

## **Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)**

### **Oral History Interview**

Interviewee: Bill Flookes

Interviewer: Joan Schiebelbein

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BF: I was born in Napanee, Ontario in 1944. Born there because my father was based at the air force base at ?. He was an air force officer. My mother was there at the base, and the closest hospital happened to be Napanee, so that's why I was born in Napanee. Not too many people born in Napanee, Ontario. I'm actually a sixth generation Montrealer, and lived, until I moved to Calgary, my life in Montreal. My mother was a jazz singer. She sang in a band with Oscar Peterson and Maynard Ferguson when she was a teenager. Offered a job with Count Basie, but married my father instead. My father was an air force officer during the Second World War. Just as he was scheduled to leave Halifax for the European theatre, he was called back to Montreal, and eventually ? to teach navigation. So my father spent the war playing baseball and hockey for the air force

and teaching navigation, and escorting my mother around to all these nightclubs. It was a good deal for him. So I was raised in Montreal, and I guess a funny background in terms of coming to this type of thing. My father's actually a stockbroker, a bond trader, even though he came from a working class background. After the war he wanted to be a sports reporter, but ended up in the stock exchange instead, and stayed there for over 50 years. He refers to me as his socialist son. One of his good friends, a person who belongs to his golf club, is Jack Layton's father. So they like to talk about their sons a lot.

Q: So you went to school in Montreal?

BF: Went to school in Montreal, Sir George Williams College. It turned into a university eventually. But it was the '60s then, and there were other things that people were involved in. A lot of activism going on. I turned into a skier for a while, and that's why I came out west from Montreal was to ski. Ended up looking for a job that could allow me to ski, which was at the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company, because the busy time is the summertime. I thought I could work in the summertime and ski in the wintertime. But I got involved in the union instead.

Q: Was the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company your first main job?

BF: No, because by that time it's my mid-20s. Before that I'd worked at 16 in the bush in New Brunswick. I worked at Thompson, at the Inco plant there. I picked tobacco and worked at various odd jobs in Montreal. Worked for Northern Electric, that's NorTel now. Quite a few jobs. One of the funny things, I remember going to Northern Electric and given the choice of working in the front office or working in the back. Chose to work in the back, and that's basically been my story ever since.

Q: Were you involved in any unions before you came to work at the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company?

BF: When I was working at Inco, for instance, I was a Steelworker. In terms of the involvement myself, it didn't really start until I started with Calgary Brewing and Malting, and the people there.

Q: What was your job with Calgary Brewing and Malting?

BF: I worked everywhere. I worked in packaging, I worked in the brewing section, I worked in the fermenting section, I worked in the cellars, worked in the retail store. So I worked everywhere there. Became involved with the union when the other union members decided to send me to Labour College, send me back to Montreal to go to Labour College in 1974. That really started my active involvement.

Q: Talk about your experience at the Labour College.

BF: One of the things about the Labour College, it was at the University of Montreal. At that time it was pretty active, it was the centre of the separatist activity in Quebec, in Montreal. So it was a really exciting time to be there. There was a contingent from Quebec as well, so there was a lot of interesting conversation, a lot of interesting talk. I think it was the last time they actually had the Labour College in that type of setting, because there was too much activism. A lot of going down to various pickets, a lot of demonstrations, a lot of overall activism in the Labour College itself. But fascinating thing, one of the turning points in my life, not only for the people who taught there who were fabulous, but also the various people that you meet at a place like that. From just about everywhere across country, just about every union, different age groups, all kinds of different stories and histories to tell you. It was really good.

Q: So your co-workers at Brewing and Malting chose you to go?

BF: What happened was that when the group of people who started working at the plant at the same time I did, the person with the junior seniority in the plant had 20 years of seniority. So one of the things we realized was that there was going to have to be a change in terms of the people who were running the union and looking after things. So for some reason they chose me as the one. I wrote a paper and got a scholarship and they sent me down. They paid money for it as well. As soon as I came back they elected me president. I was right in the middle of it right away, and was every since. I was president for 18 years after that.

Q: What union was that?

BF: Brewery, Distillery, Soft Drink, Flour... it goes on and on. It was a huge long name, as more and more groups joined along the way. But it was initially an international union that started in Cincinnati back in 1870s. A union that was really active in forming the Teamsters sometime later. Ironically, when the Teamsters then took over the old international brewery workers, the Canadian contingent decided they wanted to form their own union. That's what happened back in the early '70s, was that the Canadian Brewery Workers was formed.

Q: What was the rationale for breaking away from the international?

BF: I think it was control. One of the things that I learned in terms of the Brewery Workers' Union, both in the old international and with the Canadian section, was that it was run from the bottom up, whereas the Teamsters was basically a top down type of organization, very authoritarian and structured. Whereas with the Brewery Workers, they were really run by the locals, and the locals were run by the members. I remember when

we would have a local meeting. We'd have local meetings every month. If ever there was a meeting where less than 50% of the people showed up, the people thought that the union was collapsing, and there was all kinds of talk, and people were upset about not showing up. I had one meeting where one person was missing. So it was very active. The idea in the union itself was that you were responsible, and therefore you needed to be involved. If things were going to continue to be good, then you'd better be there.

Q: So you were president of the local then, at the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company?

BF: That's right. Calgary Brewing and Malting, which was formed by Mr. Cross in 1892. He was one of the big four that formed the Stampede as well. Lots of history involved with the old plant.

Q: What are some of your memories of the time that you were president of what became the Canadian Brewery Workers?

BF: Well this was just the local, right? I was a national vice president as well for a while. But no, as I say, it was a very active local. One of the big things during the period I was there, because of the shift in demographics, there was a shift in activism as well. The '70s and '80s were very volatile. There were a lot of strikes and lockouts because of the change in the industry itself. One of the things about the brewing industry was constant change. It went from local breweries that were there. We had at one time 9 different breweries in Calgary. Then they were consolidated on a local basis. At one point Calgary Brewing and Malting then basically was the main brewery in the province. Exported to Saskatchewan and BC a fair amount. They owned all the hotels. There was a different kind of industry. Then there was the consolidation Canadian. So Calgary Brewing and

Malting was bought out by Carlings, and it was controlled by E.P. Taylor. They started closing down plants then. So there was a continuous consolidation, continuous plant closures, continuous people losing their jobs. One of the good things about that was that as each plant was closed down, the surviving plants had a lot more power. So the brewing industry at that time, together with the Autoworkers, were probably the leaders in terms of wages and benefits and things. So there were good things and bad things about the changes.

Q: When you were president of the local, were there any strikes?

BF: There were strikes, there were walkouts. At one point in all of this change, one of the things the industry wanted to do was to control us. From their perspective, we'd been doing too well. They used a term called leapfrogging, which meant that if a Labatts plant in Edmonton, for instance, would negotiate an agreement, then we would negotiate an agreement better than theirs. Then Molson would come along and negotiate one better. So we kept advancing that way. The power that we had at the time was that, because they were fighting for market share between the big three at the time, they couldn't afford to be down. If they were down, they lost market share, which cost them enormously. So we had a lot of leverage in terms of negotiating. The big battle, late '70s into the early '80s, was trying to bargain on an industry basis. And that meant on a provincial basis. So the big dispute that we had lasted 7-1/2 months, and that's what it was about. We had a couple of plants in the province that went on strike, and we weren't. They had tried it a couple of years previously, and we actually won a landmark decision and an illegal lockout. Even though we weren't open for bargaining, they locked us out anyway. We were able to go to the Labour Relations Board and have it declared an illegal lockout.

Q: When was that?

BF: This would've been about 1978, '77. But subsequently in '79, they managed to get themselves all together. Between the strikes and the lockouts, the whole province was down. For people who were avid beer drinkers at the time, this was a disaster. It was quite the battle. In a sense we lost the war, because we did have industry bargaining after that. But my fondest memory of the dispute was at the end of the 7-1/2 months, after we had worked out a settlement, I took it back to my membership. At the time, everybody had the same proposal put to them by the industry people. But at the time, the Labatts plant had a paid half hour lunch, and we didn't have one at our plant. So you can imagine, this is 7-1/2 months. So we took it back to our members and our members said, we want the half hour lunch. We got it. After 7-1/2 months, they were still willing to say, we're not going back. I can remember afterwards walking around the plant talking to people and people saying, hah, it was worth it, especially at lunchtime. It was an epic battle. I remember going around trying to find money so we could pay our picketers so they could eat. My first son was born during the dispute. It was hard, but for a lot of the people who went through it, it was probably one of the funny moments of their lives. When one fellow who celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> year of working for the plant, for the old Calgary Brewing and Malting, on the picket line. I can remember having a big party for him at the strike headquarters.

Q: When you were the local president, did you also work in the plant or were you employed by the union?

BF: I worked in the plant. That was another thing that differentiated us from the larger unions, was the fact that all of the people who were in charge of the locals or who were

doing the negotiating or handling the grievances were all the same people in the plant.

We would get time off to do those things, of course, but basically still did your regular job.

Q: Do you think there's a benefit to having the people who are representing the members actually working alongside them?

BF: I think there is a benefit. It's very difficult as well. We worked out of cardboard boxes. It was difficult to keep things together, and it was difficult to keep up. But we did it. At my particular plant at one time we had 170 members. That year we had the third most grievances in the province for any union. The first union had 40,000 people in it, the other union had 30,000 and we had 170. So we were active.

Q: What types of things were people fining grievances about?

BF: One of the big things was around arbitrary decisions that management would make. A lot of times, what people are faced with is that if there's a problem, the supervisor will write up a reprimand or something. So the reprimand stands on the record unless you get it removed. It's a way of going after people. A lot of times it's a way of going after active people, people who are active in the union. We did a number of things. We took everything and ran it ourselves, and learned how to do the arbitrations ourselves. We were third in the province in terms of numbers of grievances, or arbitrations I should say, that particular year. Behind unions with 40,000 or 30,000 and we with our 170 people. And we did other things. Like we used to write reprimands in reverse. We use to write paper up on the supervisors and the managers, and we'd copy them up the ladder in the organization. They didn't like that. Eventually they learned to deal with us. One of the things I did learn later on, which made a lot of sense to me, was that our problem to a

large degree was that we were the decision makers for the union, but the people that we dealt with weren't. When I was sitting on one of the committees for the Alberta provincial government, The Future of Work, that was one of the things that we talked about a lot, was this whole business of where the communication was. A lot of times between management and unions, and a lot of times in the hierarchy, the top of the union would be speaking to the middle of the pyramid. As a consequence, decision makers were speaking to the people who could not make decisions, which is where a lot of frustration comes in in terms of relationships and communication. That's something you learn in terms of how to manage.

Q: What were the working conditions like in the plant?

BF: A lot of the activism that we had in the '70s and '80s was around that type of thing. In our union we had a fellow by the name of Doug Laughton that we sent away to school for occupational health and safety. He was instrumental in working with the Alberta Federation of Labour, setting up all these joint occupational health and safety committees in various plants. We had one at our plant, of course. It was a big enterprise for a small local like ours, but I think it worked very well. We fought to get an apprenticeship program for our own people as well. A lot of the people who became tradesmen were workers within the plant. The plant differed from area to area. It's very noisy and dangerous in the packaging area. But the other areas, like the brewing areas, cellars, fermenters, not so much. Except in a lot of places you'd have to work alone, and that's one of the things we changed as well with occupational health and safety. You'd have to get in the tanks themselves, and you'd be by yourself. So there were gases around, etc., so

there were dangers that way. But up until they closed my plant down in '94, it was getting better.

Q: Were you still president when the plant closed?

BF: No, just prior to that I had stepped down. I'd run for MLA for the New Democrats in 1989, and it looked like I was going to have to run again. So I stepped down. I almost won in '89, which is why it looked like I was going to have to do something else as far as the union was concerned. So I stepped down. What they did of course, is they gerrymandered the boundaries and put a city NDP member into mine. So I had to bow out and let him run the next election.

Q: And at what point you were a national vice president?

BF: With the Canadian Brewery Workers? That was in the '70s. It was a period of time when the Canadian union was trying to get set up. But we were under a lot of pressure from other unions and from the Teamsters themselves in Ontario. As it turned out, the union split up in the early '80s, and joined various other groups -- Teamsters and UFCW. During the '70s it was pretty exciting. It was pretty exciting belonging to an organization, a Canadian national union that was starting from the ground up, albeit with a big heritage, but setting up a Canadian union. Although at one time there actually was a western group formed with brewery workers and malt workers and distillery workers and soft drink bottlers, etc. in the western province. They for a while had one set up I think. But because there were so many plants that closed during that period of time, there was lots of change on a continuous basis, in terms of how the locals were set up and how the unions worked together, and which unions ended up being the successors to the various groups joining together. I know that just in the period of time that I was at the Calgary plant, they closed

the Red Deer plant and they came down and joined us. They closed another plant here in Calgary and they joined us in our plant. When Molson bought Carlings, they closed the old Lethbridge plant, and those people came up and joined us. There was a lot of that going on for 50 years.

Q: Where were the headquarters of the Canadian Brewery Workers?

BF: They were in Toronto. I used to spend a lot of time flying back and forth from Calgary to Toronto. There were a fair number of major disputes in Ontario as well. But at that time, because the growth and the market was in western Canada, and also because of the change in the demographics of the locals, it was more dramatic out west. We have younger groups, and the market was growing so fast that the demand for the beer was there. Therefore we had the ability to pressure the industry for gains. So most of the activity in the '70s and '80s was out west here, Alberta, BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba. A lot of activism, a lot of fun.

Q: So you said the plant closed in 1984?

BF: No, in 1994. The plant was 102 years old when it closed down.

Q: What happened to all those workers?

BF: Some of them went on to work at other plants. Some of them went to Edmonton, some of them went to Saskatchewan. Some of them went to BC. But the majority of the people who were working in the plant, the union members, had just gone off to other jobs at other worksites in Calgary, for the most part. There are a number of people that went off to do union jobs. One of the fellows who was active with me in the union is now working with UNA in Edmonton.

Q: When the plant closed, did the company and union negotiate a severance for the workers that were laid off?

BF: In our industry we were used to this process, because they've been closing plants across the country on a continuous basis. So it was pretty standard in terms of working out an arrangement. Although I remember thinking at the time for the people that we were looking at, it was about \$2 million, the total cost for everybody. And Molson, the parent company at the time, I think they gave one of their executives \$6 million. He'd worked for six months. They'd hired him up from the States to set up a subsidiary in the renovations market and it didn't work. So they paid him \$6 million to go. I always thought that was kind of an interesting contrast, for six months of work for one fellow to get \$6 million, and for 150 people they get \$2 million to share between them.

Q: What happened to you at that point?

BF: I did some independent union work. I worked for the theatre workers, IATSE. Funny enough, they'd been in the province since around 1902 or 1905. This particular local didn't have a certification at all with the Labour Relations Board because almost all the work they did was around voluntary recognition. So they thought they'd like some certification. So they hired me to do some certifications, which was very strange. It's a very interesting union. I'd been on some organizing drives before in plants and industries. Snuck in the plants to sign up people, to make copies of who was on the punch cards. But in this case I got the list of names from the manager of the plant. It's a very different union. I was supposed to sign up. I went and signed them up. Because that's how the industry works. When the movies come in, the theatre people come in, they contact these people who then own these little companies, who are members of the union, and they

contact other people in the union and hire them. So it's a very strange situation. Then after that I did arbitrations for other unions. Two years after I left the Calgary Brewing and Malting Company, when they closed it down, I was working here for the staff association of the Calgary Board of Education. I've worked there for 10 years now.

Q: What types of things do you do there?

BF: I manage the union. So I look after the negotiations and the grievances, and basically look after the collective agreement and the relationship with the Calgary Board of Education. That was a big change for me, from the industry I was in and the union I was in, which was almost all male, blue-collar, industrial, to a white collar, almost all female, and public sector. So it was one extreme to the other. I really enjoyed it. It's been an education for me as well. It's always better to work at something you can learn at as well, so it's been very good.

Q: What are some of the things that you learned there?

BF: One of the things, well a huge difference for instance is community, and the community of interest within the local. One of the things I was describing before about the local that I learn about unions from, was one that everybody was active in and where everybody knew the collective agreement. Where if something happened, anybody would say no you can't do that, or yes what's going on here, yes we should do this. But in this type of union where the community of interest is so diverse, and you've got 250 different work sites for 3000 members of my union, and they work at well over 200 different types of jobs, it's very difficult to get people to understand how other people are thinking. Therefore it's very difficult to get people to think collectively in terms of trying to make gains. That's probably been my biggest task, is to make them think as a union and to

make them think of themselves as union members. Even in the name, they call themselves an association. It took me a long time to get the people I work with to think of themselves as a union. They do now, but it took a long time.

Q: How do you do that?

BF: Part of it is to demonstrate that there are benefits and positive things about a union being there, and that it's not something which just has negatives attached to it. So if you do things for them and you talk about it being union that's doing this, and you are the union, it's other people who are supporting you, and that's the reason you do have this accord. It happens, but it's a long and slow process. But I think they've come a long way.

Q: Is there more than one collective agreement, or is the whole membership under one collective agreement?

BF: There was one collective agreement when I started. I made two others while I was there. But we merged one of them, so now we just have two. We have one which covers the vast majority of membership, and another that covers what we call our professional group, which is psychologists and speech pathologists and people like that.

Q: Have you had any struggles with management since you've been with the school?

BF: I'm having lots of struggles right now, lots of problems right now. I'm going through a very interesting little situation right now. But initially what I was looking at was a union, even though they were having difficulties. We had an administration at the Calgary Board of Education that was very wanting to engage the employees quite a bit. One of the questions they asked me when they interviewed me for the job was, what did I think about mutual interests and mutual gains. I said, it's fine if you're an employer. I said, I thought that was something where both sides mutually agreed that the union would

give up things. But they thought in fact that this was something they could work with. As it turned out, I learned an awful lot by doing the process with people on the other side who are invested in the process as well. It sort of fit a lot of things I'd learned along the way, which is that a lot of the work that's done in labour relations is really done through relationships and communication. So mutual interest, if both parties are actually using it, actually works quite well. But it doesn't work at all if only one side is doing it, which is really what's happening now. But at the time it worked very well. We actually did very well. I think the employer did well by it as well. But certainly we did very well by it. So I learned that. The thing that I was talking about now in terms of a situation, is that we have Telus, who have been in the news lately for being not a stellar employer, have set up a splinter subsidiary that deals with HR, called TSS. TSS two years ago took over the HR functions, benefits, salaries, and to some degree the EAP type of situation, for the Calgary hospital district. They decided to do that with Calgary Board of Education as well. It's kind of like a hollowing out of the public sector by using a method to go inside and taking over the HR functions within a public institution and making them private. So I've just been through a whole negotiating process with the CBE and TSS, the subsidiary of Telus, to take over about 40 of our people from the Calgary Board of Education. I know that it's been a huge problem at the Calgary Health Region. I think there's probably been very few paychecks that have been correct for quite a while, and there've been all kinds of problems around it. One of the things we did was we hired a professor from the university to do a study on it for us. He was fabulous and did a great job, and proved without any doubt that there was no business case for this to happen. This was all politics.

This was all the provincial government and Telus that have arranged all of this. For some reason or other Calgary Board of Education has gone along with it.

Q: So they just ignored his findings?

BF: Absolutely. They had no answers to any of his questions. There are other reasons for it. It seems like it's something that they're intending to do for a big part of the public sector, for municipalities, universities, school boards. This is just starting, so we were second on the hit list.

Q: It would be nice to get that study out there.

BF: It was on our website for quite a while, and we have given them out. We've given them to CUPE, and CUPE took them down east and used them down there. He's an interesting fellow to talk to. He did a very good job for us.

Q: You said this has affected 40 of your members. Are they still members of the Calgary School Board Staff Association?

BF: They're still members right now. This only just happened October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005 here. But we're looking at an interesting situation, because the people who moved across from CUPE, who were CUPE members and moved with the Calgary Health Region, they're there at TSS. So we have an almost equal number of our people now who are there at TSS, doing basically the same jobs, two different unions. We're looking at sometime or other, the Labour Relations Board, probably at the bequest of the employer, taking a look and deciding that there should only be one union and one certificate. But not yet. Right now they're still members of our union.

Q: In terms of the Calgary School Board Employees Association, do you work together with the other unions?

BF: We actually have worked well together. We sit on various committees with Calgary Board of Education, at least we have in the past. That's getting to be a problem these days, because Calgary Board of Education, the way it runs now, doesn't want to meet with us. So it's become more difficult that way. But actually we do work very well together, and have. Different of course because in the bargaining, which is where you'd like to work very well together, we have ATA in essence now are almost moving to provincial bargaining. CUPE is basically tied in with their other locals, and they're in the same sector. And the trades are tied to their own unions. We haven't worked as well together as we might have, but we've tried quite a bit.

Q: Were you president of the Calgary District Labour Council at one point?

BF: Yes. That was just after I ran for the provincial election in 1989 for MLA. I was just there for a little bit, just for two years. The reason that I didn't continue on was that I then got dragged into national bargaining from the brewing industry at the time, so I was spending an awful lot of time in Toronto trying to work together with the negotiations that were going on in Ontario at the time. I couldn't spend a bunch of time in Calgary with the District Labour Council, so I was just on term, two years as president of the Labour Council.

Q: What was it like trying to bring together a bunch of different unions?

BF: I was of course familiar with the Labour Council, being involved in it. Especially being in situations where we were out on the street so much, you do need the support of other unions. There was a lot of help that was given to us, so we tried to reciprocate, which is why we got involved so much. One of the things while I was there was just that type of thing. A lot of times labour councils can become just a place for people to talk,

but there's not a lot of action. One of the things that seems to follow me is that I just don't like to talk about things, but I like actually to do things and actually to have some consequence at the end of whatever project we're on. One of the things I was really keen on doing, and I think has remained true to this day, is for the labour council to be that type of focal point for the unions to expect a place to come so they can tell other unions what's going on and what their problems are and, when there are issues, what to do about them. Not just about the strikes and lockouts, but the other issues. At the time, we had all kinds of issues around NAFTA and we had issues around the health care system. There were all kinds of issues around that type of thing. There were a lot of affiliates who thought that the District Labour Council can just be a place for people to speak about radical things on a continuous basis, and not really get down to what matters to the regular members. It's important to still have that platform for people to come into town and to look at things that are outside just your local area. That's a major part of what a district labour council has to do. But I think the major part is actually maintaining that local relationship, both with the locals and also with the individual members, and try to make it relevant to them. That was part of what I tried to do when I was there.

Q: But you had such a limited time there.

BF: Ya, in terms of being the president. Although I said I was involved with the council for quite a while before and after.

Q: What caused you to run for provincial politics?

BF: One of the things is that I think as you get involved actively within the union movement, you realize that so much of what you do and how things turn out for you really revolves around politics, and maybe more so for the industry that I came out of, the

brewing industry, than others, because you were controlled at that time mostly by the province. A huge thing that happened to us during the period of time that I was involved was that the provincial boundaries had been knocked down. Where the industry had been set up across the country, such that there were plants in every province except for PEI. What you had is you had, even in provinces that didn't have a lot of industry, you actually had very well paying industrial jobs that were localized and that contributed an awful lot, not just in salaries, but in other ways to the local economy. So we depended a lot on politics on decisions made by politicians. It was something where we were involved pretty well on a continuous basis. So when I was asked to run, I decided that I would. As it turned out I thought, as I was, one of the things about running was that people talk about going door to door and how hard that is. I thought that was a lot of fun actually. I actually did have a lot of fun going around and meeting people and talking to people. Here in Calgary where you think that coming from the left and being a member of New Democrats, etc., that you would get tossed out on your ear when you knocked on doors, I didn't find that to be true at all. I only lost by 126 votes. As a matter of fact, at least from a lot of our perspectives, it was stolen from us. There were a lot of things that were going on in the election which shouldn't have happened. We actually took them to court, which is why I got thrown off the Alberta Labour Relations Board.

Q: What was the issue?

BF: As it turned out, there was a big section of downtown that hadn't been enumerated. Nobody showed up to enumerate them. Then at the polling stations, these people who weren't registered showed up in buses, and were herded into the polling stations by people wearing my rival's buttons, and in essence were told how to vote in the polling

stations themselves. These were people out of seniors' homes. I won the vast majority of the polls, except for this little section of downtown, where I lost by quite a bit. And it turned out to be by only 126. There were all kinds of irregularities that we took them to court on. But even though it was determined that those things were there, the judge didn't overturn the election. That was it for my run in politics.

Q: That must've been really disappointing.

BF: It was at the time. Although I remember the chair of Alberta Labour Relations Board telling me the only thing worse than losing may have been winning, because of course everybody lost their seats the next time around. It was fine. I had my whole plant involved in it. People who were supposed to be at work were doing all kinds of work on my campaign. We ran an old diner. We had the old diner, the counter was still there, the booths were still there. We were right on a busy street with a bus stop. People used to come in for coffee, into my campaign headquarters. It was busy all the time. We had so much fun. Another reason I lost, I hope Cathy and Bill actually hear this. My campaign manager was Catherine McCurry, who was a very active person, a labour lawyer. She was my campaign manager. The person who was running my signs, that was Bill Flynn. He was head of the local union at the Malt Workers. They met at my campaign. They fell in love and married. The last couple of weeks there was a downturn in the activity in terms of what was going on. Maybe that's one of the reasons we actually lost. So Cathy if you're listening to this some time... No, we had an awful lot of fun on the campaign.

Q: You mentioned earlier, you sat on a provincial...?

BF: I was on the Alberta Labour Relations Board from 1983 to '91. As I say, I was thrown off because the Tory caucus didn't like the fact that I had run against them, which

was one thing. But actually to take them to court as well was another thing. So when my term was up they threw me off. The chair of the board put my name forward, actually through the minister, the minister put my name forward three times back to the caucus, and they turned me down three times.

Q: What did you do at the Labour Relations Board?

BF: Just sat... The way the labour relations board is set up, there's a chairman and some vice chairmen, and then what we call wingers. Half of those people come from the labour side, and half of them come from the management side. When I started sitting it was just at the time we had all the problems in the province with the trades and construction industry. It was an interesting time to sit on the board.

Q: What years were those?

BF: From '83 to '91.

Q: So you were on in '86? That was an interesting year in Alberta.

BF: Yes, although I didn't sit on any of those hearings, because they were in Edmonton. But I was involved in other ways.

Q: You mentioned a commission on the future of work.

BF: One of the things that happened was that after I was thrown off the Alberta Labour Relations Board, I was asked by the minister of labour to sit on a Future of Work committee, which was very interesting. We had all kinds of interesting people to talk to. We talked amongst ourselves in terms of various things that we could look at doing within the province to change both educationally and with the province to deal with the change in structure of work. As I was saying before, one of the things I did learn a lot about was that whole aspect of hierarchies and sociology in terms of how people

negotiated and how we actually evolve in our relationships. Which kind of followed up another project I was on in this last two years with the University of Calgary. They had a project for a film for the federal government on best practices. They looked at four different industries or relationships across the province, which we decided were actually emblematic of very good relationships within the industrial relations type of communications relationships, organizing, bargaining. The thing I learned about there, an aspect in looking back on my 35 years doing this type of stuff, is that so much of what works and what doesn't work depends on individual personal relationships. We're looking at things that we thought had worked. As we talked amongst ourselves about areas that we knew were successful and that were positive, when we went back and looked at them, a lot of them had collapsed. We tried to figure out what had happened to them. The thing that we really took out of that was that the people who had set up the relationships and who actually drove them had changed. Just a lot of times in the changing of one side made a huge difference. All of a sudden a relationship would go from being a wonderful one where they worked really well together, to ones where it just devastated the both of you, sometimes locally and sometimes nationally, a company or a union. We did come up with four that still seem to be working quite well. But I don't know how long that'll last. I don't know how you deal with that aspect. I don't know how you deal with that type of situation in this world, because things change so fast now.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about what's going on in the province today, and what you see for the future of the labour movement?

BF: In some ways my change, my move, my personal move in terms of one union to another, really shows the shift of where unions have to be. The old industrial sector is

nowhere near the strength that it has in our economy that it did have before. There is a difference in terms of how working people and the groups that represent them are seen within our society, a huge difference. It had started to happen before I became active. But it really accelerated during the period of time that I was there, that I had been active. We used to have people who were elected to city governments or provincial governments, a lot of times came from union backgrounds. That was a lot of times how people did get involved publicly, was through their unions. That's not true very much anymore. They were involved both in municipal politics or provincial politics or even federal politics. If you weren't the person who was elected, you were somebody that the politicians would pay attention to. If things were not going well, that communication would be there. With the change, especially in Calgary where it's really accelerated beyond the rest of the province because of the big oil and gas companies, and historically coming from the States, they have not been connected that way with unions or with working people that way. So it's changed in a dramatic way in Calgary. To the degree I remember one of the other things I did was work with United Way. I was on a campaign cabinet here in Calgary, and also went to meet with the national group one time in Montreal as well. Up until a couple of years ago, Calgary was the only major metropolitan area in the country that didn't have somebody full time working with United Way from the labour movement. That's because even the United Way was run by head office, by corporations. And United Way was formed as a partnership between unions and corporations. In Calgary there was no direct link on a continuous basis, and it was no accident. So there have been huge changes along that line. It'll change again.

Q: Do you see a way to turn it around?

BF: I think the big thing is recognizing change. One of the difficult things with any organization or any sector of labour is that the economy changes around you. Like any economic system, they're made by the people who inhabit them, and therefore they have to change with those people. To a great degree a lot of the unions are still living in old structures that are old in terms of the industries they came from. They don't work well. Not that they're not well meaning, but they don't work well with the changes that we're seeing. To that degree I've been lucky. I'm working predominantly with women. I've got a fair number of professionals who are working in the union as well. It's been interesting trying to work around them in terms of how they see unions. I have to tell you a little story about that. When I started with Calgary Board of Education, they were an exempt group. I decided that they shouldn't be an exempt group, so I went after them. As it turned out, the Calgary Board of Education just gave them to me when I went after them, cuz they were so scared that I was coming after all of these exempt people. These professional people had no idea. They were very angry and did everything they could to try to not belong to the union. Right now they're the strongest group that we have. We structured around them. We structured a complete collective agreement around their work, as opposed to trying to impose an alien type of structure on them. So what we have is a union with structures that are worked around professionals. So they control a lot of what they do together. They work as peer groups and make decisions on a peer basis. Even in terms of how long they work and how they do their work. To the degree that when the employer decided that one of their group should be exempt, because there were 50 of them, psychologists in this case, and they needed somebody who could manage them. The manager didn't want to be outside the union, so we had to work out an

arrangement for her that she could come back any time she wanted. It's that type of change that we have to do. We have another group like that with our tech people, our IT people. They work differently, they have different needs and different backgrounds. What we have to do is adapt to them. Or maybe even learn from them.

[new tape]

BF: Where I'm working now, the big issue with the teachers for instance, with the principals is being in the union. So they've split the principals from the union in BC, they've split them from the union in Ontario, and it's been a big political thing. Whereas in Alberta, they haven't, and they're still in. I was going to a ? conference, it's a law and education conference that's held every year. Talking to one of the heads of one of the principal groups in Ontario, that was one of the things that they were struggling with, trying to organize themselves, and how they were going to be able to work without the larger structure of belonging to the union as a whole with the teachers. They were going all over the place, the States and England, trying to find out how to do this and how to work. It's a big change in terms of how they work. It takes them away from the education model and puts them in a managerial model. It's a huge difference.

Q: You're now in the public sector. Is that an opportunity for the labour movement to gain more public support?

BF: I think that's true. I think that the fact that unions are there fighting for healthcare or fighting for progressive things, environment, that type of thing. One of the things that's happened from the right and from corporations is that's been turned around, so that the activism itself becomes tied to the self interest. So the self interest then becomes the issue, and that's why we're defending healthcare, or that's why healthcare is stuck in its

static mode or whatever, as opposed to the fact that what we're defending is something that works. Nobody wants a system that costs 50% more and an enormous number of people ? at all. I think that that's true. The difficulty is engaging the other side into being part of the change itself. Because change has to happen anyway. It needs to happen. The group that I like who are involved publicly in health are the nurses, who are both the most active and have not just self-interest from their perspective, but also interest in their own profession in terms of what works and what doesn't work. It's coming up with solutions from groups like that that'll actually work.

Q: That's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

BF: A couple of sayings. ? said – I use this every once in a while negotiating with management – he said that we all have strength enough to endure the misfortune of others. We all have the ability to say that what the most have is enough, because we're not there and we can make those decisions for them. The other one was, it's an old story, the first scene written in Sanskrit. The devil and his friend were walking in a busy market. The friend looked across the market and saw somebody bend down and pick something up. He asked the devil, what was that? The devil said, oh that's a bit of truth. So the devil's friend said, aren't you going to do something about that? That can be problems. He said, no, I'm going to let him organize it. I guess from my perspective, one of the things about unions, and one of the things that I've learned from dealing with the union movement and the political movement around it, is that people think that, or it's portrayed, that unions are controlling, that unions are something which takes away liberty and individual rights, etc. In fact, it's just the opposite. From my perspective, what I try to do is empower individual people to be able to do the things they want to do. The vast

majority of us are just working in a regular job. That's where you're going to be spending the second greatest amount of your time in your life, is at work. If you don't have an ability to affect that work, then you've lost a big part of your life. So I think unions, if they're run properly by the people who are the unions, the regular members, that's what it does, it empowers that individual.

Q: Thank you very much.

[END]