

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Bill Broad

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

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Index: British immigrant - mechanic - machinist - Public Service of Canada - NAIT instructor - Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSA) - Public Service Employee Relations Act - Divisions - Jim Scott - Ross McBain - Alberta Hospital Association - National Union of Provincial Government Employees (NUPGE) - John Booth - Bill Ives - Mike Poulter - Roy Whyte - NDP - Ernest Manning - Peter Lougheed - Bert Hohol - Neil Crawford - Ralph Klein - public sector layoffs - Joint Consultation Committee - Divisions - Yellow Cab

Early life and immigration to Canada

I was born in England in the city of Stoke-on-Trent. That's the pottery district of Britain, where they make cups and saucers and all that sort of stuff.

My mother was the one who raised me, because my father was a very sick man, and died of heart trouble when I was 13 or so. My mother always said it was with him selling newspapers when he was a kid, getting wet and contracting rheumatic fever. He died when I was about 13, so mother looked after us - for a long time before that. She was really the mainstay of the family.

I've got a brother who's 10 years older than me, and a sister, who's 12 years and another who's 4 years older, and another who's two years older. I was the baby of the family. My mother did everything. She really saw that we lived right.

I went to school there; to elementary school and then to a technical school. It was much like the technical schools you have here, where you learn to use machines and things.

I left school when I was 14. The school wanted me to go on until I was 15, but I wanted to work and bring some money into the family. It was kind of tough, there's no doubt about it. I got a job first in a pottery, making molds for saucers. But I didn't stay in that long, and later got a job in a garage. Then after that, when I was about 16, I got a job with Rolls Royce as a machinist, and I did very well there. We went on strike there, and that was the first time I went on strike. I didn't know what I should do. My mother just said, you do what the men do. If the men tell you you're on strike, then you're on strike, and don't you do anything else. It was the Amalgamated Engineering Union. I went there and then I joined the air force when I was 19; this was in 1940 after the war started. I joined the Air Force and did six years with them in Canada, Italy, and all over the world.

I was an engine mechanic, which I did during the war for six years or so. I was in there for a long time, in Italy and Canada and who knows where. The war ended and I came

over to Canada right away. I lived in Manitoba, did some farming, but we didn't have any money to do anything. I married a Canadian woman who wanted to go farming, but we did very poorly. We didn't have enough land to do anything, so we got out of it in 1952. After that, I went to Winnipeg and worked in a foundry there as a machinist, a member of the Steel Workers Union. Then I got a job working in the Public Service of Canada. After that, I came out to Edmonton, because Northwest Industries had a contract to make radar trailers for the Canadian air force, and I was there checking them. That job finished but I still stayed with them, making tools and big equipment for the aircraft industries. They were coming in with the T33 training aircraft, and I was the foreman making tools for this project.

Working for Northwest Industries in Edmonton

There was no union there at all. Well there was a union, but we weren't associated with it. We were just a couple of guys who were working on this particular job, and never saw anybody.

That was in Winnipeg. Oh, you may say so. I don't know that it was very active, but it was there. They had the contract. That was at Anti's Imperial, a foundry making cast iron water pipe. As to Northwest Industries, I started working with the government, but went over working for Northwest Industries. When the trailer job was finished I worked in the aircraft end, making tools. I was there for quite some time making tools. When I say making tools, this is a big thing, outfitting the rear end of an aircraft into something so that they could align it and do whatever repairs. We went into the designing tools with special jobs, and making them. Then, they gave me the job of superintendent of the plant, and I stayed in that position for a number of years, after which I went to production superintendent running the paper end of the business. I don't know when I left there, perhaps in 1963 I think it was. I quit, and went over to NAIT and started working as an instructor there.

Early activity in the Civil Service Association of Alberta

That's when I hooked up with the Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSA). CSA was a voluntary organization; you just signed up and paid your dues. They had meetings every month or so, but nothing very exciting. The management and everybody else was in the CSA at that time. It was just a Civil Service organization, and had deputy Ministers and whatever in it.

They represented the workers in some ways, but in a very mild way. They used to meet with the Minister or Public Service Commissioner who always brought a Minister with him so the Minister would know what was going on. As you know, I don't know how to say it, but that was something they tried to do for the workers, but it was just as much a social organization as anything else.

There were only two staff people working for the Association, I think. There was a secretary or something. They had an office with a typist, and that's about all there was to it. We all paid dues to CSA, but it was really just a social organization. You'd have some input to the government, but not very much, or if you had input, they didn't take much notice of it, which amounted to the same thing. They elected a President, and had a

convention every year. The President stayed at work and left the running of the organization to the staff in the office, and that's about all there was to it.

Beginnings of negotiations and contract administration

I think it was during Lougheed's time that they first brought in arbitration people to sort out difficulties. It wasn't really arbitration, but they'd bring a fellow from the university in labour relations and he'd talk to both sides and sort things out. However, in 1970 they brought in a contract. We negotiated a contract, but the President of the CSA wouldn't sign it at the time - he didn't agree with it, and therefore, he wouldn't sign it. That was the time I was elected President - in 1972. That particular contract was on wages and who was going to be in the association. When I took over, I signed the contract on behalf of the workers, and this meant that all the management people were out. They were not in the CSA. That was the first time that we got to be anything like an employee organization.

We did alright in those early years. We had one or two bust-ups with the government, and two or three times, we went out on strikes. They'd never done anything like this before, but we managed to get them out on strike a couple of times. As well as government departments, we also had what they called crown agencies. These were organizations like the liquor board, and one or two hospitals. We started negotiating contracts for them. University of Calgary was one place we were looking after, for example.

As I said, we had strikes and began to throw our weight around, but we needed to do much more. Burt Hohol was the Minister then, and he was very upset with us, that we would go out on strike. The labour movement used to have a meeting at Jasper. Jack Dyck with the Labourers Union worked it out with somebody, and we used to have our meeting there. I remember Bert Hohol talking to those guys, not to me but to those guys, about how bad we were. That's just Bert; he was just trying to put the blame somewhere else. However, we brought in Ross McBain, a lawyer from Calgary, who did a lot of labour work. Before that though, we brought in a fellow from the university to talk about how we should be organized in our Association, a fellow who worked in the labour relations area of the university. He told us how we should be organized to be an effective organization, and did a good job for us. All of the documents from that time, I sent to the Legislative Library here in Edmonton. I don't know if anybody's seen them, but that's where they went to.

Early functioning of the CSA

The Civil Service Association started quite early in the '20s, as a fraternal organization. We inherited this organization, and started up with a grievance procedure. I suppose it worked alright, bringing grievances forward, but after Jim Scott designed a constitution for us, we had a Convention to put this new constitution into force. Before that we were just under the Societies Act. Ross McBain gave us better ideas about how to do organizing and negotiating, and we had another Convention. I think that there were about three conventions in one year to get us organized. We came up with a method of dividing the workers into Divisions. In the public service they were divided into Divisions that could negotiate part of the agreement, and then we had the boards and agencies to work with. We were able to negotiate agreements for them with the hospital boards or, in the case of University of Calgary, with the university.

Things began to take shape then. We were doing a pretty fair job as an employee organization, when a few of us got the idea that we should be joining the House of Labour. It wasn't just me; there was another guy, Derrick Meyer, who was the Treasurer of the Association and did a lot in this direction. There was also a member from High Level who was one of them that supported the idea of joining the House of Labour. We got nettled, because CUPE was forever sniping at us. I sort of don't blame them, but they were pretty nasty, and we didn't have anything to do with them. Then we got in touch with the Congress, and they sent out a fellow to work with us. At this time, we got other groups in the public service in different provinces to work with us. There was an organization which was attempting to join the provincial organizations, so that we could sit down and talk to each other.

It wasn't much, but it was a start; Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan were original members of that organization. We wanted them to join the House of Labour. I guess they were interested, but slow to act. We did get started in a first try with this loose arrangement that we had with the other provinces, but then it broke down. We had a person who said he'd start it, and then he never did. He said he'd get in touch with the labour movement and try to get us started, but he never did, so we broke down. We got all the other provincial organizations interested in joining the House of Labour, and held meetings, mainly around Ottawa, to set up a Constitution for this new provincial organization. The Congress didn't want to let us in as a provincial organization. We had to agree to set up a national organization; that was what the Congress wanted. We had meetings under the guidance of Shirley Carr to see what we could do to set up such a meeting, and it came along pretty well. But when we said that we would do it, CUPE wouldn't allow New Brunswick be a part of it. They'd been trying to organize in New Brunswick and they thought they were the big people in New Brunswick. So, the way it turned out, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta got together to form a national organization, NUPSE.

Labour relations in the Provincial Service

Provincial government employees organized because many managers were petty guys saying what was going to go on in their little departments. These little dictators, what they said was the law in their departments, and people got fed up with it. What we wanted was to have some say in what went on in a department, and what could we do with these little dictators. We were under the Public Service Act at that time, and when we had a strike, we had to go to court, where there were no real winners or losers. We were working hard to get the right to strike, and they answered us by bringing in the Public Service Employee Relations Act in 1977. But what we didn't think of that there's nothing in the Public Service Act to say that we shouldn't strike. But when we went into the public service employee relations act, they put in all kinds of controls, but there was no right to strike. So in our efforts to improve things, we really set ourselves back. We couldn't strike under the Public Service Act. That was very unfortunate, but I guess we didn't know as much as we thought we knew. They brought in the public service employee relations act and another act for the crown agencies employee relations act. That was for these other boards and commissions. Everything had to be arbitrated. If we didn't agree with things, we had the chance of voting on it.

We did start putting out votes on what was agreed to in negotiations. With the first vote we put out, just so that people would get the idea that it was anonymous, we hired a chartered accountant company to count the votes and write us a letter what the answer was - for or against. We improved things quite a bit, although we went backwards on the strike business, which is something we just couldn't beat once they got a strike ban into law. We had strikes at the University Hospitals. The doctors would phone up and blame me for strikes. I suppose they were right, but they only saw it from their point of view. There we were on strike, and they had patients they wanted to treat. They didn't see the other side, that there was a reason for the strike. The hospitals, like Foothills Hospital, had the Alberta Hospital Association negotiating for them, and they set up quite a labour faction there. These guys tried to be pretty clever. We went on strike in the public service and got an increase.

We then tried to get the same for Foothills Hospital, and we insisted it be the same, but those people were so smart, that they gave us more than we were asking for, and then challenged us to strike on that. However, we took the idea that money was money, and we'd take it and not complain. In a way that was kind of amusing, the way they tried to beat us at our own game. One thing the Public Service Employee Relations Act was good for was for a grievance procedure, and we did quite well with it. But one case we came up on the short end. For example, one guy in Lethbridge was asked which was the best piece of equipment. When he gave a name, the seller of that equipment played heck. He went to the chiefs of that area and said, he said this, so they fired him for saying what he did about the equipment. We had a grievance and hearing, but nevertheless we didn't win it. I still don't know why we didn't. Maybe we didn't present it well enough. We had a good grievance procedure then. We were looking after people pretty well. People looking after money, if they'd been charged with taking it, we'd get a lawyer to represent them in court. It was a good thing. I think we improved the Public Service Act quite a bit, that is the grievance procedure. And the negotiation went well with the divisions. We set up votes on it. They'd never had a chance to vote on anything before. It was working out pretty well. At that time we were in the labour movement, we were part of NUPSE, and things were doing alright.

Dirty dealings around NUPGE

When we set ourselves up as part of the union movement, some people went along with it. A lot of people were union members before, and they just went right into it, but some had difficulty. I remember one of our staff quit. He said, this business of calling people 'brothers and sisters' was not for him. However, it all turned out well. We'd go to conventions of NUPGE and to the Congress and our members liked the idea of it. It took a little while, but they did - and they liked the link to the Alberta Federation of Labour too. They liked being part of the labour movement, but there were always some behind the scenes who would natter about it, but in general, people enjoyed it.

NUPGE was ok when it was formed, and the first President was a guy from Manitoba. The British Columbia government employees organization were already members of the Congress, and at that time, John Fryar was on the executive. When we got on to part of the union, we never saw Fryar because he didn't want to have anything to do with setting up NUPGE or anything like it. I don't know what he thought, but he never had a thing to do with it. I had the major role in setting it up, but other people put their views forward.

Shirley Carr was there trying to get us on the right path, but with Fryar being on the executive and having a union President on his side, it was a question of who would be the 'chief'. Somebody asked me to run for the executive of the Congress, and I talked about it but didn't. Joe Morris at the time said it wasn't a good idea, we should wait awhile. Fryar got bothered by this and did a real job on me. He said he was going to run for President of NUPGE, and would I come around with him and meet the people, which I did. Then the President of their organization came to see me and said that they couldn't let Fryar go, that he would have to stay with them - so would I go as President? I thought this was the only thing. They didn't want the guy who was there now to continue, and they asked me to run. So I did.

Fryar did just that - he set me up. As soon as I got to be President, I wasn't in there six months when they started to have meetings about the organization, to which I was not invited. I was trying to run an organization; I wanted NUPGE to be recognized as a union by the Congress. However, the Congress staff wouldn't recognize NUPGE and would still talk about a different B.C. government employees union and others. They didn't talk about NUPGE being the union in the bulletins, etc. I always used to complain about it. The Congress staff didn't like this and the secret meetings were all around complaining about me. I hadn't done a damn thing, but they were just setting the thing up for the big fall. I'd set up a meeting to talk about politics, and Shirley Carr was to come to it. This was a meeting in Quebec, and when she didn't come, Fryar took over. I tried to find out what was going on. He called me a liar and I walked out of the damn meeting. I just walked out and left it. I said that because at the previous meeting, John Booth had complained about what I had said at the meeting in Manitoba. There's really nothing wrong with what I said, it was right from the constitution. But he complained that I hadn't said things right. So at that meeting I said I'd resign. They had a meeting whether they would accept my resignation, they decided no. So I guess Fryar thought, well there's a good thing. He tried to resign, so this time we'll just upset him and he'll quit. So that's what happened; it was Fryar trying to work a deal against me. I think he just disorganized the labour business in Alberta. John Booth took over from me, but there was nobody here to talk about the labour movement. I know darn well this is why AUPE moved away from the labour movement. They may have been smart to get rid of me, but they did themselves a very bad turn.

Bill Ives was a good man. He worked with the post office before he joined us. He was the head staff member, supposed to have the experience to do things we needed doing. Derrick Meyer was the treasurer of the organization. He wasn't on staff, but he had control of the money. Derrick was also a good man, one of the guys that pushed to join the labour movement. Mike Poulter was in favor of joining the labour movement. He was a good man, no doubt about it, and John Booth was a vice President. He didn't have much to do with it. He didn't seem to want to get involved with the proposal that we join the labour movement. Roy Whyte was the first full time Secretary-Treasurer of the union.

I had the Public Service Alliance in mind for what NUPGE would turn out to be. We wanted something strong that was well run, and a good union, working in a number of fields. I thought NUPGE could do the same. Within Alberta, NUPGE or AUPE was the largest union, it could've had a big influence on the labour movement within Alberta. As the biggest organization, people would take notice of us, and we could've led it in a good

direction. But that failed. To be active within the political and labour movement in the province - I think we missed out on that.

We have to realize that these provincial organizations, that's what the Congress called us, they wanted a better deal from their employers. So they wanted to join the House of Labour. We in Alberta had a lot to do with getting other outfits along the same sort of thinking that we were doing. We wanted to join, but the Congress and... let me stop here. The BC government employees union was already a member of the Congress. That was very important to know that. When the others wanted to join, they said we had to join and make a national union. They wouldn't take us individually. So each of us, that's Alberta, Saskatchewan, not Ontario, they wouldn't join this, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland, we met and let me use this word, under the guidance of Shirley Carr, who was executive vice President of the Congress at that time. We met in different places. We would travel around the country and took different aspects of getting together. Indeed we did manage to form something, the National Union of Provincial Government Employees. The Congress accepted that. Some of the provincial organizations had difficulty swallowing it, but nevertheless they went forward with it.

I saw the NUPGE as an organization like the Public Service Alliance of Canada, that would be a respectable member of the House of Labour. The staff of the Congress had difficulty with that. Trying to get it together, get the different organizations together was a difficult thing. I was the prime mover in all the discussions. But BC was not part of it. But it started putting its two bits in afterwards. It was very difficult trying to tell the BC government employee unions what we were trying to do. It was a part of the House of Labour and they thought, we've got all the answers. It couldn't see the other organizations' points of view. However, that's what we thought we could do. So we did set it up. I was the prime mover, but they didn't want me as the first President. They got a fellow from Manitoba to be the first President. I don't think he did very much. He did what was needed. He'd never been a member of a union before, so that was his difficulty. He didn't have a line to guide him. When I took over as President, I tried to get the Congress to recognize that we were a union. But they insisted in the newsletters and whatnot in talking about us as separate organizations, like BC Government Employees Union, not as the National Union of Provincial Government Employees. It came out that we wanted to be called components instead of separate unions, we wanted to be called components of the National Union of Provincial Government Employees. But the Congress didn't follow that. They were too fixed in their ways. I was always writing to the Congress and pointing out that Newfoundland is a component of the National Union of Provincial Government Employees, as was the BC Government Employees Union a component. One of the difficulties is that the BC Government Employees Union already had a member on the executive of the Congress. It was very difficult. Here was I trying to speak as the President of NUPGE, and that guy was in a position that would put him at the center of things and was talking in a different way. So it made things very difficult. We would put on training courses for NUPGE, that's a good thing we did. Having done that, I tried to get them together. At that time that was the extent of what we could do.

I believe NUPGE is just an organization to accept the dues from the provincial government organizations, and then pay those to the Congress; that's really their function. They're not doing much more. Just before I separated from the union, Ontario was

interested in coming closer to the House of Labour, but this was one place that showed the difference between the President and the executive member. The President of the Ontario government wanted to talk to John Fryar, who was the executive member for the public service. He wasn't interested in talking with the President of NUPGE; he made that very clear with us. Where NUPGE is now, I don't know. It's probably just fulfilling its function as the dues paying member for the different provincial organization, but not having any active role in organizing or putting a good step forward for provincial government employees in the House of Labour. Quebec, for its part, never talked about joining. We had one or two meetings, and that's about all, they were not interested.

Political action

There were troubles throughout Canada at that time, not just Alberta. I guess governments thought they had to retrench, and there wasn't the money to go around that we thought there should be. The labour movement had to take a backward step. I think that's part of the reason for the trouble we were going through.

In those days, I was a member of the NDP. I really believed in the position of the NDP on most things and thought that it was a good organization. I was involved to some extent in the meetings, but not a lot; I was mostly just a member, paying my dues. But I think being a member of a political party is very important, whether you're in a trade union or not. You get a chance to do something, to have an influence, regardless of whether the influence is very small or very large. It depends on what you're doing, whether you've got much influence. But I would say my influence was quite small, but nevertheless it was there. It's important to be a member of a party.

It's popular to say that we had no success. I don't know why this is, but it just got to be that most people just follow along. There are very few that are active and try to influence the politics or influence their neighbors. So I think that's the trouble in Alberta. People just follow along - it baffles me. I can understand people in years gone by, like in Premier Manning's time who followed the religious aspect in his politics. But why on earth we still are that, I don't know. People have come into Alberta; they've come in by great flows. But for some reason they still follow what has gone before. That to me is baffling. I would've thought that people coming from eastern Canada, whether it be Newfoundland or Nova Scotia or Quebec, Ontario, would've brought with them the ideas that they had there. But no, they collapse around the conservative idea. I don't know if anybody has ever come up with an answer to that, but I know I can't.

I never dealt directly with Ernest Manning - Harry Strom yes, I talked to him. I sat in at one Cabinet Committee meeting in his time. They were nice people, fine people, but they didn't grasp what other people wanted, working people. They didn't grasp or didn't want to grasp it. I think that's all I can say about that. It's baffling to me why they're like that.

Ernest Manning was a preacher. He used to put on a religious talk every Sunday, and I think that he must've drawn a lot of people to the radio. He was just following his predecessor, William Aberhart, who spoke on the radio. They generated quite a following with that. I was never much for the religious stuff, so I never followed what he had to say. That was of no interest to me in those days. I don't think Manning was pro or anti-union. He would never come out as being anti anything; he would just let it go by. He

wouldn't make a fuss about one thing or another. That's what he thought was the political way to do it.

The Lougheed government

It was kind of refreshing when Peter Lougheed came in and became Premier. I met him in his office, just a matter of talking, and found that he was a very nice fellow to talk to. I attended one or two meetings of his in what is now the museum, talking about generalities. He was a good man, but he certainly wasn't in favor of any labour positions or ideas. He was contemptuous of people who tried to bring these out - nice, but really contemptuous of them. I was speaking to him once about legislation, and mentioned the Revised Statute of Alberta. I wanted to be quite sure he knew what I was talking about. He just took it that I wanted them to go through all the statutes of Alberta, which is rather ridiculous for him to think. He was just belittling my ideas. As a lawyer and Premier, he thought he got all the answers with regard to laws.

Speaking about what he did to bring in legislation, we have to go to the time before he came, We had always been under the Public Service Act. We tried to strike, and often did strike. When we went before Justice Steer in Edmonton here, he didn't say anything against us striking. I didn't understand that, but according to him there was nothing wrong with us being on strike. At that time we had a correctional officers' strike, and the guy that was in charge of the Public Service and the public service commissioner found me at one of the correctional officers' meetings. They started to read the law to me, and I just said, "You may say all of this, but you've got to understand things are not quite the same as you see it in the law." He said that this could happen or that could happen, that I could go to jail for a long time. But we just said, we're on strike and that's all there is to it. He just quit his grandfather talk then, and we didn't pay any attention to him.

Bert Hohol was the Minister responsible for Public Service. He was the one we had the most to do with. Bert didn't talk to a strike, he would rather 'sluff things off.' One time I told him that he would have to do something about safety. Driving down to Calgary one day, there's guys working on the highway and no signs out there. They could've been killed quite easily. I wrote to Bert Hohol about that, but he just said, "Don't talk to me about that, that's none of my business". However, it was his business, and he could've done something about it, jacked up the highway people to put signs out. But no, he didn't think that was his business at all. I would say he was a mid level Minister. He wasn't one of the powerful members, but then again he wasn't a minor member. Bert could've had something to do with the public service, but he never did.

I knew Neil Crawford well, and thought that he was a good man. We used to meet in the sweat room of the YMCA. He was a good man, but I don't think he had any effect on me or that I had any effect on him - he was just a nice fellow to talk with.

He used to come to open the Annual Convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour. In 1977, we had arranged to get up just as soon as he started to talk, and walk out. I do remember people saying that as soon as he opened his mouth that I should've got up. However, I didn't. I waited until he was talking, then I got up and walked out. Most of the people then followed me out. Neil was at a complete loss. He came down the stairs and went into another place and found out that it was the wrong stairs. He got completely confused. However, he knew we were not in agreement with him over the new Public

Service Employee Relations Act. We let him know we didn't like it, but it didn't have any effect. Those guys will put up with an awful lot. They won't change things at all, even if you insult them or make a fool of them. They won't change things unless there's a damn good reason for it. Albertans are not very interested in political activity, no matter what starts it off. I can't understand that. There's enough going on, you'd think the people would do something about it. But they don't. It's beyond me.

The problem with Civil Service bargaining

The Civil Service was a comfortable place to work, there's no doubt about it. In general, things were alright if you just kept your nose clean, things would go on alright, especially if you respected some of the little dictators that were around. Some of these little dictators wanted you to know they had the whip hand in their little section. Having said that it was a comfortable place, good or bad, you could keep your job. Working in places like the land titles office and the different offices of government, it was alright. People would think they had a job for the rest of their life, and many of them did. There was no reason to worry about being laid off in the old days.

That was all before Ralph Klein came in and implemented his huge layoffs. The Minister of Transportation when he took maintenance from out of the public service and contracted it out, those were big changes. It made a lot of people unhappy. Whether they did any good money-wise, I'm not in a position to know, but I do know that they made people very unhappy, people who'd been doing their job and doing it well for the government for a good many years. They were just tossed on one side.

In the old days, we did manage to bring the pay up and did a very good job at it. The tradesmen that worked for the government, the plumbers and other, at one time they were just given a percentage of the tradesman's payout in the private sector - something like 90%. We brought it up that we could negotiate it, and when I was there we were getting just about 100% of what people were getting in the private sector - a big difference. I think we did quite a lot there.

In the old days, the government tried to set the wages and we would write them a letter containing our proposals. We would say that we thought that these people should get more, or that's an unsatisfactory wage. Whether the government took notice of it, I don't recall, but I don't think they did. Then after a while we had a Joint Consultation Committee where we met with the Public Service Commissioner and the Minister responsible for Personnel. We would put our position forward. I don't think it helped. We did alright. One thing we did come up with was pensions. We used to talk to them about pensions. One of them that came up in my time was people going on early retirement. That was brought out at one of these meetings with the personnel commissioner and the Minister. We asked for it and we got people could retire early on something like 80%. I'm not sure of those figures. We got it so they could retire early and that was quite a big move forward.

We didn't really begin bargaining on a general basis until we set up Divisions in the Union. Then we would bargain and agree on items. The Master Contract, that was done by the union in general for items common to everybody, and then we would talk about the wages for technicians and tradesmen and hospital workers in a separate bargaining session. As for hospitals like Ponoka and Oliver or the University Hospital and Foothills

Hospital in Calgary, they were all bargained separately. We used to bargain with the Alberta Hospital Association for those, but it made a big difference to us. We had one man who would do the negotiating for the union with one division, like technicians, and somebody else would do it for the clerical workers. It was a pretty fair system we were starting to develop.

Previous to the Divisions, we had the Branch structure where, if you lived in a certain area like Ponoka, Westlock, Barhead, everybody in your area would be in your branch. That was the idea; it was a geographic thing and really had nothing to do with negotiating. It was just a get-together of people in the Civil Service. You talk about what parties you would have, Christmas, etc. You'd make resolutions for the annual convention, and they would be talked about there. They weren't much other than a way for civil servants to get together and talk.

Organizing Yellow Cab

Yellow Cab; I don't really recall how that organization drive started. In the mid-Seventies, the cab drivers came to us and said they wanted to join a union. They didn't have a good deal where they were, so they joined with us. We went to the Labour Board and tried to get the bargaining rights for them. We didn't, of course, because some of these cabbies owned their own cab and some didn't, some were just hired on. The Labour Board didn't see them as being employees, so that fell through. It went to court, we and tried to get it organized, but we were unsuccessful.

Ideas from his British roots

In Britain it was different. The shop steward was a powerful individual. He could take you out on strike just by saying, "Let's all go out." I think that's what happened to the British automobile business. If they didn't like something, they could take them out on strike. It ruined the automotive business there. There was nothing like negotiation for the industry or the plant, it was up to the stewards. That was the way in mining and industry. Some unions were very easy to get along with and they weren't much other than family affairs. But some of them were very active, and I think they really ruined some industries. They lacked the discipline that we have over here, to negotiated plant-wise or to negotiate industry-wise. The mine workers fire brands in there, very hard to get along with until Maggie Thatcher brought them to heel and changed the union system over there.

Whether unions should be involved in the political sphere or not, I think that's an individual decision. I do know that when I was there people said they were members of the NDP, but many of them were not. I've had people talk to me who were senior members on the Congress committees talk to me about union business. But they were not members of the NDP. So the idea that people should belong to the NDP is still an individual thing.

Some of the unions have expanded into areas where they're not doing work for the members. I mentioned the auto workers, and some of the steel workers' efforts. Some of the steel workers are completely out of the steel working business and into other endeavours. But there are other unions that want to do that, and some people think they're not doing their job. It's much better to have unions in an industrial area. If you're steel workers, be in the steel workers. If you're auto workers, be in that. But to have unions

moving over into others, some of them have gone into hospitals, some of these big unions, the steelworkers, is not good. All they can do is just give a big voice for the people that they're trying to negotiate for, but they don't really know the business as they should. It's very important. As craft unions are important, so are industrial unions important. But the industrial unions should stay in their industry and not just cover the waterfront with every opportunity they can.

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