

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Barrie Regan

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

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Index: United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 1325 - hiring hall - structural steel - journeyman - apprenticeship - certificate - Red Seal Program

His background

My name is Barrie Regan and I'm with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 1325, which received its charter in Edmonton. I hold the position of recording secretary to the local, and vice president of the Alberta Regional Council of Carpenters.

Actually I was born and raised just 20 miles east of Edmonton, a place called Half Moon Lake. In my earlier days, you're right, I wasn't in the trade movement, or even in the trades. I joined the Canadian navy. I spent a few years in the Canadian navy. Upon release from the Canadian navy, I followed basically my father's footsteps as a trade unionist, or actually a construction worker in the trades. My father was a handyman carpenter, and he did that basically all his life. I started in the trade movement actually as an iron worker working for the structural steel local. I can't recall the actual local number, but that was in Edmonton here. In 1969 I decided I didn't like laying on cold steel plates. We were building barges for waterways. I decided to become a carpenter, which I'd always dabbled at anyway. I joined the carpenter's Local 1325.

Working in a structural steel company

The company I was with was called AIM Steel, which was just off 34th St. out by Stelco. The conditions, as a union shop, they were fairly decent. This was back in '65, and for that time the conditions were fairly good. At the shop, we were building bridges for bridge spans crossing the Saskatchewan River. It was cold and miserable work in the wintertime. But all in all, I think organized labour at that time wasn't too bad. It was ups and downs, but overall it was pretty good.

At that time the structural steel workers really didn't go through a hiring hall. We were hired right at the gate. As the company needed men, you had an application in to the company and you started your job with the company. Then you became part of the Local that was involved with that company.

Union involvement

It didn't take long for me to get involved. With the Structural Steel Workers, I became recording secretary probably within 3 or 4 months after joining AIM Steel. It was shortly after I started that I became involved.

The reason I got involved right from the onset is that there was certain things that needed change. I thought by being a part of the group, being active, that that was the only way to make the changes, and it did benefit all workers at that time, the changes that we did get put in place.

I became involved with the hiring hall procedure when I became a member of 1325. The first job I had there was as a young apprentice. I was hired through the company. Once that job was completed, then I became involved or had my name put on an out of work list; thus, the start of the hiring hall practice. I think the benefit of a hiring hall practise is that the first guy laid off is the first guy to go back to work. It is important that we treat all members and all workers fairly. The hiring hall practise that we have is that system. Everybody gets treated fairly as to your capabilities and your trade qualifications. Companies want certain qualifications. You're the first guy on that list, you get to go out to work. It's fair. It's a fair system.

With the hiring hall practices, it is up to the members. It's his onus that he reports all his qualifications with documentation. That's the important thing. As a journey person, you come into the union hall. You bring your certificates and maybe a bit of a work history of where you've worked. And practises you've maintained on the various jobs. If you are an exceptional tradesman, you may hear about it, you may not in most cases. However, if you are not a very good tradesman, the union will hear about it. Therefore, we can adjust the qualifications as need be.

Apprenticeship

I apprenticed through the Alberta apprenticeship program. I took my 4 years at NAIT. I'm a Red Seal, which is, the carpentry trade is involved in the Red Seal Program. That means you can basically go to work and receive the same respect right across Canada.

The Apprenticeship Program is an important part of any trades person. It is no different than going to university. You start out your apprenticeship program, you learn all aspects of the trade, whatever that trade is. You'll go right through it, through job site training and through technical training in the technical schools. It is important that you continue this. Alberta can take the pride as being one of the leaders in the world as to the apprenticeship program. I just hope it maintains that leadership. We do have a good system.