

Grant MacNeil Part 1.mp3

Transcribed by Donna Sacuta

Interviewer [00:00:00] You mentioned the Blubber Bay strike as important to trade union rights in Canada.

Grant MacNeil [00:00:08] The Blubber Bay strike involved the quarry workers of the Pacific Lime Company on Texada Island. A large number of them were Chinese workers. The company management was centered in New York. It was organized and certified—as we call it certified now—was organized by the Lumber and Sawmill Workers, for some reason, which was then Communist-led. There was a sub-local of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers. The president was Jack Hole who was a professed Communist. They threatened strike. They go into a lot of trouble. Mr. Justice McIntosh was sent in, and this would give a significant turn to legislative developments, and attempted under the rather inadequate laws of the day to conciliate the strike and failed to reach a settlement. So they went on strike in 1937. At the time, the IWA was in process of formation. Their first convention was in 1937 in Tacoma, Washington. The strike went on and on and the company took rather a brutal action in evicting, first the Chinese workers from their quarters, who remained loyal, very loyal to the union, which was a remarkable development at that time because the Chinese workers had been given second-class status in trade unions practically up to that time. The families, white families, were evicted. I could mention several members of the families today who can recall how their parents suffered when they were forced to move down to Van Anda made to live in miserable little shacks while the strike was underway. The Communists, Pritchett was head of the IWA (International Woodworkers of America) at the time, of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers. It was a Lumber and Sawmill Workers local for a long time afterwards. It became part of the IWA in 1938. It aroused tremendous support in Vancouver and large mass meetings were held here. The treatment of the strikers, they were ambushed by a squad of provincial police sent in by the Attorney General Gordon Wismer. There was a great deal of brutality. I remember going in there to investigate as an MP (Member of Parliament), and I couldn't move anywhere. I couldn't go to the Post Office, to the telephone office, anywhere, except under police escort. It was virtual martial law. Because of this brutality and because of the significant turn in the development of legislation, George Pearson was then Minister of Labor. He was trying to apply the law as he had devised it up to that time, to handle this situation. It attracted a lot of attention. We shipped the boys from Vancouver on a picket line which was stationed on the docks at Blubber Bay. They did nothing more than sing parodies of popular ditties ridiculing the police. The police took their vengeance and one after another of these boys was arrested and convicted for unlawful assembly, which under the Code that was read at that time, when two or three are gathered together and conduct themselves in a manner to cause fear in the minds of bystanders, they are guilty of unlawful assembly. So in the courts here they were convicted and sent one after another to six months in Oakalla, on the evidence of the wives of the scabs who occupied the cottages overlooking the dock, which had been vacated by the strikers. They had been forced to vacate them by brutal action of the company. That came up in the House of Commons. I brought that up in the House of Commons and demanded an amendment to the Criminal Code, and Tom Berger

took it up more recently, a Criminal Code that would make it impossible to convict men on such flimsy evidence, obviously biased evidence. One man was brutally killed. He was taken out of his own home, Bob Gardner, taken out of his own home one night. I'd stayed at his place. I knew him well, a very inoffensive sort of chap taken out of his home, taken down to the hoosegow that the police had set up; the provincial police. They were really goons dressed in provincial police uniform. He was brutally beaten, kicked and taken to hospital in Powell River the next day. He died eventually of his injuries. Of course, Wismer was accused by us of murder in the legislature, and taken up. There's a plaque in our office here, one of the early labour martyrs, Bob Gardner. His wife is still living in Nanaimo. She'll tell you the story. It was significant because it was the last and most brutal attempt to suppress strike activities by force. Secondly, it was a case that brought to the attention of the legislature the necessity of amending the labour legislation because we made capital out of it in the House. Also, it brought to attention the wrongful interpretation of that section of the Criminal Code attempted to deal with a situation like that. This situation and the projectionists' strike in New Westminster were the two instances where that section of the Code was used, as I always contend, quite improperly.

Interviewer [00:05:57] In terms of the section of the Criminal Code. Woodsworth carried on a very strong campaign.

Grant MacNeil [00:06:02] Section 98.

Interviewer [00:06:03] Section 98, which was deleted in 1937? 1939 or something like that. I noticed in one of their publications that the Communists claim it was the Canadian Labor Defense League's propaganda that got it repealed.

Grant MacNeil [00:06:19] I can't believe it because I remember distinctly Woodsworth, session after session, moving and speaking most eloquently for that and finally getting the ear of the Honorable Minister Lapointe, Minister of Justice, who respected Mr. Woodsworth with an agreement, respected him, and finally got an agreement with Mr. Lapointe that he would introduce an amendment deleting Section 98. Mr. Lapointe was a statesman and realized how dangerous it was to Canadian liberties.

Interviewer [00:06:55] The other item of interest that has come up from my study of the minutes has been the Health Insurance Act. It was in 1937. This seems to have been a very hot issue by the unions. To what extent was this a union or CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) originated pressure, what happened to it eventually?

Grant MacNeil [00:07:21] I think it's more proper to say it was a general public demand to which Premier John Hart acceded. Supported vigorously by the CCF. He finally agreed to present it to a plebiscite, and a public plebiscite approved it.

Interviewer [00:07:36] What happened to it?

Grant MacNeil [00:07:37] Shelved. They appointed a Health Commission and functioned for a while. I remembered the names of the people who served on that for a long time.

Interviewer [00:07:48] It was never proclaimed, never put into?

Grant MacNeil [00:07:52] Supported by the CCF, supported by the trade unions, supported by Comm— Everybody saw the necessity for that.

Interviewer [00:07:58] Is it still on the statute books, or was it never passed?

Grant MacNeil [00:08:02] Must be still on the statute books. It was never rescinded.

Interviewer [00:08:06] So we have a health plan in the province, it's just never been put into place?

Grant MacNeil [00:08:10] When the battle for Medicare was on, Strachan brought that up time and again, while we had a law endorsed by plebiscite. How would they dare rescind it when a plebiscite approved it?

Interviewer [00:08:27] Going back to the lumber unions. You've done some work in studying this out. It's all pretty hazy in my mind. Could you run through it through the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), the origins of the IWA, really.

Grant MacNeil [00:08:51] The first organization in British Columbia and on the coast was the Shingle Weavers. They were organized at the turn of the century and affiliated with the AF of L (American Federation of Labor). They had the opportunity to organize because they were working in small, concentrated groups where they were available to transportation. They wouldn't broaden out. The IWW came on the scene after 1905. Organization in British Columbia was in a very very unsatisfactory state. The IWW made greater headway in Washington, Oregon and influenced British Columbia because the lumber workers here have always felt a kinship with the lumber workers in the fir belt in the Pacific Northwest. I'm trying to summarize this, it's a long story, have to telescope it a bit. The IWW met, of course, tremendous opposition from the employers. There was incident after incident of vigilantes being used, as well as sheriff's deputies, to shoot down the IWW, as they did at Everett, as they did at Centralia, they filled the jails. Remember the IWW in its early days was more interested in street corner propaganda, and meetings and they loved to be arrested en masse, and they filled the jails of Spokane and Seattle and some of our jails up here. Debs was in here, remember too, with the American Railway Union and had a big fight with the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway). The IWW were an organizer of migrants, really, who travelled to and from in boxcars and without expenses. There was no central organization. They kept no proper records. They penetrated the BC woods, and a very large extent, we recognize today, they were responsible for the direct action, quickies, the burning of the blankets, the lousy blankets, keeping the constant turnover, crews were coming and going, coming and going. The employers had no stable workforce. They were responsible for cleaning up the camps of the terribly unsanitary conditions in the camps, and the poor food. The IWW, of course, World War One in the States they were blotted out by the 4L, the Loyal Legion of Lumber and Lumbermen Loggers (Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen), a semi-military organization. They

were persecuted here as being subversive elements, very bitterly persecuted, so they were practically exterminated as an organization, lots of IWW men. The tradition remained. In 1932 and 1934 and 1935, there was a rudimentary organization of loggers here. The story is told of loggers' organization in Mrs. Steeves' book, *The Compassionate Rebel*. Ernie Winch succeeded in organizing almost 30,000-40,000 strong loggers' organizations.

Interviewer [00:12:11] To what extent was the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, which is Winch's baby, shall we say an outcoming, and the OBU (One Big Union) for that matter, an outcoming of the old IWW organization?

Grant MacNeil [00:12:25] I would say it was influenced to a great extent because the IWW brought the idea of organization, of a militant organization, they fired the minds and imaginations of our people. Winch had the idea of making it on a business-like basis, and succeeded to a very great extent until it got involved in the OBU schemozzle.

Interviewer [00:12:51] What sort of organization was there in the woods after the collapse of the OBU and eventually—?

Grant MacNeil [00:12:58] Very little. They formed the Lumber and Sawmill Workers eventually and affiliated definitely. You find the BC delegations appearing at the conventions of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers and associating themselves with the struggle in 1936. That brought organization to a head in the United States and up here. For the first time they had a strike, almost an industry-wide strike, through Washington and Oregon in 1936, the famous strike, it's well written up in Jensen's book, *Lumber and Labor*. The Carpenters attempted to take the leadership of that, they attempted to make a settlement. There was resentment of the type of settlement, the type of leadership furnished by the Carpenters who regarded the Lumber Workers' Union [unclear] organization. They'd had a famous fight at their 1935 convention when the delegation from the West was treated disgracefully, not even given a proper hearing. They wanted equality of status inside the organization, the chance to organize in reasonable autonomy. The secretary treasurer of the Carpenters at that time really read the riot act to them. They were sent back, and when they came back, on their way back they met with Lewis, then forming the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations). As a result of the 1936 strikes, they formed the Northwest Strike Council, to make what they called a proper settlement. The majority of the lumber workers stayed by this council. Some settlements were made by the Carpenters, sweetheart settlements, we called them. The residue of this Northwest Council formed the basis of developing CIO. Pritchett up here, with his District Council of lumber workers here, which was a very small organization at the time, kept hoping that he could reach a satisfactory affiliation with the Carpenters. In Vancouver, meeting after meeting was held with the Carpenters' representatives looking to some sort of deal. That eventually became impossible. He was swept along with the tide of the CIO and in 1936 he formed an organization which was preliminary to the IWA he formed in 1937. What was it? Prior to that, of course, they'd attempted to form a strictly Communist organization in the woods. It was up here too, affiliated to the Workers Unity League.

Interviewer [00:15:27] What was that called? Isn't it the Lumber and Agriculture Workers Industrial Union?

Grant MacNeil [00:15:43] No, doesn't sound right.

Interviewer [00:15:51] Now, there was no real organization. You said the odd local, the IWW and Lumber Workers during this—

Grant MacNeil [00:15:59] They had a IWW local here, but remember, it was a shifting membership.

Interviewer [00:16:04] The core that went and made up, eventually, the Lumber and Sawmill Workers, was this an old IWW core, Lumber Workers Industrial Union core, or was it very much a Communist core?

Grant MacNeil [00:16:16] No, I couldn't say it was Communist. Remember in the NRIA (National Industrial Recovery Act), that was in 1933 wasn't it, that sparked, all over this continent, sparked a desire for unionization. The Lumber and Sawmill Workers had been formed down in the States was an offshoot of the Carpenters and the desire for organization. People were flocking to the unions. They flocked to the Lumber and Sawmill Workers. I can't say, the Communists can't take credit for that. They took command of it here, but they had to ditch their old Communist organization, the Workers Unity League and try and make something out of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers. They formed a District here of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers and led it into affiliation with the Lumber and Sawmill Workers organization there. Pritchett at that time, head of it, wanted affiliation with the Carpenters, felt that they had greater strength that way. Incidentally, I think he hoped to infiltrate the Carpenters. That goes back to an old, old story. You know the old story of the carpenters and woodworkers? Going back to the turn of the century, Green ordered, at one stage sanctioned, a separate organization of the woodworkers. They were 40,000 strong. This was objected to by the Carpenters' leadership. They forced him to allow them to raid those workers and absorb those woodworkers eventually, as a subsidiary section of the Carpenters and Joiners.

Interviewer [00:18:04] That was the old Timberworkers Union, wasn't it?

Grant MacNeil [00:18:08] No, the Timberworkers Union was one of the forerunners of the IWA in Washington. This was called the Woodworkers Union.

Interviewer [00:18:12] There was a Timberworkers Union—

Grant MacNeil [00:18:14] [unclear] by the AF of L.

Interviewer [00:18:16] It was a Timberworkers Union that became Winch's organization.

Grant MacNeil [00:18:21] There was a Timberworkers all through, one of the organizations that led up to the IWA, as well as the Lumber and Sawmill Workers. It preceded the Lumber and Sawmill Workers.

Interviewer [00:18:34] Then there was no real organized core or unorganized core in the woods between the First War and after the collapse of the OBU?

Grant MacNeil [00:18:50] There were elements of organization in World War One.

Interviewer [00:18:52] I mean after the collapse of the One Big Union in 1921 to 1935-36, when the Lumber and Sawmill Workers; there wasn't any real union in the woods then?

Grant MacNeil [00:19:02] They had strikes in 1934. They had strikes in 1936 here. Strikes in 1932, the famous strike. Somebody told me the other day about the Fraser Mills strike in 1932. It was said then that the French-Canadians were imported as strikebreakers and somebody from our camp in there now is trying to prove it. I denied that you could label the French-Canadian population of Maillardville as descendants of the strikebreakers brought in at that period. That was a famous strike in Fraser Mills.

Interviewer [00:19:32] The Shingle Weavers, I believe, strike.

Grant MacNeil [00:19:38] I can't give you firsthand, I prefer you interview Jack Holst about that. He was in it.

Interviewer [00:19:42] What was the general—

Grant MacNeil [00:19:45] The loggers' strike in which they— Mainly the strikes in those days were a protest against cuts in wages. I have it here, in an outline. (Reading) "Strike action flared across Vancouver Island though they were badly organized. Many would live precariously in tent colonies, returned to slim gains varied from camp to camp. Later the union declared the strike to have been a mistake because of poor preparations and lack of organization."

Interviewer [00:20:22] Which union is that?

Grant MacNeil [00:20:22] 1934, that was the—they called themselves all sorts of names—the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union. Have you got this?

Interviewer [00:20:46] No. Do you have any extra copies?

Grant MacNeil [00:20:48] Keep that, It's a very brief summary. It's just propaganda.

Interviewer [00:20:50] Now, with the influence, since British Columbia didn't have very many of the mass production industries, what influence outside of the IWA did the CIO have? Did it have much influence?

Grant MacNeil [00:21:13] The IWA was the main CIO element here, after 1937.

Interviewer [00:21:19] Yeah, the fight was led by the IWA rather than by the CIO. Admittedly it was part of the CIO, but you don't have the mass influence of the CIO.

Grant MacNeil [00:21:30] Many, many other unions went CIO. There was terrific support for the CIO.

Interviewer [00:21:37] From what I can make out, there wasn't very many unions in BC—

Grant MacNeil [00:21:39] They formed a CIO Labor Council here, eventually.

Interviewer [00:21:43] Yeah. In 1940. It was the old CCL, well stayed the CCL. It was pretty small.

Grant MacNeil [00:21:55] Some of those unions incorporated in that CCL labor council were with it from the start.

Interviewer [00:22:03] I just wondered if you had any of the really bitter and strong fighting that you had between elements in labour here that you had in—

Grant MacNeil [00:22:16] Not as bitter here as in the States. Some of that bitterness crept in up here. Hutcheson of the Carpenters said that not a stick of CIO wood would be nailed by his men. He picketed some operations. He picketed CIO lumber and boycotted shipments of CIO lumber, all up and down the coast here. That was a very bitter struggle in 1935, 1936, 1937.

Interviewer [00:22:44] Do you know anything about the longshoremen's strike, was it in 1936? 1935, 1936?

Grant MacNeil [00:22:53] 1934 was the general strike, wasn't it?

Interviewer [00:22:56] In that period because—

Grant MacNeil [00:22:59] I only know because of the contact with that. Harry Bridges of the longshoremen came out and played a very influential part in our international conventions in the IWA. He played along with Harold Pritchett and supported the administration then, which was Communist led. Later, Bridges was sort of repudiated by our fellows when we cleaned house in 1941. The trouble was Bridges wanted agreements with the lumber workers that would not interfere with the setup he had on the waterfront. There was great bitterness because Pritchett agreed to withdraw our pickets to accommodate Bridges. Bridges never carried out any satisfactory boycott or had any plan to break the boycott on CIO lumber as produced up here. Remember that time too, there was a terrific agitation underway to prevent the export of any lumber from British Columbia to the States. The CIO was a convenient pretext to place a boycott on Canadian lumber.

Interviewer [00:24:20] Well, Bill.

Grant MacNeil [00:24:26] I don't know if I'm telling you anything worthwhile or not.

Interviewer [00:24:26] Want me to ask— Go ahead and ask any questions that you have.

Interviewer [00:24:39] I wasn't really prepared, but I am interested in the [unclear] in 1948. This was after when you quit in 1946 and 1948 was the revolution, the October revolution. Is it possible to get a sketch from you on that?

Grant MacNeil [00:25:03] From 1937 to 1941, the International was under the control of the Communists. They maintained control by paper locals, by controlling the organization's staff. Around about 1940 those who rebelled against Communist domination appealed to the CIO and a commission was set up by the CIO, headed by a man named Dalrymple, investigated and found out the truth about the manner in which they had been perverting the democratic intentions of the union. In 1941 it was cleaned out, not so much by an anti-Communist move, but by a pro-democratic move. No paper locals, a proper election of delegates to conventions, a clearcut expression of majority will, instead of the pervisions that had been inflicted upon it by the Communists. That led to trouble up here in Canada from 1941 onwards. The Taft-Hartley Act came down in 1946. The Taft-Hartley Act demanded certain assurances that men were not Communists. One trustee, elected from the British Columbia delegation, refused to sign this affidavit and was dismissed by the international President Fadling. The dismissal was upheld by the international convention. That angered and was one of the reasons why the District here started attacking the International. The District became the headquarters for propagandists trying to overturn the democratic administration established after 1941. That alarmed the international officers. There were, 1941-1948, there was evidence of maladministration. They were able to prove later that favourites of the officers were getting loans that were not repaid, maladministration of funds, funds were being siphoned off for purposes that were not strictly trade union purposes and were sponsored by the Communist Party. Defence funds raised, Defence Fight Against Fascism and that sort of thing, and it drained the union's funds. So, for years within the locals of the IWA here, white blocs were formed. We took up the cudgels and fought for clean democratic administration. They saw the handwriting on the wall, they called a quarterly meeting of the Council in October 1948, and openly moved for secession from the International. Appropriated too, this newly formed organization, seceding organization, the Workers Industrial Union of Canada, openly appropriated all the assets, all the equipment, all the funds, all the records, and left the IWA organization to start to build from the ground upwards. Then commenced a real bitter fight. The International officers moved in, that's when I became associated with them. The white blocs and everywhere. The Canadian Labor Congress sheltered the group that re-organized the Vancouver local. They had a strong organization in the New Westminster. The Federation and the Congress provided men who toured and told the story to all the local unions. Gradually they won, the membership repudiated this move and defeated the Woodworkers Industrial Union.

Interviewer [00:28:58] Was this started by the international officers?

Grant MacNeil [00:29:06] No, it was a spontaneous thing. Fred Fieber here will tell you he was chairman for years of the white bloc in New Westminster. Just spontaneous protest against the Communist domination. George Mitchell was active in that. The same was going on in Duncan. The same going on in Vancouver.

Interviewer [00:29:21] Then in 1946 it became an open fight.

Grant MacNeil [00:29:25] It would be encouraged by the international officers who were worried about situation in British Columbia.

Interviewer [00:29:34] What about the CCF here?

Grant MacNeil [00:29:34] I don't think they had any part in it.

Interviewer [00:29:35] A lot of guys, for instance like Jim Burrie was—

Grant MacNeil [00:29:38] Because of his association with the Federation and Labor Council.

Interviewer [00:29:41] That's right. There's a lot of these people who were CCFers.

Grant MacNeil [00:29:48] Oh yes, Dan Radford toured all over British Columbia and people like that. Jim Burrie and—

Interviewer [00:29:56] Tony Gargrave got active, I think.

Grant MacNeil [00:29:58] It wasn't a CCF move, because at that time the CCF was determined to remain aloof from trade union jurisdictional struggles.

Interviewer [00:30:03] Did you know each other? This is interesting, because Mine Mill had something around the same time, there was, well the CIO also did a report on them, as a matter of fact, and I think they had a sort of unity policy during the war, and after the war the fight broke out that the Communists won in Mine Mill. Do you have any explanation why for instance in the IWA the Communists lost control?

Grant MacNeil [00:30:55] Mainly maladministration and partially misappropriation of funds and the dictatorial policies, mainly the dictatorial policies which our men felt was contrary to the will of the majority.

Interviewer [00:31:10] It was pretty well a rank-and-file movement.

Interviewer [00:31:17] OK Paul.

Interviewer [00:31:21] In the later part of the 1930s with the rise and with the Spanish Civil War, the Communists claimed that a lot of the trekkers, the '35 trekkers continued and

went over with the Mackenzie Papineau Battalion. Do you have any recollection here of how solidly labour was behind and organizations like the CCF—

Grant MacNeil [00:31:55] I have no recollection of labour as such being that. There was a general prevailing sentiment in favor of supporting.

Interviewer [00:31:59] What about the CCF? Did they?

Grant MacNeil [00:32:03] Not officially. I think they were on the side of the revolution. There were resolutions passed at that time favouring the anti-fascist resolutions. Oh, certainly.

Interviewer [00:32:15] Did they collect money or anything?

Grant MacNeil [00:32:18] Not officially, but there was a lot of that done. There was a lot of that done. A lot of our people went.

Interviewer [00:32:26] Did they consider it was part of the struggle?

Grant MacNeil [00:32:29] As I remember it.

Interviewer [00:32:31] This is the general impression I get because even Trades and Labor Council was circularizing their unions.

Grant MacNeil [00:32:37] At that time no thought of distinguishing Communists and non-Communists in that struggle.

Interviewer [00:32:45] This seems rather interesting that singling out the Communists appears to have happened only a few times in the course of history in BC. One time was it the time the Canadian Labor Party broke up in 1928 and the Oriental question. This is the other question I wanted to ask you.

Grant MacNeil [00:33:10] Remember on that point there's always been in British Columbia a strong sentiment against red-baiting or witch-hunting. As far as the trade union movement is concerned, we don't want men pilloried because they're Communist. What we do want is the Communists to keep their hands off an independent, autonomous organization. We want no outside interference, not even from the CCF or NDP (New Democratic Party). That is the difference in the policies of the CCF and the Communist Party. The Communist Party kept, as you know, they changed their policy from time to time. First it was trying to dominate and it was infiltration, changing policy, trying to interfere in various ways with trade union policy and get control of trade union funds for their purposes. The CCF said, "We'll support labour's aims as expressed, but labour must remain independent and conduct its affairs in an autonomous basis."

Interviewer [00:34:16] Do you remember much of the anti-Oriental campaign?

Grant MacNeil [00:34:22] I can remember well when it applied to East Indians and Chinese and Japanese. Famous riots in the harbour here and when a shipload of East Indians was kept out in the harbour. The Chinese were denied access to the land, that is timber limits. They were not allowed to work that. Were kept as contract workers, contract labour.

Interviewer [00:34:47] Fishing licenses.

Grant MacNeil [00:34:52] It was contract labour in the woods. The unions would not allow them membership, and when they did allow them membership, it was second-class membership. They were allowed to form auxiliaries. Joe Miyazawa here, his father belonged to an oriental Japanese auxiliary. I remember where I came in contact with it was the pulp and Sulphite mills. We began to realize that keeping this minority group working at less than the minimum wage, they were getting less than the minimum wage of the day, was endangering the standards of the other workers. So, they said, "To hell with that. We'll take them into the union and demand equality for them." And they did.

Interviewer [00:35:31] When did this realization—

Interviewer [00:35:34] As I remember, it came into fruition around 1934-35.

Interviewer [00:35:40] What about the election campaign in 1933?

Grant MacNeil [00:35:44] 1935. There was a strong—I had the ad here the other day. The ads posted by the Liberals. "A vote for the CCF is a vote for Oriental domination." They ripped that up.

Interviewer [00:35:54] This didn't have too much effect at that time?

Grant MacNeil [00:35:56] There was a strong prejudice against them, for economic reasons, fearing they were swelling the labour force to the detriment of the white workers.

Interviewer [00:36:07] It seems to me that—

Grant MacNeil [00:36:09] In 1939 the prejudice against the Japanese was terrible. They wanted them all deported to some island in mid-Pacific. An MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) down here, Alec Paton, I had vigorous rows over that. We had a panel touring the province, pleading for justice for the Japanese Canadians. We suffered. We suffered, it was such an unpopular cause that the CCF took a rap over that until later years.

Interviewer [00:36:38] This is one place, it seems, that the CCF came apart from the labour movement, because the labour movement at this time was pretty anti-Oriental.

Grant MacNeil [00:36:49] I don't think it's fair to say that about the labour movement as a whole. A lot in the labour movement were against the Japanese. Remember the stories of

atrocities. Japanese atrocities flooding the country at the time. All sorts of rumors about what the Japanese were doing here. As a matter of fact, the day after Pearl Harbor, every Japanese saboteur or agent was rounded up with the RCMP. They knew them all. They were all rounded up. These were just little people, didn't know what the score was about, had no, beyond a sentimental regard for their native land, they had no idea of engaging in sabotage here. The real reason they were moved was fear of actions by the white population. The white backlash as we call it now. Believe me, that was the reason. I was secretary of the Security Commission that moved them. Lieutenant Governor Woodward called me up one night, took me down to his house and said, "I think it would be a good idea. We're setting up this Security Commission. You're a CCF MLA. It would be a good idea if you become secretary of the Commission." I said, "Okay, no salary." Became secretary of the Commission with the consent of my colleagues, so we could speak for a more humane treatment. It wasn't a matter of humanity. It was a matter of common sense to move them in a way that wouldn't harm the rest of the community and to have them moved to justice. I remember the editor of The Colonist—am I getting off the track here? The editor of one of the papers came over and said, "You're pampering these people." I said, "You come and see them." I got a taxi and come on out to the exhibition grounds where they had these people housed. I took Jack Scott along from The Sun, took him out to the building where all the Japanese women and kids were playing around, in the old cattle barn. There were bunks fixed up in the stalls. I said, "What would you have us do, push these kids around with bayonets and that sort of thing?" He shut up; just can't be whipping up a frightful campaign against pampering the Japanese and moving them out. But they were moved. It was a cruel thing to do. A lot of them lost their property. This editor was as guilty as anyone else.

Interviewer [00:39:12] I was actually referring to the earlier period.

Grant MacNeil [00:39:16] It was anti-Oriental, no doubt about it.

Interviewer [00:39:20] As a matter of fact I heard that Percy Bengough at one time was secretary of the Asiatic Exclusion League.

Grant MacNeil [00:39:25] Resolution after resolution at our conventions to bar the Orientals, to kick them out of the country.

Interviewer [00:39:32] That was the servicemen, was it?

Grant MacNeil [00:39:32] The Trades and Labor Congress.

Interviewer [00:39:34] When did this stuff pass?

Grant MacNeil [00:39:38] [unclear]

Interviewer [00:39:38] When did this stuff pass?

Grant MacNeil [00:39:40] I don't know exactly the year.

Interviewer [00:39:42] What was the reason? Why did people smarten up on this?

Grant MacNeil [00:39:49] Because they began to see that holding a minority group, working in industry, holding them in substandard levels was threatening the general standards. I remember the debates taking place in the pulp and Sulphite workers up at Ocean Falls for instance.

Interviewer [00:40:02] This was forced by the Depression, wasn't it, to take this stand?

Grant MacNeil [00:40:14] It came earlier. I think it was a matter of enlightenment.

Interviewer [00:40:14] Do you feel the socialist movement had anything to do with.

Grant MacNeil [00:40:14] You go to a plant like at Ocean Falls and they'd be bringing in gangs of contract labour, Chinese or Japanese, working for God knows what. Because they were able to handle them that way they were displacing men at regular rates. The fellows just wakened up to it, it was damn ridiculous. They should get the same pay as we are, if they're as good as we are. Put them on the basis of equality and we'll all get along better. I remember thrashing it out at the meetings.

Interviewer [00:40:47] This was about when?

Grant MacNeil [00:40:52] 1934.

Interviewer [00:40:52] How important were the socialist organizations in opposing this attitude?

Grant MacNeil [00:40:59] They were against discrimination, always, as far as I remember.

Interviewer [00:41:01] Were they very important in changing the attitudes?

Grant MacNeil [00:41:05] I think about education, yes.

Interviewer [00:41:06] Because the OBU thrashed this question out in 1919 and they decided to let Orientals in. Kavanagh got up and made this speech. They were 'wage slaves', just like us, and there's no sense—

Grant MacNeil [00:41:21] They were in then, of course, on the CPR construction. They were drifting into our industry.

Interviewer [00:41:27] So as I can gather, no socialist party ever in BC—

Grant MacNeil [00:41:28] Can't remember—

Interviewer [00:41:32] Had an anti-Oriental platform.

[00:41:33] No, all I was interested in is how influential were they, in attempting to change the position of the labour movement. When I think about it, it was Wally Lefaux that got the Japanese workers into the Trades and Labor Council.

Grant MacNeil [00:41:45] It was, eh?

Interviewer [00:41:48] As a representative of the Socialist Party.

Grant MacNeil [00:41:52] The socialists fought against racial discrimination.

Interviewer [00:41:57] I think it's fairly clear when you see it in the OBU.

Interviewer [00:42:03] I was going to ask you—

Grant MacNeil [00:42:06] How could a socialist do otherwise?

Interviewer [00:42:07] Well, I know, but you find people like Ernest Bevin. He was pretty bitterly racially prejudiced.

Interviewer [00:42:20] I was going to bring up, what were your political affiliations before the CCF was founded?

Grant MacNeil [00:42:25] I was probably Liberal, that was back in 1917.

Interviewer [00:42:28] Liberal first?

Grant MacNeil [00:42:28] Very mildly so.

Interviewer [00:42:28] Sometime during the.

Grant MacNeil [00:42:37] Remember because I was fighting for conscription. I was in the Army then. Just in hospital.

Interviewer [00:42:47] When did you drop the Liberals?

Grant MacNeil [00:42:49] When I got into Veterans.

Interviewer [00:42:54] Who would you have supported then, would it have been the Socialist Party, or the Independent Labor Party, or the Canadian Labor Party?

Grant MacNeil [00:42:58] I wasn't politically conscious. I had one crusade and that was a crusade for the disabled veterans. Until I met Woodsworth. When Woodsworth came in the House, I became acquainted with him and with his wife. His wife started the League for Peace and Freedom. She brought a delegation of German ladies. Was it League for Peace and Freedom?

Interviewer [00:43:18] Yeah, I just wondered where that came from. Thank you.

Grant MacNeil [00:43:21] She brought a delegation, including some German women to speak to the women, and their meetings were being outlawed. They refused them the use of Massey Hall and some of the ex-servicemen, the wild-eyed ex-servicemen were raiding their meetings causing a lot of disturbance. So we went, voluntarily, went to Mrs. Woodsworth and said, "If you anticipate trouble in your meeting in the large hall in Ottawa, we'll police it for you. We think these women ought to be heard in the name of peace." As veterans we did this. So I got to know Mrs. Woodsworth. Then I began to watch and admire J.S. in the House, he invited me down to his place and he, every Wednesday night finally, Charlie Bowman the Editor of The Citizen, formed a 'New Canada' group. We met once a week and the younger men, younger of the group we would go up to Woodsworth's office. He would devote his Wednesday evening, which his only free evening a week, to get to lectures. Not only on politics, but in broad cultural subjects. We got to admire the man and follow. We were disciples. (laughs)

Interviewer [00:44:31] When was this?

Grant MacNeil [00:44:34] This was back in 1920-21.

Interviewer [00:44:38] How old are you now?

Grant MacNeil [00:44:41] 74.

Interviewer [00:44:42] That would be your early 30s.

Grant MacNeil [00:44:51] I began asking Woodsworth, I had a little shack up on Meech Lake for summertime, and I'd been asking him up there. He and I used to go out on the lake in a canoe. I was quite a canoeist. We'd drift around the lake around sunset and we'd talk and talk and talk and [unclear]. I got closer to Woodsworth even than Grace did. Tremendous things he had in mind. Then, I got in trouble. They slashed thousands of men off the pensions list for technical reasons. The chairman of the board was Colonel John Thompson, son of a former Conservative Prime Minister. I was desperate. I was the legislative representative. I had appeared before the parliamentary committee dealing with Veterans Affairs. They just ignored me. I had a mass of evidence and the Pension Board was just sort of ridiculing me, you know how efficient it can do. So I laid charges, serious charges with very extravagant language and Woodsworth backed me up and moved in the House for a Royal Commission. The Royal Commission was appointed by Mackenzie King and I was vindicated for my, mildly reprimanded for my language. I was proven correct. These men were reinstated. Then the second part of the Commission's inquiry was a review of all the veterans' problems, and I was appointed counsel for that Commission and travelled Canada. I was mixed up in those sort of political happenings, but not party politics.

Interviewer [00:46:21] How did you actually get into the CCF then, through what organization?

Grant MacNeil [00:46:25] I'd known Woodsworth. I was living in the North Shore. Ted Garland came through and held an organizing meeting and I was right there and joined right away.

Interviewer [00:46:32] The CCF clubs?

Grant MacNeil [00:46:39] Yes.

Interviewer [00:46:39] You're a CCF Club man then?

Grant MacNeil [00:46:40] I was friendly to the League for Social Reconstruction. They weren't organized.

Interviewer [00:46:45] Were you in the Dorothy Steeves faction?

Grant MacNeil [00:46:47] Oh my golly, I was the one that nominated her, got her in the house. (laughter) I remember we assisted her nomination and the rest was working down on the grounds at Hollyburn there fixing up some sort of carnival to help to make money for the kids. I remember dropping my hammer, stripping off my overalls, we just got word the election had been called. Dorothy got the campaign going for Steeves. We had no money and the next Sunday we get out to the Sports Day at PNE stadium and take up a collection. That was our start, we got her elected.

Interviewer [00:47:21] That is the other thing. I've come across reference to the "McInnis trial" in 1936 or 37.

Grant MacNeil [00:47:31] Involving Angus McInnis?

Interviewer [00:47:32] Well, I don't know, it's just referred to as the "McInnis trial" and I was wondering if you—

Grant MacNeil [00:47:39] Angus was never brought to trial.

Interviewer [00:47:46] I just wondered if it was because—

Grant MacNeil [00:47:47] He had a lot to do with trials in Toronto at the time.

Interviewer [00:47:52] This was in Vancouver for something to do with one of the unemployed organizations. That's about it, I think, Bill.

Grant MacNeil [00:48:10] I had been implicated in a lot of racial discrimination issues. When Earl Haig came to Canada, I was instrumental in arranging that and set up a committee to which we nominated a prominent Jewish lady, Mrs. Archie Freeman of

Ottawa, head of the Hadassah. That got me into no end of trouble. The Chief of Staff tried to have me fired. I refused to be guilty of a disgrace to Mrs. Freeman on account of race. He tried to keep her off the committee, this was back in 1921 or 1922. The secret of that was that the convention of [unclear] at the Chateau Laurier, a tremendous convention. The first act was to suspend the regular order of business and move a vote of confidence in me. The motion was moved by Ian Mackenzie, the man later I clashed with on the Bren gun issue. It was very funny. When I moved the motion of reference — maybe this shouldn't go on tape — When I moved the motion of reference.

Interviewer [00:48:59] Do you want it off? Leave it on.

Grant MacNeil [00:49:16] I don't know. One of the senior secretaries came and intimated to me that if I proceeded with the motion that they would rake up all this old stuff when I was before the Senate Committee. They accused me of subversion. I said, "Go ahead." (laughs) "I'm moving my motion." [unclear] heard about it and [unclear] got worried. I said, "Okay." I phoned down to the library and the boy came up with a hole cartful of these Commission records into inquiries. I was completely vindicated. I went ahead and I rose in the House and claimed that the ancient privilege, the very ancient British law that you must not interfere with a member of the House in the performances of his duty, either travelling to or from the House. King got up and said, "If my friend will meet me later when the House rises, I'll try and resolve this. So, I went to King's office expecting I wasn't going to take up too much time. You don't spend too much time with a Prime Minister. He took 20 minutes talking about his sciatica. (laughs) He's like that. Then he said, "Oh, just leave this with me, my friend." That's the last I heard of it. They really tried to threaten me by smear, for which I'd been vindicated. God, if I'd been five cents out I'd still be in Kingston Penitentiary. They were so bitter about it. I'd fought the establishment.

Interviewer [00:50:39] King was like that though, wasn't he? He would try and power first.

Grant MacNeil [00:50:54] He had a sense of decorum. I'd say that about the old man.

Interviewer [00:50:56] If he couldn't step on you, then he would deal with you.

Grant MacNeil [00:51:02] He had to do something with me because I'd raised the issue in the house. It was on record, a matter of public record. He had to do something about it.

Interviewer [00:51:06] He tried to power you first, though.

Grant MacNeil [00:51:06] Butter me up. I said, "I want my rights. I'm moving my motion."

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