

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewees: Jan & Jack Tarasoff

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

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Index: Ukrainian Hall - Drumheller valley - Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC) - Communist Party - May Day - Tim Buck - United Mineworkers of America (UMWA) - the Cold War - RCMP raids - Federation of Russian Canadians Red Finns - Workers' Benevolent Association (WBA) - Calgary Labour Temple - CUPE 38 - cultural programs - Sylvan Lake Camp

Q: Jack, in your recollection, where do community activists come from? Talk about your own background.

Jack: I began my life just south of Calgary, between High River and Vulcan, a little town by the name of Blackie Harington out there. My main influence out there were my parents and grandparents, and they were very involved in a number of things, especially the Federation of Russian Canadians, which goes back to the '30s. I was born in '33, and through the '30s I remember the parents talking about the newspaper Vesnik and the people that were involved. They used to pass through and visit from Toronto. Our parents always talked about the need for organizations like the Federation, because they fought for peace in the world, for social justice, and working conditions and proper wages, etc. The farm doesn't always lend itself to political activists, but it often produces those kind of people.

When the 2nd World War came along, my parents were very active traveling through the district collecting things that they could send to the front for the war effort, like clothes and other things that were needed. A lot went right to what used to be the Soviet Union, and specifically to the Red Army. That again was a very significant influence in how we developed out there, in the sense that you couldn't talk about the war without talking about the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union represented the worker's state, the socialist state, and that had to be protected at all costs, according to our parents. So as we went through school, that's how it was. Of course being with that kind of philosophy, it wasn't always simple. The community knew who we were and what our position was on things, and we weren't always the most popular people.

Q: Talk about what it was like in the '30s, with the anti-Bolshevik attitudes.

Jack: When we would go to school, people would be talking about Britain and the war effort, and we'd try to intervene by saying that they should look at what the Soviet Union was doing in attempting to block the invasion by Hitler? But that was just not part of the agenda of the community, and they would put us on the other side, sort of. However, that

didn't deter my parents from doing what they felt they had to do, and we were just part of it, but it caused friction. When it started to ease off a bit was when it became evident that the real thrust of pushing the Nazis back to Germany was really coming from the East. Then the Soviet Union became a great place, because they were advancing to the west. But as we know, that didn't last long, because immediately after that, the Cold War hit. Since the people in our community already had the view of who we were, the Cold War didn't help either, starting as it did in the '50s.

So we had our ups and downs in terms of living in a community like that, but it did instill in us a sense that there were other ways to run the world than the way that was presented to us in school. I graduated from high school and came to Calgary in 1951. I wasn't sure what I was going to start doing, but I went to the Calgary Business College and took some business courses. I then got job in a small company, and worked there until I joined Canadian Western Natural Gas. Edmonton used to have Northwestern Utilities, a sister company. I worked there for about 10 years, and during this time, in 1959, no earlier than that, in about 1954, I met progressive people here of course. That's where I got involved with the AUUC and met some very fine people there, and joined what they used to call their English speaking Branch. There was a Federation of Russian Canadians here too, and I was involved with those people. It was a very good place to be. Then later on Jan and her family moved from Drumheller, so we met, about the middle '50s, maybe a bit earlier and got married in 1959.

Q: Jan, what's your background?

Jan: I came from a coal-mining family in Drumheller, and my father and mother were both Communists. My dad became a Communist in 1936, after he and his brothers had belonged to the Young Social Crediters for a year or so, a fact which he never wanted us to tell anybody. But he did belong to the Social Credit Party, because he thought it was a reform movement that was going to help working people. Of course that didn't last very long, so in 1936 he became a communist, and as well, that was the same year he and my mother were married. I think that really shaped everything that's happened to me in my life since then. My dad was always a union activist with the UMWA; In fact my earliest memories are of wildcat strikes. He'd be coming home at 1 o'clock in the afternoon because something had happened in the mine that they didn't like ... so they'd all go home. Then there would be negotiations with the manager, and they'd go back the next day. This happened a lot when the mines were working on a regular basis, but later on, when they began to only work one or two days a week, then union activism increased and so did his Party activity.

My dad was a regular candidate for the Labour Progressive Party, which of course was the name given to the Communist Party when it was outlawed. He had the support of the majority of coalminers in Drumheller, because most of them were eastern Europeans and thus were supporters of the Party. However, most of them couldn't vote, because they weren't citizens, which limited the number of votes he would get in different polls. One of the funniest things that used to happen to us was we'd go over the poll lists after the election was over, and there'd be one vote at the Lake Louise Chateau, or there'd be one vote somewhere else. Then everybody would be wondering who the hell that was. But anyway, I think these were the kinds of things that shaped our activism. As expected, we started going to Party meetings when we were 4 years old, my sister and I. They were always at the Ukrainian Hall, because that was the most welcoming place in Drumheller.

The community itself was, as Jack was talking about with his community, really split. It was the Slavic population and the eastern European population that were sympathetic, while the English population in Drumheller - we considered them the enemy. So that's the way the community was. Newcastle, which is now part of the city of Drumheller, at that time was a little community where coalminers lived, and that's where the Ukrainian Hall was situated. There were also other people there. I recall wonderful people, one of which my dad knew well, - the last name was LaMal. They were French, and he was a revolutionary. During the Spanish Civil War his son disappeared in battle. That was part of my dad's function in the union; to write letters for immigrants, to fill out applications for their citizenship. He helped Lemal search for his son after he disappeared, he wrote letters to all the embassies he could. It was part of his function. They finally did discover that he had been killed in action. So these were all things that were deemed to be important in our household.

Q: What other people do you remember coming through your town?

Jan: My sister and I spent half our lives sleeping on the floor, because someone was always sleeping in our bed. Tim Buck, the leader of the Communist Party, Leslie Morris, another leader of the Communist Party, A.A. McLeod, who was I believe an organizer for the Communist Party - I recall a lot of other people. James Endicott used to come to Drumheller a lot, but he always stayed in a hotel room - he was always given the same hotel room too, because it was bugged. When dad would take him to the hotel room, he'd say, okay, we're going to have a chat. Then he'd get out his pencil and tap it on the table. My dad would say, why are you doing such a thing, and he'd say, 'because they can't hear us talking, all they can hear is the tapping'. So it was part of the Cold War thing, I guess. There were a lot of people that passed through our home. Different groups would come, and sometimes there would be 50 people in the house, and the house was only big enough for five. However, it didn't matter, that's how it was. My mother was always good at watering the soup, and there were always lots of people around.

Q: Talk a bit about more about Tim Buck.

Jan: I was very young when Tim Buck became a part of our lives. I recall him as a very gentle man, and a 'gentleman' too, always very polite, always very neatly dressed, with a shirt and tie. He was very good with kids too. I was very impressed, because my father had insisted that we attend all these political meetings, even when we were very young. I remember him telling my dad at one point that we were only 8 and 9 years old, and that he didn't have to worry about the two of us. We'd be active, he said, because once you teach them, nobody else will have a chance to influence them. I guess it worked. That's how I recall him. When he stood up to speak, nobody said a word, it was absolutely dead quiet. People listened and hung on every word he said. They didn't always necessarily agree with him, but he had this charisma which drew people to him. He didn't ever put anybody down in terms of the questions that they asked; he answered them all. Because he was a working class person himself, there was no arrogance, there was no superiority about him; he was just one of the people in the group, and was very respectful of everybody. That's the way I remember him anyway.

I know that my dad traveled around the province with Tim Buck a lot. That's exactly what he always came back to say; i.e., that he had been well received wherever he went. Large groups of people would come to listen, even if there was no agreement there. Now as far as that goes, there was also bad, a lot of the things that happened during the Cold

War, when we were quite young. The worst thing I remember was the Rosenberg trial. I'm not very good with dates, I don't remember the years. However, my sister and I used to talk about it, and that it was a very frightening time for us. It might have been partly because of our father's political activism. I don't really know how else to explain it. It was very, very frightening. Other than that, I don't know that we really experienced a lot of terrible things at our age, but I do remember being very young when the RCMP raided our house. Came to the house because somebody - of course it was my father - was one of them, and so were a lot of other people Communists in Drumheller. Somebody had been putting leaflets out in the dark, and had put one under the RCMP door, in the barracks. So they came looking for the source. The leaflets were in our house, of course. My mother had hidden them away, and then stood by the cupboard and put her arm on the top of it, while they went through everything. They never asked her to move, and that's where the leaflets were. They were very polite; it certainly wasn't a vandalism type thing, and everything was left very neatly. That was my first memory of the contact with the RCMP. Of course the RCMP followed everybody around all the time, and if anybody that came to town, they knew they were at our house, so they'd be sitting outside. But I don't really recall any other frightening things right now, except for that Rosenberg era. It was very terrible.

Q: This all happened in the late '40s? But other than that,

Jan: The early '50s, I would say. I was about 12. Of course, we were always talking about it and reading the letters that they had written to their families. But other than that, it was sometimes quite funny the things that used to happen. Of course you knew who were the people in the community that were very anti-communist and very anti-union. They just weren't part of our lives. It was harder on my mother, because she grew up in Drumheller and knew a lot of people, went to school there. However, people would cross the street so they wouldn't have to talk to her, because of her political activism. My dad always said, he was Welsh and he had a big mouth. He just couldn't keep it closed; he had to speak out. But he always said it was my mother who taught him everything he knew. So while it was difficult for her, she also understood what was going on. It wasn't a family where my mother was on one side of the fence and my dad on the other. We were all on the same side of the fence. It was, in many ways, a very happy time.

Q: How did you get involved with the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians?

Jan: The Ukrainian Hall in Drumheller was the centre of all the political activism in Drumheller and the valley. While we were never members of the AUUC, we were always there with anything that happened. They were also the ones who brought in all the Soviet films about the 2nd World War. All the kids would sit in the front row and cheer when anything happened that was good. Then, when I came to Calgary in 1956, I started playing in the orchestra with the AUUC. Jack was already a member of the English-speaking Branch. I don't think I became a member until after we were married.

Q: What year were you married?

Jan: 1959. So I've been a member ever since, here as well as in Vancouver or Regina. I play with the orchestra, and I sing with the choir.

Q: You remember the Soviet films. Do you remember anything else that the Ukrainian hall was doing at that time? Were they organizing any other activities in the community?

Jan: As far as organizing, I don't know. Most things in Drumheller were usually organized by the Union. At least that's my recollection.

Q: What sorts of things did the Union organize then?

Jan: The May Day parades; every May Day there'd be a parade, and everybody in Drumheller was there. The kids didn't go school, as we all got the day off so we could go to the parade. All the coalminers were there, and the AUUC always had a big banner. It was just a wonderful occasion - you had to be there to realize it. They were always involved in other activities. I don't recall anything specifically. I have a friend you might want to talk to about that - Lydia Husak. She'll be at the meeting tonight.

Q: I'm going to switch it over to Jack now. When did you first become in the AUUC, and what did it mean in socio-political terms?

Jack: Let's go back to the farm days. My parents used to come into Calgary, but not frequently. When they came, they always met up with progressive people from the Russian Federation or from the Ukrainian organization, which I think was the AUUC at the time. So they would come home and tell us about people like Claire Hume and Butaschuk and all these guys that were very active progressive people. My father also took on responsibilities; for instance, he was the district representative of the Workers' Benevolent Association (WBA) out there in the farm area. This was when I was finishing high school. One person that came out to the farm with all kinds of WBA business was a person by the name of Roy Tuchak, who told my father that when he come to Calgary, he should come right down to the Ukrainian Hall, and be introduced to the young people there. It's a great place to be, he said, with music, dancing, and all kinds of things. I met people like Marshall Diachuk, who comes from Drumheller originally, and a whole lot of people who were around there.

I also read the charter of the AUUC very carefully. Without too much thinking or examining of the charter, I knew immediately that this was the organization to be involved in. They laid out what they stood for, and all the goals and missions that they had. It was all to do with helping the dispossessed, the poor, supporting the trade union movement, and supporting the political parties that were representative of these people. So the AUUC was in my opinion the best organization, along with the Russian Federation to be in. They worked together, because they had the same goals. They published their own newspapers, and were progressive left-wing. With discussions in the papers, people participated from coast to coast - it was national. So you could go to any part of Canada and go to the AUUC centres and be at home, wherever you went. It was a great place to be, and I enjoyed being there a lot. They put on political rallies, picnics, supporting other movements in the city that were involved with the workers, the poor. They fought for better housing, better wages, better conditions - the whole gamut. So that's really what attracted me to the AUUC. I didn't play in the orchestra, but I did sing in the AUUC choir and in the Russian choir, because there were two choirs with the same conductor, Hazel Skulsi. There were some singers in the Russian choir that maybe didn't sing in the Ukrainian, and back and forth, but they generally went from one choir to the other. All they had to do was change from Ukrainian or Russian, and that was it, but the philosophy and the goals were identical. When people would come from Toronto, whether it was for the Federation of Russian Canadians or whether it was the leaders of the AUUC, Mitch Sagel and several people used to come and visit. I always went to meetings to meet leaders of the organizations from Toronto.

Q: When Ukrainians and Russians came to Canada, did they make it a point to touch base with the AUUC? Or were there other organizations which handled that?

Jack: No, they made it a point to touch base with the AUUC. I'll always remember leaders from over there that would come to Canada; they knew where the place was that they should go to. The organizations would set up meetings for them or receptions and banquets. Those were the kinds of things that took place, and it was really a great feeling to be involved. I'll always remember, this came to my head, that one of the high officials of the Russian Orthodox Church was doing a tour, and spoke both at the Ukrainian centres and at the Russian halls across Canada. I had an opportunity to meet him, and I talked to him in the Russian language. I said, what's the state of the art with the church? And he answered, "Fine, we do this, we do that". At that time they said, religion is repressed, religion was not allowed to function, and all this. But, meanwhile, he's the guy standing there with his robes and chains and whatever. So that helped dispel this myth that was perpetrated, that if you practiced religion you were sent off to Siberia.

Q: What was the Cold War all about?

Jack: In my estimation, the Cold War was set up purposely by the western powers to stop the expansion of the Soviet Union, and ultimately to destroy the Soviet Union. That to me was the sole purpose of the Cold War. It had nothing to do with freedom; they could have cared less about those people in captivity behind the Iron Curtain. They were so frightened that the idea of socialism would take hold more than it had that they started the Cold War and did the propaganda thing. And they did a super job too, I might say.

Q: How did you encounter the Cold War?

Jack: Personally, I encountered the Cold War in two main ways. One was at the workplace. It was very difficult to express what you really wanted to say about the relationship of East and West, because if you stood up and pounded a table and said that the west was this and the Soviet Union was this, of course many people were fired summarily. The other way was that when we did political action, like leaflet distribution, there were always occasions when people would be absolutely hostile. How dare you bring this stuff to my door; how dare you spread this vicious propaganda about the Soviet Union? If you're so in love with that place why don't you go there? - this kind of stuff. We went to camps, like the Sylvan Lake camp, that used to be owned by the Finnish community which was centered around Sylvan Lake, and then they turned it over to the Communist Party. That is when I really started going there. We started building and had great schools there. But these had existed there on the Finnish property long before that. There was always surveillance and intimidation by the RCMP, who always knew who was there. I was fortunate that I didn't get hauled into the office of the chief executive officer, say of the gas company, and say, look, we don't like your activities. I'm sure they knew. I had the occasion, when I started university, to meet a person who's aunt worked for the RCMP. This person one day (maybe it was a slip of the tongue) said, how come you have a file with the RCMP? I said, really Fred, do I? He says, yes my aunt works in the file department, and she saw your name there. I guess they were on a picnic and he mentioned my name to her. I said, "Well I guess I do certain things that they don't like, so I have a file there." That was another side of the Cold War. I knew I was popular there because they had a file on me.

Q: You weren't doing anything illegal, they were maintaining a file on you because of what you did?

Jack: That's right, because of my beliefs and my activities.

Q: Talk a bit about the Russian Federation.

Jack: We are still members, because there's still a branch here of the Federation of Russian Canadians. At one time it was known by another name - I can't remember now. But when I joined it was that, the progressive organization to which Russians belonged. I know many Ukrainian people who belonged to it to, as well as other Slavic people. It was one of the most significant organizations in this country which supported the causes of the working class and of the poor, and supported such ideas as that all people should have the opportunity to go to university. Not only the rich should go, it had to be from the working class. They supported the Soviet Union during the great struggle during World War II and afterwards. There were some very fine people that we met over the years, from the Russian Federation as well as from the Ukrainian organization. There's still a federation of Russian Canadians, a big branch in Vancouver. They have their own hall which they call the People's Home. It's not too many blocks from the AUUC hall, so there's a lot of interaction there.

Q: What about the Workers' Benevolent Association?

Jack: I didn't know much about the WBA until a fellow came out of Winnipeg during the '40s to our farm. They knew of my dad because he'd been a Russian Federation member and a Communist Party member. He went to conventions and was well-known. So this person came and told him that they needed somebody in his area to handle WBA affairs. So, my dad took it on, and from that day on we were members. He took out policies for all of us. It's a fraternal organization that was set up to help people who were had problems in terms of living and economics. They set up their own organization, the WBA, which was Ukrainian, Russian and generally, a working class organization. That's why I could relate to it so well.

Q: What does the word "progressive" mean to you?

Jack: It is used to refer to somebody that has progressed in his or her thinking and philosophy from what exists to what could exist. We applied it to anybody that talked about a time to change, to change let's say the social economic system - it didn't have to be to communism. It was enough to move even slightly more a bit towards the left. We called them a progressive, part of the progressive movement, the one who was making a contribution to the progress of the human condition.

Q: So you would strike alliances and coalitions to advance the progressive cause?

Jack: Oh yes. I would say that the alliances we were involved in came from many ethnic groups and organizations with different purposes. We knew people from the Finnish group, the Jewish group, the Scandinavian groups, and also the Finns, the Yugoslavs - you name it. They were all part of this progressive movement. It didn't mean necessarily that they were all going to stand up and overthrow the system tomorrow, but they were trying to just make inroads into making conditions better.

Q: What were some of the cultural activities in which you were involved with the AUUC?

Jan: When I became involved with cultural activities, it was with an orchestra. The orchestra was made up of different age groups, some very senior members of the AUUC and some young members of the AUUC. Mostly at that time, it was a mandolin orchestra,

because there were a lot of people who were playing that wonderful instrument, and were really expert. A lot of them were self taught. We had excellent orchestras, which played at all the funerals, at weddings and at dances. If anything was happening, the orchestra was present. Concerts were put on and the orchestra was always part of these; still is, in fact. The orchestras have evolved. At that time, we were all members of the AUUC or the FRC, because they worked so closely together in the cultural activities. A lot of the older people were very active at that time, some were very elderly people. We have a lady who, until this year, sang in the choir and had played in the orchestra. She was six when she started, and she's now about 85 years old - and she's very proud of the fact that she's been around for that long. The choirs were always very active, and the dance groups have evolved as well. There's always been a lot of discussion about the dance groups, because originally they were traditional dances and they were taught by people who knew them as folk dances and as things that they did as part of their entertainment. Now it's more a performance art; it's become very professional. The dances have evolved and they're beautiful - both the costumes and the dances are beautiful, and the music is very orchestrated.

These are not the simple things that they were originally. I think that that's alright, however, because it still gives an idea of the Ukrainian culture and traditions. However, now the orchestras are made up of anybody who wants to play. I would say that probably, in Calgary anyway, at least 50% of our members are not AUUC members, they're just people who want to play in an orchestra. We also play other cultural forms besides Ukrainian music. There are a lot of mandolins, and a lot of traditional instruments, but now our orchestras have brass instruments in them too. Actually the piano is probably an addition as well. I've been there for almost 50 years, so it's been part of the orchestra for a long time now too. It's always been an enjoyable thing. I love the music, and I would think anybody who plays in the orchestra finds it very enjoyable. We play in two or three concerts a year now, whereas it used to be a concert every Sunday. That was the centre of the family's activity, so the whole family would be there. They'd put on little plays, they would have the orchestra and choir. Some of the people started in Calgary when the Hall was just a tiny little place in Bridgeland, Now are still at the hall as part of the seniors group. A lot of them are gone of course, but they all recall that the activity was centred at the hall. It was part of their lives, not just something they did once or twice a week, but part of their lifestyle. There was sharing of food and the sharing of family occasions. The funerals were all at the hall. It wasn't something you did at the funeral home; the funeral was out at the hall with the choir singing and the orchestra there. The speeches were all done by people who came from the leadership to speak at the hall if the person had been an activist, and most were. So the cultural activities have changed a lot, and I don't think that the membership is as active in them as they used to be. It's not the centre of activity anymore; it's not so much a part of their lives.

Q: Does this cultural program you're talking about reflect any political activism, and if so, what's happened to that aspect of it now?

Jan: No. It did, it used to be very political, because those people who were political activists were also the cultural activists. It brought the people together around discussions that were political, around social justice activities and the peace movement. But the cultural things brought people into the hall, and they became part of whatever came with it. It was integrated, and that's why I stayed at the hall, because of the activism there, the political and social justice activism.

I'm afraid there's no longer too much of that. What I see is that there's some fear of being involved politically and of being tainted. The halls were all known as the 'Red Halls'; in fact, there are some people who still say, "Oh you belong to the Red Hall." I think they're trying to overcome that, and I feel that they've gone too far with that attitude, to the point that they're almost afraid to become involved. I can give you an example of what's been happening in the last few years, with this war in Iraq. We invited people to talk at the seniors group in Calgary about the war in Iraq and the need for resistance to what's happening. While the seniors are very interested, no one else wants to be, and if they are, they don't choose to talk about it. I find that very disconcerting. I always felt that the hall was for me a political and social justice home. I don't find it that way any more.

Q: Talk about Sylvan Lake for a while, and specifically what it meant to you.

Jan: We have to go back a little farther than the AUUC to do that, because, originally the site at Sylvan Lake belonged to the progressive Finnish organization, the 'Red Finns', if you like. The land belonged to them. They also had a hall that was up on the main highway out of Sylvan Lake heading towards the west. The party used that land and the hall freely, because they were the Red Finns, they were our supporters. Many of them were CP members, so there were political schools there, where Marxism was taught. But it was also a fun thing. I remember in the '50s, being very young, and the whole family packing up and heading to Sylvan Lake for a weekend of camping. While dad and mom were in the classes, there were activities for the kids. But then the Finnish organization become sort of depleted of membership, and they weren't able to maintain the Hall. Well there were still branches, but they weren't able to maintain the same level of activism, so they turned the land over to the Party. I'm not sure what the whole agreement was, but I believe it held that as long as they paid their taxes, it would be theirs.

The political schools continued and, as Jack said, it was then decided to move the hall, this big old building, from the highway down to the acreage which we owned by Sylvan Lake. So that was accomplished, and once it was in place, then the renovations had to start. This was after we were married, so it was in the '60s already that we worked there every weekend. I was chief cook and bottle washer. We had a stove out in the middle of the field, and that's where we did the cooking. We worked for the whole weekend, and had a lot of fun - worked like dogs, but it was still a great place to go. Then when it wasn't being used, when we weren't working at it, there would always be Marxist classes and other such things going on there. Then, of course, the Communist Party was always scrambling for money, always. We could never raise enough money to pay for everything we wanted to do. And, because of that, the taxes weren't being paid on that land, so it was sold to the AUUC. The AUUC took it over, with the idea that the party would be able to use it when they wanted to have a school or whatever they wanted to use the buildings for. That didn't last very long, because the Cold War atmosphere and the fear of the 'red brush' again, it just petered out. As well, the leadership of the AUUC and its membership was changing. The younger people were coming in, and they were the ones that were worried about being called Communists. With the older people it was different, because most of them already were communists, and had no problem with it. But it became a serious problem, so the Party just stopped using the land. I have no problem with the way the land is being used now and the way the camp is being use. They use it for children's camps, as well as for seminars and for dance schools; it's all cultural activities now. They are teaching Ukrainian tradition and culture to the children, which I think is a good thing.

But there isn't any political activism there anymore. So that's really the history of the camp.

Q: What did you think you could accomplish by belonging to it?

Jan: I have to think about this answer very carefully. I was raised, as the expression goes, as a 'red diaper baby'. I always hated that expression, because it always implied that you didn't think for yourself. However, I did think for myself, but according to the principles we were raised with; there weren't any other - that was the way things had to go. Not that we were going to change the world overnight, even though there were a lot of people who thought so. Jack and I always laugh when we'd go to some meetings and some of the old timers thought the revolution was happening tomorrow. We knew that wasn't going to happen, but we also knew that the Communist Party, and the way we saw it function, at least both our parents were supporters and activists. My father and Jack's dad always thought that being part of the Communist Party meant helping people immediately. Their union activism or their activism was in community things was part of their function as a Communist. It wasn't that we were going to change the political system in Canada tomorrow or in five or ten years, but that because of the things we supported today, things that would become better for working people. We supported such movements as 'Put Canada First', and became part of the campaign. Now this is part of a lot of different organizations' philosophies and activism. That's why we both became members. Actually, we weren't members until we were married.

Q: Jack, what did you think you could accomplish?

Jack: From the outset, we were taught that we should think that way. Way back when, just before I started school - and remember that I was born in 1933. Discussions in the family were always around the Soviet Union. It was something new on the world stage, and my uncles and aunts and everybody else we knew was involved with it; my dad's brothers and sisters, their spouses and what-not. So it was just part of the scenario out there on the farm; we were steeped in socialist thinking. In a community like that, you didn't race up and down the streets of High River (our farm was just east of High River) with the red flag. You'd have been stoned to death before too long, but when I came to Calgary and got involved with the AUUC, the discussions went on right within the hall. We discussed all kinds of issues; e.g., what's the Soviet Union saying about this, or what's the press saying about that. And we weren't only talking about the press from Moscow; it was what our press was saying. Our press presented a left-wing socialist approach, which was part of the culture that we talk about in the Federation of Russian Canadians and AUUC.

So I believe very strongly that yes, there is a time coming when the world will start to move in unison into more of a left-wing socialist mode, you might say. It seemed like it would happen for a while, but then the powers that existed at that time realized that too, therefore, they had to invent the Cold War. They say the Cold War, the Iron Curtain has descended on the Soviet Union. Well the Iron Curtain was an invention of the powers that be, because that's exactly what they wanted. They wanted to say, "Here's this group, they're in slavery back there somewhere, and we have to free them." This was the propaganda that was so prevalent, but it didn't deter me in terms of understanding the basis on which the Soviet Union was built, the philosophy or idea that people could actually take ownership of what is rightfully theirs. I believed that then and I believe it

now. We know at this point what has taken place, but that doesn't deter myself and Jan from pursuing the same ideals.

Q: Jan, tell me about the trade unions in this area?

Jan: It's a very right wing city, no question; it's head office city. I always used to think the difference between Edmonton and Calgary was that Edmonton is a working class city and Calgary is a head office-type city. I'm not sure that's fair, but to me it is, because here we have all the head offices of the oil companies and all those other corporations, and then, of course, the head office people who work for them. So it isn't working class like Edmonton, I don't think. As well, in the '50s and '60s, we didn't have the Ukrainian influence and the kind of cultural influences that you have in Edmonton. I used to always say, I like to sew, and I'd always to go Edmonton to get more colorful material. You could get a lot more colorful material in Edmonton than in Calgary, and I always said that this was because there were a lot more Ukrainian people than in Calgary. In Calgary they were more classic in the way they dressed, and vice versa.

However, when I first got involved in the union movement and started working for the City itself, it was always known that labour elected the mayor. If you wanted to be a mayor, you had to be on the right side of the trade union movement, and particularly the public sector unions. I don't think that's prevalent now - surely to God the labour movement would not have elected Dave Bronconi; I find that almost impossible. Rod Sykes, though, was a working class person's mayor, and even Ralph was - you could always go and talk to him. Old Don McKay was too, and so was old Andy Anderson before Don McKay. When I first got involved, we used to be very involved in politics, and we used to always make sure there were aldermen on there that were pro-labour. I doubt if some of there's any of them - well Helen LaRocque, she's the last one, and apparently Transit supported her. But I don't see her as being that supportive.

Q: Do you remember any of the pro-labour aldermen?

Jan: That's what I was just trying to think. Greg Husband wasn't too bad. He was not quite as progressive as she was, but Elaine certainly was. It's hard to remember names. I went to Labour Council for years, from the '60s on, and we used to always get candidates who were happy to come and talk to us, because they knew we could get our people out to vote. That was one thing we could do. We worked hard at it, especially in the civic and school board unions. We used to say to them, "You can elect your own boss, get out here and get busy." They were always very happy to come to us, not just the NDP. Of course in civic politics, party affiliation was underlying, but I think it's more out in the open now; you can probably to some degree know which parties they support. But, at one time it wasn't true. The other part I always thought was interesting was that it was acceptable to be a labour candidate. If you got elected, nobody turned their nose up at you because you happened to support the working people. Now that would not be as acceptable; if you wanted them to help you, you would probably hide it.

Q: So Calgary has changed in this way? Has the labour movement also changed?

Jan: Oh yes, it has changed a lot. It's a chicken and egg thing, but I think Calgary has changed more, because we've gotten so big, and we've gotten more head offices, with lots of big development and developers going - and of course they're always on the right wing side. It's in some ways too big of a city. They got the road store up and they're building

everything. It's a booming city, and yet it's not really booming for the lower class or for the street people. And it's certainly not booming for those in low-paid jobs.

Q: Have the city workers been able to hold their own? If you were a union member, would you still be doing okay?

Jan: I think so. I don't think they're getting big raises like they used to, but they never really did. I think they're holding their own. It's always better to have a union job than a non-union, except in the construction business. I think in the construction business now they just have to pay high rates, because there's nobody to work. They're so short of workers, they don't care what they pay.

Q: Are there still places in this city where people like us could go and shoot pictures where things used to happen?

Jan: That's the problem, isn't it; the old Calgary Labour Temple is gone; it was where the Flamingo Palace used to be? I don't think Flamingo Palace is there anymore, on 11th or 12th Ave. and about 1st St East. The Local 38 building on 12th Ave and 1st St., Transit owned it for years and years. Then Local 38 bought it in the '70s. When you go to Local 38, ask them if that used to be the old Labour Temple behind there. The Flamingo Palace is where it used to be when I worked there in the '60s. That's one thing we lack in this City; we don't have a labour temple or a central labour - another thing different between Edmonton and Calgary. In Edmonton the unions like to get together and stay together. In Calgary, they're like right-wing entrepreneurs; they want to be way out here and way out there, and have their own little corners - and it's back to divide and conquer again. Whether they do it consciously or subconsciously, I don't know.

There's Local 37, way out there, and Transit moved far out first, way out past Chinook Shopping Centre. Local 37's past there now too, and of course, the CUPE District offices are way out past Deerfoot Trail now. When you go into the PP office, I worked there for all those years, and they're not very friendly. It isn't somewhere you'd want to go and shoot the breeze. They don't have that camaraderie like we used to have. I don't know if that's because we have so much money and you don't need that, is that why it is? I really don't know, but I do know that when I worked in the Labour Temple for the IBEW 254, the building also housed the Calgary District Labour Council and the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 92. This was in '62, and there were also the iron workers in that building too. Leo is dead now. He was an iron worker and his wife worked like a man. There was the painters union, and Bill Patterson worked for that union at the time. There were all those unions in there including IBE 348, the telephone workers' local. At any given time of day you could go and visit with somebody, because there were always people coming in there and visiting. I learned a lot there, just talking to people, but we don't have that anymore. Even the Labour Council office is way over there in that crumby little place called the World Trade Centre.

You should be able to go to those places and talk. But who would you go to? Olga is very nice, and Gord Christie is alright too. But it's not the same.

Q: In your 55 years, who emerged as some of the strong unions and union leaders?

Jan: When I first started going to Labour Council, there was a lot of different unions that went on a regular basis. The Postal Workers were one, they got involved, with the Letter Carriers, before they amalgamated. There also used to be a few guys from the machinists, who worked at the airport. As well, there were the Amalgamated Transit Union?

Old Frank Brody used to be secretary treasurer of the Labour Council before Bill Paterson, and he was from the Transit Union. I was young then and now I'm old, and they seemed old then. As you get older, your ages get closer together. I really can't say. We lost touch with him, because he was in the transit union, and he was secretary treasurer of the Labour Council for a lot of years, on a leave of absence from the city. When he came back he came into one of Local 38's jobs. People had a hate on for him, because he was also on the board of referees of UIC, and he didn't attend Labour Council. They kind of ditched him, and we sort of lost touch with him. But certainly, in his earlier history, he was a very articulate person.