

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Name of interviewee: Neil Reimer
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Index: Regina Coop Refinery Organized
Coming to Alberta
John L. Lewis
Formation of the Congress of Industrial Workers (CIO)
Walter Ruther
Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour
AFL and Socreds work together
Carl Berg
Sweetheart agreements
Unions and the CIA
Labour Progressive Party
ICFTU
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian Congress of Labour
Teamsters break away
Formation of NDP in Alberta
Back to the Bible Hour
Prairie Bible Institute
Ken Pugh
Tar Sands
Communist scare
Moral Rearmament
Canadian Religion Labour Organization
Packinghouse Workers
Elmer Roper
The preferential ballot
Nuclear bombs
Public ownership of resources
Petrochemical industry
International Chemical Workers
Making the atomic bomb
In-house unions
Celanese
Pension plans
Seniors

My name is Neil Reimer. I live in Edmonton. I came here from Regina after leaving university. I had moved to Regina to work for the world's first cooperative refinery. We helped build many cooperative expressions, from stores to refineries to funeral homes. Then the question was asked, well what about labour? We organized the plant and it was the first oil workers plant to be organized in the modern era. There were times under the Wobblies years ago that they joined a union, but they were all defeated. I was sent to Edmonton when I first became an international representative of the Oil Workers International Union. I didn't know Alberta. I didn't know that there had been about six staff people here before me who had all given up and said it's impossible to organize in Alberta. But I was sent here anyway. We came here. In many respects it looked to me like we were coming to a new country from Saskatchewan, a different country entirely. It certainly was an entirely different environment. Politically, in Saskatchewan it's a wide open, or at least it was, a wide open society. On the farm where I was raised, farmers would get together. One might be Liberal, CCF, Labour Progressive. They all knew their politics, but they all stayed friends and they were all open about the debates. They'd have debates around the stove in the wintertime. Here social credit had almost all the seats, and I couldn't find anybody that voted for them. I thought we would have discussion as to what magic they had. That was different. We didn't have a single member, so it was a real beginning in many ways, in a strange country. One of the things that I noticed was the car insurance at the time. I think in Saskatchewan I paid \$21 for my license plates and my insurance. Here I had to buy my license plates, and the insurance was \$120 a year. I thought to myself, gosh those people in Saskatchewan don't know how good they have it, and they'll be in power forever as long as they understand that they're ahead of the game.

Q. What plant did you first organize?

That was an interesting one. I opened up an office at my own expense, where I went every Saturday. In those days the people came downtown to shop on Saturday. The men would drive their wives to the stores. It might take all morning, so many of them came up to my office and we would talk union. One day this fellow said, how come you're not asking us to join the union? I said, you're all mature people, 21 and over. When you want to join a union, you'll be asking me. So this one fellow came up, his name was Nelson Wigger. He was a prospector from Northwest Territories. But he was also a licensed powerhouse engineer. He was working at McGavins. He says, we want to have a union. I said, let's call a meeting. Oh no, he says, we don't need a meeting. Come in the back door. So he introduced me to all these tradesmen, skilled people who kept the plant going. The Bakery and Confectionery Workers Union represented everybody else, and they'd excluded these. I couldn't figure that out. Why would they exclude them? It turned out that John Howard had placed them there. They all had records of some kind. They looked at me as if, well here's just another guy trying to do us some good. So we got certified. I asked them to be members of a committee. No they didn't want to be members of a committee. I said, that's not the way I operate. I'm not going to go and meet the boss by myself to negotiate for you. I want some of you present. So two of them decided they would come with me. I never realized how important that was. It only took us a couple hours to negotiate a whole new agreement, because the employer was afraid of them. But they really became very loyal people. For years and years after, even after the plant

closed and they left, they never failed to call me, wishing me a merry Christmas or something like that.

However, organizing was different than that most times. I learned that there was an undertaking between the Manning government and the industry that they would try to keep our union out. Certainly I wouldn't say that we were welcome by open arms. When a lot of our neighbours found out that I was a union representative, I was looked upon as the guy that came here to kill the goose that laid the golden egg. There was a real difference in attitude towards a person like myself. It was a learning experience for me.

Q. What was the CIO?

It was a breakaway from craft unionism.

The Congress of Industrial Organization, generally referred to as the CIO in the United States, but it came here in Canada, the CIO was such a catchy term. But here in Canada another congress was formed, the Canadian Congress of Labour. The reason John L. Lewis and the miners pulled out, and the oil workers, steel workers and auto workers, pulled out of the American Federation of Labor, because they wanted to divide up the number of bargaining units in one plant. They wanted to have an industrial union. So John L. Lewis didn't get his way. Of course, you know him, if he didn't get his way, he did something about it. So the six unions pulled out of the AFL, American Federation of Labor, and formed the CIO. It was much more progressive, much more left wing than the American Federation of Labor, who basically had a policy of giving us a good day's pay for a good day's work. Whereas John L. Lewis, Walter Ruth or Jack Knight and those people, they felt that they had to take social action in order to realize the aspirations of

working people and the ordinary citizen. So in Canada, Hepburn was the premier in Ontario, he said that never will they recognize the CIO in any of the plants. So consequently we had to fight our way in. We were branded all kinds of names. Irresponsible, Commie, you name it, that's what we were. A lot of the legislation that was passed here as a result was that they figured that people who were full time representatives had too much influence. So there was legislation passed giving the final autonomy to local unions, which they had anyway by our constitution. But these were the common perceptions that they would have better industrial relations if somehow or other they could put a wedge between the representative and the rank and file member. Here in Alberta, the Alberta Federation of Labour had a dominant influence with the government. We were sort of on the outside. We formed the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour of industrial unions, which essentially was the packinghouse workers and the mine workers. The first convention I attended of the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour, I had a voice now with one local union formed. There were 35 of us, I was the 35th person. We met in the basement of the old Mandarin café that was on Jasper Avenue. Today, after the mergers and whatnot, it's much larger. In spite of adversity, the labour movement has grown, our union has been established. But it was a long uphill fight.

One of the things that I noticed, when the Alberta Federation of Labour had their annual convention. Everybody came from the labour department. They closed the labour department down, and I would recall that we had the Masonic Temple where there was a balcony. They would sit in that front row. Ken Pugh was the deputy minister of labour. If

I remember correctly, they even had him on the resolutions committee of the federation. At least he was an advisor and had his say.

When the banquet was held of the merger of the Federation of Labour of the two organizations, Donald McDonald, who was the secretary treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress that just formed, was in town. He wasn't invited to be the guest speaker, it was Ernest Manning. I got acquainted with Muriel and her fur coat at the convention. I spoke the next day, I took an opportunity to criticize the speech that Mr. Manning had made. The chairman was so shocked that at 20 minutes to 12 he stopped the convention to have a draw. People said to me later on, you can't talk that way in Alberta. I said, why not? They won't do you any favors. I said, I'm not getting any anyway. There was that close relationship. If there was a competition, they'd get the break. Not only that, Carl Berg had a bunch of agreements that we call sweetheart agreements. He would get recognition from the employer without the consent of the employees, and he said you've got a union. Building Products was one of them, and I think the Husky Oil Refinery was another one of that kind of thing. They were still certified. Later on you had expressions about all this union support. You had meetings and what not. That was to frustrate us. As long as they had the say, it was relatively easy for them to organize a union. Also of course there was considerable red baiting at the time. Mr. Manning encouraged that. When we formed the New Democratic Party, he would always refer to the communist nature of the organization. I remember I was a candidate in Edson. I was in a small town where I had a meeting, and the Liberals came and they shouted "communist, communist" at the back of the hall. This was in the era of the McCarthyism, and it prevailed, the attitude that communism was a very dirty word. That's the labels that they tried to put on

us. I don't know how many innocent people have been injured by that whole deal. A whole lot of them. I knew it was a false report because I never had any inkling or any desire to join the communist party, or had ever been asked to join. The local union that I had, I think they had the right to have their own political persuasion. But my experience has been in the labour movement that people who are primarily political of any stripe have their first loyalty to the political party and second to the labour movement. I felt it should be the reverse, that the working people should have a voice that the political party should listen to. That's been my philosophy. In the United States our international union, and most of the international unions in the United States cooperated initially with the CIA in the establishment of international labour organizations. Later on they formed the AIFLD, which is American Industrial Federation of Labour Department, which gave it the greater respectability than just working with the CIA. But there's no question about it that there was a great deal of red baiting going on.

Q. What result did they hope to achieve by all their red baiting?

Silencing them and discrediting them. It was really very serious, and people don't understand the history of it. During the war we made common cause with Joe Stalin. The Russian people, particularly through the Ukraine, paid a tremendous price, 20 million men were killed. It's really where Hitler lost the war, in the final analysis. He couldn't match the west anymore after the losses that he suffered in Stalingrad and through there. There was a lot of sympathy in Canada for Russia and the people. With it, of course, came the Labour Progressive Party, who also grew and had a lot of sympathy. Not only that, the history of the Communist Party was such that during the depression here, they

heard that there was a country where workers' voices counted. So there was a sympathy established there as well. When there was a march, like the single guys who marched from Vancouver to Regina and on to Ottawa, they were supported by the Communist Party. Even though they were against the march initially themselves. But these young guys decided they were going to go. The police disrupted them in Regina. Those young guys were all red baited, these are a bunch of reds, these are a bunch of communists. They just wanted a job. They could've been anybody's boy. They were mostly single and young. One thing the Communist Party did in that march was to have some discipline and told the young fellows to behave themselves, and they did. But they were all branded with one brush as to being communist or led by a bunch of communists. They did that on their own, when they marched. I know a little bit about that because my brother got \$10 a month when he was single to work for another farmer. The farmer would get \$10 a month from the government to keep my brother. So it wasn't much of a living that these young fellows had. They wanted more than \$10. They really wanted to work and have a job and have an education, training, and all the things we have. The biggest contribution to ending all that was the war in 1939. There was this sympathy that had been established with the massive killings in the war and during the '30s, that I think the McCarthy era wanted to kill, and were successful in doing that. That doesn't mean to say that communism didn't change and there's no question that the human rights were violated very seriously under Stalin. It set their own movement back a great deal. That's part of the history that isn't understood. There was no labour legislation until PC1003 was passed in the mid-'40s. That was the communist party supported the labour movement in their strikes. They played a positive role in the minds of many people. I remember working in

the refinery. The fellows came back and all the fellows that came back identified with the CIO. They said, this is what we thought we were fighting for. The employers did not want to recognize unions. During the war there were a lot of strikes for recognition. Not wages or anything, just for recognition. McKenzie King had to pass legislation, which is called PC1003, that would certify unions under certain conditions, but also strikes would be illegal during the term of an agreement.

Q. Neil, I understand you were once fired by your union. What was behind that?

I was being drafted to become international president. I didn't want the job really. Not that that wasn't a big challenge, I would've loved that. But I just didn't want to become an American citizen. My daughter Jan and son Greg were just young, and I wanted them to grow up in Canada, not in the United States. Wonderful people there, but we were primarily Canadian. We immigrated to Canada, and I know the price you pay growing up in new cultures, and there are different cultures in the United States and Canada. We are different in many ways. So I didn't want that. But there was a big meeting and represented the majority of delegates to that convention. I had taken a position that was opposed to the administration. The rank and file people supported me and wanted me to be president. I had no desire for that. But I had some well wishers and people who said, be careful what you say over the telephone. I couldn't understand what they meant. They said, well you're bugged. I saw all kinds of different people in the lobby of the hotel. The people who phoned me who were working for the international encouraged me to accept were later fired or disciplined in a severe way. There was no campaign, this was a spontaneous thing. I had just finished the political campaign here in Alberta on May 23rd

in 1963. Even if I'd have wanted to, I wouldn't have had any time for campaigning for the international union. You were being monitored, you were being followed, there's no question about it. And here in Canada too. The RCMP, the Canadian government didn't go as far as the United States in outlawing the Communist Party. But they said they were going to make book on everybody who's a leader, and that includes leadership in the trade union movement. They had a security force that made book on almost any leader of any influence that was left of center in Canada. This is all part of a form of intimidation. I never really felt that Canada was in any danger of becoming a communist state at any time at all. Nevertheless, these are the kind of things that went on. Including the labour movement, they had in constitutions, many statements with respect to their political beliefs. For example, if you advocated the violent overthrow of government, you couldn't be a member of the Canadian Labour Congress. Why do you need it in a constitution for? It's something that is natural. Nobody was advocating a revolution or violent overthrow of the government. But it referred particularly to the Communist Party. This was their Marxist training or whatever that they were addressing. It had disappeared but it had its influences all over. It had its influence with the ICFTU. For a period of time the ICFTU, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Brussels were primarily to arrest the growth of communism. Not that they shouldn't have done that, but that should not be the prime purpose of any organization. They should be doing what they plan to accomplish in terms of having a better quality of life for all the people in the world that are starving.

Q. How and why was the CLC formed?

It turned out that everybody realized that organizing after the war was much more difficult than organizing during the war. We'd come out of the '30s and there was a pent up need. All the organizers did was they called a meeting at the gates of the plant, made a speech, and people would join the union. So once that initial thrust had been satisfied, organizing became a more difficult task. Because there was an ideological difference between the Trades and Labour Congress, the AFL as it was known in Canada, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, the organizations raided one another. So we spent a lot of time and energy having internal fights. Leadership recognized that there's no future in this. So they decided that they would form the Canadian Labour Congress. So the Canadian Congress of Labour and the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress formed the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956. I was on the first executive board, and I was also on the executive board of the Canadian Congress of Labour that participated in this merger. What the difficulty was was this whole question of political action. The Trades and Labour Congress did not want to endorse the CCF. Claud Jonoin, who was their president, said we'll have to form a new political expression. That's what brought the two organizations together. The raiding and jurisdiction became a very important aspect of the merger. There were severe penalties for raiding one another. So that by and large was arrested. It was never completely stopped, but it was not the issue that it was before. The union that broke away because they thought the mergers were going to create unhappy people were the Teamsters. They thought they would pick up this stuff that fell by the wayside, and they would grow that way. But other than that, there was fairly good adherence to the policy of no raiding. Here in Alberta, the Canadian Labour Congress, or the Canadian Congress of Labour and the Trades and Labour Congress had provincial

federations that they chartered. Here in Alberta it was the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour for industrial unions, and the Alberta Federation of Labour for the others. So it followed that the labour councils and the federation were encouraged to merge as well. And they did here. It was surprisingly easy. The workers themselves wanted it. They didn't like their union spending their money fighting one another. So it wasn't that difficult to achieve, once the main bodies had merged. The Alberta Federation of Labour had more members than the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour, and they got the first president. But the other organization was very adequately represented. They had some very good people over the years, like Roy Jamha, Hampson, and whatnot. Gene Mitchell from our organization in Medicine Hat. They became important in the organization. The CSA however eventually withdrew, even though in any political campaigns the public sector was excluded in our policies. Manning was unhappy with that and engineered behind the scenes the withdrawal of CSA from the federation.

Q. To what extent was the labour movement involved in political action those days?

At that particular point, it wasn't until the formation of the NDP that the labour movement here became active politically. I became its first president. We decided not to have a leader the first year. In the formation of the party and later on at the next convention where they elected a leader, which I was weak enough not to resist, so I was their first leader. The labour movement, including the building trades, I had their full support. There was no reservation at all. It was the labour movement in Alberta that built the NDP. The CCF in this province never did endorse the formation of the NDP. It was a new party. We had formed a bunch of new party clubs. We had over 50 of them in the

province. They were all over the political spectrum, from ministers, churches, technologists. The job was to merge those 50 groups into a common expression, which was the main challenge that I had to phase together with organizing every constituency. We didn't have an constituency organizations at all. So the labour movement supported it 100%. The New Democratic Party in my view would've never got off the ground without their support.

Manning had the Back to the Bible Hour, and he professed that that was separate from the social credit party. How he could separate himself that way was always interesting to me. I was interested in just what the man was like. I listened to his Back to the Bible Hour to see exactly what he was saying. He talked a lot about the Revelation and the hordes coming from the North. He never did mention the social credit party. But I wanted to put it to a test. I asked my secretaries to subscribe to some of these speeches that he had made, because for \$5 you could get a copy of them. So they did. They all, without exception, a few weeks later the party would call and ask them if they'd be interested in joining the Social Credit Party. So there clearly was a link. Not that it surprised me. It would be almost unnatural not to have a link. But that's what they professed. Then of course he had the Prairie Bible Institute at Three Hills that had a choir that followed him when he spoke at meetings. I know a bit about them, because my two nephews were sent there by their stepfather after my brother died. The only outside person that would come in and talk to them was Manning. There's no question that indirectly or directly his Back to the Bible Hour and the bible belt and whatnot, the theory was that he's a man of the

cloth, he will not lie to us, he will tell the truth. My observations were that he was as much a politician as anyone else.

Manning used the communist scare quite frequently in his political life. He refrained from using particular names of parties in his sermons. But inferentially it was all there, the way I interpreted his comments. He had complete control of the government. I don't know if he appointed all of them, but he appointed the main deputy ministers. Some of them would quite openly brag to me that they report directly to Mr. Manning and not to the minister that they were deputy for. So he had complete control of the government and anything that they did. They formed a very big basic religious decision in the Tar Sands. The Pugh family and Sun Oil got the lucrative choice of land, as to who was going to be developing the Tar Sands. The Pugh family had no background in the Tar Sands, had made no contribution up there at all. They're the ones, because of their approach of religion and politics. Their meeting was in Jasper and it was announced that the Pugh family got the award of developing the Tar Sands.

Q. Carl Berg is a name I've often heard, sometimes with respect, sometimes otherwise.

What is your recollection of his leadership here in Alberta?

During the '20s he organized some general strikes. He was considered a very progressive person. But it seemed to me the man changed. He became an advocate of Moral Rearmament as were some of his staff as well. Moral Rearmament was headquartered out of Geneva. It's religiously inclined. They felt a change of morality was necessary in order for labour to exist and demand greater cooperation with the employer. In many respects

the Canadian Religion Labour Organization is the kind of thing that they were advocating at that time. It sounded very good. They had a good sales pitch and some very key people were nibbling at it. But when they really examined it, they backed off. That happened before my time here in Edmonton. But I picked up a collective agreement and they had a Labourers' Union for the refinery. I said to them, how come you guys would join a Labourers Union? They said, Carl Berg got us this agreement. They didn't know any better. The Building Products here in Edmonton, I tried to organize them. A lot of the people there were immigrants. I would talk to them about what life was like for workers. They'd go to the plant and quit, so I wasn't getting anywhere. But Carl got an agreement with the employer, and they were told that they had a union. They were sweetheart deals. Particularly the Husky Refinery, didn't come anywhere close to the kind of wages that were paid in the industry.

Q. The packinghouse workers union was an important factor in labour's history for many years in Alberta. What influence did they have on the labour movement and on yourself when that union was in its prime?

They were certainly important to me. The packinghouse workers were a great union here in Edmonton, as I got to know them. When I came here they welcomed me with open arms, and they did everything they could to help me. I tried to help them as well. They had national bargaining. In many respects, they had the same problem as I would see for the oil workers. They had Swifts plants all over the country. BA or Imperial had refineries all over the country. So their structure lent itself to the same thing. I studied their operations very closely. They had a form of national bargaining, even though the

recognized regional rates to some extent. When they bargained, they bargained nationally. Norm Ritchie, Jack Hampson were very aware and did an excellent job. Canada Packers was always the plant that people talked to, and that's where a lot of the leadership came from. Alec Gorek was almost a full time president there for years and years. He should've moved up but he never wanted anything other than being president of the local. I knew him very well and they helped me a lot. When it came to electing a regional representative on the executive of congress, they voted for me. They worked to help me. . .

Fray Dowling was the Canadian director of the packinghouse workers. He supported the CCF. They had an affiliation with the CCF. I personally have never been an advocate of affiliation, even though many of our locals did. We always encouraged them first of all to sell a lot of individual memberships before they would affiliate. But there's no question the leadership supported the CCF and did a fairly good job. They had some political success here because we had a preferential ballot. Elmer Roper and a number of them got elected on the basis of the preferential ballot. They all got defeated when that preferential ballot was discontinued. Then there were no CCF at all.

The preferential ballot, first of all they counted the firsts. If they didn't get 50%, then the number 2's would be counted. And so on down the line until somebody got past the 50% mark.

No, you marked your ballot that way, the first ballot. It encouraged a broader representation in the house. It got more liberals and CCFers into the house. Manning saw that and decided that wasn't good for democracy.

Elmer Roper came out of labour. He was a printer. He established his own business, Commercial Printers. He became leader of the CCF, got elected. They didn't have to work very hard on preferential ballots for a person like him who had a good name. He served as an MLA for a number of years. When I came I asked him what things were like in the house. He explained to me that we didn't have a very good administration in his view, because he said a grade 9 student can run it with the money we've got. He gave me an example of a highway that had been built and disintegrated within a year. Nothing was made of it. They just got the same contractor to build it over again. He says, anybody can do those kind of things if you've got enough money. However, I must say this in favor of the Manning government, that they never ran a deficit. The deficit that we got was the doing of the conservative party after they got elected. There wasn't a deficit when they took over. What we've seen is an ebb and tide of the conservative party in the whole financing of our province. Just as an aside, I thought I'd throw that in. Elmer then was defeated and we had the Hawrelak years. Elmer Roper was squeaky clean. He was almost drafted by the citizens of Edmonton to become their mayor. He cleaned house and was a good mayor for two terms.

Q. What about the CCF?

The Alberta CCF didn't pay much attention to organization, but paid a lot of attention to ideological arguments. They felt that my arrival, that I paid too much attention to organization. Well if you haven't got any constituencies I don't know how the hell you're going to get elected. But anyway, that's between you and them. They saw their role of peace in the world. They were very much against the nuclear bombs and they felt it threatened the safety of the whole world. I give them full marks that they fought that battle the best they could. So that really meant a different relationship with other political parties. If you wanted to have peace with Russia primarily because they were the other nuclear power and they didn't want to have a war break out where there was a contest to see who could throw more nuclear bombs, which potentially could wipe out mankind. So they were devoted to that mainly. The provincial party acted more like a national party than being involved just locally. They were not happy of backing off from that role. They were sincere in what they were trying to do, but I think their energies were misplaced. Elmer Roper and a representative from Calgary did a great service for the people of Alberta. The Manning government never thought of this checkerboard arrangement. They brought that home from the opposition. They weren't prepared to give, just because the oil industry had found something in one section, to give all the land. They could have every other quarter, and the other was then reserved for crown sales. This is a real achievement that Elmer Roper and his supporters in the house gave to Alberta.

Q. Wasn't preferential balloting a good thing?

I never looked at it that way. I don't think it was much difference than strategic voting.

Q. Why did the coal mines close?

When we discovered natural gas and oil, that put the pressure on why should we use coal? I remember very well that even in our house in Regina we had to bring in coal ever fall. It ruined the basement. For the trucks to come in and dump the coal so we could have a furnace that we'd stoke with coal. It was work to keep your house warm all winter. On the farm it was even more difficult. At that time a lot of the farm homes wouldn't have a basement that was made of cement. They would have pails of coal beside a stove, and feed it all night so the house could stay warm. Then of course the steam engine, they would be much better off with a diesel or low grade fuel. We provided low grade fuel for them at the time, because we didn't have the crackers in the refineries. There was a lot of pressure, and history will show that most of the coal mines shut down. We had an abundance of natural gas. We couldn't get rid of the stuff. People are happy to strike natural gas. But at that time it was considered a nuisance for people when they were drilling for oil and found natural gas. But the closure of the coal mines meant we were also losing tradesmen, skilled people. Rightfully so, the coalminers union went to the government and said, what are you going to do with our people? Are you just going to throw them on an unemployment heap? So representations were made and assurances given to the coalminers. For their cooperation the oil industry would hire as many as they could in terms of refineries. In some respects it was an idle promise, except for those people who had specific skills. Boiler house engineers, there was a shortage of them, they got jobs. But operation of mining itself and running a refinery or drilling an oil well are entirely different. There's no resemblance whatsoever. The oil industry couldn't just go and pick up some coalminers to run a refinery. They just didn't have the skills, and

unfortunately, in some cases wouldn't have had the education to learn the chemical processes that were necessary. However, usually I would know initially as an organizer that people working in the boiler house and steam end of it had union experience. Those are the ones I would contact.

Q. At one time there was quite a campaign for public ownership of oil and gas. What happened to that idea?

Later on that was the case. But I think there was a plebiscite that the liberals had succeeded in terms of public ownership for power. It lost only very narrowly. It seems in the whole provincial vote there was only 500 votes different. Considering that did not have the endorsement of the government of the day and strong advocacy of Trans Alta or Calgary Power at that time, it could've gone either way. It was before my time, but I understand it. And of course there's been public ownership that the people have endorsed the treasury branches. There was the AGT. So there were a lot of government operations that the Conservatives got rid of, and not the Social Credit. The Social Credit, in their original thrust, really endorsed state medicine. They were going to do away with the banks, they had the 50 capitalists that they were going to straighten out. The government was going to give everybody \$25 a month dividend. They were very radical. But it was all government activity that they were selling. Even though they changed, they had difficulty in going all the way in saying there shouldn't be any public ownership. The position that I took with respect to the Tar Sands is I translated the wealth of the Tar Sands with the conservative estimate potential, what it meant to every individual. People . . . had \$1 million worth of investment. It ought to be publicly developed for your

interests. Of course that isn't being done, all that extra money is going to be siphoned off to other countries. Sure it gives us employment. But those are huge reserves that we have there. There's an advantage in being there, because you don't have to go look for the oil. You don't have to drill for it, you don't have to explore. You know it's there, it's a question of separating the sand from the oil. But they don't have the other expenses. Innovation is a second nature in the oil and petrochemical industry. That's how they got started, that's why they exist. So it's a culture in there, almost with every employee, and the employers. There's been a productivity increase in the oil industry of 7% a year since 1947. We used to have 17 refineries in Saskatchewan, a dozen here in Alberta. Now for the whole prairie provinces we've got 3. It's a tremendous technological achievement, but the number of people that are employed in the Tar Sands will gradually shrink because of this technology. It's going to be bigger than a normal refinery because you have to remove the overburden. But it will continue to decrease, because that's the nature of the industry, they're very innovative.

Q. What about the petrochemical industry?

A good example of that is the closure of Celanese. At that time the oil industry built petrochemical plants where the oil was. They built in Saudi Arabia, they built here in Alberta. Because they never thought that these countries would give up the export of feed stocks. For a period of time we didn't. For example, the Empress plant, all the gas that goes east goes through one more scrubbing in Empress. The reason it's built on the border is because they wanted to build it in Regina, further down where more gas had been. The provincial government at that time took the position we won't guarantee you that we

won't upstream you. So they built it as far down the line as they could in Alberta in order to do that. It's a huge gas plant. I was shocked when I first saw the big valves that they had. You need a motor to open a valve. But that's what they do. There's a compromise, people live in Saskatchewan and the plant is in Alberta. In the Celanese case, they're one of the largest gas consumer in Canada. The price of gas has gone up considerably, and we're exporting feed stocks, so they're not competitive. We have a number of advantages. Our advantage is that the oil and the gas are here. The disadvantage of Alberta and Saskatchewan is that we're not located on any body of water where we can transport. We have to transport to Prince Rupert or Vancouver or the Lake Head in order to get our products to other countries. In addition to that, we have cold winters. The cost of building a plant here is higher because you have to insulate and protect against freezeups of water and condensate. So we have those disadvantages. When we give up our advantages and only keep the disadvantages, we can't export. We can't export our winters very well. Then it makes the plants less competitive. The other fact in Canada is that we're only 10% of the population of the US. In order to be worldwide competitive, you have to have world scale plants. Canada would only require 10% of the capacity, and the rest of the 80% that becomes profitable is 70% export. In the US, with 10 times the population we have, they can fill that 80% with domestic consumption, and only have that 10% at the top that they have to screw up to supply all of Canada. There's all these factors that have to be taken into account. This government here in Alberta has taken away Celanese's advantages and kept all the disadvantages, and with it go about 1000 jobs.

Q. What was the role of the International Chemical Workers Union?

The International Chemical Workers were one of the unions in the American Federation of Labor that was established. They in effect had jurisdiction, except for skilled people like tradesmen, pipe fitters, officially they made application for all of them and got away with it here or there. But officially that was the way it was established. They were also established as an anti-communist union. The chemical workers had jurisdiction in the US in making of the atomic bomb. Evidence shows that they were very concerned after the war was over. Before that it didn't matter. After the war was over, of having their secrets stolen and given to other countries, particularly Russia. My experience showed me, however, that's not the way the communist party operated. It isn't that they wouldn't have received those documents if they were available. But they generally had infiltrated management. Some of the management that were sympathetic to the Soviet Union acted as real union haters, took on a personality of the industry where they didn't want unions. But it never really come to the fore. I think if there were leaks, that's where the leaks took place. Yes the workers are in bargaining units, do operate these operations. But generally speaking, once it's in the public domain, it really can't be considered secret anymore. They use technology that's already been proven and already there. The advanced technology is really in the hands of management. Anybody who wanted to benefit from espionage, that's where they would logically infiltrate.

It was known very well that Celanese was not a pro union operation. They weren't organized anywhere in the world. They came here and hired Brown & Root to construct their plant, and they weren't going to have any collective bargaining at all. There was a big fight between the building trades and Brown & Root. Finally Brown & Root had to

back off. But in the meantime, after a couple years of that, it had escalated the cost of the plant enormously. We had to deal with that in collective bargaining, because they said, we underestimated the cost of the plant. The company then formed in-house organization. It didn't work, because it's so large people didn't get to know one another. Many products are being made. It covers a section of land and is spread out. They didn't have the skill to communicate with one another in that plant. Then there was the yarn, which had a different work ethic than a petrochemical plant as such. Because it's more of an assembly line production. There's a different culture develops in those. The International Chemical Workers made inroads there. I had the inroads in the other parts of the plant, because many people that worked for the BA refinery had quit and went to CIL and Celanese. They wanted our union in that plant and kept their loyalty to our organization. But the break that I got came when the International Chemical Workers handed out a leaflet that accused the in-house union executive of being communist. That was a very serious charge. They were quite the opposite. If anything could be more opposite, they were the ones. The issue then came what union they didn't want, rather than the union they wanted. They didn't want the International Chemical Workers. I handed out my leaflet and said, we don't call names, here's our program, consider us. They did consider us and they joined us. It demonstrates the concern that was evoked in the public mind just by calling somebody a communist. They weren't, I certainly wasn't. There must've been a lot of others that were innocent. Not that that, even though being a communist in Canada was still legal, but it was the McCarthy era overflow. At the Gulf BA plant in application they wanted their political affiliations.

I had organized it and we lost by 10 votes. When the board held a hearing, the majority of their directors came out to attend that meeting. They were very friendly and nice, but the government got the message. So they gave the company time. But they thought they'd lost it, but we lost by 10 votes. So a lot of people quit and went to CIL and Celanese. They were my contacts in those plants when we organized them.

Q. Organizing isn't easy in Alberta, but would you say unions play a major role here?

I would simply say this. All working people in the province of Alberta are better off because there is a trade union movement here. With the weakness of our opposition in the Legislature, I think the trade union movement is the last bulwark in protecting peoples rights. Even though there's such a campaign, I don't need a union in many of the plants we have the lowest percentage of union people in Canada and this province, 21%. But when you take a look at later years, particularly in the pension, and I've been active with seniors. Only 21%, exactly the same percentage, of people who retire have a pension plan with their employer. Seniors, there's 330,000 of us now, and 60% of the 330,000 seniors have an income of \$20,000 a year or less. It spells the weakness of social activity in this province. The highest percentage of employer pension plans of working people is in Newfoundland, which is 59%. So Newfoundland people, the poorest province in a way today, have 3 times as many people who have a pension plan as what Albertans do.