

## SP FC 3803 U54 N\_5-7-trk2-Percy Trerise.mp3

Transcription by Donna Sacuta

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**Interviewer** [00:00:00] Mister—

**Percy Trerise** [00:00:01] Percy Trerise.

**Interviewer** [00:00:02] Percy Trerise, that's right.

**Percy Trerise** [00:00:04] And at that time, I was a delegate from the International Granite Cutters. I think, as I said before, that the most, if not interesting, but rather embarrassing situation would be the Asiatic Exclusion League, which was formed partly as a result, I think, partly as a result of cheap Oriental labour. I think that the general rate of wages in the lumber yard were around 25 cents an hour, and the Chinese were able to work for considerably less.

**Percy Trerise** [00:00:41] The situation became so serious that the lumber barons here were quite concerned about Norwegian, Swedish, other lumber entering the British market. I remember they referred this to the Vancouver Labour Council thinking, of course we should be interested in promoting our own industry. I distinctly remember the Labour Party here sending a letter or contacting the British authority to tell them that an industry that couldn't pay a reasonable, a decent living wage, wasn't as far as we were concerned here, they weren't concerned whether the lumber went to Norway or Sweden or wherever. Understand what I mean?

**Percy Trerise** [00:01:34] That was the situation and ultimately, as I said before, the Asiatic Exclusion League was formed. It came [to] the Trades and Labour Council. I'm not quite sure whether it gave full endorsement or not. I'm not so sure of that. You'd have to check on your records, but I do know that as a result of that, they formed a political party, called the Asiatic Exclusion League. The leader was Joe Phillips. He was a granite cutter, a bald, tall man about 55 with a considerable ability, executive ability and so on. There were raids on Chinatown. This was unusual perhaps or not. The Chinese were, they didn't put up a fight. They didn't offer a great deal of resistance so they had to take it. They swung back and quite a few were injured with matches on the shoulder and so on, but they met an altogether different opposition when they got up Powell Street where the Japanese were. They realized when they got there, well, this is a little more serious. Later of course they formed then the Asiatic Exclusion League. I'm not quite sure whether they polled enough votes to lose their deposits or I don't know. I don't remember how I voted myself. That, I think, probably was one of the most embarrassing times shortly after the turn of the century there.

**Percy Trerise** [00:03:18] As I said before, later in 1918 I joined the Fire Department, then we had quite a job getting organized because there was considerable opposition from the Boards of Trade, quite natural, I suppose, thinking that it was quite a revolutionary step that firemen and policemen should organize. However, we became organized and was listed in sequence, I presume, of organizing with Local 18. From then on I attended there as a delegate from the Firemen and then of course that was when Birt Showler was in, and Percy Bengough's time. Harry Neelands was explaining the other day I would say he got probably more seniority that I have. I don't know if I can tell you a great deal more.

**Interviewer** [00:04:12] Well, you know, the Asiatic Exclusion League, and if you went on these excursions to Chinatown.

**Percy Trerise** [00:04:23] Right, yes.

**Interviewer** [00:04:23] Were they organized by labour?

**Percy Trerise** [00:04:36] No, no, I wouldn't say that. No, they were organized. But as I said before, I don't think, you'd have to check on that, I don't think it got the full endorsement of labour to operate on this way because, after all, it was a lawbreaking issue. I certainly think —

**Interviewer** [00:04:56] Were they trade unionists, were there some trade unionists who were quite organizing this?

**Percy Trerise** [00:05:03] Oh, I think I can safely say that 90 percent of them were trade unionists. It was one of these protest things probably you know, got organized without too much thought of what might be involved.

**Interviewer** [00:05:18] Were you approached as a trade unionist?

**Percy Trerise** [00:05:20] Pardon?

**Interviewer** [00:05:20] Were you approached as a trade unionist? Were you approached to take part?

**Percy Trerise** [00:05:26] No, no, no. I was naturally approached to support the labour arm when they became a political party, the Asiatic Exclusion League. But as I explained to you the other day I was never quite sure of the justification.

**Interviewer** [00:05:49] Could you speculate on what may have made labour change its attitude?

**Percy Trerise** [00:05:52] What made labour change its attitude?

**Interviewer** [00:05:54] Yes, towards specifically [unclear].

**Percy Trerise** [00:05:58] Well, I think that the attitude changed as a result of organizing, and first thing we knew there were Oriental delegates, a few sitting at the Trades Council, Japanese I'm sure. I'm not quite sure about Chinese. It was a gradual process of improved relations, you might say, between a better and more tolerance. The time arrived when there were Asiatic delegates to the Trades Council. I think probably that might have been accounted for, I'm just taking a guess, through the IWA organizing the woods or it might've been [unclear], I'm not sure. However, there were delegates to the Trades Council. Mind you, quite a number of years ensued before this happened, but it was a gradual, shall we say, gradual indication of tolerance, more toleration toward these men. I think they realized these Asiatics were the victims of circumstances and there was no reason why we should feel hostile toward them. They came to the country, some of them perhaps illegally, but not all of them. It was a gradual recognition of peoples' rights, I would say.

**Interviewer** [00:07:21] Do you remember the incident with the Indian ship?

**Percy Trerise** [00:07:26] Yes, Komagata Maru.

**Interviewer** [00:07:28] Were you in on that?

**Percy Trerise** [00:07:29] No. I'm not too familiar. I remember the name of the incident but that shouldn't be very difficult for you to get that, because there—

**Interviewer** [00:07:38] I just wondered whether you were involved.

**Percy Trerise** [00:07:40] No, no, that was, what year was that? 1919? I'm not sure of the date for that. I'm only making a guess at the incident of the Asiatic Exclusion thing, I'm making a guess mind you, I would say that might be anywhere around from 1909 to 1912, somewhere in that interval that three-year interval.

**Interviewer** [00:08:11] Were you here during the war?

**Percy Trerise** [00:08:13] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:08:16] Do you remember the incident, the raiding of the Labour Temple?

**Percy Trerise** [00:08:27] Yes, I remember. But I couldn't give any detail. No, I'm sorry. I couldn't give you any detail on that. As I explained to you before, I joined the Fire Department in 1917 and we were quite concerned. When we became a union of involvement when we expected during the Winnipeg strike when that reached the coast and we got involved here. But no, I can't give you a great deal of detail.

**Interviewer** [00:09:03] Did your union take the position that you shouldn't go on strike?

**Percy Trerise** [00:09:04] Pardon?

**Interviewer** [00:09:07] When the general strike was discussed in Vancouver in 1919 in sympathy with Winnipeg, what position did your union take?

**Percy Trerise** [00:09:18] Well, you must remember we were just recently organized, and if I remember rightly, the Constitution stated in its preamble or its objectives that it was deemed inadvisable, if I remember rightly, deemed inadvisable to strike, and we didn't become involved. It was rather an embarrassing situation all the same.

**Interviewer** [00:09:47] Why? Did a lot of you want to go on strike?

**Percy Trerise** [00:09:49] Pardon?

**Interviewer** [00:09:49] Did some of you want to?

**Percy Trerise** [00:09:51] No, but because of being affiliated with the Trades Council and so on we were wondering at all if it would reach that serious situation or they would probably call everyone out in desperation. That's what we were rather afraid of. You know, sometimes it's difficult. You can't serve two masters, it was one of those cases where it was a rather embarrassing situation, but possibly without our involvement, they never stopped us even to ask or request.

**Interviewer** [00:10:39] Maybe talk a bit about the jurisdictional disputes between the granite workers and the rock workers.

**Percy Trerise** [00:10:44] Yes, that is interesting. The Parliament Buildings in Victoria, that must have been started shortly after the turn of the century. I explained to you they had been built of Haddington Island stone. Haddington Island stone was used here quite extensively. At the present time I can refer to the City Hall. Everything above the base course is granite, polished granite and most of that from Haddington Island. The same thing applies to the Court House, about the entrance to the courthouse, including the lions are granite, above that is Haddington Island stone. It, as I said before, we didn't know what to call it. We knew it wasn't granite and it wasn't soft stone. When the granite cutters started coming here when we talked about building the Post Office and the Bank of Commerce, they were confronted with this situation. The Parliament Buildings in Victoria were then completed and talking about using it in the Court [House], this Haddington Island stone in the Court [House] there. I explained to you before I think it was north of Prince Rupert, the deposit up there north of Prince Rupert [Port Hardy], on Haddington Island.

**Percy Trerise** [00:12:13] So this is sort of a demonstration of our relations started then shortly after the turn of the century. The granite cutters to cut granite effectively you have to use compressed air, a pneumatic tool cutting through [unclear] you know a two-inch band perhaps and a three-inch flute and so on, those seemed to be torn off by hand and then cleaned up with a pneumatic tool. It's quite skillful. The same thing with cutting the faces or crimping job caps with a tremendous amount of relief. It is quite a skill. So this pneumatic tool was quite an invention. When they talked about using the Haddington Island stone in the Court House, they thought, well, we might as well try McDonald, Wilson and Snyder with a contract. They have a [unclear] on Main Street. You go in there you can see the Haddington stone. Just over there near First Avenue on the east side. They thought, well, we might as well attempt or rather experiment with pneumatic tools so that the granite cutters who cut some of this stone, and they discovered that they were probably 20 or 25 percent more efficient by using pneumatic tools than the old soft stone masons were using a wooden mallet, because a wooden mallet wasn't quite as strong, effective enough to do a great deal of work on this stone. It would do a lot of work, but it wasn't nearly as effective. Cutting wasn't sharp enough.

**Percy Trerise** [00:13:55] As a result, there became a jurisdictional dispute between the two unions, the soft stone cutters [Journeyman Stonecutters' Association of North America] and the granite cutters [Granite Cutters' International Association of America]. They each had very capable executives here. They each were affiliated with the Trades Council. Then, of course, someone had to decide who had jurisdiction this Haddington Island stone should be cut under. So the Trades Council was unable to solve it and it ultimately was referred to the Jurisdictional Disputes Committee of the A F of L. They submitted their findings, explained that it was neither granite nor soft stone or sandstone. It was a hard lava caused by a volcanic eruption. There was no nature to it. With granite there is a flat grain and an edge grain just like a piece of wood. There was no nature to this Haddington Island stone. Their report coincided with this report from the AFL Jurisdictional Disputes Committee in Washington that it was this lava that I just described. It was them, both organizations they were sensible enough to work it on a 50-50 basis. They each have constitutions, you see. The granite cutters said that they claim jurisdiction over all hard stone which pneumatic tools have been used. The soft stone cutters had a constitution with similar provisions saying that they cover cutting jurisdiction over all stone that their particular mallets are used on. It was settled. I thought it was a demonstration of the

personal involvement through automation and that's going quite a long ways back. It took two or three years to get that finally settled. Today, of course, it doesn't make so very much difference because the darn stuff is all sawn and not a great deal of cutting required anymore. I doubt whether there are any more than eight or ten stonecutters or granite cutters in the city. Mr. Gooderham and I tried about three or four years ago to try to revive the interest in the monumental garrison. This of course fell aside and we weren't able to. We finally decided that it was up to the stonemasons, bricklayers and stonemasons, it would be their problem to try and see what they could do and take them under their jurisdiction.

**Interviewer** [00:17:06] Well, what years was this?

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:07] Pardon?

**Interviewer** [00:17:07] What years was this? What year was this about?

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:14] What year am I talking about now? Seven, eight, nine, ten, 11, 12, up to the war.

**Interviewer** [00:17:19] I see, and the settlement you reached was 50-50.

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:24] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:17:25] That would be half recruited by your union and half—

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:30] That's right. That's right. We had to permit those men to use the pneumatic tools, which we formerly considered they had no right. It was out of their jurisdiction even to think of using.

**Interviewer** [00:17:40] You taught them how to use the tools.

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:42] That's right. That's right.

**Interviewer** [00:17:44] So it worked out.

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:49] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:17:49] What arrangements did you have before the settlement was reached? While the discussion on it? What did you do then?

**Percy Trerise** [00:17:56] Well, it was quite an embarrassing situation. The employers here, the contractors were decent people. They realized that the granite cutters were quite more efficient on doing this work. It was more properly employed granite cutters than these soft stone cutters because of their knowledge of the pneumatic tools. They generally wanted the granite cutters to get jurisdiction of it. The stonecutters on the other hand, by virtue of being the first in when the Parliament Buildings were built in Victoria were first here in the West and they claimed they had kind of squatter's rights. They were a very proud organization, were very reluctant to give up these rights that they considered, that we as granite cutters considered that we had, were quite justified.

**Interviewer** [00:18:54] Well, what did you do? Did the stone workers work it until the settlement?

**Percy Trerise** [00:19:00] Yes they did. They took a few of the granite cutters into their union rather than—a temporary settlement. It didn't disrupt.

**Interviewer** [00:19:15] Did you use the drills? Did you use the drills then or did you only start using those after you reached a settlement?

**Percy Trerise** [00:19:25] Used the drills?

**Interviewer** [00:19:25] Used the pneumatic drills?

**Percy Trerise** [00:19:25] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:19:27] You used them right from the start?

**Percy Trerise** [00:19:27] Oh yes. They took three or four of us, I was one, into their union and we did all right and tried to instruct them. It didn't take them long to catch on, a matter of a few months and they were able to adjust to the pneumatic tools.

**Interviewer** [00:19:51] How many members did each union have around that time?

**Percy Trerise** [00:19:55] I would say 150 to 200. It wouldn't be more than 200.

**Interviewer** [00:19:59] Each of them?

**Percy Trerise** [00:20:01] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:20:05] Now, what's interesting is your jurisdictional dispute. You applied for a settlement to the AFL.

**Percy Trerise** [00:20:19] The Jurisdictional Disputes Committee, yes.

**Interviewer** [00:20:20] It wasn't the Canadian Labour Congress at all?

**Percy Trerise** [00:20:20] No. There was no Canadian Labor Congress in existence then that I remember. There probably was, but we weren't affiliated with them, I'll put it that way. There were other affiliations, but with the AF of L.

**Interviewer** [00:20:35] So that's naturally where you applied.

**Percy Trerise** [00:20:37] Yes, as a matter of fact, the President of the AF of L at their conference, his name was Jim Duncan and he was a granite cutter himself from Quincy, Massachusetts. He was the president. He was well respected. He followed Gompers. Jim Duncan. So that's pretty well the story. They were sensible enough to sit around the table and discuss it and it was naturally heated and embarrassing moments, of course, there would be. I often think of that now as a real demonstration of the first advent of automation where people have to re-adjust and adapt.

**Interviewer** [00:21:25] Were you aware of this at the time of the issues that were involved?

**Percy Trerise** [00:21:30] I don't think so. No, I don't think so. You mean that were we are aware of the involvement of automation? No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

**Interviewer** [00:21:46] I think we've pretty well covered that. What about the organizing of the firemen? You said there was some difficulty.

**Percy Trerise** [00:21:48] Oh yes. Mind you, I would like, I feel in talking about this, I would like to get confirmation from the President of the Firemen's Union, before you use it. Gordon, the President.

**Interviewer** [00:22:12] Well, we can check it with him.

**Percy Trerise** [00:22:26] I would like. I wouldn't like to be too presumptuous and quote and give information unless they've approved of it. As I said before, the Vancouver firemen, Local 18, were organized in that sequence; they were the eighteenth city in North America. There was considerable concern among the influential people, when I use the term influential, I'm referring to boards of trades and civic organizations that what it might involve. It was quite revolutionary as I said before, that firemen could become organized, become a part of organized labour. There was considerable, I think if I remember rightly, the first city was Philadelphia and all over the country there was the same opposition to it. That it was too revolutionary that firemen would become organized. However, we were working here those days for 21 hours a day, six days a week. The executive had a little local union were doing their best to try and convince City Council that these were conditions that were really deplorable. Men hardly, perhaps may be exaggerating somewhat, I want to say that their own families scarcely knew them. However, they were working 21 hours a day and there was certainly need for some— When I say they work 21 hours a day, they were at the firehall for 21 hours. They'd go for breakfast enroute between six and seven, another seven and eight, another between eight and nine.

**Percy Trerise** [00:24:32] They decided to organize. The International Firefighters had their first convention down in Portland in 1918. We sent two of three delegates there. One of them was George Richardson who was then nominated as Secretary pro tem and he held that position until a few years ago with the Vancouver firemen. We held this position of secretary of the International all those years. Of course as the years went by, I think the people at the Merchants' Association they surely saw later that there was no need to be so dubious or afraid of this so-called revolutionary step of organizing the firemen because as far as the employer-employee relationship throughout all the years, it was the City Council could be desired. Nevertheless, that condition, and you can understand why it did. That complex, shall we say, service clubs and so on being so concerned about firemen becoming part of organized labour.

**Interviewer** [00:25:54] When did you get organized?

**Percy Trerise** [00:25:59] In 1918.

**Interviewer** [00:26:00] Did somebody come up here from the International to organize you? How did it happen?

**Percy Trerise** [00:26:11] Yes. [pause] There was an attempt. They weren't exactly organized yet. They hadn't received their charter yet. The first convention was held as I said in Portland in 1918. Well, of course we must have been organized to get delegates

seated there, weren't we? I'm sorry. I can't think of who. It was done through the Trades Council.

**Interviewer** [00:26:57] Trades and Labour Council.

**Percy Trerise** [00:26:58] Yes. One of their delegates invited me. Two of their delegates, I forget who they were, came and talked to the firemen explaining to them the advantages and so on. They were also conscious of the deplorable conditions that they were working under. They felt that they were doing what was right. Now, I can't tell you who they were. Victor Midgley was one I think. There was somebody else. Anyway, that's where it emanated from, yes. There wasn't anyone came here from Washington or anything like that.

**Interviewer** [00:27:41] We can check on them.

**Percy Trerise** [00:27:43] Again, as I said before, I think that perhaps I would like you to get the confirmation, before you refer to the firemen in any way, of their own executive. I think it's only right. Roary MacDonald and you can get the delegates to the Trades Council whoever they are. I don't know who they are at the Trades Council. I would like you to—.

**Interviewer** [00:28:09] They may have more information as well.

**Percy Trerise** [00:28:11] They've got the minutes see, right back there. As I said before, I think perhaps if you went and saw Roary MacDonald or Bob Middleton, if you care to take their names. Roary MacDonald is the President and Bob Middleton is the Secretary. I think that will be more perhaps authentic; don't you think? If you can have access to their minutes, which I'm sure you can.

**Interviewer** [00:28:36] There's just one thing now. To get recognition from City Council. Did you have to go on strike or anything like that?

**Percy Trerise** [00:28:42] No.

**Interviewer** [00:28:47] What did you do? Do you remember? Did you have much difficulty with recognition?

**Percy Trerise** [00:29:08] There was no Labour Code then. [pause]

**Percy Trerise** [00:29:09] I'm sure it was the result of a direct canvass, lobby with the Aldermen. They themselves a majority saw the advisability of giving consideration of what the firemen were asking for.