

**Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)**

**Oral History Interview**

Interviewee: Walter Doskoch

Interviewer:

Dates:

Location:

Index: Childhood and family history – Coal mining in the west during the 1910s – Enemy Aliens – POW internment camps, Morris B.C. – United Mine Workers – Mining Strike in the Drumheller Valley, 1920s – Hunger Strike of 1931-32, Edmonton – RCMP and deportations – Racism toward Slavic peoples – Slim Evans – Strikes in Wayne – Teamsters Union – Alberta oil industry boom, 1948 – Jimmy Hoffa – Joe Clark, president of the Mine Miller Smelters Union – Fighting for the ward electoral system in Edmonton – City operated ambulance – LRT

Walter: My name is Walter Doskoch, I was born in this city back in 1926 at the Royal Alex. Lived between 95<sup>th</sup> St and 96<sup>th</sup> . That was a more or less a Slavic ghetto there was all the Slavs when they were coming in off the train settled in that area between the CN tower and 107<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 95<sup>th</sup> Street and 102<sup>nd</sup> Street. That was pretty much Ukrainians, Serbians, Croats and all the rest of them. Pollacks. That's – that's who lived in that area. I think it's Italian now more or less. Or somebody or Lebanese or somebody. But it seems that it's a kind of area that's built for ghettos.

Interviewer: And you're mother and father...

Walter: What about 'em?

Interviewer: Came here. At what time did they come here?

Walter: Oh, my dad came here in 1910. My mother came in 1922.

Interviewer: From where?

Walter: They came from a town called Laza(sp?). Laza was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. At that time it was a Gelecia(sp?) was a province. So when all these Ukrainians came here they were all poor Gelecians(sp?). I thought you knew that. Anyway I used to have a poor Gelecian boy's accent. Because we had a very sharp 'e'. Everything you said wound up with a very sharp 'e'.

Interviewer: Did they both come right here to Edmonton or. ...

Walter: No, no. My dad came in here, my dad came him and his brother DJon. It was Djon, (John). They went, they came in here in 1910. The old man was 16 years old. And he went to see their brother George who was farming just north of Bruderheim(sp?) in a place called Jerislow, the district of Jerislow. And, that was named after a great Ukrainian, Jerislow the Wise. If you look on the wall up there you'll see a guy with a big cross. That's Vladimir(sp?) Valeeky(sp). He was the guy Walter, Vladimir the great. He was the guy that brought Christianity to the Ukrainians. He only had 25 wives (laughs). He must have been a great man (laughs).

Interviewer: So did your Dad start working here in Edmonton at the time.

Walter: Oh no. Oh no no no no. Then the old man and Djon, they went into B.C. Because it looked like the work was in B.C. and they wanted to get rich and buy a few hectares of land and sit back and relax. And the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry. Anyway they got down to the coal mine and geez it's terrible. The stokes are different then anywhere in the world. It's the only place in the world where your coal runs up and down hill, in B.C. You never know when you are going to hit a gas pocket. You never know when you are going to get flushed, waters gonna come in on you – you don't know anything. I think they killed more people then, there than anywhere else in North America, was on that Vancouver Island.

Interviewer: They were on Vancouver Island?

Walter: Yah. But it was a job eh? And the two brothers went down there, about 1912 or 13, Djon said, 'hey this mining – this is not for me'. But the old man, my old man, old Bill – he liked coal mining. He liked that timbers crashing and smashing, and rocks falling down and he knew what he was doing underground. He stayed. He stayed 'til about 1915. In 1915 he moved to Vancouver and he was going to go, that was when they started to open up The Crow, yah know, with Shell and all these places. But he never made it. He got picked up and in Vancouver as a, not as a POW but as an enemy alien. Because they came from Austria they were enemy aliens. And as an enemy alien, they didn't get the two bits a day that the POWs got. They had to work. He never saw a dentist, doctors were very rare. And the food was always turnips, potatoes, carrots, maybe the odd case of bully beef or some goddamned thing. That was the end of their struggle. So anyway in 1915 he got picked up and he got moved to Morris in British Columbia. And there was I don't how many, four or five hundred Ukrainians and there was a couple of Polacks in there, a couple of Germans in there a couple of everything in there. There was eight, eight thousand of them in Canada anyway. They were locked up because they were poor Galiceans or Ukrainians. Because the Ukrainians were with the Russians which was just across the border. They were with the British, they fought with them. But these guys (laughs) still a bit of a ham in a sandwich – they got chewed right out.

Interviewer: That's why they were concerned?—

Walter: Yah, that's why they were enemy aliens. Coughs. The other thing is, there was a priest, a Catholic priest. Because, Austria, eh they were about Catholics. He said boys, 'you gotta go back and fight for Franz Joseph'. The old man and about 8,000 others said, 'you can go to hell'. This guy ran the worst bloody show in the world, and you want us to go back and support him? No. So they got locked up. They got into the Morrissey. Geez things were really tough in there. They wound up with dysentery. The guys I guess they couldn't even hardly walk from here to the car outside without having a crap. The camp commandants refused to talk to them, because they were not POWs, they were enemy

aliens. They had to go to the Swiss embassy, because the Swiss embassy represented Germans in Canada.

Interviewer: Okay, had your father become a Canadian citizen then?

Walter: Oh no no no no no no. So uh he got to be the spokesman for the Slavic community in that bloody camp, Morrisey. And, they fought for bread, they fought for this they fought for everything. In 1917 that camp closed down. But they wouldn't let the old man go. They moved him to Vernon. Then they moved him to Mara Lake, just down the north, it was a beautiful park. It was all built by slave labour eh? Enemy aliens (laughs). Then they moved him back to Vernon and in Vernon it was already 1919, and they sent him a letter 'your brother Djon is dead. He died in December of 1918, on the 19<sup>th</sup>'. So the old man wrote a letter right away to his brother George. 'You go to Vancouver to live, and I'm gonna figure out what the hell happened. Where is, why did Djon die?' Because these two guys were, well since they were kids they were two peas in a pod eh?

And (coughs). The old man stayed there for a little bit and they moved him to a camp at Kapaskasing in Ontario. They were building a great big farm. It was an experimental farm for the government of Ontario. That's where the old man finished up. He was discharged from there in 1920.

Interviewer: Was he not in Banff?

Walter: No.

Interviewer: Who was in Banff? Your dad wasn't there.

Walter: No no no. Hey there was 28 camps. You can't visit them all and stay there.

Interviewer: I thought there was a connection with Banff.

Walter: There was a good story coming out of Kapaskasing. Every morning they had to go into the bush to chop bush. And they had a little Englishman. And the guy always had a gun at the back of old Bill's back. 'You goddamned bohunk, Jesus Christ'. But the old man noticed they had to walk across a little trestle two planks wide. And this old guy would get nervous as hell. So, this morning, there was a real big hoar frost. And what happened, the old man jumped up and down twice on there. The old man got nervous and he fell in the water (laughs). The old man grabbed the gun and pulled the guy out. Took him back to camp. All of a sudden the old man carrying a gun, that was my dad Bill, he was carrying a gun and this old guy was saying 'Bill you're a great man, you saved my life.' (laughs)

But after that, the old guy would always give the old man tobacco, and all kinds of things that he couldn't get. (coughs). And that, that was the kind of stories that went on. So, 1920 came back here, first thing he went into the ghetto to see what the hell's happening what's happening. And I think that's where he first saw Mary was in '22. Because him and his, her sister, Eva, grew up together. But anyway the old man went back to Nanaimo, he didn't like it there, he went to Michelle. He didn't like working with the, with the United Mine Workers, because the terrible goddamned union. There was so much in-fighting and back-biting and so much crap. So he moved north, Nordeg. Moved into Nordeg. He moved into Cadum, and he worked at Cadum, he worked at Bruelle, and he worked, Mountain pipe. Mountain pipe was very bad because it was very high up there. And anybody that had any trouble, and I guess the old man must have had a little heart trouble at that time, and he was just a young fellow. So he could only stay up there for a little bit, then he came down and get down into the lower echelons and he'd go to work.

Interviewer: This is all still coal-mining now that he's doing?

Walter: Yes. And he keeps coming back here to the, to the ghetto (laughs). And that's where he met my mother and, all from the same village but he never saw her in his life for Christ's sake you know.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Walter: No. Not until he came here. And, and they finally got married and that was back in what 1920, 20, 23 I guess it was. Yes. Yah and from there on he went into uh Drumheller Valley. In Drumheller had a hell of a strike. Everybody else was settled except the teamster. The guy pulling the coal out of the goddamned mine was an old horse and this old man and he wanted a bloody nickel. And they were out for six weeks. Jesus you know. It's like construction for Christ sake, and the mining in those days. You only had a certain time of the year to get your money and you didn't get it you'd starve. And these. Cause the old man every time he went on the job, he was either elected to the negotiating committee or strike committee (laughs). And those were the two main committees that he (laughs). Anyway there was six weeks. So when the strike was over, the old superintendent called the guys in. And he said to the scabs, he said, 'boys', he said, 'I'm sorry, I can't use you anymore. I gotta give these jobs back to these union guys. But, if we ever go on strike again, we'll make sure that you have a job' (laughs). He said 'what a pile of shit'. He said and the mine was just, instead of them going down that stoke there and figuring where the hell you were, everything was chewed up and the, you, you were scared to even walk in it because you were liable, because they never cleaned it, trimmed the top. And pieces were falling, timbers were cracking, it was a hell of a mess.

(Coughs) When he left there, he went to work for the CV of RT as an organizer. And he was organizing here to Churchill. That was his run. Just outside of Edmonton. It is one of the locals the old man set-up was in Prince Albert, in CVURT local. But they were there for awhile, then all of a sudden the depression hit. Jesus Christ, there were no jobs, there was nothing. We'd just bought a house down here in 66, on 61st Street and 29<sup>th</sup> Ave. Do you know we paid \$500 (laughs). \$500 for that. It was 22 by 22. No basement. It was sitting on four rocks and there was a hole in the middle and you kept your goddamn potatoes and cabbage and your carrots down there. And then you pile up the straw all the way around it. And then you pile that and when it started to snow you piled the snow on top of that. To make sure you had vegetables or after the winter anyway. You remember that Jack? (laughs)

Then he started with the, by 1931-32, Hunger Strike. That took place at the Market Square here. The farmers come in from a march and they wanted a meeting with Brownlee, and Brownlee refused to talk to them, (coughs), so there was a real frou-fera. And it was the old man's job was to bring all the guys from the east, all these Ukrainian boys into the march. So he gets there and it's a little stoolie he spotted him. A small stool pigeon. A guy by the name of Wodjanke. He was after the old man. The old man he snuck out of the the Market Square there right where the library is. He went over to the Brou(?) hall at 96<sup>th</sup> street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. And he hid amongst all them women's dresses and skirts, and he was stuck in there while that's that (laughs). And the cops came in, they went through the joint. Jesus Christ, in the meantime, some of the boys pulled up a car around the back. And as soon as it was all clear the old man jumped in he went to Bruderheim. He was, he stayed with a railroader there for a day or half a day. And the heat was on already so he snuck over to his brother's place which was about 6 or 7 miles north. And the cops right after his ass there too. So there he went to the big Russian settlement in the burroughs. In Wabamun you know there was that was, Belluvaseas, between Russia and the Ukraine eh? It's a little, it's a little country. They got a language all their own and they eat nothing but potatoes I think. (Laughs) And they drink juice made out of birch trees. Birch, oh yeah when they bleed them birches and they make that, oh it's a beautiful sauce. So we stayed there for about three months. At home the cops –

Oh yeah, Christ they wanted to they wanted to get rid of him and souce(?) him back to Poland. If he'd of gone to Poland, if they'd have got him, he'd have been dead in 2 weeks. He wouldn't have lasted. So anyway, what happened. Every everyday or so, they cut the old lady off relief. But the old man'd talk to George, before he went to, with the Russians. And old George was bringing in some pork and he'd bring in this, bring in milk. So there was always something to eat eh? And then they were always sitting up on the fork trail and this drives by from the association, 'Ye got enough to eat there Daskoch' (laughs). So anyway, Jesus Christ, one morning about one o'clock, we had a little porch maybe three feet wide or four feet wide in the front. Walk across there. Holy Christ, scared the hell out of me. The oldest – the oldest one was about 9 or 10, scared the hell out of everybody in the house. Two minutes later, in comes a mob of cops they're 6

foot four, 6 foot 6, really big guys. (laughs). Went through the house into that goddamned little basement cubby-hole there where you got nothin but potatoes. Upstairs in the attic, nothing. Search lights all around the house, into the chicken coop. The old man. And they chased him from December until April. The old man would sneak home once in awhile. Him and mom would get together. This was late, late late, end of March, beginning of April.

Interviewer: What Year?

Walter: That was in '33 I think it was. '32, '33. And he went to stop up there at Swift's. There used to be a little store there Hoodinsky, where all the left-wingers used to gather at Hoodinsky's store. And they would have their meetings and they would drink their beer and eat their herring (laughs). And anyway, that little bastard Wodjanke spotted him. Ye know. So the old man came home, he said to the old lady, 'I think it should be all over for me now'. So, Sunday morning, down the Fort Trail, here's this cop stops. He says "is this the Doskoch residence?". And when I was six, six or seven years old, I said 'Yah'. He said 'Is your dad in?'. I said, 'Yah. He's cleaning out the chicken coop'. 'Can I see him?' And well I said 'You'll have to talk to him, not to me.' So he walked up to the door and hammered on the door, he said 'This is Sgt Datko of the RCMP. I want to see Bill Doskoch'. Just then the old man came through the back door, so he smiled he said, 'You don't mind if I change before we leave?' My mother just about went ape, oh my God. Then she went over to see her sister who lives next door. Her sister couldn't say nothing. The old man says 'don't say nothing'. And they went to see Stroise up the hill here. They went to see Stroise, not the old man, the old man went to jail. In half an hour there was a lawyer called Jackson that we had here. Progressive guy. He used to be in the old, you know the old building that the Social Credit had? On Jasper Avenue?

Interviewer: Yes.

Walter: Well right up there was Jackson's office. Jackson he had set the whole thing up and by 8 o'clock that night, the old man was home (laughs).



Interviewer: Is that right? Everything was dropped?

Walter: Well, they did not have sufficient evidence. So they couldn't deport you.  
(Laughs) Then he went to Berman.

Interviewer: I see.

Walter: Mile Lake.

Interviewer: But you get involved with Banff because....

Walter: Because of the committee.

Interviewer: That's what they wanted?

Walter: The committee said 'yah, get over there and they used to be called 'fuckin' bohunks'. And they used to jab 'em in the goddamned side of the head, either with a bayonet or a gun, 'come on you fuckin' bonk let's go'. Jesus you know. Not only that but you get robbed. Anything they had when they came into the camps, goodbye. It was a lot of 'em went nuts. Stark raving mad. Lot of them tried to escape that were shot. It took a lot of guts to stay and hammer out a policy.

Interviewer: So we were just finished up from your dad getting released from jail, but you were just starting to say that didn't mean you

Walter: Oh released from jail and uh, they they were still chasing them. But he was kinda set in the background a little bit, but he kept working with the people here. The miners always came to see him. And the miners said when the old man died, they said 'that, was my left arm', 'that was my right arm'. Because the old man had to figure out all their time. Make sure they didn't get chiseled on their coal. You know. Jesus some of them in that Nordeg area. Them old Ukrainians. Hey they got a homestead out here that, one cow maybe a pig and a little room and the old lady and the kids and the pig and the cow and

everybody in the same goddamned room. But the old man is trying to figure out how he can make enough money out of that coal mine so he can buy another pig or a cow, or maybe buy a piece of machinery so he can break another couple of acres of land. And coming back out well, was the way they went in. On the back of the freight. But the Mounties and the CP bulls, CN bulls, every time one of them Mounties, them miners came out of the mine, he maybe had \$40 bucks in his pocket for a winter's work eh? Then, they would charge him \$35 dollars for riding. And them old miners would just scream and they'd cry like a son-of-a all goddamned winter and the goddamned miner. Here the Mounties and the CP bulls or the CN bulls wind up with all the money.

But who are they gonna bitch to? They couldn't bitch. They never get organized and they went in there. The old man being a lefty, a left-winger used to sell books, sell literature on the job. And they'd say 'you fuckin' commie bastard' (laughs)

Interviewer: Would the literature be in English or would it be in Ukrainian?

Walter: He would sell literature in both English and Ukrainian. The old man, when he first came to this country, what he did, he bought one of those Edison, you know them tubes players, he introduced them to the English language. And the man could speak. He spoke English. It was fluent but it was accented eh? He could speak Ukrainian, he could speak German, he could speak Polish, he could speak Russian, he could speak five languages. And they'd say 'the dumb fucker. He can't speak English' (Laughs)

But anyway, when my old man got out of jail things cooled down a little. He worked very close with Margaret Crang at that time, who was the, who was running for election here in the city as the Alderman. He was very good, and he worked very close with her. And then there was an old lady, and they used to, what they did, soon as somebody came to town that was a little stranger, they would give him a horse or two horses, a hay rack, a cow, and ship him out to a goddamn farm. And some of these farms they were just nothing but sand. You couldn't grow nothing on them if you tried. So this lady, she was on the farm and she just about starved. She came in and she said 'Bill, they won't give me any relief. What am I going to do?' 'Well,' he said, 'let's think about it. Come back in

a couple of days and we'll have a committee and we'll talk about it'. And just about where the building is now, the new federal building on 97<sup>th</sup> Street and the theatre. Right in there was the where you got your relief. Bill said 'Tell you what. You go see this guy once more. Tell him what bad shape your in, what bad straits, and that you need some support. And then come out and tell us and see what happens'. So she went in and it was a great big Irish an Irish or Scotch man. He was a sergeant at one time. And he just headed for the door and he said, 'get out of here. You aint gonna get nothin'. So she came back and told the committee. The committee thought about it for a while and then said 'Listen, tell you what you do. You go back in tomorrow morning. But you have a big coat on. And under that coat you have a baseball bat. And when he says 'get out', you let him have it with the baseball bat.'

So Jesus Christ, next morning in the meantime they were all over 97<sup>th</sup> street from the railway tracks all the way to Jasper Avenue, full of unemployed. So the old man got the boys together, and he said 'Listen, as soon as this lady comes out of there, there will be cops over there and we want everybody to go to the police station.' So what happens (laughs), the lady goes in, the guy says 'Get out!' She takes this baseball bat and she beat the piss out of him. Oooh boy. Two minutes later, no it was only one, just a block away from the goddamned police station, out come about 10 cops, one little lady (laughs). Arrest one lady (laughs). They take her back, but they don't go back alone. There's 400 unemployed guys oohing and jazzing and cheering, 'Let her go, let her go, let her go'. And Jesus what are they going to do? So this went on for about 2 hours and the guys are out there, they're all orchestrated, 'let her go let her go.' I think the jail was vibrating (laughs). They let her go and she got some unemployment insurance and she got some relief. These were the kind of battles that went on.

Interviewer: How much was relief back then?

Walter: Oh Christ, relief wasn't very much. It was maybe a pair of pants if you were lucky.

Interviewer: There was no money?

Walter: No. They would give you a chit, and you'd go to the store and buy groceries with that chit. And the grocer would cash it in the city. Even then the grocer had to wait three months, or the storekeeper had to wait three months to get the money from the city. They didn't have any. This was a crisis, the Depression was a real goddamned crisis. (Coughs)

Interviewer: There was no such thing as unemployment insurance?

Walter: There was nothing. These fights took place also in them days, many of the old-timers and the unemployed they all got really Marxist-capital on everybody's street corner. They were reading this Marx. And the reason for it, was to understand what the hell was happening. They didn't know. And it is because those old guys did a little bit of reading and a little bit of fighting. And by 1940 when everybody started to work, the trade union movement started to get built. They started to get recognition for unions, unemployment insurance, benches??? All came out of this. Any progressive legislation we have today is thanks to those guys because they had set the ground work. They fought, they fought hard, they really fought hard. And they were de???? They had a big strike in Drumheller Valley. And big Slim, what's his name?

Interviewer: Slim Evans?

Walter: Slim Evans. He went to jail for two years. For the simple reason, he took money out of the United Mineworkers pockets, to feed the strikers, and he was charged with theft. (Coughs) That's why they came upon the Canadian Mine Workers Union. The communists were opposed to the Canadian Mine Workers. They said 'We need one goddamned union in this country, not a hundred of them'. And there was a hell of a lot of guys broke with the party when that happened. And they said 'hey, you're telling us what to do. This is bullshit. We know we can't work.' Here's a guy who had a contract. United Mine Workers had a contract sided with everybody mine, every mine company in the country, but no members, and no dues. And you, when you went to apply for certification, you couldn't because they were a contract (laughs).

See what was happening?

Interviewer: So you never certified?

Walter: You couldn't you couldn't do nothing. And the only certification that you could even –

Interviewer: The agreements then didn't –

Walter: Well there was an agreement in effect.

Interviewer: But it didn't mean that you belonged to a union?

Walter: You didn't belong to a union.

Interviewer: There was no...

Walter: There was nothing.

Interviewer: You didn't have to belong in order to work there, or was there a collective agreement?

Walter: That's right. So they had a hell of a fight. And the old man participated in these battles and battle after battle after battle until 1940. And then in 1940, he got a job at the Swinging Gate, the Swinging Bridge, and just at the east cooley. And he went and that was a CPR mine too. And he died up there, heart attack, 47 years of age. It was just a rough schedule of the old man.

Interviewer: Was he buried here in Edmonton?

Walter: He was buried here, yes. The miners buried him. Yah. Geez and we had the funeral.

Interviewer: In the meantime were you in school, or --

Walter: Oh yeah. I was what? 13 years old or something. Yeah.

Jeez and you know when the old man died, it took, ??? well the blessing to the old man took 45 minutes. For all the miners to go by him.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Walter: Yeah. Cause he was our right arm, he was our left arm

Interviewer: He'd earned it.

Walter: He'd earned it. But that was the kind of a guy that he was. ??? on relief. Christ we've got a little place there, a little garden there.

Interviewer: And your mom, she lived a long time?

Walter: She lived to 84, 83.

Interviewer: 19?

Walter: She died in, it was about 1984. She was born in 1900.

That means 1200 people. But when they were mining in the winter time there was 27,000 miners working in that little valley. So you can see how big it was to coal. See that Wayne, that's where they had some big strikes was at Wayne. You been in Wayne?

Interviewer: No.

Walter: There's about 14 little bridges you go into before you get into the little town. And the battles that took place there.

Interviewer: What was your, what was your first job Wally when you came out of school? We're rolling again.

Walter: My job? I was a labourer (laughs). Packing lumber for some jerk head for about 25 or 30 cents an hour I don't know.

Interviewer: And then from there?

Walter: Oh it didn't take me long to find out that this is a lot of bullshit, and I went carnivalling (laughs). And then I, you remember the Teamsters Union? In those days it wasn't bad. The Teamsters because, we would organize this, it was North Edmonton Taxi and everybody was doing fine.

Interviewer: What year would that have been?

Walter: Oh boy it was in the forties

Interviewer: And you remember the Teamsters Organization?

Walter: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you organized it?

Walter: No no no. I joined them about 1948 I think it was.

Interviewer: Is that because you were carnivalling?

Walter: Carnivalling, carnival carnivalling. When you're carnivalling you can only do it for a certain parts of the season. You can't even work at it 12 months of the year.

Interviewer: Now did that lead into the Teamsters –

Walter: Yeah. Now well, my dad's influence had a hell of a lot to do with me being a party member, member of the union and everyone else. That's why I got started.

Interviewer: You started in the Teamsters' Union

Walter: Yeah. By 1948, yeah. That's the taxi. Everybody didn't do good. Well, everybody did good, but it was selling booze eh? Oh gee. Selling booze and playing cards, shooting crap. Oh Christ. Everybody else was working for \$25 a week. We were making \$120 (laughs). They get \$7 for a case of beer, cry we didn't get \$8 (laughs) Jesus. We had an old guy just down the street. He always left his doors open. You'd go in there at 2 o'clock in the morning get a bottle of whisky, take it out, leave him the money, sell it.

Interviewer: The union movement was, at that time, 1948, that's when the oil first, the big oil –

Walter: Yeah the oil started to come in.

Interviewer: It started to happen here?

Walter: Yeah. Yeah. It's when it started up in the area.

Interviewer: And the union movement, what was happening?

Walter: Oh the union movement, it didn't move that fast. We were always a little behind.



Interviewer: Because there was construction and refineries being built, or started to be built around –

Walter: Everything was just starting then. It really didn't start until the fifties, the building of everything eh?

Interviewer: ???? was built in about 1952, 53 some –Were you involved with the Teamsters then?

Walter: No I was still cabbin' working about 1955 I think I started to get involved serious. I started with the post office, trying to get the Teamsters into the post office. You know hustling mail in the winter in-between. Yeah and we started in there. And everyday it gets more serious and serious and more seriouser (laughs).

Interviewer: Then -

Walter: Then we got fighting like hell. There was old Dave what's his name. He started the big fight for two, what do we do, what do we got here now. We got broke down ??? Because we worked with, we used to get a letter from old Jake Penner from Winnipeg. To explain the board system and how it works and how we needed it.

(Coughs)

Your old Jack Upland, Doskoch and a few Mary or Annie,

Interviewer: About 25 years later (laughs)

Walter: 20. We got, we got all kinds of things done.

Interviewer: But back to your – some of your stuff with the Teamsters –

Walter: We were organizing trucking companies and warehouses.

Interviewer: And how was some of that. What's some of the stories, that you can relate some of those about how negotiations went. How you did –

Walter: Negotiations were tough and that. Remember we had the Scot, Scot whatchamacallit, oh that Fruit, Fruit, Scot Fruit. Geez that was a rough one. The guys said 'you and I can talk' but he said 'These, these aren't people, they're animals'. I said, 'what do you mean animals. They're like you, born the same goddamned way'. 'Yah,' but he said, 'they don't think'. He said 'all they want to do is get in the corner and fuck'. If you were a foreman you could screw any girl you wanted in there. Oh and even though some of the guys there ---

Interviewer: When you were getting at that time were you involved with the Labour Council at all?

Walter: Oh yes.

Interviewer: And you were by that time?

Walter: Teamsters, Teamsters were always involved in the Labour Council. To me the greatest, the best guy that ever lived in this area, was Dave Keer. Dave Keer was the, he was the top notch in the building trades. And he was from what union? He was from the IPW. He was an old mayla obok. That's what one of the electricians he first came into this country eh?

The guys had all the work cut out from the attics. So they called all these guys 'narrow-backs' just so they could get in-between. But old Dave when he set that local up he came out of the Winnipeg General Strike. And he moved in here by freight or I don't know how he'd gotten here. But he set it up and he took over from the City Local when he set it up this local the sub-local'd start, 424.

Interviewer: Oh the one for construction?

Walter: Yeah. Construction was set up. And then he started. But he was the kind of a guy that refused, he would never go on a job and settle agreements. He said 'it's not my union, it's yours. You settle the son-of-a-bitch' And he had all them guys (laughs) I'll tell you, somewhat evident bang, that was it. That job would be down and we'd shut every goddamned thing ????? until it was settled.

Interviewer: You could do that in those days?

Walter: Oh. And old Dave, an old Scotch man you know. They would be in negotiating. A nickel in them days was a hell of a lot of money you know. And he'd grab a hold of the table and he'd say 'I'll no move until I get me money'. Oh Geez, oh boy. (Coughs). But he had those guys trained. (Coughs) He said the business agent's job is to make sure that compensation is correct, unemployment insurance is correct, pensions are correct, this is correct. This is the job of a business agent, to look after the business that guy can't do. But the union is the member's business, and the member has to run that goddamned union, and he has to fight for what's his. He don't get it for nothing.

Interviewer: In those times there was a social credit government here. What, how were things playing out –

Walter: There were fights, fights

Interviewer: ...Progress?

Walter: Oh there were a lot of fights. But old Dave didn't give a shit. He'd just say, 'Bang' I remember when we first started building over there at , oh I was a business, I was organizing for the Teamsters but I oh what the hell is down about Jasper, Hinton, remember that guy. Everybody had the, the beaver. Ooooh boy (coughs). That's when old Dave tuned me in 'ye caint do that by'. You can do this you can do that you can do the other thing. And he started me thinking a hell of a lot in the trade union movement.

Interviewer: For some reason there was a great apprentice-ship program in the province, but the rest of the programs like health and safety didn't seem to be very much.

Walter: There was nothing. He was anti, he was anti everything, Manning. Like his kid. (Coughs). And hell,

Interviewer: ...between 1950 and 1960. Sorry, what happened in, I wasn't too clear on on what the what the events were there...

*They were building a pulp mill ????*

Walter: Well they had a very bad camp in there. Jesus Christ it was a bad camp. And the guys shut her down a couple of times because of the camp. And everybody got that ??? – remember that beaver disease everybody got runnin? ??? another crap in the house you couldn't sit in for two days (laughs). It was terrible. Jesus the smell, oh my God. Almost kill you (laughs).

Interviewer: But some of your, some of the other negotiations I think at the time –

Walter: Oh we were also negotiating up at Gunner mines. We settled it the last agreement we had. It was me and Nestles, and ?? Alan who used to be with the IB, with the IBW – Lethbridge? He died. And oh Janoski, he was with the labourers. He was the shop steward up there. We had sat down and figured out how we were going to get a goddamned agreement. Well what happened, if we went on strike, it would have been November. You know, Lake Athabasca in November about 40 mile an hour wind or a 50 mile an hour wind. Christ everybody near froze out on that bloody lake.

So we had a dime. What to do with the dime. So we made a deal. Take 7 cents first, 3 cents in the last bit. But that put us in at 2. A labourer at that time, sweeping the goddamned machine shop was \$2.35 hr. Christ it was unheard of. And then the Irish men, at that time there was all them Irish men come over to this country. And Jesus Christ as soon as they found out they had an agreement, I don't know where the Christ all that

booze come from. But the place was full of booze (laughs). And we had a Mounty that was living right next to us. And one of them backs up there while we were up there negotiating. He said, 'you goddamned union bastards' he said, 'you should be having the shit kicked out of ye'. He said here I am working 12 hours a day and I'm getting nothing. And you guys are negotiating money. He was madder than hell because we were getting it and he wasn't. We said stop, join the union.

Interviewer: I thought that was a ??? or was it a

Walter: That was a Gunne??? It was the Teamsters it was a joint venture.

Interviewer: It was a joint venture, oh, different.

Walter: There was the Teamsters were there the labourers were there, the electricians were there, the operating engineers were there, machinists were there and the millwrights were there. There were about 5 unions in there. We had a hell of a fight.

Interviewer: So, you got that resolved?

Walter: We got that, yeah we got that dime. We were the highest paid in the industry. The dime really switched it around. He offered us two cents and three cents up to build up a dime. To build up to that dime, and we got it switched from 2 cents to 7 cents. Which was a hell of a lot of money.

Interviewer: So then you came back to Edmonton and continued on the organizing?

Walter: Oh yah we started we were organizing all the time.

Interviewer: What were some of the things that some of the various ?? business plans -

Walter: Oh my God. We got into a lot of trouble. We had a couple of guys that had a lot of aspirations. Chuck Palmer, and a guy by the name of Charlie White. They always

wanted to pick up easy shops. You know. And it caught up. And the International stepped in. And they fired the goddamned business manager Erickson, who at that time was the president of the federation. And we had a hell of a time and the unions started to go down hill after that. There was so much pressure from all over. You just couldn't, you couldn't hold it. That was 514.

But we did have, when these fights were going on I'll tell you what, the guy I really liked, the best was old Jimmy Hoffa. We said 'Jimmy we gotta problem'. He said 'What happened'. So we told him what's happening. He said, 'tell you what you do. You bring your preacher into the meeting, and let him say grace or something before the meeting starts. He said, you'll kick the shit out of 'em' (laughs). And it worked.

Interviewer: Oh good.

Walter: Oh yeah. He did real ????? tonight. It just takes the wind out of their sail. Here's this guy praying for everybody for peace and understanding and love and friendship. All these little wonderful things. What do you do? So, that's the way it went.

Interviewer: So, Jim, Jimmy had some role to play here?

Walter: Oh yes.

Interviewer: You guys were in touch with him?

Walter: Oh, he was the only guy, only international president I know if you phoned him right now, he'd answer. He wouldn't dare say 'Listen, I can't help you. Phone so and so, he'll do something for you'. To me, he was the best.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Walter: Yeah. Well, as I remember meeting here at the time old Joe Clark, Joe Clark, a good devout Catholic, was the president of the Mine Miller Smelter's Union which was

known as a great communist union you know. And Joe, he's an old Catholic, but he's the president. And man that guy could speak. I tell you, the words while he was talking flow out of his mouth. Man it was love and peace and friendship and everybody had an agreement. Everybody was doing great. To listen to him talk was just. It was at that time we had a strike we called in Colorado, and they were getting raided by steel. And Joe said, 'You know I need some money. How ???go on strike.' When you got no money in the bank, what do you do?. So he said 'I went to see Jimmy'. Jimmy says, 'tell me how much you need partner'. Joe said I need a million dollars. He said 'I'll have it in the bank tomorrow morning 10:00' That's the kind of a guy he was.

I tell you that you know that goofy scotch man on the coast there? Who used to be on that television show always with all the answers?

Interviewer: Jack Wapsaki

Walter: Jack Wapsaki, went to the room with ????. Jimmy was. He said 'Young Jimmy Hoffa. What do you do this far away?' And Hoffa looked at him and he said, 'Where the hell did you come from out of that woodwork?' (laughs) That's all he said to him. Oh that guy didn't like old Jimmy for –

Interviewer: It seems Hoffa has a real reputation for being an anti-communist. So when you talked about that story about the mine workers, that's really different than how people normally hear about him.

Walter: Hey, communism is, communist party is like a liberal party, it's like an NDP party it's like a social democratic party. Like I said here before, competition. Everybody is competing for a position. You know as long as you're in power you're going to try and fight like hell to keep that power. And everybody else is doing the same thing. So when you look at the trade union movement, is this what we want? Everybody competing for the same goddamned thing. Or how do we learn to get together. That's why it was always figured out hey, 'this class struggle'. Here you've got a boss, and what does this boss do? He sells the products. But, he doesn't pay taxes. He doesn't pay rent, he doesn't pay a

power bill. He doesn't pay for anything, because his customers pay for everything. Now, on top of that, he has shares for sale. Interest of money in the bank is his. You know. And he has so many more monopolies, that a working guy can't get enough money to buy what he produces. Yet whose the guy who consumes what he produces is the worker. And he can't get it.

But instead of looking at it as 'hey we're all workers and we're in a class, fight for that class', people say yeah but I'm not – I figure I'm this or I'm that or I'm something else. This is my claim to fame'. But it's not - because it's against every, but the contradiction is there, it's the competition, it's the phenomenon.

Interviewer: Wally how did it come to be that you joined the Plumber's & Pipefitters Union?

Walter: Cause I thought it was the best goddamned union there was in this area.

Interviewer: So you joined that ??? steamfitter ???

Walter: Yes, I liked that union. It was a very good union. We fought, you and I fought and that bastard we fought like hell, we got the goddamned LRT started, and we got the ??? system in, we got the ambulance in. All these things we did. Annie, and I've talked to Annie, and I've said 'Annie, for Christ sake. You've got to answer some questions'. She said, 'I don't know'. So I'm trying to get a meeting with Bill Braughton. Bill Braughton was the guy that brought AUPE into the goddamned trade union movement when it was a department of the government. And I'm trying to get those two people because they've got a lot to offer.

Interviewer: So you, when things were not, you said things were slipping with the Teamsters, you weren't happy, you –

Walter: Well that local went out of business. And I had to go to work.



Interviewer: Because you would have known?

Walter: We were in the pipefitters union for years.

Interviewer: What made you think it was a good union? You said it was a good union

Walter: Because it was. It was a lot of rank and file participation. That's what made the pipefitters such a damn good union. It was a rank and file participation. It didn't matter what happened, there was some rank and file there. Saying 'this is wrong, this is wrong' or 'this is right'. Christ I remember when George, George Rankle got a smack in the mouth by his brother's a golf pro here. He lives on the coast there. (Laughs) George didn't say no and no charges or nothin' was laid. It was the best union. I don't care.

Interviewer: Tell me the story of some of those ?????, because you guys know about them, but I don't. So, start with the wards system. What's that about?

Walter: The wards is a certain area that elects a certain person, one person or two persons, the way it broke down here.

Interviewer: I was talking to Jack, but I just want to get the answer.

Walter: There was six. We broke out of the six wards here, with two aldermen in each ward. What it used to be in the city was the guys in the west end had the money to get elected. When they had their ballot it went right across the whole city. And they would, they would go out to the west end on a Sunday morning and have a beer and decide policy for the city of Edmonton. Then here again the working class is left out in the goddamned cold. It's got nothing. No voice, no vote, no nothing. We already spent our vote, and it was a bad one. And that was the, that was why we need the ward system.

Interviewer: And actually and you and I co-chaired and co-chaired the civic affairs committee for the labour council. And that's what we worked on. But those are 10 years projects.

Walter: Oh geez it was.

Interviewer: So how'd you go about doing that? Keep talking to each other, but just, you know, how, what were the stages of that. How did you...what were the stages of that. How did you manage to get that through. Because obviously a lot of people with a lot of interest wouldn't want to see it happen.

Walter: A lot of people didn't want to see it happen. But we argued and debated and debated.

*(Wally says he talked about it in 1955 eh. I didn't come along until about 196?)*

Walter: We were talking about it all the time. Because it was, we didn't establish any precedent. It was there. All we had to do was make it work.

*(But it was uh, well we kept working with the various councilors at the time, the various mayors and whatever. And friends we could find here and there.)*

Walter: Everywhere.

*And those were the three things we took on. Having an ambulance, because in those days the ambulance was privately owned.*

Walter: It was a terrible thing.

*It was an awful mess.*

Interviewer: Tell me more about that. How was it a mess, I mean. So I've got it on tape.

Walter: Well everything was privately run. And when it's privately run, it's only run for the guy that's gonna try to make a buck. It means nothing to the guy that's sick and

dying. He can't afford an ambulance so he has to stay home all day. So we figured 'hey. We're more people than that'. So we fought like heck to get the city to operate the ambulance. Which we got. It was a little bit of a fight but it was a worthwhile fight. And we got that started. Just like this LRT. My God we had a hell of a fight there. We started out at the university. Then we went from there and met with the Ukrainians I don't know. We met with the unions, we met with everybody. It went to a bloody vote in the city, we finally got it passed. But we had one hell of a fight. But it was a big fight. It was worth it. Then we had old Jack Dick. He said what are you guys doing to management? Oh my god, look at the money they gotta pay. Yet the labourers made more money off that bloody job and built that bloody union of theirs. The plumbers only had a few people on that bloody job. But the labourers – they were the ones that totally opposed it. Most of them.

*Then right after that we were kicked out of the Labour Council.*

(Laughs)

End.