

## **SP FC 3803 U54 N\_5-1\_Grant MacNeil Part 2.mp3**

**Transcribed by Donna Sacuta**

**Interviewer** [00:00:01] You said the late '30s were very significant for an understanding of what followed in the '40s and eventually the break in 1948.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:00:14] Do we confine our remarks to the Communist issue?

**Interviewer** [00:00:19] No, not necessarily. But we can start there. Let's just start with the development of hostility around 1937-38 and see where that takes us, with a view to arriving at an understanding of the split, but anything else that occurs to you. Go ahead.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:00:57] The IWA (International Woodworkers of America) was founded in 1937. It was the outcome of a struggle with the Carpenters' Union, in which the IWA first petitioned for equality of status within the Carpenters and Joiners. This was denied, then appealed to John L. Lewis, head of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), and were given aid in their preliminary organization by way of a loan from the CIO. I don't want to keep going.

**Interviewer** [00:01:40] Actually, I just like it to be a conversation. It needn't be anything else. You told me that they were treated as second-class citizens, you thought.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:01:49] Non-beneficial members. They paid lower dues than Carpenters did. The AFL (American Federation of Labor) had been given jurisdiction over woodworkers to the Carpenters' Union but they were not allowed to voice or vote on the floor of the Carpenters' International Convention.

**Interviewer** [00:02:10] My goodness. What was the discrepancy in the dues?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:02:19] Anyway, a delegation went from what was then the Federation of Woodworkers to the Miami Convention. They were unsuccessful in getting a status within the Carpenters' Union. Journeyed to Washington, interviewed Lewis, and got a promise of aid from Lewis, which was implemented when they met in Tacoma and in Portland that year to found the International Woodworkers of America, an industrial union. From the very start, the members of the IWA believed in the principles of industrial unionism as opposed to craft unionism. It has since remained an industrial union. From the date of its foundation, a struggle developed within the IWA as between suspected Communist domination and those who were opposed to Communist domination. For five years until the convention of 1941, a clique headed by Harold Pritchett of British Columbia ruled the International Union by various devices. They controlled conventions, mainly by setting up paper locals. They controlled the organizing staff, demanding that paid organizers in the union should be affiliated with the Communist Party. They moved the International headquarters to Seattle, where it was almost next door to the headquarters of the Communist Party. It was known that officers of the union and officers of the Communist Party were in frequent consultation.

**Interviewer** [00:04:09] You mentioned to me before, by the way, I should mention this is just for my own use, nobody else will hear this. I just want to go home slowly and write it up. You did mention that these were very sincere and able men. You also intimated that they were not perhaps wicked and devious, so much as they perhaps misconstrued what was in the best interest of the membership. Would you say that or were they?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:04:40] On economic issues they professed to be militant, but their policies veered with those of the Communist Party. For instance, they in those early days, they bitterly opposed the Marshall Plan. When during the days of the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact, they advocated a no war policy. When Hitler invaded Russia, they promoted a no strike policy on the part of the IWA.

**Interviewer** [00:05:15] They promoted a no strike policy?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:05:16] A no strike policy. An all-out war effort to support the war against Hitlerism.

**Interviewer** [00:05:22] Yeah.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:05:24] With sacrificing strike rights.

**Interviewer** [00:05:27] I see. It was construed, especially by the Canadian Congress of Labor, as a very patriotic move, this idea of a no strike call and so on.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:05:44] Not exactly. A later period they were suspended from the Canadian Labor Congress because they violated the policy of the constitution of the Congress.

**Interviewer** [00:05:57] How did they do that?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:05:59] By insisting on support of the Soviet Union policy. Now, every convention up until 1941 was the scene of battles. Not only International conventions, but the District conventions in British Columbia. British Columbia was known as District One, the International Woodworkers of America at that time. Since been changed in 1958 to Region One, including the four western provinces.

**Interviewer** [00:06:32] At this time, it was the biggest was it not?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:06:35] One of the biggest unions in British Columbia.

**Interviewer** [00:06:38] Was it not the biggest delegation to the conference in Portland?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:06:46] No, the District was not well enough organized. Their representation at the early convention was not very strong, but the base of Communist activities was in British Columbia. The delegates they sent down there like Pritchett, like

Nigel Morgan, were associated with the Labor Progressive Party, political arm of the Communist Party.

**Interviewer** [00:07:13] What year was it?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:07:14] Not until about 1940 or 1941 did the British Columbia delegation show some strength in the International convention.

**Interviewer** [00:07:23] It did become the largest, I believe.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:07:26] It is in recent years.

**Interviewer** [00:07:28] During the war, was it not?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:07:30] One of the largest. I'd have to check the records to show. It was one of the largest, most influential Districts. Nowadays we're thinking in terms of five regions. At the present time the membership of Region One, which includes British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, is the largest in the International Union. From the early days, the B.C. District Number One was strictly British Columbia. At that time, the interior of the province was not as well organized as it is now.

**Interviewer** [00:08:09] You say there was tremendous heated disputes both in the District and in the International convention. Was the cause of the dispute the same at the local level as it was at the international level?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:08:27] The IWA quickly developed a tradition of independence in its early days because of the struggle with the Carpenters' Union.

**Interviewer** [00:08:33] Yeah.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:08:34] When they joined the CIO as an industrial union and claimed representation in woodworking operations in the Pacific Northwest states, Bill Hutcheson of the Carpenters' Union declared that carpenters would not touch a stick of wood produced by a CIO union.

**Interviewer** [00:08:55] Maybe I should just restate the question.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:08:58] I'll recite some facts, how about that?

**Interviewer** [00:09:00] Okay. Sure.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:09:06] The IWA was founded in 1937. At that time, British Columbia became District One of the International organization. Not until 1958 was the International divided into five regions, with the necessary constitutional changes. At the time of its formation the representation at the International conventions from British Columbia was small, but the old Lumber and Sawmill Workers which had preceded the IWA had been

dominated by a pro-Communist group. This same group took control of District One and by active organization, assumed control of the International organization and retained that control until 1941. This domination was protested vigorously by large sections of the membership, notably the loggers from what was then known as the Columbia River Basin District. To understand the character of the IWA it must be remembered that it came into being as a move of rebellion against the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. The Carpenters and Joiners had been given jurisdiction over the woodworkers by the American Federation of Labor. They had negotiated unsatisfactory settlements in the year 1936, with the result that the Federation of Woodworkers sprang into being but attempted to retain affiliation with the Carpenters and Joiners. In British Columbia, it is interesting to note that the pro-Communist group attempted for a much longer period to retain that affiliation. In any event, prior to the 1937 first Constitutional Convention, a strong delegation representing the Federation of Woodworkers went to the International Convention of the Carpenters and Joiners in Miami, Florida and demanded equality of status. They protested vigorously the status of beneficial membership, which denied them full voice and vote on the floor of the Carpenters' conventions. In their disappointment, they journeyed to Washington, interviewed John L. Lewis, received promises of assistance and returned to their first conference in Tacoma with a loan \$25,000 to assist in organizing the IWA. At that time, the name International Woodworkers of America was adopted and confirmed by a constitutional convention held later in Portland, December of the same year. The succeeding two years was a period of bitter strife with the Carpenters contending for control of woodworking operations in the Pacific Northwest. This struggle was not so bitter in British Columbia because of frequent conferences held between the District Council in British Columbia and the Carpenters' Union here. Gradually the IWA demanded and secured certification in sawmills and logging camps in British Columbia. This developed a spirit of independence. It also marked a very definite trend of opinion in favor of industrial unionism as opposed to craft unionism. Industrial unionism was better adapted to conditions in the mass production industry, such as the lumber industry. From the very first convention, the pro-Communist group headed by Harold Pritchett was fought by a large and influential section in Portland and Oregon, headed by A.F. Hartung, now the International president who resented this domination. The result of the fact that this domination was made secure at International conventions by the creation of paper locals, by the fact there was also there was no genuine roll call vote in conventions, by the fact that this pro-Communist group secured control of the organizational machinery and made certain that paid staff members, organizers notably, were members of the Communist Party. The anti-Communists resented the removal of the office to Seattle, where it was situated almost next door to Communist headquarters. They were well aware that officers of the IWA were in close consultation with Communist Party leaders. Every convention, International or District convention was the scene of battles between what were known as the white blocs and the red blocs.

**Interviewer** [00:15:02] Just tell me, when did the term white bloc start? I mean, would it be after 1941?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:15:07] In the Pacific Northwest states the white blocs were active from the start. They raised their fight and were successful in 1941 in overturning the pro-

Communist rule and elected Worth Lowery as International president. From there on in the International union they restored full control of the union's affairs to the membership, and that was the basis of the reverse policy. It was accomplished by constitutional amendments which assured membership control of the affairs of the union, which assured that there would be proper roll call votes on the basis of actual membership, they eliminated the paper locals, they established better administration of the union's funds because previously there had been accusations of irregularities and they took control. However, the base of the pro-Communist control was in British Columbia, the British Columbia District Council, which Harold Pritchett was the head. From 1941 until 1948 the District Council machinery and the District Council came to greater strength in those years, became better organized, had a larger treasury. They seized this occasion to constantly attack the policies of the International union to the discomfiture of many members in British Columbia. Now, I think it's important to say that the active pro-Communists had shielded themselves behind the traditional tolerance of woodworkers for left-wing activities. A strong sentiment in support of freedom of conscience in political and religious matters prevailed. Red-baiting was decidedly unpopular. The militancy professed by Communist trained leaders was accepted as genuine trade unionism by many. The majority of the woodworkers had little interest in the ideological controversies of the day. Few, very few, were actually members of the Communist Party, but many were confused by the Party's propaganda network. These factors account for the fact that it took five years for the newly formed union to free itself from disruptive intrigue.

**Interviewer** [00:17:59] Now, when you say disruptive intrigue isn't that loading it just a bit? Would you say it was disruptive intrigue?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:18:09] Well, I said it was disruptive because the strength of the union was dissipated. The attention of union members was focused too often on the controversies promoted by the Communist Party. For instance, over the objections of large sections of the membership, they opposed the Marshall Plan. During the non-aggression pact, the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact, the Communists actively promoted the no war policy, which after Pearl Harbor was resented by large numbers of the American members and certainly by Canadian members. Then when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union they ditched the old policies and actively promoted a no strike policy. Actually, the agreements negotiated during that period were virtually dictated by management and the anxiety of the Communists to avoid any industrial strife to impair the war effort. That was resented by large sections of the membership.

**Interviewer** [00:19:29] It was disruptive in a different sense because the organization of the union was increasing. It was becoming a much more forceful body under the Communist control. So it wasn't just disruptive in the terms of organization.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:19:46] It was disruptive in the sense that the introduction of political policies of that type in conventions divided the membership. We had this disruption, divisions at every convention and bitter battles at every convention.

**Interviewer** [00:20:03] White and red bloc.

**Interviewer** [00:20:04] White and red blocs fighting for control. Not until 1941 and the International convention did the white bloc gain control. They gained control by establishing in 1940 convention a Unity Committee. This Unity Committee of four recommended constitutional changes that stopped and prohibited the machinations of a special clique. I contend that the machinations of a clique is always disruptive when they violate the accepted democratic traditions of an organization like the Woodworkers, who have felt intensely democratic when the organization was first founded. Felt themselves allied with the policies of the CIO of that day and anxious to support CIO policies which were contested by the pro-Communist group.

**Interviewer** [00:21:10] So you would contend that even though there were tremendous organizational gains, there could have been a lot and a very strong union formed. It could have been a much stronger union, had not been—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:21:28] I certainly agree. It could have been a much stronger union had they not resorted to these tactics.

**Interviewer** [00:21:33] So then you can't really attribute that much ability and energy to these Communist leaders. You attribute the gain more to increased industrial activity due to the war?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:21:51] I would say so. After about 1940, the situation became so acute that a rump session was held after the Aberdeen Convention, and the International officers were charged with creating dissension by attempts to purge staff members that were not subservient to the Communist Party and displaying rank discrimination against members not in accord with the dictates of the administration of that day. So, a direct appeal was made to the CIO president and a committee of inquiry was set up. It was comprised of Dalrymple, Chairman, J.C. Lewis and Reid Robinson, later of the Mine Mill. Hearings were held in January and February 1941. I read the transcript of the evidence and it clearly disclosed that, supported the facts that I have stated.

**Interviewer** [00:22:54] So this led then to the changeover in 1941 and the election.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:23:01] Partially.

**Interviewer** [00:23:03] The constitution.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:23:03] These facts were disclosed. The IWA was in debt to the CIO for more than \$50,000, other large outstanding debts, a fictitious membership claim of 100,000, proved to have declined to a dues paying 19,000, inflated or per capita tax reports to the CIO were supported by worthless promissory notes. Financial statements concealed the true facts. Later, the International trustees who probed this matter, condemned these financial manipulations as fully irresponsible. There was arbitrary pro-Communist interference with local union self-government that annoyed members. For instance, the CIO loaned Adolph Germer, a well-known trade union leader in the United

States, 'Pop' Germer as he was called. Just recently died. He won a number of elections. Say, for instance, the very strong Weyerhaeuser operations, the Longview area, with tremendous votes. When the Germer organizers first appeared on the scene, they were flatly denied cooperation by the local officers who favoured the administration. Nothing could be done, they said, until Germer was fired. It reached the point where the members voted to oust the financial secretary, who was not obeying their wishes, and he, displaying a gun, refused to vacate his office. It just grew to be that serious. Men were carrying clubs and guns and Germer was protected by an armed bodyguard.

**Interviewer** [00:24:38] How about in B.C.?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:24:41] Well, B.C. was the base.

**Interviewer** [00:24:44] So you mean, these guns and clubs were carried—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:24:48] The [unclear] was finally compelled or refused admission to United States. He got across for almost two years. He ran that office on special permits. Then he was forced to resign. He, without reference to the membership, promoted his second in command, Orton, to be president and rule continued.

**Interviewer** [00:25:09] Did he pack a gun off to the convention?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:25:14] Well, there are some bloody struggles behind the scenes. Grew out of similar struggles with the Carpenters because the war with the Carpenters was very bitter and very bloody.

**Interviewer** [00:25:24] All this club carrying, was any of this done in B.C., or was this just in the states?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:25:29] No, because they had full control in British Columbia until 1948.

**Interviewer** [00:25:32] Yeah.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:25:36] Germer's organizers penetrated British Columbia. That had an influence here and was largely responsible for the organization of white blocs in the British Columbia local unions. The largest one of these was probably in the New Westminster local. Fieber belonged to that and Andy Smith, works down the hall, belonged to that. They kept challenging Pritchett's rule and in 1948 the convention which sealed the record there, a crisis was reached. The pro-Communist group saw that they were losing control. They didn't dare face another convention. They'd lose out as they had done in the International scene. So they held a packed meeting of the District Council in October 1948 and moved to secede from the International. They moved to seize all the funds, property and assets of the District Council and transfer them by this resolution to the ownership of the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada. They moved to disaffiliate all the local unions in British Columbia from the International union. A decision of that nature, without reference to the membership, as Fieber stated, was very much resented.

**Interviewer** [00:27:10] Who voted? Representatives of, you said it was passed by a packed house.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:27:13] It was a packed house. The local unions in control of the pro-Communist group, dominated from by the District Council officers had elected delegates who carry out the will of the administration.

**Interviewer** [00:27:30] Why didn't the other unions come along and vote against it? The other locals.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:27:37] All the locals were represented.

**Interviewer** [00:27:39] They were all represented?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:27:40] Oh yes. As far as I know, we have the proceedings.

**Interviewer** [00:27:42] But they made sure. They made sure that the representatives were—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:27:45] They had that well-organized machine. They control the election of delegates.

**Interviewer** [00:27:55] How did they control the election of delegates? It was not from the membership?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:27:59] In every local union there were Communist cells. These Communist cells would meet in advance of the meeting which elected delegates and with a carefully planned strategy, they would outwit. Perhaps the most common practice was to delay decisions until late in the evening. Meetings would never break up until 12:00 or 1:00. By that time most of the fellows had grown weary and gone home. They got the decisions through. That was a common tactic. They're talking about that this morning in New Westminster.

**Interviewer** [00:28:43] How about in BC? Is there any particular incident say in 1942, 1943, 1944? Or was there just terrific turmoil within the union?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:28:57] There was turmoil but the issue was clarified at the 1948 District convention.

**Interviewer** [00:29:02] Yeah, I realize that, but I mean, during the intervening period, was there any particular incidents which would demonstrate the turbulence within the union itself?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:29:16] No, there were no violent incidents. Just this constant battle going on in the local unions.



**Interviewer** [00:29:22] And the white bloc's growing stronger.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:29:24] For instance in New Westminster, the white bloc would meet. They'd canvassed all the members of the white bloc prior to a membership meeting. You'd be sure to attend, sure to hold them there in attendance. The meeting was over and lay out their strategy. Introduced probably innocuous resolutions just to test their strength and then challenge the policy of the District Council as dominated by the pro-Communist group.

**Interviewer** [00:29:49] But they were never successful, but they were gradually growing in strength.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:29:53] They were growing in strength. They had occasional successes, but more often defeats.

**Interviewer** [00:29:59] And this was organized from people from the States sent up here.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:30:04] From 1941 until 1948, it was organized at the headquarters of the District Council here in British Columbia.

**Interviewer** [00:30:10] But what gave them the start, this man sending up organizers for the white bloc?

**Interviewer** [00:30:20] Loaned by CIO Adolph Germer, yes, he was a factor. He was a well known trusted leader. His organizers, he appointed the organizers as International Director of Organization, and he secured a special assessment to support his organization activities. He penetrated British Columbia and helped to build this. At the same time, the Canadian Labor Congress was interested in the situation. The B.C. Federation of Labor, George Home, people of that sort, were all interested in the situation and were helping. Bill Mahoney came through here on behalf of Congress, spent some time in British Columbia and assisted in coordinating the work of the white blocs prior to this secession move in October 1948.

**Interviewer** [00:31:09] Was the CIO still active in helping the white blocs to form and organize during 1942-1943?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:31:18] Yes, the CIO responded to the appeals of the white bloc, sent Germer in.

**Interviewer** [00:31:24] Personally?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:31:27] They named Germer and loaned him, as it were, to make him so that he could be made Director of Organization for the IWA.

**Interviewer** [00:31:34] But was he personally here?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:31:37] Occasionally, and he was appointing the organizers, given authority to appoint the organizers.

**Interviewer** [00:31:46] So Germer's influence was in 1941, 1942, 1943, right through, up to the revolution.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:31:53] Because by that time, people became cognizant of the evidence disclosed at the official inquiry instituted by the CIO.

**Interviewer** [00:32:04] And that was held against Prichett?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:32:08] Oh yes. Now, at the 1948 convention the issue was clarified. A resolution was introduced—

**Interviewer** [00:32:19] Could you tell me before we go into that, could you just go over the strike and the master agreement, the beginning—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:32:27] The pro-Communist group conducted the strike in 1946, one of the first industry-wide strikes in the history of the IWA, which laid the foundation for industry-wide bargaining. After that strike, the employers in British Columbia agreed on a central bargaining agency, and from that time on, we began bargaining on an industry-wide basis, not very successfully, because the taint of Communism charged against the IWA was used to the disadvantage of the IWA in bargaining. Employers would rip up propaganda that we were a red-controlled organization.

**Interviewer** [00:33:09] Which is true (laughs).

**Grant MacNeil** [00:33:13] Remember up until the end of the war and shortly afterwards we were subject to the Wartime Regulations, so little could be done. 1946 was the first time we could bargain freely and strike, with effect.

**Interviewer** [00:33:31] PC 1003 was still in effect?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:33:34] Yeah.

**Interviewer** [00:33:34] In 1946? That was before—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:33:37] Well thereabouts. I'm not sure of the exact dates.

**Interviewer** [00:33:45] What were the conditions of the master agreement? You don't have to be too specific but just wage increases, closed shop?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:34:02] Union shop didn't come for some time. \$2.25 a day. 36.

**Interviewer** [00:34:30] This was supplemented, I take it, by cost-of-living bonuses during—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:34:34] In the camps, 1942, as a result of demands upon the War Labor Boards, logging camps, whistle punks got \$5.90 a day, choker men \$5.90 a day, chaser \$6.25 a day, a back rigger \$5.90, a scaler \$7.00, rigging slinger \$7.00, head rigger \$9.76. That was about the general wages throughout.

**Interviewer** [00:35:02] So what they wanted was a wage increase?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:35:04] In the Fraser Mills the War Labor Board granted an increased base rate for day shift of \$0.65 and night shift \$0.70 a day.

**Interviewer** [00:35:14] That was the main point, that a wage increase was it?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:35:18] \$0.65 an hour I mean.

**Interviewer** [00:35:20] Yeah, but that was that was the main condition. The master agreement was the wage increase.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:35:28] Yes, up until that time.

**Interviewer** [00:35:30] That was what provoked the strike in 1946? Wage increase, or would it be other things?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:35:43] [unclear] hour minimum work week and union security. That was the first time they organized industry-wide strike action and 37,000 strikers. That lasted for 37 days.

**Interviewer** [00:36:05] Do you have the date there?

**Interviewer** [00:36:06] May 28th, the union went on strike for 37 days.

**Interviewer** [00:36:12] What did you say the wage increase was?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:36:15] They demanded \$0.25 an hour wage increase, a 40-hour week and union security.

**Interviewer** [00:36:35] And they got it.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:36:36] Sloan appeared on the scene and they rejected his proposals for \$0.15 an hour with a 44-hour week and the irrevocable voluntary check-off. They accepted Sloan's proposal which gave the union \$0.15 an hour, the 40-hour week and the irrevocable check-off as well as the elimination of the no strike pledge.

**Interviewer** [00:37:00] They got the check-off for the first time?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:37:04] Yeah, the irrevocable check-off. At the 1948 convention the issues centred around the dismissal by the International president of a Canadian member, a B.C. member, Greenall, who had been elected as International trustee. A resolution was introduced at that convention which demanded the recall of the International president, Jim Fadling, for setting aside the International constitution in relation to the president's suspension of International trustee Jack Greenall. In a roll call vote, there was also that vote that time to show the Communist control, 17,377 Yes, 4,370 No. That was in January, I think it's January 1948.

**Interviewer** [00:38:19] Could you give me some idea of the breakdown of control by the white bloc amongst the membership? There was a tremendous drive to go right to the members in the camps and persuade them by any means possible to organize and overthrow it. What would you say was the was the turning point where they finally did overthrow them? I mean, what was it? Was there any particular event which triggered—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:38:59] The District Council meeting of October 1948. Up to that time they had been working in their local unions penetrating and gradually building up strength. White bloc in the local union related to white blocs in the various plants and the various camps all finding common cause and then uniting at District conventions, hoping to get control of the District organization, as well as the local union organization.

**Interviewer** [00:39:31] So by the time this council meeting occurred—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:39:36] They nearly had control. That forced the hand of the pro-Communist group because they saw the next year's convention, they'd lose control of the District.

**Interviewer** [00:39:52] Can you repeat that story Fred told about the picture in the Sun of him ripping up the charter?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:40:05] That was resented, that plot was carefully prepared in advance. It was a plot. I have personal knowledge that Harold Pritchett had his broadcast ready hours before this council meeting was convened. At the council meeting, the buttons, WIUC, appeared. They'd been prepared in advance and later a picture appeared in the Vancouver Sun of Harold Pritchett tearing up the IWA charter. Steps of that nature, taken without reference to the membership, offended the membership, and made the work of the field men—

**Interviewer** [00:40:44] A little easier.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:40:45] A little easier. Remember too, that the Canadian Labor Congress had been on the scene before. Remember too, that the International officers saw the situation developing and been putting on radio broadcasts, distributing leaflets, trying to get the organization here on the rails in line with International policy. The minute they passed this motion of secession, International officers were on the ground here. The

white blocs went into action to rally the membership and all the local unions. Conroy, who was secretary of the Canadian Congress of Labor, authorized his men to take the field. The Federation helped and a strong crew of organizers scattered across the province and met with an amazing response.

**Interviewer** [00:41:40] You said the B.C. Federation helped this.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:41:45] George Home did.

**Interviewer** [00:41:45] Yeah, but at that time—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:41:46] The Federation was split.

**Interviewer** [00:41:49] I'll say, because the president at that time, I guess was still Dan O'Brien and the Secretary Treasurer was still Pritchett.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:41:56] O'Brien was not a Communist, but he was a fellow traveler in many respects.

**Interviewer** [00:42:00] Yeah, so the BC Federation had its president and secretary treasurer against itself.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:42:10] Oh, it was split, badly split. But there was no doubt about the Congress support, men like Radford and so on.

**Interviewer** [00:42:17] Yeah, because by that time I guess O'Brien was not with the Congress in the capacity he formerly held as Regional Organizer.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:42:28] I'm not sure of the dates of his office. Look up the records.

**Interviewer** [00:42:33] But anyway, it didn't happen.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:42:43] It was amazing how the union rallied. Their provisional officers were installed. They took the ground. They got a court order the very next day, freezing the funds of the IWA. The provisional officers were installed. J.S. Alsbury, District President, First Vice President. Lloyd Whalen, Second Vice President, Jack Squire, now MLA for Alberni, District Third Vice President, Gordon McEntree, Financial Secretary Mike Sekora, Trustees Lynch, Shaw and Joe Morris. The provisional officers pledged themselves to do four things (reading): "To call a convention at the earliest date to enable delegates from all B.C. locals to elect their district officers and determine district policy; Two, to assist all B.C. locals to transact the business of our union, overcome the attempt to split our union; Three, build up to maximum bargaining strength of our union and improve wages, hours of work and working conditions; Four, install strict accounting of district finances and restore full democratic control by the rank-and-file members of district officers." Remember they found financial irregularities. (reading) "The investigation exposed juggling of the union's funds, in some instances, definite misappropriation. The

auditors reported over \$100,000 had not been accounted for by supporting vouchers. Large loans had made to district officers and members of their families."

**Interviewer** [00:44:26] On the basis of that, I'll repeat the earlier question. Do you think that people like Pritchett and so on were self-interested men, were wicked? Or do you think that they were very sincere and trying to do the best that they could?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:44:48] I would not like to credit Prichett with being evil, but he was a Communist. I do know from personal knowledge that he protested this move directly to Tim Buck, head of the Communist Party of Canada, and was overruled. He thought it was an unwise move to make and predicted it would fail.

**Interviewer** [00:45:15] Which move is this?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:45:17] Harold Prichett.

**Interviewer** [00:45:19] Yeah, he protested which move?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:45:21] The secession move. Disaffiliation. Nigel Morgan, who later became leader of the Communist Party, was at that time editor of the B.C. Lumber Worker, was an International board member. He counselled the disaffiliation and won the day in the Communist Party because behind the scenes there was a committee of Communists to direct this operation.

**Interviewer** [00:45:52] This disaffiliation vote was 4,000 to 17,000.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:45:56] No, the vote I'm referring to there, is a vote in support of a recall of the International president, Jim Fadling. It's Resolution Number 31, I've got it marked.

**Interviewer** [00:46:15] Could you tell me the vote on disaffiliation?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:46:21] We have the proceedings. I don't think it was recorded here because it was a packed convention. Right after the 1948 revolution, the International officers installed provisional officers. The local unions arranged, and they installed provisional officers in the local unions. Men took to the field and appealed to the membership to stand by the union and they succeeded.

**Interviewer** [00:47:09] I see. What was the date of this? I mean, what was the date of the meeting where it was decided to bring in the Constitution and fix up the shenanigans?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:47:30] Well, they had a convention early in 1949.

**Interviewer** [00:47:35] Well, that would be an annual convention.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:47:37] Yes, the provisional officers carried on. While other conventions denounced the action of the District officers in B.C., International Council of the IWA and the Canadian Congress of Labor.

**Interviewer** [00:48:00] I can get the numbers of the strength of Pritchett's—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:48:04] They took provisional offices. For instance, the Canadian Congress of Labor made room in their offices for the Vancouver local. The New Westminster local was in good shape. The whole bloc by that time had gained control and took over the offices in New Westminster. Then began a long battle in the courts to recover the assets, property and records of the union. We never got the records. We never got all the equipment.

**Interviewer** [00:48:32] The records were destroyed?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:48:33] We did recover the union's boat, which was hidden up in an inlet up the coast, the Logger's Navy. They did get the bulk of the strike fund back.

**Interviewer** [00:48:45] Yeah, they had two boats though, didn't they?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:48:50] The Laur Wayne wasn't in that commission, I don't think. The Logger's Navy, one boat, one main boat. The sheriff seized that. The court held everything frozen until it decided by court decision how—

**Interviewer** [00:49:13] Could you just go—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:49:15] It's in that scrapbook. The decision of the court.

**Interviewer** [00:49:19] Could you just go through the year 1949 and just explain how the IWA regained its lost strength and brought back—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:49:35] It gained its strength very slowly in 1949 and interesting to know if they made no particular demands at you, they didn't make any substantial progress in the negotiations because of the weakness. Some of the logging camps remained in control of the WIUC. The WIUC had fairly good organization for a while in the southern interior of British Columbia. There was that uncertainty about their work, made it very difficult to rebuild. It took a lot of work, organizers in the field. Remember, they had no records, no property, no office equipment. They started building the union from the ground up. 1949 was a year of rebuilding. It wasn't until 1950 that they began to show some strength. In 1952, they had their next industry-wide strike.

**Interviewer** [00:50:37] Could you go through the fate of Pritchett during those years? 1949, 1950, 1951.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:51:04] For some months, he kept for some months to conduct the business of the WIUC.

**Interviewer** [00:51:13] He was brought to trial.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:51:15] Brought trial by the International convention and barred from membership. Expelled from membership in the IWA, by order of International convention. Eventually, he returned to the industry to work in the industry, though he cannot hold membership in the IWA, he's allowed to work. He was allowed to work for years as a shingle weaver, shingle sawyer. One of our certified plants. They just didn't interfere with him, but they wouldn't allow him in the union, or any of his colleagues could hold office or membership in the union. One of them has been reinstated, I understand since, because he redeemed himself.

**Interviewer** [00:51:58] How long did Prichett work as—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:52:02] I understand he's still working as a shingle sawyer.

**Interviewer** [00:52:08] Is that right?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:52:08] I'm told that, at some New Westminster plant. Occasionally you see his name in the news in connection with some Communist front activity.

**Interviewer** [00:52:21] His son is very active.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:52:23] His son is very active, very able man, in the longshoremen.

**Interviewer** [00:52:27] Communist?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:52:28] I don't know. I don't think so.

**Interviewer** [00:52:32] What was the fate of his breakaway union? It gradually lost more and more members to the IWA.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:52:42] It held some membership in the logging camps for some time, about a year and then finally disappeared. The appearance of a "Wooley Buckman", we call them "Wooleys" on the job was greeted with derision, they took them down. They retained some units in the southern interior for several years. We had trouble with them in the strike we had in there in 1958-59.

**Interviewer** [00:53:07] How long did it take to get them out of the camps?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:53:12] They were pretty well eradicated in about a year.

**Interviewer** [00:53:15] In a year? I see. But they maintained themselves very strong in this—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:53:26] They had units here and there, and they had some camps.



**Interviewer** [00:53:28] They gave you some trouble in 1958 you said.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:53:32] I have here the Iron River incident.

**Interviewer** [00:53:54] That was a big fight.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:54:05] Oh, it was violent.

**Interviewer** [00:54:05] O'Brien resigned from the B.C. Federation as a result of —

**Grant MacNeil** [00:54:11] Reading from the Lumber Worker of November 15, 1948, it says, "Smooth-tongued Danny O'Brien, apologist for Pritchett and his gang in the WIUC has lost his job as president of the B.C. Federation of Labor, CCL. O'Brien is the man who, in his own words, has been sitting on the fence, sitting with the saboteurs who tried to wreck the IWA." It goes on to say, "O'Brien is the man who was chairman of the rump meeting in New Westminster the night of October 3, when Pritchett and company held a packed meeting of alleged 1-357 members to try and swing them out of the IWA. They failed miserably. O'Brien's a man who doesn't condone but doesn't condemn the trade union-busting tactics of Pritchett and his gang."

**Interviewer** [00:54:54] They failed, but at that meeting didn't they—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:54:58] His resignation was forced on him at the Executive Council meeting of the Federation. A resolution introduced by George Home, Secretary Treasurer read, "That the B.C. Federation of Labor's Executive Council endorses the action of the Secretary Treasurer supporting the IWA and pledges its support to the IWA in their battle to organize the woodworkers and lumber workers of British Columbia." O'Brien apparently could not stomach that resolution. We know why. The resolution was passed by six to five votes. O'Brien tendered his resignation, it was accepted by six votes to four. W Stewart, First Vice President, becomes President. J.S. Stu Alsbury moves up to First Vice President of the Federation.

**Interviewer** [00:55:39] From another Congress?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:55:42] Mine Mill, Fishermen and so on.

**Interviewer** [00:55:43] I see, and join up with Pritchett's union. But it didn't materialize. What was the failure of it to materialize? Lack of sympathy with the other unions? Or was it just because they couldn't—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:55:59] Lack of membership support.

**Interviewer** [00:56:01] In the IWA?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:56:03] Oh yeah.

**Interviewer** [00:56:04] If they had got the membership support—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:56:06] Once the IWA regained its strength, it outmatched the WIUC in negotiating agreements.

**Interviewer** [00:56:15] Sure. But supposing now, hypothetically, that Pritchett's union had been successful in swaying the membership of the IWA into his union, do you think those other unions would have gone along with him to set up a new Congress? Mine Mill, Fishermen?

**Grant MacNeil** [00:56:35] I don't think they were in a position to do it successfully. Mine Mill has had its struggle and its membership's been declining. I don't think United Fishermen would have, they're not disposed to war with the lumber workers. Anyway, the number of Communists in the fishermen is very small.

**Interviewer** [00:56:57] Yeah, sure.

**Grant MacNeil** [00:56:58] It's really a good union, a very democratic union.

**Interviewer** [00:57:02] They're not ready to quarrel with the loggers, but supposing that the loggers had gone with Pritchett, they wouldn't be quarreling with them if they joined them and set up a new Congress. Do you think there would be—

**Grant MacNeil** [00:57:19] It never got off the ground, that move. The four western provinces? In this province, we have in one house, one union house, one union, the loggers, the workers in the plywood plants, all of them, the workers in all the sawmills and nearly all the shingle mills. Those but one or two exceptions which are in the old Shingle Weavers Union affiliated with the Carpenters. The situation is different down across the line. The Lumber and Sawmill Workers have about an equal number of certifications to the IWA in the sawmills. We have the loggers mainly. But here is the problem of the IWA today to keep all these sections together in one bargaining agency.

**Interviewer** [00:58:15] Very fine. I think we've covered it.

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