

Neil Reimer

October 21, 2007 Interview by Alvin Finkel with Ron Patterson as videographer

NR: One of the reasons I was hired and sent to Edmonton was because of the construction that was going on here, particularly Celanese and CIL. So I was a brand new representative when I came here. I had been president of the local in Regina, mind you. In 1914 New Jersey took on the oil workers union of that day. The strikers lived in tents and the like. They had an army and they shot them and whatnot, and there was a big revulsion in the United States. Celanese also had a plant in Bishop, Texas, which the union tried to organize for many years but was never successful; it isn't successful to this day. But I briefed myself as to the tactics and attitudes of the company down there. It's also interesting to note that they followed Imperial Oil's leads to Rockefeller's attitude. So he hired Mackenzie King to look after what he should do about restoring his reputation, so to speak. Mackenzie King said to him, you were never able to stop workers from wanting to organize, so you'd better give them an organization that you can control. So the company union got born; it's called the Joint Industrial Council. They established that right off the bat. They didn't ask for certification or anything like that, so you couldn't fight it, but they gave them an agreement, recognized them. The thought was always enough, even in those days, for the labour board to say, well we need to have a vote. They have an organization. So you got there and they had an organization waiting for them as they were being hired. CIL had a different approach. They were not anti-union but it was very selective. I convinced the ones that they had brought in that they should be voting for us, and that's how they really got going.

Q: Tell us what the CIL stands for?

NR: Canadian Industries Limited, it's ICI in England, the subsidiary of ICI. They've sold it since. But Celanese had a bigger plant. CIL maybe had all told about 200 people in the plant. Celanese grew to 1500. But they hired mostly young people, even though Mr. Manning, the premier of the province at that time, had reached an agreement with the mineworkers that the industry would take as many of their laid off people as they could. Celanese never did. My contacts often were people who were mine workers and they were powerhouse engineers, because they were in short supply at that time.

Q: Do you think Celanese wouldn't follow through on this notion of hiring laid off mine workers partly because they were trying to keep unions out?

NR: I don't know of one that they hired. But CIL hired the powerhouse engineers. I found out some of them were my neighbors where I used to live and that's where there was a core. District 50 really didn't have any skills in the chemical industry. Celanese hired mostly young people that were in their 20s; the average age at the time that we organized them was in their 20s, around 26 or 27. That's a pretty young workforce. They were making more money than they'd ever made in their lives. But there was a real problem. The people who ran the joint industrial council had no experience. The plant

covered a section of land, and there were many petrochemical products. It was like 4 or 5 plants in one location. There was the textile workers, cellulose acetate, petrochemicals and so forth. They all require different skills to run. They had great difficulty communicating. They paid no dues. The company paid for everything, so they really didn't have any power. So that was really the issue. However, the problem that I had was the Canadian Congress of Labour had given chemical jurisdiction to District 50, because we weren't even around. We're a new industry. So they had the chemical jurisdiction and we had a narrow jurisdiction which was simply oil. I had a good job. I was on leave of absence and I wanted to know whether there was enough viability in the union to become a self sufficient union. I concluded that they weren't, because oil refineries are not labour intensive. Even though there was 12 or 13 plants in Alberta and Saskatchewan, there weren't any big ones. Prior to Leduc, most of the crude was from Turner Valley. There weren't pipelines, they had to truck it in and all that kind of stuff. Same in Saskatchewan. But the plants that we had, and we did organize quite a few plants, we had 2 oppositions. The companies always objected to us for some reason or other. Then we had Carl Berg of the trades and labour congress, he would sign backdoor deals. Like Husky Oil, we went in and got a contract. They said - here, you got a contract. I tried to organize building products, which has a pipeline right from Imperial Oil to supply them with the asphalt that they make the shingles in. But most of them were people who came from Europe and were immigrants. After meeting with them and told them how they were being screwed, what the conditions were in other plants, they went to the plant and resigned. I was responsible for a turnover. One day I was handing out leaflets in front and Carl Berg came out the front door and he waved a piece of paper and told the guys they had a collective agreement. So I had to take the plant away from him, as I did Husky Oil. So you had this different approach. I remember when I organized CIL, I always thought I'd better go and meet the manager and introduce myself. He says, well of all the people that have tried to come in here, I met everybody but you. Everybody else came in for the backdoor deal. I wouldn't say everybody, I can't prove that, but I know quite a few did. There would be the operating engineers, there was the international chemical workers. What we had then, I had Roy Jamha was with the congress, and I convinced him. I went to see the federations in the prairie provinces about the congress convention getting jurisdiction. My boss, Alex McAuslane, was very upset with me. He said, you haven't got a snowball's chance in hell about getting that; I should be making those applications, not you. I thought, well then I'll get the federations and the labour councils to make the application. Well the congress didn't, but they hit convention running. The day before the convention, on the Sunday, a lot of them had caucuses. They all raised the issue of that. Of course they knew that district 50 was just a catchall. So A.R. Mosher and Don MacDonald were going to get rid of this application first order of business Monday morning. And you know what? They lost. The convention voted for giving the jurisdiction to us. The papers carried it on the front page. People don't understand that, but it was sort of an endorsement, looked upon as an endorsement from the Canadian Labour Congress. There was a number of unions that tried to organize. There was International Chemical Workers. There was the Gas Coke and Chemical Workers, they

had membership in Sarnia; they were organized in the United States by the CIO for the same reason as the International Chemical Workers, sort of an anti-commie union. International Chemical Workers had an agreement that the tradesmen would belong to the tradespeople, and they would take the rest of them. So they made the application. There was a gas coke, there was a catholic syndicates, there was us, there was the building trades. They were all handing out leaflets. So I said, let me say this. There was a change in the workers' attitudes. There was new technology industry and the oil industry was the first to be that industry. We had a relatively well educated workforce. Working in the plant I used to ask myself, what would influence me? Certainly handing out a leaflet in front wouldn't do anything. But during the war time, Alex McAuslane was the vice president of the Canadian Congress of Labour. They would call meetings and have plant gate meetings. He was a tremendous orator, and a Scots brogue; he could turn it on and off at will. So he went across the country. There were a lot of strikes for recognition, to the point where Mackenzie King had difficulty with his war effort. He had to put in legislation that would recognize the union, so they put in what they called PC1003, an act that the federal government was in charge of labour, that would recognize an ability for them to get certification. That was only 1944, I'm not so sure. So the workers' attitudes were changing; they were no longer going to come to the plant gate. Employers were changing, because they had a hyper attitude towards the CIO. CIO was magic letters; I didn't even know what they meant, but to me they meant workers get together. So the CIO formed first and the Canadian Congress of Labour after that. They were recognized as the CIO of Canada. We had militant talk because we didn't think the TLC was very militant. They had too close cooperation with some governments and with the boss, in many instances. The support that I had, I had organized the BA Refinery, which is now Petrocan. The board of industrial relations sat on the application week after week. For some reason or other the whole board of directors of BA came out from Toronto to the board hearing. They didn't have enough chairs or a table big enough. Just them all coming was a message for the board. So they finally ordered a vote, and I lost the vote by 10 votes. However, what happened was all my supporters, all the oil worker supporters, quit their jobs and went to Celanese and CIL. At that time, having wanted something and being denied what you want, they worked harder in those plants than they did at BA, because they thought they had it won.

Q: So that became the core group that helped you organize Celanese?

NR: Ya. But there was enough workers quit the BA plant that they had to shut the plant down. It's an organizing strike. I tried to persuade them not to. They had to then bring in people from other plants, a foreman and whatnot, to run it until they hired other people. I was against them quitting, but I couldn't persuade them. They weren't going to work for those bastards. I knew if they quit it would be a long time, the anti-union guys would have to die off. They finally did and we got the plant, years later. But on the other hand, I got many more members because of them quitting than what I would've had in BA, maybe 125. We got a lot more in each one of those plants before. The Celanese plant was in sort of a turmoil. We knew some people there. There had no problem in petrochemical,

but the textile section was the next one with a lot of people. A lot of women there. The International Chemical Workers had a good base there. I don't know how they got it, but they swung over too, but that was the case. They got frustrated. They were out there, I got copies of their leaflets. A note came, a leaflet, calling the Joint Industrial Council people communists. Well that's the furthest thing what they had in mind. But they were very offended. I don't think people today realize how the red baiting, how seriously it was taken. BA, before we organized them, they wanted everybody's histories, who their mother's and father's teachers were, in order to search out who might've had a background. We fought that publicly and they had to withdraw that, even before we had their bargaining rights. I've always taken the position I should be known for what I'm for, not what I'm against. Both in ICF that I mentioned to you about, ICFTU, it's main problem for many at the beginning was to take on the communist unions, what they call communist unions. Well maybe in itself it's something that was internationally justified, I don't know. But they sure as heck, as a primary project, it wasn't something that you can organize on. At least I didn't think it was. It created a lot of problems, having that position. But workers understood it; okay you're against that, now what are you for? That simple. So I handed out a leaflet into the plant, the only one I handed out there that says, we don't call name. we have a program, this is our program, period. One page, big print, call a meeting. So they did. They voted to look at us and have a meeting, so to speak. Quite a few people were there and for some reason or other a lot of the CIL employees that we had certification for already went too. I couldn't go, because they knew me. But Roy Jahma went. They had their meeting in the Polish Hall, and there's telephones in the back. He phoned me and says, this is the questions they're asking, what do we tell them? So anyway, they decided to have a meeting that they called where I could talk to them, and I did. The meeting was on 98th Ave. opposite Alberta Hotel, where the fire hall is, the new building there. At that time the international airport wasn't, I came in from Vancouver. Roy picked me up and he says, they're there, they're waiting for you. I mentioned Buck Philp and another guy that were our friends, they were going to ask a lot of questions what their concern is in the plant. He says, so don't get mad at them.

Q: What were their main concerns of Celanese workers at that time?

NR: Communications. As a matter of fact, when they voted to join us, I had to promise them that I wouldn't go for a wage increase. I said, somehow we'll get an agreement with the company on that. But they wanted grievances, the internal services of a union.

Q: So they felt that no one was representing them?

NR: That's right. So they changed their mind in a hurry about that wage stuff. So we signed them up. I made the application on the basis that all workers accept those that are already certified. I was well on record that, the whole industrial union movement is on record that craft severance is not an appropriate unit for collective bargaining. You have 16 unions in a plant sort of thing. But what could I do? The board certified them without a vote, but when it came to us we had to have votes all the time. Manning had a meeting with the oil industry and they agreed to keep us out. That has reflected itself, for example

the first thing we thought was to organize the drillers after Leduc, and then the guys would take the union with them wherever they went. We did sign them up. The applications were made. What the company then did is they transferred all the union members to new jurisdictions – BC, NWT, Saskatchewan – and brought a whole new crew in, and the board allowed them to vote.

Q: Fortunately you can't do that at a place like Celanese.

NR: Ya, you couldn't do that. So I decided that pretty well they're impossible to organize, because of that. That's what the industry does each time. We organized some in Lloydminster, but they're on the Saskatchewan Alberta border, and just switch them back and forth, or form a new company, what they did there; they formed a new company. Then they forgot about that; they wanted to reactivate it about 15 years later, and then they found out they had certification. But nevertheless, that was a tactic. They did the same thing. I organized Suncor the first year they were operating. The board would always ask the question, it's premature. In that case. Ackroyd, remember him? He had a constitution and everything ready for them. They had a collective agreement with only about maybe 50 people. So I could say, look they said it isn't premature, even though it's still under construction. There are employees there, and they've got an agreement. So the board had to go along with me. But they ordered a vote, and they brought in 75 labourers and told them that if the union came in, they would have to go. If the union got in, they'd be fired. So they all voted and they got fired anyway. They didn't have the skills but they got a bunch of people in to do that. Those are the kind of things. Bargaining with Celanese after certification was not easy. Alex McAuslane had been fired and I rehired him. I told him I'm not going to get involved in any labour relations problems in the union. Everybody starts from a clear new record; I don't even want to know what he got fired for. Mind you, he got drunk in Chicago and got thrown in jail. But he had fired some other guys. So the attitude here and then the other attitude with Duplessi was difficult for the union. We had a big strike with a copper plant for recognition both in Shell and the copper plant. But Duplessi had said he's not going to deal with the CIO, industrial unions. And he didn't. There was one guy they had appear before the labour relations board who claimed that he had not been contacted about joining the union. So Duplessi set the hearings aside and charged the lack of natural justice. We lost the strike, both of them, with all the police out there... Shell took a long while, but they formed their national union and whatnot, but they're with us today and so are the others. It's expensive, it was difficult, but you had to stick with it. So Alex is rehired and the president says, okay but you're going to have to put him where you are in Edmonton. There was some talk about why it was locating in Edmonton, as well. That of course suited CIL and Celanese, but that's not why I did it. Because everybody's in Toronto. So here I am with no members, a big title with 100 unions' headquarters in Toronto or Montreal. I didn't think that was a place for me, and this was the oil province. We were as far as I know the only national headquarters of any union here in Alberta. It was the right thing to do, and still should be here. For some reason or other, when a union gets to Ottawa, they get embroiled in so many side issues, legitimate, but you lose presence in

the rest of the country. I ask you, does the Canadian Labour Congress have a presence in Alberta? Hard to convince me that they do have. Those are the things that get washed aside when you're dealing with the prime minister and you're dealing with the governor general and all those people. It takes their time. There's a lot of things to be run with the union. There's nothing wrong with the leadership in our union. There might be good reason for it to be in Ottawa. But there should be more emphasis across the country. There's 5 different economic cultures in this province. In Canada you've got the prairie provinces, you've got BC, you've got Ontario, Quebec, the Atlantic region and the Northwest Territories.

Q: So your headquarters was in Edmonton through the whole period that you were in charge?

NR: Ya.

Q: So that's from '54 on until they formed CEP?

NR: Ya. There was always a lot of pressure from Ontario that I should move there. But I said, look, I got a tremendous advantage here, because they had to select someone from the prairie provinces to be vice president of the congress. You can't do it if you're living in Ottawa. Under national chemical workers and whatnot, their leadership always had a lesser standing inside the labour movement than what I did, simply because I moved here. I like to think maybe it's more ability too. ... I would say that it's been very exciting. I really thought I was moving to another country when I first came here. You can't blame the social credit department of labour for not cooperating with the labour movement. But they call the shots. When the federation had a convention, they would shut down the offices and everyone would come to the convention. They used to have it at a building on 100th Ave, the lodge building. They have a balcony up on top. They all sat in the front row. I got on the floor and said, it looks to me this is like what Caesar had, whether they'll turn their thumbs down or whether they'll their thumbs up. They had Ken Pugh on the resolutions committee.

Q: His line was, you can't pass that resolution because it's against the law.

NR: He was pretty smooth. But the message was there. I'll never forget this, congress had merged so this was their first convention that the Alberta Federation of Labour had. They were all sitting up on top. Donald MacDonald was in town, and guess who they had as a guest speaker? Ernest Manning.

Q: What year was that?

NR: About 1957 I would imagine. Donald was upset, he didn't come to the banquet. Why should he? He came the next day at the convention thing. It takes a lot of gall to do that, doesn't it? But I got upset about it too. I sat next to Muriel with her fur coat. I was waiting for an opportunity to speak on a resolution if the right one came up, whether I could work in this ? list. He spoke about, it was somewhere around Thanksgiving I think, Manning spoke about a horn of plenty where we're all sitting around a table and getting our share.

It was 20 minutes to 12 and there was a resolution on that I thought I could get it in. I did and I said, I come from the farm. One time we had a sow that had 13 piglets and 12 tits. I said, we're that 13th piglet, as far as Manning is concerned. ... The chairman was shocked. He adjourned the convention at 20 minutes to 12 to have lunch. But before he did that, there was going to be a draw for a Benrus watch. Guess who won it?

Q: You won it, okay. Who was the president?

NR: Frank Bodie. He changed a lot later on. He got a job on the Workers Compensation Board.

Q: Then he got to be commissioner for Yukon.

NR: Ya.

Q: When did they stop having this open relationship with Ken Pugh and the AFL. You're talking about '57, when did that end?

NR: It lasted for quite a while. They always had the minister come. I remember this one very well, I think it was in Calgary. What the federation did, because I was vice president of the congress, they scheduled me to speak right after the minister. Well I guess I earned that because they were really bragging about their labour situation in the province. So when it was my turn to speak I said, I don't know where the minister lived, but clearly he didn't live in the same province I lived in. But anyway, the membership liked it. Then, I can't tell you, Gene Mitchell might be able to tell you, exactly what year it was. I'm not so sure that was, it was a reaction. It was after the NDP was formed and whatnot. The NDP would've never been formed in this province except for the labour movement. But anyway, we're getting back to Celanese I guess. Alex McAuslane, I tried him out. He never negotiated a contract in his life. He came from Scotland, and the miners there don't have a collective agreement; they just walk off if there's something. So that was his...and he was rather foulmouthed. He would say all kinds of things and CIL. He liked intrigue. I was going to send him to Celanese and I said, Alex, there's a new challenge on for you. I says, you're going to have all Americans sitting across the table. Clearly our fellows down there are on strike. They don't want more money. You're going to have to use your suave part of you to get an agreement. I said, CIL will be telling people what a foulmouthed rotten bugger you are, the way you've been down here. So you be on your best behavior and they won't know what CIL is taking about. Okay. He used to stay at the King Edward Hotel. After days of negotiations sometimes I'd go up there to see who it was, because I knew I had him. He would get up and take his shirt and says, this is the new Alex McAuslane, as he looked into a mirror. And it worked. We got an agreement. Mind you, we had a guy there from Wales, and he hated Americans. When the company said no to something, after making all the progress the guy would say, well I'm not surprised, you Americans would sell your grandmother for a nickel.

Q: What did you get in the first agreement with Celanese?

NR: It didn't take us long. For some reason or other, the company decided in mid negotiations to remove all the Americans. They put in a new manager by the name of Greiner. Actually him and I became pretty close friends in many ways. He was a real good fellow. You could trust him, and he wanted an agreement with the union. He wanted good labour relations and he made it known. They removed him and promoted him and sent him to Montreal. That's what you do to those kind of guys. A long time ago he phoned me and said he was going to quit because the company has made the decision they're going to get their money out of the CIL plant and then close it down. He asked if I would make a recommendation to the University in London for a job. I did, and he got the job. He was a real find for us. But he said to me afterwards, how come CIL speaks so badly of Alex McAuslane? I think there were 4 craft unions that had certification as well. There was a machinist, pipe fitters, IBW and carpenters maybe. At first there was no real problem. The problem was that they represented only a handful of people compared to the rest of them. They went up first and couldn't get an agreement, then they waited for us. But then they smartened up, particularly the IBW. They waited for us to get a collective agreement, then they wanted more. It got so bad at one time, after a number of years, that the IBW decided that they would strike. In effect, he wanted a strike to get more money than what we got. But I've always taken a position, if there's a picket line you honor it. But I told my rep and the open union, you should meet with him. If they do that, the whole plant will go down. Whether that's what they want. And I said, then the companies aren't going to put up with that. So I think they agreed that it was just an information line. They wanted us to know they're not happy with it and whatnot, and didn't want anybody to do their work. I guess the guys agreed to it. But some guys wouldn't cross anyway. I simply refused to take the position that we cross a picket line anywhere, because you can't win on that, in the long haul. A lot of unions do that, and it weakens the strike on the overall. Even though in effect it looks like we're striking against ourselves or supporting a program against. They didn't have the other building trades of course would have to do the same thing. They might've put some pressure on them, I don't know. Anyway it didn't last very long. We had our strike against Celanese ourselves.

Q: What year was that?

NR: It was somewhere around 1970. Greiner had gone, and it was more or less an influence from United States. But the textile operation was still operating. They closed that down years later. They had a personnel manager that had no influence. Usually they do, but this guy didn't. It was cold wintertime, the girls stopped him in the car and took him out, took his pants down to see if he had any balls. Because they were blaming him. Anyway, it was settled. But by and large, eventually the labour relations turned out very well. But as a result of the IBW strike, the company made up its mind that they wanted to get rid of the craft unions. They brought in heavyweights. Ackroyd, they met with Manning. All the talk that BI had over the years that this isn't a unit appropriate for collective bargaining fell by the wayside. They decertified them. I had made the application for all employees who were not members of a certified bargaining unit, and they automatically became our members. There was no problem we've ever had with



them. But clearly it was a significant policy change from the government. Management here at Celanese has always been quite wary of the plant in Bishop, Texas and the US influence. They sold Celanese to the Germans. I don't know what year that was, but shortly after that I think. There's been all kinds of financial transactions since that time. The last group that took over decided to finish it off. But for many years they've been getting their investment out, not replenishing, and closing down plants as they wore out. It's a sad affair. I didn't mention this to you, I was part of the economic trade and development board for the federal government. We were asked to make a recommendation and a study of the petrochemical industry, which we did, I was co-chair with a guy from Shell. Everybody on the committee was a CEO of Imperial, BA, all those companies. Imperial Oil got cold feet every once in a while; they wanted to get out but I wouldn't let them get out. I said, you agreed to be here. You can write a minority report if you like. They didn't like to be a member of a committee that a union guy was the chair. It was quite an experience. They wrote quite a report and I've still got a list of all the companies that were involved, petrochemicals. A lot of them are closed off today. That's the most shortsighted decision that our government could've possibly made. There's secondary industry and tertiary industry. Like for example down here, the BP and the asphalt plant, a pipeline. But the costs for the feedstock was very high. Apparently ? wanted to keep a lot of it for himself. I think this would be brought up, this whole question in the energy debate in this province right now, is that when the industry had their way, we lost the petrochemical industry. They've been closed up all across the country. And they're good jobs, they're well paid jobs. The problem really was twofold, that the feedstocks were quite expensive, but there they had market price. They complained about the market price and the price of the feedstock. The economics of the petrochemical industry, as far as labour is concerned, was more easily managed than in the oil industries. I found that surprising. But it was because of the cost of the feedstock and other material, that the percentage of labour cost was lower than it was in the oil refineries. Consequently, actually to get a wage increase from the petrochemical industry, even though it was more expensive to run, was easier for them than it was from the oil industry. The oil industry always said, sure we've got lots of money because we didn't give it to you. But they've never pleaded inability to pay. It's interesting from that point of view. They have interest in good labour relations, because they were more labour intensive. But there's an enormous number of jobs that have gone begging because of the shortsighted policies. We have a disadvantage already; we've got cold winters, it costs more to build our plants down here because of that. And we're not on the sea. Celanese had to send it their stuff to Prince Rupert and then send it across. Now they're building in Mexico and in Chicago. Mexico likely has a price advantage, but Chicago likely does too because they're right on the lakes. I've been surprised by the silence there's been in Canada closing down these plants.

Q: Back to Celanese again. When you first started organizing there, they had a company union. I read about how the working conditions were pretty bad. They had acid and poisonous fumes. Tell me about that as a part of your organizing.

NR: Health and safety was, as you know, a centerpiece of our union. The companies would take the position that it's their responsibility, one of those management rights things. We had to shut down Shell Oil for a long time in order to win that. It actually became an international incident. We did better in Canada on the health and safety than they did in the US. But nevertheless, that's what the official positions of the companies were, they didn't create any awareness amongst the employees. The problem with using it as an organizing tool is you have to educate the people, particularly your committee. You have to take your time to do that. In Chalk River the evidence was pretty clear that the wives of men that worked there had a high incidence of cancer. They would come home and sleep, and he would have whatever radioactivity there was. A lot of those people don't want to believe you. It's quite a stress on people in say, look, you're going to die earlier. With the oil workers we were lucky. We used to give them a water stained receipt every month for their dues. But on that was the classification that they had. That went on for years, for no reason, but they kept them on file. Then the union itself got conscious about occupational health, and we got a grant in the US from OSHA. They looked at that and said, we're going to trace back and see what the health of these people were, if they're dead why they died. It just came out stark that cancer, cancer, cancer. So we had good material to tell them about what exposure to toxic substances will do. On the other hand, at that time it wasn't so much a part of the issue, because they just had worked there and they were happy to have the job. It became an issue, you have to unionize those people after you got the certification, and that's when that comes in.

Q: Talk about the changes in health and safety that occurred over time.

NR: Well the health and safety, the big issue was identifying the substances that they were exposed to. I think at one stage they were making 85 products. In the oil industry it's simple; you have the crude and you make gasoline or oil. But here they made a lot of products, from cigarette tow to pharmaceuticals. There's nothing that you can't make from oil derivatives. You can make bread if you want to. So it's a constant committee that watched that, what products are made and get to know exactly what the impacts on health were. That's where we really used the ICF as well. Some European countries have had these plants longer, and there in some areas was a fairly good employer. I know the Masburns are not, they're named after them, but... Then of course the argument is about what say does the union have. By and large, in the latter years in particular, the personnel department, of course we had Gary Shury there for a period of time. He would never fight that kind of stuff. He was a representative of ours. One of the interesting things about Gary is that he says to the company, you're giving money to the conservatives and to the liberals, why aren't you giving to the NDP? So they gave him a cheque for a few thousand dollars to give the NDP, and they sent it back.

Q: That's interesting that connection with the international chemical federation, but that was something you were able to use in able to ...

NR: Ya. Well the thing is, there was an interesting program in South America The American oil companies just absolutely kept the workers ignorant. It's hard to understand.

Mind you they're more that way in the US than they are in Canada. I don't know what the reasons are, maybe we just have more of a y manager rather than an x one, I don't know. But what we did is that we established a computer network. If someone in San Paulo Brazil wanted to know what the impact of hydrogen sulfide is, they would flag London England they want that information. Well London England would likely say, well this is something that the unions in Alberta would know something about, because of Turner Valley and their experience send them this information. So we had in the third world country a network where we could provide the workers with this information. They never got it from the employer. That does two things. I'm sure you know about it, in case you're asked. And you can also use it the other way. Maybe there's things that we'd like to know, so we have a worldwide network that we can use.

Q: So were you able to get the companies to reduce the levels of toxicity?

NR: Ya, mostly it revolved itself around exposure and ventilation. We've had fairly good success throughout Canada on that. They were all nervous about it at first, because they didn't know how much it would cost. But when you explain it to them that you're saving money, there's been a huge change in the industry on those things. Mind you, I think that in Canada the board of industrial relations across the province, particularly Ontario, has never challenged or supported the industry saying it's not union business, like they have in the US. A lot of our plants are fairly new. This occupational health and safety, it isn't that the companies didn't need jacking up, and some didn't want to do what they knew they should do. But if once they knew that the union knows, well they're not going to, public relations wise, they can't win on that. Even in Ontario, it's still far ahead of us in many areas, like with hearing. We used to take hearing tests of workers every year. It was amazing what you learn from that, how the hearing deteriorates. Even the steady whine of an electric motor and whatnot. We live in a noisy society to start with, and for somebody to put up with even a fairly innocuous sound, it's not really noisy but over time it works out that way. So that still continues. Here we don't do that, and that's one of the things I still want to get off the ground. Not only because of this, because I've noticed that too often, particularly working with seniors, a senior will report to me about a meeting he was at, and I wonder if we were at the same meeting. What you learn if you're in this, how many words there are that are substitutional. It isn't that the guy didn't pay any attention, he just heard it that way. So the saying is that at 45 you've lost 45% of your hearing, I mean 40% of the people will have substantial loss of hearing. The problem is with the people who buy hearing aids, 75% put them in the drawer. Why they don't speak up, I don't know.

Q: At Celanese were you able to get changes in terms of noise levels?

NR: Ya, I think those lab people were pretty aggressive. You just have to tell them and they'll take it the rest of the way. ... And the petrochemical guys that came from the refineries where they're much advanced in this thing. The other thing was is that can be largely determined by local management. This is their health and safety program, if they reduce the number of illnesses and sicknesses, New York will be quite happy with that.

Q: Back to Celanese and the closure of the plant ... Why would Celanese close? Was it Blackwater who came in and bought the place? They haven't stopped operating Celanese, they've just moved it.

NR: That's right. It's a big story, in my view. I remember in China a couple of times we went down the Yellow Sea about 1986. Here they had a parcel of land that was going to house 208 industries, foreign industries. They had built on one side of the bay they made a whole port for these people and a city for the westerners, the skilled people, the engineers, who wanted to live and send their kids to school. A big gas pipeline coming in that they were giving gas at cheap prices. China was on a program of having to catch up on technology. These were the duty free ports. When Jan went in there, the twins were the city in that area, the place was all full. They had a number of these on the coast. They didn't trade with domestic market; it was cheaper to run it there by the water, and send the product worldwide. I bought something from supposed to have been manufactured in the US, import from US. But inside you'll see the US has imported it from China. These duty free ports were the start of many of these, and China wasn't the only one. Canadian capital, American capital, particularly American capital were all there building their plants. The Chinese are pretty smart, because they're pulling on the US what the US does to us. For example, 10% of a world scale petrochemical plant will satisfy Canadian needs. In the US 80% is domestic and they only need to screw it up a little more for 10% to supply all of Canada. So in order to be competitive we have to have world scale plants. But we don't have the economy, I mean the population; and we have the distance and we have the winter and we have a lot of places where we're not on the sea. So this started the ball rolling. It was never really reported back here in Canada what we had in those duty free ports or what the US had, except they know it's manufactured from someplace else now today. But they volunteered to go there. China has a billion people; there's an enormous domestic market, if you want to open it up. They can always guarantee that any of those plants China themselves make, that it'll run full time and run cheaper. They talk here in Canada about cheaper labour rates. That's slightly true, but hell. The cost of paying all the labour in an oil refinery is about 1 cent a liter. So what are they talking about? And the second reason is, actually you can compare the benefits just on the basis of the wage rate. What we get is subsidized labour. When I was there, there was obviously some relaxation on it, that the housing, health, education, transportation, is all public. It comes from a central pot. So if you're just going to compare the wage rates, it's an unrealistic comparison. If I didn't have to pay taxes and if I didn't have to pay mortgage fees or buying a condo like this or whatnot, I could afford a smaller wage. It's still a little cheaper, but in the final analysis if you take a look at what the overall costs are on the product that you make, there's no case.

Q: What's happening with such a self-defeating way of using our resources? We've got iron, we've got nickel, we've got oil... Yet the jobs are being offshored. Is that not totally self-defeating in the long run?

NR: I would say it's self-defeating in the short run, because it depends on what you want to do for your people. What's happening in the US, the good jobs are disappearing and the unions are arguing that. It's becoming a retail country. They say there's many jobs, but what kind of jobs, at Walmart? Those are the kind of jobs that they're talking about.

Q: What kind of policies could Canada follow to stop this export of our industrial jobs?

NR: Sure they've exported them. If they're going to build in Chicago, you're going to rebuild some of them down there, because you know what Bush's position would be. Somewhere down the road this exodus the auto industry has is Bush inspired. There's some money going under the table there somewhere.

Q: What kind of policies do you think Canada could follow that would stop this?

NR: Well I think it depends on what kind of results you want. I think we're not getting or are we, we're not getting anything much cheaper because we're getting it imported, are we? The cost of living is still going up. I think this globalization is a catalyst for greed. Some people are enormously wealthy. The industry seems to create it and governments seem to tolerate it. There's somebody that gave \$200 million or \$2 million to charity. He was worth something like \$40 billion. So I decided to work out what that really meant. In terms of even modest interest rates on \$40 billion, it's more money than you can imagine. It's like you and me giving \$10. But we then go around and name buildings after them. It's worth your time, it shocked me to see just how little that was in the overall income that the guy had. We don't have tribes where we have chiefs anymore, but we're getting people with such an enormous wealth that they can almost do anything they want. I think there's got to be some kind of brakes put on that. I don't know how in China that whole thing is working. People are starting to live better, and in India. But it's not working here. But the thing is, we've never had an appropriate policy to help the poorer nations, so they resorted to cater to our greed and say, well here, you can make more money building a plant here.

Q: With the petrochemical industry, would it not be possible simply by having a different pricing policy for the feedstocks that are used here versus what's exported, to recreate that industry?

NR: I suppose there's certain things in globalization that you can't ignore. The Celanese plant made cigarette tow, and then China built its own plant where they could do it cheaper. But there's a lot of things that I think if we're the only person in the world that has the resources, we're the only people that have oil easy to find and to refine out of the tar sands, it shouldn't apply to us. There's certain products that we have that we can certainly manage to our liking. But it involves government involvement, and the industry is dead against that. Even though the governments their kind of operation, I think the reason for it is, take a look how they operate. The oil industry or whatever made a certain amount of profit last year. I would say with the oil industry a lot of it is windfall. But

that's not to them. They will schedule making more profit next year than what they did this year. When the papers report it, profits are coming down. Geez, I hope so.

. . .

I think there's much more innovation. We should involve the universities and research the new uses of products. But by and large, I see the American system's greatest weakness is their own greed, and the greed they're instilling in other people around the world. I can't understand...

Q: What's lost to the community by Celanese disappearing?

NR: They all have dues check off for United Way; that's all gone. You can mention many of the people in the union who were volunteering in all kinds of endeavors. Part of that the energy chemical workers union can take a lot of credit for, because that's what we felt the union was all about. In the days of the CIO they used to ask us, why do you want to have a wage increase? Why do you want to have a wage increase? So you can have a better standard of living, you don't have to worry about your food. But you might be independent enough to make a community contribution. In other words, the union movement has to be a social movement as much as an economic movement. It just can't be a business union. I know our guys are talking to me today, we had this osteoporosis program where a guy cycled across the country and we raised \$1 million. They like that today; they remember that more than any wage increase, what you've done for society. People are socially conscious if you allow them to be. I think workers haven't changed much, in the sense that they want to be proud of their job, they want to be proud of their employer, they want to be proud of their union. We often don't let them do that. I always took the position as a director that if they're just interested in money, I'm not interested in the union. You can't go that way. Take a look at the building trades, the problems they've had. They're not much more, because of the nature of their work, it isn't that the people aren't socially conscious. The work requires them to be a business.

. . .

I think like at the Canadian Labour Congress we used to have citizenship months; I think it was a bad mistake to discontinue them. Unless you involve the worker, he's going to forget you. But I think that'll all come out. The labour movement has a tremendous potential and it'll go up and down. There's a real change taking place in society and they have to change with it.

[ END ]