We now have a fully funded pension fund. The additional _ percent that was initially increased has been downgraded again. Now there's some problems with the investments and they had to increase it again. We also established a cost of living increase each year, which we weren't too happy with. We felt that it should be 75%, it's 60%. I'm also pleased that even though the government rejected it initially, a retiree should be sitting on the board. They felt it would be selfish, that the retired board member would just be interested in the increases in the pension. Our argument was that we contributed for a lifetime and there should be some input for the pension. So there's a pensioner who sits on the board now.

Union education

At that time the best educational sessions were after the conference in the hallways, talking to each other about the various problems; things like tool allowances. At that time there was very little exchange of information between the unions, besides the Conference, which was just once a year. We started to communicate better, and exchanged information during the year. We got together with the Alberta unions. I was tremendously impressed with Reg Baskin. He was down to earth, a great representative of the unions. I also remember Dave Werlin, who used to be a bus driver at one time. Roy Jamha, Neil Reimer, Pam Barret. Bill Paterson. John Cochlin, and from the transit union, Bob Sweenen, Bill Palish, Phil Hiehlen from Edmonton.

The Calgary Labour Council had schools, which we faithfully attended. Our wives attended quite a few of them, as they became interested in the labour movement through the strike and other actions. They got to know each other and when I finally became a full time officer, I was very involved in making sure that the members got to know each other socially as well on the job, so that when you spoke about issues, the wives knew what was going on. The Amalgamated Transit Union also had schools; for example, the Western Conferences always brought in people, sometimes from the AFL, sometimes from the CLC, who became instructors. But basically, education was something you picked up from people who had been there for a number of years. I guess if you're interested, it's surprising what you can learn by talking to other people.

Like I said, the Calgary Labour Council put on some excellent schools, with instructors like Dave Werlin, Winston Gereluk, Bill Paterson and various others. It was especially important for me, as over the years, I became more familiar with the English language. One of the courses that I especially remember is public speaking. I was not very comfortable standing up in front of the membership and speaking. I would write down what I had to say and with my hand shaking, I had a heck of a time just reading it off. But the more I did it, the more comfortable I got, and eventually I didn't have to write it down anymore. Eventually I could make various reports from conventions and negotiations from memory. You get more confident as you go along, as you find that the people you speak to are your friends, your fellow workers. They don't really mind if you mispronounce something; they want to know that what you're doing for them.

The House of Labour

One name that in later years did not ring true anymore was Bill Mack, who was the President of ATU Local 569 in Edmonton.. His political views obviously changed after he gave up his position with the union and became an MLA for the Conservatives. But while he was involved in the union, he was a good union man.

When the Edmonton ATU Local dropped out of the AFL, we tried to convince them to re-join. I think the problem was the back dues that they would have to pay were prohibitive. I think that held it up. There was never any thought of our Local leaving the AFL. We always felt that a union belonged to the House of Labour, which is the Calgary Labour Council, AFL and the CLC. Maybe at times we weren't as involved as we should've been, depending on people who were on the leadership of the Local. But there was never any doubt that Local 583 was part of the house of labour.

Likewise the NDP! In later years when I became involved with the NDP during elections, I don't know how many times people would say that they didn't want anything to do with communists or bolsheviks. That was painful. I believed strongly in democracy and I think that democracy only exists if you allow different views. If you don't allow different views, you're a dictatorship. I think it has changed in the last few years. People wouldn't necessarily vote for the Party, but they would listen to you, and even argue with you at times about their political views. But at the time in the '50s and early '60s, unions and association with CCF or NDP was frowned on. When you went to parties, my wife would always say, don't get into politics. There are people that you could talk to, that you could exchange views with, but you had to know them. I didn't mind telling them I was union; I was proud of that. One of my favourite stories concerns a German u-boat captain from

the 1st world war by the name of Neimoller, who became a minister. When Hitler came to power, he finally ended up in a concentration camp. He was the one who said, 'first they put all the communists into the jai, but that didn't really affect me, because I was not a communist. Then they put all the other political people, but I was not a politician, and so it didn't involve me. Then they went after the the Jews, which didn't bother me. Neither did the union people. Finally, they went after the people who were involved in churches, and there was no one to stand up for me.. When you don't allow the least of your politically-inclined people to express their views, it's the first step in doing away with democracy. When you look at a country that has changed from democracy to dictatorship, what's the first organizations they ban? It's the unions. Unions are the most democratic organizations that you have anywhere. People had a closed mind, because all they knew about was what news media had to say. I don't think there was any labour media in Canada at that time. The odd editorial once in a while, but very little sympathy for people in the union movement or in the political field that didn't support conservatives or liberals. That pretty well describes it.

I remember a fellow by the name of Tom Thick from Winnipeg. He was a fellow that was involved in getting the One Big Union, and he was involved in moving the one remaining local to the Transit Union. The first time I met him, I was a little shy, but he told me not to worry, to just sit back and listen. You're an outsider at first, the first time you come in, but it won't take very long to get recognition from the people that might have been involved in the union longer, if your interests are just as great as theirs. If you truly believe in the union movement, you must truly believe in educating the people that follow you. You shouldn't be afraid; the Union isn't one person. The union is the membership, and you have to make sure there's always somebody coming up in the ranks that eventually can take over, even if it means taking over from you. That's democracy.

Conditions of work

As mechanics, we always had to buy our own tools. So, we negotiated a tool allowance. Obviously, there were some guys who had very small tool chests; pair of pliers and a wrench. However, the tool allowance was based on tools we were required to have; the more tools you're required to have, the higher the tool allowance. It was a percentage, 10% of the value of the tool allowance, which got paid every year. Some of the fellows weren't all that impressed, but I said, 'Holy smoke, you want a tool allowance based on the tools you have? You may as well forget it.' We still get the tool allowance, and they've probably improved on it now.

The other thing that I felt quite pleased with concerned my apprenticeship, when we had to work 26 hours a week in order to get the full pay, which I felt was totally inappropriate. I would come home from studying at SAIT, lock myself in the bedroom, and tell the kids had to be quiet. We negotiated full pay for apprentices while they went to school, which I have to say pleased me. There are some things that you just think you shouldn't have to negotiate that, it should be given. But nothing is ever given to you. As another example, we didn't have right hand mirrors on the buses, only left hand. It took us years to get right hand mirrors. We didn't have locations for operators to go to if they had to pee. It took us years to negotiate service stations that Calgary Transit would allow, toilet paper and soap so that an operator could stop and have a pee. These are the little things. It took us years to negotiate seat cushions for the seats, so the operator sitting

there for 8 hours wouldn't stick to his seat without tearing his pants. It's the little things that should have never been necessary to negotiate.

I think membership doesn't really know, which is why they sometimes think they don't need the union. Let me give you another example. We were approached by the cafeteria employees of the City of Calgary to organize them. At that time we didn't think that was within our jurisdiction, that it was the United Food Workers. But the only union they want to belong to was the Transit Union, so we organized them and negotiated the first agreement. One day a lady came to us and said that one of the cooks, had spilled hot oil all over herself and had to go in the hospital. The supervisor who was in charge of the cafeteria went to her in the hospital and argued that she should not come back. They were disputing the benefits which the city had, and she should quit. And you say we don't need any unions? These are the type of examples that make me shake my head, that employees should be treated like that in this day and age. People think that it's the wages that make employees think that they should have a union. It's not the wages; nine out of 10 times it's the working conditions. It's the fact that they can only go once to the lavatory or that a woman can't have any time off because her child is sick and the teachers has sent him home. It's those little things. It upsets me when I hear people say, that we don't need unions any more. Sure we improved working conditions for unionized workers, and sure there's an awful lot of non unionized workers who have good working conditions as well. But they have them because the unions negotiated them.

The other thing which it's hard to believe existed was 'spread time', which means the time that you start work until you finish. There were operators that worked from 12 to 20 hours of spread. In other words, they started at 6 in the morning and they were finished at 10 at night. The labour laws said 12 hours, or at that time it was 10 hours, but some people hardly ever saw their children or their wives. In 1975 we established a lady's auxiliary support group, which brought to our attention that we should do something about it. We applied to the Labour Board, but before the hearing, the city came to us and offered bring it down to 12 hours, and after that, 10 hours time and a half. Our membership turned it down. They figured 10 hours was enough. We went back to the labour board where the wives of some of the operators made presentations. I still hear from people at the board that these were the best presentations they ever heard anybody present. They talked not about their work, but about family life. Unfortunately, the labour board only brought it down to 12 hours, which was better than 20. At that time I was somehow disappointed that the rest of the labour movement in Alberta didn't give us as much support as I thought they should, because I knew that eventually, others would find themselves in the same position. Today, the labour law stipulates 12 hours (at one time, it was 10 hours). If we had all stuck together, maybe we would have gotten 10 hours.

The funny thing is, the labour act says that after 42 hours you had to pay overtime. But our agreement says you cannot use overtime to make up the guarantee. At that time there was a 70 and 80 hour guarantee. When we got the change in the spread time, we told them now you have to pay us the overtime. Because what they used to do is work you 2 hours a day, 2 hours a day, and the last day of the 2 week period, which the guarantee was based on, they would work you 10, 12, 16 hours to make up the guarantee. But when that change came in, they had to make up the guarantee, because they couldn't use the overtime for the guarantee. There were some big cheques that were coming out to some

of the operators. Sometimes you have to be a little tricky. They have access to the information just like we have. If they fail to research that properly, they have to pay for it.

Union organizing

I would have to say one of the pleasures I had was organizing Handibus when it was a 'rag outfit'; no uniforms, no guarantees - just awful. One of the ladies approached me to help them organize, and we did. The manager there was just totally against it. Two years later, however, he commented that it was the best thing that ever happened to them. Every day somebody would come in and complain, he said. Now they come in once a month to straighten out the problems. We have uniforms now and a work force that doesn't turn over every 2 or 3 months because we don't pay enough.

I've got to tell you a story about one arbitration we had involving a lady who was a helper for the Handibus. She had a mentally handicapped child, who the bus used to take to the school and pick her up at the end of the day. One day when they were going to pick her up, the daughter was gone, and obviously she got really upset. The van was going to drive off, but she says, "I'm not going to go, I've got to find my daughter first." She was fired, dismissed for caring about her child that was lost. As it turned out, we were successful. I think she got about \$6,000 in back pay. But things like that have a big impact on the rest of the membership.

One of the biggest disappointments was when the employees of the city of Airdrie approached us to organize their little transit system. However, the Board told us that since the city of Airdrie had only a small number of employees, we would have to organize the total workforce. We lost out by one vote. What bothered me was that the one vote was a lady who worked in the summertime for Handibus and in the wintertime she worked in Lake Louise for the ski outfit. How you can consider her an employee? Organizing is heartbreaking, because you find people that would really like to become union affiliated, and you have some that obviously they have a good relationship with the boss and they get all the good jobs, and they're totally against it. It's disappointing when you have to tell people that are really interested in forming a union that you weren't successful – like when we tried to organize Cardinal. We didn't get enough signatures, because the labour board said Cardinal was province-wide, so we had to organize province-wide, which is impossible. We were close to it just before the Olympics, but the owner found out how close we were, and offered them a raise. Just before the Olympics – all it was a bribe. Those employees had higher benefits, higher rates than Handibus, but they're so far behind now that it isn't even funny. One of the operators was suspended because of it. We tried twice, and I still o phone calls from some of the people that I got to know real well. They said they wish we could do it again.

On another occasion, we made a presentation on license suspensions for operators. We felt that of your license was suspended as a bank clerk, you didn't lose your job. However, if your license is suspended as an operator, you lose your job. It's not that as an operator you should not be as careful a driver as anybody else. But we felt at that time that what you did privately shouldn't impact on the job. The AFL supported us on that. We got something out of it, not all of it. You never get everything that you want.

On another occasion, I was approached to see if I would represent labour on the Appeals Commission of the Workers Compensation Board, but I wasn't too sure I wanted to,

because of the restrictions you have as a member. You're restricted in determining whether an appeal is successful or not, which can have an impact when you make a decision that you feel should be in favour of the claimant, but can't be because of those restrictions. I served there for a number of years, until I was 65, and for about 7 years, I ended up as Hearing Chairman. It was a part time job at first, but then it became full time. There are a lot of changes have been made in the meantime, and hopefully eventually it'll come to the recognition that an injury is an injury. Even so, one of the physicians might say you should be able to go back to work. I never agreed with the fact that if you were a mechanic and couldn't do a mechanic work anymore, you should be able to go back as a street sweeper. That's degrading..

I retired in 1957. I have to say that I retired from the job. I'm a strong believer in volunteer work and I volunteer for the food bank, on the support group for Local 583. I feel that there's a lot of good things we can do. It was also an enlightening experience when the city finally recognized that you don't just have to be male to drive a bus. Or you don't just have to be male to be a cleaner or serviceman. When we finally established that we got female operators, and there's more female operators than ever, even in the maintenance section. When I retired I decided that I should give something back to the community, the people that have supported me for years. For a while I helped out MS, the charity that the amalgamated transit supports. And, once in a while, I do the odd arbitration. Not as many as I used to. When you're away for that long there are changes you might not have kept up with. I was involved with the NDP for years and was campaign manager at one time. I don't have to go to work anymore, but I'm busy. I enjoy the outdoors. I'm a passionate cross country skier. I go out with the seniors. Your health is your most important thing, and you can only keep your health if you look after yourself.

I think that as far as unions are concerned, the image of unions probably has improved, bthe issues have changed, and they will continue to change. What was important when I was business agent isn't necessarily important anymore. I think that a big job that unions have to do is reduce working hours; changing technology should also result in shorter working hours. It shouldn't be required that husband and wife both have to work. It's not necessary that the increase in profits should go to shareholders. The people who are in fact responsible for the increase in profits are the people who produce the product, and they should benefit by it. Eventually well have to come to realize that if we don't want to have people on welfare, if we don't want to have people unemployed, we have to create shorter working hours so everybody can have a job. Just volunteering for the food bank, the people that are getting help are not necessarily unemployed. The greatest number of them are people who are employed on minimum wages. In a province like Alberta, that's totally wrong. That should never happen. I guess I'm getting to preaching.

I appreciate the opportunity to reminisce a little bit. The history of the labour movement is important. There's an old saying, how do you know where you're going if you don't know where you're coming from? It's important that our children, our grandchildren, will know that they might have problems today or tomorrow, but nothing compared to the problems that unions in general have resolved and created a better environment for people that work now.