

Marion Leskiw

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Interviewer: Winston Gereluk Camera: Ron Patterson

ML: I'm Marion Leskiw, the president of CSU 52. I've been the president for nine consecutive terms now.

Q: How many years?

ML: Coming on 18 years.

Q: Tell me about your background.

ML: I was born and raised in a small town in northeastern Alberta. The town's name was Spedden. I was born in the Vila hospital. At an early age I was exposed to local politics. My father was a county counselor for years and years, and ended up reeve of the County of Smoky Lake before passing away in 1971. I went to school, part of my high school in Vilna. The last year of my high school was in St. Paul, the St. Paul Regional High School. Always involved with student's union, school politics, that type of thing. Never planned on being president but that's just the way it worked out.

Q: What were the politics of the area?

ML: Obviously at the time, that would've been in the '60s and early '70s, Social Credit was the party of the day in this province. Along came Mr. Lougheed and that's history, we all know that. I will say that my father was not a Progressive Conservative. I remember federal Liberals, provincial Liberals, being in our kitchen and trying to meet with him and trying to convince him that he should get involved in politics. I remember him always refusing, never did want to leave the farm and never did want to leave the local politics of the county. That's the way it was until the day he passed away, and he was reeve of the county when he passed away.

Q: What did you do after high school?

ML: My father passed away my last year of high school. I had planned to go to university but decided to work. I started work and got involved in legal surveying. One thing led to another and in April of 1973 I applied for a job in survey, the transportation department at the time, the City of Edmonton, because it paid better. It was a better paying job. I was just hired for the summer. Once again, one thing led to another. It was a busy season. Fall came and they posted for a few permanent positions. At that point I had to make a decision, would I go to school or would I take the permanent posting and work for a while? I decided to take the permanent posting, and 36 ½ years later I'm still here.

Q: What were the work conditions like?

ML: It was different, but it wasn't different. I haven't surveyed now for, I was in this office for two years before I became president. But I'm still exposed to all the work areas. Things were, I would imagine, different in the sense of equipment, the way you did things. But I've been down to the survey yersrds a number of times in the last number of

years and many of the people are still the same there. I'm just trying to think. I would say that most areas, including the survey area, still have very good people, very hard workers. Most of the senior people that I started with are all retired and some of them have passed on and things have changed. One of the things I mentioned, leaving private survey for city survey, I remember it was the wage. It was so much better than private. My starting wage with the City of Edmonton was \$3.11 an hour and I thought I was in heaven.

Q: When was your first contact with the union?

ML: At the time, our union was going through some turmoil. We had a couple of people that ended up as business agents, and I believe you're going to be interviewing Jim Cox and Gary Ahlstrom, that worked in the survey area. They were really quite involved. You're right, I didn't know a whole bunch about unions, coming from the farm. I didn't know a whole bunch about labor. But I did know what was right and what was wrong. There were a lot of things going on at the time that, in my opinion, weren't right. I believe it was in about 1973 I started, maybe even earlier, I started to attend meetings and became a shop steward and got involved. As I said, we went through some major changes. I'm sure some of the more senior people than me recall the dates. Lloyd Egan was elected as president and Gary and Jim were hired as business agents and came into the office here. One thing led to another and I stayed involved in the union. As I say, that was basically my beginning with the union and labor.

Q: What were some of the problems in the union back then?

ML: What was happening with the union at that time, from what I could gather and quite obviously the people I was getting the information from may have been one sided, but I certainly made up my own mind on some of the things that were going on. We had a business manager in the office at the time and there was a power struggle between him and the executive. Eventually the executive won out. I don't remember if he quit or was fired or what the case was, but that's the time Lloyd Egan was elected. That did give the union stability for a number of years. But it was really funny, when I sit back and go over a bit of my own history and the union's history, and I'm sure Winston you know this, I think the biggest enemy this union has ever had is ourselves. It wasn't the first time we went through turmoil, and maybe we'll talk about this later on. But when I decided to run for president, it wasn't something I'd ever even dreamed of. This union was in turmoil, we were being raided. It was either stand up, take a stand and get elected and try and do something, or basically walk away from it. We were to the point of self destruction.

Q: Talk a bit about Lloyd Egan.

ML: The one word that comes to mind when I remember Lloyd and some of the discussions and dealings I had with Lloyd, is he was always a gentleman, a real gentleman. He preferred to handle things in a manner that was very civil and low keyed. He was very efficient at doing that. He was president I'm not sure for how many years, but it was quite a lengthy stay in this office. Definitely he was a big influence. I think just attending union meetings and getting involved with people like Leo Derkach and Gary Iskiw and Zonia and people like that, were a big influence on me. I learned a bit about what labor was, what it meant. In the later years when I got much more involved and ran for trustee, I did have a little background by then. By the time I ran for president and was elected I had a pretty good history of this union and a pretty good feel for what it was we had to accomplish in a very short period of time. When we do this interview and I think about it being our 100th year anniversary, it's incredible that we have existed this long. We were on a shoestring 20 or 30 times over that period of time where things could've just fallen apart.

Q: What is the role of a trustee?

ML: The trustee oversees the finances, the spending of this union. We've gone through some turmoil, we got ourselves back into some turmoil with some things that went on, right or wrong. So my job was to take a fair look at everything that was going on and report to the membership and make decisions that were going to be in the best interests of this union. I do have to say that towards the end of my term there was an election and there was a new president. Lloyd was defeated and Frank Zaprawa was elected. I'm not afraid to say I never agreed with Frank's politics and I didn't agree with the spending and some of the other things that were going on in this union. I actually walked away from the union for a two or three year period. I got back involved again when Shirley Wood defeated Frank one term later. I guess it would've been two years. She defeated him and Shirley needed some short-term assistance in this office, and I came in to assist her. One thing led to another and I ended up running for president after Shirley left.

Q: In what capacity were you assisting her.

ML: At the time there was no union in this office. Each president got elected, Fred got elected, removed everyone that was in the office and brought in their own people. So you started from scratch every time there was a new president. At the time Shirley came in the business agents obviously supported the previous president, he'd brought them in and the office staff. For her to come in and have to deal with these people and give them orders and manage the office, it was obvious she was going to need some help. So she requested if I could come in and assist her. I did and then I was asked to stay on as executive assistant, which I did.

Q: Was that in the '90s?

ML: Yes, 1990.

Q: Do you remember when this union had to make decisions regarding its affiliations with CUPE?

ML: Oh yes. What I recall was, I don't know when our union joined CUPE, I think it probably was before my time. But I do remember my reasons for not supporting remaining in CUPE and basically breaking away from them. I believe it was '78 or '79

when we had a real bitter strike. I was on the picket line and at that time I was fairly close to Lloyd Egan and the people involved. I believe the business manager was still here – Alex Sczechina. But what took place in my understanding was we as a union requested assistance from CUPE national and requested some financial assistance, because the union was basically broke.

This was during the strike. The response we got back was, we can't provide you with any financial assistance and you will have to continue to pay your membership dues to CUPE national. So not knowing a bunch about international affiliations, I wasn't overly impressed. Don't get me wrong, I worked very well with the CUPE locals here and in Calgary, and supported CUPE on a number of problems they've had over the years, and most recently some of the turmoil they had in-house, and assisted the interim president, that type of thing. It's not that I have any objection or any bad feelings towards national or international unions, it was the situation at the time. The situation was that we really got no assistance at all from CUPE national. At the end of it, people had to sit back and say, is this really worth it?

Q: What were the pluses and minus to belonging to CUPE?

ML: I can't really speak to any of the pluses or minuses because I'd just become involved with the union a few years before, and my exposure was to my local. I didn't attend any conventions, I didn't attend provincial meetings or anything like that. I was a union member involved with my local. When all this took place I had to make a decision whether to protect our local or continue on with CUPE. The breakaway, I remember that vividly. It was meetings at City Hall and we had a couple of big surveyors at the elevators because CUPE national was trying to send guys up there, heavy weights. It was really interesting. Whether you use this or not, and I don't even know if you want to record this, but the one office on the south wall has a hole in it. Some of the cement chipped out. It was Lloyd Egan's office, and there was a shot taken. I remember having a look at it. It was a pretty heated time, to say the least. But we broke away and continued on. Good or bad, we managed to exist. I think we've always been a very good member of labor and the community and assisted at the drop of a hat. There was never a question with CSU 52 while I was president or when Lloyd was, that we'd do the right thing and be part of labor and part of the movement. Until this day we still operate that way.

Q: What was the local like 17 years ago?

ML: It was terrible. We were going through a raid in Edmonton Telephones at the time. I even forget the name of the union that was raiding us, but we were being raided there. We ended up being raided by IBW and Epcor at the same time. I'll never forget that as long as I'm involved, because I don't believe there ever was a need. IBEW represented people in Edmonton Telephones and so did we. But neither of those raids for successful. At the time there was a move by AUPE to get CSU 52 to join them. There was a bunch of back room stuff going on. The president of the day thought it was a great idea but the executive didn't want any part of it. So there was a lot of infighting going on and this union was just about to explode. The president of the day was having a number of problems, in fact she left before the end of her first term. Peter Neuschafer, who was the first vice president at the time, completed the term.

As I say, at that point I decided that either I run for president, I had been in the office the two previous years, I had a pretty good idea of what was going on and what we needed to see happen and the work that had to be done. So it was at that point I decided to run. Basically it was like living through a nightmare. You were working 12-hour days, you were in a constant struggle with outside forces, inside forces. When I look back, and I'll have to mention this to you, I've got a folder of memos and documents and things that I just came across, that I'd saved from that period of time. When I opened it up and started to go back, it was like reliving a nightmare. Some of the things that we were going through then internally and externally, how a person ever got any sleep I don't know. That was part of my decision.

We had a good office staff in here. At that point in time it looked like a number of the office staff were going to be run out, things were going to change again. It was at that point I said we need a union in here. We contacted the United Steelworkers and that wasn't a very popular move. They came in and met with all of us, the labor board met with us. Then there was a vote taken and we had a union in this office. As a matter of fact, I still have my Steelworkers card, because as executive assistant I was ruled into the membership by the labor board. We had a vote. So that caused a lot of turmoil and trouble but it finally gave this office some stability. We would have people that, unless they weren't doing their job, remained here no matter who was president or who the executive was. Why are we here? The most important thing, to represent our members. That was the biggest thing. That was one thing I wanted to see happen, and it happened just before I made my mind up to run for president. That was another factor in me saying, you know what, if I'm elected at least I've got people that I know and I trust, and they're going to be here for a while. If I'm not elected, at least they've got the protection of the union and we won't clean house and start all over again.

Q: What are some other challenges the union faced in those early years?

ML: Before I was elected president, and it kind of led into it, when Cec Purves became mayor, a lot of the city services, specifically construction services, they began to privatize them and contract them out. That was a real concern. We were losing people. I remember CUPE local 30 I'm sure lost half their membership. We used to build all the roads and do all that type of work, and all of a sudden the work was being lost. So the privatization issue at the time was critical. Budgets. It's funny, because I think I provided you with some documents there. If you were to pick out an article from this year's budget debate and go back to 1993 or '94, not much has change. The sky's always falling and we're short of money and we've got to reduce services. One of the biggest challenges has been dealing with all the changes. It seems every two years you'd have to be reorganized, realigned, redesigned. I think the people that were around for a while were just recycled. So constant change, Edmonton Power being put on the zone as an arm's length company, Edmonton Telephones. To this day it still breaks my heart that we sold Edmonton Telephones and we're now in the process of selling the power company. I would like to talk about that a little bit down the road. Those were the type of things. As I said, had we been able to concentrate on a lot of these things rather than union issues, I think we'd have done maybe not a whole heck of a lot better but it would've been a lot easier.

Q: Can you remember some of the early losses, when you were executive assistant – such as public health?

ML: That happened before my time. We as a union represented the, I forget what they were called now, public health service. I'm not even sure how they were moved out or what took place.

Q: You mentioned Ed Tel. Can you remember the loss of any others – did you lose the janitors?

ML: We as a union did. I remember that because I was the executive assistant at the time. At the time, there was a move by the janitors to join CUPE local 30, and probably the union they belonged to, but they'd been part of this union for years and years. Steve Sumka Sr., who was quite involved with the union, worked in that area and they'd always been part of the union. I think it was after he left or just before he left. As I said, there were some wars that went on with the executive and office and so forth, and there was a lot of politics involved. When I first came into the office to assist Shirley, this move was on, where these people wanted to join CUPE local 30. As it turned out, they did. There aren't many of them left today but whoever is left is still in CUPE local 30. It wasn't like they were privatized or anything like that. It was just a movement from one union to another union. As far as privatization or the loss of those positions to labor in the city, that was never the case.

Q: So it was a board decision to move them over?

ML: There was a vote, and the vote went in favor of CUPE. That was the same with the healthcare people. There was a vote. That's why I can't remember if they were a part of the city or how we represented them. I guess that would be interesting to find out. But what happened is a little before that time, that's why I'm not familiar with it, there was a movement because of all the infighting for these people to leave CSU 52 and join the operating engineers. So that's what took place through a vote. But I cannot recall if they were ever part of the City of Edmonton or the province or what they were.

Q: What are union politics like?

ML: I guess I'm leaving, so I can talk about it here. It's not even a matter of it not being used. You obviously get a number of people that are elected to executive from different positions, different bargaining units, different backgrounds. That includes me. We're not professionals in managing, we're not professionals in negotiating. I think everyone has their own idea of what they'd like to see happen. Many people are influence by external forces, such as other unions or that type of thing. This all comes to one table. Then there's the issue of power. Once you're elected to one of these positions, a certain amount of power comes with it. As time goes on and people are in positions for a number of years, they expect certain things, they do certain things that maybe they shouldn't be doing or should be thinking about twice. I don't know of a union that I've ever seen that's been able to stay united as one for any period of time. You can have 10 people at this table that are

elected the same time, that supported each other, that ran on the same card, within two or three years you've got nothing but problems. I don't know, Winston, with your history maybe you'd know a little more about it, but it amazes me. It absolutely amazes me. You're right, we're not special. I assisted CUPE local 30 here, I turned people away that were coming in and wanted us to sign them as the union to represent all of CUPE workers. I was in contact with Roxanne Wells at the time. We have a coalition, I made her aware of what was going on. I assisted them in settling things down and getting their union back on track. Having CUPE local 30 represent the outside workers is very important. I believe that without them it would be a big loss.

Q: Why do raids happen?

ML: The fairly obvious reason is that once we broke away from CUPE national we were booted out of the AFL and CLC. In other words, we're an independent union, we're fair game to any union that decides that they want to increase their membership or whatever the case may be. After we didn't have the protection of the CLC or the AFL, we were fair game. Everybody has unhappy members. All it takes is one member to be unhappy and call another union and say, look, why don't you guys get in here, we've got to do something, we've got to shake things up, we need a new union. Any union that belonged to the CLC or the AFL were able to do that. They could come in and just take a run at us.

Q: They took a run at Ed Tel – were there any other raids?

ML: Yes, we were raided. Obviously the one in Edmonton Telephones the first time was a big one. I cannot remember the union. IBEW was involved in there but IBEW was not raiding us. They were in the mix, and I understood that, for self-preservation. But during the raid in Edmonton Telephones, IBEW sent out people and attempted a raid on Edmonton Power, which was a totally different area and totally different collective agreement. To this day I have very strong feelings when it comes to dealing with anything that has IBEW's logo on it. I was just proven right – and this is just for the record – they're raiding CUPE 30 right now down at Gold Bar. They've made application for all of CUPE's positions. I must not be a vindictive person, because I would consider the janitors a raid. They brought in an organizer and they went out and organized these people and got them to sign cards and then got the votes. Over the years there have been a number of those things. But I do have to say, a couple of years after I was elected we managed to settle things down in a big way. Since then we've had our, well you crossed the line in the sand, you're crossing it and we'll get at it. We've had quite a bit of labor peace over those years. You always hear rumors about this or that, or unhappy members. But to this day we've done alright.

Q: Has CUPE or any other union tried to bring you back in?

ML: Yes, a number of times over the years. I don't know how serious they were, but there were approaches. We've been approached that if you want to get back in the AFL you have to have to give us a vote. They've held that over our heads all these years. But over the years we've made alliances with different unions – the TWU from Vancouver, from BC, they offered to bring us into the house of labor under their banner as an independent. We've been offered that a number of times over the years by other labor groups. There's always been an objection by CUPE, and when CUPE objects, obviously there would be a big drawn out legal battle over this thing. We've always backed off and

said, you know what, we've managed to exist this long, we'll continue to exist. If the day comes that we can walk back into the house of labor as CSU 52 without any strings attached, we will certainly consider it. I just had that offer made probably six months ago.

Q: What are some of the gains that were made, that you're particularly proud of?

ML: One of the things that I'd have to say, and I mentioned it earlier, probably one of the best things we've ever done as civic unions was forming the coalition. That'll be a bright spot for me forever. It's something that we formed in 1993 and it's still extremely active today.

Q: Explain the coalition.

ML: What had taken place is, in 1993 we were facing some budget cuts, some possible layoffs. What really brought it to a head is we were attending a meeting on our pension in City Council. We were kicked out of City Council. Lance White was the councilor that made the motion to kick us out. We couldn't even hear what was going on with our own pension. So we went across the street and decided to have a coffee. There was ATU, the bus drivers, there were the firefighters, Rob Hartman was in charge of the firefighters at the time, Bill Chahal of ATU and I believe Don McCaskill of CUPE local 30. We went across the street and sat down. I'm really proud of this. We started to talk and we said, maybe it's time we meet, maybe it's time we meet as a group and start talking about some of these things that are common to all of us. Some of the issues are going to be better dealt with by a group.

From that point on, we started and we formed the coalition. People in the city, I remember Ken Krekowitz, a number of people, made fun of this group. They didn't think we would exist for any period of time. Over the years this group has done nothing but get strong and stronger and stronger, and dealt with countless issues for our members in the city of Edmonton and issues outside the city of Edmonton. A good example is, and we're over and done with so I can speak about it, was we've tried to form a provincial coalition now between Calgary and Edmonton. It worked really well in this last round of negotiations. Calgary had their feet put to the fire. They were all in mediation and they were being offered 3.5% and 3 and 3, over a three-year deal. We met with them, we asked them to back off. We'd met with them a couple of times during the year. I was in touch with Peter Marsden, the president of CUPE local 30, and said, hey can you get your guys just to back off a little bit, I think we're going to be able to do quite a bit better up here in Edmonton. I just had a call from Peter last week thanking us. We received a 4.5, 4.5 increase and the city of Calgary has had to give them, even though they broke it up so they don't have to pay all the retroactivity, but they ended up getting the 4.5 and 4.5.

That's just an example of one of the things this coalition has done. It has worked extremely hard on pension issues, negotiations, a lot of social issues, those type of things. It's a group that meets every two weeks. It's changed a bit over the years but basically twice a month we meet and sit down and we're able to discuss what's going on in the city of Edmonton, what each union is hearing, what they're facing, the approach management is taking. It has worked extremely well for us. It's one of the things that, when I do retire in the near future, it's one of the things I'll remember as one of the great things we did.

Q: What about the gains you made on behalf of the members?

ML: I would have to go back and take a look at them, because in each collective agreement there's things that you gain. You try and not lose anything. But I guess the biggest thing that we would've gained as a union, being part of the coalition, was the unified bargaining approach. I know for a fact the settlements wouldn't have been near what they are. When we go to the table, healthcare, health benefits, pension, all those things are very important. One of the most important things to the members is their salary, and that salary affects their pension down the road. So that's something that I've always maintained had to be at the forefront. Being united has got us some tremendous collective agreements. The city has tried to split us up, take one union aside and offer them a little more under the table, offer them this and that. But we've got an agreement that no union will – and it's a gentleman's agreement – but it's never been broken, that no union will ever agree to a memorandum before the president has called the other three presidents. That's worked since 1983.

Q: You took over as president in the days of the big cutbacks? Do you remember those?

ML: Oh definitely. It was terrible. We came in and had a collective agreement when I came in, and I actually helped negotiate that collective agreement because I was the executive assistant at the time. I think it was 3 and 3%. But then we went in, I was elected and then we went into the zeros. There's another highlight. We manage zeros. There were 5% rollbacks in the province, most areas took rollbacks. We managed to hold the line for four or five years. I'd have to have a look at it, but it was a lot of years. If you were ever going to get defeated as the president it's when you're giving people nothing. What did you have to show? But I still managed to do the job and I think the membership knew the job that was being done, and we were doing the best we possibly could for them at the time. Politics being what it is, if you're not producing or people feel you haven't done the job, you won't be there very long.

Q: What about the political leadership that the city had, that you were facing?

ML: When I was first elected, Jan Reimer was first elected. We were elected basically at the same time. I really like Jan, don't get me wrong, but there were things that Jan did do or didn't do. For example, her involvement in Edmonton Telephones; I don't think she ever was as involved as she should've been. She never did step up and publicly say we shouldn't be doing this. To this day, I still feel bad about that. I see Jan occasionally and we're good friends and I enjoyed working with her. But those type of things I can't forgive. I may forgive them once I leave this office, but while I'm president I can't. I enjoyed working with Jan; I was very disappointed when she was defeated. We worked extremely hard for her up until the last moment. Financially we supported Jan in a big way.

When Bill Smith was elected I didn't know what to expect. It ended up that Bill and I are very good friends today. We accomplished a lot of stuff behind the scenes. Everyone thought Bill was an extreme right-winger coming in and was not going to be supportive of civic employees and want to privatize everything that existed. It's really quite funny because I guess I learned a lot from Bill and he learned a lot from us. By the end of it, by

the time Bill lost out, I don't think we could've had a better supporter of civic employees than Bill as mayor. Not many people know that. I mentioned it to Bill at our retirement banquet a couple of weeks ago, as long as I'm president there's always room at my table for him. I'm sincere. Some of the things that Bill did for us that people will never know, and shouldn't know – those are things that went on behind the scenes – he did them and it was part of doing business. Some of the things he did I didn't agree with, but then again I didn't agree with some of the things Jan did. It was quite an experience getting to know Bill, getting to know a little bit about his history, and then actually dealing with the man. By the end of it there wasn't one union president – and I think you can ask presidents that have come and gone – that didn't have a great respect for Bill, and supported him.

Q: What are some of the challenges facing your members today?

ML: Just what's taking place right now. We talk about politicians, and I'm really disappointed in the latest thing, this behind-the-scenes sale of EPCOR. Over the years we fought a lot of battles. We've won some, we've lost some. But they were public battles and they were fought in good faith, and they were fought out in the open. What took place with Gold Bar I think was a smokescreen for what was going on behind the scenes with the sale of EPCOR, I call it Edmonton Power. I'm so disappointed. That's one of the things that when I leave it'll be one of the most disappointing things to me ever. We didn't even get an opportunity to address this. What they've said they've done, there's three parts to EPCOR – there's distribution, transmission and generation. What they've done is broke off generation, which is all the hard assets – your power plants, power lines, everything else. So what's left? A bunch of paperwork. So the citizens of Edmonton now will own a bunch of paperwork. I didn't hear one thing that the citizens of Edmonton were getting. I didn't hear that they were going to get part of the profit from the shares that are going to be sold; those are going to be reinvested in the company. I feel that it's so underhanded. I have not talked to one council member or the mayor about what's taken place. I just feel that, well not only myself and our union, but I think this is one of the greatest felonies this city has ever seen. It took place right under our noses and we never had the opportunity to even make a statement. It was done on the 17th of April and we found about it two or three weeks later. There were councilors that attended our banquet. No one even mentioned it to us. That will be one of the biggest disappointments to me ever.

Q: What do you say to people who say: "But EPCOR's a private company; we haven't really divested ourselves of it"?

ML: What I say to them is, right now 25% of the company is going to be up for sale. Pretty soon it'll be 51% up for sale. You'll get a company like Duke Energy come in, make an outrageous offer to all the shareholders, and what do you own after that? You don't even own control of your own company. I honestly believe that's going to happen.

Q: How important are the City employees to this city?

ML: I think they're invaluable. People we represent are the same people that we represent in Edmonton Power and formerly in Edmonton Telephones, when they were departments of the City. They're the technical, professional and clerical people. It was fairly obvious when we went on strike in 1979 what these peoples' worth was and the job they did. For years and years after, there were things that had to be corrected, things that

had to be fixed. To this day we still talk about some of the things that were mishandled and mismanaged during that period of time.

That's one of the things that's extremely important to me and one of the reasons I've stayed as long as I have. We talked a bit about why there's so much infighting and problems in unions. One of the things that has kept me around and got me through a lot of this stuff was knowing that you're representing people that get up every morning, pack a lunch, send their kids off to school, and go to work and just want to do a good job. Do a good job for the city of Edmonton, for the citizens, get a paycheck and come home and exist. Knowing that and being out there and meeting people like that on a daily basis is the main reason that I've made the decision term after term after term to continue running. When you run nine consecutive terms, people always want change. It doesn't matter whether it's union politics or federal or provincial politics, people want change. To be able to keep sight of what it is you do and make certain that there's never any self interest, never any self interest in it and you're doing it for your membership, I think is the reason I've been able to stay around and have the honor of representing people for this time.

Q: Why is the union spending so much time and money on the anniversary?

ML: It's a wonderful landmark for an independent union that, as we talked about earlier, has been raided, has had problems internally, at the point of destruction I don't know how many times. We're here today, after 100 years. We're still here representing people and doing a very fine job of it. We've got an absolutely professional staff, and I guess I'd like to make mention of that as well, something that we didn't speak about. One of the things that I insisted when I was elected president is that we hire, we have a hiring committee and we hire staff to come in and work in this office. They're not appointed by the executive or appointed by the president. We've kept that to this day. We have a number of people that are external. We just hired July Ross, who is one of our members, doing a wonderful job for us. But I've always maintained that these people are here to do a job and they go home at 4:30. Whether they support me or another candidate, they stay out of the politics. That makes for a smooth operation and fair representation of the membership. We've had to represent some of my arch-enemies over the years, and we've not done anything less for those individuals than we would've done for any other. That's a real important part of my existence. Over the years I've had people like Mayes Norie, Michelle Strong, those type of people. The old saying goes, you're only as good as the people you surround yourself with. To this day, I don't think for a moment that I would've been able to exist two terms let alone nine terms without those good people, and being able to give them the ability to do their job, to do a fair job.

[END]