

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Jean Ross

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

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Index: Public Service Alliance - UNDE - grievances - City of Calgary - National Union of Public Employees - Canadian Union of Public Employees - business agent - union representative - union education – CUPE training program - collective bargaining - job evaluation - women's issues - childcare - pension benefits - job steward - political awareness

Q: Tell me something about your background. How did you grow up and become a union activist?

JR: My name is Jean Ross. I was born in Vermillion, Alberta, where my dad was a grain buyer for the Wheat Pool. We moved to Oyen, which is down by the Saskatchewan border, when I was 10. We then moved to Calgary when I was 14, and I've lived in Calgary for 55 years. When I moved to Calgary I was in grade 9, and went to a school in Bowness, where we lived. Then I went to Mount Royal College. At that time, Mount Royal College had a high school attached to it, and Bowness was a small town on its own. The Town Council paid for you to go to school. Mount Royal was a United Church school, and they would go out and make a big pitch to all these outside places. By sending us to Mount Royal, the students in my grade, they got quite a reduction in tuition. Some of the kids I went to school with, the odd one went to Western or Crescent, but most of us went to Mount Royal.

I went to Calgary Business College and got a secretarial diploma, after which I got a job at Traders Finance as a credit counselor. I worked there for about four months, and then all of a sudden my supervisor came to me and said, we're going to let you go. I said, why are you going to let me go? Is there anything wrong with me? You probably won't believe this, but I was very shy and introverted in those days. I wasn't very old, about 19 at that time. They just said, we want to let you go, but we think it would be better if you resign. So I went home and talked to my mother and she said, that this was not right. If they have some reason to let you go, they should tell you. So she phoned them and wanted to know what was going on. In the end what really happened was they had branches all across Canada, and they had somebody transferring in and had no job for them. So guess what, I was the last one there, and I was young and they thought I'd just go along with it.

That was my first taste of what employers do to people. I still didn't understand about unions or anything, but I understood that something wasn't right. From there, I went to work for the United Mine Workers' Pension Fund. It was in the old Burns Building, on

the 4th floor, and the elevator never ran half the time. It was a really old building, where the performing arts are now. I worked there for a while, until I had my appendix out. When I came back I had quite a struggle climbing those stairs all the time. So I quit working there and then I went to work for the federal government. I worked in the parts department for a short period of time, and then I transferred to Lincoln Park, which was the air force base at that time. This would've been about '54. Then I worked there for five years, in the motor transport section, looking after log books and vehicle things and that sort of stuff. I designed a system, because we used to have to keep track of our vehicles all over the country. I quite liked it, because I'm quite detail orientated. I had to keep track of how much gas was used, how much was spent for repairs, etc.. Then at the end of the year we would be able to say, this vehicle cost 'x' amount of dollars. I designed this new engineering outfit for it for how to do these stats. So they decided to create a job out of this. I had been doing it for about two years, so naturally I thought, "Well gee, I'll probably get this job." But I didn't - another slap in the face. The lady that got it was an older lady. She had been my assistant, and she hadn't worked there for long.

Q: At this point, were they unionized?

JR: Yes, they were in the Public Service Alliance, or whatever it was - UNDE I think it was at that time. I wasn't involved in the union, but I knew it was there. So I filed a grievance and went to see the union rep. He said, we really don't want to have any grievances right now, because we're in bargaining. That was in the Diefenbaker years, when the public sector workers' wages had been frozen for a long time, and we weren't getting any raises - we were close to getting raises, so we didn't want to rock the boat. I said, "I don't believe this? What do you mean, you don't want to rock the boat?" So, I filed this grievance and I went by myself. That was really a great experience, because I went in this room where there was a round table, and it was military. I worked for the air force. So there was a squadron leader in the middle, the flying officer, a sergeant major, and then a couple other officers on that side. Talk about intimidating but as I say, I would handle it differently today. Anyway, I filed a grievance, nothing happened, I didn't win of course.

So I quit. "To hell with this, I'm not staying at a place that doesn't want me," I said. But my supervisor who I really liked and I'd worked for a long time, talked me into staying. So I said, "I'll withdraw my resignation, but you tell me why, you find out why I didn't get that job." He'd said that he'd recommended me. So anyway, he came back and the long shot is that that lady was a war bride. She had a boy and her husband was dead and they felt they owed her something. Can you imagine? So anyway, I quit four times in one month. Once you decide that you're going to leave, the loyalty to the organization is gone. So I left there. Because I'd worked there for quite a while, never been sick, I got \$2000 back from my sick leave time. So I didn't work for about four months, I just puttered around.

Then I went to work for the City in 1960. I worked there for a couple of years, got along very well. It was the old National Union of Public Employees there. I went to the odd union meeting, but wasn't terribly involved. Then I got pregnant and had a baby. When it came time to leave, of course there's no maternity leave in those days, there's no nothing. So I had to quit working for the City. So I quit and took time off when Kelly was born, and then afterwards went back. I was off for about four months. They promised me they'd give me a job back. Of course promises are only as good as the paper they're not written

on. When I went to go back, of course they didn't want to hire me at the electric system. But I did know the guys there from the IBEW, and they were very nice to me. One of them job me a job working for them with Beth Wichar (she was Beth Tones at that time). I worked there for about six weeks until I could found out I was pregnant. I went to apply for unemployment insurance, because there was no maternity insurance or anything then. I was going to get \$30 a week, for which I had to make sure that I would have a babysitter - they just put you through hell. They phone your babysitter to find out because, it was not good enough for you tell them. That was another experience I thought wasn't quite right. I went back to work for the City in May of '62 I guess.

Q: By this time you were CUPE?

JR: No, not till '63; it was still the National Union of Public Employees. I got involved in the Union, because I figured all these things were happening to me, I needed to find out why these things were happening. In 1963 I got on the executive, and I've never looked back - well I was off for one year, because of Orly Campell. I got into a fight one time with him at an executive meeting, and disagreed on issues. I was blackballed for a year. That's another thing that was interesting.

Q: What do you mean, you were blackballed?

JR: I didn't get elected the next time around. It was funny, because I was the only woman on the Executive until another lady came along. This is the interesting part, and I don't remember now what the issue was, and I'm sure it couldn't have been that major. I took an opposing point of view and he didn't like it, and that was that. Another thing was that the Executive in those days were pretty much all metre readers. I don't want to sound snobby, but they didn't really even belong in Local 38; they belonged in Local 37, which was for outside workers. We had a big executive, and they ran the place. You can imagine if you go in there, especially if you're a woman, and you want them to do something different. At least if you have another woman or another like-minded person, you will have somebody to second your motions. Many times I couldn't even get motions on the floor, because I didn't have anybody who'll second them for me. I was off for a year, but when I got back on, I was never off till I went to work for CUPE. It was right around that time that the City was doing one of those what I guess in those days were called 'classification reviews.' Out of our whole bargaining unit, which was around 1,600, the only people who were either frozen or got a decrease were the clerical workers. Everybody else got a raise. That really ticked me off. When you go into those kinds of things, you take your chances, but it seemed to me awfully funny that the jobs that were traditionally and prominently women were the ones that took the big cuts. The men didn't want to fight for us, and the other side, the women didn't come to union meetings. It was mostly men - and I say this in the nicest sense - most of the people who went to union meetings and ran the union were people who had come from the trades and that sort of thing, and wanted a more permanent job with the City. In those years the old myth was if you worked for the City, you were there for life. And of course they were used to male-dominated unions, and didn't have any understanding for, first of all, public sector workers. Secondly, they didn't have any understanding of women workers.

Q: It seems that the women's work was systematically undervalued. What happened with that? Talk about the fight within CUPE to change that.

JR: That was a long fight. As I said, I was off for a year, and then the next year another lady came on - Barbara Lawson. She came onto the Executive. So there was her and me;

we could sort of at least support each other. Then by this time, I had maintained some credibility, and I hadn't run away and hid. I think some of the guys were learning to respect me, as a person. That's all I ever wanted. I didn't want them to be kind to me or treat me properly because I was a woman. I wanted them to treat me properly because I'm a lady, I'm bright, and I've got good ideas, most of the time. So I finally got that through to them. After that, the next time we were in bargaining, we did adjust some of those salaries, but the unfortunate part about it was that, to some degree, we were competing against unorganized clerical work in Calgary. There weren't any women's unions for all of those kinds of female-dominated jobs. And of course the oil patch had lots of clerical and secretarial workers, but none of them were organized.

They didn't know anything about each other; women that worked in the same office didn't know what each other made. That was a very elitist kind of thing, and yet they kept them divided and conquered. So we really had a tough job with those kinds of jobs. And at the time, the City paid well for those kinds of jobs. So when you tried to raise wages, that's where they went - outside. At that time, even the Public School Board and the Catholic School Board, which employed lots of clerical workers, were dealing with associations. They certainly were more like company associations, with a kind of loose bargaining arrangement but they were in my view, very far removed from what you'd call a union. They called themselves a union, and I think they're a lot better now. They've hired people from unions, and I think they're more militant now and also more in tune with things. They got kind of beat up a few years ago.

So we went along and tried to adjust these issues in bargaining. One time, we adjusted it by giving everybody under pay grade 10, everybody got say 4 or 5%, and then under pay grade 10 everybody got another \$10 a month to kind of bring them up. It's very difficult, as you probably know, to bargain with employers outside of the percentage. They like that; it keeps the rich happy and the rest of them down where they belong. You only have the people at the low end when you have flat increases. They always had to get to this business, they didn't like their grids, because 5% on a grid is easy. They didn't like that. Then we got a lot more social workers and those kinds of people involved. Again, there wasn't just women, there were men in there too. They were another sector that was really poorly paid. I went to bat for them. They used to call me "Jean Ross and her crazy social workers". I wasn't even a social worker, but every time I'd bring up something different or way outside, they'd say, "Oh there comes the crazy social workers". Lots of times it was my idea, not theirs. Eventually we went into a proper job evaluation scheme where they evaluated jobs, not people.

In the City in the old days, it was a real old boys club. The department heads really controlled their departments. I always remember the assessment department, for example, and I laugh when I say that my daughter's on the 'dark side' now, and she's managing commercial assessment for the city. But assessment was the real thing; their director was pretty smart about getting things. Of course he had the City over the barrel, because they didn't understand assessment, and the assessment springs the tax base. It's how you assess houses that give you the taxes. You can say a mill rate is x, but if the house isn't assessed properly, you don't get those dollars. So they really had city council buffalos.

Q: They were also with the planning department?

JR: No, they just had their own structure. The other one that was really good was the land department. This Bob Leach who was the director of land, boy he was quite a guy.

Even when we went to do job evaluation, it was a riot. I don't know how familiar you are with job evaluation, but you have a manual, and if you make a mistake, what does it cost the city? You worry about consequences, that kind of thing. When you got to the land man, oh my god, if they sold a piece of land at the wrong price, because that's what they used to do, buy and sell land for the city. Well the consequences were just terrible. And they got away with a lot of it. Before we had job evaluation, the salaries even in the city itself were really exaggerated in some cases, and not in others. One thing about job evaluation, I think it's a tremendous system. It doesn't matter if the job needs 5 years experience and you bring 20, you get paid for 5 years experience. The same as if you stay in a job for 100 years, if you want to bargain something for that, then bargain long service pay. But don't over-inflate that job because you happen to be sitting there with all that experience, because another guy with 3 years could come in and do that job. You know what I'm saying? It's a more fair way of doing things.

Q: In your years of work to get proper recognition for women, what sort of support did you receive from the union?

JR: In those early years it was very difficult; it was hard to make them understand. The other part of it was, that it was very hard to get women involved in the Union. For example, I had a little girl. If they wanted to have a meeting after work, I couldn't go, but if they had a meeting after supper, I could go, because I could go home, get my child's supper and look after, and then get somebody to look after her. I was quite lucky because I lived with my mom and dad, so my mom would look after her. But I was the primary caregiver for her, so I couldn't do that. Same as the length of union meetings - two hours should've been long enough, but they'd go on and on. Then, they'd go to the bar afterwards. I had nothing against drinking, but I couldn't do that. If I went home, looked after my kid, and then went to the union meeting, by the time I went home again I'd have to wash diapers and wash bottles. Those two hours they sat in the bar, I couldn't go with them because I was home working. And that's where they made the decisions - lots of times, that's where they make the decisions, and I wasn't able to be part of that. I used to tell them, not to make their decisions in the bar, because they won't find me there, and that's not fair. It's not fair to the people who don't drink, and it's not fair to the people who don't want to do that. In those days, you had to sit in smoky bars. It's not so bad now; I don't go to bars, but I gather they're not as smoky.

So that was a difficult thing. It's the same as going to Conventions and those kinds of things where decisions are made on behalf of organization. It was difficult in those years to get women to go. They somehow had to provide for childcare while they were away. Now it's good, because they have childcare at conventions, although it's still difficult, because you've still got the evenings or those hours you have nobody to look after your child. But at least they've made a major start. The interesting part about it was that they started to get it when we started to have more single men, or men that were single parents. Then they seemed to get it when it was them, but when women complained about it, it was just your job, same old stuff that's been going on for years. It was very difficult to make progress until we got more women involved in the executive process and the shop steward process and that sort of thing. Another thing that's very difficult, and I think it is much easier in a plant situation, or even the city outside workers. You can go to them and say that the boss is being a real jerk, and these are the kinds of things he's doing, and that we need to do something to straighten him out. But you go to a bunch of secretaries and they probably know the boss very well. They work with him one-on-one

lots of times. They probably buy his wife's Christmas presents, and they probably have been to dinner at his house. You're not going to convince those people that he's a jerk, even though he is. So, clerical and secretarial workers are very difficult to organize. I guess it's the nature of their job, and it's their nature because they're women.

Q: But you took it on. Did you have any success?

JR: Oh yes, I did. I used to go around and talk to them. I was on the executive for a long time, and I used to have little groups at coffee time or something, and we'd talk about what it meant to be a union worker. You'd get a bunch of women together and you'd say to them, now, and they'd say they didn't want to be part of the Union. To them it was a heavysset guy with a stogie in his mouth, blurry-eyed. They didn't like the image of it. I used to say to them, "Well look at me, I'm not like that." But it's very difficult to overcome. I always found that once we got them involved, they became the best unionists, but it's difficult to convince them. I used to say to them that I've been through it, it's not an easy job to work and have children. There's so many things you have to do. Once your kids get older, somebody has to go the school and somebody has to do all those kinds of things. It's very hard.

Q: What do you think about the current situation?

JR: It's hard for me to say too much about that, because I've been retired for going into my 10th year. I retired in 1996.

Q: You won a lot. You won some wage parity, and you won childcare.

JR: Yes, and we even got to the point where we got another thing that they didn't understand when I first got involved. When we went to a convention, we were given \$20 a day for expenses. That was in 1963, so it wasn't too bad. But out of that \$20, I had to pay for proper daycare for Kelly when I was at work. She couldn't go to that daycare because there was nobody to take her back and forth. So I had a friend who would look after her. But I had to pay her, and was still paying for a space in the daycare. Their answer to that was, "It's your problem, you should've thought of that." The other thing that I didn't think was fair, but it benefited me, was that we used to get a straight \$20 at that time for wages. It didn't matter how much you earned. That's where I made my extra money, because I didn't earn as much as the guys, and \$20 was set to suit them. But I still didn't think that was right, and I fought to get lost wages. Another thing I fought for with a bunch of other people was to get pension credits for time on Union business. In the early days, when we'd go on union business, and if you were involved in the union you were away a lot, then your pay was docked and the union paid you. That's okay. But just think how many pension credits you lost at the end of the year. So then we got into the system where your check would carry on, and then the union would bill the city for your benefits, or the city would bill the union. That made a lot more sense. Otherwise, I was short when it came time to tabulate some of my pension. Some people could've been short even more, because they were away a lot.

Q: What year did you become a union rep, and were you the first woman business agent? If so, how did people accept you?

JR: I became a business agent for the local union in 1977, which is almost like a staff rep except you just work for one local. I didn't have any trouble that way, because I had a lot of credibility. And I also had a lot of credibility with management. I wasn't 'footsy-footsy' with them, but I had the reputation that they always said I was tough, but I was

fair. There again, I was the secretary that worked for all these guys. I knew them well. One time one guy came to visit me with a grievance, and he wanted to see a man. I said, "I'm sorry, but I'm the person you have to talk to". Then the next time I had to have a second interview with him, I brought the steward in, who happened to be a man. Not to pacify him or anything, but I just thought it was probably a good idea. And there are women that don't want to talk to men either. That was another thing, when I did become the business agent, I think that was good. At the end of the day, their problems are the same as everybody else's. But you know how people feel that their the only one that's being picked on.

Q: How long were you a business agent, and where did you go from there?

JR: I went to work for the national union in 1982. I almost kept my own job. I was a servicing rep for a couple of years and then I went into education.

Q: Here you were, working for CUPE in a province that's probably the most anti-union in Canada. I want you to talk about some of the challenges you faced at the time. What did you think you'd be able to achieve?

JR: First of all, PP's a lot different than other unions. Of course we have a national education program. And, I liked working here. At that time, about the time I came in, around that time is when Jeff Rose became president of the national union. He freed up a lot of money. He also was an academic to some degree. He gave the education department a lot of money. We never had money before that. We had a lot of manuals made and we had a lot more money for education.

Q: Who was heading up your national program at that time?

JR: That might've been just at the time before Jim Dahl retired. Then Dave Adams took the job. In between, Elizabeth Plettenburg was there too. Jim came out of the Auto Workers, and he was very autocratic. That was about the best thing you could say about him. Elizabeth had been a schoolteacher, and also had a very aristocratic German background. Then when Dave came, he brought a little more folksiness. The best part is they left me alone. I had my region, it was Alberta, and as long as I stayed within the program and taught the courses they offered, and my expense sheets were reasonable when I sent them in, they left me to run my region. They didn't want to come out here very much, it's too right-wing for them. It was easier for them to go to the provinces like Ontario. They liked Saskatchewan very much because it was pretty left-wing, but they pretty much left me alone. But the best part about the education rep's job and what I, and I got disillusioned a few times but I still maintained my enthusiasm, was that I could help people learn to help themselves. Nobody ever taught me, I had to find it out all by myself. I found it very delightful to go into a small town like Claresholm or some of these places, and you'd get hospital workers, school board workers, maybe some town workers. They only were in a union because they worked in a place that was organized, and we had the Rand formula. But by the end of the two days they would be coming to you and saying, can I do this and can I do that? Sometimes it was even frightening. You had brought them so far that you were scared, thinking "If I'm not around, what are they gonna do?"

I used to say to them, now don't go back and say Jean said this and Jean said that. The other reason that I was a good education rep, was because I had the stories; 38 was a very big Local, and by the time I left there we had 2700 members in all those departments. It

was just like a bunch of mini-unions. We had all kinds of crazy grievances, so I really had a lot of stories. That's what makes you successful, is when you can tell real stories. I used to tell about the different grievances I had. You never name names or anything. It was lots of fun, and they liked that, because it was real. Sure you can give them out handouts and all this stuff that says you should do this and that. Eventually, I'm sure when they go home and read it they'll say, oh that's what she meant. That's a good part too. But I really think the best part was, and I think that's why I was so successful, was because I never asked them to do something I wouldn't do myself. I told them things that I'd been successful at and the things that hadn't been so successful. Another thing, when I was the business agent, I went around and did all these things. Before I was a business agent I was the recording secretary for the local. In those days, when Orly was the rep, he always took an officer of the local with him to grievances. I worked at the sewage treatment plant as a timekeeper, and I didn't have a very heavy job. My boss was really good. So I got to go to everything with him. The other guys had more, like the president was Jim Jordan, he had an outside job. They couldn't get away as easily as I could. So he took me to everything. It was like a training position. I got to see how things were done. I got to experience a lot of grievances, and then of course when I was a business agent. So that really helped me.

Q: The people you taught were adults. What difference did that make to your education program?

JR: Yes. To me, workers are as important as anybody else in the world. I always had a great faith in workers and a great admiration for them, being a worker myself, coming from a working class family. But I always felt that most of them were good people, even the ones that got in trouble. They just needed somebody to say, gee, you're not so bad, and maybe if you did it this way it would be a little better. Or many times in my experiences, somebody would get into trouble. Then all of a sudden the supervisor would say, you stupid son of a gun, how come you did that? So then you go to grievance and you'd say to the employer, this guy's worked there 10 years, how come he just all of a sudden became stupid? And he's done that job for 10 years, you've never said anything wrong to him? What is he to think? That's normally what happens. Even when they do the wrong things, it's because nobody has showed him how to do it right. After a while if you've been doing it, nobody says anything, don't you think that you'd assume it's right to assume that you're doing a good job?

Q: What was the job of a CUPE steward? What were you trying to make these stewards into?

JR: They were supposed to go out and get people interested in the union, number one, and try to get them signed up. Bottom line is, we had the Rand formula, if you don't keep 50% plus one signed up, that can get away on you quite easily if you're not diligent. The other thing I used to teach them was once a new person comes to work, you should be the first person they meet. You should go up to the and say, hi, my name is Jean, I'm the union steward. I'm not sure you're aware we have a union here. Because we had the advantage, we were the union. We were there in the public sector. These are the things that should or should not happen to you. I'm the guy you come to see. Then after they've been there for a while, you would say, "Hi, how you doing? Anything I can help you with?" So often people don't do that, they're too busy in their own little world. You're the guy, we try to train them so they can handle the grievances at the first and second steps.

Most grievances could be settled at the first and second steps if things were done properly. After you get to the third step, then hard lines develop and people are trying to win. They forget the guy in the middle. That's what we try and train them to do.

Q: To what extent would you try to show them that they have a larger role outside the workplace? Was that a part of the CUPE training program?

JR: We tried very hard to that. Don't forget, a lot of my work was done in small areas or small towns, where everybody knows everybody. It's easy if you're in a city and you're a union rep and an activist, you can be a rebel without too many people knowing - not that it would matter to me. But if you're in a small town, and belong to the local church and this sort of stuff, it's quite difficult for them. But we did try it. We did have political awareness courses. We had all the whole gamut of those kinds of things. I used to try to sneak in things. Even in a shop steward's course, I always talked about, I'd get the political stuff in if I could. There are always ways of getting in things subtly. Another thing I always felt quite competent about was they always came back. Some of them, I wish they hadn't come back, because they'd take the same course over and over again. I used to say to them, it's difficult if you've got 10 people; 9 are new and one guy's been in your course 3 times. They don't change that much. Every time you try to, he'd say, oh I remember that.

Lots of them just like to come to school, and lots of them used to tell me they just liked to hear me talk. I can't believe that you didn't have anything else to do with your time. But I must tell you this story. We used to go to different provinces for our counterparts. I went to BC and when Dave was the education rep there, he'd come to Alberta, or Dave Walley in Saskatchewan. We did that, particularly in the western provinces. I was fortunate, I even got to go to Antigonish, Nova Scotia. But this one time I was teaching a public speaking course in Saskatchewan at Waskasoo. I had about 12 people, it was a weeklong school. So the first morning you just try to get organized and get people to know each other, because they were from all over, it was a provincial school. Then we had our lunch, and after lunch this one guy didn't come back. I don't know the folks. If it had been in Alberta, I'd know the players. I said, what happened to him. They said, I don't know. Then one lady came and said to me, he drinks quite a bit. I said, is he expected to come back? If he wanted to go and get drunk, that was his problem. But my worry was that he might be sick or something, because we all stayed in little cabins. They said, "No he'd be okay." So that was fine. So the next morning he didn't come again, and somebody brought me a note. In this note it said that he was going home, that he was an alcoholic, and he was going to get help. He wanted to thank me because I was the only person that he knew that had spent some time with him as a person, or something like that. It was really humbling. He was quite impressed with the way I treated him. So those kinds of things make you feel better. I talked to Dave about it without showing him the note. The rep in Saskatchewan, you'd better see how he is. Then I talked to Dave later, and he did, he did go to AA and got straightened out. So you never know.

Q: Tell me about the trade union?

JR: It's a very right wing city, no question. It's head office city. I always used to think the difference between Edmonton and Calgary is Edmonton is a working class city and Calgary is a head office type city. I'm not sure that's fair, but to me it is, because here we do. We have all the head offices of the oil companies and all those, and then the working

people that work for them. So it isn't working class like Edmonton, I don't think. Then of course in the '50s and '60s we didn't have the Ukrainian influence and those kinds of cultures that you have in Edmonton. I used to always say, I'm a sewer, and I'd always to go Edmonton to get more colorful material. You could get more colorful material in Edmonton than Calgary, and I always said that was because there were a lot of Ukrainian people than in Calgary. In Calgary they were more classic in the way they dressed, and vice versa. But when I first got involved in the union movement and started working for the city, the city itself, it was always known that labor elected the mayor. If you wanted to be a mayor, you had to be on the right side of the trade union movement, and particularly the public sector unions. But I don't think that's prevalent now. Surely to god the labor movement would not have elected Dave Bronconi. I find that almost impossible. But Rod Sykes was a working class person's mayor. Even Ralph was. You could always go and talk to him. Old Don McKay was too. And old Andy Anderson before Don McKay. When I first got involved, we used to be very involved in politics. We used to always make sure there were aldermen on there that were pro-labor. I doubt if some of there's any of them, well that Helen LaRock, she's the last one, and apparently transit supported her. But I don't see her as being...

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

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

Q: So Calgary has changed that way?

JR: Oh it has changed a lot.

Q: Or the labor movement has changed.

JR: That's it, it's a chicken and egg thing. But I think Calgary has changed more, because we've gotten so big, we've gotten more head offices, we've got lots of big development and developers going, and of course they're always on the right wing side. It's in some ways too big a city. They got the road store up and they're building everything. It's a booming city, and yet it's not really booming for the lower class. It's not booming for the street people and it's not booming for the low jobs.

Q: Have the city workers been able to hold their own?

JR: I think so.

Q: So if you're a union member, you're still doing okay?

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

Q: Are there still places in this city where people like us could go and shoot pictures off where things were happening?

JR: That's the problem, isn't it? The old Calgary Labor Temple is gone. You know where the Flamingo Palace used to be? I don't think Flamingo Palace is there anymore either. It's on 11th or 12th Ave. and about 1st St East. But 38 building on 12th Ave and 1st St., transit owned it for years and years. Then 38 bought it in the '70s. When you go to 38, ask them if that used to be the old labor temple behind there. God knows if anybody, well Peter... It was the old labor temple, and I think it's still there. But I don't think it's the Flamingo Palace anymore. I worked there in the '60s. That's one thing we lack in this city, we don't have a labor temple or a central labor... That's another thing different between Edmonton and Calgary. In Edmonton the unions like to get together and stay together. In Calgary, they're like right wing entrepreneurs, they want to be way out here and way out there, and have their own little, and it's back to this divide and conquer again. Whether they do it consciously or subconsciously, I don't know. There's 37, way out in, well transit did it first. They moved out there way out past Chinook Shopping Center, 37's past there now too. Then of course CUPE offices. When you go into the PP office, I worked there for all those years, and they're not very friendly. It isn't somewhere you'd want to go and shoot the breeze. We don't have that camaraderie we used to have. I don't know if that's because we have so much money and you don't need that, is that why it is? I really don't know. But I know when I worked in the Labor Temple, I worked, like I say, for the IBW 254. In there was Calgary District Council, PP. This was in '62. And there was the iron workers, Leo, I think he's dead now. He was an iron worker and his wife worked a man. There was painters union, Bill Patterson worked for the painters union at that time. There were all those unions in there. And there was 348, the IBW telephone workers. Any given time of day you could go and visit with somebody. There was always people coming in there and visiting. I learned a lot there, just talking to people. But we don't have that anymore. And the labor council office is way over in that crummy little place it is.

Q: It's called the World Trade Center.

JR: Is it called that? And that's another thing, you should be able to go to those places and talk. But who would you go to? Olga is very nice, and Gord Christie is alright too. But it's not the same.

Q: What about the Exhibition Grounds? Was that always the Exhibition Grounds as far back as you can remember?

JR: Yes.

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

JR: When I first started going to labor council, there was a lot of different unions that went on a regular basis. Postal workers was one, they got involved, and letter carriers,

before they amalgamated. There used to be a few guys came from the machinists, that worked at the airport.

Q: Amalgamated Transit Union?

JR: Yes, they were. Because old Frank Brody used to be secretary treasurer of the labor council before Bill, and he was from the transit union. I was young then and now I'm old, and they seemed old then. But they may not have been as old. As you get older, your ages get closer together. I really can't say. We lost touch with him, because he was in the transit union, and he was secretary treasurer of the labor council for a lot of years, on a leave of absence from the city. When he came back he came into one of local 38's jobs. People had a hate on for him. Then on the board of referees of UIC, and he didn't attend labor council. So they kind of ditched him. We kind of lost touch with him. But he's certainly the earlier history, if he's okay and still alive. He was a very articulate person.

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