

**Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)**

**Oral History Interview**

Interviewee: Doug O'Halloran

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

Dates: March 13, 2007

Location: Edmonton

Index: Palace Casino Strike, crossing the picket line – News coverage – Brooks Lakeside Packers strike – Labour legislation – Traffic incident in Brooks – Picket line altercations – Criminal charges – Backlash of public opinion against Lakeside Packers – Contract and settlement – Safeway strike of 1997 – Background leading up to the 1997 strike – Palace Casino continued – Struggle with the labour board over the striking conditions on the picket line (heating)

Q: Talk about Palace Casino.

Doug: The Palace Casino strike goes on. We go out to the Okanagan, we leaflet the casinos out there. The Palace is owned by a company called Gateway Inc. Gateway is the third most profitable company in British Columbia. They have some casinos organized in British Columbia, and they seem to work reasonably well with the union there. We went out and leafleted Okanagan and Kootenays. The problem there is they're the only casinos, they're the only deal in town, so you can't go to another casino. We went on to Vancouver. They have a number of casinos in Vancouver. But there's also another 7 or 8 casinos in Vancouver that belong to Great Canadian Casino. So we ran some ads out there as well as here, asking people to go and visit other casinos, to not play at Palace or the New Westminster or the Riverboat or Langley or Burnaby casinos in B.C. It was a 2-week ad that cost \$54,000 on the radio. But we thought it was important to try and get our message out there. The company, they seemed to be a little interesting in getting back to the bargaining table. We met in December, it went no place. Then over Christmas they called me and suggested we should go back to the table. I said, we're not going to settle

this if we're not talking, so we agreed to go back to the table. One of the rumors around town is that the casino here is being helped by the other casinos, because they don't want unions. I think that Palace, Baccarat, Yellowhead, Argyll, have all been in cahoots to keep wages down. Howard Worell here, the Palace probably paid near the top in wages, but they were still terrible. An average dealer made \$8.80 an hour, a server makes \$7.01 an hour, a woman who's been dealing for 5 years makes \$9 an hour. A slot lady, a grandmother who's raising her two grandchildren makes \$8.50 an hour after 4 years. There's a few people making \$17 or \$18 an hour, but they're the supervisors, the pit bosses, and what have you. So the wages are a real problem. No sick days, full time or part time. The full time can pay for half their benefits, and the benefits aren't that great. There's literally no representation. In part of the negotiations, the merger agreement gave us a union office in the casino, so you could actually go sit in there and have people come visit you. One of the first things on the table in negotiations was they took away the union office, took away all the union grievance procedure, all those kinds of things when we started negotiating. The Labour Board actually ordered them to put another proposal back on the table that contained some of the things that were traditional in the company agreement that they had with the association. All the union things were really melted down to where you couldn't live with it. It was designed to get rid of the union. Why would you vote for a contract that gave you worse representation than before, because you went to the union to get representation? So these are all issues that are along in July, August, September, October, and what have you, and they're still an issue come January. The union office is still a big issue. The company had said that we could come visit the place, but we couldn't have a union office. They'd give us a space if we wanted to meet with somebody. So come January 3<sup>rd</sup>, we get back to the table, we start talking about some issues, we give to them the fact that we want a union office along the lines of the past. We want to be able to talk to people in the lunchroom, go to the staff room to post bulletins. They come back with a proposal that says no union office, but you can visit the place, which was the same thing they had in their last proposal. We said that was unacceptable. We settled maternity leave, some of the leaves. We settled the grievance

procedure. Then the company came back with an offer that was two-tier, right out of the blue. Hadn't been talked about in a year of negotiations. Came and said that in order to survive we need these new rates. The rates were \$8 an hour to \$10 an hour for dealers. The interesting thing about that was that, under the current collective agreement, a dealer could get up to \$12 an hour. So we were going to end up with a contract that had lower wages for new hires than the top rates in the old agreement. Also, security, for instance. Coincidentally, all but one security person crossed the picket line. They gave them the biggest raise, \$4 an hour, over the course of the agreement. And yet, in the new agreement, instead of \$16.47, which was for the current people, they were back down to \$14. The reason they said they gave them so much money was they had to pay that kind of money to attract good people. On the one hand they're saying, we're giving these guys raises because we need to attract good people, and yet for new hires, they're going to be \$2 below this rate. So they're sucking and blowing at the same time. Then they give us an offer of the union office that says, now you have to give us 24 hours notice. If you want to come visit the workplace, you phone us and give us 24 hours notice, and if we can accommodate you, you can come and visit the workplace. All this was through the mediator now, no face to face, no nothing. So we of course tell them where to go with that. So we propose a union office that we can visit any time we want, we can go in the lunchroom any time we want, and that if there's problems the head of the company and myself would meet to discuss them. They came back with a final offer: you can either have a union office just inside the door – you walk into the casino and literally over 20 feet there's an old slot office that you can have. So I said to the guys, that ain't bad, why don't we look at that. One of the committees said, Doug, you'd better ask the question. I said, what question? They said, whether you're allowed to leave that office. I said, if you've got a union office, of course you're allowed to leave the office and go visit the floor. They said, well you should ask the question. So I did. The answer was, no, you can come in, go into the union office, and you can't leave. So you're not allowed to go out on the floor anywhere. If people don't come see you, then your hands are tied. Or you can have the deal where you give us 24 hours notice and we'll allow you into the place. We of

course said no to all those things. So other than money, those are the key issues. And they offered the full time 3 sick days after you're there 3 years. If you don't use the 3 sick days in the year, you lose them. After all this, the wages the first year would be 3%, the next year 3.5%, the next year 3.5%, and the next year 3.5%. So even though wage settlements right now are running 4% plus, they're offering 13% over 4 years. They wonder why the workers aren't accepting it. In order to save the union there, the workers will accept the deal if they get rid of the two-tier and give us a union office. As a matter of fact, if they get rid of the two-tier, I'm not sure they'll go back to work without the union office and our ability to service in there. Mr. Gadia, the head of Gateway Inc., phoned me in January and said, look, why don't you take this deal? I'll give you my word that the people will be treated better when they go inside. I said, Mr. Gadia, no disrespect, but they've been treated the shits. Well I'm giving you my word from my executive, that we will treat them better when they're inside. Trust us. So I phoned the company negotiator and said, I'm suggesting you trust us, that you give us the union office, you give us the right to go in. He said, maybe you should talk to Mr. Gadia. So I talked to Mr. Gadia and said, look, if you want us to trust you, how about trusting us? You give us the union office, allow us to go in the lunchroom, and it's only 2-1/2 years until the expiry of the agreement. Mr. Gadia said, I'm not going to negotiate. I said, I wasn't asking you to negotiate. He says, you don't understand, we have another committee that does that sort of stuff. I said, that's fine, but I'm just saying that if you want us to trust you, then you could trust us. He says, you don't understand, we have a business to run. I said, I understand you have a business to run, but you're asking us to trust you that you're going to treat the people better, and you won't give us a union office where we can represent the people. What does that tell us? Well we don't think you should take that attitude. We think you should accept it and in 2-1/2 years we'll know what the problems are and can negotiate them. This is a profitable company in British Columbia, the money from Alberta is going to British Columbia. But the bigger problem with this whole system is that Palace just isn't the problem, the other casinos are the problem. They're in cahoots, they're keeping the wages down. You're having people come into a casino, losing their pensions, losing their houses.

And yet the people are the poorest paid in Alberta. The stuff they put up with, the rudeness, the customers swearing at them. They'll sit there and see people with a gun under their coats. So you're living in this fear. All the government would have to do is take a half percent less, and these workers could be paid like real workers. We even suggested to the company to keep the tips and pay the workers \$18 or \$19 an hour, and give the tips to charity. They said, we can't do that, that's how we run the business is that the tips pay part of the wages. But when you go to buy a house, if you're making \$8 an hour, you make \$3 or \$4 in tips, the bank don't take the tips as collateral. So this is really a fight over a first union contract. This is the first union contract, even though there was an association. It's a fight over whether or not workers can have a union. And it's a fight over a big company, the 3<sup>rd</sup> most profitable company in British Columbia, that says, hey we're not going to have a union. Sooner or later here in Alberta they're going to have to make a decision. They can't continue to lose the millions of dollars they're losing. I think there's 3 options, which I've said to them. One, you sit down and negotiate a reasonable contract, we go back to work. Two, you close the place. The other option is that you continue the way you are. I don't believe they'll continue the way they are, because they can't afford the losses. So I think we're down to two options: they either come back and negotiate a reasonable contract, or they close the place. We've talked with the workers, and we're comfortable with whatever. The people on the picket line are making between \$8 and \$10 an hour working there. You can go to Tim Horton's and get a job for \$12 an hour with benefits. But the thing that the public doesn't understand or the labor movement doesn't understand, because we'll have other unions come up and say, why don't you go get a job somewhere else? This is a job where people love to work with people. They love the public. It's a job where they can feed their addiction and not cost anything. They gamble with the casino's money, and they're happy. The only problem is they're not making a living wage. It took me a while to understand that, because I couldn't understand either why you'd put up with all this. Literally, the reason you do is because you like gambling. You like the people who come in. There's a lot of customers who have stayed away, and they're staying away and they'll come back when the strike is over. But

they're not going to come back until the strike is over. That's the biggest thing. We've got these oil workers coming in and saying, well go get a job. Why are you out here on the picket line? If you only make \$7 or \$8 an hour, why don't you go work somewhere else? They don't understand that the people love the place of work. Our commitment to them is we're out here for the long run. The only time that this strike will end, unless the company negotiates a reasonable settlement, will be in 2 years when the government takes away our right to strike. We're not about 12 days away from 200 days, we're going to have another party on the 200<sup>th</sup> day, we'll have a party on the 300<sup>th</sup> day. The labor movement came through at Christmas time. We had a big Christmas breakfast with presents. The labor movement in Alberta kicked in a ton of money for it. April 1<sup>st</sup>, even though it's April Fools Day, we're going to have our next party. You've got to do things like that for morale purposes, because it's pretty boring standing there 10 or 12 hours a day. We've had constant battles with the media. The media will not cover this. They've admitted openly that it's because there's no violence – it's not newsworthy. It's a strike, but that doesn't sell papers.

Q: I would've expected there to be incredible unpleasantness, knowing something about the nature of casinos.

Doug: It's more the senior women that have a difficult time. The people crossing the picket line, some of these middle aged men, will call them sluts and whores and spit on them. Even the one woman, a fairly attractive woman in her mid 30s, this guy said, bend over and I'll split you from Adam to asshole. She had a great comeback. She said, if you walked into a glass door, your nose would hit before anything else. But it's amazing, they abuse the women. They simply say, look you old bag, why are you out here? They actually call them the c word, and these are grandmothers. These are people who are 60 or 70 years old that are out there walking the picket line. You just want to go pound whoever it is that's saying those kinds of things. But if you do, then you get charged. We've had a number of people from the staff that are banned from the mall. They've got a

10 year ban, mostly for causing disturbances that they allege. They've been to court, the charges got dropped. But the mall continues to have their position; they can ban whoever they want. So you've got to be reasonably careful. We've had 3 people fired so far, one for saying to the manager of the place, you're a liar and a thief. They're true. He is a liar, and he was charged with stealing one of our signs. So the accusations were true, but they fired the guy. Another lady wrote "scab" on the cement beside a scab's car; she got fired for that. We've had people suspended for tapping on the glass by the casino. Anything that they can find to suspend people. We have another individual who's suspended indefinitely for getting involved in a fight. The guy gets 2 black eyes out of it because he doesn't defend himself, and yet he gets suspended indefinitely.

Q: The company was trying to make it appear to be a racial issue in the strike, and a number of news reporters picked up on that. I know you're doing a really good job about combating that.

Doug: The issue was that there was no racism. There was racism in the town, but there was no racism amongst the workers. They were on strike as brothers and sisters. In town in July we were walking down the street one day, two of our white union reps and a couple of the black people from the plant. A 75 year old lady there comes walking up and points to one of our reps and says, you're the reason these niggers are here. That was the kind of thing we were dealing with in the town, but there was no racism on the picket line. Everybody was a union member, everybody helped one another, so it wasn't an issue. And we didn't want it to become a race issue. It might've been a race issue in Brooks, but it was not a race issue in the plant. So we downplayed that, and it was good. We had people protecting each other. When I got run off the road on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, I came back to the picket line on the Monday, and all of a sudden I've got 12 people around the vehicle. I'm thinking that they're pissed off or something, but they were just standing there. They'd say hello or whatever, but they wouldn't move. They were a mixture – white, black, Chinese. So finally I said to one of the picket captains, what's this all about?

He said, they're protecting you. I said, what do you mean they're protecting me? He said, they're not going to let anybody get close to you. So it was not an issue.

Q: When I was down in Brooks, there were two reactions. On one side was a lot of support coming in, and the other was a concern that there would be some reaction from the membership. Could you comment on that?

Doug: After the accident we had to be very careful, because the workers were so annoyed that they were going to go burn the plant, literally. So the company agreed not to have production on the Saturday because of that. I think we finally were able to bring things into perspective. But the workers couldn't believe that would happen, that they would run their president off the road. And these were people who came from a country where, this one individual, they had a fight against the schools and they just thought it was normal. One day strike, 3 students dead, 2 police dead. This particular guy laid in a jail cell with 2 dead people beside him for 3 days. That's what they came from. So over here, they thought we could literally kill people for crossing the picket line. They said, why are you allowing that to happen? So it was a togetherness, and they were so protective of myself it was unbelievable. They offered to come and stay outside the hotel room, it was just amazing. So gratifying. When the strike was over, when I went back to visit the picket line, people were throwing themselves on the ground thanking Doug and God. That was really amazing. I said, don't thank me, thank yourselves. I did nothing. They're the best people in the world down there.

Q: I heard a story about when the RCMP were arresting some of the people who ran you off the road.

Doug: Kerry Cop was to testify at a Labour Relations Board hearing. The RCMP came in and Nancy Slessinger said, you can't take him out of here, he's here at this hearing. The RCMP said, we're taking him. They put him in handcuffs and took him out. He was one

of the ones that was charged, and eventually the charges were stayed. It was unbelievable. The workers that were there, and it was just so great seeing this bully being put in handcuffs and taken out. It was funny, he wouldn't come to the hearing. We had to guarantee his safety if he came down. So we said as a union, we're not going to do nothing, we want to hear his testimony. He can come down and explain what happened during the accident. So he came down. He wasn't in the room 2 minutes when the RCMP walked in, handcuffs, out the door. That was a bit of a morale booster.

Q: Another thing I'd like you to touch on is labor legislation. A number of the things you alluded to in both strikes are about not allowing scabs to cross the line, and that kind of stuff that's fundamental in a first contract.

Doug: There was a lot of talk during the Lakeside strike, and minister Cardinal said he was considering it. Then the strike's over, we write him letters, and he says it's no longer an issue, the strike's done. We said, there's going to be other strikes around the same issue. Before we went on strike here, we first asked for binding arbitration. They wouldn't agree to binding arbitration. Then we asked for the disputes inquiry board. They refused the disputes inquiry board, because they said it wasn't the right time. So we really have to push for better legislation. But the problem is, every time we push for better legislation, we get worse. So the labor movement is going to have to be very careful in how they do this, especially with Stelmach now the premier, because there's a few more right wing nuts in there than before. The union has to be careful on what they wish for.

Q: What is the better legislation we need?

Doug: I think Quebec would be the best, but we could live with British Columbia. British Columbia's legislation is you can't hire replacement workers, but workers who want to go into work, even if they're union members, can go. I think that's great legislation, because if you can't convince your members to stay out on the picket line,

that's the union's problem. As long as they can't hire replacement workers, that gives you a level playing field. I don't think we need total anti-scab, but at least if we had part of it, I believe that would work. I'm comfortable with convincing our members. The ones that do go in, they're not going to be able to run the company anyway.

Q: You've been a president for quite a few years. What has been the real benefit and joy of being a president?

Doug: Just the fact that you can work with the membership. I've been a president since 1989. I'm not a good administrator, I don't sit in the office. I'm probably the only president of UFCW that's on picket lines most of the time, doing barbeques for the workers. I love visiting the membership, talking to them. The thing that I found is that if a member is pissed off, if you sit down for 5 minutes and talk with them, they leave maybe not happier, but they leave knowing the union is doing the right things. So it's really dealing with the rank and file membership. I've always said I'd be a better king maker than a president, because I do a better job of convincing other people how good people are, whereas you don't do that for yourself. I've always said, just let me go work with the workers and I'll be happy. That's what's happened. Since 1989 I've been president of 401. Prior to that I was the western assistant to the Canadian director. Prior to that I was president of a meatpacking plant. I've not lost that thing with the members. I think that's why I've survived, and I'm now the second longest serving UFCW president in Canada. In two or three years time I'll probably be the longest, and hopefully the election in 2008 will give me another 4 years to do what I love.

### Tape Two

. . . The tire comes off on the front, and then this car tries to stop me. As I would get right on his bumper it would speed up a little bit. Then a brown truck came up beside me and they were forcing me to stop. So what I did was drive into the lane of traffic, half in it an

half in our lane, because I suspected that people coming toward us would move out of the way. That's what happened. If it hadn't have happened that way, then I would've just ran into this truck that was beside me, because I didn't want to endanger the public. We're going down the road at about 80 km an hour, and I've got no front tire on the left hand side. All these cars are peeling off into the ditch, the traffic that was coming toward you. Then there was a space where there was no cars coming. So this guy really starts to slow down, because he could get right in front of me now, whereas before he hadn't moved into the line of traffic. This brown truck that was beside me was trying to force me off the road. As I was going along, I noticed a house. The ditch was sort of a rolling ditch, so I thought, I'll go down there and phone the RCMP. I'd lost my cell phone in the first accident, because I'd taken it out to dial the number and it fell on the floor and I couldn't reach it. So I go down in the ditch and start to go up to the house. It's a large lot and I thought I could get in there, then I realized there's nobody there. I was watching to see if there was any kids or dogs or anything. Then I thought, if I get in behind there then I'll really get the shit kicked out of me. Because that's what I thought this was all about. I thought that because of the things that had happened the night before and that morning on the picket line, that these supervisors were going to get their 5 pounds of flesh. The only people that I recognized at this stage was the brown truck, which was the security guard, Andy Crocker, who was head of security. And the guy in the greenish blue car in front of me, he looked like one of the supervisors. So as I'm driving along, the driveway for the house is there, so I turn to go out of the drive. Crocker, who's the head of security, cuts me off, parks across the driveway. So I then go over the ditch and continue on. I was hoping to get back to the RCMP, because I knew they were just over this hill, because that's where they were stationed on the picket line. As I was going along, all of a sudden I notice that there's telephone poles coming up in the ditch, so I decided I had to go back up on the road. As I came back up onto the road, I was driving for a couple hundred feet, and all of a sudden there's this big crash, and I wake up in the ditch. To this day, I don't know what hit me. All I know is when I got my head cleared and looked up, this Andy Crocker was leaning over the front of this car that was in the ditch in front of me with a

video camera taking pictures, and a bunch of people outside the vehicle laughing. I looked in the rear view mirror and there was a truck in the ditch behind me. So the first thing I did was lock the doors. Then I reached to see if there was something I could get to protect myself. I usually have an apparatus for when you get a nerve pinch or something when you're driving, it's got a long curve on it and you just sort of relax yourself. So I was looking for that and couldn't find it. By this time there's a lot of company people around the vehicle. They're all laughing and saying, we got him now. I was more worried about getting beat up than anything, at that stage. As this was happening, some citizen came up and I could hear him saying, is he okay? They said, yes he's okay. I put the window down a little bit and said, no I'm not, would you call 911? He says, I'm on the phone with 911 right now. Then I remembered that I had a cell phone in the console, that was dead. Because I have two. I thought, maybe it has enough juice in it. So I take it out and try to remember the staff sergeant's phone number, Peter Pushka, but I couldn't. I thought, why don't I phone 911. So I dial 911 and I remember talking to them and trying to explain to them what was going on. I couldn't understand why it was taking so long. To this day I don't know how long it took, but it seemed forever, because I'm paranoid about getting beat up. So then there's nothing. I guess I sort of passed out, because the cell phone had fallen out of my hand. The next thing I know there's a knock on the window, and it's an RCMP officer. I couldn't understand why he wasn't opening the door. Then I figured out that I'd locked the door. So I unlocked the door, he opens the door, and as he opens the door and steps back, this guy comes running in. At the time I couldn't figure out who he was, because it seemed like he was one of ours. As he got up to me he shoved these papers in my face and said, consider yourself served. At that time I realized it was the human resources manager, Kerry Cop. I said, fuck you Kerry, and I went to grab him and I fell out of the truck. As I'm laying on the ground I hear him look at the RCMP officer, you're a witness, we just served him. Then he disappears. Then subsequently the ambulance comes. I could hear a lot of arguing, because by now a lot of the staff and picketers have shown up and everybody's just trying to keep the peace. I'm laying on the ground, there's dirt in my eyes, you can't see. Somehow you end up going to the hospital

in the ambulance. We get there and they take you in. I'm dying of thirst, and I want them to clean my eyes because there was dirt in them. They won't do anything until you've seen a doctor, and the doctor won't do anything until you've had x-rays. Amongst all this, there's an RCMP officer that wants to take a statement. I said, I have no problem giving a statement, but we have some lawyers here, and can they be a witness? So they come in, Gwen Gray. She says, Doug you don't have to do this now. I say, if I'm going to be laying here, I don't have any problem. It probably took 2-1/2 hours to give the statement, because when the doctors would come in the RCMP would have to go out. So I gave my statement, then they take you in and did some x-rays and what have you. Because of my size, they weren't able to do certain x-rays. They said that if they persisted then I should go to Calgary. They decided I'd be more comfortable at the hotel than in the bed at the hospital. So I went back to the hotel. That night my daughter and wife came down. The next day the pain was so bad I had to go back and get some shots for pain. We decided to drive out to where the accident occurred. Up until that moment, I guess I thought that this is just part of the job, this could happen. When I went back out and looked over the scene and realized that if they had hit me a second later I would've been into the side of the telephone pole that I was trying to miss, because it was only 10 feet in front of the vehicle, I could've been dead. So it became a pretty traumatic thing, to say the least. We had people on walkie-talkies listening to the company. They're telling me afterwards that these people were told to run me off the road. They could hear them saying, put him in the ditch, run him off the road. The staff were listening to this, and they didn't have any idea where I was, because Natalie and I had been in communication, but when my phone got lost, I wasn't able to communicate with them. It took a while for the impact of what happened to really set in. This happened on a Friday night. The Sunday we had to go before the labour board, and they were trying to get an injunction against these company officials being anywhere near the picket line. It was unbelievable. The company lawyer, David Ross, kept saying, look Mr. O'Halloran, that's not how it happened. You obviously misunderstood how this happened. Isn't it true that it was only a short distance when you went off the road, and that the tire pulled you off the road, the company didn't force you

off the road? I said, no as a matter of fact, it was about 3 km. He said, no you could not drive a vehicle for 3 km on the rim. I said, I was there and I did. He says, let me tell you that you can't. I said, all I know is I was there and I know what happened. He says, well when you were coming back up out of the ditch, is it not true that your vehicle spun back into the ditch as opposed to someone hitting you? I said, Mr. Ross, you're lying. Then the board chastised me for accusing the lawyer of lying. Then he accused me of some other things, and I told him he was full of shit. Of course Nancy Slessinger got upset at the use of that language. But here I'm the victim, and I'm being grilled. He's trying to make me believe that it didn't happen the way it happened.

G: What was the issue at that particular time?

Doug: The issue was to keep Kerry Cop, Andy Crocker, Cronan Bush and the other people that ran me off the road away from the picket line, that they shouldn't be allowed to go to the place of work because of having endangered my life. That was the issue. David Ross was pretty compelling in his argument to me, to the point where the next day I actually went back, because I thought maybe it didn't go as long as I thought. So I went back with a friend of mine, an international rep, and we measured the distances. That's why I know exactly how far it was. The way that I was able to measure it was that the tires in the ditch from the stop sign, then from there you see the grooves in the highway. Where I drove there was the grooves in the highway from the wheel, all the way down the highway into the ditch, up out of the ditch, and then back into the ditch. I knew it happened, but he was so sincere in his questioning, I thought it must've been my imagination that it took so long. But it had actually played out over 7 km. It was something like seeing cops wildest chases without the cops. I couldn't believe that all this would happen, and there's no RCMP. They're a mile away, and they're not coming. People that are pulling off the road have got to be phoning 911 and saying, you can't believe what's happening here. Yet I was literally fearful for my life. And I'm not somebody that bothers very much. Like a lot of us, I've been at Gainers and all these things, and this was

the first time I ever actually thought I was going to die. The problem with that is that you continue to relive it. Each time you think you've got it put to bed, something else will come along that will bring it up. After the accident, they charged me with dangerous driving, leaving the scene of an accident, and hit and run – three charges. The individuals were charged with dangerous driving causing danger to life, criminal negligence, criminal harassment, criminal intimidation, and there was one other one – they had five charges. Also on the Saturday, right after the accident, they came and charged me with two counts of mischief for allegedly breaking two bus windows the first morning of the strike, and possession of a weapon dangerous to the public. The possession of the weapon dangerous to the public was that they had affidavits filed by company people saying that I used a pick axe to break the windows. What it was was the same placard axe handle that I've had on the picket lines for 20 years. As a matter of fact, their testimony was, he never had that, because there was a new price tag on it. Well the price tag that was on it was Beaver Lumber, and there hasn't been a Beaver Lumber around for 12 years or so in this province. So the courts go on, there's going to be all kinds of witnesses. I get called in to give my testimony. Then a couple of weeks later I get told by a lawyer that the charges have been stayed against the company, against the goons, against the people that ran me off the road. The charges had been stayed, and I asked, what does that mean? I was told that it means that unless there's new evidence, the charges will be dropped after a year. We of course objected to that through our lawyer. Their argument was that there was not enough evidence to get a conviction. They believed they would be unable to prove in court that this occurred. You've got 3 vehicles in the ditch, you have nissa armada that the insurance company already paid out \$65,000 for, and yet the prosecution claims that they can't prove their case. In the meantime, I have 2 counts of mischief and one count of this dangerous weapon. I can't believe that I'm going to court. So they set the court date for December 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup>. We're now in 2006. So the lawyer's telling me I have to plead guilty. I said, well the first window in the bus, yes. But the second window, I hardly touched it. It just shattered. The other thing is, I said, I want my day in court to explain to a judge that everybody's lives were in danger by that bus pushing through the picket line,

and all they had to do was come up to the picket line, be refused, and then they had enough to go to court. But this was a case where the employer wanted to prove they could go through the picket line, even if it meant running over people. I was at the Fletcher's picket line when a young chap, a log that was across the road rolled up over his legs and broke them. So I knew the dangers of that. In this particular situation, when the bus was coming, it stopped and then it started edging forward. One of the chaps put a placard over one side of the windshield, I put mine up over the other. But they could still see, and they kept coming forward, coming forward. So I hit the window to get the attention of the bus driver, and he just kept driving. I hit it 2 or 3 times, and the window finally shattered, and he stopped and backed up. So that's fine. They do the same thing at 9:30 in the morning. They come with the bus, the RCMP are standing right there. I say to staff sergeant Pushka, all you need is us refusing to let the bus in, you don't need anything more. So why don't you make them stop, make them back out? The grille had come off the bus and people were tangled up in it. I said, if you don't I'm going to stop it. He's standing there with his arms like this. So I hit the window, it breaks, and the bus stops, and they back up. No charges, no nothing, and the RCMP are right there. Then on the Thursday night, which is the next night, a busload of supervisors, they sent this Kerry Cop down to the front picket line, and everybody thought they were all going to come out there, so we're all there. Then they send the bus out the back gate where there's 3 picketers. The supervisors come off the bus, kick the hell out of the 3 picketers. We end up over there. There's a big melee, the RCMP bring out the SWAT and the guys with the guns. They come around the corner of the bus and I'm standing there, and they said, move. I said, go fuck off. The guy, I thought he was going to fire. He had it right underneath my chin. The people from Sudan and Ethiopia are standing there saying, shoot us now, kill us now. It's just a terrible situation. People had rocks and we were trying to keep them from throwing them. Staff sergeant Pushka, I said to him, Peter, we don't need this. We had this under control before those guys come in. He says, I'm not in charge anymore. So we were finally able to get it all cooled down. The next day, all of a sudden now they're looking at laying charges against these supervisors, now they're going to charge me with breaking

the 2 bus windows. That relates back to the beginning of the story about why I was coming back around the picket line. I've done far worse things on a picket line and never had a charge, never been found guilty of anything in my life on a picket line. And here I am charged with these things, and they won't drop them. So we get ready to go to court. I said, I want to tell the judge that I think that I had a right to do what I did, to protect people's lives. The lawyers, the best in the business, Alex Pringle, said, you're going to be found guilty and you're not going to be able to go to the U.S. As part of my job as an international vice president is going to meetings in the U.S. two or three times a year. So finally 2 days before, he convinces me to plead guilty to one of the charges, which is one count of mischief. It's not a criminal charge. I go to Medicine Hat and I get up before the judge, and the prosecution give their story and our lawyer goes back through my history, how I've never had anything like this. The judge lectures me on how lucky I am that they decided this plea bargain, that I should very thankful that all I'm getting is 3 month conditional discharge, 3 months probation where I have to go see a probation officer every month, and he's telling me this is such a great deal. The cost is \$330.70 for the two windows, and that's all I have to pay. So I ended up spending thousands of dollars on a lawyer to go to be found guilty on a mischief charge that cost \$330. The company people had their charges stayed against them, when there's hundreds of thousands of dollars involved, and yet, nothing happens. And I'm not allowed to leave Medicine Hat until I go see the probation officer. So you're like a criminal. I gotta leave the courthouse, I gotta go a couple blocks over, go in, see this probation officer, sign statements that I'll report by 5 o'clock the next day in Calgary to probation. The probation officer tells me that if I violate the conditions in any way, that I'll spend 18 months in jail. Here we got a picket line to run up here. So you're walking around on pins and needles because he convinced me that this judge would send me to jail. I reported to Airdrie to the probation officer and they decided that they didn't need to send me for counseling. It was so humiliating, I couldn't believe it. The good news is that in 2 days time I'm off probation. But the little kicker to that is that if I don't do anything at all for 3 years, it automatically goes away, whereas if I do anything that's illegal in the next 3 years, it'll be 10 years. Then they'll

have to get a pardon to clear your record, and the problem with that is that when you get a pardon, your record's sealed, you try to go across the border, they won't let you across because they don't know why you got a pardon. So literally I'm on probation for 3 years, and anything can happen when you're involved in strikes and what have you. I get a 3 year sentence out of this, where I have to walk on my tiptoes. These individuals get nothing, and they walk. So to say the least, I'm a bit bitter about it. I went to see a psychologist, and I don't know whether that was a good move or a bad move. She convinced me that the nightmares and dreams I was having were related to this thing, because they all keep going back there. So anyway, to make a long story short, I don't believe her. I go see her for a few times, then last fall, around September or October was the last time. She claims that I have what's called post-traumatic stress syndrome. She deals with a lot of soldiers when they come back, where they have a serious incident and have trouble getting past it. She tells me look, you'll never be healed, but we can treat it. So you know me, I don't believe any of that, I believe I'm tougher than all that. So now I'm going to have to go back, because the dreams are getting worse to the point where I'll wake up in the middle of the night swearing at police and flaying my arms, and my wife is actually paranoid to sleep in the same bed because she doesn't know when you're going to have a good night's sleep or when you're not going to have a good night's sleep. It all goes back to RCMP and it all goes back to Brooks. The dreams are all like that. Three weeks ago I had a dream that I was in black armada and it's flying through the air and I'm trying to steer it so it'll land in this water so it'll be a safe landing. I think I'm going to be killed, and then I wake up. Two weeks later I'm going from Edmonton to Calgary, and just north of Red Deer there's a Blind Man River or whatever it's called, this truck in front of me pulls out to pass. All of a sudden it loses control, it's hitting the guard rails. I put the brakes on really gently so that I don't spin out. Literally I stopped to see if the young guy was okay, but I drove the rest of the way to Calgary 70 km. Ever since, for the first 6 or 8 months after the strike, I had a driver all the time. I had somebody drive me around, and now I don't even drive unless I absolutely have to. If I'm driving and trucks are coming up near you on curves, I'm just paranoid. Even my wife, who thought I was the

best driver in the world, now she doesn't want to drive with me. From that aspect it's been pretty disillusional, because it's affected my life so much of things you just take for granted. The other thing is now you second guess everything. With this strike here, what should you do? Whereas before I was always really confident, and now it's like a person has lost their direction. I used to love to go to the picket line all the time, now I maybe go there once or twice a week. I was never like that before. Part of it I guess is the thing with the probation, because the more often you're there, the better chances of getting into trouble.

The criminal lawyers are looking at hiring a private investigator to see what happened, with why the charges were dropped. I can't believe that you have the vehicles and you have the drivers of the vehicles, and yet the Crown claims they can't get a conviction. It wasn't a mirage. There's videos of the vehicles in the ditch and everything. It puts the whole system in a rather, you become disillusioned about the government, you become disillusioned about the police. We've had a lot of strikes over the years, and we've worked well with the police. This situation down there, our national director wrote letters to the superintendent, the commissioner in Ottawa, saying how great the RCMP did their job and everything during the strike, how they remained neutral. We were really impressed with what happened. But then you get here and whether it's Tyson the big company, or political things in the province, charges get stayed. We're probably going to have a press conference somewhere down the road to bring it to the public's knowledge, because I don't think the public is going to be very appreciative that this can happen and you can get away with it. Because what's next? You almost get killed and there's no charges, there's no follow through?

Q: What's the upshot of it as far as the labour relations are concerned? What's the aftermath of the whole struggle, and the certification?

Doug: Believe it or not, there was a positiveness to it all. I think that the company had such a backlash of public opinion because of me being run off the road, it actually brought the strike to an end, because they were looking so bad. We've got a good working relationship with the company. We haven't allowed our feelings of what happened to

interfere. The previous manager who was there during the strike wouldn't meet me for coffee. This new manager, he's now the 4<sup>th</sup> one since the strike, we actually had a meeting a couple of months ago with all the players – compensation board, the doctors in Brooks, the company, us, the union – to discuss how we can better service the members from an injury point of view. Tyson would never have done that before. So we've actually established a good relationship. The first 2 months after the strike we had 300 grievances a month. We're down now; I was told yesterday we have 26 outstanding grievances, which is unbelievable. Are there still problems there? Absolutely. We've gotta find a better way of not having so many people injured, there's gotta be a better training system. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we're sending our health and safety guy down to meet with the company and all the health and safety officers in the plant, to see how we can better train people to circumvent these injuries. The company has been rather cooperative in that aspect. We've never raised the issue with them about what happened. They'll ask how I'm feeling to other people that we have working down there, but we've never discussed it myself with them. And I don't plan to discuss it with them, because it has nothing to do with the people who are there. These decisions were from higher up. I think the management firm that was representing the employer had a lot to do with it. This Dwayne Trollman, who's a lawyer here in Edmonton, he was quarterbacking the thing until, he claims, the chase started. When the chase started, he says, he had nothing to do with it. But up until that point he was telling them what to do, where to see me, where I was. Apparently they'd been following me all day so that they could serve me with these papers. So they had it set up with all these vehicles at strategic points, so that if I went near any of these, they'd know where I was. They were even phoning the RCMP and asking them, do you know where O'Halloran is now? So it was a pretty good setup. It's the only time I was by myself. Every other time down there, I always had people with me. We had been up since 4:30 that morning. The international staff person that was with me all the time, he was tired, Archy. I said, go back to the hotel and have a sleep. Otherwise, I always had 2 or 3 people with me in the vehicle. They of course feel really badly and the other staff give them hell about, you shouldn't have let him be by himself. Even today if I go to Brooks, I

don't go to Brooks by myself. You're paranoid. After the strike was over, people came up to me down there and said, we're gonna get you. I said, oh ya, you're real heroes. They said, it'll be in an alley or Safeway store, but we're gonna get you. During the strike, the RCMP advised me that my life was in danger. We had private security guards the last few days of the strike, because they weren't sure whether it was a serious threat. But because somebody had phoned and said if I settled the deal, I was going to be killed. Not if I got the deal, but if I settled the contract. It was a pretty emotional time.

Q: Were the workers happy with the contract?

Doug: The workers who were on the picket line were happy.

Q: What type of contract is it?

Doug: The big thing that we achieved was getting a union in the place, a grievance procedure. A couple of negative things were the benefits where the workers have to pay the costs going forward on the benefits, that was a negative. And the company, to punish the workers, took a 10 minute coffee break away from them, which was just salt in the wounds at the end of the day. But we'll get those things back in 2009. This company, let me assure you, will not take us on so quickly again. They believed that they could take the people in across the lines, that they'd have no problem. And they didn't think that people would walk out. The reason nowadays, and a lot of the unions aren't overly happy about it, is the strike pay we're paying. Back in the old days you got \$100 or maybe \$200. You cannot ask anyone to go on strike now for that kind of money. You have to give them near what they're making in order to go out. Our strike pay now is \$8 an hour for the first 2 weeks, and then it increases to \$10 an hour after that. The payroll at Lakeside was about \$800,000 a week. But how do you ask people to go and put their jobs on the line if you can't reasonably make them whole? Here you're allowed to pick it up to 80 hours a week at the Palace Casino in order to make the money you were making inside. Is the system

perfect? No it's not perfect. Because now we've got people who are making \$300 or \$400 a week inside, that are making \$800 picketing for 80 hours a week. So there's gotta be some little quirks to work on it. All disputes have some problems. The Safeway strike in 1997, they actually, somebody stole my son's truck out of the driveway and took it out on 22 exit Calgary, burnt it, and then put a burnt broom handle stick on the doorstep of our house. So we had 24 hour security at the house. Safeway was never involved in that. Whoever was involved in it, it was not the company.

Q: Would you describe the Safeway situation in 1997?

Doug: I became president in 1989, and in 1990 we negotiated a contract with Canada Safeway. They wanted 4 years of labor peace. We tried to convince them not to negotiate a 4 year agreement, because the unknowns were out there. They bought the deal. They put a lot of money on the table. Consequently, some 6 months after the deal was signed, they're crying poverty, that they need to renegotiate. They tried to get us to the bargaining table. We wouldn't agree to go to the bargaining table. In 1992 they started making some serious demands. In January of 1993 they said, if you don't give us these, we're getting out of the province by February 28<sup>th</sup>. I called in a negotiating committee, which was 50 people from 1990, and said, what should we do? Should we talk with them, should we not talk with them? The consensus was that we should sit down with the company and see what they had to say.

Q: Could you describe what the situation was in the province at that time?

Doug: The situation in the province at that time was that Safeway had a Cadillac agreement, the best in the industry. Superstore, SaveOn Foods, some of these other companies had Volkswagen agreements. Safeway's costs were in the neighborhood of \$17 or \$18 an hour, SaveOn Foods and Superstore's costs were in the neighborhood of \$12 an hour. So it wasn't much wonder that Safeway's share of the market was going down. In

the '80s Safeway had 70% share of the market. They were down to about 40% share of the market. The question was, do you put the company out of business or do you try and do something? We sat down with the company. Then we had meetings where the company wanted to meet with the membership. We agreed to that. I was very shocked, to say the least. The company officials got standing ovations by the membership. I couldn't believe that you're getting told you're going to get a \$2 an hour cut, and you're happy. But back then, you had a lot of long term Safeway people who believed Safeway was a family orientated company, it had all that history. So Superstore, Loblaws, decide they want to buy Safeway. We knew the problems that we had with Superstore in negotiations. We took out a full page ad in the papers advising the workers at Safeway not to get sucked in by Superstore Westfair, that they were better off, even with these concessions, to live with Safeway. Superstore took out ads saying that they would buy Safeway and they would leave the contract the way it was. Our history with Superstore was, ya, you'll leave it the way it is until the next negotiations, which is in a year's time. Here we are, we're getting criticized by the Rick Bells of the world for taking these concessions, getting criticized by the labour movement for taking these concessions. We did it because we believed it was the right decision at the right time. . . .

The Rick Bells of the world were writing stories about how the union was sucked in and how they shouldn't be given these concessions. The labor movement was absolutely upset with us because of having agreed to these concessions. But we made the decision based upon do we want to keep this company in business or do we want to put them out of business. We were convinced that they would leave the province, and if they left Alberta they would leave Canada. Why would you have Manitoba and Saskatchewan where there's very few stores? They might retain B.C. because it's close to the U.S. The thing that was underestimated was we argued that the senior people should have first choice in the buyout. The company didn't want to agree that seniority should prevail in the buyout. We said, well we're not going to agree. The senior people should have first choice to jump ship if they want to jump ship. The company wanted somewhere between 700 and 1,000 people. That's what they figured they needed to get back into the situation of where

they wanted to be. So finally I said, if that's all you want and if you believe that's all that's going to happen, why don't you agree to buy whoever wants a buyout, if you don't want to put seniority down? So they did. Much to their shock and ours, 3800 people applied for the buyout. That showed how dissatisfied the people were with Safeway, and that sent the company into a tailspin, because they have all these new people who don't know anything. Part of the commitment from the company was, and it was given by Bob Kenny, look, when we get profitable we will share with you. Help us now and we will share with you in the future. The CEO then was a guy by the name of Peter McGowan. He stepped down. A guy by the name of Steve Bird took over, and Steve Bird is still there today. McGowan at the time was making \$1.2 million. This Steve Bird comes in and says that's too much money, I only want \$348,000 with bonuses. That's in 1992. Safeway stock is worth \$10 a share. Over the next 3 or 4 years it goes to \$50, splits and goes up and up and up. During the course of this time, they reward Steve Bird with \$85 million in compensation for turning the company around. They come to the bargaining table and offer the workers 25 cents an hour. The people were pissed. They said, we're going to go on strike. And they did.

Q: What year is this?

Doug: 1997.

Q: Talk about that.

Doug: In 1997 we have a strike vote of 93% across the province. We end up with 85 picket lines across the province. The strike is 75 days long. The one thing that we underestimated was Alberta's only 7% of the company's market. Their business, except for Calgary, was shut down to about 15%. Stores that were doing \$400,000 were doing \$15,000 or \$20,000. Safeway were running trucks up to Ft. McMurray with nothing on them. To show that they were still in business, they'd run the semis up and down the road,

making it look like they were in business. We ended up finally getting a deal. One of the good things out of the deal was that you had to get 12 hours or nothing. In the past they'd schedule you 4 hours. The people were pissed off at Safeway, they were pissed off at us, because that's all they were getting and they were paying high dues. The good thing about it was that we were able to negotiate that you either get 12 hours or you get none. The nice thing about that was that the people were actually going to get some hours. We lost about 2,500 members in that, but they were people who were getting 8 hours a week and it just wasn't worth the hassle of trying to explain to people why the dues were that. So from our perspective, while we lost a lot of compensation, it helped us politically with the workers. Then the next time we have a contract with Safeway we're able to negotiate away a bunch of the stuff dealing with bought hours and how many hours you could have. So the last agreement was a good agreement with Safeway. What nobody understood back in 1993 was that what do you do? If you have a good company, do you put it out of business or do you try to keep it in business and go forward? In hindsight now, if we had known what was going to happen with Canada Safeway, we may as well put them out of business back then. But if they had lived up to their commitment in 1997 when we negotiated, then all would've been well. Hindsight is wonderful, and I think it's great for other unions to be able to take strong positions. But I think that the other unions need to find out all the facts first. We've never been shy about why we do things. I was even critical of our own union at the time, because the meat cutters section of our union took the position of not recommending the deal. They said, it's up to the workers, it's too serious a situation. My attitude was, what do I get paid \$75,000 a year for if it's not to give advice? We never recommend or reject, we never say it's up to you. The final decision is up to you, but you pay us to give you advice. That's one of the things that has worked well with the companies, because they know if they don't get a deal with us, then we're going to be recommending rejection. Sometimes you can get an extra few percent or an extra 20 cents or so, just on the recommendation part. Because 9 times out of 10, if you go to the membership, they have enough trust to listen, and they'll turn the deal

down. That's what's happened with Palace Casino here, is that the company tried to buy the deal.

Q: Start at the beginning with Palace.

Doug: Palace Casino is actually a casino in West Edmonton Mall. The people who originally worked there had an association. They'd had the association for about 10 years, but the company gave them a dime here a dime there. They never really had any power. So some of the executive came to us and said, we want to join the union. So we had meetings with them. There was an anti-union group and a pro-union group. We ended up merging them in to us. For the next 3 years of the contract that was in place, we fought with the employer. They wouldn't let us in to service the place, we finally had to get the labor board to allow us to do that. It was a war for 3 years. We then get into the situation where the contract is going to expire. That was in 2005. There was an anti-union group in there that all along was taking us to the Board, took us to the courts. Supposedly this individual was paying out of his own pocket. This was literally thousands and thousands of dollars. He had recently had a settlement for a motorcycle accident, and he claimed that that's where he was getting the money. We suspected that it was coming from the employer, that they were just finding a way to pay it somehow.

Q: What were the issues?

Doug: Over the merger, that the merger wasn't done properly, that the bylaws weren't adhered to. Then when they lost to the Board, they challenged it to the Court of Queens Bench. We spent probably \$300,000 on legal fees through this. So then we get into negotiations. Our negotiator and the company negotiator weren't able to work together, to the point where the Labour Board called the parties together and suggested that we replace our negotiator and the company would replace their negotiator. It was recommended to me by our guy, Tom Hesse, that we agree to this. I said no, they're not

going to tell us who will negotiate. He said, well Doug, you're never going to get a deal. He said, we gotta get rid of the company guy, and if the only way we can get rid of him is by doing that, then that's what I'm recommending. So we agreed to it, they bring a negotiator in from British Columbia by the name of Peter Parsons, who's a company negotiator there in pulp and paper, and he's also involved with the casinos out there. We sit down and over June, July and August, we negotiate 90% of the contract. Things are going reasonably well, then all of a sudden the company decides that this is their final offer. They put on the table 0 increase in the first year, but a signing bonus of 3%, and 3% in the next year and 3% in the next year. The workers weren't willing to accept that, so we ended up going out on strike. Because it's in West Edmonton Mall, we had two people against us: we had the Mall and we had the Palace Casino. The Mall had us before the Board. As a matter of fact, the strike commenced Saturday morning, and we were at the Board at 7 o'clock Saturday night with them complaining about our picketing. We were able to negotiate down the road, after a week or so, that we could have 20 people inside the mall, 30 outside entrance 9, and as many as we wanted back by the poker door where you come in and out of the poker room. So it went reasonably well, and then it got cold. We went down to Brooks and picked up the propane heaters and stuff that we had from there, brought them up and set them up. Low and behold, the company comes and tells us to put them out. We said, why? They said, they're unsafe. So what we did was put caution tape around, we set the propane canister in a milk pallet so it couldn't be tipped over, and it's sitting inside and there's 8 people around the outside. They have us before the Labour Board within a day. We go to the Labour Board, and the Labor Board agrees with the company that it's dangerous and that we're not allowed to have propane on the property, even though there's cement pillar, there's caution tape, and there's 8 people around it that you have to go through before you might get to this canister.

Q: On what kind of expert testimony were they making that decision?

Doug: Based upon the fact that the propane tank might get kicked over. Not only did the board take away our right to the propane heaters, they also said that we couldn't have electric generators on the property, so that you couldn't run an electric heater. So then we came up with the idea of a stove. So we go to Campers Village, buy this stove that you put in a house. Set it up, and within an hour the fire department's here. The company complain about the smoke. When you first set it up, for about 20 minutes the oil and everything burns off of it. Fire department come and said, look, there's nothing wrong with it, it's safe. As a matter of fact, the guy gave us a tip to put some sand in the bottom of it so it wouldn't burn out so quick. So we're back before the board the next day. The company argued that it was an environment issue, that burning the wood was causing people to have problems with coming to the mall, that when they drove onto the property they smelled this burning wood and it was upsetting them. We gave testimony that there's very little smoke or anything. The board met and said no, you can't have these stoves anymore, so they took those away from us. Then we went and got a big tent and put it up. Went to the board, the board took that away. So finally what we did was got a tarp and wrapped it around everybody. People would sit in a circle and you'd have the tarp wrapped around them. So these workers have literally dealt with the cold north. They're sitting out there in -35 degrees. What they did then was they got some candles and put them in plastic buckets, and had the candles around them and pulled the tarp over the top. Back before the board, can't have candles because it's lit. So you weren't allowed any kind of heating at all. So we then went to Works Warehouse and made a deal with them, and got gift certificates for \$150 so that everybody could go down and get warm boots. Works Warehouse was really good about it. They gave us a big deal.

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