

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Peggy Morton

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

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Her background

My name's Peggy Morton. I was born in Toronto, grew up in Toronto. It's one of those questions people always ask you, where did you get these political ideas? I didn't come from a political family. But I did come from a family that, my father especially, always encouraged his girls to argue out their positions and to stick by them. He'd often play devil's advocate with us. Sometimes you didn't even know what he thought. He'd always try to get you to argue out and fight for what you stood for. I think that enabled me to look more into what was going on in society, and later on to defend the stand that I took.

That was the thing from my early upbringing. I remember when I was in high school I didn't know anybody who was involved in these things. I'd see pictures in the newspaper of demonstrations against nuclear weapons and thought, gee I'd like to go to that. It just seemed a necessity. One thing you find in people who become political activists is irrespective of the class background of their family, because I don't come from a working class family, they're families who had a sense of social responsibility. So the idea that you had a responsibility broader than yourself and your family, and that you had a responsibility to the society itself, was really the other fundamental part. So when you put those two things together, one is that you have to investigate the world around you and see. Starting with your own experience, but going from there. If you have that kind of thinking to question what you're being told, then you find...if we just give an example from today, many people found in the last two years through thinking through their position on the question of the war in Iraq, then people found their own experience and what they were being told were two different things. That from their own direct experience they could surmise that what they were being told about this war was not what was really going on, and that there's a whole level of disinformation. So that opened me up.

Questioning the military-industrial system

I went to university when I was only 17, which is very young for Ontario where most people are about 19. The first year I got involved in some anti-war protests. I think it was the Pearson election. I went to Queen's University in Kingston. It was the year of the election of Pearson, and Diefenbaker and the whole issue of nuclear weapons. This was one of the first times in the post-war period where the whole question of US putting pressure on Canada to be part of the US military strategy, and unseating Diefenbaker because he would not go along. That experience also opened up for the youth the question of what role we want Canada to play in the world. We started questioning the whole conception that Canada is such a great peacemaker, the extent to which Canada is doing the dirty work or yeoman's service for the Americans, and its whole role in the Anglo-American imperialist scheme of the world. The civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam were big catalysts for the youth of my generation. I find it interesting that a lot of us from that period are still active. Many people across the country are still active, whether it's in the labor movement or political movement or many other things. We were galvanized by that. At Queens, it was quite unprecedented in those days, it was when the salma Alabama was taking place. We decided we should go to Ottawa and protest at the American embassy. First time I'd ever seen an American embassy. So we phoned everybody in the queen's phonebook and booked two buses. We filled two buses of people and took them off to Ottawa to protest at the American embassy.

The Vietnam War really started everyone thinking. Because we had to really ask ourselves why the Americans were doing what they were doing. If you think back to this period, this was the period in which the Americans wanted an excuse, Johnson wanted an excuse. 1964 was the Gulf of Tonkin. We had to look on the map, we didn't know where Vietnam was. It was that kind of world where we were very naïve in many ways. The Cold War had completely shut down political discussion in the country. It was only starting to really open up again. People had been under tremendous pressure not to speak openly in criticism of imperialism, of capitalism. So in our generation everything was opening up, and it was almost like we had to find out for ourselves all over again those things which people had figured out in the '30s and '40s. Then there was a whole period of disconnect there. We thought we were discovering these things for the first time, and only later did we understand that we were part of historical movement. In that period we had to come to grips with the question of why are the Americans in Vietnam. They said that the north Vietnamese had attacked them in the Gulf of Tonkin. It turned out this was another piece of disinformation, that this attack had never taken place. It was a complete concoction.

Those years were very important in shaping my political philosophy. One of the things that everybody had to tackle was what stand are you going to take. Was the stand that we're against violence on all sides, that we neither support the Americans nor the Vietnamese? I was one of those people who said that's not a position we can take. People have a fundamental right to their independence, to defend themselves against aggression. The fundamental thing about the right to be is to have your own nation, to have your own self determination and independence, for people to decide for themselves what government they want to have and how they want to live. In some ways that question got settled for a lot of people, through really big battles that took place at that time.

I was in Kingston in that early period, and it was a pretty sleepy place, all things considered. Maybe because of that we did some good stuff. This was all unheard of there, but we said, we have to go and talk to people. So let's have our newsletter and we'll start talking to people, and we'll organize debates. By the end of the '60s it was mass action. As well as that, I worked with the drafter sister and we did some interesting things. I'll tell you one of my funny stories. There was a man in Toronto who used to make draft cards. The draft cards would be provided to people, because in those days if you applied for your citizenship from outside Canada, then you got extra points. So the thing was to provide people with a safe way to be able to go back into the States and come back into Canada. You needed a draft card that gave you an exemption. There was a man who printed them. We discovered that the bridge at the 1000 Islands is a very long bridge and you can turn around in the middle. So you never really have to go to the United States to re-enter Canada. We discovered that. There was a lot of debate at that time. We would characterize it today between single issue politics and anti-imperialist politics. The single issue politics said our aim is to stop this war, and that's our only aim. We don't want to discuss anything that will detract from that. The anti-imperialist stand was that this whole question of war is not going to be settled until imperialism is finished. So we have to take an anti-imperialist stand, we have to stand against. Then that was the next controversy. Is the Soviet Union a factor for peace? At this time we're talking about the period in the '60s when Khrushchev has come to power. Is the Soviet Union a factor for peace? Or is it in fact a country that is socialist in words but imperialist in deeds. The inundation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 really settled that question for a lot of people as well, so people saw this was a country which was not respecting the right of people to their independence and to determine their own futures. It was not acceptable for one country to impose its will on another country by force.

Late years of the Cold War

In those years you have the collusion and contention of the two super powers. So really they're colluding in the sense that each recognizes that it's not in their interests to have the people of the world develop their politics independent of super power politics. So the collusion is against the national liberation and revolutionary struggles of the people, and the contention is over how big each sphere of influence is going to be. There's a certain amount of that sphere of influence which is recognized, and then you have contention. The Americans thought Latin and Central America was their sphere of influence, and the Cubans had no bloody business having their revolution, because it belonged to the US. So you have a blockade which has gone on to this day because of that. So you had that bipolar division of the world, whereas today we have a unipolar world. After the fall of the Soviet Union we have George Bush declaring that it's the new world order, and the new world order is that the Americans will dictate to everybody. There's been a lot of shifts, but the consistent politics from that period has been the anti-imperialist politics.

I think it's different today than it was then. Then there was a lot more conflict between the anti-imperialists and the people who really just wanted to deal with the single issue of peace. I as a youth felt that we were being told by the peace movement that we had no right to express ourselves. It's a different situation. We were all-out supporters of victory for the national liberation front in Vietnam. We felt that the people of Vietnam had every right to run their own country, and we wanted victory of that. There was a definite

opposition that we should not have these slogans and we should only speak of peace. We should not speak against US imperialism, that you couldn't use the word imperialism, that it's going to alienate people. You can't talk about the world, because to talk about the world is going to alienate people. As a youth, one always has trouble with these things. One of the features of youth is that you want to find out. So that really went against that spirit that one has to go where the truth leads you. You can't be afraid of it. You can't make up your mind ahead of time that this is what I'm going to think, then if the facts don't substantiate it then I don't want to talk about the facts. You have to go where the facts lead. So today things are really quite different. In the movement against the war in Iraq, there was much more acceptance that we may all come here from different perspectives. Some people are pacifists, etc. But we share the conviction that the Americans should not be invading Iraq, that this is an illegal occupation and we want it to end. I think we have matured since that time. There was much more acceptance, as there was in the whole anti-globalization movement in Quebec and so on where people would say, we understand that people have different tactics. People have different approaches, but we're all part of one movement.

The anti-globalization movement

Yes, I was in Quebec City. We're jumping a lot of years, but sure. My union local decided that we were going to send two people as our stand against the FTAA, the free trade agreement of the Americas. We decided we would do that, because we know the FTAA is a further extension of the free trade agreement of NAFTA which, amongst other things, was that this will impact on the question of private and public health care in Canada. So to use it was very important that as healthcare workers we send a delegation there. So two of us went on behalf of our local. We did participate in the union march, but we also participated in the long march of the youth. That was very exciting. This is another good example of direct experience versus disinformation. I could tell another story about that later. We called people from the march on our cell phone, because we called our executive members at work and said, spread the word, this is what's happening, we're now on the march. What they thought is that the whole of Quebec City was on fire, that anarchists were running rampant, that there was violence. We literally didn't see any, except on the TV. For all we know, the only violence was that the police deliberately set some fires in order to create this atmosphere. We did see any organized by the demonstrators.

So we started off on this long march with the youth that started at Laval University and was a seven hour march. We get to a certain point and here are all the Darth Vaders, quite a long way from the hill. There they were with their water cannons, their pepper spray, their teargas. All of a sudden we're being tear-gassed, pepper sprayed, everything all at once. They did not want this march to go any farther because it was starting to approach the fence. You have to appreciate that they have criminalized and militarized Quebec City. They have a fence around four kilometers of Quebec City. The whole of the old town is this fence, in the middle of which is the meeting. The stand of the youth in Quebec had been that they're going to challenge this militarization. They're not simply going to accept that you can militarize your city any time you want. You can't even go into your own home without a pass. They called shaking a fence 'violence'. There's people shaking the fence. This is not violence, hockey games are way more violent than

this. That was our experience. So when we came back, we explained to people what was going on. They are criminalizing dissent in our country. You've got huge numbers of people and polls have been taken. Canadians were asked by the Canadian Labor Congress, do you think we should have a referendum on NAFTA. Something like 80 or 90% of Canadians said yes, we should be able to decide this. So instead of that you have the criminalization of those who are dissenting from this absolutely undemocratic meeting of leaders who are going to impose this on Canadians without Canadians having any say. So this really showed in a nutshell how things are developing in Canada and what the problems are that we face.

The peace movement

My second year of university I became the president of the student union for peace action, or maybe it was still CUCND there. Nobody else would do it. I said ok, I'll do it. Then that organization became the Student Union for Peace Action. Everyone's studying that these days, there's three or four people writing books on it. It's one of these organizations that was very short lived. I remember its founding conferences, one of the biggest disappointments of my life. We'd saved our pennies, we were not wealthy students. We took the train to Regina, then spent two days debating what is the definition of a student. Because those people who weren't students wanted to be part of the organization, so they had to have the definition of a student. I was so disappointed because I'd been so excited. It was my first time meeting people from all across the country, and we were going to talk about what stand we were going to take on all these questions. Many of us had been reading and talking and discussing. There was none of this, just all this maneuvering for position. It was so disappointing to people like myself.

So that organization didn't last long. After I finished university I worked in the office of the Student Union for Peace Action for a year. Then it morphed into the New Left Committee, which sort of rose and fell without ever doing anything, and disappeared. But in the process of all this, some of the women had started to have discussions amongst themselves. Four of us wrote a paper called Sisters, Brothers, Lovers, Listen. I think that was in about 1967. That paper sparked a lot of discussion. If you read it today it's a pretty funny paper. But it sparked a lot of discussion and debate. We were people who just assumed we were in this movement that was about freedom and liberation and justice and rights, and that we were going to be treated with freedom and justice and rights. Then we found out that we weren't, that we were expected to do all the grunt work in the organization. All the leaders with big egos would do their thing, and we would make sure that everything got done and they would take all the glory. I don't think we were looking for glory, but we just wanted some recognition.

The women's movement

I remember one day thinking, "Gee I said that an hour ago and nobody listened. Now some guy said it and everybody's talking about it." Then I started noticing that's what happens every time a woman speaks. We started talking and discussion and out of it came the Women's Liberation Movement in Toronto. We formed that in 1968. It was very exciting, because for the first time women were really discussing. Everybody was there. All the different conceptions and ideas were there. Those of us who were absolutely convinced that you can't have freedom under capitalism, and that you can't have

socialism without women playing the major role, and those who thought men were the enemy, etc. Everybody was there, and it was a very lively time. We did some single issue things. The interesting thing about those was we actually got out on the streets and started talking to ordinary women. We were organizing for the abortion campaign. We went to Ottawa and actually a group of women chained themselves to the seats. It's the first time in history that the debate in parliament has actually ever been stopped by anything. So this group of women, all dressed up very nicely with their heels and makeup, put our long hair up in buns and off we went, got some passes from some friendly MPs. We went into the parliament and chained ourselves to the seats and started shouting and carrying on.

It took them about an hour to get us all out of there. They had to stop the debate. So we did some lively things in those days. But we also talked to a lot of women. We just discovered that the working women of the country had so much to say and so many issues on their minds. This conception that the student youth had, that they were the ones who were thinking this way but most women were happy with their lot in life, was just blown to bits. That was one of the experiences that led me where I went. As life went on, I was one of the women. Quite a few women said it's the working class who's going to change things, so we're going to organize in the working class. So the first step is to ourselves become workers. So I never took up any kind of a career, even though I had gone to university and got a degree. I went to work as a worker.

Communist Part of Canada Marxist-Leninist (CPC-ML)

Before I seriously took up any kind of work in the working class, I joined the Communist Party of Canada Marxists Leninists in 1971. CPC-ML was founded in 1970 as a party. It came out of an organization called the Internationalists, which was founded at UBC in 1963. It came into being under the conditions of the '60s where the old communist party had really become a party that didn't do its own thinking. We're very much living in the Cold War here. The pressure on everybody is don't do your own thinking. Either accept the American way or you accept the Soviet way. This is the period in which Khrushchev has come to power. Everything is changing in the Soviet Union. Under the guise of criticizing Stalin for being undemocratic and so forth, in fact the Soviet Union is consolidating power in the hands of a new elite. So far from solving the problems left over from the post war period and actually tackling that problem of democracy and how the people can directly govern themselves, far from it they went the other way. Internally you had a Soviet Union that was not any longer building socialism, in which the people had less and less role to play in determining their society, and which internationally was becoming an imperialist power. Under those conditions, in many countries and Canada you had the formation of new parties.

Our Party started with the youth and students. I wasn't around in those days, but they thought in those days that from the working class would come a contingent which would give rise to a new party, and this was the youth and student wing. But that didn't happen. Eventually in the course of time from '63 to '70, the Internationalists took up building a disciplined organization on a very new basis, which is that it's conception right from the beginning. It's important to go into this in terms of what the problems we face in today's society are. Everybody has the responsibility to participate in making decisions and in carrying them out, and that's the basis of the organization. So right from the beginning it tries to go against this conception of leaders and followers, that you have leaders who

decide everything and followers who carry it out. Also against the idea that no one has any responsibility. That you can come and participate. Here we are at a labor convention having this discussion. We know it's one of the biggest problems we face today, that all kinds of things are going to be passed here. People are going to put their hands up. At the end of the day, do they take responsibility to make sure those things are implemented? We needed an organization of a new type, and that was the basis of CPCML.

The founder and leader of CPCML was Hardial Bains. He was the one who founded the Internationalists in 1963. Unfortunately he died in 1997 at a very early age. That was a very tragic experience for us. But there are many comrades who've been around since day one and who are still around. Sandra Smith, who's our current leader, she joined the Internationalists in 1968. She's one of the people who came right from the beginning of the organization. And there are many others.

Revolutionary work

We didn't see them [the Trotskyites] as a revolutionary force at all. At that period of time they didn't even think there was any prospects for communism. They didn't speak openly about communism. We just didn't take them seriously as a force. We were trying to work out all these questions of imperialism and so on. We weren't interested in somebody who was just following. If I want to give you a personal example of this, during Expo '67 we formed a mime troupe. We went and performed at the youth day. It was a neat little mime play in which the Vietnamese people defeated the American aggressors. We performed it all along the way. In Oshawa the auto workers helped us, in Kingston and Cornwall, all kinds of places all along the way. After that somebody invited me to a camp and William Cashton was speaking there, who was the leader of the communist party at the time. So I went to listen. It was just words. I had tried to read some Lenin and Marx in university. We wanted to deal with burning questions facing society. But it was just all this language being used to bludgeon you. It no longer had any meaning in terms of analyzing what was going on in society and solving the problems that people are facing. What is theory if it can't guide you? If it just becomes this dead thing that you hit people over the head with. So we didn't look to that at all for a solution. Peace activists are not necessarily anti-imperialists.

Working in a trade union

It was a conscious decision on my part to go and work in a place with a union. I worked in a few before I managed to get through my probation period and stay long enough that I became a fixture. But it was a conscious decision on our part. We started that work, analyzing the working class movement back in the early '70s. I was just re-reading some of that the other day. It's even timely today. Part of the work in '72 was to look at all the changes that were taking place in the labor law, and how the labor law was being changed at that time, and how all those changes were taking place, to further consolidate the post war arrangements in which the state has more and more control over the unions and how they operate. That was the NDP labor code, which was opposed by the labor movement in BC and by quite a strong section of the NDP caucus. We had done a lot of work to analyze that to show what's going on in society, that the independent action of the working class, the job of this is to eliminate that independent action of the working class. Our joining the trade unions and becoming part of the trade unions, first of all it

was a question of proletarianizing ourselves in the sense that we came from the youth and student movement. We had to go and learn by having this direct experience, what the conditions of life are for the workers in these different sectors.

So we began there. You go there, you're a person with opinions and views - this is one of the reasons I kept getting fired. I became a shop steward within four days of working at the hospital. I became a hospital worker. I had a short foray into the meatpacking industry, where I got laid off on orders from above, without my foreman having any idea why I was being laid off. That was Canada Packers. It seemed to have been a mutual understanding between the union and the management that they'd be smart to get rid of me. I had three days to go before my probationary period was over. And I was silly enough to go to a labour school. Everyone was alerted that I was there, and Monday morning, I lost my job. Then I finally ended up at the Misericordia Hospital, where I went to work in 1978. I worked there from then until last year when I took early retirement so I could be a full time political activist. I was president of the union there for 22 years. I was President, but I had a full time job the entire time. These small locals can't afford to have a full-time president. For 25 years I worked there, and for 22 of them I was union president.

Deteriorating conditions of work

There are two differences today from then. The first is that conditions are much more brutal than they were in terms of the work level, the stress on people, the pressure. Think about the cuts that everyone went through for 10 years, and what that meant in terms of the workloads of the people who were left. But the other thing is that the workers are much more ready to stand up for themselves today. I do not agree with people who think that this working class today is pacifist. I don't agree with that at all.

First of all, people do stand up. After all those years, you wish you could start all over again with that hindsight and wealth of experience, not just of myself but of the whole class and party. You wish you could start all over again. Because one of the things that's really become clear is that the unions as they exist today de-politicize people. If we go back to what I was talking about in terms of post-war arrangements, when workers and unions agreed in the post-war period to the labor piece, the unions won labor recognition. But there was a price to pay. One of the prices that's expressed in a lot of things, is that the workers become less and less in charge of their own organization. Partly because everything has become very legal and complicated, and you can't figure out what your collective agreement means without having somebody who's educated in this, if not a lawyer. So it's not so straightforward. People have to go to somebody else to find out what their rights are. They're not so straightforward. That's one aspect of it.

Then all of the avenues of taking direct action have been replaced. For example, the workers are standing around and the boss is screaming at somebody. This kind of trade unionism says you file a grievance, you call the steward. Why should workers stand there and call the steward and passively wait for the steward to come? Everyone should say, I'm not working. Get out of here, stop harassing this person, go back into your office, you come out and apologize. Up until then there's not going to be a single piece of work done here. Then you're going to see an end to this. But instead of that, people go through endless grievances. They can't sleep for weeks. They're so stressed they have to go on

stress leave. A nightmare is created for people, they drag these things through the courts. So this replacement of the workers themselves being responsible as a collective for the well being of all. We still have the slogans, all for one and one for all. But we have to put the life back into them, we have to make them alive again. That was one of the things we learned, is the passivity of the workers is a direct result of the fact that you have a union which is organized, which says the remedy for something is to go to your steward, go to your president, file a grievance. So you've got a lineup of people a mile long outside your door waiting for you to fix their problems. Of course you as an individual don't have any more power than they do. Yes, you have the authority of your office so you can say certain things without getting fired. You can threaten to take legal action. They have to hear your grievances. But you as an individual in the end just don't have any more, it's the collected united which has the power. So workers have been de-politicized in this whole process. That's one of the reasons for the passivity. The other thing we discovered, we're all creatures of habit. We found out hospital workers, what is the life of a hospital worker? Some of them have two jobs. You say, why don't you come to the union meeting? It's because they're going to their other job because you can't live on one job. Or their husband works opposite shifts so they can look after their kids. Or they work the early shift so they can be there and their grandchildren are going to come to them for after school care. So one of the things we started doing was organizing noon hour pickets, so we had all our pickets at noon hour. Everyone came. People used to say to us, our people won't come out and demonstrate. We said, sure they will, they're no different than ours. All we have to do is walk around the building, our stewards will just walk around and tell everybody tomorrow at noon, and everybody will be there.

One of the interesting things every trade unionist could learn from is how they're organizing at Stelco. Stelco was faced with one of these situations in Canada which exposes everything. Here's this company, under bankruptcy protection, supposedly facing insolvency, while it is making record profits. There's not a single monopoly media or anyone who comments that there's anything strange about the fact that you can be under bankruptcy protection, you're going to restructure your company, your obligations to the active and retired steelworkers what's under attack, especially the pensions. And once you go under bankruptcy protection everything is under attack – all your collective agreement, all your rights. And yet you're making record profits. It's an example of how the state is used to ensure monopoly right prevails. But one thing the workers there have done is when the new president Ralph Gersenburger came in, one of the things he instituted was a weekly meeting. He said as long as one worker comes, we'll have a weekly Thursday meeting. We all know that in a monthly meeting of the union, you have all your business you have to conduct. You have to account for how you spent the money, elect delegates, etc. There's so little time for people to go into anything. So the weekly meetings have become a forum where all the information is brought forward and shared with everybody.

Everybody can be part of the decision making. This is one of the things which is a real problem in the union movement today, which is this conception that the union should not share all the information with the workers, that everything shouldn't be on the table - that the workers shouldn't be the decision makers, that all the decisions get made behind closed doors. Then the conclusions are presented to the workers. So you come and present to the workers that this is what you should do. But why you should do it, what are

the conditions, what are the alternatives, this discussion doesn't take place, and so workers don't own the decision. Sometimes things are very straightforward. You're presented with a contract which everyone knows is a big concession. Now the discussion is going to be, what are our alternatives?

Hospital cutbacks

When we went through this in the 1990's, in my opinion the union movement here utterly failed to address this question. I can give you this one example. We got a leaflet from our union, so I looked at it. My first reaction was to rip it up but I said, that's wrong. So I took it to the meeting. I said, we received this, I'm going to read it. I want to have a discussion on whether we should distribute it. So pretty soon we had workers saying, they want us to cut our own throats? The line that was being given was in the face of 30% concessions, that they should not cut our jobs, that they should find some other place to cut the money. Anybody who works in a hospital knows that if you're going to cut 30% out of the budget, you're going to cut jobs. Where else are you going to take the money? Are you going to stop putting bandages on peoples' wounds? It's absurd. What it really is is a way of stopping the discussion. Our party in that period said, let's fight for a moratorium on the debt payments as a way of starting that discussion and putting forward an alternative. If the problem is that these money lenders are demanding that they be paid, and the price of that is that the workers are going to be attacked, and the services which the people need are going to be attacked, then let's decide, is this what we agree with? Who has first claim? We said the workers have first claim on the wealth that's produced. We as hospital workers, our wages are paid from that production, which is from the working class itself. It's not the government's money, it's not the monopoly's money. It's the money which comes from the production of the workers themselves. So who should have first claim? Shouldn't the services which people need come first? Shouldn't the claim of the workers on society, shouldn't those two things have first place, and not the money lenders? So we said let's put a moratorium on the debt payment.

If the unions had taken that stand, then the whole discussion would've broken out in society, that we don't accept that everything in this society has to be done to serve the monopolies. This society has to function to look after the well being of its members. But instead of that, a whole mentality was developed that there's no alternative. We all know there's a problem. Even what that problem was wasn't really discussed. As the years went on people started discussing that problem. They said, ok the government had a debt because it gave all this money to the forest companies, it changed the royalty arrangements so it wasn't getting money from oil anymore because it was giving it away. That's why they had a problem. But at the time when it really mattered for the workers to have an argument, people need to feel confident in their own positions. Like we say, the workers are always looking for an argument. Give us an argument. Give us confidence in our stand. Our instinct tells us that this is what's good for this society. Here we are, we're hospital workers, we know that the patients need these services. We know the kind of things that the government says are ludicrous. The liberals actually made a statement, the case that's in front of the supreme court now. They made a statement that the demand for healthcare is limitless. So if you ask a healthcare worker what they think about this, they'll say it's ridiculous. Nobody's coming in to get their hip fixed if their hip isn't broken. So what does it mean that it's limitless? It means that they simply don't recognize

that society has a responsibility to look after the needs of the people. We faced a very terrible situation at that time. And we have not recovered from it yet. Because it led to a situation of workers being very dissatisfied with their unions, feeling that their unions hadn't fought for them. I'm not saying that there wasn't a lot of fear at that time, but how do people overcome fear without having the confidence of the alternative, of having confidence that their stand is just?

The minute you start making concessions to this incessant demand of monopoly right, then people lose confidence in themselves. Maybe we do have to make these concessions. So of course there was fear. But instead of collectively overcoming that so that we would work it out... Then everyone was faced with this threat of contracting out. If the unions had said, ok the first place that's contracted out, every union pledges that we're going to put all our resources there, that those workers are going to be organized the next day. And we're declaring war on this contracting out. We're not going to say that we're going to give you a cut in pay to keep you from contracting us out, because this has been going on for 10 years and they still want more. It will never stop. Furthermore, they weren't contracting out in the first place to save money. It was to provide these corporations with a place where they could make profits. That failure to really put everything on the table, you see this in labor conventions. Even the rules of order we use. Yesterday there was a discussion, should we have ? Roberts rules? It's clear that the whole thing is wrong. We have to work out our own new rules. We ought to have an ability to come together to sum up our experience and, on the basis of that, to have our policy. That's not to say that the leadership shouldn't put anything forward. But when it's put forward without people participating in that, and then everyone's weight is behind it, then you have a situation like we had yesterday in the convention hall, where all kinds of things are being passed. There's no debate and discussion on them. Everyone has the feeling that it doesn't really matter, that it's not going to give rise to anything anyway, it's just a resolution. So peoples' unity in action isn't there.

Evolution in thinking

If we could go back 22 years, I think we evolved over time from thinking that our job was to go and convince people to be militant and fight. In the end to say this is the situation we face, and let's put it on the table. The problem my local always faced was it was always the last one to agree. But because we had a structure where everyone could do their own thing, then again and again we'd be put in a position of fighting by ourselves. We did have a very positive experience, but maybe we can save that for the next tape.

(to be continued)