

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Reg Basken

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

Date: August 2003

Location: Edmonton, AB

Index: Union representative – shop steward - Oil Chemical & Atomic Workers – Energy Chemical Workers – President, Alberta Federation of Labour – President, New Democratic Party – Saskatchewan life – CCF – agricultural clubs – company ‘Donkey Councils’ – union organizing – the Tar Sands – environmentalism – negotiated separation – Energy & Chemical Workers Union

I was born and raised in Churchbridge, Saskatchewan. I'm a Saskatchewan farm boy, born and raised on a farm, if you could call it a farm; it was a quarter section. I went to school in Churchbridge and then, when the high school shut down in Churchbridge, we had to go to Langenburg to finish our school. The earliest influences I have were my father, my mother, and the 4H clubs; I became president of the 4H beef club and the 4H green club.

I raised a calf every year and cried when I sold it, raised some grain when the rain came, or didn't come - some years it came too much. Farming got so bad that dad had to go out to work building elevators and got involved in the union there. Years later, he got ‘grandfathered’ as a carpenter, because he'd never taken the training; he only had what he learned on the farm. He could calculate how many bushels of grain there was in a bin faster with a nail on the granary door than anybody with a calculator these days. Dad was a very strong influence on my life. In those days, we were still farming with horses. When we farmed with a tractor, we modified the equipment, but the tractor and binder still needed two people, one to drive the tractor. I used to get time off school each fall to participate in the harvest. Later, when I was in grade 8, 9, 10, we got a threshing machine and used to thrash for the neighbours. I used to be involved in that most of the time.

The question of politics came to me in an election when I was in grade 10. It was a Saskatchewan election, and my uncle, who was the big Liberal in town, used to think that he had convinced everybody that they had to be Liberal. But, it didn't take dad long to convince me that it wasn't Liberalism that was going to do anything; it was the CCF. There was always a debate in the family, and we never knew for sure whether mom voted Liberal, but in the later days, she worked for the CCF/NDP. In fact, while she was working for Lorne Nystrom, the CBC asked her to be the commentator for the constituency. So she only commented on the good NDP things, and was quite proud that she'd got in the NDP when she was supposed to be neutral and reporting for the CBC.

My involvement in high school, and the air cadets was another strong influence with me. I participated in three memorable excursions with the air cadets, one of which was at the

British Empire games in Vancouver. I was on an honour guard for Prince Phillip, which tied into later discussions with Prince Phillip about a number of labour matters. I got on it in a funny way. We were in an air cadet camp at Abbotsford, and they called out the name Sergeant R.C. Basken. I stepped forward. Later on that day my cousin came to me and said, because he was a year older, they must've made a mistake and meant him. So the next call for a parade, he went, but later that evening they kicked him back to the barracks and put me back, which caused a considerable rift for many years. He quit the air cadets, and I became the flight sergeant with the air cadets in the Langenburg squadron. I took six weeks off on an exchange tour to the U. S. in 1957, after a senior leaders training course in Camp Borden, Ontario in 1957. When I came back from the United States, I went on to university.

I was involved with the 4H clubs before I was old enough to be a member. The leader, Henry Putland, who is now over 90, gave me a book of history on the 4H clubs. He saved a copy of it for me, because he'd never dealt with anybody that young who had been involved in the leadership of both clubs. We had a tremendous time in farm life those years in the early '50s, as the 4H clubs and the agricultural society were the centre of activity, with informal dinners with 50 people at somebody's house. How they ever got the food together is beyond me, but they could do it. I probably learned public speaking by having to do it through 4H clubs. I was chosen when I was in grade 11 to be Chairperson of the Grade 12 graduation, which had never happened before. It scared the living daylights out of me. I remember going to Yorkton to pick my dad up, who was coming home for the ceremony. He'd been on elevator construction out in western Saskatchewan. His bus was late. I remember picking him up. We had to pick up a suit for me, because we didn't have enough money to buy a suit. So we borrowed a suit from the credit union manager. I've always hated a double breasted suits, cause it didn't fit. But it was the only suit I could borrow. I went out at night and was chairman of the graduation banquet in a suit I knew was uncomfortable because it didn't fit.

We never had good enough land, so I could win much in terms of buying a good calf or raising a good calf or growing a good 2 acres of wheat or barley or flax. The part that made me so enthusiastic about 4H clubs was that I could always win the grain and calf judging, or the showmanship case. High school was also a lot of fun. I was in a small class, and if I didn't place first, it spoiled the whole summer. The school was a fairly large building, about the size of this house. We had 3 and 4 grades in one room. So grades 1 to 4 some years would be in one room, and the teacher had to teach 3 or 4 different classes. But it wasn't nearly the centre of attention that the agricultural community was. That's because it was in rural Saskatchewan. The town had 150 people, if that. We only lived a quarter of a mile from town, so walking into town was easy. It was the place where they held dances until the community hall was built in 1947.

They had an election in school, and my uncle thought I should run for the Liberals. That was foreign to me, but because of my dallying around with the Liberals, I missed out on the nomination for the CCF. Walter Carol, a guy who I never dreamed of being a New Democrat, ended up being the candidate for the CCF and won the election. My uncle was devastated that the school would go CCF, and the Liberal/CCF thing in my family was a war for a number of years. In the '30s, it may have been '38, they sent grain out from Atlantic Canada for seed for the Saskatchewan farmers. In 1937, the year I was born, in

fact the week of my birthday in September, my dad took his total crop over to the neighbours to be threshed in one hayrack and brought it back in 3 bags. I remember them talking about how they spent the winter - they picked the buckwheat and everything out of the bags and ate it. They kept the barley aside to roast for coffee. That's the kind of farming there was in Saskatchewan in 1937. In the spring of '38 when they brought in the seed grain, dad went in to get a few bags but couldn't because he didn't have a Liberal membership card. They were selling Liberal membership cards at the edge of the train station, and dad wouldn't buy one. He went home without the seed grain. The intriguing part of it was the fact that the person handing out the grain was his brother, Fred.

One summer on an air cadet visit, I remember meeting Orville Fauvis, the segregationist Governor of Arkansas in his office in Little Rock, Arkansas just before the riots, before university students went to the white school. I lived a little wee corner of it, the one that happened to me was Orville Fauvis. Then during the trip to BC, the one on the honour guard for Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh, we stayed over an extra week so we could be at the opening of the British Empire Games, as they were called then. Then the leadership course in Camp Bordon, Ontario, was another 6 weeks of intense training. You had to be selected by your local squadron of air cadets, then go through a national selection committee. You had to be interviewed, and they assigned different people to interview you. In the whole province of Saskatchewan, there were only 4 or 5 chosen, and I happened to be there. With the 4H clubs, we'd go to Saskatoon once a year for a club conference. In which we'd judge grain, and weeds and all these things. I was an agricultural kid, I just loved agriculture and completely intended to be a farmer, until dad sat me down one day and said, "You know kid, there's a quarter section of land here. Some of it's slough, not much of it's arable. You ain't going to make a living on this. We haven't been able to make a living on it. I've had to go out to work."

I was interested in Hereford cattle and saved the money I'd made from the 4H clubs to buy 2 heifers, a purebred and a grade. As it turned out, the purebred had twin heifers and the grade had one, so I ended up with 5 Herefords, well on the way in 1957 to having a start. When I came home from university, I sold them at probably the lowest price in 20 years, because I found out that my dad had mortgaged the farm to pay for my tuition at university; Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan - the most illogical subject of anything for me. But in those days there was no introduction to university; it just wasn't something that anybody talked about. The story in Saskatchewan, around that area was that if you had a good farm you should be a farmer; if you didn't, you should have an education. My dad had to quit school when he was in grade 8, because his father died in 1916. He had a number of brothers and sisters, but he was the one that was designated to quit school at grade 8 and look after the farm and his mother and the smaller kids. There's no doubt in my mind that he was hurt by the fact that he didn't have an education, but he got an education through reading and through practical experience. He figured out things on his farm, and he ran the farm better than anybody could ever have expected. He got his education through the school of hard knocks. He did a damn good job of it. The rest of us 4 kids except for one, graduated from high school and went on to further education.

Going to University was scary. Saskatoon was a huge city after a Saskatchewan farm. I was completely unprepared for the kind of studying that was necessary. But, as I said, I quit to get a job because I didn't have any money to go back. It was a crazy thing. I was

out of work, and home painting our house, and I got a call from a guy I had known through the 4H clubs. He said that he had a job for me with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation down at Estevan, and that I should go and see Flett Seiman. So, one day I drove my mom and dad's car down to Estevan and went in to the Saskatchewan Power office and asked for Flett Seiman. The gal called him in and he came storming into the office, and when I told him I was looking for a job, he said he didn't have any jobs – that they were waiting on a guy who supposed to be here 3 days ago. I said that I was the guy, and he said, “Where the hell have you been?” That was my interview for the job.

So I got a job with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. It was called grunt work, the lowest of the low. I was to do a little bit of paperwork, and then go out with the line crew and help dig holes to put the power poles in. If they needed somebody to read metres, I was to do that. I was paid at the lowest rate; \$1.22 an hour. I was to do anything that the superintendent or the assistant superintendent or the foreman or the district operator told me to do. I started in mid June, and on the 30th of June I got hurt connecting a metre m- I shoved the screwdriver through. I didn't know what electricity was, shoved the screwdriver in to connect a metre, and burned my fingers. They all grew together and I took the screwdriver and cut them apart and carried on for a few minutes. I figured I'd better go home, because I wasn't feeling very good. I got down in front of the doctor's office, left the truck running and walked across the street into the doctor's office and promptly fainted. I got my fingers bandaged and went home. Flett phoned me that night about 10 o'clock and gave me a supreme dressing down. I thought he was angry that I got hurt, but he was mad that I hadn't told him. He said, “Safety's important around here, people shouldn't get hurt. I've got to know these things, what's the matter with you, don't you know anything?”

By mid- July I went to work with the district operator. I had a half-ton truck, and I'd been on the job all of 3 weeks. I had the superintendent's ear to the point where it wasn't unusual for him to come down to the warehouse where there were 10 or 12 guys around, and call me and we'd go off to check the coalmines or the oilfields. He was talking to me about metering and transformation and all those kinds of things. It finally started to irritate some of the boys. Of course I didn't know anything about this; I thought it was pretty damn good. I had a truck, I could drive to work in the morning and use it after hours too. Nobody ever complained in those days about you driving to the movies or going for a beer. People started to really get annoyed with me. You could tell, because the conversation would stop when you walked into the room, and nobody was calling me to go for a beer. When you went for coffee, you generally went alone.

A few weeks later I heard about a union meeting in Oxbow. The only thing I knew at that point about unions was how they had, according to my uncle Fred, ruined the Saskatchewan farm by having a strike on the railroads in '54. He would never forgive the unions for ruining this. But I was paying \$5 a month union dues, so I decided I'd better go to this meeting. I got to this guy's house, and there were about 20 people there, and they'd all had 2 or 3 beers. They called the meeting to order. The district operator, which is the central figure in any district, was the union chief steward for the area. They called for nominations for union steward and nominated me. The next order of business was that they wanted me to file a grievance – about myself! I was in the wrong job, and I shouldn't have a truck. My job had to be posted. The first time I'd seen a union agreement

was at that meeting. so I read it, and realized that they were right. I was going to lose my job and truck, and go back to being a grunt and working in the hot weather and cold weather digging holes and carrying crap. They gave me the forms to do it and said, go ahead and do it. I wasn't welcome at that party where they were drinking beer, so I decided I'd better get back into Estevan.

The other name I knew in the union was Jack Chapman, who was in the power plant. I knew of Jack's name because I'd heard it in discussions and read it in the union newspaper, so I phoned his house about 11 that night, and told him that I couldn't file the grievance because I was involved in it - I'm the guy they're fighting against. He said, "You're right, I'll do it for you", and did it. When the superintendent got it, he swore and kicked the garbage can. So he refused the grievance; he wasn't going to have me kicked out of my job. So it goes off to Regina then, and when the report came back in about a week, the grievance is upheld and the job posted. Flett tells me to apply for that job even though everybody else was senior to me. He says, "Listen to me, have I ever told you anything wrong? You apply for that job." So I applied, and I was the only applicant. I got the job after 3 weeks in purgatory. I got my old job, my truck back, and I got the dialogue with the individuals - they forgot all about the other stuff. All they said was they wanted the union agreement upheld, but none of them had the guts to do it, so they elected me. I guess I mouthed off or something somehow or other, because they decided I should be the steward and should handle the problem. It was the Gas Coke and Chemical Workers Union in North America, and the Oil Workers Union.

When it was time to go back to university, I couldn't afford to go, even though Flett offered to get the money for me. In the end, he agreed that I'd get more education from him than at university anyway. True; I was getting more education, because I was hand selected to get special jobs all through the period I worked there. There were dozens of times that we had union problems, because Flett was one that, his idea was I'm going to run the business, and not give a damn if the general manager of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, or the premier, or the minister in charge, or the union or any individual got in his way. He was a technical wizard and could fix anything. But he and I used to clash in real serious terms over the kind of fundamental problems that a union must have, and fundamental issues that he saw as a way of doing business - getting things done in the fastest way possible.

During the election of 1960 he called me into his office and said, "You stupid bastard. How many times have I told you that you have to watch your Ps and Qs. You're in the public's eye. You're carrying that fucking NDP stuff on the seat of your truck; at least put it under the seat." So I did. He used to look to me to set examples. One day I took the girls from the office over for coffee, and we stayed about half an hour to find him standing on the back step when we walked back. He said, "Basken, you son of a bitch, you get 15 minutes for coffee, not 22-1/2. Now get downstairs and get to work." Never said anything to the other 3 people, and never mentioned it again.

One time in the summer we had what was called 'substitution pay', where you worked in a higher category and got pay for that category. So all summer, everybody was working in a higher category for vacation purposes to fill in. So a lineman, which I was called, who was getting lineman's pay, would work as an assistant district operator, which was a 15 or 20 cent adjustment. You're supposed to get that. Well a whole bunch of us put in

our substitution timesheets one day, and when the assistant superintendent picked them up, he said, "What the hell's this?" and rips them off, throws them in the garbage can. So I went to the guys and said, "We got to make out a new one." So we all did, and when Porky saw us doing it, he stormed out, he was gutless - just stormed out of the warehouse. But later, when he got wind of it, he said, "You're not running this corporation, I am," and he wrote me a note saying they were denied. So I filed a grievance on behalf of everybody. He wrote back, 'grievance denied', so I sent it on to Regina.

When Flett comes back from vacation, he hears about this and asks me to get in the car and tour the coalmines. Those were the days when Estevan still had the old company store and the coalmine shacks people lived in. He told me about these places, and said, "This is the difference between the good union that you have and the union that they have. They're still living in these conditions. They don't get paid, just script that they can buy at the company store. They're not allowed to go into Rodfers and buy from the store there, even if they had money." He certainly was making a political point. Then at S the Steeldon gas plant, he got out and talked about natural gas coming in and the uses for it, and was really angry that they were burning it off and wasting it. The sky was red at night because we burned off billions of cubic feet of natural gas. He went on and on, another political statement. We drove around all day, talking and looking at things and connecting and disconnecting metres, taking metre readings etc. I hadn't done anything, just enjoyed the day, when he asks, "What are we going to do about those fucking grievances?" Then I realized that's what this whole day was about. He couldn't get around to it. When I said, "Either sign the grievances or sign the time sheets," he said, "That's what I thought you'd say," and didn't say another thing. Next day he signed the substitution time sheets and everyone got paid. It never became an issue again.

We had several experiences like that. One other time he he'd fired 17 people, including some of the most senior people in the area. He called me because he knew he couldn't get away with firing them. So w I asked him about happened, he said that the bastards were working on a 25,000 volt line with no grounds and he told them many times that they have to put grounds on both sides of the switch when they're working. They had 20 miles of line and not a ground in sight. I said that there must be more to the story, and said that I would talk to the guys and see what's happening. I met them at the warehouse and they told me that Porky was pretending he was in charge and told them to work on the line. Nobody got hurt, but they were all quite upset that they'd just been fired. I went back to talk to Flett, and told him, "The only guy you should fire is Porky."

I think about Flett and the way he needed help. He knew he needed help he called on the union. He called the union guy, and I happened to be that guy. To make a long story short, I convinced him that he should reinstate them all. They were never fired, and should all go to work in the morning. Except do it as a safety meeting. Tell them what their rights are as individuals; be wide open. The guy you should fire is Porky - but I was told in no uncertain terms that I was to quit worrying about Porky. So he finally agreed no firings would take place and I went down to the warehouse where all the guys are, drunker than skunks. The young single guys, 2 carloads of them, were going to Mexico. They said, "We've got it all solved Basken. You file a grievance tomorrow, and we'll go to Mexico for 2 weeks, and by that time the grievance will hit Regina and they'll reinstate us. We'll get our full pay and we'll have spent the 2 weeks in Mexico. I told them that it

wasn't going to work, that I made a deal with the boss, and that they would be at work tomorrow morning. I had made a deal with Flett. So I had a couple of beer and we had a vicious argument. Some of the older guys knew that was a stupid idea, but these young guys were all full of piss and vinegar and they were determined to go to Mexico for 2 weeks. To make a long story short, about 4 in the morning they agreed to come to work the next day. By 8:30 they're all there, pissed out of their minds, and Flett is just a boiling, prancing and pacing up and down the room, kicking everything in sight and calling me everything under the sun about not keeping my end of the deal.

He walks in and says, "You stupid bastards, you ought to know better than to work on a power line than isn't grounded. Reg is going to give you a safety lesson." I'm the junior man on the crew, and I've never taken a safety course in my life, so I spent a few minutes talking about safety. It didn't matter; they were paid from 8 o'clock that morning and the dismissals were withdrawn.

There were 3 or 4 other instances when I learned from him. One time we had a terrible ice storm and the power plant was going down. He had us sitting up on top of the switching gear with steel wool cleaning the ice off. We'd put one little section of the city on, at a time, working for hours in the cold and wet. You couldn't see the ground. They'd send messages up to us on a rope because it was noisy in the switching station. Flett asked me how long before we can get the city back on, and I suggested maybe an hour. In one hour he called us down, we flipped the switch, and put the city on. He said, sit down guys, have a rest, hop in your cars, we're going to go downtown. The city has power on, and the Princess Café has got steaks for all of you. You must be getting hungry by now. We're only going to keep the power on in the city for 2 hours. After that we'll shut it off and put it out there. You guys have got to eat. You learned lessons from a guy like that. It wasn't a sandwich brought out from downtown, it was a big steak. But he had to have the power on for an hour to cook the steaks. We worked all night, all the next day. We worked about 3 days, sleeping as we could and get somebody else to drive us. I've always said that I got involved in the union because of my boss - not because he was a bad boss, but because he was a good boss. Sometimes he didn't consult in advance; he jumped to the gun and then had to figure it out later. But he came to the union, he worked it out, and we never had a problem. He showed me that leadership was leadership, that there was right and wrong, and he showed me that you can make a mistake and adjust it.

I can't go directly from there to where I became a union staffer without going through the Medicare fight in Saskatchewan in 1962, because I was directly involved in that.

Representative in an International Union

I just want to start with one other thing about how I became a union rep, and what my thought processes were. When I had all those problems in the Saskatchewan Power Corporation and the senior people wanted me to represent them, it brought me to the story that even though they had a lot of service with the company, they just weren't prepared to deal with the boss. The whole value of a union came into play on that particular kind of thing. Here's a group of people who had a problem, or had a number of problems, but didn't have enough wherewithal or desire to go and speak to the boss. I was a mouthy guy, so I did it. I found out it wasn't difficult to do it. As long as you were fair

and honest and reasonable, the boss understood. It all worked in my favour. But I was the junior person through most of those years in Estevan.

The reason I took on the union role was because I noticed how people needed somebody to represent them. That's the total value of a union, it starts right there. You're not different than anybody else, except that you're prepared to mouth off to the boss on behalf of people. That's where I came from. In 1963 I was successful in getting a scholarship to Labour College of Canada in Montreal. While I was there, Claude Jodoin, President of the CLC, called me to Ottawa for an interview, and hired me as a CLC Rep. I didn't start until September 1st – this was in early July – as I wanted to attend the OCAW international union convention in Chicago. I was the Canadian representative on the constitution committee, and we wanted a number of changes in the constitution. I was vice-chair of the committee with 9 members, one from each of district - Canada was one. That was a great experience for me.

Remier got on the wrong side of a political issue with Al Grossburn who was the president of the International. Grossburn won and sent him home from the convention in '63. In those days, the National Director was appointed by the international president, although Canada, particularly under Reimer, ran its own show. We didn't join their bargaining programs in the United States, even though they really wanted us to, and pretty much handled our own thing. But there was always that difficulty of being an international union, even though we were less covered by the international union than our members thought. Certainly the public thought we were just sucked by Denver, which was not true at all. I sent in my expenses in, that was about the extent of the contact I had in those early days. Our District Council in Canada set the policy for us, and frequently was in opposition to the US, including the question of nuclear weapons and the missiles on Canadian soil. In 1962, if I remember correctly, the Americans were going to put missile bases in Canada. I made a speech at the district council convention saying 'under no circumstances', and the International President was there, Al Grossburn was there to hear me. He was the guest speaker at the banquet that evening, and went on to say exactly the opposite of what I had said, that OCAW would be supporting the nuclear weapons being on Canadian soil. I had to draft a resolution for the next morning to say we weren't going to do it, and it passed. As a result of that, I got elected president of the Canadian District Council of the union. It was a political football, but Canadians were different than the Americans in many other ways - a very profound difference.

There was some communication between the national office here and the Denver office in collective bargaining with the major oil companies. But in most of those years we had higher wages and better working conditions. Health and safety was a bigger issue in Canada than it was in the US in those days. Our bargaining style was different. They used to set their target company, they tried to mimic a bit of the auto workers. We never did that. We had a better recognition of where we didn't have strength, and that was in the oil refineries, than the Americans did. They thought they had some strength. The American system in those days was particularly hard on unions. The oil industry was notorious in being anti-union. We recognized that in Canada and we had to deal with it very gingerly. You can't walk in and throw your weight around if you don't have a lot of weight, because the wind blows you away. The oil industry could've gotten rid of us in Canada, had we tried to blast them out of the water. I think they would've been successful in

decertifying, because they would've gone to the employees. I remember once bargaining with Shell. The vice president came up from Houston to do the final days negotiations. I remember him sitting at the bargaining table in Winnipeg at the Shell refinery. We had a lot of niceties, but everybody knew the vice president was there, and that we were going to get the wage offer that day. The wage offer, you either took it or went on strike. He said to me on the bargaining table, we all had a nice time and a nice discussion here this morning. I just want to thank y'all for coming out. This collective bargaining process is a very nice process. It ain't a question of strength, it ain't a question of anything else here. It's a question, have we got the money? We're gonna give you as much as you can squeeze out of us. Now when does the squeezing process start? We had a small discussion on money, they made the offer, and we conveniently went on strike 3 months later. It was bullwarrism in terms of the way they bargained with us. It was very rare that they put an American on the bargaining table. Usually they had the Canadian people handle the bargaining, but they were taking the American line. We did get different conditions and offers in Canada. Sometimes it created a rather serious difference with the Americans, because they didn't get as good as we did, and wanted it. We had different issues here. Health and safety was an issue in Canada before it was an issue in the US.

On the plane on the way home from that first Convention, Ron Duncan, who had been appointed Canadian Director after Neil Reimer was fired, asked me if I would join the staff of OCAW. I said I would, but had made a promise to the CLC which had some contracts to negotiate. I worked for about a month there starting some negotiations, then began my job with OCAW in Regina, where I worked for a year servicing collective agreements that were not part of the Local 649 I was part of. I looked after the Co-op refinery and a small number of members in Manitoba. The biggest one was the Winnipeg Gas Company, and the 2nd biggest was the Shell refinery. I looked after those from Regina for a year, then was transferred to Winnipeg, where I looked after the Husky refinery in Fort William/Port Arthur, as it was then called and some units in Saskatchewan as well as the units in Manitoba. Politically, I was involved with the NDP. In 1967, Neil Reimer phoned me. He was back then in the good graces of the International and was back as National Director, and wanted me to move to Edmonton.

Somewhere in there, I went to Labour College of Canada; I got to be the first graduate. It was a university style course in those days, designed to be a quickie to get university some economics, social studies, history. It was a crash course. You worked day and night for 7 weeks. It was the best forced education anybody could get in those days, and it was valuable to me because I learned what I should read to find out certain things. I learned a lot about where I could find things in economics, because that was an important part of being a union rep. But I didn't have a hell of a lot of background in it. So I learned where some books were and where things were and got to know some people that I could count on to give me a further crash course if I needed it in some of those subjects, like economic history and sociology and things like that.

Labour College was in Montreal at St. John Brabeuf College. One of the instructors was Sidney Ingerman was there, and the other was... his name escapes me ... he closed his books at 3 minutes to 12 on the last day and said, my course is complete. He went on to be a big shot in the Conservative government.

I looked at coming to the head office of the union with a great deal of glee and some apprehension. I was still a pretty young and didn't have a lot of experience, and was coming to the place where organizing was a serious problem. We had some large bargaining units like Celanese and CIL and there were lots of other opportunity to be in the centre of action and at the head office of the union in Canada. We had no oil refineries organized in Alberta at that time, except Husky in Lloydminster. The Edmonton oil and Calgary oil was non union, and Imperial Oil kept the unions from organizing by setting up under John D. Rockefeller in 1912 the Joint Industrial Council. This Council was first set up to settle a coalminers strike in the US., where John D. Rockefeller called in William Lyon MacKenzie King, who later went on to become prime minister in Canada. He settled strikes in the coal industry in Canada very well by getting the coal companies all together and telling them to work like hell, to build up a stockpile, and then let the unions strike. So they'd work all summer, get a good stockpile of coal, strike in the fall, and 6 months later when they ran out of coal they'd get a settlement. That was the Rockefeller style. MacKenzie King went down to Colorado to settle a strike that was embarrassing for John D. MacKenzie King went out to Ludlow, Colorado, and saw that the sheriff's henchmen were killing people, and forcing othersto move out of their company houses and into tents. But then the sheriff's deputies burned the tents and killed a few people. It was getting embarrassing - John D. was getting some bad PR out of it, so he wanted a settlement. MacKenzie King went in and spent a few days there, and made the offer. He told John D. that the miners would get a union, but one that he could control. There would be 12 representatives of the workers, selected by the workers and 12 members of management selected by the employer. The chair of the joint industrial council, would be the mine manager. So if there was any danger of a vote, it would be 13 to 12, because the mine manager controls the other 12 votes. 'That's going to settle your strike.' Rockefeller calmed down and that was the birthplace of the 'Donkey Council', as we called it, the 'company union'.

They had one in the Edmonton refinery until we organized it in 1997. But this 'joint industrial council' survived and was a plague on us, because they would get the wage offers before we did. It was a real dance in the oil industry to appear that we were doing anything. Our membership could look around and say, we see this joint industrial council with no union dues, and no strike - to get the same anyway. When we organized the refineries, wages were not the issue. The employer, Imperial Oil particularly, paid them far more. In the '60s an oil worker in the joint industrial council would get 5 cents an hour more than our members did; that was enough to keep them out of the union. Later, in the '90s, it went to \$2 and \$3 an hour more. All we had to do was go in and throw a few cards on the desk. They did that at the Imperial Oil refinery in Winnipeg, called me and wanted some union cards because they were going to join the union. They signed them up and walked into the plant manager's office and said, 'we want a wage increase and here's what we want or ...' – and they threw the cards out on the table. They got the 'or', and I never heard from them again. So they used the union to get themselves wage increases. Where they started to organize was over individual issues, where they had somebody who could stand up to the boss for individual issues. Health and safety issues were entirely under the control of the company. Those were the kind of issues that organized the union. Money was always a problem for us, because they always received more.

Unions were seen as a problem by then Social Credit government of 'St. Ernest', as we fondly called Ernest C. Manning, and his Back to the Bible Hour. St. Ernest thought we were going to be the death of the oil industry in Alberta if we organized, so he passed a law for the Great Canadian Oil Sands in the late '60s, which said that if you don't vote, your vote is counted against the union. So we could sign up a majority, and then the day the vote was called, 150 people would be in Chicago being trained for some aspect of the job, and their votes were counted against the union. So we lost vote after vote, but that was the design of the Social Credit government, How the hell a union would want to prevent an industry from creating good jobs and creating jobs is beyond me, but that's how they saw it.

The world was different then. I remember my first set of negotiations in Alberta, in the fall of 1963, just after I started work for the OCAW, I was assigned to negotiate the first contract at Birstol, because Reimer didn't want to. He'd organized it, and sort of had a deal that the company wouldn't fight the organization. But in the final analysis, before the vote was being held, the management came out from Calgary and slept in the plant to make sure everybody voted the proper way. They took sleeping bags and slept there. So Reimer had the first meeting of negotiations and I was assigned out of Regina to drive the rest of the province and get over there and handle the second meeting. I went there and it was a shock for me. I forgot I was in Alberta. Half way through the bargaining, one of the bargaining committee members showed me the minutes of the previous meeting, which were god awful. They said that the union was killing the gas plant, and that Reimer was just an awful son of a bitch. I didn't pay much attention, but they were posted on the bulletin boards in the plant. So I said something brilliant like, there'll be no more posting of the notices, and this meeting is over until those are taken down. Well I got a lesson fairly early that I was in Alberta. Saskatchewan law didn't allow that, but Alberta law certainly did. But I'd called off negotiations, and it was 11 o'clock that night before we got back to the bargaining table, and the company agreed that they wouldn't post any more notices. I was really tough then, I'd won something. So I said, and we'll be not negotiating again until the ones that are up there are taken down. So we left the meeting, and negotiations continued some weeks later. But they did take them down. So I won a couple of issues in Alberta because I had a Saskatchewan stubbornness and stupidity. I didn't know the law was that rotten here. That was my first experience of negotiating a collective agreement in Alberta.

Our union was a very active union in Alberta. For the size of our membership, we were involved in almost every conceivable thing that was on. We were up to our ears with the CCF/NDP. Neil was the leader, and I was the treasurer of the NDP. We were active in the labour council. Roy Jamha and Gene Mitchell were active in the Federation of Labour. So the OCAW was the most active union in everything; up to its teeth in every single aspect of society - the United Way and the charitable organizations, the community, elections at city council, and stuff like that. My involvement in Edmonton was getting involved in the Federation. I got on their executive, as well as on the Labour Council. I was treasurer of the New Democrats. At the same time, I was negotiating in Medicine Hat, Pincher Creek, Edmonton, and Lloydminster. I spent my first few years in a car. I'd leave here at 4 o'clock in the morning to get to Medicine Hat, 6 hour drive, negotiate all day, drive back here for a meeting with Dow Chemical or Celanese or CIL. Negotiate all day with them, then go back down to Pincer Creek the next day for meetings with them. I

did that for weeks and weeks and weeks. Then in my spare time I would be organizing in Ft. McMurray with Stu Sullivan and several other people. We didn't have a Calgary rep. That time is sort of a blur to me, because I didn't have 2 seconds off. I didn't have a day off. In fact I rarely took any vacation. I guess we didn't know about burnout in those days, or I would've been a candidate. You drive to Medicine Hat, you drive back to Edmonton, you drive to Pincer Creek, you drive back to Edmonton. Drive to Lloydminster and drive back to Edmonton. Negotiating in Edmonton, organizing in Ft. McMurray, and organizing around here. Because we were so activist that people would call us and say, we want your union. You'd end up going out to organize.

Organizing in the Oil Industry

There were half a dozen different places I organized; places like Canadian Liquid Air and some small gas plants. I was supposed to be the negotiator not an organizer, but I was the only person here for a while until Stu Sullivan came in, so I ended up being both.

The Petro Canada Refinery; it was interesting how we got that one. But, Texaco was the first one I got. They were in trouble in bargaining and they had an independent union, a certified one, not a 'donkey council' like Imperial Oil. Emil Budinsky was president of the independent union when they got into trouble and were about to go on strike. But they had no strike fund, and no knowledge of collective bargaining and were in the final throes of mediation. He asked me if I would handle his mediation and I said, only on one condition; if your membership know I'm doing it. He agreed, and we had a membership meeting, and I went there to find that everything had been recorded by the employer. But I told them what I was going to do. They made no commitment to joining the union, but the union's door was always open. The issue there was settling a collective agreement and I was going to do it for them. The manager of the refinery was a nice guy, but scared of the union. Robby Robinson was the head office guy from Toronto who came out for mediation. When we walked into the room, he looked at me and thought he was in the wrong place - his management had not told him that I was going to be speaking for the union. He called it off right away. We never met again - settled the collective agreement without meeting. That's how scared they were. The mediator got an offer from the company, brought it back to us, and it contained everything we needed. He figured that the way of keeping them out of the union, was to make sure I didn't stay around too long.

We organized the union shortly thereafter, and they affiliated with us, as we had a clause in our constitution that allowed affiliation. Alberta had a lot of independent unions to keep workers out of the OCAW. So we got a number of places across the country where all a union had to do was pass a motion at its meeting, conduct its own vote at its union meeting, and the labour board was cut out of it. They automatically could join the OCAW. Texaco did that. We worked for weeks to get the conditions right, and went to a membership meeting. There was a picture of me from the newspaper in the guardhouse, and I was not allowed on the plant site after the first meeting. So all of our meetings were over at the Capilano Motor Inn, which was closer to my house and very convenient for me, which the manager apparently didn't know. It was just a silly decision on the part of the employer, because they had no management at the plant site. They had a whole bunch of workers that, had there been an emergency, would be a mile away. It was all intended to keep me off the plant site. That's the essence of the Texaco organizing. We had a love hate relationship with Texaco for years, because it was the most backward company

anywhere. The only thing about them is that they had the most sparse head office, whereas Imperial Oil and Gulf and Shell all had pretty splashy offices.

Petro Canada was Gulf at the time, and had an independent union. I had been in there organizing the independent union. They didn't like to see Texaco leading them in anything, because they hated it. I had worked with a number of people at the Gulf refinery, and we were negotiating nationally with Gulf, because we had more members in Gulf than any other oil company. So they were the national bargainers in the early to mid '70s. We were negotiating in Toronto. I was organizing in Edmonton and negotiating in Toronto, so I had an inside track on everything. We did all the legal things by passing a motion at the executive meeting, at the membership meeting, and stuff like this, and getting everything in order. I made the application to the labour board while we were down in Toronto, but to be honest with the company, told them that we had applied. That scared the living daylights out of them, because this was their premiere refinery. While we were negotiating, I phoned a friend of mine at the Labour Board and asked about my application for the Gulf refinery. However, he wouldn't give me the information, so we had to go to the last meeting of negotiations and put in a little clause saying this applies to the Edmonton refineries should they join the union.

The advantage was that I knew these members were already in the union, but couldn't tell the company or they'd know I had an inside track at the Labour Board. We had pattern bargaining in all of Gulf, that we squeezed out to the rest of the industry. So we ended up negotiating a settlement that day and organizing the Imperial plant in the same breath – and got those workers a settlement that they never had to go on the bargaining table for. Gulf took it in stride, but they were angry. But they didn't show it much after the certificate was issued by the labour board. Those were interesting times. I had another crazy time in organizing the steam engineers at City Power, who were in the Operating Engineers, which they didn't like. My friend and fellow rep, Stu Sullivan, had gone to a meeting that I didn't even know about, and talked to them about joining OCAW. The meeting was held in the plant, an entirely different culture because the city wasn't fighting the union; that choice was up to the workers. This was in stark contrast to the oil industry, where you couldn't be seen in the same town. They called me back and said, we'd made the short list. They wanted Stu, but he wasn't in town, so I came to talk to them alongside CUPE and the operating engineers. I had 20 minutes, and they let me go at the end of the 20 minutes. I never heard another word from them. Three weeks later Willy Leeman, who had worked at CIL before, came over to the office and asked for some union cards, for the steam engineers, he said. They had voted to join OCAW and just needed to be signed up. So he took the cards, went down to the plant, signed them up, brought me back the cards, I applied for certification. Everything went hunky-dory.

A certain percentage didn't apply in the oil industry much. Where the employer objected to certification, there was always a vote – and the employer in the oil industry always objected. A.O. Akroyd, who laughed at me on a number of occasions, drafted the constitution for the McMurray Independent Oil Workers to get a company union to keep OCAW out. He was quite proud of it, because having a donkey council, one that you controlled, was easier to keep a legitimate union out. That's what happened in Ft. MacMurray. They started operating in '68, and we'd been out there organizing. We won 2 or 3 votes. But we weren't certified, because you had to get more than 50% of those

eligible to vote in those days, not just those that voted. So if somebody was sick and didn't vote, that vote counted against you in those days.

The CCF government in Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, where we'd had an NDP government since '44, there was all kind of talk during the post-war that this was a communist government. Wherever you were, if you were a trade unionist or a member of the CCF, you were tantamount to a communist. Politics was a wide open, a 'dog eat dog situation'. The CCF government had created a considerable amount of distress in the business community, not because they had done too many socialist things, but because they had passed the *Minerals Renegotiations Act* in 1958. J.J. Brockelbank was the deputy premier in the ministry of energy at the time. The oil companies had gone around Saskatchewan ostensibly telling every farmer, they'd give 2 cents an acre for their mineral rights; there were no minerals here, they said, they just wanted to clear this up. So they got the mineral rights at a grossly decreased price. The CCF passed an act that required them to cancel all those deals, but the Lieutenant-Governor refused to sign it. So, the CCF took it to the House of Commons, where the federal government passed a law that said the Lieutenant Governor had to sign. That created an outcry of 'here's the government interfering in private business, saying you can't do your own business because the government will take you over.'

Furthermore, the government had gone into job creation, a shoe and soap factory and things, but not a lot of thought had gone into them, and they failed. The CCF was not in particularly good shape. A former CCF'er named Ross Thatcher was making an awful lot of noise. In a small town in southern Saskatchewan (I can't think of the name) he had a debate with Tommy Douglas, and for all that, won the debate, primarily because he was louder and didn't give a damn for the truth. But it worked. The CCF had started the natural gas utility, Sask Power and Gas; they had done the best they could with the little bit they had. Saskatchewan didn't have much. The debate was primarily having to do with Saskatchewan, but the argument across the country was that we don't need a third party; it made elections too difficult.

The CCF was the 3rd party, and it was making some noise. In the '40s after the War, it had threatened the former government of Ontario, and things were moving along. But the idea of a 3rd party seemed to get a lot of people annoyed. We don't want a 3rd party -we've got enough trouble making up our minds between tweedle dee and tweedle dum. That was the debate nationally, but in Saskatchewan, it was a debate issue by issue. We were considered CCF stooges as a worker for the Saskatchewan Power Corporation and were held in terrible stead by the Liberals who were so viciously anti-CCF. In 1964 when Ross Thatcher was leader of the party, his theme was "It's time for a change". And it was, according to the population – the CCF lost.

In 1960, the premier was Tommy Douglas, and we squeaked through that election. The Minerals Renegotiations Act and a number of others developments created the idea that the CCF was interfering with private business – let private enterprise look after gas. Then the CCF developed the water resources and a crown corporation to look after mining of sodium sulphate and things like that, treading into areas the free enterprisers thought was their profit mould. Medicare was just on the edge of the 1960 election, It was a huge issue, and by the end of the campaign, Medicare was dragging down the CCF. It was

based on had the medical experiment in the Swift Current/Maple Creek region, where the system was in effect for 4 years, and produced conflicting reports. All the radio reports and newspaper reports treated the issues as if they were either free enterprise or a communist. Free enterprises all thought it was horrid, that we had only to go a couple of steps further and the government would take over everything; your medical report would be in the newspapers. All of that turmoil was taking place at that time wasn't lost on guys like Flett Siemen at Saskatchewan Power who just got madder at his friends in the business community in Estevan that would distort the facts so badly. He told me that Medicare is working in Swift Current, that he had daily communications with people there, and they wouldn't have it any other way. It's working for the people; it's just not working for profit. That kind of debate I got involved in. It was part of growing up in Saskatchewan and being there. Everything was very political.

The birth of the New Democratic Party

The older people, including my dad, thought it was wrong to change the name of the Party. Many weren't as open to me, because they knew I was a trade unionist, and many still felt that trade unions had killed the Saskatchewan farmer in 1954 with that rail strike. They thought that unions were too strong, too big, and run from the United States. They stuck to the idea that it is Tommy Douglas who made the CCF; it was their CCF, and they're were not giving it away to anybody. So we kept the name CCF. All across the country it was the NDP, but in Saskatchewan it was hyphenated, CCF-NDP to smooth everybody's feathers so that everyone could say they won. But it didn't last long; I think the 3rd convention thereafter was when we changed to the New Democrats – 'NDP'.

What happened was that the CLC got concerned about the political system in Canada, believing that the 2 other parties were just 'old line parties' - Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee. They also thought that the CCF didn't have a broad enough base, wasn't making any headway in Ontario, and was only reasonable in the province of Saskatchewan. The rest of Canada looked at Saskatchewan as a pimple on an elephant's rear end - that things could never grow out of there. So, the argument went, if we were going to grow, we need a better base, and that base could not be Saskatchewan - it had to be industrial Ontario. And the way to do that, the CLC said, was to form a new party. They passed a resolution at a Convention and took it to both David Lewis and Stanley Knowles, who played a bigger role in it than anybody knew. When he was defeated from the House of Commons in Winnipeg North Centre, he was hired by the CLC as an executive vice president.

Claude Jodoin, president of the CLC at the time, had 2 options - get involved in politics, or adopt the way of Gompers in the United States; i.e., reward your friends and punish your enemies. It seemed to work with Democrats and Republicans in the States, but in Canada it didn't make a lot of sense. Joe Morris was another one who tried to get the labour movement more involved in politics. They sent invitations to all Parties in the country interested in making a new political arrangement with the labour movement. The CCF response said 'yes, let's sit down and talk', while the communist response was that there already was a labour party - end of discussion! So the only discussion was with the CCF. I remember attending the first new party committee meeting in Calgary in 1960, where they had 4 or 5 new party conferences. There were about 300 people at the Calgary one, and I was sent by my local union as a delegate. It looked as if everybody there had been CCF for a long time, and as if everybody was against us.

I remember talking to Stanley Knowles after a CLC executive council meeting one time, and having him say how important it was that everybody understood that if you were a worker, it didn't matter. Citizens matter, and citizens are workers – so, when you protect workers, you protect your citizenship. His base was that you protect workers from cradle to grave. He was such a religious man he never got from erection to resurrection, but from cradle to grave, that protection was important. Then let their entrepreneurship spring out. Stanley was so calm and quiet. I could never be so quite about this, because it was very profound. He said, give them the base to start with, and then let them think. He said, they'll do wonderful things and we'll make this the best country in the world. He said the society should be judged by the way society looks after its young, its poor, and its old. These were beautiful discussions. I had a similar discussion with George Cadbury from Cadbury Chocolates, who was the federal treasurer of the NDP. We were drinking my scotch in my hotel room and he said, “Reg, I don't understand how you can be a socialist. You really can't afford it. With me it's no problem.”

There was never a question in my mind. When I went to the new party conference in '60 in Calgary, I wrote a report back to the local union about it and my conclusion to go full steam ahead. I never looked back, ever thought there was anything else. To debate those issues to me was not worthwhile, because it was automatic. It had to go!

We had to light a bit of fire under the bottoms of a whole lot of people. We lit a lot of fires, and screwed a lot of things up. We didn't take the advice we should've taken sometimes. In the long haul, the labour movement's attitude towards the party bothers me more than the party's attitude towards the labour movement. The reason I say that is that the labour movement is so evident during an election campaign. It loves you when you're in opposition, and hates you when you're in government. The labour movement has never gotten over this idea that in government, you have to make some tough decisions that are not necessarily popular. I hate to say it but, you're the government of all of the people. But damn it, I've always felt there is a time, and I get shot for this, but there is a time for a New Democratic legislature to legislate workers back to work - but only the legislature. You don't put in legislation that says you don't have the right to strike. Everybody has the right to strike. But at some point, if the parties can't end it, the legislature should. Very rarely should this happen, but I don't see any reason why that shouldn't happen. It depends on lots of things. I would say make sure the settlement is good. If you're going to use arbitration, make sure that you provide a role in the process, and that workers get proper treatment. But nevertheless there could be a time, a critical situations having to do with the safety and health of the public.

The labour movement expected, from day one after the amalgamation occurred that there would be people coming out of the woodwork, and that the movement wouldn't have to do much except pass a resolution at convention - and we were good at that. We'd pass resolutions at conventions, we'd get in guest speakers, and that's the extent of what we did. When it came time to look down the union membership list and find out who were New Democrats and who weren't, you could skip page after page. Politics became a bit of a debate in local unions, but not a very big one. It's almost gone now - I never hear of it anymore. The labour movement failed the merger more than the CCF or outsiders failed the merger. The labour movement had such promise, but day to day priorities always took far more energy and finances than being involved in politics.

I got involved in Saskatchewan in the Estevan constituency in '59, when Kim Thorson ran and got defeated. I was the one that had to go and tell him that he had to make his concession speech. I went to the Saskatchewan provincial convention in '59, '60, '61, '62, '63, and remember chairing a panel in Saskatchewan at the '59 convention. I ruled this guy out of order, telling him that he wasn't following the rules, and came sharply to my feet and my common sense when I found out he was the Speaker of the Legislature. My involvement was through the union, and was considered one of the first people the union went about taking time off to help in an election. I damn near ran in the 1964 election in my home constituency. I applied for a leave of absence from the international union, because I was on staff by that time. I never held any formal positions in Saskatchewan within the party. It was just always as a labour delegate. I was sergeant at arms and things like that, as I was at the Founding Convention of the NDP in Ottawa in 1961. I was on the balloting committee, and quite proud to be able to count the ballots when the election for leader came up. I knew Hazen well. He was an opportunist. He couldn't get elected in the Liberal party, so he thought he'd come back to the CCF and ran in order to raise his stature. In my opinion, he ran because he knew he would lose, and it would give him a greater foothold in the Liberal Party when he jumped ship. And he did. The idea was to try and find a way to keep him on board, but nobody had a way to do that. We weren't going to make him leader just to keep him on board.

Organizing in the Tar Sands

When the Great Canadian Oil Sands, which was Suncor's predecessor, started operations, we organized and organized. We had people living up there. I lived up there for months, Stu Sullivan lived up there for years. We'd bring 10 or 20 people in. We'd go to every house in Ft. MacMurray. We'd sign up a majority and get a vote, lose or win the vote, and not have enough to get certified. So all through the '70s it was an organizing campaign. Sometimes we would be working with the MacMurray independent oil workers. It was originally called GCOSCBA, Great Canadian Oil Sands Collective Bargaining Association. That was the original constitution. Then they felt their muscles and decided to become a union, so they changed their name to MacMurray Independent Oil Workers. We sometimes worked with them, thinking we could convince them to join the union by love instead of fights. We used to think that was working, and that didn't work. Then we'd go up and organize around them. That didn't work. Then the auto workers and steelworkers and building trades would get involved, and that didn't work. They didn't join the union until May 1st, 1986.

They were locked out on May '86, right when the Gainer's strike was on, and while I was in Geneva at the ILO. We'd negotiated the barebones and essence of an affiliation agreement, so that the oil workers in Ft. MacMurray would affiliate with ECWU as it was then - the Energy and Chemical Workers. We'd been an independent Canadian union for 2 years, and I was president of the union. We'd assigned a rep to Ft. MacMurray to organize it, Ian Thorne, who was living up there. The essence of the agreement was that they would get every service we had, except that, as they didn't ever have to go on strike, they wouldn't belong to the strike fund. I negotiated this with MacMurray Independent Oil Workers (MIOW) through the early stages of '86, and we were going to go to a vote during the summer. But they got into collective bargaining, and it didn't go well, and the company issued lockout notice. The union, in its wisdom, said you can't lock us out,

we're going on strike, and on April 29th I got this call saying they want to join the strike fund, that they wanted to change the merger agreement.

I agreed to it, much to my dismay, as I found out later. In the early stages, I was told to stay away from Ft. MacMurray, to keep my nose out of it, that they could handle the situation. They didn't want anybody from the union around. They had 250 RCMP officers up there, but we didn't get any publicity out of it, which was probably for the good. We didn't, because the Gainers strike was on in Edmonton and they were getting all the publicity. Besides that, there was an election on. The situation in Ft. MacMurray was pretty violent. The mine is a long ways from town. Our guys would be on the picket line, and there was a whole bunch of people living in the plant; all the supervisors and scabs had to get out to vote to make sure the Conservatives won. So they brought the RCMP in by plane-load to make sure the way out was cleared, because we had a fairly heavy picket line. So the guys would be out there and upset a bus or something and cause a bit of trouble on the picket line, and the RCMP would throw them in the bus in handcuffs, take them into town, fingerprint and charge them. The MIOU had a bus on the other side of the police station, and they'd get back on the bus, drive back out to the plant, get involved in something else and get arrested again. Then - get put in the bus, back into town, printed and charged, and back into the union bus.

They did that all day. One guy got charged 7 times in the same day. Once the election was over, things got back to normal. The strike continued with no sign of a settlement. Then I got a personal call from Don Marchant, the president of MIOU who said, "I can't say this publicly, but is there any way you know anybody in Suncor?" I lied and said 'yes' and he said, "I can't say this publicly because we don't want you involved, but could you get involved?" He wanted to be the kingpin in getting a settlement, and he didn't want anybody to know that he couldn't do it himself and needed help. So I called a guy from the news media here and said, your brother is on the board of Sun Oil isn't he. I said, "you know me; is there any way I can get a number for him so I can call him about the strike in Ft. MacMurray?" He gave me the number and I phoned the kingpin in Toronto, told him who I was, and why I was calling. I said, "you don't know me, but I want you to check with these CEOs that I knew to see if I could be trusted. If they tell you that I can't be trusted, because this has got to be done in the greatest of secrecy, if I can't be trusted then don't bother calling me back. But you've got a serious situation here that's going to erupt into the 3rd World War if you don't get a settlement out there and the MIOU can't do it. I'm prepared to get involved."

He phoned me 2 days later and asked for a meeting in Toronto? He told me to go to Toronto, to the Four Seasons Hotel on the 23rd floor and knock on the door exactly on time, 7 o'clock in the morning. There's one guy in the room but there's 3 coffee cups. There's an adjoining room with the door this far open, so I knew I wasn't alone. Didn't bother me a damn bit. I laid out what the situation was, in my view, and who they were dealing with. I wasn't necessarily polite to the MacMurray Independent Oil Workers, because they didn't have a concept of what a settlement would be. I said, 'You guys have given so many things to keep the union out over the years, you've given crazy things. Your insanity went to the extent that if a job becomes redundant in your mine up there, and somebody wants to stay where they were at their rate of pay, they can do that. But if they choose not to do that, they drop down to a labourer's rate. But if they choose not to

drop down to a labourer's rate, they stay at their trade rate in a redundant job and play cribbage. Do you know that's in your collective agreement? You've got that kind of stupidity that you've got to get rid of. But you offered them so many things to keep them out of the union, and they're far higher paid and have got far better conditions than any other oil worker in Canada – all because you didn't want us. Now you're going to have to put up with us, because they're affiliated with us and I think I can keep the affiliation together, strike or no strike. So your only solution is to negotiate with me. You may not like it, but you're going to have to negotiate with me.'

He got back to me, and we started negotiations, Buck Philp and I, in the Towers next to the Chateau Lacombe in Edmonton. We got the essence of an agreement worked out, which took away an awful lot of those crazy fringe ideas that were in the agreement, that were not in any other collective agreement, and wouldn't have been in there if a union had been there. We wouldn't have been stupid enough to ask for them, because no company would've given them to us. But they gave them to them to keep the union out, and they were successful for damn near 20 years. But their costs were gone through the roof, and at that point there was a doubt as to whether it could continue. The price of oil wasn't high at that stage; we were in '86 and the price of oil wasn't too good. It was costing them about \$18 a barrel to pull a barrel of oil out, and they were getting \$14 for it. You can't stay in business long doing that. So I said, you're in danger of closing that mine down because you can't make a go of it. One of the reasons you can't make a go of it is you've kissed ass with the McMurray Independent Oil Workers for so many years that your costs of labour are out of this world, and you haven't got a concept of running a mine - you just don't know how to be management. You can't do it. You've failed in every aspect of being a business. I was brutal with them.

But we worked out the essence of a settlement here in Edmonton. I was occasionally speaking to Don Marchant, nothing in detail. We assigned Buck up to Ft. McMurray to live there to keep tabs on the situation. We had to have meetings, because they had roving gangs of people going around trying to convince them to go in to scab. The company was pulling out all the stops in trying to get them not to join the union, not settle an agreement, but to go back to work with an agreement, without a union. That was their number one priority. Go back to work; no union. We kept on top of it throughout the summer and fall of '86, and worked out all the details. I wasn't very popular up there, so I stayed away, and Buck, who was fairly popular handled it. We had to go in there and present our package to the membership and get them to back off some of those wonderful cushy commissions they had. By this time the MacMurray independent executive board was onboard.

They agreed, and wanted to get back to work, but there was one more trick that the company pulled, which I hadn't counted on. I thought we were dealing with a certain amount of honesty. In Ft. MacMurray, it looked like the workers were getting pissed off. They couldn't afford to strike, because they were making big money, big overtime. They didn't want to be on strike; it wasn't their idea, so they were talking about going back to work. There were emergency meetings all over the city, and we'd have to rush a team in there to convince them to stay out on strike until we got a negotiated settlement. One night I got a call from Buck who said that he just got word from a printing company that they were printing up a collective agreement without without any union name on it. I

could see that they intended to present the collective agreement that we have negotiated, and say, "Here it is; come back to work, here's the conditions under which you can work." It contained no wage increase; it was just a regular collective agreement, but they were going to present it as the conditions of work, and the workers were going to take it. I said, I'd better have a chat with the people in Toronto. I was in Ottawa on the weekend for a meeting of an international chemical conference of some kind.

(George Schultz was the guest speaker. I got a kick out of him and met him on a number of occasions. This is an aside, but it's so funny. About the Vietnam war, he said that they had finally solved the problem of the chemical plant that was poisoning Vietnam. He said, if you recall, what we did is we even found the plant on the border of Pakistan, where they were making these poisonous chemicals that they were dumping on Vietnam to kill the American soldiers. There was little dots on the leaves of the trees all over the forest. He says, we announced that we had not only found the chemical, but we found the plant where it was made. As you may know now, he says, the truth is that when bees start to navigate across the countryside, they travel by the billions. Not only that, when the defecate they all do it together. It makes little yellow spots on the leaves of the trees. We found out that's what it was, it was bee shit. But he says, we got a lot of international publicity out of saying that the communists were buying poison chemicals, and we even identified the plant. That's an aside.)

It was Sunday, when I phoned back to Ft. MacMurray to talk to the executive vice president. When I finally got hold of him. I said that I wanted to be at his board meeting on Wednesday in Toronto. He says, "well..." I told him that I knew what he was doing, that he was putting 3 alternatives. One is no union, everybody goes back to work. Alternative number two is MacMurray Independent Oil Workers much tamed from where they were with an agreement that we negotiated, you and I. The third alternative was to recognize the Energy and Chemical Workers Union and become legitimate. I wanted to tell the board what the alternatives were. I told him that I had \$10 million in my strike fund, and I'd contribute every single penny of that to making his life miserable over the next 5 years if we're not recognised as the union, because he'd been completely dishonest and was trying for alternative #1, with alternative #2 to sit back on. I said, "We're alternative #3, and we've got \$10 million to say it's the best alternative for you - not only for the workers up there, but for you. I told him he would save millions of dollars in labour relations alone in the first year, and that I wanted his board to hear it from me. So he said he would call me back. He called me back the next day and said it wouldn't be possible for me to be at the board meeting. I said, remember, you're going to the board meeting, and you can lay out the alternatives; 1, 2 and 3, and the only one Sun can accept is 3. You have to tell them if I'm not going to be allowed there, because they're going to hear it from me the next day anyway. I've got \$10 million to fight Sun in Ft. MacMurray if you decide to go with alternative 1 or 2.

On Wednesday night I got a phone call in Ottawa at the Hilton Hotel from his secretary in Ft. MacMurray. She said, "Hi Reg - and I said to myself, "Oh my God, things have changed, I've made it." She asked me to meet with Mr. 'So and So' at the Chateau Lacombe tomorrow morning at 7 o'clock, and I agreed. She said, "OK Reg, thanks." I had never been Reg to her in my life, so I phoned back and said, "I'm having a breakfast meeting tomorrow morning with the executive vice president, but here's the situation. I

can't make it public because I could be dead wrong, but it seems to me the way that tone of the conversation, and the fact he didn't call me and she did and she was so friendly, is that the board must have allowed it to go." So I walked into the hotel at 5 minutes to 7, and he was sitting at a table at Chateau Lacombe. He's about 6'8", a little bigger than me. I could tell from the second I walked in and when he stood up to shake hands with me that it was all over. He said, we have decided that we will make a formal offer to you if you will agree to have a vote on it next week. The offer will be as we have discussed - not negotiated, discussed. We got it through. The membership ratified it and a whole bunch of them were completely relieved that they now had somebody else to rely on; they didn't have to rely on Don Marchant, or on the company. From what I could tell, the relationship ever since just improved exponentially.

But that wasn't the end of the story. I think my promise to them was that, I would save them \$500,000 in the following year in labour relations issues, because they had 129 arbitration cases outstanding. I would save them \$500,000 in the next year, but I don't want the money, and you can't have it. You have to give it to the members, because they're getting no wage increase; it was not in any agreement. Don Marchant wouldn't have anything to do with it. Buck phoned me and said, Marchant won't go for that savings of \$500,000 going to the members. I said, "ok stroke it out. Take it out of the memorandum. I'm not going to argue with him over it." Buck took it out of the memorandum, and they got the thing ratified without it. I phoned up the company and said, we had to take it out of the memorandum for our own internal political reasons, but it's still there, right? Do you understand? It's still there, \$500,000 in the first year in labour relations savings, and the membership get it.

Going down the tube a bit, I went up there to talk about their 129 arbitration cases, and we removed 120 odd, just dropped them. They were not cases that should go to arbitration; they were stupid. All they were doing was hiring lawyers. Sheila Greckol, for one, said she just hated handling cases there, because frequently they were just complaints that somebody had, but they had a policy that everything went to arbitration,. We had I think 11 or 13 cases that they went back in, and when we met the company, they worked out a solution to those cases. We had 2 that went to arbitration and justice was there. We won one and lost one. The settlements came in October, and about March or April of next year, we did a joint labour management training school that I set up on how to be union in the management; how to work together. A whole host of things we did were to the company's benefit.

I got a call from the company saying, can you send up your accountant? I said, why? Well we want to do an accounting on this \$500,000 bullshit you talked about. I said, it's not a year yet. Well we want to keep on top of it. So I called Buck my accountant. I didn't have an accountant, so I called Buck an accountant and sent him in. He phoned me to say that the company hasn't saved \$500,000, and I replied that the the lying bastards were lying through their teeth. I should've known they were going to get me - but Buck says, "Oh shut up; they saved \$950,000, and it's for only 6 months, and they've got a check for \$950 for every employee here. They want your authority to send the checks out." I said, "Holy shit. We said we'd save them \$500,000, but they saved a million, and now they're prepared to keep a verbal agreement. Things are looking up in this world. So I told them to send out the cheques. Don Marchant, in his wisdom sent out a letter charging that tthis

was not according to labour relations, and don't cash the cheques. I sent a letter saying, contrary to what Don thinks, I think you'd better cash the cheque before the company changes its mind. They all cashed their cheques.

There were other things besides arbitration, but that was the big one. It was clearly evident to me that I could save the money on arbitration, but as well, improve other things in terms of day to day relationships - health and safety and other things that they would save money on. They saved millions and millions and millions.

The Trouble with Syncrude

Syncrude was another story. Imperial Oil set the tone for Syncrude. For example, I was refused entry to the site of the Duke of Edinburgh study conference in '86 because I was a union guy. I was up there interviewing people for the Duke of Edinburgh study conference, and we just about had a wildcat strike of the conference touring committee because Imperial Oil refused my entrance. They finally succeeded during the night to allow me to go in, but they gave me a special van so I wouldn't be visible to the employees of Syncrude. Syncrude was run by Imperial Oil, and they have this fundamental opposition to unions. As Jack Armstrong the CEO of Imperial Oil used to say, "We love unions as long as they're somebody else's." He thought workers should have it, but they didn't need it at Imperial Oil; that's the kind of situation we had there. The original Syncrude plant cost \$2.3 billion to build, but now Suncor is making more money than Syncrude, because Suncor has a better operation; it has the union.

We tried an arrangement with the building trades, and the Steelworkers. We tried to do it on our own. We tried to set up a company council, so we could affiliate it later and do it that way, but nothing worked. This was partly due to the fact that they were being paid more than the Suncor workers, and partly because they didn't like the Suncor workers, because they didn't like Don Marchant. He was Mr. Union in Ft. MacMurray in those years. However, Don left at the end of the strike and was no longer an influence. But they still saw the number of strikes that the independent union had against Suncor, and then the big strike in '86, and decided that they couldn't afford to go on strike. In those years, they were making \$60-70,000 a year, and a strike was expensive. Conditions weren't that bad and wages were good. It's still been impossible to organize them. You can buy a union off if you have enough money, and they had enough money, and they bought the employees off from joining the union. Always did.

Then there were Alberta's labour laws. I charged the Prime Minister, the Premier, the ministers of energy, all the Imperial Oil management and all the partners with unfair labour practices. They put out gross bulletins about how the union would be the destruction and the death knell of the oil industry in Alberta. I thought it was grossly unfair, so I charged them all. I remember Akroyd there acting on behalf of the premier that day. I'm there, and there's 17 lawyers for the 17 companies that I've charged. We'd gone through a couple of days of hearings, and I didn't have much evidence except these bulletins. I was pretty shaky. But I had these 17 lawyers this one day. Akroyd stands up at the back of the hall and says, Mr. Basken, is it your intention to throw the Premier in jail today? I said, no I don't think I can do that. Good, he says, I've been paid for the day, I can go golfing. Anyway, my case was thrown out by the Labour Board.

Health and safety issues have been raised in the refineries. Those guys deal with all the carcinogens; they make carcinogens for society, but in the '60s they didn't know it. In the '60s, we had already tied the environment with health and safety, and were telling people who lived next to oil refineries that if benzene escapes it was going to kill them. Benzene is a highly volatile substance, it's very sweet and gives you a nice high. It's lovely to smell, but it causes cancer, and so do 101 other things. But their method of controlling a benzene spill was to sweep it into the sewer that went into the North Saskatchewan River. We made an issue of a number of those things and finally negotiated the first union represented health and safety committees. We did it through our national bargaining program in the oil industry. We named representatives to health and safety committees in the '60s, before health and safety ever became an issue with the majority of the people that were negotiating in Canada. It was far ahead of what the OCAW was doing in the US. They started in the early '70s in hiring health and safety professionals and wrote a book, *Peril on the Job*. However, the essence and guts of the book Mazzochi was writing was based on ideas from attending meetings in Canada. They interviewed a whole bunch of people here in regards to health and safety and where it should be and where it was. Tony Mazzochi just died last year. His first book, *Peril on the Job*, contains a number of references to chemical plants in Edmonton and Alberta.

Organizing in the oilfields, where people used to be the highest paid in the industry, and are now the lowest, was impossible. We could sign up 100 rigs that worked for one company, and the day we made the application to the labour board, the rigs would be closed down. Under the law here, if we organized one rig, the Labour Board would say we had to organize all of the rigs for that company. If we organized all the rigs, the labour board would say we had to organize them one at a time. So we were damned if we did and damned if we didn't. In the late '50s or maybe early '60s, we organized all the rig workers, and they just shut the rigs down. The guys said, "Oh my God you can't join a union, they shut the rig down." So we had no contact anymore. You can't organize people when their jobs are at stake, and so we never did crack the drillers. On the other hand, the gas plants – and there's hundreds of gas plants in Alberta; there's 170 or something gas plants in Alberta. Most of them are automatic, run from a central location, but there's a number with 10 or 12 employees, and others with 100 employees. The first one we organized was Shell in Pincher Creek. They hated us with a passion. It was awful, it was agony trying to negotiate an agreement with the industry. It didn't matter what company it was; their only issue was how do to get rid of the union. You faced that every single day.

Stu Sullivan organized the Pincher Creek plant in 1969 I think, and I ended up doing the negotiations. Negotiations were just about impossible. You felt, and all of your committee felt under threats all the time. They couldn't get paid for negotiating; the union had to pay them. Getting a leave of absence to come to bargaining meetings meant weeks in advance that you had to apply. The gas industry, which was the same as the oil industry, just didn't want the union in the gas plants; they were going to keep them out. They had to prevent us from getting agreements. We had one at Birstall at Pacific Petroleums and eventually got one at Pincher Creek, which was a little different, because they were in an independent union. So they had some structure there, which saved our lives, because if we'd have gone in there with no structure, they'd have killed us. And they were local people, they weren't seen as outsiders.

Willy the Local President kept the thing together. We were doing this at the same time as they were having investigations into the sour gas systems down there. We ended up taking a public position that the gas industry was not telling the public the truth. I remember speaking up and the membership phoning me to say that I was hurting our company, going to shut their plant down. They threatened to withdraw from your union if this kept up. I went to special union meetings to tell them that they had a public responsibility, that if it's harming the public that much what's it doing to you? I guess I convinced them, because they stayed in the union. They worked there, and so a cleanup will not only be good for their families who live at home in Pincher Creek, but also be good for good because you'll live longer.

Environmentalism in the Union

I have to admit that this industry has made substantial gains in their environmental protection. They do it because of cost. When the price of sulphur goes sky high, they can get 99.99% of the sulphur out of the gas, but when the price is low, they throw it out the stack. In the '60s, gas was an unwanted thing at oil wells, and they'd burn it off. On a cloudy evening in 1963, I remember flying over southern Regina, maybe coming home from Labour College. There was a low cloud over southern Saskatchewan, and it was orange, the whole of southern Saskatchewan was orange. They didn't have the number of gas and oil wells that Alberta had, but that were burning off natural gas; hundreds of trillions of cubic feet of natural gas, because it was thought to be a waste product. Then they said that it was impossible to clean that up. There's ethane, methane, propane, pentane, hexane, heptane, octane in natural gas, and if we can pull those things out, we make plastics and fertilizer, use butane for this and that. Holy schmoly, this is more profitable than the oil industry is, and once they found that out, they saved the gas.

My Union's environmental position came about because there were an awful lot of people raising concerns about cattle, women, environmental issues that couldn't be proven - or at least we didn't have enough money to prove them. We were all convinced they were correct, and the oil industry was nervous, because they saw a huge expansion of concern. The oil industry was so nervous that I think they said to the government that they would allow a health, safety and environment position. They would allow it, because if it became such a political issue they could get a rotten NDP government, they may do something really bad and clean up the environment really well - then they'd be in trouble financially. So they negotiated their way into some changes in occupational health and safety, because publicly they can't win the argument - they couldn't win as long as there are cattle dying and pregnancies being aborted. They just don't want bad publicity. They thought, "The easiest way for us to go into a place and set up a gas plant is if we don't have bad publicity. We get bad publicity, Carolyn doesn't exist. We get bad publicity and all of these other gas plant communities wouldn't allow it." So the oil industry, I think, went to the government and said, don't be too harsh on us, but we'll cry and scream that you're being too harsh, but here's what we can tolerate. I think that's the way it turned out.

It was difficult to get a union member on the committee, however, because the new Act didn't require it to be a union member. We had worked it around so that the only places in the province that had joint health and safety committees were union places. Non-union places didn't have a method of selection. This is why the oil industry fought so hard; they

didn't want any structure in their plants, because if they had a structure, it would look too much like a union. If they had no structure, they didn't have to have an occupational health and safety committee. We tried to make something out of it, but it didn't go far, because the industry, the little local plants, started paying attention to health and safety issues. The head office didn't know much of what they were doing, but they started to pay attention, because we were starting to make a pretty hefty noise that if you want a health and safety committee in your plant, you'd better join the union; that's the only way you can get it. Our success was our own death, because they got their health and safety committees and said, "screw the union; we don't need it now. We've got our money, we've got our health and safety."

Breaking with the International

There was a growing nationalism in the trade union movement in Canada, an anti-Americanism actually. Industry and governments played it against us all the time. There was the French language question. The Americans never could understand a word in French and weren't about to. There was no way you could make your union newspaper bilingual or even have a convention that was bilingual; none of that could occur. So it was becoming increasingly difficult, and with the arguments that were then taking place in Canada, it was obvious that there was going to be bigger unions in Canada, and that there wouldn't be bigger unions until there was an independence from the US. So we started years earlier, in the late '70s, getting our own things on this and that and doing our own thing here and there, as a very gradual thing, to be more cognizant of what Canadians needed, without offending the international union. Because, the international union, to be kind to it, was kind to us, good to us. For the most part, we wouldn't have been able to exist, because we felt a certain amount of security by being able to thumb our nose to the oil industry and know that OCAW would be supporting us if we had a strike or a problem. So it gave us a certain independence in our formative years, and without it, we likely wouldn't have been successful in organizing any of the oil industry. So I give them full credit for that.

However, with all of the developments in Canada at the time, it seemed to us there was a way of bringing your own philosophy home, keeping it at home, and still having a connection with the international union. So we worked on that throughout the first 3 conventions of the '80s, with the OCAW, working it out in terms of every time we talked to them, we'd talk about a new relationship, a certain independence in Canada where we elected our own national director - which would be over their dead bodies in some respects, because the other 8 in the US were appointed. We started to put our own newspaper out, and always had our own bargaining program. We decided to have an issue every time that was different than the American issues, just to show our differences. And yet we wanted that connection, because we respected the way they had helped us out. We always got help, but they never came here, other than Grossburn coming to Regina and saying, "We're going to have nuclear weapons on Canadian soil", and us saying "no". We disagreed and they didn't kick us out of the union. He wasn't very happy with me, he didn't like my resolution, but I got elected President of the district council, so he had to deal with me. This was before I was on staff of the union. Then I came on staff and he had to hire me, same guy, although he did put me down a bit when I applied for leave of absence to run for election in Saskatchewan in the 1964 provincial election.

When I applied for the leave of absence, he wrote me back asking if I wanted to be a politician or a union rep – to make up my mind. I chose the union representative's job.

When we went to the 1982 convention, no '81, we were OCAW members. While there, we set the framework for discussions about independence. Then in '83, we went to the international convention in Miami or Denver with the idea of changing the constitution to give us the authority to set up an independent organization which would still have ties with the international union. We would attend joint conventions and have joint executive board meetings. We would have a number of things we'd work together on, but we'd be a Canadian union. It caused an awful lot of concern in the international union as they didn't want us to go. They were caught between a rock and a hard place. Some of them wanted to kick us out because we were a pain in the ass. Others didn't want us to go because they wanted to be an international union, like all the other international unions.

This was before all of the other breakaways, there were few breakaways at that time. The paper workers just broke away, and lost all their money. We weren't going that route, because we were going to maintain everything. We weren't going to break away; we were going to be a negotiated separation with organic ties with the international. I remember going to the convention., at which this was the major subject. I was chosen by Canadian delegates to be the spokesperson on behalf of Canada. We had always been highly respected by delegates at the international convention. We gave out Canadian pins, and everybody looked forward to hearing the Canadians. Tommy Douglas came down and spoke. I'll never forget him speaking at a convention in 1963, at which he gave a barn burner. When the speech was almost finished, Tommy was doing a fine job. This black fellow from Florida was sitting across the table from me. He looked across and said, "He's talking socialism!" and I said, "You're right again". Tommy spoke to our convention in Toronto in the early '70s, and David Lewis also did; we were an integral part of the political involvement of the OCAW because, much more than most of the Americans, we agreed with the political arm or the political action statement. They were always shocked at how well the NDP was doing in Canada and were flabbergasted that they could see this kind of government in Canada, but they couldn't see it in the US. To many of them, we were just 'down and out commies' that couldn't be trusted. There was that dichotomy that they had over many things.

The debate at that convention really got out of hand. There were line-ups at the microphones, with delegates talking about what we were doing and what kind of rotten bastards we were, all of us Canadians. So we made an agreement with the executive board that they would have one speaker and we would have one speaker. Then they would ask questions which I would answer. So we went through the whole thing for hours and hours, and I kept answering these questions. Finally the vote was taken, and it passed by a hair-thin majority. We were all elated, but people came by and threw pins and papers at us because we had sold them out, pulled away. We'd pulled out of the international union, which wasn't our intent, wasn't our desire, and wasn't even a fact at that point, because we still had a joint constitution. They didn't understand completely where we were going, and they didn't trust us either. So over the next year, through joint executive board meetings, we worked out a separation of the two unions, with them helping us and paying our wages for the first 3 months. They should get no end of credit for their wisdom in making sure that we had a negotiated separation, not a breakaway like

the auto workers and the paper workers and all the others who just went on an anti-American approach and broke away. We didn't do that.

Mergers and a New Union

We'd been having discussions with the Canadian Chemical workers union, over the dead bodies of the American section of the union, the International Chemical Workers Union. In the International Chemical Workers, an old criminal was president of the organization. He fired all his staff, and they quickly set up the Canadian Chemical Workers Union so that we could deal with them on an independent basis, because they had nowhere else to go to. They didn't have a 'pot to piss in or a window to throw it out'. Bob Stewart became the president and couldn't be American, so he didn't want to call himself the President, so he called himself the national director. We negotiated with their executive over a period of a year to set up a single constitution with the name Energy and Chemical Workers Union in 1982.

We picked new locals up in Alberta; a couple of chemical plants and Northwest Nitro in Medicine Hat. We picked up the Sherrit Gordon mines in Ft. Saskatchewan, a CIL plant in Calgary and a Domtar plant here and there. We picked up a few members in Alberta, but mostly in Ontario and Quebec. We had about 16,000 members of our own and they had about 4,000, so we didn't pick up a great number of members, but it was essential in our minds to consolidate the chemical industry. The steelworkers had a lot of members in chemical, and they wanted to be the chemical workers union. The auto workers wanted to be everybody's union, so we wanted to do some things on our own.

It was obvious with all of the things that were going on in Canada, however, that we could not continue as a small union. We wanted to see legitimate mergers, not takeovers. I remember having lunch with Bob White one time, when he talked to me about joining the Autoworkers union. I made some statements that we weren't joining anybody, but if the constitutions were to our liking, we were open to mergers, not takeovers. The Steelworkers and a number of other unions approached us and wanted us to join them. We felt that we'd better do something useful and had tried to merge with the paper workers union years before in the late '70s and early '80s. Our cultures were just so different that there wasn't a chance of it happening, however. We thought they'd change, but I'm not sure that's true. I say that with a great deal more knowledge now than I had in 1978 when I was leading the merger discussions with them.

I became president of the Energy and Chemical Workers in '84. Neil Reimer had some discussions with the Steelworkers and several other unions prior to my taking over, but after '84, it was me having the discussions with guys like Bob White and a few others. However, Neil had been the prime mover with Jim, the president of the Canadian Paperworkers Union. One day, we were sitting in a CLC executive council meeting and I jokingly said to the Paperworkers and Communication Workers, "You know, you guys could join us, because we don't have to break away from the international union. Don Holder, the president of the Paperworkers Union, said that maybe we should talk about that. Fred Pomeroy was president of the communication workers union. The 3 of us decided we'd have a chat about it. So we went and had a chat about it. I had this stupid opinion. At that time we thought we were the smallest union in the three, and I thought that wouldn't make a difference. As the merger occurred, however, it made a hell of a

difference. But we weren't the smallest union; the Communication Workers were smaller than us, but they counted every part time worker and their method of calculation was different than ours. We only counted the full time equivalents, and they counted every part-timer that ever worked an hour a month as a member. We ended up thinking they had all these members, but when the payday money started coming into the international union after the merger, it was clear that they didn't count only full time equivalents as we did. They counted all the part timers. So we ended up being the second largest union in the merger.

It made a substantial difference. All the deals that were established were made between Fred Pomeroy and Don Holder as to succession and staffing, operations and stuff, and they left us out. I always think we made a mistake. I think we made it too clearly known that we wanted a merger, and they took advantage of us. Me, I let it happen, so I'm responsible. I'm not happy about being responsible for it. I was there, I was the head of the Union, and we had the opportunity to build a much better organization.