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Interviewer: Bill Piket

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Bill Piket [00:00:00] This is the recording of an interview with Mr. Chris Pritchard, the Plumbers. Mr. Pritchard, could you tell us a bit of personal information. How old you are? Where you joined the union movement?

Chris Pritchard [00:00:19] I joined the Plumbers' Union in Winnipeg in 1918. Prior to that, I had been in another organization in 1914. In 1919, the OBU [One Big Union] strike came on and practically all the unions in the construction industry in Winnipeg voted to go into the OBU. When it was all over, our charter was lifted and ultimately we were all fined by the International, and finally our charter was reinstated and we went back into the American Federation of Labor. That strike upset the labor movement in Winnipeg, which in my opinion even to this day, has not fully recovered from the conditions that prevailed due to that strike.

Bill Piket [00:01:47] What would you say? What would you say is wrong with it then, in this case? When you say it hasn't recovered, from what do you think?

Chris Pritchard [00:01:59] Well, my meaning there is practically every union in the City of Winnipeg was on strike at that time, including postmen, CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] men, civic employees, policemen, firemen, people who were all in the pension category, especially the CPR and the postmen. Men with possibly 20- and 30-years service lost their pensions through that strike. It disturbed the whole movement to the extent that I would still say Winnipeg has never fully recovered from that strike, because in my opinion, at that time, Winnipeg was one of the best organized towns in Canada. They have never been in that condition, it couldn't be said that they were the best organized town, since that time.

Bill Piket [00:03:07] Well, you came to British Columbia.

unidentified [00:03:13] You can shut this off if we don't want —

Bill Piket [00:03:17] When did you come to BC and why did you come to BC?

Chris Pritchard [00:03:21] I came to British Columbia in 1925, and the reason I came to British Columbia was the construction industry, and practically every other industry in the City of Winnipeg, was dead. There was no work available. I came here, things could be called to be booming in the construction industry at least. I went to work the first week I came to Vancouver and worked in one shop steadily for five years.

Bill Piket [00:03:57] Which shop was that?

Chris Pritchard [00:03:58] Barr and Anderson.

Bill Picket [00:04:01] Were you a union, did you have a union position in Winnipeg when you were there?

Chris Pritchard [00:04:08] No, I held no position except on a small committee in the organization, a Board of Examiners.

Bill Picket [00:04:16] But you were an active member?

Chris Pritchard [00:04:19] Oh, definitely.

Bill Picket [00:04:21] What happened when you came to Vancouver in the union?

Chris Pritchard [00:04:24] Well, when I came here, we had a strike in 1927 here for the ten dollar, we came out on strike for \$10 a day. That was the time when I went on to the Conference Board of Local 170. At that time, Mr. William Watt was business agent, who is now a master plumber in the City of Vancouver. In 1925 in this city, our organization approached the employers on the basis of the five-day week. The employers were not in favor of adopting that. They claimed that they would lose business. The union proposed to show them that they would, in their opinion, in our opinion, they would actually save money in as much as the Saturday morning it was felt was generally wasted time. A man no sooner got on the job and it was time to go home. Further than that, we had quite a few men out of work in 1924 and 1925, and it was felt that if we had the five-day week we could put all our members to work. At that time there was no helpers in the organization. It was purely mechanics, plumbers and steamfitters. We finally agreed between the employers and the union to try out the five-day week for three months, and if at the end of the three months the employers could express their opinion as to whether they felt we should continue it, and the union also would state their case. However, at the meeting to decide whether we would stay on the five-day week, the employers were practically as much in favor of the five-day week as the journeymen. From then on, our organization established a five-day week. I might say that we took a reduction in pay because at that time we were earning \$1 an hour and we were getting 44 hours a week, \$44. We were prepared to forego the Saturday morning \$4 to establish the five-day week. The strike in 1927 for an increase in pay, we finally established our \$10 a day for the five-day week, which was \$50 against the \$44 that we were earning for the five-and-a-half day week. The conditions from then on [un]til 1930 were excellent in the construction industry as everyone knows. Then of course, the Depression, so-called, came along and the bottom dropped out of all industry.

Bill Picket [00:08:05] What about the strike? The strike you just mentioned?

Chris Pritchard [00:08:09] The strike in 1927 lasted nine weeks and we had the full support of all the construction industry. While there was a lot of ill-feeling created, from then on there was no strike between the Plumbers and the employers until around 1947. We maintained, in my time, we maintained a conference board from 1925 on until the time I left with five employers and five journeymen. The idea of the conference board was to

meet once a month to discuss the problems of the industry, take up any grievances, and to endeavor to create better feelings between the employers and the journeymen, and also to try and get as much work as possible into the union shops. On the other hand, if a union grievance arose, the conference board could be called within 24 hours to settle the differences between the organization and the employers. I must say in my time that while still we were in a depression, we maintained the union all through those years. I always felt that the conference board was an excellent medium to settle our differences, which came up from time to time.

Bill Piket [00:10:08] Now, when you joined the union here, who were the leading figures in the local union?

Chris Pritchard [00:10:17] [The] president at that time was a man by the name of Bert Stinchcombe, who is now in the United States. The business agent was William Watt, who is a master plumber in this city now, at the present time. The executive board members, I don't remember their names, but I went on the conference board in 1928, if my memory serves me correct, and on the Board of Examiners, Steamfitters' Examining Board in 1930. I also became business agent in 1930.

Bill Piket [00:11:08] And you stayed on until when?

Chris Pritchard [00:11:10] 1940, the end of 1941, I think.

Bill Piket [00:11:18] Now, what do you know about the history of the local before you came? For instance, do you know when it was founded?

Chris Pritchard [00:11:27] In Vancouver? I think our charter goes back, but our charter would show that, I think our charter goes back to 1898. I think our charter here was established in 1898. We were the first union in the construction industry and perhaps in any other industry for that matter, in this province to establish the five-day week. It was many years after before any of the other trades in the construction industry went on the five-day week. The Plumbers, in my time as business agent, I had quite a time explaining to contractors why our men were not on the job on Saturday morning. They could never understand why the Plumbers were not there when every other trade was there. Finally, of course, we all know the construction industry went on the five-day week. Following on that, if we want to carry on on the hours of labor, I attended a convention, an International convention of the Plumbers in Atlantic City in 1938 with one other delegate who was the president at that time, Bob Simpson, who is now passed on. We presented a resolution on the floor of the convention for the six-hour day to be written into our Constitution. John Coefield was the International president at that time and the Resolutions Committee of the convention were not prepared to accept the resolution and place it before the convention as to whether we should adopt the six-hour day. However, the resolution stated that we should endeavor to obtain a six-hour day wherever possible.

Bill Picket [00:13:40] What about the relation of your local in the union? For instance, it [is] said that BC trade unions are very radical. Did you have any problems within your International?

Chris Pritchard [00:13:58] How do you mean, Mr. Picket, within our International. Do you mean within Local 170?

Bill Picket [00:14:05] No, I meant not you personally, I meant your Local as a group. For instance, did you have any differences with the International?

Chris Pritchard [00:14:17] No, I would say during my time as business agent, we had the best of relations. Thomas E. Burke was the secretary of the Plumbers' International in Washington, DC, and I have much correspondence in this house at the present time, which would show that the most cordial relations existed between Local 170. If we felt that we had any problems, all I had to do was to write Mr. Burke and he would immediately give us any assistance necessary. The present Secretary Treasurer of the International Plumbers and Steamfitters, William C. O'Neill, was at that time an organizer on the Pacific Coast. If we couldn't get Mr. John Bruce, who was our Canadian representative whom everyone knows, then Burke would send up William C. O'Neill. I also was on the International payroll from time to time as a representative of the International, especially from 1938 on, after war broke out, until the time I went on to the Workmen's Compensation Board. I was on doing organizing, especially on the Island, on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis. I wasn't a permanent International representative, but I did do work for the International if we could not get an organizer up here at that time. When you asked me, 'Did we have a good relationship with the International?' I would have to very definitely say, "Yes."

Bill Picket [00:16:30] What about your organizing in the province and what other locals, how did you get the union developed in BC?

Chris Pritchard [00:16:38] In my time as business agent, there were only two other locals in existence in the province of British Columbia. One in Prince Rupert, which possibly had half a dozen men, and the local in Victoria. Local 170 had the control of all the members in British Columbia on all jobs that we could organize. We had members living in different parts of the province and they always paid their dues into Local 170's office. Personally, I found no problem, but I would have to admit that at the time that I took over, our union had dropped from 380 mechanics to 60 in 1930. However, in 1940 we had 600 members and when I left the organization, I think it would be safe to say we were somewhere in the 800, we had 800 members. I had to do all the work for the organizing, looking after the shops and bookkeeping and so on, just myself on the job.

Bill Picket [00:18:08] What about, was your Local or the Victoria Local the first in British Columbia?

Chris Pritchard [00:18:16] Local 170. The Victoria Local didn't come in until after 1900 and the Prince Rupert Local was an offshoot of the First War if my memory serves me

correct. Ultimately, they all came into Local 170 and then after I left they again established another local in Prince Rupert. I might state for information, after the Depression came on, we had to battle, go on strike for nine weeks to get our \$10 a day. Things got so bad in 1930 that in 1931 the bosses dropped us to \$9 a day, or the employers dropped us to \$9 a day. In 1932 we were dropped to \$8 a day. There was no chance of us opposing this because our membership had practically all left the organization. As I stated before, we only had 60 members in good standing at that time, but we never went below \$1 an hour, We maintained that \$1 an hour all through the Depression days for the members that we had in Local 170. I must say that we had the support of every member in the organization. There was no fear of a man, even though he may need a job in the worst way, of going out and undercutting the union rate of pay.

Bill Piket [00:20:04] Your union was a pretty strong union in that respect?

Chris Pritchard [00:20:10] Well, the members we had, Mr. Piket, were real trade unionists in my opinion. The bulk of the members were out working on their own. I wouldn't know what they were doing, but we still maintained \$1 an hour for those members that belonged. We got a dispensation from the International in 1936. I wrote Burke with the idea that we might be able to get some of the boys back into the organization if we could reduce our initiation fees and we had a special dispensation given to us of \$3 to try and get the membership back. From 1936 on or 1937, I was able to get a tremendous amount of the old members back in again on that very basis.

Bill Piket [00:21:12] Well, what about the bodies, the various organizations your local has been affiliated to during the TLC (Trades and Labor Congress) I mean?

Chris Pritchard [00:21:24] Our local at that time was affiliated of course with the Trades and Labor Council, the Building Trades Council, and I was instrumental in establishing a Metal Trades Council in this province in 1938. Five of us went to Portland. Mr. William Page of the Carpenters, Mr. Harry Arbuckle of the Machinists. Mr. Dan Macpherson of the Sheet Metal and myself of the Plumbers. We had to pay our own way. There was no money in the treasury. There was at that gathering the men from all the different metal trades from San Diego to Vancouver. We set up a Pacific Coast Metal Trades at that time. We had to pass the hat round the meeting, to pay for the meeting hall, but at least we established a Metal Trades Council. Our charter was given to us, I think it was 1939, and presented by John P. Frey who was at that time the International President of the Metal Trades Department.

Bill Piket [00:22:57] What other unions were in on the Metal Trades?

Chris Pritchard [00:23:03] In Vancouver?

Bill Piket [00:23:07] That's right.

Chris Pritchard [00:23:07] We had the Carpenters, which would be the Shipwrights, and we had the Sheet Metal, the Painters, the Boilermakers, the International Boilermakers,

the Electricians, the Laborers, Machinists. I guess that's, I can't remember, but all the metal trades.

Bill Picket [00:23:39] Were they all in on it right from the start?

Chris Pritchard [00:23:42] They all joined right at the start, but there again trouble came along between the AFL (American Federation of Labour) and the CCL (Canadian Congress of Labor), and a split came about and some of the trades left and went into the CCL.

Chris Pritchard [00:24:08] The situation had got rather drastic in the Trades and Labor Council and an International man were sent up here from Seattle with the idea that this matter should be straightened out. At that particular meeting, when the communists were, the so-called communists were supposed to be expelled, several of the different groups or delegates left the Trades and Labor Council and joined the then CCL group. From then on it was simply, to a certain extent, a certain amount of chaos existing on work especially in the shipyards during the war.

Bill Picket [00:25:11] Who was the fellow that was brought over?

Chris Pritchard [00:25:14] The gentleman that was brought over for me to carry out this job was Mr. Hughes a member of, at one time a member, of the Plumbers' organization, the International in Seattle. At this particular time, he was an AFL organizer, and it was his job to straighten out this particular problem which Vancouver was faced with at this time.

Bill Picket [00:25:43] What exactly, was it just that you had communists in? Did they control it? Or did they seek control?

Chris Pritchard [00:25:52] They didn't control it, but, it was a matter of disrupting it, the same as usual. Coming back to the Metal Trades, after this had taken place in the Trades and Labor Council, then the Metal Trades were faced with not being able [clock chimes] to have a 100 percent AFL agreement in the shipyards. Mr. Bengough, Mr. Jamieson, Mr. Showler, Mr. Macpherson, Mr. Page and Mr. Jack Ross and myself interviewed the owners of the shipyards in North Vancouver in 1939 with the idea of getting a closed shop AFL agreement. We were advised that they had already signed with two or three trades. One, the Boilermakers, to my recollection, as far as I recollect, in October 1939 for the duration of the war, and consequently we never were able to establish a closed shop in the shipyards. There was always considerable problems to be faced between the two organizations all during the war.

Bill Picket [00:27:25] Now, your relations with the CCL were fairly bad, I guess, ever since they started?

Chris Pritchard [00:27:37] Well, our relations, as far as being an AFL man were concerned with the Canadian organization were, we considered them an outlaw group as far as we were concerned.

Bill Picket [00:27:57] The Plumbers were, there was never any doubt in the Plumbers about them? About their affiliation?

Chris Pritchard [00:28:04] In answer to that question there was not in my time. I think that it was over this very matter that I left the Plumbers' Union as business agent. Some of the members in the shipyard were feeling that we should meet with the rival organizations. At one particular meeting, a motion was passed that I attend a meeting in the Fishermen's Hall with the Boilermakers and some other group. I can't recall who. This meeting was held in the big hall at 529 Beatty Street, the old Labor Temple. I flatly refused to attend this meeting, pointing out to the membership, and it was a full hall at the time, that I saw no reason why we should fraternize with these people in any way, shape or form. They had undermined us, in my opinion, because the Metal Trades Department had held a convention in San Francisco in 1939. It was agreed that the wages would be for the shipyard workers, bear in mind this was 1939, \$1.07 for all mechanics and 77.5 cents an hour for all helpers. At that time, the uptown rate in the construction industry in Vancouver, the highest rate was \$1 an hour, which the Plumbers were getting. We all agreed that this was what we would present the employers with. I wrote the employers in this province following that convention and advised them that we wanted \$1.07 an hour as of the first of January 1940 for mechanics and 77.5 cents an hour for the helpers. We were advised that there was already an established wage in the shipyards set up by the Boilermakers, who had signed in October 1939 for \$1 an hour, pardon me, \$0.90 an hour, plus the cost of living for the duration of the war and \$0.50 an hour for the helpers. We finally had to go to arbitration and Professor Angus was the chairman of that board, which was a federal board. Mr. Percy Bengough represented the Machinists, the Plumbers and the Sheet Metal Workers on this board. Mr. McLaren, who is now passed on, represented the employers. That board came up with a unanimous award of \$0.90 an hour, plus the cost of living bonus for the duration of the war, which we finally had to accept. This had already been established by the Boilermakers Union in October 1939. You asked me, "Was there any feelings towards the other group?" Well you would have to draw your own conclusions.

Bill Picket [00:31:21] What about the BC Federation of Labor? You were in that. Were you all connected right from the start?

Chris Pritchard [00:31:32] Yes, we were affiliated. The Plumbers, according to our constitution, must affiliate with all groups that are set up according to the International and the Canadian Congress of Labor. We have to affiliate with the Building Trades Council, the Metal Trades Council, the Trades and Labor Council, the Pipe Trades Council, and the BC Federation of Labor. If there is one in effect. In my time there wasn't one. BC Federation was not in effect and didn't come into being as far as the AFL was concerned, I don't think until 1946. I'm not too sure about that. But James Barton, who was a member of Local 170, was the President of that BC Federation at that time.

Bill Picket [00:32:29] There was a BC Federation of Labor long before 1946.

Chris Pritchard [00:32:33] But that was in the other group. Wasn't the AFL. The AFL was not affiliated with that BC Federation of Labor.

Bill Picket [00:32:43] So you didn't affiliate until 1946?

Chris Pritchard [00:32:47] Or whenever the AFL group were set up. I'm not just sure about that.

Bill Picket [00:32:53] What about the Vancouver Labor Council?

Chris Pritchard [00:32:56] Well, the Vancouver—there was two Vancouver Labor Councils, ours was the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council. The other was the Vancouver Labor Council. The councils merged as we all know, when the merge took place between—the merger took place between the AFL and the CIO. [Congress of Industrial Organizations]

Bill Picket [00:33:20] Did any of your members hold offices in the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council?

Chris Pritchard [00:33:34] I don't recall. Oh yes, we had certain members on some of the committees. I became the Secretary of the Trades and Labor Council in 1942, when Mr. Percy Bengough, who was the Secretary, went to Ottawa to take Tom Moore's position as President of the Trades and Labor Congress owing to the illness of Tom Moore at that time. I then became the Secretary of the Trades and Labor Council until March 1943, when I was appointed onto the Workmen's Compensation Board.

Bill Picket [00:34:18] Was that a full-time position, Secretary?

Chris Pritchard [00:34:20] Of the Trade and Labor Council? I would say it was more than a full-time position and I would say so now that it's a full-time, double full-time, position.

Bill Picket [00:34:33] I mean is it a salaried position?

Chris Pritchard [00:34:36] Yes, I went on at \$50 a week.

Bill Picket [00:34:44] Did you have any jurisdictional disputes at all? As far as you remember.

Chris Pritchard [00:34:52] In my time, we had many jurisdictional disputes, but not of too great a degree, I would say. Generally, and I have no recollection of any disputes that the Plumbers ever got into, that we were not able to settle satisfactory to all concerned.

Bill Picket [00:35:19] Without a strike?

Chris Pritchard [00:35:20] Definitely.

Bill Picket [00:35:26] What about the political angle? Your union didn't take part in politics?

Chris Pritchard [00:35:37] No, our organization never took any part in politics except in 1933 or whenever the CCF was formed, which I am not quite too sure about. CCF clubs were formed around this city and province and lots of our members joined these various clubs. I belonged to one right here in Point Grey at that particular time. We always tried to keep the politics out of the organization to the extent, as far as I am concerned, that is the individual's prerogative to decide where he fits the same as his religion or any other personal matters. We never had any problems over the politics, as far as I can recollect, because generally speaking, if someone got into a political argument, the Chairman immediately ruled it out of order, so there was no problem anyway.

Bill Picket [00:36:49] So in effect your local steered clear of all the various labor parties and socialist parties that were formed in this province?

Bill Picket [00:37:01] Yes, but we had members who were in these various parties. I belonged to some of them myself. I might say that I voted for J.S. Woodsworth in the City of Winnipeg the first time he ran and was elected to parliament. The same with John Queen, Fred Dixon, Mr. Tanner. All those people became members of the legislature in Manitoba and some in the federal house. Because a man doesn't go around with a badge on his arm saying he belongs to a political party, doesn't say that he doesn't support that political party, does it?

Bill Picket [00:37:46] No, no, I agree.

Chris Pritchard [00:37:49] I maintain at all times, if more people done more voting and less talking, we might get a labor party elected.

Bill Picket [00:38:03] Probably true. You just mentioned a number of these people from Winnipeg. Now, people like Woodsworth came up to the coast, for instance, with for instance, Bill Pritchard and Malcolm Bruce. I was wondering, do you have any recollections of them? What is your impression?

Chris Pritchard [00:38:31] I have listened to Mr. Woodsworth many times in the old days, because in my time in Winnipeg, where the old City Hall used to stand on a Sunday, it was a common thing for any one of these people to get up on the soapbox and discuss the problems of the day. Somewhat similar to the Hyde Park Corner in London. Winnipeg was a very labor-minded, perhaps a socialist-minded city at that time. Fred Dixon was a personal friend of mine. John Queen, I know very well. Bill Pritchard is no relation of mine, but I knew him very well and I saw him in Vancouver some 10 years ago, the last time I was talking to him. I have two books in my possession. One is Fred Dixon's address to the jury and the other is Bill Pritchard's address to the jury when they were tried in 1919 for so-called sedition over the OBU strike. It would seem to me that those are the kinds of things that labor reps should find time to read because they disclose some very valuable information as far as I am concerned, as to where we stand and also what our freedom amounts to, and that we should not be too ready to give it up. In that direction, I feel that

the labor movement has given a lot of its freedom up on the basis of the type of legislation that we have, from time to time and still are, requesting the legislature to put into effect. In my time as business agent, there was no such thing as having to get a government-supervised strike vote to see whether you had the right to organize. You either sold your union or you didn't sell it. But as far as I am concerned, that is still the best and proper way to handle our trade unions. If you can't sell your union to the guy, then perhaps it isn't worth selling.

Bill Picket [00:40:56] Well as a matter of fact I read one of Pritchard's books that you just mentioned, and Pritchard did play a very active role in British Columbia.

Chris Pritchard [00:41:10] Oh yes, he was Reeve of Burnaby after, that was all after, I'm talking about 1919. I wasn't here then. Oh yes, as was Woodsworth.

Bill Picket [00:41:22] What did you think of Bill Pritchard? What kind of a fellow was he in your opinion?

Chris Pritchard [00:41:30] Well, as far as I am concerned, I would have to put it this way. He knew the workers' position in this form of society. He knew what he was talking about. That doesn't have to mean that one agrees with everything that he said, but he certainly was capable of stating the position of the workers. So was Mr. Woodsworth.

Bill Picket [00:42:07] Do you remember Woodsworth being in British Columbia? He worked here as a longshoreman.

Chris Pritchard [00:42:12] I was in Winnipeg at that time.

Bill Picket [00:42:18] What about, say, Malcolm Bruce? Did you know him?

Chris Pritchard [00:42:21] No, not too well. No. No.

Bill Picket [00:42:26] Well, what about say, Percy Bengough? You certainly knew him. What do you think of his role in the labor movement in British Columbia?

Chris Pritchard [00:42:37] Well, all I can say is that he has done a grand job for the labor movement in this province, regardless, without any question of doubt.

Bill Picket [00:42:52] Well, maybe I should go on and talk about—you mentioned that you were appointed to the Workmen's Compensation Board. When was it exactly?

Chris Pritchard [00:43:05] I was appointed in March 1943, but prior to that, Mr. Picket, during the war, there were wage control boards set up and price control boards. I was on the Regional War Labor Board for British Columbia when it was first appointed. The employers' representatives were Mr. Boss Johnson, who later became Premier, Mr. Syd Smith of Bloedel, Stewart and Welsh and John Tucker of the Dominion Construction Company represented the employers. Mr. Horace Mackey of the Railroad Locomotive

Engineers represented the railroads. Mr. Lish Campbell of the Boilermakers No. 1 here, represented the All-Canadian group, and I represented the AFL. That Regional Board functioned under the chairmanship of Mr. George Pearson, who was then Minister of Labor, and Adam Bell was vice chairman. We had to endeavor to keep the wages within line according to, on a comparable basis if wages were increased. Let me put it this way. We had to have something to raise them up to that is on a comparable basis. Do I make it clear?

Bill Picket [00:44:39] That's right.

Chris Pritchard [00:44:42] In many instances, I would say that we did a pretty fair job because many groups were brought to our attention, which were receiving wages even at that time, which were unbelievable. Naturally, they were not all organized groups because we had to deal with non-union as well as union employees. Some of the wages being paid in some of the industries in this province were, to say the least, somewhat scandalous. Also, it would be my feeling, and I don't suppose anyone else would agree with me, that during all those years that the price control board functioned and the wage control board functioned, it would be my opinion that the worker was better off to this extent, that the wages that he was receiving, he was certainly able to purchase practically the value for his dollar because the prices were being held at the same time as the wages were being held. While the Plumbers were getting \$1.50 or \$1.75 at that time, in 1943 anyway, I would say they were equally as well-off as they are today with the wages that they're getting and the prices that we have to pay to live. Whether anyone else agrees with me or not it doesn't matter. I'm just stating my position, as I see it. Prior to going on the Compensation Board, also there was a Royal Commission appointed here because the steel industry, a big industry, decided that to pursue the war to a successful conclusion we, the shipyard men, should work seven days a week on a straight-time basis. Immediately this was put out, an uproar arose, and a Royal Commission was set up by the federal government under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Richards from Winnipeg and two employers, Mr. Hugh Lewis of the Burrard yard and Mr. Don Serviss of the salvage who I think are both passed on. Mr. McAuslane, Alec McAuslane of the Canadian Congress of Labor and myself representing the American Federation of Labor. We sat for many weeks, went all down the coast, visited all the shipyards. The final outcome of that was that the agreements were lived up to and so on. But there were many arguments presented by the employers at that time as to why the workers should give up all the conditions that he'd ever fought for to pursue this war to a successful conclusion. However, I pointed out in my report to the government that we could do that quite easily under the terms of the agreement that we had signed in 1940. Finally, the agreements were lived up to. Then I, of course, got out of the labor movement and went on to the Compensation Board as previously stated in 1943. That didn't mean that I severed my membership because I stayed as a member of our Examining Board for two years after I went on the Compensation Board. That is the Steamfitters' Examining Board, but my membership was continuous up until this present time, and I attended meetings and so forth. Going on the Compensation Board, I was perhaps as much surprised as any man in British Columbia when I was broached to put my name in for that job. The Trades and Labor Council were asked to submit three names. The Vancouver Labor Council were asked to submit three names, and I think the railroad

groups were asked to submit three names by the government of that time. I was appointed, I suppose, by good luck. I never sought the job and I stated to Mr. Pearson when he suggested that I let my name go, that I was quite happy where I was as secretary of the Trades and Labor Council of Vancouver. However, a lot of my friends suggested that I should go for the job, so I took it.

Bill Picket [00:49:46] You were nominated by?

Chris Pritchard [00:49:47] The Vancouver Trades and Labor Council. Three names were sent in. Harry Neelands, Bert Showler and mine. I know the names of the other groups, but that isn't worthwhile mentioning.

Bill Picket [00:50:11] Did they appoint all three? Or they just chose one of the three?

Chris Pritchard [00:50:15] No, you could only appoint one. I mean there was three names to be submitted by the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.

Bill Picket [00:50:22] And the government chose?

Chris Pritchard [00:50:23] There was nine names submitted from three labor groups here, three from each group. The government asked them to submit them. Mine was one from the Vancouver Labor Council and I got the job. I found it most interesting, up to a point. I well remember George Pearson saying to me, "It'll be no sinecure, Pritchard." I found that out because it is no sinecure if you want to do a job for the people that you're supposed to represent and in their best interests. I endeavored to do that up until the time I left.

Bill Picket [00:51:15] Were you dissatisfied with some aspects of the Workmen's Compensation Board?

Chris Pritchard [00:51:26] I've never said very much, Mr. Picket, as to why I left. I don't think that I want to say very much now, anymore than well, let us say too much interference from the outside. Let it go at that. What was inside, I felt that I could take care of my position at all times. I knew where I stood and I never was pushed around or wouldn't stand being pushed around by anyone. If I made a decision, rightly or wrongly, I made it the way I saw it, and that was the stand I always took on the Board. I made many mistakes, undoubtedly, but if I did, I did so and called it the way I saw it regardless. I might say while I was on the Compensation Board, it was part of my job to take care of and look after the industrial first aid of this province. Also, of course, to a certain extent, the safety end of it. I have visited practically every corner of this province and where I could have and where they would let me, addressed labor groups and employer's groups on the basis of the importance of, and the value of our Act and the necessary support that should be given by employers and workers as far as the regulations and the Act itself for their own good. I have always tried to preach to the workers of this province that safety is paramount regardless of anything else. While we have battled to increase the benefits and they have been increased, maybe they are not enough yet. Let us never forget if there were no

accidents, there'd be no compensation. My contention is that when a man goes on a job, the first question that he should ask the employer, "Is this a safe job to work on?" Because I have found out in my experience with the Compensation Board that the cheapest thing that an employer can get is a workman. The loss of a workman or the loss of 10 workmen or 20 workmen on any job, never tied a job up. The loss of a costly machine or the holding up of a costly machine, the employer is most concerned about, but a workman that is another matter. Therefore, it is the workman's responsibility not only to himself, but to his fellow workmen and his family, his wife and children, that he go on the job with his lunch pail and go home at night with his lunch pail and not go home on a stretcher or into a hospital. The regulations are such today, in my opinion, as a member, a former member, of that Board that any group of workers in any part of this province, be they organized or unorganized, if they feel satisfied that the condition is unsafe. I don't care whether they are drilling a tunnel or whether they are topping a tree or whether they are working in a paper mill or whether they are in a sewer or whether they are on construction. The law is there to protect them and the Compensation Board must uphold any group of workmen who refuse to work under an unsafe condition. But I am sorry to say, too many people are prepared to throw caution to the wind and take chances. But the man who loses a leg or an arm or an eye, I have always said, and I say now, "There isn't enough money in the province to pay that man for that loss." Because why? He immediately becomes a derelict in the labor market. He has no possible chance of getting a job. He isn't wanted in this competitive age. Therefore, I say again, one of the most important things in this province was the Compensation Act, is it necessary? Under that Act, the worker has full protection. Full protection, I repeat, so that he doesn't become injured on the job. I can recall that terrible disaster we had in the Second Narrows when 18 men were killed. The concern, mostly one could say, was possibly over the loss of the steel in the water and the equipment and so on. Eighteen men lost their lives. Did it tie the job up? If you read the record, you will find they didn't know how they could get Mr. Gagliardi's job done because they couldn't get the steel quick enough. The loss of the men, though, made no difference whatsoever to that job.

Chris Pritchard [00:57:35] At the time the welders had no organization. The asbestos worker or pipe cutters had no organization and the gas fitters had no organization. I ultimately got the asbestos workers, the welders, gas fitters into Local 170 through the International agreeing that they could come into our organization inasmuch as there was no International covering them in this area. Rather than have them non-union men on the jobs and with them stating there was no place for them to go, we felt we'd take them into the Plumbers' until such time as they could set up their own organizations. That was the reason that they were brought in and I organized them in 1936 or 1937 under that special dispensation. I also organized, the first attempt, when I was Secretary of Trades and Labor Council, the morticians in this town. That was quite a job. There's quite a history attached to that.

Chris Pritchard [00:59:04] In 1940 appointed by the federal government at that time it was composed of 30 contractors from all over the Dominion and 30 labor men from every part of the Dominion. There were three contractors went from British Columbia, Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Fred Hale and Mr. John Tucker and three labor men, Mr. William Page, the

Carpenters, Mr. Jack Ross of Local 213 and myself of the Plumbers'. This meeting was held in Ottawa under the then Minister of Labor, Mr. McLarty. Tom Moore was president at that time, president of the Congress, Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Mr. Humphrey Mitchell and various other notables whom I can't recall. The idea of this meeting was that the construction industry would give some sort of pledge to the government that there would be no strikes or tie-ups on federal government, army, or at least defense construction for the duration of the war. We met in Ottawa for some four days and finally an agreement was arrived at, and I would have to say that for the duration of the war, it was pretty well carried out because no delays or strikes or hold ups occurred that amounted to anything on any construction in this Dominion during the war. In a way, it shows what could be done if employers and labor and perhaps government are prepared to sit down with their feet under the table and talk these things out. I became the first president of the Metal Trades Council here in 1939. I think I already stated that, and I also followed Mr. William Page, as secretary of the Building Trades Council, up until the time that I went as secretary of the Trades and Labor Council.

Bill Piket [01:01:45] What year was that? Do you remember?

Chris Pritchard [01:01:48] I became secretary of Trades and Labor Council in 1942, September 1942, and the Building Trades Council, I went on there I think that was 1938. Then I was always on the executive of the Building Trades Council as well, and also the Trades and Labor Council.

Bill Piket [01:02:10] What about?

Chris Pritchard [01:02:12] After I quit the business agent's job, owing to the fact that I refused to sit in with a rival group, the meeting wouldn't listen to my—I already said all of this—the meeting wouldn't listen to my ideas, and I stated, "Well, in that case give me five minutes and I'll show you where I stand." And I wrote out my resignation as business agent to the Plumbers'. Further to our activities in the Plumbers' Union Local 170, in 1926 we were responsible for bringing about a more up to date plumbing by-law from the City. After much gathering of information, it was based on the Acts in some of the more larger cities in the United States who brought their Acts up to meet the requirements of present times. Out of this new bylaw the plumbers working in the City of Vancouver had to obtain an efficient, so-called Efficiency Card, which was given them after passing an examination, passed by a Board of Examiners set up under the new plumbing bylaws for the City. It was felt that great improvements would come about in the sanitation as far as the new bylaws were concerned. The employers cooperated, of course, in this matter, and since that time, naturally there have been improvements. The new up to date regulation came in in 1926. In 1934 or 1935 we also brought before the City Council a matter which we felt should have consideration here, which was the setting up of a central heating plant, a central steam heating plant. The City of Winnipeg had had one since 1920 and which at the present time is on a paying basis and returns considerable amount of money into the treasury of the City, which is beneficial, of course, to the taxpayers of City of Winnipeg. It was felt that here a similar undertaking would not be too costly. Furthermore, with the amount of coal available in this province, that central heat could be produced at a fairly

reasonable rate. However, nothing came of it and the matter has never been taken up since that time, to my knowledge. Also in 1938, we petitioned the provincial government to raise the provincial Plumbing Code. The idea was to establish a Plumbing Code in the province on a uniform basis. Also, wherever possible, to eliminate the use of septic tanks. The then Minister of Health listened, but no action was taken at that time. It was the feeling of Local 170 that it was high time that changes should be made in that regard. We also have taken up around that time the matter of, before the government, of installing sprinkler systems in all public institutions such as schools, hospitals and the mental institution in places where older people are gathered together in large numbers. The union, I presume, is still agitating for this to become controlled by legislation, but apparently so far the government has not seen fit to do anything with this type of legislation.