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Interviewer Winston Gereluk, Camera Don Bouzek

Q: What is your current occupation?

MB: Currently, I am, I suppose, a professor in the Department of Labour Studies at George Brown College in Toronto. I am also an instructor at the University of Toronto; I teach Labour Studies and History.

Q: Tell me about your background.

MB: I was born in Grand Prairie, Alberta, northern Alberta. My father was doing research on wolves and skunks in northern Alberta. So I was born deep in the north. I lived in the north, moved around Alberta a little bit and ended up in Red Deer, where I partially grew up until I left the province when I was a teenager. My family comes from a very Canadian background. My grandmother's family was given a land grant due to war service, and they came from Scotland in 1926 and walked into a farm. My grandfather's family were no-region progressives who came to Alberta also as farmers via the United States. They had a fairly successful farm in Minnesota, which they then sold and brought it to Canada. My mother's family was also farmers. My grandmother came from a progressive family. My great grandfather was a founding member of the CCF. His brothers were both charter members of the Alberta Wheat Pool and were heavily involved in the cooperative movement. My grandma was a socialist and antiracist activist in Edmonton for many years. My parents are both scientists – my mother teaches Chemistry and Biology and my father is a biologist. So that's sort of my background – mostly Swedish, Norwegian, and part my family is from Bohemia.

Q: What kinds of political activities was your family involved in?

MB: My grandma was a Socialist. My mom is a lovely lady but the political one in my family was my grandmother and my great grandfather. My grandfather was also an IBEW member, a CCF member in the depression, and then an NDP partisan and a union activist within the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. My grandma had some problems with finding employment, because of her politics, so even though she was trained as a nurse she worked building the family and also sewing, cooking, and teaching piano.

Q: You presented a paper today on the great labour revolt.

MB: My talk today was on some older research I did towards my undergraduate thesis on the Edmonton general strike. I basically looked at how the Left and the labour movement in Alberta looked during the war and the post-war period. Alberta has a long and difficult history. They were trying to remove the Indigenous folks so they could turn the land in to capital. Then they flooded it with proletarians and farmers to try to increase the value of the land. This sudden break often caused people... I did some research on the Western Federation of Miners for my Masters thesis, and one of the reasons why the miners said they were Socialists was because they said, when we started mining here the Indigenous people still controlled the land. It wasn't that long ago, and then the capitalists just stole it, and now we die in our thousands as miners digging gold, silver, and coal out of the earth. But even 20 years ago this land wasn't fully enclosed, it wasn't private property. So this idea of socialism, of socialized production, production for use, was one that was very immediate for these people, because they had lived this change into high monopoly capitalism from a concrete capitalist project. I talked briefly about the running trades. The first strike that happens in Alberta is the Royal North West Mounted Police officers in the 1880s. They say, we don't want to work anymore; it's a lot more fun to just sit around and drink. They take a whole bunch of RNWMP officers and ride them in from Regina and smash this strike of the officers and actually haul them back to Regina in chains. But in Alberta, after the construction of the railroad comes through--that largely finishes up in about 1911 or 1912 and there's a huge unemployment problem in Alberta. We see this in the demographics of Edmonton. In 1911 the population of Edmonton is about 25,000; by 1914 the population of Edmonton is

76,000. So it basically triples in two and a half years, and then by 1915 because of enlistment it drops down to 56,000. Most of these populations are single men who are mostly immigrants, and under the racial taxonomies of the time, they are non-white. They're from eastern or southern Europe, or they're proletarianized, which is racialized in British discourse even. So 1914 and 1915 are relatively quiet times for labour uprisings, although after the sinking of Lusitania there are some so-called patriotic dismissals where miners go on strike and say, we refuse to work with these Austro-Hungarians. That helped accelerate what became interim operations of World War I. That's doubly troubling because a lot of these United Mine Workers locals were headed by Socialist Party of Canada members, people who were officially anti-racist, who were supposed to be Marxists, and supposed to believe in internationalism and proletarian internationalism. Yet they used the arm of the state to create more work. Because of that depression there was starvation in the mining regions in 1914, and people don't really talk about that. Children were dying; child death rates in the mining camps was through the roof. Wages were below starvation levels because the province was so full of surplus labour. But once this surplus population issue starts to get taken care of as '16 rolls into '17, then we start to see people getting more and more active in Alberta, and the state being very heavy-handed. The War Measures Act in Canada is extremely expansive and basically gives the government power to do whatever they want with no holds. So we have the internment operations, but the government also passes these orders-in-council which ban organizations. The government tries to ban strikes, or they actually do ban strikes. They ban foreign-language newspapers. They do all these things. But as this is going on, we also have profiteering scandals. We see the state actually starting to creak and crack a little bit under the weight of the needs for the war. Inflation is hovering between 10 and 30 percent a year, wages aren't going up, people are demonized for going on strike. Then in 1917 you have the Bolshevik Revolution. We have the Royal North West Mounted Police, which was supposed to be shut down; it was down to about 140 members. It was brought in to police and discipline the Indigenous population. That had been largely completed as a project in the eyes of the Canadian state by 1910. So Parliament was always trying to get rid of the RNWMP. But one of the interesting things is that after the Bolshevik Revolution the government is like, oh I know what we can do, we can reform the RNWMP as the RCMP and then we can use them to crush the Left.

That's exactly of course what happens. As the end of the war approaches, strikes in Alberta and the West generally start to get more common, more active, larger, and more militant. Also, at this time, the Left and the socialist militant Left that had been in Edmonton for a long time, like Rudolph Rocker, the English- language anarchist, spoke there in 1912 and there was the Socialist Party of Canada group. There was the Ukrainian Left, which eventually formed up into the USDP until it became the ULFTA, and there were a few other leftist organizations of so-called white ethnics. They were able to in some ways help push the labour movement to be more inclusive. Edmonton lost a third of its union members during World War I, which created space for non-British people to enter the Labour Movement. We see this in people like Carl Berg, who is an IWW member, who becomes involved in the Labourers Union. We see openings for people like Sarah Knight, who later helps write this newspaper, *The Soviet*. She's arrested in Winnipeg in 1918 for being anti-war, but her and her partner, Joseph Knight, edit the paper together, *The Soviet*, and are basically the head of the Socialist Party in Edmonton. So they're able to try to push the unions in sort of more leftward direction, but really this is coming from the bottom up, and they're able to direct it, and because of the crisis of capitalism they're able to move it along to the left and promote a revolutionary position in some ways. I think what happens in 1918 is that we have this sort of bifurcation in the Canadian labour movement. This is an old debate in the old historiography that was very contentious back in the '70s and '80s. I think there is something to it, that in the west it was disproportionately revolutionary socialist leaders and it was mostly industrial-based on the west as well. In the east there were lots of lefties but it had a very entrenched craft union movement that was very tight with the political system in the east. So you saw a lot less militancy and you certainly didn't see the sort of revolutionary arguments that we were seeing from the west – support of the Bolshevik Revolution, support for the Spartacus Revolution, a general strike to stop sending troops and supplies to fight the Soviets in the east, calls for the cooperative commonwealth. These were resolutions that were passed. So what happens is the labour movement splits east to west. Largely the east stays with the craft unions and the American Federation of Labor, and the west decides that they're going to start the One Big Union which is sort of modeled after the Industrial Workers of the World but it's sort of watered down. So all of that comes to a head and there's all this sort of repression and everything

in Edmonton. But it all comes to a head for May 1919 when everyone knows that when the May round of bargaining starts, something's going to happen. As the labour movement is splitting and moving in a left revolutionary direction in the west and sort of a socialist electoral movement in the east--they're not reactionaries; they're socialist labourites mostly. We had the general strike, which had always had a mythological character in the West because of the impact of the Industrial Workers of the World and all of their propaganda. We see it in Edmonton with the firefighters. The firefighters have a new chief imposed on them who's very unpopular with the firefighters; they want someone to come from the bottom up. So they go to the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council in 1918 and they say, hey if you want to support us, the way to support us is by threatening the City with a general strike. ETLC says, oh ya, we'll float the idea. So they go to Mayor Joe Clarke, who is a Labour guy elected out of Labour picket and they say, if you don't pick a new fire chief we're going to launch a general strike. So Mayor Clarke says, ya okay, and breaks, and they promote someone from inside. Then you have the freight handlers' strike in Calgary, where we have a strike and a sympathy strike. What happens is five union members are arrested and imprisoned under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act and the CTLC threatens a general strike if they're not released. The government backs down. This is the federal government, not the municipal government, and the federal government actually releases the five workers. That's just under the threat of a general strike. Then you have the revolution in Russia, which people see as a successful revolutionary general strike; the Petrograd general strike is what throws off the revolution. And then people are looking at the general strikes amongst sailors and soldiers in Germany. They're talking about Kiel, they're talking about the Spartacus Revolution in Germany even as early as 1918. So there's this idea and there's this proof that the general strike works. So you have all these things in the mix. You have the labour movement and workers dealing with high inflation and crappy working conditions, and xenophobia and British race patriotism, being largely a non-British population in the west. You have a split in the labour movement between people who believe in revolution politics and those who believe in social electoralism, which also has an element of geography. Then you have the world situation, which is changing. All of this comes at a head in May, because bargaining in Canada generally happens in spring because most labour is seasonal. Coalminers don't work all year round; they only mine

coal in the winter. Then coalminers would do things like become agricultural workers or even factory workers, because lots of factories would be seasonal as well. They always start bargaining in May because that's when the work year starts in North America. So all this was coming up in this big stew, and that's one of the things in Edmonton that I'm interested in.

Q: How did it happen?

MB: One of the things that's interesting about the industrial unrest in this period is that it's very immediate. It's difficult to divorce the politics of society, and by politics I don't mean who's getting elected -- who has power, how it's exercised, and what impact that has on the working class, and to juxtapose that with the immediacy of their needs. Workers had been told to just struggle. Specifically, Austro-Hungarian workers had seen their friends and comrades interned, and a number of the internees during WWI at least were USDP members if not union members. It has this very involved disciplinary regime against the working class, but also inflation is at this huge number. Wages aren't keeping up; so people are really interested and there's a demographic crunch. Until the Great War veterans come back, labour is in a really good bargaining position. It's not so much that they need big strike funds. It's not so much that they need a whole bunch of logistics -- they mostly relied on solidarity support from fellow workers and on the idea that if they acted with the maximum amount of power they could, they'd be able to win short strikes. The labour leadership, including the revolutionary leadership, like Carl Berg, who helped lead the Edmonton general strike, was an IWW member in Alberta. These people did very high-level interaction with strike action. They're like, long strikes lose. If you want to win it's got to be quick; you've got to smash the boss real fast. Everything has to work, because if the strike drags on, then the capitalists can maneuver and figure things out. In the Edmonton general strike, it was mostly again, like I said, this confluence of factors: demographics, inflation, global revolutionary upsurge, people angry over the situation. It didn't take much of a push to get 38 Edmonton unions to vote to join the general strike. Also then when people outside of the labour movement joined, like the Chinese laundry workers, although it was widely disparaged in the

press in all sorts of horrible racist ways, it showed that these feelings had a lot of deep resonance in the Alberta proletariat.

Q: It's interesting that in Winnipeg, more people showed up in the streets than were actually members of unions. It was more of a community strike. Was that true of Edmonton?

MB: The Edmonton general strike was fairly short. It was effective, it was well led, but Edmonton didn't have the industrial capacity that a place like Winnipeg had. We're talking about a fairly small city. The city at the time of the Edmonton General Strike had a large transient population. So it's tough to figure out how many people lived there, but between 55,000 and 65,000 people. The censuses aren't great; people are moving in and out all the time; we see fluctuations of tens of thousands of people in months. So in Edmonton we didn't really see that big upsurge, because there just wasn't the population. The other thing is that a lot of the workers in Edmonton were-- it was almost a white-collar town. It's the new provincial capital, so they need all these administrators, which sort of colours the feeling of the city, whereas the industrial workers were mostly the miners in Beverly and a few other places, who were overwhelmingly socialist, and the railway workers, who were very prosaic but also tended to be fairly progressive. Anywhere where the railway goes, so go blacksmiths, machinists, and all those other things. But Edmonton was mostly building trades; that was the union base. The people who built the houses ran the labour movement. If you look at the leaders of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council who ejected all of their revolutionary comrades, they're stonecutters, carpenters, building trades. They're not the way we think about it today, like building houses. A lot of these labour leaders were inclined towards electoralism. I'm not saying they're bad people because they're not socialists or revolutionaries, but they're inclined towards electoralism because they're really good at it. Almost all of the labour leaders who expelled the socialists and the One Big Union members, almost all of them end up elected and one or two become mayor. These are left-wing labour leaders but not that left-wing, and they believe in electoralism because for them it works. Also they're largely British. So they can enter into these sort of respectable positions like alderman in a way that maybe a guy like Carl Berg as a Swede might have a little bit more

trouble, let alone the Southern or Eastern Europeans, let alone lots of freed slaves that came to Canada from Oklahoma, and of course the Indigenous population that doesn't have any voting rights, and the Chinese, who were limited and racially excluded from most occupations. Legally Chinese people in Edmonton could only work in restaurants or laundromats, and weren't allowed to employ so-called white labour. So for these guys it worked, but for the rest it started this proletariat or people who had capitalism foisted upon them, like Alberta's Indigenous community. There were lots of English people who were Socialists, of course, like the Knights, but there was more attraction for revolutionary politics because the IWW would print propaganda in their language. The Socialists would treat them like equals instead of paternalistic. Then if the Socialists didn't treat them like equals, the Ukrainians would walk out and create their own social democratic party that was modeled after the Bolsheviks. These were real serious organizations. But ya, it's sort of a difficult thing.

Q: What good, if any, came out of the general strikes?

MB: This is a really tough one. What we call the labour revolt is part of this global phenomenon in 1919 where capitalism had more or less lost its lustre, when people learned the reality of WWI and that it was basically just a European imperial fight over the remaining colonies, and tens of millions of people died for nothing. It really took the shine off this capitalist project. World War I had no defenders. If you look at the papers in 1919, 1920 and 1921, nobody's saying WWI was great; we did the right thing. It was an incredibly unpopular war all over the world – in the Yangtze River valley, all over Africa and South Africa, in Egypt, and then in the United States, of course, with Seattle. We don't think of the Edmonton General Strike as being connected to something like the Spartacus Rebellion in Germany, but of course it is. Not only is it connected, but they're talking to each other. In Edmonton they're reprinting tracts from the Spartacus, talking about revolutionary general strike, and they're hoping the Left takes power in Germany. In Canada there's people who see themselves as part of this international movement to overthrow capitalism and take power. In Canada, in Alberta and Edmonton's case anyway, Carl Berg didn't run the whole general strike but he was there, he was elected, and his ideas were popular. But

they didn't have the social power to really take control of the city, even though they sort of informally did for a few days. But a lot of the things that come out of the general strike pertain to state formation. You get the re-formation of the RCMP, you get Section 98, and a lot of them in Edmonton. Mayor Joe Clarke actually loses the election to a right-winger who says Clarke was too soft on the strikers. But for positive outcomes, it's very difficult to say. I think what it did was it laid the basis for further action. Also, we tend to see the general strike as an end, but the people who were involved didn't see it that way. If you look to 1918, in 1918 they won, they won just with threatening a general strike. In 1919 they actually do it, and while it doesn't work out so well, they're like, well we'll try it again in 1920. But the state does come down with a tremendous amount of discipline, employers come down with a tremendous amount of discipline, and also the international unions come down with a tremendous amount of discipline to smash out the One Big Union. One of the things it actually does is it concretizes the hold of bread and butter AFL Gompers-style unionism in Western Canada and gives them a foothold that I don't think has ever really been broken. Since you had all these revolutionaries preaching the red stuff and talking about a revolutionary general strike, the UMWA who says, we just want a contract with a bit more money and a better doctor, looks very reasonable. All of the craft unions look very reasonable. So they're actually able to make some progress. But then the '20s isn't a great time for Labour and the '30s is a disaster. The long-term effects of the general strike are difficult to assess, and I don't know if I want to pontificate at them. It's a tough thing.

Q: We noticed the farmers getting quite militant in the '30s. Is there any evidence of farmer presence in the general strike period?

MB: That's an interesting question, because the precursors to the UFA. . . . The progressive movement, the progressive farmers, a lot of whom are Scandinavians who've come up from the Dakotas and Minnesota because the progressives were pushed out, sometimes through mob violence, a lot of them end up in Western Canada. And especially with the Scandinavians, they come over with the tradition of democracy and in some cases sort of agrarian socialism. In Winnipeg's case, for instance, when they tried them, they tried to make sure all the jurors were

farmers. In Edmonton there's not really any trials, but when I looked at the farmer press, they don't talk too much about it. There was one protest against the general strike, led by farmers, but that was the only thing. But the farmers, I couldn't really figure out what they were thinking politically; it's a little bit difficult. There's a good book on that about the early UFA.

Q: CUPW in the '80s was the government's whipping boy, and they were also quite militant. Can you explain why?

MB: I'll start in '65; well this can go back to the great labour revolt actually. The big national strike in 1918 was actually postal workers. I'm working on this a little bit; it's been shelved for a couple of years. But the postal workers launched a big national strike that was totally illegal, and they won. That's one of the reasons they don't join the Edmonton General Strike, because they just won a big national general strike for themselves and they didn't want to push their luck too much.

Q: What did they win?

MB: They weren't all fired and they got some concessions from the state. What had happened was that the postal workers were often returned veterans. It was extremely poorly paid. By the '60s women had started to work at the post office, almost always part time. They were subject to huge amounts of sexual harassment, and they actually made more money on welfare than they did working for the post office in the '60s. It was a bad job. In '65 there was a big wildcat. One of the big demands was a stop for sexual harassment of male supervisors against female employees; that's one of the big demands from the shop floor. This was again an illegal wildcat strike, before Canada Post was a crown corporation. So there was always a strong tradition of bottom-up democracy in the union that goes back to those wildcats in the '60s, mostly a youth movement, very militant, also imbued with a socialist politics. Then of course you have the 1981 what we called maternity leave strike, but I know some people involved in that strike don't like to call it the maternity leave strike. But it is the strike that won maternity leave after 46 or 56

days on the picket line, which of course had cascading effects on the Canadian economy, which is why the government fought it so hard. If they have to give maternity leave to postal workers, then other unions are going to fight for it. If unions fight for it, then middle-class women are going to want it in their nonunionized jobs. They were worried about this having network effects, which, of course, it did, and led the government to change the law. Then basically after that we had a period of capitalist entrenchment in Canada, whereas even though Canada Post is extremely profitable and makes tons of money, the government decided that legislating people back to work and threatening them with fines was a much easier way to control people than sending in scabs like in the '88 strike or '89, where there was fights and people arrested. Then I became a postal worker after I finished my undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta, and I got a job at the post office at the University of Alberta, Depot 9, and became a letter carrier.

Q: Stephen Harper seemed to really have it out for CUPW. Do you recall any incidents?

MB: I was a postal worker under Harper's regime; I started at the post office in 2007. It's shocking to watch the news and hear just abject lies about organizations that you're a part of and that are pretty benign. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has a very militant reputation, which I think is very well earned and shown over 70 or however many years of history of the organization. But it's not the One Big Union, it's not the Western Conference where you have the Carpenters Union and Labourers Union moving motions to support the Spartacus revolution in Germany or to say, we believe in the totality of the cooperative commonwealth, which means we believe in full Communism. No losses, no borders, full internationalism, the abolition of money. That's pretty radical stuff, and that's all in Alberta's labour history and Canada's labour history and of course transnationally. But ya, Harper would just demonize us all the time, and often personally, and this all trickled down. One of the main reasons the capitalist class hates CUPW so much is that it sets a base wage for Canadian society. We have of course our effective minimum wage, but then a postal worker is a bare minimum so-called middle-class job in a lot of areas. If you can crush the postal workers. . . If somebody needs a job and they don't know what kind of job they need but they want one where they can live a decent life, have a family and have

a few benefits and make \$22 an hour – post office, deliver mail. It's cold, it's hard, people yell at you all the time, but it's a socially necessary thing to do. But if you're an employer you look on this with horror, because that means there's a technically government-funded (even though the counter post self-funds through its own sales), there's government jobs in every corner of the country by law because they have to serve every address, that sets basically a wage floor for workers. So they wanted to smash CUPW so they could do wage adjustment. This is part of a longer process of course that's been going on since Canada was settled of trying to promote what they call labour fluidity. We see when EI gets smashed up and when they make it much more difficult to get EI in the '90s and then under Paul Martin later again, the reason they did that wasn't because EI was going broke; EI was perfectly well funded. They did it so people couldn't go on EI. Why don't they want people on EI? Because they want labour flexibility. Why do they want labour flexibility? So they can lower wages and they can scare people into doing things like not going on strike or joining unions. So all of these different things are connected. They're part of an offensive against decent jobs and good wages, and very clearly so when you scratch them a little bit and see what they actually are.

Q: What do you think of the state of the labour movement today? I think the scales are tilted vastly against us, with the consolidation and strengthening and deepening of global capitalism. Do you agree, or do you have something to say about that?

MB: I think that's basically true. One of the primary drives of capitalism as an economic system and one of the things that differentiates it from the stuff that came before is the necessity of competition and a focus on labour-saving devices. If we look at what industrial capitalism has done, it's allowed for people with access to capital to buy machinery to replace workers. People say historians shouldn't prognosticate, but every time a labour-saving device comes along there's apocalyptic worry about it – this is going to be the end, this is going to wipe us out. This goes back to Luddites. Why were Luddites destroying looms? Not because they hated looms, but because they were putting them out of work and they didn't want to starve. What happened to Luddites? They all came to North America because they were surplus population. That's what

happened to the surplus population of England and then later Europe. But I think the automation this time can do things that the factories couldn't do previously. It's worrying, combined with climate change, that we might be. . . If the employer could get rid of all the employees at their place, they would. That's the dream – a fully automated cash-making machine built on technology. Look at a company like Twitter. It has 2,500 employees. Its market cap is \$56 billion. That's the size of Carnegie Steel, and has 2,500 employees. Carnegie employed about 150,000 people. This is a problem, and it's difficult. The labour movement has got to deal with it. The interesting thing is that it really looks a lot like the gilded age and the late 19th Century and even the pre-war period. Labour has been down before. Labour has been beaten to a pulp before. Labour has been nonexistent before. The labour movement has been smashed into pieces before, even after the workers' revolt. Look how many people they deported – thousands and thousands of people. Tons of people went to jail unnecessarily and probably illegally. The unions who didn't play by the government's rules were basically destroyed. But people rebuilt. The workers' union: we managed to reorganize during the Great Depression. I can't even organize today, and these guys (well a lot of them were women of course) were able to organize 60,000 workers in two years during the worst depression that capitalism has ever produced. There's always a way forward, but there are always worrying trends.

Q: What is the way ahead? What is to be done?

MB: It's extremely difficult. I talk to some union leaders sometimes, but usually it's just about labour history. The big thing that the unions have to do – this is what I wrote my PhD thesis on, was how you had this very prosaic working-class movement up until 1944 and then the government were bringing some PC 1003 which creates thorough bureaucracy around unions. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. It gives them a consistency and allows them to fund things, allows them to build a bureaucracy that isn't necessarily bad. But one of the things it did is it basically took the shop floor and working-class self-activity and bottom-up organizing and made that very unneeded. What you needed was technocrats and lawyers. This was going to be how the class struggle was fought, in the grievance and arbitration room. Unfortunately, the scope of

what people can bargain over--it started out quite wide in 1944 and it's still pretty freewheeling, but it's got smaller and smaller and smaller. As the state has been able to bring the unions into the legalistic process of basically administrative law and union enmeshment within the functioning of Canadian capital, it's meant that the membership is not necessarily... the power doesn't derive by the boss being immediately scared all the time of their workers. The ability of workers to make immediate impacts on their working lives through their own actions is officially and informally stymied. One of the problems is that the labour movement – and I'm sympathetic to this – the labour movement is in a bit of a difficult position. On one hand, if they rebuild the base and build it from the bottom up and rebuild a democratic tradition within the unions, then they're intrinsically and without a doubt going to get things like wildcat strikes, job actions, marches on the boss. This makes things difficult for labour leaders who have things like pension funds and union halls and, for many, labour pensions. The government can walk in and take all that. It can be disingenuous to hear labour leaders say, well my members are all right-wing or my members are all complacent. You hear this from some labour leaders quite often, and it's because the solidarity and militancy that was there for so long has been officially beaten out of the unions. The unions are basically business unions, and again there's nothing wrong with that. They've made huge advances in Canadian society and globally against poverty, against racism, and basically everything that's good and decent in our society we can trace back to the labour movement. But we also have to be fairly clear-eyed about the way that industrial legality has been planned and has shaken out in Canada, wherein things that tend to centralize power upwards to those who already have it tend to have tremendous longevity and stickiness, and those things that tend to promote or allow for power to be more evenly distributed amongst the population tend to be very easily washed away or destroyed. So it's not so much that the bosses had a plan in 1944 and executed it. It's Mackenzie King's world and we all just live in it. But they created a plan and created a legislative society in which they could ensure that it would be plastic and malleable but that over time power would continue to be centralized up with wealth, and misery would continue to be promoted and expanded amongst the proletariat.

Q: I have one question about the general strike. What was the media coverage in Edmonton at the time?

MB: There's actually a thesis written specifically on the Edmonton general strike and the media. It was written in the '70s. Basically the media in Edmonton is really bizarre. One of the papers is Liberal. So they want the Conservatives to look bad. Borden's in power. So it's Frank Oliver. He's a Liberal. So he owns *The Bulletin* and he wants them to look bad. So he takes a really pro-striker position. Then you have the Tory press and they're just fanatics: these people are all just Bolsheviks. Then you have the *Edmonton Free Press*, which is run by the ETLC, which is really anti-strike because it's the ETLC paper. It's less radical than *The Bulletin* is because it's the established labour movement. Then you have Sarah Knight and Joseph Knight editing *The Soviet*, which I've digitized in OCR now so we'll be releasing it on the ALHI website through Alvin with a short writeup. You can see this newspaper that was printed in Fernie, B.C. and then smuggled to Edmonton, that ran for six months including during the general strike. So we can learn what these people are talking about, and what they were talking about was revolutionary socialism. Then there's the *One Big Union Bulletin*, which is published out of Edmonton by Carl Berg for two or three issues until it's centralized in Winnipeg. Berg was still a syndicalist at this point. So he publishes it until it's centralized to Winnipeg after Issue 3. So it's an interesting media landscape. One of the things that's really good and that didn't exist back when I was writing my thesis at University of Alberta is that almost all this stuff is online now. The *Edmonton Bulletin* is online from 1919; the *Edmonton Free Press* is online from 1919; I believe *The Journal* is online, and a few of the smaller ones as well. Now with *The Soviet* being online, the other Edmonton newspaper, we're going to have basically the entire run of Edmonton newspapers available for people from their homes. People can just go back and if they want to check something, just go back and look. That's really powerful and that's something I like being a part of, is the digitalization of records.

Q: Did you run across any good descriptions of the strike when the railway and electricity were out?

MB: Not really. One of the reasons is because, although the press was on a spectrum of what they found important, there was almost no photographs taken in Alberta of any of these events. In Drumheller, which is the centre of OBU activity and militancy, I think we have two pictures. But the RCMP and the military were out there with machine guns; they sat up on top of the bank. OBU activists and organizers were tarred and feathered. People were running around the town with guns. This is a militarized operation against the miners and it has the full support of the government, of the United Mine Workers of America, and of the coal bosses. It's a full court press against these militant unions. Even if journalists wanted to go out there with a camera, they would have very little luck. So one of the problems is we don't have a good relationship. Another thing is that the leaders of the Edmonton General Strike disappear. Joseph Knight and Sarah Knight are very active socialists. Sarah Knight is a woman who is the president of the Labourers Union. Labourers 42 still exists, still in Edmonton. They had a female Socialist president in 1919, who helped lead the general strike and edited a newspaper called *The Soviet*. That's weird, right? Carl Berg is a Swedish dude; he was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World and he becomes the vice-president of the strike. That's strange, right?

[END]