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Interviewer Winston Gereluk

Q: What do you know about the treatment of Indigenous peoples in countries other than Canada?

RA: First of all, thank you for this opportunity to talk about Indigenous issues from an international perspective, I would say. Before I get into it, let me say that I'm an Indigenous person as well from Chile. My nation is the Mapuche from Chile and Argentina. The Mapuche, like the Cree in Alberta, never knew any boundaries; they just lived. The only natural boundary, I would say, is the Andes Mountains, but they live through Chile and Argentina back and forth and roam around and did lots of stuff. Now entering to the situation of Indigenous people like me, if we look just through the Americas – because there are Indigenous people throughout the world anyway – if we look at the Americas and we compare, for example, the Indigenous nation on the south of this continent called America, in comparison to the Indigenous people of Canada and the States, the situation is very similar. The only difference is that the Indigenous people in terms of being colonized in the case of South America were colonized mainly by the Spaniards and also by the Portuguese, which is Brazil. We know that Brazil speak Portuguese because Portugal colonized Brazil. There is a huge population in Brazil, by the way, and probably you've been reading the news as well what's going on with the Amazons. They've been untouched nations in there living in the Amazon, but because of the advancement of colonial, because colonialism is still there, the advancement of that, they've been logging the Amazon and burning the Amazon in terms of making it available for agricultural land and also to raise cattle. So the Indigenous are getting to be in the second wave of colonization and they've been pushed even farther, more to the corner basically, so to speak. That's the situation in general of Indigenous people. In the case of the Mapuche people, precisely the same thing. There were also, in the case of Chile, there was what they used to call missionary school, which is similar to residential school. Fortunately, it didn't happen what happened here with Indigenous children in Canada, with all the residential schools and all that. But however though, the position and the influence and the stand that particularly the Roman Catholic Church took is basically the

same thing as with Canada's Indigenous people – basically take the Indian out of the Indian, so to speak. As I say, it was the same thing with Mapuche. I don't speak my language. My parents did an effort that I should learn Spanish in order to make it through school. I thank them for that, but on the other hand I'm not thankful in the aspect that I don't know my language. Particularly my generation, it's the same story. Likely some of us, in my case I reached the university, but however without the full knowledge of my culture, my language, and so on and so forth. So that's the reality internationally I would say of Indigenous people. The only change I would say is the land where we live. Speaking of the land, it's the same thing as here, the Indigenous people here say they're caretaker of the land. The Mapuche, my people, is the same thing. We say we don't own the land. That's why originally the government of Chile had to settle what they also call reserve, they call it reduction. Incidentally, reduction means making less, and that's what happened. Just one data. The government of Chile in the 1800s after winning a war against Peru and Bolivia because of the natural fertilizer that was reaching the north part of Chile in the desert and it was exploited by a British company, they went into a war over that dispute. I don't want to talk too much about that because that's history. However, what I'm going to try to say, after the military won the war, the government of Chile decided to send them to the south part of the country where the Mapuche population lives, in order to so-called pacify Mapuche. Incidentally, the history of my nation, and it's been recognized historically, is the Indigenous people who have resisted the longest war of colonization of over 300 years. Finally in the late 1800s, as I was saying, the Chilean government decided to send the army to pacify the Mapuche. What they did obviously, there was a very modern army at that time with lots of weapons. Obviously the Mapuche with just the traditional weapons couldn't win the war; so we were dominated in that aspect. But the Mapuche never give up, never give up. But in terms of the land, what the government did, once they conquered the land in there, once they defeated militarily Mapuche, they initiated a process called colonization. That's the name of it. They brought colonizers from Europe – Germany, Italy, even from eastern Europe, from Yugoslavia, Swiss. They gave them land. This is how they did, just as an example. They give 500 hectares to the colonizer family, and 50 hectare for each son or daughter. In the meantime, parallel to that, they did a process of reduction, as I say. They legalize, for lack of a better term, the tenancy of the land of the Mapuche. Each Mapuche got at that time 5.0 hectare as an average. Now fast forward, today I think the last number I read was, because the family has

grown, is 1.4 hectare per family, as an average. Who will live on that with the land when you have to use the land to grow food and all that? The saddest part, as I was saying, the second wave of colonization is interaction of Canadian companies in there. Canada is not immune to this second wave of colonization. What they're doing, because there's lots of mining of minerals in the north part of Chile through the leaching out that's [9:14] lithium, a Canadian company is mining for that too. What they have done in the Mapuche territory when the military took over in 1973, they create a decree. What they call for, because it's such a rich climate, they call for forestry company to start forestry in the country. What they did in Mapuche territory is they took over some of the remaining land of the Mapuche and they start planting pine and eucalyptus, mainly pine. Those are non-native tree. Pine require lots of water, so what has been a result of that is that now there is a big shortage of water. Some rivers have almost run dry; some of the lake is the same thing. Pine, as I was saying, and eucalyptus, they got lots of water. Canadian company out of B.C. are getting into the forest industry as well. I think that's why I always say it's quite important that Indigenous get together. We need to stand as one nation, I will say one nation, across the globe, because we're facing the same thing all over again, second wave of colonization, at least in the southern part of this continent. As I say, we can't forget Canadian companies are there. In the case of mining, Barrick Gold is one of the big companies. I can't remember now the name of the forestry company out of B.C. that is making investments in the forestries in Chile as well.

Q: What has been the experience of Mapuche in the labour market?

RA: Traditionally, just like here, Mapuche face discrimination, racism, and of course job opportunities were minimal. Since history, once capitalism got introduced there in the 1800s, obviously it was cheap labour. People were forced to work. Even in the forestry industry, I remember some of my neighbours and or relatives as well, distant relatives. . . In reality, Mapuche is just like here; we're all relatives anyway. So I used to hear their stories that they were going to plant pine tree. I'm talking about in the '60s. That's when the whole process started there. Mapuche were obviously in the lower scale of the jobs. Some of the jobs that were traditionally for them, it was being part of the police, the low rank of the police. There's even jokes about it, lots of jokes about it. But also they used to work in construction, used to

work in bakeries. The main bakers in the bakeries in the south part of the country were Mapuche. Then, little by little some of them, because of the location, some of them became teachers and so on and so forth. But still very much it's so much difficult. I remember entering university, one of the first fights that I remember, I remember we decided what we're going to do. One, it was to fight for the recovery of the land, the land that was stolen. So that was one of the big things among some of the high school, college, and university students. We created an organization of Mapuche students. That was one; the other one is education. In order to get education, you have to go to the city, paying rent and food and all that. It was very expensive. So one of the first struggles we had was to create a, what's the name now? I know it in Spanish.

Q: A co-op?

RA: No it wasn't a co-op; it was a kind of residence; I don't know the word. But that's what we were struggling for, because some of them were travelling from a distance to school every day. In winter it was very hard because it rains a lot. So, obviously there were days that people, young adult or children, were missing school because of the rain. It pours like crazy. In my region the average rainfall is 2 meters, the average through the winter. Anyway, so that was one of the things. Little by little people started entering, because they're starting to get educated. There's no other way than actually getting educated; otherwise you can't live out of the land because there's so little land anymore. Today I could say kind of proudly that there are lots of educated Mapuche. But you know what, because of racism and all that, obviously it's very hard for them to have access to the job that they need. Even one of my experiences when I went there last time, there are some Mapuche doctors who were educated in Cuba. I think there are about 30 of them, very well educated. Cuba has one of the best medical schools and medical services. By the way, medicare is free in Cuba anyway; everybody has access to it. So they were educated. But one of the difficulties they encountered when they went back to their country: they didn't recognize their degree. So they fought and fought, and I think finally probably they were accepted, but they send them to work outside the city, which is good in a way, because they were dealing directly with Mapuche. One of my older brothers was telling me last time that he had a chance to see one of them he was very impressed. I think it was a young woman doctor, Mapuche. But it's very difficult in terms of the labour market. But on the other hand, there's a

pretty good story of Mapuche being involved in the trade union movement in there. I remember reading a book of Juan [16:14]. He was a union organizer. They call him the rebel and different names. He became a Communist actually, member of the Communist party. But he was a union organizer. There was a really neat book; I liked his book. Yeah, they play a very important role in the Labour Movement. But still, same thing as here, labour, as progressive as we might say sometimes, sometimes Labour is not that progressive in terms of accepting the diversity. I can talk about my own experience when I started working here and I belonged to the union. That was one of my big fights, actually – racism and human rights in general and so on and so forth. So labour has a lot to learn, same thing in Chile. When the Socialist government won and took power in 1970, there wasn't much of a program in relation to Mapuche. Now when the military took over, obviously that was even worse. One other thing that I learned in one of my trips to Chile, that even human rights organization weren't talking too much, there were more than 200 Mapuche disappeared because of the military takeover. Obviously, they were killed; there's no chance that we're going to find them alive today. That's only because they were trying to make their life better. Same thing as the rest of the Chilean population, like in labour and all that – lots of people disappeared in there because of the military takeover. That's a challenge for labour, I would say. I always maintain that labour needs to understand that it needs to be inclusive. But fortunately, there are lots of more progressive forces in the labour movement as well who push for the inclusion of other people. I can refer to my experience at the post office, where we have lots of immigrants, immigrants of colour basically. The other one, the ones who come from Europe, they don't face the same fate as people of colour from the south. So that's a big struggle. However though, having said all that, labour has facilitated also at the same time some changes that have taken place and are still taking place. I can speak on my own union, for example, postal workers. There's lots of good stuff in terms of promoting international solidarity and understanding the issue that labour is a diverse force as well, coming from different nations, in this case and when we talk about Indigenous people. It's kind of hard, because obviously the cultural aspect lots of time is not very well understood. So it makes it difficult. I heard some pretty sad story about Indigenous people working at the post office. I remember one particular young woman, she ended up quitting because she didn't feel that she was fitting in there. She wasn't understood, especially by the corporation. In any case, that was the main thing. They couldn't understand that, for example, in summer sometimes they needed in this

case a little bit more time to go back to the community for ceremony and that kind of stuff. They wouldn't budge; they wouldn't give that time. I tried to convince her to stay, because I thought she was a good prospect for the union anyway. But she decided to quit; she couldn't take it anymore. And I'm talking that's not too long ago. I retired in 2010; I'm talking about 2005 or 2006. So we're talking present.

One other thing that we coming from Chile and coming out of the brutal dictatorship, one of the things that we decided when we got here is to basically work in solidarity with the people in Chile, basically denouncing the violation of human rights, the imprisonment of people, the killing of people. In that sense, that was our priority, I would say. I came to this country thinking that I wouldn't spend more than five years here, expecting that the dictatorship would fall and then we would go back. That was exactly the situation for most of the Chilean exiles at that time. I came here in 1977, but others came before me in 1974. I think it was the first exiles that came here in particular to Alberta and Edmonton. Obviously, that's been a priority to solidarity. I couldn't forget of my people, the Mapuche people, advocating for that as well. Little by little we started making some connections. I managed to get some Indigenous people from here.

Unfortunately, all of them that I worked with at that time, which I'm going to get into soon, they have passed. There was such an experience, such a knowledge in there. One was a couple, Sam Bull, he was a lawyer. He lived at Frog Lake, what's the name of the community there? I forgot now. On the west side of Frog Lake. It's north of St. Paul, northwest of St. Paul. There's a community there. Anyway, it's important but the most important thing is we established connection. Him and his wife, Linda Bull, she was teaching at the U of A at that time, University of Alberta. We started working. They understood that Indigenous people need to get together across the border, because we're suffering the same fate, the same colonial history, and also obviously now only colonial but now imperialists, USA imperialism. So we started working and they become interested in it. At that time it was prior to 1992. In 1992 it was obviously the 500 years of the discovery of America. That's what they say, that we were discovered. One elder, that was a joke that he told me. They say, Columbus was supposed to go to India but he got lost and ended up in America. So that's why they were called Indian. But we're not Indian, right? The Indians lives in India, Southeast Asia. He said, well he was heading to India. Lucky, he said, that he wasn't heading for Turkey; otherwise we would be called Turkey in here. That's just a joke anyway and I always enjoy that joke very much. So we started working for the 500 years of

Indigenous and ... There was a big awakening because of the 500 across the continent basically. We can talk about the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. That's very interesting. That moment, they said highlighting the Free Trade Agreement. NAFTA at that time in 1994 was implemented by the Mulroney government here in Canada. The Zapatista in Mexico, the Mayan in Mexico, they rose up on New Years Day in 1994 opposing NAFTA. Totally, they rose up. That created also a big wave, a big awakening, I would say, in the rest of America. But prior to 1992, the movement was initiated. It was called, as I say before, Popular and Indigenous Resistance. So we did a big thing in here. It was quite interesting. We created a committee and we got Indigenous people from here; we got Labour. By the way, several people actually work on that from Labour. Lucien Royer, I don't even know him anyway, but Lucien Royer is a long-time activist. He has an umbrella organization at that time called Action Canada. Action Canada was very much created to oppose the whole idea of the Free Trade Agreements where Canada was participant as well. Action Canada was a big supporter of the commemoration of the 500 years of Indigenous and popular resistance. We did a big show, a big show I would say. We went to Hawrelak Park and there was an artist woman, for the sake of me I can't recall her name now. Anyway, we started talking about at that time the people from the north and the south, in the case of Indigenous, we need to get together. We need to fight together, we need to struggle together, and we need to express our solidarity to each other. So we started talking about, we identified the people of the north, the people of the eagle. Eagle is a very important, sacred bird for Indigenous people in the north, and the condor in the south. Through the Andes Mountains there are lots of condors, actually. We say, well it's going to be the unity of the eagle and the condor, and that was the theme. This artist woman created a huge image, created an eagle and a condor. We did a beautiful parade at Hawrelak Park at the evening of October 12, because that's when supposedly Columbus discovered us. So we created a big show, very nice actually. I can never forget the setup. It was a full moon. It was a rare moon at that time; it was beautiful. I wish we could have had the technology that there is today, with cell phones and all that. But I'm pretty sure somebody out there might have an old video of that.

Q: Was the artist ...?

RA: Yes, ... that's right; that's her name. She was so instrumental in that. Anyway, fast forward a little bit and then I get in touch with Indigenous people from Treaty 6, because Sam Bull, I think was president or some position he has at that time. So we say, well we gonna have to get together, contact people from the south. So we started working on this project and finally came out, we took a delegation of seven or eight Indigenous people. One was from a community out of Red Deer, the other was from the north, and there was one Blackfoot from Calgary that also was part of Treaty 6. It was quite interesting. We took them; we went to Chile to meet with the Mapuche. It was a wonderful encounter actually, very good in terms of exchanging experience. And the ceremony, people discovered that it was the same. I remember one anecdote. Linda told me, yeah everything is so similar. But one thing, she said, why is that? The Mapuche ceremony, because it's a round dance, they do it from the right to the left. Here it's the other way. I said, well how you look at the position of the sun, because we are now close to the South Pole. So people see the sun at the north, and the sun tends to do this thing in spite of what we see in the south. But the rest is almost the same thing. So that's how much similarity and understanding was made. The other part, very interesting, I was telling Winston about it. At the same time, there was a Mayan delegation at that time. So it was basically an encounter of three nations. So that was one of the first experiences in terms of people from the north meeting people from the south. The idea was that a Mapuche delegation would come here, but unfortunately that never took place because Sam and two others got sick. They were older and they passed. So obviously nobody took over with that. It's difficult because it required money; it required lots to actually do this kind of thing. But out of that, I think by example has extended. I don't know if you know this or you have watched it, there is a movie called "The Eagle and the Condor." It was done by Indigenous Canadian filmmakers. If we look probably on the Internet we can find it, called "The Eagle and the Condor". Then I've seen lots of other examples. I remember a few years ago they did a culinary show out of Enoch there, and I went there to see. I noticed that two of the indigenous chefs have traveled to Chile as well, and they were exchanging whatever – knowledge about food, recipes, and all that, but also learning about how the different nations live and under what conditions. So that's really encouraging. But unfortunately, over the last few years, in my personal case, I haven't been able to be involved more directly with Indigenous people from here. However though, I continue to be in touch with what's going on in Chile. About four years ago we brought a delegation of Mapuche here,



and we went to visit the group that we have that Winston is president, the Global Foundation. We went to take them to the acreage that they have close to Tofield there. There was a nice conversation, because it's the same issues – the land, water, language, opportunities in general. I guess we're in the process through Global Foundation to continue to do that, because the connection exists. This fall we were supposed to do a ceremony there with Indigenous people from here, elder and others, and make a connection through this system that I don't understand very well yet. What's the name of the system, Winston? The one that Lucien is working that makes the connection through the Internet? . . . That's one of the things that probably is going to go ahead in any case, because we need to continue to do this type of work more and more than ever. The reality is that Indigenous people here struggle not only with their residential school issue but still the land is an issue. Water is a big issue, obviously; we see it every day on the news. It's the same situation in Chile, the same situation in Guatemala; it's the same situation in Mexico. The same situation and worse probably, I don't know if I can call it worse, in Brazil with the whole Amazon burning and the second wave of colonizing that is taking place in there. It's really hard for Indigenous people. But at the same time, we have survived over 500 years and they haven't been able to eliminate us anyway. So not only will we continue to survive, but I think I see that in lots of ways we're thriving. I'm proud to see there are lots of very well educated young Indigenous people from whatever nation you talk to here in Canada, and same thing in the rest of America. In Chile there are lots of, as I was saying at the beginning, well educated Mapuche young women and men. But the issue of racism and discrimination is one that is still keeping us at bay, for lack of a better word. But we're going to break that barrier; we're going to break it. There's no way that they are going to defeat us. They weren't able to for 500 years and they're not going to be able to do it now. . . .

There are always people who know the language. In my case, I have served as a translator on numerous occasions anyway; where or what, I have tried. There are lots of other people. You see lots of immigrants have been taking place in here. You see now people from all over the Americas. You've got Mexicans; you have Colombians. Whichever country you talk about, you are going to find somebody here. Some of them are involved in the struggle; some of them are involved in solidarity. Eventually we are going to be able to use our own language and get translators as well. Incidentally, that's what I'm saying: there is hope. In the case of Chile, they are drafting a new constitution now in Chile. The constitution that is actually implemented by

the military dictatorship doesn't recognize the Indigenous people. So now there is a process of drafting a new constitution. Through struggle, people before the pandemic were filling the street like you wouldn't believe it. People were defying police; they were defying the military in order to change their reality there, because it's pretty harsh for people in general, not just for Indigenous people, but for workers in general. They're in that process and they were forced to reserve seats for the Indigenous population. I can't remember the number; I think there are 15 reserved seats out of 155. The Mapuche have seven seats. How progressive this constitution is going to be, well we have hope because of the people that were elected. A Mapuche woman is presiding at that convention; we call it the constitutional convention. She's making history. She's a language teacher out of one of the universities in Chile, and she was elected as a member of the constitutional convention as they call it, and then they elected her as president. Not only a woman, but also Indigenous person. So that opened up hope. One of the things that they have done, and it created an irrational reaction from the right wing, that they have addressed the convention in Mapuche language, and other languages as well. That created hope. You should see Facebook, Twitter, whatever, irrational reaction, irrational reaction. That can tell us how racism and discrimination and the domination that the descendants of the Europeans are still trying to exert in Chile. But we think that things are going to change. The possibility of exchanges of people getting together, I think it depends on all of us Indigenous people. It depends on how much effort we put in terms of making that possible. One of the things that it is important is that we exchange knowledge in terms of how to govern ourselves, how do we understand autonomy and self-determination, and how we should govern ourselves. In spite of some of the things that are still in most of the Indigenous nations, however we were influenced by the colonizer in lots of ways. We have lost part of our culture, that thanks, to the new generation, now we are trying to recover that. I can see that process here and I can see that process in Chile. Very much so. I got to know a few years ago a young woman, a Mapuche woman. This is quite interesting. She was given by adoption to a German couple. So they took her to Germany. She was lucky though, because the German couple never told her that she should forget about her roots. They made sure actually that she would learn the language. They used to make a travel to go back to Chile, and she started searching for her mom. Finally she found her mom. She told me herself the story. I went to a ceremony and lucky she was there and she told me the whole story. I'm just talking about a portion of the story. Now she decided

to stay there. She learned the language and now she has an organization trying to recover the language and teach the language into schools and universities. So, quite interesting. I link all this now, in the case of Chile, with the process of creating a new constitution, because I think lots of good stuff is going to come out of there, hopefully the recognition that Chile has several nations in the country. That's one of the first struggles that they're doing there. Same thing here, that it should be recognized the country, Canada is not just one or two nations. I remember that fight in the labour movement too, whether Indigenous were considered a nation or not. It was a big discussion in labour in Canada, and also in respect to whether Indigenous should be considered the third component of the country called Canada, as another nation.

Q: There are many nations.

RA: Well of course, I'm talking about just the overall terminology of Indigenous. I know that it's several nations. Same thing in Chile. In Chile there are over ten different nations as well, but they're re-emerging now because some of them have almost disappeared, or according to them. I remember reading, oh the last owner of the south, they call them the owner, the last owner. Fast forward and my first trip in there I discovered, and they were doing an event as well, and there were several families in there from the one that they were saying disappeared. That's the action of the colonizer; they are trying to make it disappear. The media plays a big role in that, spreading lies or misinformation. It happened that they are very much alive and there's a good number of several of them that were considered to have disappeared, or to be extinct, for a better word.

Q: Were there other Indigenous people in Canada Post?

RA: There were; there were more than I thought there were. Sometimes the features don't tell you much. Through my activism in there, I started discovering that there were more, particularly here in Edmonton. But they were quiet. They would just go to work, do their job eight hours, go home, bye-bye, see you the next day. Thanks to my union actually, we started, I can't remember the year now, but we created a human rights committee. This human rights committee was composed of all these equity-seeking groups: gay and lesbian, women of course, workers of

colour, Indigenous. I was pleasantly surprised. As a union, we were divided into regions. Ours is the prairie region, which encompasses Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Then the other is the Pacific, which is basically B. C. And so on and so forth. We created this committee. It was quite interesting. For the first time, in the case of Indigenous people, got a chance to get together, using union funds, which they were contributing as well, to start doing some work. I remember at that time, because I was very active in the union anyway, I remember I passed my provincial interior, which was six months, and the other day I became a shop steward. That was my own decision anyway. We created this committee, as I was saying, and I was asked to be part of the Indigenous Subcommittee. I said no, because that belongs to my sisters and brothers from this side of the continent. So I was part of the Workers of Colour Committee. Through that committee, we did tremendous work. I don't know if it's still active or not. I haven't followed up on that one. But we did tremendous work. The issue to accommodate, not just for injury but the issue to accommodate and the whole thing, cultural, that was part not only of the discussion but then it became part of negotiating with the corporation. Of course the corporation put a big stink about it; they didn't want to do that. But we managed. We created a space. I remember one fellow, a Muslim. When you see things that you know are custom, this fellow used to come with a piece of carpet and he would lay it out right at the entrance and he used to pray right there. That was impressive. Of course lots of people laugh about it, because this carpet, Aladdin and the whole thing, flying carpet. But locally we engaged more discussion with the corporation, we demanded to have a space, so finally they accommodated us. They created a space inside where any religion can go there and pray or whatever. So that was good. I was really impressed by the force of labour. When we decide that we're going to conquer something, we can do it. We managed to not only convince but also to force the employer basically to do that kind of stuff. Same thing in terms of recognizing Aboriginal Day. That was a big thing in my union. We managed to force the employer at least to recognize that day, to allow us to say something on that day, pause from work. Not on our break, because we told them we're not going to use our break. We need company time to do it. It was done. Then I discovered there were more Indigenous people in there. I convinced one fellow, I remember, but he was about to retire. He said, yeah, I'm gonna go, but then he retired and I lost contact with him. But in other parts of the country there are lots of--I got to know people from down east that were part of the committee. One of the things that I noticed, obviously you could see

that people didn't have much knowledge about organized labour, because organized labour didn't pay attention to Indigenous people. Through conversation they would say, well you know they never have ever approached me to talk about union and to talk about my participation in the union. Because that's one of the struggles of union. Union, once they get established sometimes, become complacent as well. One of the things that people used to say about unions too, when they first get involved Indigenous people will say, we see labour as another institution; we don't see it as something that we belong to. That was the lack of labour trying to open up the door basically, open the gates for Indigenous people. But I can say also proudly though that my union did that. How it is right now, I wouldn't be able to tell you. But I know that it continues, because I read the magazines, I read the publications, and I know that it's there. But it's one thing to say it on paper and the other one is actually what happens in reality, how active and what kind of action it takes in the workplace and also in the union functions in terms of continuing to have the door open, in this case, for Indigenous people. I think labour has a lot to learn from Indigenous people. One of the things that I remember, I don't know how much they advance in the union in that aspect, but one of the things that used to come is, in the case of Indigenous people, the role of elders is fundamental in terms of how they keep the community, keep the knowledge, and keep the culture and everything. Union were discussing how to use also the elders, meaning those who retire. I don't know how much of that is being done. I think there's been done some work in there, because there is an organization of union retirees. Winston is very active in that one. Unfortunately, I haven't been too active in there, particularly in the last couple of years due to COVID and all that but because I'm involved in some other things too. Solidarity with Latin America, that's always been my thing. But however though, there is such tremendous potential. I got in touch with a Colombian woman who has lived here for a few years, and through her I got to know how much the Indigenous people in Colombia also are struggling. The Colombian situation is horrible. It is a war; it is a non-declared war. Every day, not only one but several people get killed, particularly Indigenous people. It's horrible, the situation in Colombia. Yet, do you see anything on the media here? Of course not. But obviously they're very concerned now about human rights violations in China, which they haven't provided much concrete information about it. I wouldn't say that it's a violation, but I have no proof to say that there is violation. But the media, every day they talk about China. Last night they were talking about forced labour. How much it's true, I don't know. But they don't

even talk about Colombia. Colombia is a partner of Canada in lots of ways, partner of United States. United States has supplied I don't know how many billions of dollars that has been going to the government and to the army to fight the guerrilla. When was the treaty signed? Five years ago. There is no war going on there. But the military and the paramilitary are very much active there. It's the same thing I was explaining before. Canadian corporation are investing in Colombia; so obviously they need to continue to do the second wave of colonization. That's what I'm saying; it's not only a potential but there are lots of channels for how we can continue to do this solidarity work. We have to learn and use in a better way technology. Zoom, for example, is an excellent tool in order to not only keep in touch but actually to develop some of the ideas that we need to in order to continue our fight to emancipate ourselves as Indigenous nations.

Q: How can Indigenous people be encouraged to be active in the labour movement?

RA: I believe that it requires lots of continued effort of the organizations, in this case labour. They need to continue to say not only that the door is open but sometimes walk with people through that door. I think that's the most difficult sometimes task for human beings in general. Unions need to be a lot more receptive and open about how do we talk to people, how do we approach them. In our case I can talk about the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. Activism is something that is crucial and is part of the essence of a union activist. Lots of time we get complacent once we accomplish something; we think that the challenge isn't there, because we accomplished something. I remember the big fight that we had, and I think it was spearheaded here in Edmonton, to have human rights education in the workplace. That was a huge and a new thing. Unions could do it, in our union function. But to have it in the workplace, it was a huge challenge. I guess in a way we were lucky we have a director here at that time that was a little bit more understanding about it. I remember having numerous meetings with him saying, we need to do this and we can do it. Finally they agreed. We had a national union; so the thing had to go to national to discuss with the head of whatever it is in Ottawa. They managed to convince them that we need human rights education here. I think that opened up huge doors for lots of people, particularly people of colour and some of the Indigenous people at that time. I don't know how many they are now there. But there's all sorts of things, because one of the

things that I remember now thinking of some of the indigenous persons that were there, there were all sorts of troubles. One particular fellow, it was one thing after another. Of course the shop steward had to be there to talk to the employer. This fellow is facing numerous suspensions for the stupidest things. Stupidest from the corporation, I'm not talking about him. The way he used to do the work, the way he relates to people, and being late. That's a huge thing, the employer being late. You could be sick, you could call in sick, but being late is almost worse than actually being sick. So those kind of things, and issue with coworkers. I can't go into details, obviously, but that shows to me that it was misunderstandings all the time; this person was misunderstood. I was making reference prior to that about the young woman as well, who ended up quitting because she couldn't stand it anymore. That kind of issue. If the union doesn't make an effort in terms of understanding, because sometimes they also would just dismiss it, like in the case of this fellow: Oh he's always creating trouble anyway; he's a troublemaker; he will never learn. That kind of attitude actually doesn't help. We have to be patient and imagine the consequence. We don't know the history behind that person and within that person. How should I know? Now that the whole issue of the residential school has come out and the trauma that has created in the Indigenous population, one can now or I can now understand even better why people behave in certain ways sometimes. We don't know any better, and also there is anger inside of us. Of course there is anger, in the way that we've been treated. Some of us probably have learned how to deal with that anger; some others haven't learned how to deal with the anger. Those are the kind of things that unions require to understand a lot more. It's a lot more than just wages and health and safety. If we aspire and we dream about a new society, labour has to play a role in that in terms of creating the basis for that new society that lots of us envision, where it won't be this way and we won't have to be struggling for our human rights and our dignity. I think that's one thing that's been lost, even among workers in general. I think we have lost that concept of dignity, the human dignity. I'm not a religious person but I call it sacred. That dignity is sacred. Let me go back a little bit in that aspect in Chile. You know one of the things as to why people were fighting in the street? That was the word that came out the most in pamphlets and banners: we need our dignity. In the case of the capital in Santiago, they still do it. They went in there and they brought this and they raised the issue. Because of that they renamed the square in there. They changed the name. The government hasn't changed it, but people changed the name. They call it Square of Dignity.

I think that's the one that they in the age of neocolonialism, the age of imperialism, in the age of implantation of neoliberal policies, I think it's the dignity of the human being that is at stake. We can see here with the pandemic, what is it? Last night an Indigenous person was interviewed. They moved him from Saskatoon to Toronto with COVID. He's a survivor from residential school. Do you think that they told the family that he was going to be transferred? Never. He never had a chance to talk to any of his relatives before he moved. He was crying in bed. And you know what? He talked about dignity, the human dignity. Now the authorities say, well we're sorry for the mistake. But how long are you going to be continuing to say sorry? Like this, I call it sunny ways through Trudeau. He keeps saying sorry; he keeps saying sorry, but sorry doesn't make it, doesn't cut it. There's a lot more than sorry. You have to take into account the human dignity. That's something that, after watching what was going on in Chile with my people and the rest of the people of Chile, I'm thinking about the struggle in here, and I think dignity is one of the things that we need to recover. The dignity for those who live south side on the street, like the homeless.

[ END ]