

Ramon Antipan

Q: What happened after 1973, after the coup?

RA: You can't just jump right away into the economics or how the economy was turned around, as they say, without remembering what actually happened in 1973. It was one of the most horrendous takeovers by the military in Latin America and I would say the world. The democratically elected government not only were overthrown but a massive sweeping repression took place after that. After the killing of the president of Chile, Salvador Allende, they started persecuting the whole progressive movement – the political parties of the left, social organizations, particularly labour organizations, because they were seen as internal enemies. Internal war was declared by the military against their own people. So there were sweeping changes, as we say, eliminating all vestiges of oppositions so it would pave the way to make the economic and social and political changes that they wanted to introduce after that. Keep in mind that all this was not only supported but also masterminded in lots of ways by the CIA and the Nixon administration of the time. Once they accomplished the first stage, the first year was brutal. I was just reading a book the other day --one of the leaders of one of the political revolutionary parties there; it's a horrible story. They're such--I don't know how to call it, call it Machiavellian--I think it would be, kind of an honour to them. It's just that I never thought a human being could do such horrible things. It took them years and years, decades actually, to find out what happened to that person. That was just one sign of what they're gonna do. Everybody was fearful, neighbour turning against neighbour, and family against family, basically the whole thing of divide and conquer by taking it to the extreme. I think after a year or so, once they kind of instilled the fear in people and they had total control of everything in the country, from movement on the street, nobody could go on the street at any given time. So then they started sweeping changes. By that time I guess it was an opportunity for one of the most neoconservative and neoliberalism creator, Milton Friedman. That was when they started talking about it. I remember I was

in jail at the time because I was picked up in 1974. However, we kept abreast of what was going on in the street, by our relatives and friends who used to go and visit us once or twice a week, plus the radio. We kept a radio, sometimes in a clandestine way. So they introduced this minister--I'll never forget his name – Jorge Cauas. That was the minister of economy at that time, and they started talking about making changes to make Chile become a modern country, very modern country. After they make all these sweeping change by repression, then they started talking about making legal changes. For one, they started talking about making changes to different laws, constitution, which basically took effect in 1980. The government was dictatorship, governing by decree. So Jorge Cauas is the minister at the time and he's talking about making sweeping changes in the economy. They talk about Milton Friedman and his theory and so forth. So to just grasp what they were saying, I hope I remember exactly the quote about sweeping economic changes, he said, it's better to cut the whole tail of the dog rather than cut it piece by piece. So that's how they meant there'd be sweeping changes. So of course they were all neo-privatization and people start talking later on; but it was then all the foundation was laid out. They changed the labour law; they changed the way workers were organized. Of course at that time they didn't have unions basically, because they were all banned. So basically they cleaned up the field for the big companies to come in. They started talking about: we're gonna open Chile for business; Chile's gonna be open for business for anybody who comes and would like to invest. It's the best climate to invest, so on and so forth. It wasn't that easy, though. Later on the Roman Catholic Church started complaining about it because people suffered. However, one has to say, they supported the coup at the beginning. So that cannot go unnoticed. So they're also responsible on that front. However, later on, the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Silva Henriquez, he created an organization with the church to provide help and relief to people who were in jail and persecuted. Later on they created what they called the...of solidarity also to help those. They were angry in Chile because of these sweeping changes. I remember being in jail. At first our relatives came there to have us food basically ever day, because the jail food was inedible. But by early '75 we noticed the scarcity with outside too, because

people would visit us less. We didn't have enough food for everyday situation. I remember one day, in the gallery that I was inside, we were about 40 of us. It was winter in 1975 and there weren't too many visitors because people didn't have money--lots of people from out of town, far away, so no money for transportation, so they have to space out so much the visits. Anyway, to make a long story short, I remember my brother. My mom sent me a whole chicken ready to cook. Forty of us ate that chicken because there wasn't any food left. That shows how the economy was. People were saying that it was brutal outside. There was food but there was no money to buy it. So that's how people started noticing the changes.

Q: So there was a contraction in the economy?

RA: Yes, that's what happened.

Q: Describe the privatization and other neoliberal measures.

RA: Some of the big Chilean companies started firing workers. They were unionized workers; so therefore fire them and have new hires at a much lower wage, without protection, obviously. The second measure was because during the government of Allende, almost three years, the main resource of the Chilean economy, which was copper and still is, was nationalized. That is what irate the American governments and the big business in North America and Europe and obviously the CIA. That was one of the reasons why they were through the government. So they started selling those companies, everything. That was the main aspect of the economy. One of the second key too, because Chile was also and still is an agricultural country, lots of ranching and all that. So during the Allende government and the previous government, which was social democrat government, they initiated an agrarian reform to give land to the landless, to the poorest of the poor. So the dictatorship reversed all that. They returned the land to the landowners without any compensation by the landowner. They were just returned to them. Some of

them, to be fair, were put up for sale at a bargain price. Anybody who might have a little bit of money could buy it, but it was obviously aimed at the big landowners, the...as they call them in Spanish. So those were one of the most sweeping changes, I would say, because obviously you can see already lower wages, unorganized, no benefit. On the other hand, in the aspect of food, securing the food, all those lands were running cooperatively, some of them in collectives, cuz that was the desire of the people at the time prior to the military takeover. They banned it. So you could imagine those people were left without land, without tools, basically without employment, without a chance to get work. After all, they were small farmers. So what are they gonna do? So all those changes took place prior to the big change. Like I was saying, they were government by decree. So they changed the constitution in 1980. By then the economy was already in full swing toward privatization. Speaking for example of healthcare, you're in a so-called democracy because it wasn't a full democracy anyway yet. Healthcare was for everybody. Mind you, you have to take into account that it was an undeveloped country. So materially speaking the hospitals were not the best. However, anybody would have access to healthcare. Looking back historically, it's always been a mixture of public and private, but private was basically the initiative of the rich elite so they would have their own clinic and that kind of stuff. However, the healthcare system was public and it was run by the state, part of the budget every year of the state. It was run by them. The most doctors, once you get out of medical school, would have to serve so many years in the public system. Then, if you want, if you have enough resources, you would open up your own clinic. But lots of doctors were just attending the public system. So with those changes, obviously that changed.

Q: How was healthcare privatized?

RA: I would say the change in the constitution was to reaffirm what was taking place already. In terms of healthcare, it was already being privatized. They would say, well let's leave the market, as we heard today – leave the market decide on everything, the magic

decision by the market. That's what started taking place. When I mentioned Minister Cauas and his expression, that's basically he was paraphrasing what Milton Friedman was saying. When you hear and then you read what Milton Friedman had to say about it, it was downsize the state, get the government out of business, and let the market decide. That's exactly what the dictatorship decided. One of the things that they did, basically they got out of business because they sold everything that was in the hand of the state. Look at the things that was under the state. First of all, the mining and copper mine industry. There was a little bit of development of industry in Chile still. It was public; it was sold. A little bit of oil in the south part of the country: it was sold. So those were the first stage of the total privatization of the economy in Chile.

Q: So the public healthcare system remained, but it was being starved out?

RA: Very much so. The same took place with education. They said, well freedom of choice. They took lots of freedom of choice. On the other hand, ideologically, they prepared the society for the new message and the new reality – freedom of choice everywhere. Like we here in Canada, everywhere you go, the rightwing talk about freedom of choice in everything. So that's what it was. For example, in the case of education, if people want to have education and they choose some other school, that was their choice. The state also run away from supporting education in which it was totally public. So they privatized it. Since then, for example, anybody, if you have enough money, can set up your own school. The contradictory part is that, although they are private, they receive subsidy from the government. Basically, if we gonna use the language that we're using here, it was contracting out. That was leading into privatizing totally in the case of the education system. Same thing with medicare. Now we go back today and the education, for example, in Chile is totally private.

Q: There are no public schools?

RA: Supposedly they are public schools but they give it to the municipality. So it's administered by the different cities, as we call them here. We call them municipality. But, as you can imagine, there are rich municipalities and there are poor municipalities. Those who live in a poor municipality, they send them to those municipal schools; they received the worst education. Not because of the teachers, because of the resources that they have.

Q: What about some of the other public services?

RA: Everything started getting privatized. Chile used to have a very well – although I'd be lying to you to say that people retire with a very decent pension – however, they have pensions enough to actually spend the rest of their life after retirement. It was public pension. Even in the private industry, there was by law they had to establish a pension system, and people had that. I remember if you worked in the public sector you would retire after 30 years, 60 or 65 years old, similar to what it used to be in Europe up till recently, because Europe is changing as well. So it was very similar to that. That was another thing that the dictatorship did. They changed the pension system. They privatized it. They forced those people, because it was open for business, lots of these insurance companies came in and said, I'm gonna provide you the best service. That was a freedom of choice that people had – which insurance company you're gonna go. There was such a scam too, people in the process that ended up, because it was unregulated. No regulation whatsoever, opened for business, so no regulation whatsoever. Lots of people ended up losing their pensions as well in the process. When you leave everything open, of course corruption is one of the most things that you know it's gonna come in. They lost people lots and lots of money, actually. There was a recession of the economy; also there in the '80s around the world but same thing in Chile. So the economy was really in shambles too. So that's when people ended up losing all the money. However, they privatized the pension system. Different insurance now are administering the pension plan, and that's one of the struggle. Workers say, one day hopefully we're gonna have a pension.

Q: What about worker's compensation?

RA: There was also worker compensation and of course that was left entirely up to the different companies. It still is. I will be lying if, oh yes we after so many years. They have to also change because it was brutal at that time. There was nothing in there that actually people could fall back to. It all depends if you have money to seek treatment. So everything that they have to do with social programs, it was attacked by the military and changed over.

Q: So the law was changed too?

RA: Yes.

Q: What happened to human rights in Chile?

RA: The law specifically change beginning with, as I was telling you, labour organizations were banned. Later on they legislate by decree again allowing to form unions. But, I have to clarify this one. But I think you need 15 individuals to create unions. That's very important information too, cuz in the mining industry that was privatized, after they dictate this law, the decree, of course workers always wanna organize themselves because we can't say no by individual. We can't fight the bosses, per se. So there were so many unions in just one outfit, because obviously worker compete each other. Remember the mentality of the whole new liberal policy is competitiveness. You have to be competitive and that was trickling down right to the last worker in there. You have to be competitive in order to keep your employment and all that. So it creates a mentality of competition, undeclared competition. So workers will compete too who create so and so unions. It wouldn't be surprising to find 10 or 15 unions in just one place, and all doing basically the same work. How do you negotiate in the flesh? You have no power, basically.

Q: How long did it take for the correction to take place?

RA: I guess it didn't take too long because there was lots of flowing in of foreign investment. That's why later on in the final years of the dictatorship they would place themselves...turnaround the economy. Chile was seen as the modern economy of Latin America, even the world, because after all, Chile was a very well prepared plan by the government of the United States, by CIA, by the financial world, to have some field to experiment this new theory. After all, Milton Friedman was trying to sell his theory all over the place but it wasn't successful until 1980 when actually found a fertile land or fertile soil in Chile. So they opened up this opportunity for the elite of Chile, particularly on the economy aspect, for young entrepreneur, young students, to go to University of Chicago. When they make all these changes, I'm talking about early '80s, a whole bunch of these family friends, relatives of the elite in Chile was sent to Chicago School of Economy. When they came back a few years later, middle '80s, they start taking charge of different ministry, different level of government and so on and so forth. So particularly in the aspect of the economy, they were called The Chicago Boys. There was a whole bunch of them came down and wanted to consolidate all the changes, the sweeping reform. After all, they have a chance to be educated by their master, Milton Friedman. So they came back with all these ideas plus the advice of the IMF, the World Bank, reviews the side of the States, in order to get out of the situation that you are. The poor country has always been in debt anyway because there is no way that you're gonna get out of there, because they get loans from outside, shark loans basically with shark interest.

Q: Were the World Bank and IMF called on specifically to provide contributions during that period?

RA: Well they did, they did, because after all that's what it was. They grabbed the theory of Milton Friedman; they grabbed the advice of the IMF and the World Bank to make



those sweeping changes. That's when the whole process of the whole privatization took place. Probably the copper mine was the first one when they decided to denationalize it, but then all the others that I mentioned, the little steel outfit that was going, gas sector, those were all; electricity, I mean, electricity was public; it was public. Telephone was public. They were all privatized.

Q: Which companies?

RA: In the case of electricity, this is one of the ironic things in the case of electricity. It was a Spanish company. They never changed the name, by the way. The name of the electricity was Endesa, in Spanish Empresa Nacional de Electricidad, and National Enterprise of Electricity, something like that. The Spanish, they didn't change the name; they keep call it Endesa. It was a huge investment. So, later on, people started talking about the second wave of colonization, because Spanish capital actually is huge in there in the banking sector; also in the electricity sector. And the telephone: well, telephone is the big thing. I think there is a little bit of so-called competition. There is different company in there nowadays. I can't recall who they sell originally the telephone sector.

Q: At a certain point we are led to believe that there was a Chilean spring that the fear and repression you're talking about let go, and people were put in a position of living in a democracy and being able to elect a government, and there were even Socialist governments elected. When did that begin to happen? When did the repression begin to ease?

RA: Well, we have to keep in mind that the repression, the real repression, it was constant until the regime basically gave up power to the civilian government. Obviously one can say there was worse moments. But, I don't know; to me repression is repression. Because of that, obviously as I was saying, they created a fertile soil for the big company to run business without any interference. They created this mentality of fear. I went back

to Chile in 1990. Of course at that time it was wars; people wouldn't talk about stuff. Even as late as last year when I went back, you would try to initiate conversation with some people, and I noticed that there was still fear. When you go through this brutal repression, I don't think there is time to talk about those brutalities. But you know obviously people are gonna live with that constant fear inside them. They don't wanna rock the boat, per se. Never mind about creating unions and that kinda stuff because it was dangerous. The things that I guess started changing was when the women of the... people who are in prison and those who were disappeared, they started organizing themselves. They defied all odds. They were brave women and they started putting pressure on the dictatorship. Remember too that year after year the Pinochet regime was condemned at the United Nations for violation of human rights. However, like any resolution of the United Nations, these are not binding. Their political statement is up to the government whether to follow or not. But it was the human rights movement, particularly lead by the women, who actually started changing. They started getting press coverage outside; people started visiting the country. Even the delegation from labour or social organization or Christian organization from Canada too, they visit Chile and went to talk. So every country is obviously not immune to international pressure. So Chile started feeling that pressure as well, all that obviously because people were living under brutal conditions so at one point started defying. Then came the student, then the youth; so they started taking it into the street. There were massive protests, probably you will remember seeing the news in the late '80s, middle '80s up to the late '80s. There were massive protests in Chile. Lots of people were killed. I was just reading last night incidentally, one young woman who came to Canada actually: she was burned alive by the military at that time. I don't know if she was, say lucky; however she didn't die. Her companion at that time, he died right away because he was burned alive. So this woman by the way is still alive. She came to Canada a few years ago. She was in Montreal for three months, she was submitted to several operations in... international solidarity, but she still have her face. You can still see the whole brutality. I think that's one of the most visible signs of the brutality of the military in Chile. However, as I say, people at one

point are gonna start losing fear. You can't live under those conditions all the time. So pressure started mounting; massive demonstrations started taking place. Lots of repression. However...enforced the military to organize a plebiscite. Finally Pinochet, his wisdom and his air of being democratic, he say, okay we're going to submit to the nation what do they want. Of course the campaign worked, and it was a simple vote. Do you want an elected government or a democracy – yes or no? Of course big campaign took place. Finally, to make a long story short, no it was the other way around. You wanna keep things as they go or do you want change? Something along that way. So the no campaign took a big--people start organizing around campaigning no, not to continue with the situation. And they won. People of Chile won at that plebiscite, in spite of all the fear monger campaign by the dictatorship and so on and so forth. By then you could imagine there were several years already of people taking into the street almost every week, every day in some cases. People get tired, right? Some of what I would call now the elite of the progressive forces, lots of them were outside too in exile. They were educated outside, some of them even the United States. Chilean exiles went all over the world after 1973. A good chunk of them went to the United States and some of them even got educated there. Because there was no visible leadership on the anti-dictator movement, for fear people would say, well just like young people are saying today, we don't have leaders; we're all leaders. As we were saying, people would say, well they not gonna stick their neck out per se to be singled out as a leader. However, we're all intelligence work, because the military learn how to repress through brutal measures but also how to infiltrate. Remember that people still fear and people didn't trust each other. So it was easy also to identify who was rocking the boat. Anyway, all those potential leaders may appear and they see that they were about to become the one that actually was going to challenge the dictatorship. Systematically, it was systematic killing of those things. I remember the last young one; he was so good. His father, by the way, also was killed in 1973 and disappeared. His name was Miguel Enriquez. His father also was Miguel Enriquez. Now this guy was so good. He belongs to the MIR, which is Revolutionary Movement of the Left. But he was open. He was working on denouncing

the human rights violation but at the same time talking about change: how do we need to get rid of these things? Well before we know it, they kill him.

Q: Did they take him to court?

RA: There was not such a thing. The only thing that somebody was taken into court was very well known. There was two way of doing them, yes. Some of them would be taken to so-called regular justice system. But it was the same. It was in shamble. The justice in Chile--judges was so fearful of the dictatorship that they would do whatever they want. But some of the other would do in the brutal ways. These imagined leaders, it was done in that way. I was mentioning these two young men but the young woman also--I think she was 21 at the time, if I don't mistake. But anyway were pretty young; she was still at university. So they will just make them disappear, kill them. They would show up suddenly. Some of the journalists too: I remember one name in the late '80s, José Carrasco. He was writing different articles and some of the not so much clandestine person, but also a little bit underground, because I mean the freedom of press was also repressed. There was no freedom of press. However, because of his position, he was also killed. Lots of these emerging leaders were killed. So that's why I guess people started fearing also: just big rally, big movement, without any visible leader. When the plebiscite came down, as I was mention, late '89, all those who were in exile who never take the risk of being in the forefront of this anti-dictator struggle in Chile, they came back to the country. They came back to the country and they took over. Some of us tend to believe that it was orchestrated from outside too. Because surprise, surprise, after the first civilian government, lots of those who started university in United States, they took the post as minister of different areas. Once that took place, once the change took place, keep in mind the whole experiment of the theory of Milton Friedman, the imposition of the IMA and World Bank were already established. The Chilean economy was in process of recovering already. They create employment, mind you basically in the service industry. However, there was employment. It wasn't well paid, but however... I remember the

unemployment. I think it reached at one point 35 per cent, between 35 and 40 per cent during the worst year of the dictatorship when they started making all these sweeping changes. By the late '80s already that unemployment goes down substantially, substantially. Mind you, like I say, barely given to eat but at least people weren't unemployed. Now because of the situation too, you will see that later on the rate of crime goes up. People somehow also they have to eat, so robbery, killing, that kind of stuff. In spite of law and order that the dictatorship promised, that never actually took place. Yes, the economy started flourishing. However, the disparity in the gap between the rich and the poor, it widened so much. It widened so much. Those on the elite sector, basically they started making good. Profit went up because of all these changes. So the overall economy from the capitalism point of view, it was in a good path. They recover, everything was privatized, so the market was basically dictating what would have to take place, not only in the economy but in the political and social life of the country. So it was well established when the first civilian government was elected and take place. Who was elected as the first civilian president was Patricio Aylwin, from the Christian Democrat party, a center-right party. They were the one who were the most rightwing political party orchestrated coup d'état in Chile. However, after they realized their mistake, they put themselves in the opposition of the dictatorship. Because of that obviously people were tired and there were no other alternative. Of course it was the only alternative. They were able to--people were saying Chile, when the river is boiling so much, that is game for the fisherman, so to speak. Anyway, that's exactly; because things were so much in turmoil, it was easy for them to take the leadership of the opposition to the dictatorship. They got elected. Freedom and democracy is coming, happiness is coming – those were the message. It was a huge defeat of the dictatorship. They made a transition and as of today they haven't released the agreement that was made behind the doors. The opposition led by the Christian Democrat made an agreement with the dictatorship how to do a peaceful transition. One of the first requirements, and that's the one that people know and was published, is to keep the economy as it was; don't make any changes. Even they themselves, Patricio the new president, his government was saying, we're not gonna make

any changes of the economy because the economy is good. We are one of the best country in Latin America; so why we gonna make those changes? But now the other part of the agreement has never come out publicly. People suspect, like for example, not to trial for violation of human rights. Pinochet, before leaving, he gave the military amnesty. Everybody says that that's part of the agreement, because they have never been prosecuted in the way that even Argentina has prosecuted their violators. But not in the case of Chile, because of that particular agreement. So all the hopes that things were going, particular from the human rights violation aspect, those who were in prison, those who were sent into exile – that whole hope that things were going to change actually started falling away, even under this new democratic government elected in 1990.

Q: Other governments elected after that were a little further to the left.

RA: Yes. And precisely, as I was telling you, because of this unknown agreement that they have, this pact as they call it, they have never been able to make changes. Even the last president of this alliance, called *concertation*--the woman that was elected before this last rightwing person that is in power now--, Michele Bachelet, everybody has a high hope on her in terms of big changes and so on, particular in the aspect of human rights. After all, she's the daughter of one of the generals who was killed by Pinochet because he was, I would not say opposed, but somehow because he's serving the government of Allende, by the way, by that time. So that was his crime; so he also was eliminated. Michele Bachelet herself was also in prison. I can't remember for how long, but she was in prison. So there was high hope that things were going to change. But because of this pact, secret pact that was forged in 1990, she didn't make any changes either. By the contrary. This is very important in terms of the political movement of late. Under her government... Let me backtrack a little bit. I told you at the beginning that they make big changes in terms of the agricultural aspect. All this land was expropriated by Allende at that time but the government put it into the hands of the peasant that didn't have land, including the Indigenous people. There's a large population of Indigenous people in

Chile, particularly in the south. They were all restored to the big landowners, right? So the Indigenous population was the most, how should I put it, the ones who suffered the most. The dictatorship also make changes. Keep in mind that historically you look at the history of Aboriginal people, they don't have the concept of private property of the land. Same thing in the case of Indigenous people in Chile, the Mapuche. They don't have the concept of private property. It's a collective taking care of the land; that's how they put it, with their own culture, their own cultural motivation, and so forth. But the dictatorship in a smart move they decided, okay, there was and there still is special legislation for Indigenous people. So, he said, you know, being even the most racist government on the other hand toward person, he say, from now on everybody's gonna be Chilean. No more of these Chilean and Mapuche. Why we gonna have second-class Chilean? It's message like to try to capture good reaction on the people. So he decides to privatize also the land of the Mapuche. How to do it? By dividing the community. At this time, just like in here, people live here in reservation, same thing in there. They call it community there; it's a collective plot of land. So he decide to divide. He was successful to a certain point. Then people started saying, wait a minute; this is not right. So they opposed. So they did that to the community probably who were closest to the big cities. But on the outside, far away, they didn't divide and make each family a rich individual private property of the land. So people started fighting because the piece of land that they have, the Mapuches are basically agriculture, because of the land and soil in there. So I think it was 1.3 hectares per family. So how do you make a living on that? People started organizing themselves and they know that the land historically has been taken away from them. They were pushed; so they started taking over. So they started organizing themselves and they started reclaiming their land. I'm talking about, remember I started talking about... So he started sending the police, the military police, to the community. It is under her government that the most Mapuche was killed during the so-called democracy. Young people as of the year that she left that was the last one that was killed. This create a big revolt in pole; they never back down. Actually, when Gloria and I went back in 2010 we saw there nothing happened. There's still some fear, as I was saying, because of all this

dictatorship plus the alienation, because the economy is supposedly good and people like to believe that because the economy is so good we are now better than the rest of Latin America. So they create this alienation too. People are alienated, or were alienated. We went back and the only sector that actually was mobilized was the Mapuche. We participated in several mobilizing in there, and they haven't backed down since then. For the longest time there was a hunger strike actually for those who were in jail, because not only they killed them but they also put people in jail because of their actions. They were called terrorists and they were charged by this legislation imposed by the dictatorship. They create an internal defence kind of system and legislation; so whoever defy those law were accused of terrorist. It's a terrorist law and they been try under those terrorist laws and of course not by civilian justice system, by the military. Anyway, those who were in jail organized this hunger strike to protest their situation and to protest the fact that the claim and plea of Mapuche people were never heard by the government. We got there, they were on hunger strike; not a single piece of information in the newspaper nor on TV, nothing, in spite of, I think, there were 15 of them in four different jails. By Number 73, the section of the church, Roman Catholic Church, and some group from outside, they came in and start putting pressure. Only then national TV and the big newspapers started talking about the hunger strike. Now of course the rest of the population get to know and they start protesting. But by them it was tiny protest only – write letters and make a small demonstration – but particularly from youth and the students. Then also because of foreign investment there are lots of logging going on in there. By the way, Canadian capitalism there, I mean investment. Also they are building more dam for electricity. They decide to flood a sector of the southern part of the country, one of the most beautiful area. I was taken aback by that. The reason I'm referring to that, because I think that what lead to what is going on today in Chile. The environmentalists started talking and making good use of communication and information technology. So overnight the movement expand without anybody leading in particular. However protest was set up across the country, protesting the construction of this big flooding and dam that is going to take place in the southern part of the country. That was with the present government, which is



the most rightwing government that Chile has have now after dictatorship, started taking notice. So okay, of course because they are son and daughters of the dictatorship, they have this mentality that what we say stands. So they're going ahead with the construction of these things. Even some of the environmental agency of the government decide it's okay, they can build, and so on and so forth. We know who's governing, right? But then the students decide, okay it's time for us also to, I'm pretty sure they didn't say that, now it's our turn. However, coming June--by then I have left already Chile. I start reading that first it was a strike for one day, students and so forth. They start basically challenging the educational system in Chile. Remember, I start saying that Chile is one of the countries where education is the most private, not only elementary but also university. University is big time privatized anyway and people end up being in debts just like in here. I was hearing that at the demonstration one of the young students she says, I can't remember the amount now, but she says I think it's over \$100,000 that she's gonna be in debt in medical school because of loans and all that. Same thing in Chile. Not only they have a debt but because there is scarcity of jobs in spite of how the economy is. They don't have a job but they have this big debt, so students say enough is enough. So they start challenging the system. As of today they haven't returned to classes. They continue to be in the streets.

Q: And they're challenging everything, including the environmental issues?

RA: They started challenging education and then people start saying, well, because they claim education should be a right and should be free to everybody. Then the government says, well how can we provide free for everybody? That would cost a huge amount of money; where are we gonna get the money? That's when the students get smarter. I'm pretty sure this is not just recently, they've been starting to say, well first of all in order to do that, you gonna have to change the tax system. Tax the big industry, because there's lots of companies there who doesn't pay taxes. Not a penny, Winston, not a penny. So, tax industry. They start talking about that and then they start talking about changes in the healthcare sector as well. They say, healthcare should also be a human right for

everybody, not just for the rich, those who have money. So they start changing the whole concept of the new state, the whole concept of new labour policy, and they start talking about now. Now they talk about neoliberalism, which is a big thing in there now because everybody now. By doing that, they also indirectly challenge the rest of society. Keep in mind that I say people in my observation were still fearful of that, the whole thing, not to stick their neck out. So sectors of the labour movement started saying the same thing. Surprise, surprise, one of the copper mining unions were the first one to come onside with the students and say, well we should, the government should renationalize the copper industry. That's their thing. Then they say, also change the taxation system; make it fairer. Everybody should pay their fair share. Then, just like education, in the healthcare sector, the government, as a way of contracting out, left a good chunk of the healthcare system into the hands of the municipalities as well. So, good thing though, the strongest public sector unions precisely are the one that work under the municipalities. Normally they are organized at the municipal level but they also have a national organization. They've been on strike too on several locations. They've been the only one who's been challenging the government. At one point the government says, the labour minister says, we gonna deduct from your paycheque those days you were on strike. They challenged. They challenged through the court system. Surprise, surprise. I never knew that they were going to win. They won. So the minister of labour lost that fight. Because of that, obviously they feel encouraged and then they joined the students too. They've been one of the few unions that actually has called for a strike, a national strike. They went on strike in August. Of course, again, the government threatened them and so forth, but at this point I think they don't care. The whole thing now has start challenging the whole structure in Chile – the economic, the political, the legal system. Politically, also, the dictatorship has established this legislation that basically doesn't allow for opposition. They did it so well. I can't even explain myself, but only two parties or two coalitions can basically govern the country at any given time because of the way that the votes are counted. So there is no room for a third alternative per se. It's almost, I guess, like United States – Democrat one period, Republican the other. So it's the same thing in Chile. That

also is being challenged now. The whole apparatus of the state in every aspect of it is being challenged.

Q: So some active opposition is now emerging.

RA: Yes. And I guess we also have to take into account what's going on around the world as well. You can't look one thing in isolation. People talk so much about the Arab spring, although personally I have my doubt of an Arab spring. I think it was orchestrated by somebody else. However, you look at Europe, you look at Asia, India, lots of those countries are on a true path to defy the whole readjustment of capitalism. Spain, those are things that actually have influence. In Chile, for example, they don't talk too much about the Arab spring. They talk about the Palestinian struggle *per se*. I mean there is big support for that. Incidentally, aside from all this, the Chilean government, the most rightwing government of all these years after dictatorship, they support the plea of the Palestinian people. I don't know how do they vote finally at the United Nations, but publicly in Chile they say, no we think... But at the same time they say Israel have rights also too, you know. I don't think Palestine will ever say, well you know we gonna sweep Israel, or whatever. So anyway, that's just...

[Next tape]

Q: How was the neoliberal experiment in Chile exported?

RA: Well I said at the beginning that Milton Friedman for years was claiming that he has the panacea for the ailment of capitalism, basically to leave the market reign and everything. They done the experiment in Chile and they also know the ideology, neoliberalism, they wanna transfer it to other parts of the country as well. So Chile served as a model. Even when you read Naomi Klein's book, *Shock Doctrine*, she talks extensively in there on how it was applied even in Russia after the fall of the Soviet

Union. She talks about other experiments in some other parts of the world as well. The whole experiment of Chile, it was transferred to others. I remember one of the pieces that she talks about, and that is true, how they wanna implement in Bolivia as well, which is very close to Chile and Argentina, all these countries. All of them start implement it, even if it's piece and bits of what took place in Chile. They all start doing that. Bolivia, for example, also have an immense foreign capital investment in there. that's why Evo Morales has so much difficulty fighting them; everything was privatized. So I think that's what it was. Even there is some connection to Canada in terms of pension plan. The financial elites want to take over on everything. Pensions in every country, no matter how big or small, is a big chunk of money in there that appears to be doing nothing. So they eye those money. That's why in Chile was privatized, and they put them in all those insurance and investment and it produces benefit for them. Even Canada, remember in the middle '90s, I can't remember exactly, but Preston Manning at that time and some of his followers in the Reform party was talking about bringing down the expert from Chile because they were so successful in reforming the pension system and making it better for the worker, and it was working very well in Chile. Yeah, very well with pensions that don't give enough to live. Fortunately though, it failed; so I'm glad for that. But constantly there is a threat, are they gonna change the pension system in Canada? So we have to pay attention to that as well.

Q: What's been your experience working within the labour movement in Canada?

RA: It's interesting. Let me lead you in how do I get here to Canada. It was basically thank you to the international pressure that the United Nations create a program for political refugee in the case of Chile, and Canada was part of that. So I thank the solidarity of workers because I always say the workers are always in the forefront of struggle, human rights, workers' rights, and so forth. So I got in here thanks to that. Basically I was expelled from the country by decree. I still have somewhere there a decree where I was expelled from Chile.

Q: But you went back.

RA: I went back. Somehow you have to defy also the whole thing. I got here and I never thought of establishing myself here. I said, okay, let the worst of the dictatorship take place, and things are gonna change pretty quickly. Given the level of consciousness in Chile, we say at that time, lots of us, things are gonna be changing pretty fast. So I wasn't planning to stay here in Canada. I was planning to just take a shelter and go back, not to be ungrateful, *per se*. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. So I stay here. I didn't know any English. I remember in the early '80s, I think it was '81, postal workers have a big strike. With my little English that I know, I used to follow the news and that kind of stuff. So it impresses me, although I never saw a picket line *per se* in Edmonton, just because I wasn't going around at that time. I was working too. But I read in the paper that their national leader defy legislation, back to work legislation, because that was Jean-Claude Parrot. I say to myself, wow, these things also happening here, which is great. I say to myself, that's the kind of leader that any labour movement needs and also I say, that's the kind of union that workers need. I say to myself, gee, I wish one day I could work in that place where this union has organized their workers. I start applying for the post office. I wasn't accepted until 1985. I start working as casual and then part-time and then full-time. By 1987 was my first experience, strike experience, being active participant, because I belonged to the union already. I really liked the way the union was run at that time, in lots of ways very democratic. Not that I knew much about the rest of the labour movement, but by reading and talking to other people I say, yeah this is very different type of union – more democratic, more participatory, and so forth. So in 1997 was a really good experience. I fully participate in that strike. But I remember one experience in there that actually caught my attention. I was on afternoon shift and we were the first one to go out. I started at that time, I think, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So I went in before 4 o'clock and we were outside with the local president at that time and a couple of other sisters and brothers. This is downtown post office. I saw a bunch of, at that time they

were Filipino workers, mostly women. They were going in to work. I say to the local president, I say, why is that? We're on strike. Well, he says it's always like that, they never participate. I said to him, but how you talk to them? Well no, kind of saying there's not point. I say, wait a minute, I'm going to go and talk to them. So I run, I wave and I say, stop. I talked to them and I say, you know what's going on? My English was a little bit worse than now. I say, what are you doing? They say, we're going to work. Don't you know there is a strike? They say no, we don't know. Nobody has told you anything? No. I explained to them. I say, you can't do that. I explained the whole thing and I didn't threaten them or anything. You know, long story short, they ended up taking strike signs and they participate on the strike. That was the first thing that it struck me. I say, wow, labour, in spite of all advancement, there is something wrong with this picture. What's going on? We talk a little bit about it after that and then they go back to work, and it keeps bothering me. I used to go to union meetings and I was the only one different there at the union meeting. Didn't see any in spite of there were lots of Orientals already at that time, Chinese and Filipinos. None of them were involved and I say, something is wrong with this picture. In spite of all the wonderful things about the union, I say, this is not right. Now of course I remember, this is funny, because at that time there was two little factions in the local. They were constantly fighting each other...too because I come from experience and I say because they caught us divided in Chile at the last moment we united probably when we saw the threat of the military; but it was too late. So I say to myself, never again fight over little things. Just look for things that unite us. That was my own thinking, right? I saw this and it bothers me. However, I understood because in Chile we were, like the Left, were always bickering and so forth. So it wasn't a surprise to me. But it bothers me and I say, these things shouldn't take place. But anyway, because of my poor English, it was funny. By the time I raised my hand to talk about one issue that interests me, they were already talking about something else. People would look back at me and say, this guy's out for lunch, right. It took me a while and I started talking to others, talking to other people non-white. I say, well, things need to be changed. People would say, well yeah, but you know I'm happy with working and that's it. I say no, that's

not right. We need to participate and we need to challenge certain things, and so forth. So that was my thing. Then, I can't remember the year, but a little bit later in the '80s was my first AFL experience. Probably you were there; I can't remember it. But there were lots of, particular in the restaurant industry, there were coming lots of foreign workers working in there at that time. I remember we were in the middle of this debate and a resolution came down from the restaurant. I can't remember; it was a long name. They were affiliated to the AFL at that time; I think later on they disaffiliated themselves. Restaurant and Service Worker – it was a long name. Anyway, they have a resolution there. The resolution more or less called for a stop bringing worker from outside because they were stealing our job. That's basically what I got. I was in with the legation of CUPW there and we talk about, what? People were saying, and that was a good thing from my fellow CUPW members; they say, no that's wrong. I also say, that's wrong. How could they say that? So I stood up. I went to the mic. I think it was...there, I can't remember exactly now because it's been a long time ago. I stood up and I say, you know, in my broken English, and I start talking. Man, that was a wonderful experience. I have standup ovation by the majority of the delegates. I say, how could you say that when you know we're not responsible of that? You should blame the big employer, the big corporation, the rightwing government, and so on and so forth. I kind of chastised them. But I got such a huge reaction. You remember that? You remember my pretty broken English, right? Anyway, so those were some of my experiences, the good things and the contradiction in the labour movement. Then, of course, reading more and talking to people and what happened after Second World War, what happened with the labour sector unions after Second World War, and all that, particularly in the northern hemisphere, in Europe and North America: the big compromise after the Second World War. I say, well that's right, that's why also, you know, I started saying to the most progressive voices around myself and I start saying, that's how you guys profit also. You workers in here, also you benefit from what's going on in the south, indirectly. It's not your fault, it's not our fault, but you have to realize that you benefit from that. You have a better job, better paid, and we get the crappy things down south. No wonder people try to come in here

now for economic reasons. Remember also we have to then put into context again all the sweeping change – the neoliberal government around the world, Regan, Thatcher, Mulroney here in the north, and the whole Europe too, all the changes and the emerging of the most reactionary forces of the earth basically. So obviously also people need to look for better ways. If you look at the reality of Mexican, why do they come to the United States all the time in spite of all the hardship that they have to go through? Then come free trade agreements – first of all the three amigos, then worldwide agreement. Canada, by the way, has agreement with Chile, Colombia, just to mention a few. By the way, the most repressive system in Latin America, yet Canada has free trade agreement with them. Peru, too. But one thing that some of us always have say is that in the free trade agreements everything there is supposedly regulated but obviously there is not much regulation, just favoring the big corporations. But the migration of workers has never been put into the agreement. It's all been left outside, right? So therefore I mean there is no little regulation in there that actually protects those workers who moves around. So, in the early '80s, when these restaurant workers' leadership here locally were blaming the worker coming from outside, I guess in reflecting back you can say it was kind of a kneejerk reaction to the reality they're enforcing. But, once you start discussing and educating yourself, you understand that it's not the fault of the workers. It's the fault of big capital and their neoliberal policies. So that takes us back to late '90s, early 2000, when the Alberta government started opening up for foreign workers, temporary foreign workers, special program. They realize that they need more workers and so forth. Again, back to labour, Don probably remembers this one too. I don't know where you were that day: the contraction of unions in the north, I was at the ADLC meeting and we had a good discussion. I commend them because after that conversation they also changed their view. They were saying almost the same thing that back in my first AFL convention were saying about temporary foreign workers. We had a pretty good discussion at the ADLC and obviously finally they thought that we can't blame the workers for that but the contrary. One, we have to be concerned about them; second, try to incorporate them into our own organization, into our own unions, whoever is working in there. So I think that



was a really good experience. But the reason why I mention is that this concept of workers fighting against other co-workers is never going away. So that's what I think is a challenge also for the labour movement, for unions, to constantly educate ourselves in that aspect so we don't create division amongst ourselves.

Q: Describe what happened with the AFL.

RA: Well I guess that discussion that took place at the level of labour council also took place at the level of AFL. The same union was represented there by the same individual, I remember, and we continue to have these good discussions. But also, now, sometime the memory fails too. What I'm gonna try to remember is 2001. In 1973, everybody knows that the towers in... Anyway, there was a big backlash against Muslim and Arabs in general. So, through the Human Rights Committee of the AFL, we took a stand. I remember discussing the issue. Even quickly, in my own local union, we were not in agreement in there because there was also blaming and so forth. I say, you can't blame that and you have to have all the facts. We can't just jump to conclusion. But anyway, at least we unite in the fact that you can't blame everybody. So that was one of the things that we organize in one of the hotel--I can't remember exactly where it was. We had good support from the AFL. We organized this little conference to discuss the issue of 9-11 and the backlash against Arabs and Muslims in general. It was a really good discussion and I commend the AFL for that, the leadership of the AFL.

Q: How did you turn that into a discussion in Alberta about migrant workers?

RA: Like I was saying, this 9-11 thing was a really good experience and the AFL leadership support the struggle--Audrey and Les--which I was really excited about it. They say, well I think we're understanding that workers are workers no matter where we are, where we live. We're all exploited in one way or another. Just the difference here is sometimes the wages are much better in comparison to south. However, we have nothing,

just our brains and muscles. That reminds me of some of the labour songs that we have. To continue with the foreign workers, and in this case the program of the government, not just Alberta but also the federal governments, temporary foreign workers were coming here to supply cheap labour. They also worked their ass off. I can't remember the year but this has been going on in the agricultural sector in Alberta for years, especially the greenhouses. I remember years and years ago before even my real involvement with unions here, I went to this greenhouse in St. Albert and they had at that time Mexican workers. They were working in there and I heard Spanish. By that time, for me and for newcomers to hear somebody speaking my language, it was a bonus. You will approach them right away. So I approached him and asked him and he say, yeah, we are here. But they were kind of in lots of hushed voice and very timid. Then they told me, we can't talk too much because the boss and all that. I say, well too bad. I give him my phone number and I say, well to me that was bad; how could that be? So I say, maybe we can meet on a Sunday and we can talk. However, it never materialized. I think these people were too afraid, too afraid, unfortunately. That never left my mind. I always keep thinking about that: how could that be? Then when this new program came about and people started talking about it, I say, aha, that's the reason behind it. It's not new; it's just now they're making it more official, given the so-called shortage of labour. However, like we say in labour in general, that's a myth anyway, especially given that the unemployment never been down to zero. So, how can we talk about? Then you look at the Aboriginal communities, the level of unemployment in there, and yet we're claiming shortage of labour. However, unfortunately, that's the reality. So we talk and talk and fortunately enough, the... was to organize and create a little taskforce for lack of other name, to work on the issue. We have discussions on the Human Rights and International Solidarity committee. By the way, just a parenthesis in there, when I first joined the AFL, I went into this committee called at that time International Affairs. You know, it bothers me, the name, International Affairs. I say, this looks like business, the organization. How can they call it International Affairs? It's like economic affairs or something. Some of the staff was also, well they used to talk about a little bit of human rights violation themselves, and

dictatorship, which is good. Don't take me wrong. Those were important things, but nothing about Canada. Every time that we talk about human rights it was always someplace else. The Mexican workers that I saw there at those greenhouses and the Aboriginal situation keep bothering me. I say, we talk about human rights there, but what about here? Anyway, to make a long story short, we changed the name of International Affairs to International Solidarity and later on we combined the things because there were two concepts in there – human rights and international solidarity. Some of us were saying those two goes hand in hand. You don't even have to say international solidarity, just solidarity – human rights and solidarity. Violation of human rights calls for solidarity, right? What a wonderful concept. Anyway, fortunately we change it. So through that committee we did a lot of different works. We tried to liaise with the Aboriginal communities. We were partially successful. The whole concept of colonization and discrimination and all that: Aboriginal people still perceive union as a white organization. So therefore it's very difficult for them to understand or to join. Plus, as a union we don't make very good effort on it either. That's continued to be, in spite of there's been some progress. We'd be remiss if we say there hasn't been progress in there, but there's still a long way to go. So all those things make me think, and at both discussion at ADLC and AFL I voiced obviously my opinion alongside with other sisters and brothers. We say something needs to be done around this issue. We did; the AFL did. Later on I know... getting involved with a lawyer so I remember having this first meeting with the, by the way again, Mexican workers, who work in one of the outfit here on the outside of Edmonton. They do things for the oil industry. So we had a meeting with them and again also they were timid. They were afraid of something. But they were encouraged because fortunately found somebody who speak Spanish. But at work they also have an interpreter who helped them to deal with the boss. But interpreter was very much pro-boss anyway, they were pro management. So we had a discussion and horror things in there too. I remember one young man telling us the accident that he had. I guess they were cutting some pipes and the electrical source somehow went wrong, whatever. But it ended up cutting his skull. He has, I don't know how many stitches. He say, you know, all

the way to his eyes and alongside his ear. He show us at that time; that was a few weeks after we met him. But the very next day he was at work. Those were some of the horror stories. So I guess that helps actually quite a bit to solidify the idea of working alongside the temporary foreign worker and the way they were abused, taken advantage of, and so forth. Then the Polish workers also came out and just start working in there. I remember helping her on that too, talking to the Mexican workers. So I think that create a little bit of momentum in there to work with them. Unfortunately, budget is always a problem and there wasn't enough money to work on that. Plus, I was a worker as well. I couldn't be booked off all the time to do this kind of work. That's something that also I go back to my own union--I wish would have a better way of doing this type of things. Sometimes we booked off people to do other kind of work which are important too, but this one also was very important. So I always say in retrospect that I wish I could have more time to work on that issue, more on hand type of things. However, we create a momentum and the AFL took on some policy paperwork was presented, and so forth. I guess that's how the work... I don't know if that's the situation today, but I'm pretty sure they're not gonna forget about, or the AFL.

Q: The problem is that if they have to abandon the program in the sense that they have to shut down the office of the advocate.

RA: Yeah, well I knew that.

Q: The problem with the TFWs hasn't gone away. They're still importing them to work in healthcare facilities, but mainly in the fast food industry.

RA: That's a way of taking advantage of them on the other hand: put them in the lowest of the low possibilities. I still, from time to time, just talking about that issue where people ended up. I met people who are doctors, engineers, they're working in whatever but not in their profession. Boyfriend of my daughter, he's Colombian, and he's an

engineer but he's doing drywall because he can't... Fortunately, he's going to go back to school ideally. But why do people have to do that when they have their... It should be a better process, basically. But that's just one issue. That's one portion of those who have a profession. But the one who suffer the most are those TFWs who come in here.

Q: What did the AFL do in terms of reframing the debate, shifting it to the exploitation of the program?

RA: I guess overall, first of all the concept of TFWs were seen like knee jerk reaction by the workers and some of the union, a little bit like a... concept – people coming here and they take over and, as you were saying, people who were waiting for fulltime jobs couldn't do it because they have cheap labour without benefit. So, obviously, what a bonus for the company! All these discussions was taking place at the AFL as well. Not everybody was convinced this was an issue that we should be involved in. First of all, that was one of the stumbling blocks in there. There wasn't open in-your-face opposition but you read in between the line by what people were saying. People were not so convinced about this one. Some people were saying, well we have to take care of our own first, right? On the surface that might appear to be a good concept: let's take care of our own first. But such a, what word can I use on that one, selfish position. It's almost remind me, this poet in the Second World War after the Nazis and all that, first they came for the Jew. I wasn't a Jew so therefore I couldn't care less, and so on and so forth; finally when they came for me there was nobody else. I guess we use some of those paraphrasing, some of those elements in order to convince. In some of the discussion personally I was outraged to a point where sometimes I'd say, what the hell I am doing here? Do I really belong here or does...belong here? However, you can't give up; that's the struggle. Once you give up there's nothing else left. So the hope and all that, I think we have to keep it and so on and so forth. So it was a good discussion – lengthy, because everything comes down to money. Unfortunately, some people in labour put lots of emphasis in money, money being the deciding factor. When you come from struggle, I remember back in

Chile in my years of a student, we didn't have money, we didn't have union. However, we support each other collectively. Even workers at that time, I remember the solidarity strike, which I have always talked with some of the most progressive labour activists in here. But it never take place, because unions are too much into their own issues. Business unionism essentially, not so much of this solidarity union and that kind of stuff. Even my own union, as much progressive as it might appear, sometimes we have a little bit of harsh discussion too, I remember. So the whole issue again for TFWs took a while to sink into lots of people. However, it was never right there. Once the money run off, people were saying, well that's it; we did our contribution; there's nothing else we can do. That's what I remember the last time I participate in the AFL. However, I think some of the good things will never die; somebody else will take over. I think they continue to do that kind of work. But one of the things, as much as personally I wanted to get down to it, is people having a deeper discussion in terms of why this happened. Why is it that TFWs coming here? Is it because workers like to leave their family behind? They like to come here, in the case of Canada, to suffer this harsh winter? Why is it? Quite often we don't do that kind of analysis. Why is it happened? Why governments and companies are so easily promoting and accepting this type of program? Because it's to their benefit, essentially to their benefit. Again, cheap labour, and so on and so forth. It's not like they come to compete with those part-time workers. and so forth. They don't come here to compete. I don't think they come with that mentality. They come with the mentality that I'm gonna make better for my family, like anybody else. So, therefore, I think that's the challenge for us, for labour here, not only to embrace them but also to understand what the hell is going on deep down. How is this system, how is this new liberal policies affecting here in Canada as well? Why is it that it makes it more difficult to access healthcare, every time we have to be struggling for healthcare to preserve it, not even to make it better, just to preserve it most of the time? Why is it that education is so expensive for the working class? Why the working class cannot get educated and make a lot better? Why is it the homeless is still there homeless, and so forth? Who is responsible for that? There is a system. It's the capitalist system that from time to time readjusts itself. In this case the

new wave is through new labour policies that leaves everything to the market and will leave everything to the market and everything is going to be okay. Just assign a subsidiary role to the state, like the state will subsidize a little bit of those in the most harsh condition. But you still have to contribute, right? If the homeless is going to be able to contribute for his or her education or for his healthcare, for pension. So it's a pervasive and perverse system that we have. So long that we don't understand that, I think, the struggle is gonna be hard. But once we understand that, I think things are gonna be better. That's what's important to me. I went to this demo the other day to hear the younger generation talking about that, to hear the younger generation in Chile, for example, talk about that. To talk about the pervasiveness of neoliberal policy, how bad it is, and who benefit from that, I think is encouraging. I think it's encouraging and that will help the whole concept of TFWs as well in the long run here in Canada or in any country that use this system. But also changing the system, even if it's in the electoral aspect. I was encouraged by the advance among the NDP, although I'm realizing that aspect too. I know that they have to play with the system. So the challenge is, how do we change the system? I think the system needs to be changed.

Q: How do we change the system?

RA: I think first of all we have to elevate the level of consciousness. How does it come? By educating ourselves. I commend my union. I did some national education programs where our members go there for five weeks residential program. We talk about politics; we talk about economics; we talk about social issues; we talk about human rights. People get educated, right? I think that's one of the thing that at least union should be their contribution. But more so it would be if we incorporate the rest of society who is exploited, those who don't have unions and so forth. But how to change the system. I remember, it's funny because inevitable I remember the class at the national level that would say, how do you change the system? People will say, revolution. Yeah, it's great, you talk about revolution, but how do you go about it? I think that's the challenge – how

do we go about it? I think we are too fragmented. Today people start uniting themselves; I think that's the time that it's gonna change. If we do a demonstration for healthcare it's not just the healthcare sector that should be there in terms of workers. Everybody should be there. So, by challenging the government, I don't know, I'm not an ideologue. But my gut feelings tell me that it is possible to change the system, even if it's little by little, although I would like to see a much faster change. Of course, going back to my student, it would be a revolution. But a revolution, because quite often at least before, because now even the rightwing talk about revolution, they have captured our language too, but when we say revolution it doesn't have to be an armed revolution *per se*. It's a revolution where people take in their hands their destiny, not only saying enough is enough, but saying, okay, this is gonna change, and this is the way that we gonna change, by taking an active role.

Q: By organizing.

RA: Organizing and taking an active role. I guess that's a challenge for union – how do we organize? It's a never-ending discussion in the labour movement. However, I think that's some of the way that we can make advancement, and linking the workers around the world. Not just to go and this my...also and that kind of solidarity that some people say. Some of them, they call it now humanity fund. Yeah, it provide relief, water supply and all that. But it doesn't change the system. I always remember this Chinese proverb, don't just give fish to the hungry, teach them how to fish, and then they empower themselves. I think that's the challenge around here – how do we empower ourselves? How do we empower others too by working in solidarity with them? How do we support, for example, the Occupy Edmonton today that is giving support to Occupy New York and the movement around the world? I started saying in the beginning that in Santiago, Chile, 60,000 people were on the street on Saturday supporting this wide world movement that is challenging the essence of capitalism, putting the blame and the focus on the financial sectors. In Chile, out of all the movement that was done, is the financial sectors of the big



bourgeoisie that it took over. All the leading industries that were there disappeared because it's cheaper to bring things from abroad, particularly from China. But how long that is gonna last until also workers in China probably also realize, hey, the rest of the world is taking advantage of us as well. It's happening. That's what I'm saying – I'm hopeful. I guess we should never lost hope because...

Q: Talk about when you were the president of CUPW.

RA: I talk about how I got involved with the union and so forth. One of the things that struck me was the little small participation. I used to go to meetings. It's the same people over and over as usual. I would say, I don't wanna blame anybody. I think sometimes we tend to follow because things is being done in that way and that's the way it's gonna be done. I remember how in discussion, for example, we're gonna have a picket line, information picket line; we only need five or ten. To me that was, I always say, why? Well, we have the same effect. Yeah, probably so. The media is gonna be there. But what about participation of the broader membership? Those were things that start bothering me. The other thing was the lack of non-white brothers and sisters in the union, not only locally but nationally too. Even by participating nationally I realized that there was a big need in there. We also created a national Human Rights Committee, subcommittee of workers of colour, and so forth. Then, at the local level, we continually struggled with this lack of membership participation, although during strike time people would be there. But in running the so-called business of the union on a daily basis, I never saw too much participation in there. So we start talking about the lack of workers of colour and the lack of discussion of issues that was more than just bread and butter. Our union has been very successful in grievances, for example – 60 per cent is the last figure I remember reading, of winning. That was created as a result of what took place after the big compromise, to introduce those systems to keep workers at bay. Don't take me wrong, I think we have to use those things. However, it doesn't provide for peoples' participation. The grievance aspect is very technical; it's very legalistic. We as workers are ordinary people; we don't

understand the legalistic aspect. The union was winning those battles; the leadership of the union was winning those battles in there, but without much participation. It was very active in the local and we have a really good president. I have lots of respect for the president, but I still see these things that I wasn't happy with – lack of participation and the way we make decisions, and so forth. I never thought of running, actually. I was advocating for more participation of workers of colour in this case, because we didn't have many Aboriginal, unfortunately. However, it was always there too in our workplace culture. So people started encouraging me because they saw me on the floor always fighting with the boss and not being afraid. The moment that we're afraid is the moment that we lost hope and the battle. So people started encouraging me to run and I say no, no, I don't have the capability to do it. Yes you do. To make a long story short, I decide to run. Basically my take on why I decide to run was to do things a little bit differently, to incorporate more people, although you fight with the status quo. What I mean status quo is the way things have been done traditionally. In spite we advocate for changes, sometimes we are the worst; we don't accept changes so easily.

Q: The structure is there.

RA: Yes, and every structure exercise the union do, even the AFL; we always have troubles there. Anyway, I decide to run finally and it was a wonderful experience. I remember in my election for the first time there was also a problem. For the first time we feel the...of the Provincial Museum. It was wonderful. I never seen an election with so much participation in there. People even, because the union couldn't...the local with the registration and that kind of stuff. People get upset; they were screaming. A number of them left because they say, this is whatever. The local never anticipated that there were going to be so much participation. We did good groundwork. We went around, I remember going visiting all the... depots, the different shift, and talking basically about how to make the union a little bit more participatory, listen to the concerns of people, and so forth. I don't wanna take credit for things. There were lots of people who were part of

that wave. Even the previous leadership too, they understood that sometime in the process we can't see what's going on and what it means. Because we are in the traditional way of doing things, sometimes it's kind of hard to understand. But anyway, as a result, there were more participation. I remember even then one sister introduced a motion to increase the number of required quorum, because union we're very parliamentarian. That's another one of my bother – why do we have to copy the ruling class? However, there have to be certain rules. But we don't need to be parliamentarian about it. But that's another beef of mine. She introduced, because she saw that there were more participation, increase the number of quorum. That was a good thing too because then more people were required. In my tenancy as president, I guess we only, in July, it's always been everybody same holiday. I think it was only in July that we missed quorum. The rest was always, the meeting always somehow, blame it on my style or whatever, but our meeting no more than two hours, by law up to two hours. Every meeting was more than two hours and we always ended up extending. My take was even if I don't agree with people, well let's hear your voice. I know that lots of people, some of the most traditional, were taken aback and bothered by the fact that we extended the meeting. But that was the only way that we could discuss the issues. So that was my experience. They gave me a chance; we did a few things with the boss. I remember in consultations it used to be just the chief steward and maybe one or two stewards to go to consultation. I say to myself, this is wrong; how are we gonna educate? It's not the same if we are there confronting the boss, if I go there and then I tell you. I could embellish the story and make myself, oh look at what I did. I started taking more people. I remember in one consultation I took 45 members, 45 members. The boss was so taken aback he came out after that, he called me to the office and I say, I'm not gonna go inside. I took somebody else because always take somebody else, because people might think that you're making a deal. So he told me, I won't tolerate this anymore. I say, you know what--I don't care if you tolerate or not. What's important is if you promise that you gonna take into account what my members on the work floor says. I promise that I won't bring 45. I bring probably 40, I say, just in a joking way.

Q: There were changes happening then in Canada Post – they were corporatizing.

RA: Well one day with all these changes too, another way I like to always highlight the membership participation. They were about to eliminate one full-day section because of introduction of new technology. People were outraged...the more senior people. You work your ass off, so to speak, and then to end it up being in midnight and afternoon, how unfair. So people started saying, what can we do? I say, well what do you think we can do, because I can't have all the answers? Why don't we organize a sit-in in the cafeteria? I say, well sometimes you also have to take into account obviously the legal and...Organize the whole thing; you have the support of the local. I remember I was at the national at that time. I got a phone call; yeah, we have everything. So I came back and say, well what is it? Well tomorrow at break everybody's gonna go for break and we're gonna stay there. Are you coming? I say, of course I'll be there. So I was there. The breaks actually were different breaks for different sections. So, as soon as people saw me entering through the door, one of the stewards says, everybody to the cafeteria. And they did. But you know what, this is sometimes, how should I put it, it's not a contradiction but whatever. Everybody but the section that actually was going to be affected were at the cafeteria. Interesting, maybe need a sociologist to analyze that. But anyway, we went there and I remember the superintendent and supervisor were there and start taking the names of everybody who abandon the workplace and so forth. One of the stewards say, well take every name of us because we're all here, so why bother? So they went in and stormed the cafeteria. I remember this woman superintendent and she says, you guys will have to go back to work. This is an illegal thing. I say no; it's not illegal. You know what I say, I say to her, do something better too, and tell the director to come down here and we'll talk to him. As soon as we talk to him all of these people are going to go back to work. So the director came down. I give him credit. He was brave enough and he came down. I did an introduction and then I say, listen to my members. That day everybody wants to talk. The leadership didn't have to say anything. It was said by the sister, by the

brother. They were just shouting at one point and we had to put a little bit of order, one at a time. And they did. As a result of that, they never eliminated the day shift. That's a lesson – collective action, mobilizing the members. And fortunately, we don't have too many of those things. That's not a credit to the leadership; it's a credit to the members. They are the one who organize themselves. When they're empowered and you talk to them or whatever, members will do the most amazing things.

Q: Didn't you also preside over the organization of the couriers?

RA: Well yeah, we tried to organize them. One of the call centres we tried to organize and also one of the courier sector. Unfortunately, because of the provincial legislation and the whole thing in there, I can say now in spite of somebody might get upset in there too, but we didn't have the support from the department that actually was in charge of that, a clear support. We were struggle our own things in here with the boss doing that kind of stuff. I think we lack a better support and guidance also for the other structure of the union. However, the call centre, I remember we failed just because I guess the employer was better organized and they have their own things and their own spy inside, and that's a...thing sometime. But some of those who were there helping us organize, once that call centre got shut down because employer decide to shut down and open up the operation someplace else. They knew that eventually we're going to come back again; so, therefore, they move out. Anyway, some of those members end up working as casual at the post office, and then they become regular. Today at least I can recall a couple of them. They're so active in the union and the most wonderful activists in the local union.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

RA: No.

[ END ]

