

Union steward Labour college University of Calgary Highway
Patrolman Australia AUPE 1980 AUPE illegal strike Correctional
Officer

Peter Connely

May 21, '08

PC: I was born and raised in Calgary. My father worked as a shipper for Eaton's, and it was certainly a nonunion environment. I heard some of his comments about what would happen to people that worked there. He worked there for 35 years. He got sick and they tossed him out. They said, you're going on our wonderful pension plan, which was about \$50 a month. As soon as he got well enough he had to go and get another job to survive, even though he'd been there 35 years. He'd put in his five years overseas in the Second World War. I was in the navy for a short while, three years, in the late '50s and early '60s. Following that I was a police officer in the city of Edmonton for eight years. I remember thinking a few things like, oh they should lock up all those postal workers. They were always going on strike back in the '60s. Not only thinking it but also believing it. I knew some of them very well. I remember making that kind of comment to them. Where I ended up considering I used to think like that, and I guess I thought like that because that's what the people around me thought, and would express it.

Q: Do you remember any of the postal worker strikes?

PC: Yes, I do remember them. It seemed to be happening all the time. I expect it was pretty prevalent because that's when they were trying to get some contracts that actually meant something. Much later I came to the belief that no matter what they got in the contract at the post office, the post office would just ignore most of it anyway, and they would end up with thousands and thousands of grievances piled up that would never get heard. That's a different point of view. When I left the police force I went down to Australia and moved around to a number of different cities down there. Most of Australia

seems to be in about five cities. Once you go outside the city you can look for a thousand miles and not see anybody. It was a highly unionized environment. Just about any job that you got into was unionized. I had an opportunity to see that all sorts of things happened to working people even though they were in unions. I used to see things happen to other people and it didn't actually happen to me. But it used to really annoy me when I saw what the employer would do to some people and there didn't seem to be a heck of a lot they could do about it. That was even with union. One that really set me off was a guy [who] became ill a few times and the employer said, you're ill too much, you're fired. It actually went to arbitration and he still ended up fired. The reason they did it is because if you were there five years, and it was a public service job, if you were there five years you then became vested with this insurance plan. Before that, once you're gone you're gone. But if they tried to do that after five years you could go on the equivalent of long term disability. I don't recall what it was called now but it was something of that nature. That was the kind of thing that I saw a lot of times. I think that was the first time I ever became a union steward, was in response to that situation.

Q: Do you remember the union?

PC: It was called the Municipal Officers Association, and it was Australia-wide. It was one of those unions where you couldn't be affiliated with any political party or anything of that nature, because they all worked for municipalities. I thought it was a pretty good union. I subsequently became very good friends with the fellow who was the equivalent of the staff rep. A number of years later I applied for a job there and I didn't get it. Strangely enough, the fellow that got that job was working in personnel. When I didn't get that job, that's when I made the decision to come back to Canada. It's my own expression, but I think I'd have been a foreign born bastard until the day I died, in Australia. Mostly because I sounded like an American, I was constantly having to say I'm a Canadian, then it was okay.

Q: Why did you go to Australia?

PC: Probably because it was one of the few places in the world as a white man that you could just walk in. It was somewhat similar to Canada in background with a British background.

Q: What year did you decide to come back to Canada?

PC: '75.

Q: Then what did you do?

PC: The first job of any significance, I had a few jobs for a few months, I worked at the University of Calgary as a campus patrol officer. When I started there it wasn't unionized and after a few months they were included in the bargaining unit. They were having bargaining and at all times there was always a review of who's in and who's out. At the University of Calgary that process went on for years and years and years. Eventually, when I was a staff rep with AUPE, we got a lot more people in that had been excluded just because the employer would hire them and say, oh you're in an excluded position, and it wouldn't be challenged.

Q: What was the union like in those days?

PC: That was the very year that they first changed over to a union. It was the Civil Service Association of Alberta prior to that [and] was described by most people as the cap in hand bargaining, please sir.

Q: What was the process like?

PC: You went in and talked to some representative. If the employer wanted to give you something they'd give it to you, if they didn't they didn't. You walked away and would just be thankful for anything you got from the employer.

Q: When did you decide to become active in the union?

PC: Believe it or not, I used to talk a lot more then than I do now. I moved over to another job with the solicitor general's department, the Alberta Highway Patrol. They don't exist anymore but at that time it was enforcement of the regulations dealing with trucks, that was their primary function. They had a authority for any Alberta statute, including the traffic act, but primarily it was focused on truck traffic, over weights and things of that nature. I guess I'd done a lot of talking to the people I was working with about where's our contract? Nobody had one. Well how do you get one? Oh they're not in print anymore. Then I'd say, well when I was in Australia we did this and that. I guess I was saying to people, well I was the vice chair for the city of Perth and part of the negotiation process and so on. The first meeting I went to of everybody in the highway patrol, somebody who I'd been talking to said, oh let's have him be the union guy. I didn't know anything about this union, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. So I kind of backed into my first involvement. They said, ya it's going to be you, we're all voting for you. I said, well I guess you have to have the courage of your convictions, so I'll go. But what actually is this position that you're electing me for? It turned out it was a multifaceted position. I represented the chapter of the highway patrol as correction office. Almost everybody in this division, as they called it at that time, which was like a local, almost all of them were correction officers. They had a process at the time that because you came from something other than correction officer, you ended up being the vice chairman. That's the way it had been and it was usually that way. So I got elected to this position on the council of this division, almost without doing anything. I hadn't even seen any of the other people on this council, and they elected me the vice chairman of the council. All of a sudden I've got this high profile position in this division, and I don't know anything about this union. One of the other things that happens is you get elected to go to the convention when you get elected out of this chapter. I went to the first convention. The first convention I went to was the second one of AUPE, and they called it a re-founding convention. That was in 1976. My name ended up forever on this list of delegates that was at the start of AUPE because it was being re-founded. They completely redid the constitution over again because there were all sorts of things wrong when they

did it in the first place. It was like, finally we have a union and we've got a constitution that's workable. I found that convention a real eye opener in the workings of the union. It impressed me because, hey if you want something done you have to vote for it. If you want to get other people to vote for it, you've got to go and talk to them. It's when I discovered the importance of lobbying people. It really does work. I don't mean this in any negative way whatsoever, I considered myself to be exceptionally fortunate in that I was always able to talk to enough correction officers to support my views in relation to the people I was representing. I would convince them that that's good for you too. They had this tendency, it's not us, who cares, forget it. The odd person who I couldn't convince of my point of view on any issue, would probably agree at the time because they couldn't think of how to disagree, but then would resent me. I saw that later. They'd resent me and say, gee if he's not around I'm going to vote against it. I loved that, I really did. I was able to talk all these guys into supporting something they don't really want to support because it doesn't mean anything to them. That was one of the things I really enjoyed.

Q: But it did mean a lot to them.

PC: Yes it did, but they couldn't see that at the start. But I found I could actually convince them. They would end up, well all the things I've been saying I guess I'll stop saying them, because it doesn't make any sense. I had a lot of times this sort of thing happens, where I would convince somebody, not because they were correction officers, it's just those were the people I had to deal with. I would convince somebody of something they said, but the people in my chapter want me to do this. Then before we were finished they're doing something else because I'm saying, but that's not fair for everybody. Here are the reasons why. Then they'd go back and try to explain it to people and they couldn't do it. They would say you have to come and tell them. That was interesting.

Q: What's it like to work as a highway patrolman?

PC: As I said, your primary function was dealing with truck traffic. You'd be observing those trucks. If you'd see something that was obviously wrong with a truck, you might pull them over. You had a marked police vehicle, so you'd pull them over and check the whole truck out. If there was anything wrong you could give them a ticket. Almost any truck, if you stopped it, you could find 15 things wrong without blinking an eye. I used to mark them all down and say, this is the cheapest ticket I can give you for that one, so I'm going to give you that one. But if I see you next time and you haven't fixed up all these other things, because I don't want to give you something that says fix up the 15 things. If I do, they're going to be saying to me, how come you only gave him one ticket for \$15? So I'll give you that and if I see you again next time, you'll get the tickets for all of them. I used to have truckers that ran a company, phone me up at work just furious because I gave the driver a ticket because his left signal light was out in the back. He'd say, what kind of chicken shit stuff is that? But on my copy of the ticket that I don't turn in, that I just keep myself, on the back I would write all that stuff, otherwise you'd never remember. This might be a week later, you wouldn't know. I'd say, well did he tell you this, this, this, this, and did he tell you that I told him I was picking out the cheapest ticket there, but I wanted all these other things fixed? Oh no, he didn't. They'd be pretty sheepish. I liked to be able to do that sort of thing. You were still doing your job. But if you actually listed all that stuff my boss would say, you've got to give him a ticket for all that stuff.

Q: So you were serving the public.

PC: Ya. And a bit part of the job was the weight on trucks, but it wasn't always that. It was the equipment and the safety of the vehicles too. You could give them a report with all of these things to fix, but there were too many of them, I didn't like to do that.

Q: How were you serving the public in Alberta?

PC: In a couple of ways. One is because you were a marked police presence out there it affected everybody. It slowed everybody down. We didn't normally give tickets out for

speeding, sometimes but not often, because there was somebody else doing that. There was a lot of, oh that's your function and this is mine. Ensuring the safety of those trucks, because people who run trucking companies had this tendency to say, oh we'll fix that later, let's keep that truck moving, let's make the money. The other thing is the more we put on this load the more we can get on the other end. The highways are built for so much weight and if there's too much weight going down on one point, it breaks that highway all up. When you go there and you see the highways are all like this, mostly that's heavy vehicles doing that. A lot of money rebuilding those highways, and it's really unsafe to have those highways like that.

Q: Why did they need a union?

PC: I think they needed a union just in the same way that everybody else did. I'm going to give you a very specific example of something that happened after I'd been elected union steward, council rep, and all of these things. Having gone to a couple of courses about union stewards from AUPE, they ran the British Commonwealth Games and it would have been about '78. I'm just in the door. They took all the highway patrols off, all of them. Took them to Edmonton and said, you're going to drive the VIPs from venue to venue and you're going to be like a high class taxi driver for these games. You'll be required at all hours and this and that. I'm sitting there with everybody else in this room and I look around and say, god, I'm the union steward, why me lord? He's the boss, or one of them; a whole lot of them are up there at the front. He's talking about, oh you'll be required day, noon, night, doing this, doing that. I thought, what about this collective agreement? It's obvious to me that, what collective agreement, they say. This is the same outfit that would say, oh geez we forgot to budget for overtime so we won't be paying for that this year. That was the kind of thing that would happen. So I stood up and said, you know I hear you talking about this and all these things that we're going to be doing. You do know that we have a collective agreement. Are you going to working within the confines of that and paying overtime and shift differential and all of these things? The guy just looked at me. So I sat down. He started off talking just the same way again, like I hadn't said this. It was maybe 20 minutes that this went on, and I had to do it again. I

said, well I still haven't quite got the answer I'm looking for. Are we going to get paid like it says in the collective agreement? I was listing off all the different things he was talking about. His boss, who's the big boss of the highway patrol, said, oh yes Peter, everything will be done in accordance with the collective agreement. Because the other guy wouldn't say it. Then they said, well we'll have a break. So we all milled around out in the back and they called us back in and said, just read the board. On the board two thirds of us went home, including me of course, which suited me fine. I don't think they liked me much after that.

Q: So we just tested the collective agreement.

PC: I have to tell you that I actually remember the feeling that I had of, oh why me? I looked around and there [were] about 60 guys just like me, some of them my supervisors, all the bosses of this organization up at the front of the room. I thought, oh why me lord? But there was no one else and nobody else was going to do it. I thought, I can figure somebody saying to me, hey the guys stood up there and said they were going to break... every way they could think of, without literally saying that. You didn't do anything. In effect I thought I have to do it. I better get the hell out of this union job. But I also kind of thought, if I don't do it - nobody else will anyway.

Q: What did the act say about your people being in the union?

PC: They weren't excluded in any way. I wasn't a part of that process of getting them into the union, although I had been a lot closer to it when I was with the campus patrol, where they had been excluded until I got there. It wasn't me - they did it at negotiations. We were constantly trying to get more people into the bargaining unit. Over the years they were always getting this group and so on.

Q: Did the people at the university feel they had a choice?

PC: What happened with the University of Calgary is when they were unionized it was done under the act, and it didn't say this person is and that person isn't. It was essentially a general agreement of who's in and who's not. In the general service of the government, there was an agreement with the government, okay I'll be covered by a union. Essentially a lot of that was the government made the decision of who was in and who was out. Over the years some of that changed through negotiations. ... Can I just continue that other anecdote? I worked in an office where there was a supervisor and myself. At that time we were working out of Strathmore. He stayed when two thirds of us went home. After he'd done a week or so he said to one of the bosses, you are going to pay me for this as it should be in the contract. They started humming [and] hawing. He said, and I loved this when he told them, if you don't pay me the way I'm supposed to be paid I'm going to tell Pete Connely. This was my supervisor. I thought that was so funny when he told me about it after he came home. He said, I don't know about the rest of them, but I got paid the way I wanted to be paid. I think he's probably right, I'll bet they didn't pay the rest of them.

Q: What was the attitude of members toward the union in the early '70s?

PC: I think it was probably a lot more effective than people thought it was. My observation was they actually accomplished quite a bit. Almost every year they got a little bit better off for the members they were representing. But a lot of times most of the members didn't know anything about it. Even if they were sent material they would just toss it, and they didn't know anything about it. But what I did find, and of course it was mostly after the incident I was talking about in the highway patrol, people used to come to me all the time and ask me, what's this, what's happening there? Just that one incident gave me a pretty high profile in terms of the union and my particular work. I didn't see most of these people except maybe once a year. I think the great majority of the members of AUPE didn't know anything about it and didn't really want to know. Sometimes when it was something the employer just would not do for them, union or not, they would blame the union. It's the union that makes you do that. The employer would say that, and it would come down through the different levels of management, the union won't let us

do that. When somebody would ask them, what about this, the union won't let us do that. What they meant was in the collective agreement it doesn't say you can do that, so therefore the union won't let you do it.

Q: In those early years, what did the union do to make itself more effective?

PC: Probably one of the primary things was they ran a lot of courses, a lot of education courses. I took many of them. I personally went to a basic union steward, an advanced union steward course, all sorts of other courses. I continued to do that. I actually went to the labor college in Ottawa for a couple of months. They were a little hesitant about sending someone from AUPE back in those days. Somebody said, oh we sent somebody one time and then she quit after she came back. I think that happened a few times. But I thought it was a good idea. It allowed you to not so much what you were learning in the courses, but you were rubbing shoulders with all these different people from different unions and getting all sorts of waves of unionism out of that, that I don't know how else you could get that. An example of that on a not quite so intense basis is the Alberta Federation of Labor conventions, where you'd get an opportunity to see all sorts of people. I used to take those opportunities. I used to go and sit in the hospitality rooms outside the conventions. I'd never go to my own. I used to go to the Carpenters and Joiners. They eventually thought I must be a carpenter, because I was there all the time. Nobody would ever say, well who the hell are you? They came from all over the province and they didn't all know each other anyway. I used to find you learn more stuff about unions by going to these other places and listening to people talk there. Most often they were always so welcoming. One of the things that always impressed me once I got involved in AUPE [was] most of the people that I met, I really liked them - they were good people. I think that had a lot of effect on me. I thought, hey these aren't people trying to get out of going to work, they're good people and they're really concerned about doing things for the people they're representing - most of them. I say that because there are so many places in life where you can get a bunch of people together and I just thought most of these people are not there for themselves. I couldn't think of any other group that I'd ever seen like that. It did impress me.

Q: Who are some outstanding union people you remember?

PC: **Claire Brown** probably had a big influence on me. He was an educational officer in the union. He was the kind of guy that wasn't only knowledgeable and could pass on that knowledge, but he was a real friendly, likeable guy. He and I became friends just like that. When I ultimately in 1980 went to work for the union, I went and lived at his place for five months while my family was finishing school in Calgary. So we were pretty close friends.

Q: Who were some of the negotiators?

PC: I can't remember his name. It wasn't Jake, it was the guy who was a correction officer. Len John, isn't that awful to forget people's names. He and I got along very well too. He was negotiating the contracts that I was involved in. Incidentally, once I got onto this council of all the correction officers and once they saw I could talk them into anything even if they didn't want to, next thing you know they made me the chair of their negotiating committee. Not just one of the members, they made me the chair of their negotiating committee. When I got on the chair of the negotiating committee for that local, I being the chair went on to being what they called the general service bargaining committee of all the different locals in the general service, of which there were 12 at the time. That put me on the master contract negotiating committee as well. I used to say to people, it's the cream rising to the top. It isn't just because nobody else will do it. But I did sort of wonder sometimes.

Q: What was it like negotiating with the employer back in those days? What did you expect to find when you went to the table?

PC: I had originally expected there'd be some free discourse on what's good and what isn't good, and why you can't do anything. I found mostly it was the employer having you negotiate with yourself all the time, because they wouldn't say anything. You could talk

forever and they would say a few negative things about it, and you'd go away and say, well I guess we're not going to do that, but take a different position that isn't so strong. So you would sit off in a room by yourselves and negotiate amongst yourselves and come back with something less, just because they weren't really telling you anything. You had no idea if they were prepared to do anything about anything, because everything was negative. They always had this position that in my view is just ludicrous, there were all sorts of things they had [no] intention of ever doing those things. But there they were as part of their position. So you always had to balance what you might want against, geez they want to take this all away, anything that you may have had there. To give you an example, one time [a] contract went to arbitration. The arbitrators, most of whom were these real rightwing guys, because they were the only ones the government would agree to, actually gave the employee a few things the employer had any idea that anybody would ever do. It took years to overcome what these arbitrators did.

Q: Talk a bit about why you went to arbitration.

PC: Because, I'm just trying to think if we ever actually went to arbitration while I was still a member, and I don't think we did. No.

Q: How did you become a staff rep?

PC: Probably because I was becoming more and more involved in my union activities. Because of the negotiations, I really thought it was a process that I would be reasonably good at, having observed it for a while. And I was encouraged by a number of people in AUPE. I found that I enjoyed what I was doing with the union. I was spending virtually all my days off doing union business. A lot of the days I was supposed to be [at] work that I would get time off to go do union business, because of the negotiations. I found I was enjoying that a lot more than doing the job I was doing on the highway patrol. Part of that might've been I always had the impression I could do that job with my eyes closed and standing on one hand. It was so easy you didn't really have to do much. I think I did it well. I just thought, well this one interests me a lot more. I found I was spending a lot

of time doing it on my own time, and I was enjoying it. So I actually applied with AUPE once as a negotiator and didn't get that job. However, the people that actually got hired, I thought, well I'd have hired them too. So it didn't bother me. They all said, you had a really good interview, apply again. You should probably apply to be a staff representative. They'd just changed their name to union representative, that's what they were actually called. In the meanwhile I went to the labor college, came back, and the following year I applied again and was hired as a staff rep. At that time I was the vice chairman of the master contract negotiations. The president of AUPE was the chairman and I was the vice chairman of that committee. ... So I was pretty active. I don't see how I could've been any more active, because I didn't have any more time than I was already putting in. I lived in Calgary at the time and I found I was going up and down, up and down. Virtually everything happened outside of Edmonton, because that's where the government was, so that's where they wanted you to be. That's where the headquarters of AUPE was. So I found that if I had two days off I'd spend the two days off in Edmonton, and half of the rest of the time getting there and back. I was enjoying it, there's no two ways about it. I liked the people and I was enjoying what I was doing, and I thought it was worthwhile. I thought we were actually accomplishing something. So in February 1980 I started as a staff rep in Edmonton. I had to move up there. My kids were going to school here in Calgary so I left them here until the summertime and they came up in July, the wife and kids.

Q: What was it like being a staff rep?

PC: It was a learning process, if for nothing else, on how you had to deal with these people that represented the government. It seemed to me like thousands. They had buildings full of people that their only function was to tell other people in the government, here's what you should be doing on your job. They didn't actually do any of those jobs, they'd just tell you here's how you should be doing it. All the various personnel functions, they had whole buildings full of them. And then each department had a whole bunch more. We had to deal with all those people with any problems that came up, whether it was an individual or something that affected everybody. Sometimes

you had to search around, well who is it that I should actually be talking to here? Just talking to those people and learning how to talk to them in an effective way was probably the biggest learning process. Many of the things that you were doing were probably things that you do in everyday life anyway. If you were the kind of person who could successfully do those things, then you could do this. But learning how to deal with all those people, because some of them I always had the impression their job is to put me down. How to deal with that issue was something that you had to learn. The kind of people, for instance, that if you went into a grievance hearing, they wanted to talk to them and they wouldn't talk to you. You had to have an effective way of telling them, oh yes you do have to talk to me, and I'm the person you're talking to, not this griever. They would have to go their personnel first, and they'd say yes. You'd run into that a lot. People who never had anything to do with you, you'd never talked to anybody from the union before, and they would be a designated officer in a grievance procedure. You had to deal with that in a way that made it clear that yes they did have to talk to you, but not offend them so they're going to take it out on the poor griever.

Q: What kind of issues came up in grievances?

PC: Probably a lot of them were disciplinary issues, where somebody had received a letter of reprimand or a suspension, sometimes even fired. You would have to represent those people and try and get that overturned. But also a lot of issues on pay and benefits – I didn't get paid properly, I'm working overtime and you're not paying me for overtime, I'm working a shift and you're not paying me a shift differential. Things that are contained in the collective agreement, and the allegation from our member is, I deserve to get this and the employer hasn't given it to me. That used to happen all the time. You say, well it's written right there. I ran into lots of people who had never looked at the collective agreement in their life, managers. If they had they'd certainly forgotten about it and they didn't have one. Even if they knew about it, so what, it doesn't mean anything, I run this place.

Q: So having a collective agreement did not end the problem.

PC: Exactly. You have to have a means of enforcing that collective agreement - otherwise it's just a piece of paper. Managers just ignore it. Not all of them, some of them are very good about knowing what's in that collective agreement. Mind you, some of them know what's in there and they interpret it in a way that was never intended. Sometimes when that happens you have to go through the process of negotiations all over again and say, look that isn't the way it's supposed to be.

Q: ??

PC: Just the idea of fairness in the workplace, which sometimes you're never going to be able to codify in a collective agreement because every situation is a bit different. But there's a question of, c'mon you've got to treat people fairly, you've got to allow people some dignity in the workplace. Often that was not the case. Sometimes we would have grievances based on those issues. It wouldn't necessarily be a violation of any particular article in a collective agreement, but it's a violation of basic rights. I don't know how you codify that kind of thing. At the very least, if you could put a grievance in, it got somebody's attention. Otherwise sometimes they wouldn't talk to you. It's incredible that there were people who didn't want anything to do with it, nope, sorry.

Q: How far would you take a grievance, as staff rep?

PC: At that time normally there would be an informal step of one, two, three. It depended on the collective agreement, maybe three steps in the collective agreement, all going to people higher up on the ladder, supposedly.

Q: Would you handle it?

PC: Normally. Sometimes if you had a good steward, they would do one or two of the steps. It depended. Later I certainly had stewards that I trained myself and I knew them

and I helped them out, and they came with me and watched me, then I watched them, then they did it. Then some of those people were really very good.

Q: What was arbitration like in those days?

PC: It depended on the collective agreement as to what kind of issues you could actually take to arbitration. They were normally the more serious disciplinary issues or something in effect that cost you money. Those were the kinds of issues mostly you could take to arbitration. If it was your feelings were hurt about something, well that's too bad, you can't go to arbitration. It was usually spelled out in the collective agreement that this kind of issue you can't take to arbitration. So it did depend on that quite a bit. In some ways you could find there was some reluctance to go to arbitration because of the tremendous cost to it.

[new tape]

Q: Regarding AUPE's first big strike, why did members decide to go on an illegal strike?

PC: It was the year that I actually became a staff rep. It was the summer of 1980. It was probably the correction officers that were mostly involved in the strike initially. It was a question of their demands for a collective agreement not being reached in any way, shape or form. The employer was just dragging their heels on all the issues. I don't think they believed anything was actually going to happen, because it was unlawful. The Public Service Employee Relations Act said that if you couldn't come to an agreement at negotiations you had to go to arbitration. But it also said things like, here's quite a number of things, most of the things that you want to talk about, you can't take them to arbitration, because this law says so. It was in a unionist's view very restrictive. It said the employer doesn't have to give you anything and if you say, well we want to get it anyway, the only thing you can do is go this supposed third party. Here's another added little twist. You could try and agree on an arbitrator, and in the end that arbitrator is the one that makes the decision, even though there were side men, one from the union and one from

the employer. You had to have two out of the three agree. The union and the employer were supposed to agree on that arbitrator. If you couldn't agree, the government appointed one. So who do you think that's going to be? It's going to be someone who agrees with them because otherwise they're not going to appoint him. It was a system that was inherently unfair. It was also something that we as a union were continuously telling the employer- hey this system is unfair. ... I haven't talked about this for so long that I'm surprised that it just comes out all that easy. It was completely unfair. It essentially loaded the process in favor of the employer, in this case the government. Essentially they wouldn't negotiate with you because they knew there was nothing you could do about it. A lot of the things you'd naturally want to talk about, they wouldn't talk about them because they knew you couldn't take them to arbitration, so we don't have to talk about them. Sometimes they'd even say that. Not all that often, because you were supposed to know it too. But occasionally one of them would slip and actually say, well you can't take that to arbitration so we don't have to talk about that. Which is pretty frustrating, when there are issues that sometimes thousands of our members would indicate we want something to cover us under this kind of situation. So that frustration level kept building up because the employer was saying, no we don't have to talk about those kind of things. We're essentially going to give you what we want to give you, we don't care what you think. They wouldn't necessarily put it that way, but that was the effect of what they were saying. When we reported back, especially to the correction officers, when we reported that back to them the tension continued to build until eventually they said, through various meetings in their different institutions where their chapters were located, yes let's do something about it. They had their first strike in AUPE in the summer of 1980. By that time they would've been negotiating about six months. I do remember that it was the summer, because it was pretty hot. As a staff member I spent a lot of time on picket lines and there were so many of them that we'd be hopping around to all the various ones to give them some support.

Q: What places were picketing?

PC: Initially correctional institutions, jails - remand centers in cities of Edmonton and Calgary, and the jails like Spyhill [in] Calgary, which at that time I think there were three of them out there then, but I'm not sure. It was a complex of jails. So it was a bit strange to have all these people walking picket lines around outside jails.

Q: Normally the media tells the public that it was the union who convinced the employees to go on strike? What did you witness here?

PC: It was essentially the other way around with correction officers. They said, let's do something about it, when we reported to them what was happening in negotiations. They were pretty volatile. They wanted something done and they said, we're prepared to do that. And they were. It wasn't 100% but very close, very close.

Q: What happens to an institution like Spyhill when there's a strike?

PC: Essentially they just locked them down, everybody that's in there, which is a very dangerous situation, because they can't handle it. There's no way they can handle the prisoners without the guards there. You'd essentially just have management doing it, and management couldn't do it. Most of them don't know what they're doing.

Q: How did the government deal with the strike?

PC: What they did is they took the union to court, got a court order that said you can't do that. You can't go on strike - you can't be on a picket line. Then they went and served individuals on the picket line with those court orders, mostly just by throwing them down in front of people. Then they charged, they wrote down who they were doing this to, because they all know who they are, wrote down the most active people in that institution in the union. They charged those people with violation of the court order, and took them to court.

Q: Did the government succeed by doing that?

PC: No - not really.

Q: What happened?

PC: I've got to think about that part for a minute, just exactly how it went. I know that they convicted a number of people of violating the court order.

Q: What finally ended the strike?

PC: The government did move on a bunch of issues at negotiations. That's essentially what ended it. In the meanwhile, the strike had expanded out there, and there were a bunch of people out of local 1, mostly clerical people, brought out of individual buildings. Not the whole local because at that time I think there was about 15,000 people in that local. But they took them out of places like the land titles building, where now the lawyers are inconvenienced. And the treasury building, where people want to get paid for this and that. I remember the building in Edmonton, it was down the street from the legislature, and I think it was the treasury building. It was sort of a curved building. Strangely enough, all these women were really gung ho. I think some of them went out to work elsewhere, but I didn't see those, I saw all those hundreds of women who were keypunch operators and all sorts of different jobs inside the treasury building, out there on the picket line. They wanted something done, which kind of impressed me. I think that kind of pressure on the government, by picking specific buildings and functions that people were working at, that put pressure on some of the people in society that, oh all of a sudden we don't want any inconvenience for us, that caused that government to come back to negotiations and move on some issues.