

Wayne Covey

March 1, 2010

Q: What position were you holding when you retired?

WC: Secretary treasurer of Local 1118, UFCW.

Q: Tell me about your background.

WC: My father was secretary-treasurer of the shipyard workers in Halifax. As soon as I was 16 years old I had to start paying union dues, because they always gave me a job when I was going to school. The unfortunate part was that I was making more money than people who had to pay for the whole family, because I didn't have to pay taxes.

Q: What kind of community was it in Halifax?

WC: It was actually Dartmouth. But actually I can go into some other things. You know ?? My nephew also got a Stanley Cup ring. His name is Joey DiPenta. You know who his hero was? The hero of the one who got the goal against me was my nephew. Both of them ? in Nova Scotia. I went down there years ago with one of my nieces. Sidney was only 8 years old and he played ground hockey with my son.

Q: Was it a pro-union community?

WC: We're Nova Scotians – it's different than Albertans. We always protect each other. What's good for one is good for everybody. Here in Alberta unfortunately I think there's a swing, but unfortunately, I don't know how to say it, it's probably the background of

political movement in this province. It's never been conceptually popular for a working person.

Q: How did you come to Alberta?

WC: Actually I was working in Scotland on offshore rigs. Then I went from there to Texas. My wife was from Scotland. I met her in Aberdeen. She was a high school art teacher. I spent a year and a half in Scotland, and then we went to Texas to see some friends and then to Toronto to get married. We came out here with two backpacks and ? the life.

Q: You were on the offshore rigs?

WC: I worked on the offshore rigs. I also built land rigs. You want a little historical? I left university, St. Mary's University in Halifax, for a six week trip to Europe. I came back five years later. I travelled the world, and you know the biggest thing I found? You have to deal with the ethnic populations around the world, because these are the ones that are going to make the new Canadians. I've got a very strong rapport because I'll talk their languages and I'll talk their history. That's why we organize them, because we can talk with them.

Q: What year did you come to Alberta?

WC: 1979.

Q: Describe the situation when you got here.

WC: I was staying in a place called Evansburg. I don't know if you know where it's at. My address was "apartment building in Evansburg," because there was only one. What I

did from there is I didn't like the rigs; so the offshore rigs were very different than land rigs. Quite frankly, in February in Alberta, me and my wife looked at a map of Alberta. We had already been to Edmonton and we didn't want the big cities. We wanted a place to raise a family. So it was a question between Fort McMurray, Red Deer, and Lethbridge. Red Deer was in the centre of Alberta. So we flipped a coin and that's where we went.

Q: What work did you find there?

WC: Unfortunately I got here for a day and there was an application in the thing. We got here on Friday and I made an application with Canada Packers on Monday. I figured, well maybe I'll hear in a couple days what's going to happen. They said, you start now. You know how I started--carrying quarters of beef on my shoulder, in and out of trucks all day long?

Q: Describe that.

WC: If you're used to carrying 300 pounds on your shoulder all day long, in and out of trucks. I had an advantage, because I had a union background. Within six months I was secretary-treasurer; within a year I was president of 1118.

Q: Was that in 1980?

WC: '81, actually. Then I got hired to work for the council, the industrial council. Over that time I had seven presidents and eventually got down to one. But I had to get my presidency up to work fulltime for the union. I merged all across Alberta into one. After that, Albert Johnson, the president, was the longest serving president for UFCW in Canada. He's been president since 1987, and nobody even close to him across Canada.

Q: Describe the conditions in the plant when you first went to work there.

WC: The working conditions were okay, because Canada Packers was a good employer. We'd fight with them and strike with them and everything else; but they always were a good employer. At that time I worked in shipping, and it was all manual, physical. Now, after I retired, they starting bringing machines in to do it. But prior to that it was all done manually in the shipping area and the kill floors. It was ? blood and guts.

Q: What sort of toll did that take on the people?

WC: Actually we got involved big time with WCB. Eventually that's why we hired Michael Toal. We hired him specifically to deal with WCB across the province for us. The initiative in 1989 was to change WCB. All of a sudden our workers were the ones getting screwed over, because of work hardening, modified duties, and everything else. We knew we needed a professional in there. So we stole him from the WCB.

Q: And who was that?

WC: Michael Toal.

Q: What sort of problems were the workers encountering?

WC: Repetitive strain injuries: that was major. We had 1,800 people working in the Cargill plant, and they kill and cut 5,500 cattle a day. That's 40 percent of what's killed and cut in Canada.

Q: Why were workers getting repetitive strain injury?

WC: They deskilled it. At one time people used to rotate and do different jobs. Then the line gets so fast. So it's just repeating and repeating, doing the same job. You get

tendonitis; you get repetitive strain, carpal tunnel. Once they deskilled it, people would use a different, they weren't using different muscles. It was just the same muscles; so it was just a question of the body wearing out.

Q: Were there other kinds of injuries too?

WC: Back injuries and stuff like that. But the most is repetitive strain. It became an epidemic.

Q: Cuts?

WC: No, we had all kinds of protective stuff. Cargill is a big international company. I don't know if you know how big Cargill is.

Q: So you went to work as a union rep in the early '80s?

WC: I went to work in the plant. In '84 in negotiations, it was massive negotiations across the country. We had Lakeside on strike in '84, then the Burns closure in '84. Then we took another 13 Canada Packers plants out. So we had the whole country shut down. The local had 97% acceptance of contract, because we voted nationally and it got rejected nationally. So I put my people out on strike.

Q: And your people were the Alberta Council?

WC: No, that was the Red Deer location. After that, two years later I worked for the council. We also put Calgary out; we also put Lethbridge, two plants in Lethbridge out. And we actually put Winnipeg out, put Moosejaw out, we put Vancouver out, we put Toronto out, we put Montreal out. We shut down the country. We had four plants ???

because of the four plants that went out, only one didn't close because they wouldn't take concessions. That was 1984.

Q: Then what happened after 1984?

WC: We lost master bargaining and became independents.

Q: How did you lose master bargaining?

WC: Because actually the truth of the matter is, with the influx coming in from the States... I could really get into a story but I won't bore you.

Q: No, please do.

WC: When Exxon took over--you know Exxon is a big oil company. Well when they took over--right now it's Tyson, but prior to that it was another company. In '79 they scabbed all the plants in the right-to-work states. Alberta believes in right to work. Even with the legislation you've got here and right to work, you cannot get automatic certification, and you have to fight to get that first collective agreement. It's one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that has that. The worst one, by the way, is New Brunswick. Alberta is second.

Q: How did they manage to screw us in terms of master bargaining?

WC: Because we had all these plants out, they scabbed us successfully at Lakeside. They took major concessions there when they scabbed us and they took a \$3.50 an hour rollback. Then Pocklington in '84 lined up the scabs in Edmonton. I was stuck in Toronto for 23 days in negotiations with the rest of the country. Because of what happened there, it took two years to rebuild that local to take them on in '86.

Q: How did Pocklington do it in '84?

WC: You probably realize when the interest rates went through the roof and went into 17% and people were crying for jobs, he lined up and hired in front of the picket line. He had 1,000 people lined up to get those people's jobs.

Q: And that happened in Edmonton?

WC: In 1984.

Q: Was it happening elsewhere too?

WC: Yeah, in Red Deer. They did that to us in '83 at Fletchers. We took concessions and in '84, excuse me I made a mistake, in 1985. Then we worked in cohesion with guys like John Ventura, John Ewasiw, and the Edmonton people. We coincided collective agreements one day apart to shut down the hog industry in Alberta, and basically shut down the majority of the country. What happened was the rates of pay got so big that the Quebec government gave subsidies to move factories to Quebec. I don't know if you want to get into that.

Q: Yes, describe that.

WC: What happened was, the subject came up to keep jobs in Quebec. At one time we had the Swifts chains and the Burns chains. We lost two plants in Manitoba; we lost all the other plants because they were moving their workers too, when they got the subsidy. Actually most of the people there are good friends... But now this pendulum is shifted. Now Olymel is the biggest meat maker, 50% of the pork in Quebec and 50% of the

chicken and poultry in Quebec. I don't know if you're aware of that. So the biggest plant for pork in Canada is Red Deer. Olymel owns it.

Q: And you're saying 50% of the pork production...

WC: ...in Quebec comes from Olymel. And poultry and turkeys too.

Q: So in '85 you had the problem with Fletchers, right?

WC: Actually we had the problem, yeah. Actually they kicked the union out, a guy named McMillan. I don't know if you remember him, in 1983. In 1984 they said they didn't, because what they did was they moved, and this Alberta government, they moved a small little ? and moved up to an old Intercontinental plant. They never told anybody they'd all get laid off. They all got severance pay, and the company never paid it.

Q: This was Canada Packers?

WC: No, this was Fletchers. This happened in October of '84, because it's the same time we had all the other major plays out across the country. They kicked out the union. As president of the local, with Kip Connelly and Dave Mercer, our lawyer, we fought and won. You know a guy named Duckenfield? He was also the financial controller. He even testified. He said he never told the people that they were being severed because he didn't want to pay severance pay.

Q: And they did all that so they could move from the little plant to the bigger Intercontinental plant, and still call themselves Fletchers?

WC: Yep. And we won the court case. We got the union back in. At the same time, they lined up 500 scabs in Red Deer, because there was no union dues, nothing. That's when

Albert Johnson got involved as union chair and took over the thing. He was only there for about a year and you think things aren't right. His background was farming. It's completely different. But he was a great leader for our union across the country.

Q: What happened after that?

WC: Well then we got geared up for 1986. ... I was hired in January of 1986 to coordinate the strikes in the meatpacking industry in Alberta.

Q: You guys knew strikes were coming?

WC: Yes. I was hired specifically to take care of the Fletchers plant and educate them. Albert Johnson was new, and we spent a lot of time, and he believed in education. We pushed education in the local. I don't know if you realize, 1118 always has more people per capita than any other local in any union in Alberta. That's one of my legacies is education. When people think that they're going to educate people, they're going to take their jobs, they're not taking care of the members. You educate people and if you do your job, you're not going to lose your job.

Q: Describe the education you gave them.

WC: We put on weekend schools. We sent maximum amount to the fed schools, week-long schools. We always had the stewards' conferences. It was done differently than other unions and other locals. The object was to make the people on the front line responsible for going to actions instead of sitting back in the back room and telling them with no leadership. The leaders come from the people that work in the plants.

Q: What other plants were getting ready to strike in 1986?

WC: I was on the negotiating committee for Gainers. Peter Boyton was on the negotiating committee for Fletchers. We were both jointly negotiating both contracts.

Q: Were there other plants up too?

WC: No, at that point in '86, because there was a change after the '84 strike, they changed the termination dates of the collective agreements. So Maple Leaf and everybody had a common anniversary, ?, Burns, and Maple Leaf. And the only ones that didn't change was Gainers and Fletchers. That's the only two we could take out at the same time.

Q: What were the companies doing?

WC: Okay, I'll give you a very simple thing. Fletchers wouldn't come to the bargaining table. You know what we did? We had a strike vote in the plant to get them to the bargaining table. We did it in the plant to give them a message. We got a 97% strike vote in the plant to get them to the bargaining table. We met once and they said, whatever Gainers does is what we're going to settle for. We said, here's your notice. You're going down.

Q: So you gave them the 72 hours notice?

WC: Yes. By then, then the Federation of Labor, probably you were involved in it, changed the labour laws. Worst mistake we ever made, because it got worse.

Q: Actually, I wasn't working then for the Federation.

WC: Well ... I know. But you understand what I mean. What they did was then we got automatic certifications 55%. They gave the companies a 14 day window to intimidate workers. We went to change the laws and you know what we did?

Q: But let's step back to 1986 – it was a memorable summer.

WC: Yes, I was bounced between one picket line and another.

Q: Talk of your memories of what happened.

WC: I was on the picket line at 5 o'clock in the morning in Edmonton, on Sunday morning. That was June 30, 1986. Legally, our contract expired June 30th. Just to make sure we wouldn't have any challenge in the courts, we set our deadline for midnight, June 30th. So actually it was July 1st. We went on the picket line. There was me, Albert Johnson, Kip Connelly, and a few other people, on the Gainers picket line. Then we drove back to Red Deer and put people out on strike at midnight.

Q: You didn't have much scabbing?

WC: Actually the farmers tried to scab us.

Q: The farmers in the plant?

WC: The farmers that owned Fletchers. Back then there was a scam going on. Remember the hog wars? The farmers thought they owned the plant because it was shared, a guy McMillan from Vancouver. They thought they were the owners of the plant. They eventually got fucked over by him, but we got rid of him too. Q: How were the farmers convinced that they owned the plant?

WC: They had shares in Fletchers. It was through the hog marketing board. Quite frankly, it was a scam by management, and the farmers were duped. Actually farmers

don't like unions. But the hog marketing board was a union. They didn't realize they were part of a union.

Q: How did they try to scab the plant?

WC: They came into work to kill hogs, because most of them were hog producers. So they had to go and kill the hogs. Otherwise, if you know the life of a hog, there's a certain period of time when they have to be killed. I don't blame the producers, the farmers. They were duped by the management. A friend of mine, called Dave Werlin, was president of the Fed in 1986. We'd get together and get a campaign going with the Fed to deal with that issue.

Q: Did they walk across the picket line?

WC: They drove across. What was happening, I'm in Edmonton, we waited a week. When the heat got too hot in Edmonton, then we took them on down to Red Deer. It was all preconceived. That's when everything was quiet in Red Deer. We told the people to stay away.

Anyway, we were working with my buddies in Vancouver Fletchers, a guy named Dave Charelle. He gave, actually the night they got a strike vote, the Sunday Gainers went out. The Saturday Fletchers Vancouver got a strike vote and I made the phone call in Edmonton before we went on the picket line. We knew we had, and legislation in BC ?? Alberta. ? 24 hour notice and these plants down. We had that hanging on them. Then me and Albert and Kip flew out to Vancouver. A guy named Dave Charelle, the rep, said hey, this is our contract. Red Deer is getting the same contract what you took from them; if you don't like it you're down 24 hours and the fuckin meat's going to fuckin die on the fuckin shelf. They settled.

Q: But it was kind of a bitter strike before then.

WC: It was. It took us two weeks. But we got everything we lost in '85. We got the whole thing back.

Q: So you settled two weeks after you walked out, right in the middle of July.

WC: Yep.

Q: What did you people do to put pressure on the company?

WC: God, that's a loaded question. ... Well it depends if they're scabbing or not.

Q: And they were scabbing.

WC: Yep. Then you had to put a lot more pressure on. If they're not scabbing, you just want to shut down the plant, cuz we had a strike with them in '88 for 7-1/2 months and they shut down the plant.

Q: But in this one, they tried to keep the plant going.

WC: Until we shut down the rest of the operation. Because there were only two eggs in the basket, and we were going to shut both of them down.

Q: You tried the tactic of sitting down, right?

WC: Yes, we had 110 people arrested the one day. What we did, all the RCMP from Olds and all of central Alberta showed up. We stripped all the RCMP across central Alberta, because they couldn't deal with the number of people. We had 100 people arrested that

day, and they didn't have the facility in Red Deer to deal with it all. I know. I was in jail myself for 12 hours. Everybody else was too. There was 40 to a cell.

Q: You were in there for 12 hours?

WC: Yeah.

Q: When they arrested you, what was the charge?

WC: Then it was, before they changed the labour laws, it wasn't a criminal charge. Now it is.

Q: So what was the charge?

WC: It was just mischief, something that wasn't...

Q: Trespassing, mischief, yeah.

WC: It wasn't a criminal charge. We said to people, well you haven't been in jail today; it's your turn tomorrow.

Q: So what did they do?

WC: One of our guys, we told him well stop. The inspector is coming into the plant. The inspectors were contacting us. They told us when they were coming. We told the guy and he's stopping. We didn't realize he was going to have his foot going through the window of the thing, and the guy with a camera from the *Calgary Sun* gets a picture of his foot going through the inspector's window.

Q: So it got pretty rowdy, didn't it?

WC: Actually it was refreshing.

Q: So the company started feeling the heat?

WC: Actually the heat was coming from Vancouver. It's because he was getting the people in Vancouver really pissed off, because the biggest plant they had was in Vancouver. That was the process, the extra value that was making the big money. This is fresh meat, and we shipped to Vancouver, and they process it for the extra value. So we shut down this plant and shut down process, and they had, like I said, two eggs in a basket. It was a big ??.

Q: How was this coordinated with the Gainers one?

WC: We also put forth plants out in BC too, Gainers plants.

Q: Okay, talk about that.

WC: Well, they were distribution plants, okay. They went out in strike in support of Gainers.

Q: Was the Fletchers strike helping the Edmonton workers, or vice versa? You were trying to get both collective agreements.

WC: We just had a settlement 51-52 with Canada Packers nationally. We said international agreements, and Pocklington would not give it. He wanted major rollbacks. The slogan was parity. We'd just get settlements across the country – 51, 52 cents. Pocklington wouldn't do it. Fletchers were hanging on Pocklington's shirts. Their position

of negotiation, whatever you've Gainers, competitive, we're not interested in Montreal or Toronto or Maritimes, anyplace else; we're just interested in what's going on in Edmonton. So that's why two plants were involved together. That's why I sat on both negotiating committees, and the rep from Edmonton sat on our negotiating committee.

Q: What was happening in Edmonton?

WC: Actually we met with the company for about 10 minutes and gave them our strike notice.

Q: Do you remember the character across the table from you?

WC: Yes, a guy by the name of, a lawyer. It starts with a P. You know what he said? He says, this is suicide. We're all sitting at the Labour Board up in Edmonton with the deputy minister of labour. They were saying, you know what he said? I don't want the strike. He says, if I do, I won't be able to make any more money from you guys if you lose the unions. He was fuckin \$500 ? sometime, eh? You know the short little fucker I'm talking about? Yeah, Phil Ponte. ... We sat there in mediation, Fletchers on one side. Me and Kip and Peter Boyce were bouncing between the two negotiating committees at the Labour Board at the same time, because we were both giving notice. Meeting actually, the only person ? John Ventura knows and me and Kip gave him notice in Edmonton. Within 10 minutes, we're not interested, what are you talking about? You're not even talking about nothing, Mr. Ponte. All you do is say, I can't really talk about anything. We said, well 10 minutes the negotiations lasted, and we gave them notice. Then we went back to Red Deer and gave them notice.

Q: Who was taking who to the Board?

WC: Well the government took us to the Board and said in conciliation before they changed the labour laws in '88. It wasn't mandatory conciliation back then. You didn't need to conciliate.

Q: So you weren't going before the Board because the company was applying to the Board...?

WC: I don't know if you know Dan Kennedy? He was there, and he was almost in tears. ... He's a good guy. When I took Cargill out, that's another story.

Q: That was a memorable summer.

WC: And there was a big rally in Edmonton. One of the Canadian directors, Frank Ben, at that point we set up an education strike fund in Canada. I was instrumental in setting that up. I'm not trying to blow my own horn. I just gave you some literature to explain it to you, which pays \$100 a month for picket, \$100 a week for picket duty. The locals paid \$2 a week members' due and goes in this fund and also pays off legal costs, strike-related incidents, criminal charges – all covered. Now we set it up October 17th at the Westbury Hotel in Toronto, gearing up for what was going to happen in '86. So we were preparing ourselves. Now the fund is sitting – and this can't be public – but it's sitting at over \$23 million.

Q: You've got a huge defence fund. ... Back to the picket line, a few people were injured. How did that happen?

WC: I'm not going to go there.

Q: Okay. Everything that was done there was done illegal, so I'm not going there. I can go...

WC: Just tell me whatever you can say.

WC: Norm Ingles, one of the, almost had his leg taken off. UFCW Canada put him in BC close to his family, and bought a building. I really don't want this on tape. We bought a building which he managed for 10 years. Then we took care of him.

Q: But tell me, on the picket line...

WC: He was from Canada Packers. Three people that got injured on the Fletchers picket line was my sister plant, my plant. Canada Packers was only 100 meters away. That's my original plant and they're the ones that came on...

Q: What role was Canada Packers playing?

WC: Support.

Q: The local there supported it?

WC: It was 1118. They came out on the picket line on their way to work. They were told...

Q: Most people don't know how picket lines work.

WC: You know what the best way instead of picket lines in this province? I sat in negotiations with Canada Packers in 1984 in Toronto, mass meeting negotiations, with 13 plants at the bargaining table at the same time. I make a phone call to my executive in the plant. I said, don't kill any cattle today. The company comes in: what's happening in Red Deer? They killed 13 cows in six hours.

Q: So Fletchers was pork?

WC: Yeah,

Q: And Canada Packers was cows?

WC: No, Canada Packers ?????.

Q: So what's happened to Canada Packers down here?

WC: It's Maple Leaf. Now the plant shut down after Cargill came into operation. A lot of the plants that I represented, they closed the doors when Cargill came in. They couldn't compete with the new rates of pay.

Q: What kind of settlement did you get at Fletchers in 1986?

WC: We got everything that was lost in 1985 and got back to the master collective agreement country-wide, which included about a \$5 an hour increase.

Q: But also, master bargaining.

WC: I got the ? agreement Canada wide but it also was a \$5 increase.

Q: So the members were pretty happy about that?

WC: Yes, it was a unanimous vote.

Q: And the company is doing well to this day?

WC: No, they sold and Olymel bought them from Quebec.

Q: But they bought them because they were profitable.

WC: Actually the one in Red Deer was. There's only one plant in North America more modern than the one in Red Deer, and that's the one in Tar Heel, North Carolina, owned by Tyson.

Q: Describe a "modern" meatpacking plant.

WC: Well they just spent over \$100 million redoing brand new kill floor, automating everything. We went from originally we had a strike in '86--we had 400 members. Now we've got 500 foreign workers in the plant, I'll be talking about that, because they couldn't hire people. But they want to go to 2,500 members; but they couldn't find staff. But it's still 1,300 or 1,400 people there now. They wanted to go double shift, but they couldn't find workers.

Q: So when other plants were closing down because of Cargill, your plant stayed open.

WC: Cargill was beef. ... We both belonged to the same local, two biggest plants in Canada. They set the terms and conditions and wages across Canada, these two plants.

Q: You guys were the original organizers of Lakeside, right?

WC: They belonged to Local 740, which eventually merged with 401. So the jurisdiction went with them after the merger. We lost the strike in '84. We paid the people for three and a half years.

Q: So the strike was officially on for three and a half years?

WC: Yes. But the thing is it was scabbed efficiently. At that time, that plant was only 110 members.

Q: What sort of killing were they doing?

WC: Oh, it was only small time. It was only maybe 500 cattle a day. Now it's up to close to 4,000. They made a bunch of--IBP when they bought it--, they made it like a Cargill.

Q: Were they killing horses there for a while?

WC: No, that's in Fort McLeod.

[next disc]

Q: We're talking about Central Park Lodge. You've got a flour mill; you've got some nursing homes; you got Lilydale; you've got Safeway's meat and deli; you've got Cargill, and you've Olymel.

WC: Yes, and we had a lot of plants closed, a lot of our meatpacking plants closed. We also have a new plant in Calgary owned by Cargill that just opened as a meat-cutting plant. We just got that. We also have an assisted living: it was owned by CPL; we organized them. Most of the growth of this local came through organizing.

Q: What's your tactic for organizing?

WC: You don't do it with the professionals. You do it with the people that work in the stores or the plants. They're the ones that communicate with the people, not the full-time staff.

Q: So, do you call a meeting?

WC: Yes, and you let them do the work. Quite frankly, they can communicate better, and also they don't lie to the members. I'm not saying full-time staff do, but the communication is much better member to member. No promises are ever given. The only promise you can give them is that you'll do the best you can do.

Q: So you don't throw a collective agreement in front of them.

WC: No, because you know why? As soon as you do that and you don't fulfill it, you get a decertification. So what's the sense of even doing it?

Q: Was there ever any serious interference by management in your organizing drive?

WC: Since they changed the labour laws, I'll give you an example. Medicine Hat, me and Kip went down there. There was only 85 people working in the place, the CPL Nursing Home. In four hours we had 82 people signed up. We went to the Labour Board in Calgary, made the application before they changed the labour laws, got over 65%. Now you've got a 14 day waiting period and there's so much interference by the companies and the rightwing Alberta government, it's ten times as hard. We pushed to change the labour laws, and what happened was we ended up going backwards instead of forward.

Q: Have you been in a case where management actually prevented you from getting...?

WC: We were in a situation in Innisfail. We organized a plant of sheep and hogs. When we went to make the application, the company bused all the people down and revoked the ones we signed, and paid them for the day.

Q: But they're not allowed to. What do they do?

WC: Put it this way. People were scared of losing their jobs, because they were given false information. I'll give you another example. The biggest legal bill I've ever had, that really revoked the labour code in Alberta, was Engineer ?, which is 1118. They bused people and we got them organized. We didn't get a collective agreement. Probably the most notorious person in the province in for the company for negotiator is ... Okay. Anyway, they bused through. I couldn't get past and get certification. It was 47% ethnic, 53% white, in Calgary. All the freebies were given to the whites, and the ethnic groups were treated like shit. We could never break that thing. We had three strike votes and the company would shut down the plant and bus them to the vote to make sure the white people showed up to vote.

Q: That was the subject of a fairly famous landmark decision.

WC: It went to the Court of Queens Bench; it was three years in court. One of the things was certification. They challenged the fact that they said it was only 50 and it was three spoilt ballots and three spoilt ballots: votes against the union. I organized that plant too.

Q: Have the labour laws resulted in you losing any of the plants that you organized?

WC: No, we did lose, because of the 14 day cooling off period. It gives the company the right to intimidate the workers. They ? the vote and they make them scared for their jobs and when they come to the vote, it's not fair because people think they'll lose their jobs. They lose their union, because all this information comes out to the employer. Sure we

can do unfair labor practice, but the workers are afraid. The majority of the time it was successful, but a few instances I can give you is a prime example, and it's well documented. Actually, they changed the Alberta labour code. If you want to look at the labour code manual in Alberta, you'll see most of the presidents coming from Engineer ? and Local 1118.

Q: Tell me about the growth of 1118 from the time you started until now.

WC: Education, education, education.

Q: But give me the numbers. When you started, you had how many members?

WC: When I was president back in the early '80s, 250. Now I'm not exactly sure of the total, but close to 5,000. It went from a little ? in Red Deer to province wide.

Q: You also did the newsletter.

WC: Yeah, it was done by my wife and with my consultation, because I was the editor. What we tried to do was educate the members. My belief is education, education, education. I'll say that forever and a day, because if you don't educate the members, you're not doing your job.

Q: Who were some of the significant people outside of UFCW that you met?

WC: Dave Werlin for one. I have a lot of respect for Dave. He didn't mind being on the picket line and fighting the scab bus in '86. He also was on my picket lines. And actually, you were great for education. That's where I know you from. Otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you.

Q: John Ventura?

WC: John Ventura was here this weekend; he's one of my best friends. He just left last night; he was here since Friday. The weekend before, Kip Conway was here for five days. I'm retired, but I'm not out of the picture.

Q: What's happening to the labour movement in this province?

WC: I don't think it's in this province; I think it's country wide. Too much scare in conservative tactics. The biggest problem, and it gets back to education, we've got so many foreign workers that don't understand the rights they have when they come to this country. The more you can get involved, like Albert Johnson, I'll give you an example. ?? across the country, we have the Maple Leaf in Edmonton; we have Cargill; we probably have over 1,000 members of foreign workers. We have their rights enshrined in collective agreements. Part of that process is they can't get a collective agreement prior to expiry, because there's no way you can force them, ? it's got to go before the expiry. The company has to be honest and negotiate the collective agreement. Mr. Johnson, Albert I should say, was instrumental in doing this.

Q: You were at the table too, right?

WC: Yes, but that was his baby.

Q: Where were a lot of these workers coming from?

WC: Philippines, El Salvador, Ukraine. But put it this way, you're better off talking to Albert because he's got the things. I was more involved on the national scene. The local was his baby.

Q: These temporary foreign workers were primarily coming to Alberta, with a few in BC and Manitoba.

WC: Quite a few in Manitoba, actually. You look at the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon. It's big time, but they don't have the same rights and obligations we have. We have the best program, ? got the best program in Canada. The one that's going to talk about it is the president, Albert Johnson, because we've got the model everybody's trying to adapt to.

Q: I have to congratulate you on that, by the way.

WC: Actually you should congratulate Albert, because he was more instrumental than me.

[END]