

**Charles Stewart and Peter Munro Pt 1.mp3**  
**Recorded c. 1964**  
**Transcribed by Donna Sacuta, 2025**

**Interviewer** [00:00:00] This is an interview of September 15 with Charles McGregor Stewart and—

**Interviewer** [00:00:11] Mr. Munro.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:00:12] Peter Munro.

**Interviewer** [00:00:12] Peter Cameron Munro of the Street Railwaymen (Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America). Now, what we want is as much as possible, personal histories, which unions, when you got involved, what executive positions you held and anything of this importance.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:00:43] Well, how about a little background of what Vancouver was like then? Just a few words.

**Interviewer** [00:00:51] Go ahead.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:00:51] Well, that was in 1911. There was quite a building boom here. They, of course, it was mostly horse-drawn vehicles at that time. Nearly most of the people that worked in Vancouver were other builders or teamsters. That went on until about 1913, and then there was quite a depression, that was before the 1914 war. From 1914 up to 1916 and 17, you remember, Charlie, there was no conscription.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:01:37] No.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:01:37] The result of that was that there was no jobs. They wanted, well, the slogan was, 'Your King and country needs you, we don't'. That's the slogan. So you didn't get a job unless you joined up. So that went on until 1916 and 1917 when conscription came into effect. There was quite an upsurge in the labor movement against conscription. In fact, the majority of the unions were against it because they believed it wasn't a workers' war, it was a capitalist war. And they made no bones about it either. They came out very plainly and said that they were opposed to it. However, that went on in spite of all these things, in spite of the opposition in Quebec, which was the biggest opposition of all, I think, to conscription. It was put into effect in 1916 and 1917. And the strange thing about that was that a week before conscription was put in, well, you couldn't get a job. But after conscription was put in, a couple of weeks after that, they were looking all over the place for men. It just was a regular boom in jobs. I might say that during this slack period of jobs, there were thousands left British Columbia and went to the States.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:03:12] That was during the war. You could rent houses then, there were so many empty houses, you could rent a house, a good four or five room house for four dollars a month. In fact, there were a lot of landlords giving you a house for nothing, they'd look after it. Now in 1918, we were both working for the B.C. Electric at the time and I was getting 27 cents an hour, a nine-and-a-half-hour day. By 1918, there was quite a lot of men came on the B.C. Electric, about 200, because to fill the gaps of those that were away at the front. These were all young at that time, and mostly they had worked

in jobs for others at trade union before. So as young fellows, we made up our minds that we were not going to have no 27-cents an hour. We were either going to get twice as much as that or quit. The result of that was we went to all the meetings, and we passed resolutions, and finally we got 54 demands put before the B.C. Electric. There were demands about three-feet long. When Mr. Murrin of the B.C. Electric saw these demands, he went purple in the face. He pretty near had an epileptic stroke. He says to the business agent, he says, "Why," he says, "you might as well take over the B.C. Electric." So the business agent said, "That's fine, but maybe we will." [laughter] We didn't get it. [laughter].

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:04:59] Now, in June of 1918, we went out on strike, and we demanded a 100 percent increase in wages, time-and-a-half for overtime, Sundays and holidays, and a dollar-an-hour spread overtime. That means—and an eight-hour day, oh yes, that was the main thing, eight-hour day. If it took more than 10 hours to get your eight hours in, they had to pay you a dollar-an-hour bonus. That pretty near broke their hearts. Anyway, we went out eight days and we got all the demands. Every one of them, and we went back to work.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:05:47] They got a six-cent fare.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:05:49] They got a six [coughing] They got a six-cent fare. Excuse the coughing.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:05:54] So they made more than [unclear].

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:05:56] Yes, so anyway. We were only back to work a week. By the way, at that time the electricians were in with us on the agreements. Our agreements came up at the same time, and they got the same thing as far as overtime was concerned, as we got. But a week after that, Mr. Murrin decided that he wasn't going to pay that overtime to the electricians. There was too much overtime and he couldn't afford it. So, Morrison, who was the business agent with the electricians at the time, he just looked up the top and he says, "All right," he says, "you've broken that agreement," he says, "so unless you mend it by midnight, there'll be no juice."

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:06:42] So I was in Fairview at the time, I was a motorman, the Fairview, and I was doing my best to get in the barn. I was due in the barn at 12 o'clock. But the old bridge was open, and of course it's very often open these days. I was held up for 10 minutes, so I was stuck my last trip at Quebec and Main. I stayed there all night. All the cars had to, you know, they had to stay with their cars until they got the accelerators going, the steam plant at Prior, to make enough juice to go to the barn. Finally that was settled in about three days. We were out again for three days on strike. About a week or ten days after that there was a fellow by the name of Ginger Goodwin. I don't know whether you've ever heard of him. Well, he was a great guy. He was a socialist. He was also a first-class trade unionist and organizer. Well, they called him up on the conscription, but he only had one lung, and of course he was put in Class D. There was no chance of him going to war. After a few weeks, he was up in — was it up in Trail he was, Charlie?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:08:03] Yes.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:08:03] Yes, and he organized the miners up there. And as soon as he did that, they called him up again and put him in Class A. So he decided he wasn't going to go. So he went over to Nanaimo among his friends, and he had plenty of friends there, hundreds of the miners, they all stood by Ginger Goodwin. They were

looking for Ginger, of course, and they had a special constable by the name of Dan Campbell. It's too bad that a guy like that would sully the name of Campbell, but anyway. He, uh, he shot Ginger Goodwin in the back one morning. The result of that was that all the trade unions in British Columbia decided they would have a 24 -hour strike, which we did. Well, it just shows you the temper of the rank and file. The executives of these unions didn't even have to call a meeting. All they did was put up a notice. So we pulled our cars into the barn at 12 o'clock, and we had another strike. That was three in just a few weeks, 1918.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:09:12] These were the first strikes they had since the organization was—

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:09:15] Yeah the first strikes they had.

**Interviewer** [00:09:17] When was the street Railwaymen first organized?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:09:19] Oh Division 101, what is it now? It was in the—

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:09:24] It was very early it must have been. When was the Amalgamated formed? 1897, was it? I was with 101, so it must have been one of the first organized.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:09:39] In the eighties, I guess.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:09:43] Yeah, 1887 I believe it was, the Amalgamated was formed, wasn't it?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:09:48] It's just somewhere around there, I'm not sure of the dates.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:09:51] Well, now that's 1918. Then there's the 1919, maybe you could carry on from there, Charlie, the Winnipeg strike. That was another month and two days out.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:10:06] Yes, I guess the boys know that there was a strong sentiment in the West for industrial organization at that time and the OBU (One Big Union) was formed, and the majority of unions in the West, they favoured the OBU including the Street Railwaymen, but we never went into it. But there was a vote taken, and it was strongly in favour of it. A lot of the craft unions also didn't go in because they had, although the rank-and-file favoured it they had quite a bit to lose. Some of them had very small pensions for the men and all the pensions that there was of these days, and they had life insurance and one thing or another benefits that they felt the new organization could not give them. There's been quite a lot of controversy in the OBU since that time, and I think most of us over the years, even now, believe that the industrial form of organization is the correct form of organization. But what it did cause in British Columbia was a serious split in the labour movement, which lasted for almost 16 years, where the militants were kept out of many of the unions. I think it was early in the thirties that the Workers' Unity League was formed and was formed for the purpose mainly of trying to organize the unorganized, which nothing had been done for many years to do that. Although it was only a small organization numerically, with some 40,000 members, they did prove to the working-class in Canada that the wages and conditions could be maintained and improved even during a period of crisis. They proved that in the thirties. I

believe it was 1935 that the leadership of the Workers' Unity League decided that the time would come to try to unify the trade union movement again, and they proposed that the Workers' Unity League should disband and go into the recognized trade union movement. Most of the AFL (American Federation of Labor), and there was some [unclear] came to the Labor Congress at that time too. Following that I think myself that the AFL unions and the trade union movement in this country generally took a big step forward and really went out to try to do some organizing, especially after the OBU was formed inside the American Federation of Labor. Even after it was kicked out, it was still a challenge to the AFL that if they didn't organize the workers, the OBU would. There was quite an organizing competition between the two groups. It was during that period I think that was one of the highlights of the trade union movement in this country. I think it was in 1938 the— What year was the OBU expelled from the American Federation of Labor?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:13:32] I just forget that.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:13:36] It must have been before that, I guess.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:13:42] 1939 was the start of the last 1939 was the start of the last World War, wasn't it?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:13:45] I think we held them here in our Congress, the OBU, for some two years after the American Federation of Labor expelled them and I remember in 1938, even the Congress leadership and the trade union movement was opposed to the expulsion of them. But in 1939, I think it was, and I stand to be corrected in this—

**Interviewer** [00:14:07] Convention of 1939.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:14:09] Convention that was then, Niagara Falls, they decided in a roll call vote and there was very few of the unions from Vancouver which hadn't instructed the delegates to vote to keep the OBU in. But this roll call vote, a man had to stand up and be counted. I remember there's one fellow, he's dead now, Bill Wilson. He came to us that day at the convention when the roll call vote was on, and he said, "I'm sorry, Charlie, I kind of threw it," he says, "because that man, [unclear], he was the board member for the Carpenter and Joiners, he said he would take my livelihood away from me." He wasn't the only one, there was many of them doing the same kind of thing. The roll call was passed, it was quite an enlightenment. There was one couple there, a man, he was a delegate from the Electrical Workers and his wife was a delegate from the Office Employees. He voted for the expulsion in the roll call of the OBU and his wife wanted to keep them in. So deep in the family, you know, but the majority of the western delegates anyway who were for the expulsion of the OBU didn't do it because they wanted to, they did it because they felt they were forced to. Our union, all our delegates voted to keep the OBU in. I remember, although it doesn't help you fellows any at all, anyone speaking on the roll call would have to go up and give your names in, there's so many who want to speak for and against it. And there was one fellow, what do you call that, the international board member again? The Scotchman. Magnus Sinclair.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:16:13] Yeah, Sinclair.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:16:14] Magnus Sinclair was before me and he would take the mic, he had a tremendous voice and he gave the most anti-unity speech in the convention I think and I happened to be placed right behind him and I tried to do the very

opposite you see. So I was sitting beside him that night at the banquet. They had a banquet for all the Street Railwaymen and I tried to speak to Magnus two or three times and he wouldn't answer me at all. So, after the banquet was finished, Tom Duncan and I went up to the rotunda and here's Magnus standing beside one of these big ashtrays and smoking a cigar and I went over to him and I said, "You know Magnus," and he never turned around. I says, "a few months ago I attended a banquet in Vancouver. It was for Mr. Tim Buck, he'd just come out of Kingston. It was the first time he turned around and gave me a look. I says, "I went to this banquet and I saw a minister there. I said to someone, it was a kind of strange place for a Reverend gentleman to be. And he says, 'Oh, don't you know him?' And I said, 'No, I never met him.' He says, 'Well,' he said, 'That's the Reverend O'Dell he says, come over and I'll introduce you to him.'" So Magnus wasn't even interested, he never turned around again. He told me about working on the street railway in Toronto and he put himself through university by doing that and told me about drawing up a transfer, the same transfer we were using at that time, there was a competition on and he got the prize, whatever it was, for this transfer and it was the one that was accepted by the transportation company at that time. He turned around and he says, "What do you say that man's name was?" I says, "O'Dell." "Ah," he says, "That wasn't O'Dell. He says, that was Roddal, the old reprobate. He says, "I was his driver." [coughing] He came back up to his room then and he bid me get in touch with Rudell when I came back to Vancouver. They wrote to each other, I suppose, as long as they both lived. But I had heard before that, you see after the convention, that he was going to dig it up with international about me speaking in unity the way I did and countering him, you know. So nothing happened. I think that was a big mistake that the AFL made in those expulsions at that time. The same as the expulsions they made in the twenties was a mistake. It hurt the trade union movement. We can go on to these unions that set aside the organization. They recognized the trade union movement of Canada the day where they could all be in. Personally, I think the time will come before very long where the rank and file will demand that every bona fide trade union become part of the Canadian Council of Labor.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:19:30] Did you mention the Winnipeg strike in 1919?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:19:34] No, I didn't. That was something else that we participated in too, most of the time, I think.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:19:41] A month.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:19:42] During that period, a month or five weeks or something like that. It was quite a long spell anyway.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:19:48] I'd just like to mention that the telephone girls were organized at the time, and they were the last to go back. They stood it right when the rest decided to go back. They wouldn't go back. And they were out for three or four days longer. So you got to hand it to the telephone girls at that time. They were really very militant.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:20:08] That was one of the black marks on the strike too, that the telephone girls were left in the lurch, and the organization was broken. The trade union movement could have saved it, but they — [coughing]

**Interviewer** [00:20:26] The Street Railwaymen voted against going into the OBU, didn't they?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:20:31] Oh yeah. The Street Railwaymen voted against, although there had been on record previously to join the OBU.

**Interviewer** [00:20:41] But you stayed with the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, the old one?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:20:47] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:20:50] Did the OBU form a trades council too in Vancouver that operated do you know?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:21:00] No, there was no duplication there that I remember. I mean, they didn't have any Labor Council.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:21:10] I can't recall, but I'd be surprised if they didn't have. (phone rings)

**Interviewer** [00:21:25] When did you first get onto the Council, as a delegate from the Railwaymen?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:21:35] I think the first time we were on was in 1930. Somewhere in there.

**Interviewer** [00:21:43] Did you get at all involved in the Canadian Labor Party in those earlier experiments?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:21:50] Our organization was involved and continued the delegates on—

**Interviewer** [00:21:57] Of course Angus MacInnis was from your organization.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:21:59] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:22:01] Do you remember how much support, direct financial support, he got in his election campaigns, this type of thing?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:22:10] From the union?

**Interviewer** [00:22:10] From the union.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:22:11] I couldn't say, but I'm sure he got some support because he'd certainly supported the organization.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:22:21] Oh, he did get indirect support, you see, because of the constitution of the AFL. We couldn't use union money directly for any other purpose except in connection with the trade union movement, so that stymied us quite a bit, but at the same time, we used to have certain of our members go down on payday and have a list and get subscriptions.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:22:52] That's how they do mostly, get together. Help you in different organizations.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:22:57] I know I went down myself one day and I got close to \$300 in the afternoon.

**Interviewer** [00:23:03] What was this for?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:23:05] For the political candidates.

**Interviewer** [00:23:20] Bill, go ahead.

**Interviewer** [00:23:21] There's a number of things on there. Were you in the Socialist Party?

**Interviewer** [00:23:24] Yeah, there's another thing too. We wanted to try and trace some political connections.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:23:30] Well, I was in the Socialist Party for a period of time.

**Interviewer** [00:23:34] Were you there during the war? The First World War.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:23:40] I was in the States up until 1917, I come back here, and I think it was about 1917 I joined the Socialist Party of Canada.

**Interviewer** [00:23:50] That's what I meant. [coughing] Was either of you ever on the executive of the Socialist Party of Canada?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:24:01] I've never joined the Socialist Party.

**Interviewer** [00:24:04] You never did.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:24:07] I was very much in favour of the Socialist Party though. I used to attend all the meetings in the old Empress Theater there, you know, every Sunday. When we had—oh, what's his name now?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:24:18] Kingsley?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:24:27] Kingsley. E.T. Kingsley.

**Interviewer** [00:24:29] He was editor of the Clarion at that time.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:24:31] Yeah, he was. That meeting, that Hall, used to be packed every Sunday night.

**Interviewer** [00:24:43] As a matter of fact, I've met a lot of those people.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:24:46] There were so many meetings in these days it was very hard to get speakers.

**Interviewer** [00:24:49] I'm sure I've met enough of the people for a quorum in there. [laughter]

**Interviewer** [00:24:55] There's still a lot of them around.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:24:58] Sometimes there was a little agitation and propaganda that they— I think the educational campaign was kind on the Socialist Party of Canada there's still telling the effect on western Canada even though they had British Columbia.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:25:13] Well, that was a stronghold of the socialists, you see.

**Interviewer** [00:25:17] It certainly was.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:25:18] They've always been militant, the people of British Columbia, right from the old days.

**Interviewer** [00:25:21] Well, what connections were there between the Socialist Party and things like the Canadian Labor Party, which the Trades and Labor Council set up?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:25:29] Well, of course, the Labor Party came on later, of course, but these were mostly socialists in the Labor Party. But I suppose it was for political reasons, I'm not very sure, I stand to be corrected, but I think to myself it wasn't for political reasons [phone rings] that they changed the name to the Labor Party, you see, so that a lot of people would vote for labour that wouldn't vote for socialism. They were quite dogmatic in the old days, you know, the Socialist Party.

**Interviewer** [00:26:04] Yeah, that's what I was going to ask you, because some guy called A. Goodwin was turned down for membership in the Socialist Party, and Ginger Goodwin's initial was A. Alfred, you see, and I'm just trying to find out whether this is the one.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:26:20] I don't know.

**Interviewer** [00:26:21] Because I know a lot of people get turned down for membership.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:26:27] He was a member in the Socialist Party of Canada.

**Interviewer** [00:26:27] I don't know.

**Interviewer** [00:26:31] Well, did you stay with the Socialist Party until it went out?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:26:35] I stayed until after the 21 points, they affiliated with the Communist International. It didn't go out then, it still lived after that. I didn't join the Communist Party then either. But I felt that the— My personal opinion was that the Socialist Party should have been unanimous in what they did.

**Interviewer** [00:27:03] So how long did the Socialist Party go on for?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:27:06] I couldn't tell you that, but it went on quite a little time after that. Jack Harrington and—

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:27:15] Well it kept on going until the early thirties when the CCF was born. I think it did.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:27:20] I think it did too.



**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:27:23] That's right when the CCF took over. But a lot of these old chaps of us in the Socialist Party, they might have been sectarian but by golly they were true to their class principles anyway. [coughing] There was Jack Harrington for one, I don't know whether Jack—

**Interviewer** [00:27:41] He's still around.

**Interviewer** [00:27:42] He's still alive.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:27:45] I believe he's in Australia, isn't he?

**Interviewer** [00:27:46] No, he's around.

**Interviewer** [00:27:46] We've interviewed him too.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:27:47] Is that right?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:27:48] He was a wonderful man, I think, and even after the Socialist Party was finished, and there was lots of Jack's old friends went into the Communist Party, he was never an enemy. He still believed it was their privilege to go away and help. He was, he wasn't in our Division. We were in Division 101, he was in Division 113, New Westminster. But he must be an old man now. He was older than I was. I know one day he was on superannuation before I was. [coughing]

**Interviewer** [00:28:28] Well, I was going to ask you a couple of things. What did your union do politically about socialism? I mean, this morning we talked to a guy from the Western Federation of Miners, and they'd have debates on Sunday, and a big meeting, and there was debates on. Was there anything like that in your union? Any promotion of—

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:28:52] Our union officially supported the policy of the American Federation of Labor to reward your friends and punish your enemies. That was the official policy, I think.

**Interviewer** [00:29:04] But how come you were affiliated into the Canadian Labor Party?

**Interviewer** [00:29:09] It was sponsored by the Trades and Labor Congress.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:29:12] Yes, it was the 1907 convention I think who brought up first the question of a labor party, and then it was resurrected again later on.

**Interviewer** [00:29:21] 1921.

**Interviewer** [00:29:22] So that's still quite a departure from the [unclear].

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:29:25] It is, but at the same time, mind you, the international unions were opposed to the Labor Party, and the political action like that, they still persisted. That was the policy, and eventually our organization went out of the Labor Party. I just forget what the trouble was at that time. Do you remember, Pete?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:29:47] Oh, I don't remember.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:29:49] But it was caused mainly by the international unions and their opposition to it.

**Interviewer** [00:29:55] A big break-up came over the Workers' Party resolution to enfranchise the Orientals. I think it was 1926, 1928. The Canadian Labor Party went on record as in favor of enfranchising the Orientals, and a lot of the trade unions voted to get out. This is one thing I wanted to ask you about, is your reminiscences on the anti-Oriental campaign, and particularly on the activities of people like Bengough. Do you remember much of this?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:30:41] Well, I can't say much, I do, but I remember when I came here, I was just a lad when I came to Vancouver, and I thought it was terrible. I had never seen a Chinese in my life before, and the fights they used to have down in Chinatown Saturday night, I couldn't understand that. I thought it was something awful, you know. When you go into the history of the labour movement, that the antagonism to Orientals was generated by the powers that be. It's hard to believe now you can see the Chinese people living all over town and any part of the city. But it wasn't that, they were certainly in a ghetto.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:31:21] Yeah, and labour believed that they were underbidding them and working for low wages. That was the whole thing.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:31:30] And even in later years, not so terribly long ago anyway, it was during the thirties, I was chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council. The board member of the Machinists' Union came to us and asked us if the Organizing Committee could organize the garage workers. So we started to organize them, we organized many Japanese and Chinese, and we held a meeting in a hall down Hastings Street, I forget what hall it was. He came to the meeting and he said how sorry he was, and he got up and read the obligation of the constitution, and there was no Orientals allowed in their union. He told us how bad he felt about it. I'll never forget there was one, the Chinese lined up there and they said that they're condemned for undercutting the living standards of the Anglo-Saxon people, and now when they organize to try to overcome that, you won't take a stand, you know. It was a terrible thing and that organization didn't amount to anything, although we had the majority of the garage workers organized. It was years before the attempt was made again to organize them, and after we did organize them that time, the jurisdictional fight came on there, and the Teamsters claimed that they were going to have all the washers and greasers, and the Machinists was going to have the rest. So the jurisdictional fight there and the organization didn't amount to anything at all, and it was some time following that before the garage mechanics were organized. But they worked under terrible conditions, too, in these big shops at the Vancouver Motors there. They would be down there in the morning, and they, even to get an hour or two's work, they would stand around there all day for it, or would sit around, not with any paper waiting either, just to be in the job.

**Interviewer** [00:33:41] Well now, how about you, do you have any recollections of that, Mr. Stewart?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:33:47] Mr. what?

**Interviewer** [00:33:48] Mr. Stewart, do you have any recollections of the anti-Oriental campaign?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:33:52] Of what?

**Interviewer** [00:33:53] Oh, Mr. Munro, I'm sorry. Do you have any recollections of the anti-Oriental campaigns?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:33:59] No. You know, I heard about it, but I have no recollections of anything specific about it. I knew about it at the time, but there was nothing in it.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:34:15] It was even worse before we came here, I read about it in the early 1900s, was very bad. The most that I can remember of it was even the sentiment of some of the trade unions against the Orientals. But these battles on a Saturday night, that was the main thing I do remember about it.

**Interviewer** [00:34:34] Well, who would you say organized that?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:34:41] Oh, that's a pretty hard thing to say now, because people get ideas about things. Now, you take the Negro question in the United States, in the different cities in Mississippi and so on, you can't just tell who organized it. It seems to be just something that everybody thinks is right or wrong, as the case may be. You know, you can't put your finger on it. But I know that the organized labor as a whole, with few exceptions, were very antagonistic to the Chinamen. The reason was, of course, that they figured they were undercutting them in jobs. That was the main reason.

**Interviewer** [00:35:27] Well, it seems to me that I've picked up things like they felt the Chinese were dirty, and it was more than that. They also accused them of things like all kinds of things, being dirty, spreading disease.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:35:42] Opium smoking.

**Interviewer** [00:35:43] Opium, et cetera.

**Interviewer** [00:35:44] Immorality with white people in restaurants, you know.

**Interviewer** [00:35:50] How widespread was that kind of stuff? For instance, right now, I'm sure that 75 percent of the males that think they're very liberal on negroes would say that West Indians are very aggressive with girls, you see, much more so than white males. I would say that's racial prejudice. Now, how widespread was the—

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:36:19] The worst kind of racial prejudice, too.

**Interviewer** [00:36:20] How widespread do you feel these other things, other than just the job factor were amongst the unions?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:36:37] Well, I think the job factor was the main thing. These other things were secondary.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:36:43] They were excuses, you see.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:36:45] Most of them manufactured as excuses. Of course, mind you, if you had any race of people that's oppressed and been oppressed for

over a period of generations, they might not live the same as you do. If we had suffered the same oppression, would we have been any better?

**Interviewer** [00:37:07] Oh, well, that's quite true, but I'm just trying to find out how widespread were these secondary things in the union? [coughing] Do you think they were widespread? Did your members think that way? In your union?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:37:20] I don't know, I think our membership generally, in the past and even up to the present time, we had a pretty good membership, a pretty good trade union membership, and the action taken most things yet, I think was still taken the same way, quite liberal-minded.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:37:41] Well, you see, our constitution in the AFL, as far as the Street Railwaymen were concerned, and I have initiated quite a few members myself. "You shall not discriminate against a brother because of race, creed, or nationality."

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:38:01] And that's never been changed.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:38:02] No, it hasn't been changed.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:38:03] We've been through two international presidents, the original one, Bill Mahon, he was there over 50 years, I'm sure, as the international president. He never forgot his early days in organizing the transportation workers. He was a driver of a horse car in Chicago. and quit the job, and went all over the American continent, even came into Canada, came in on boxcars, traveled all over the country that way, no wages. And Bill never forgot that. Even when many of those international officers were getting high wages, Bill was getting \$8,000 a year. I was at the convention, they tried from the motion from the floor to increase his wages to \$10 ,000 a year, and he opposed it. They still that principle. [phone rings] I remember when I was expelled from the Trades Council, I didn't appeal the expulsion, but I stood as a delegate from the organization. The president, he said seeing I had been expelled from the Council, I couldn't stand as a delegate from the union for the Congress Convention. That was in 1941 I think and I appealed that to the international, and Mahon wrote back and supported my appeal. He said he didn't support my politics, but I had as much rights as any other individual in the organization, and the president was wrong in devoured me from standing. When the election came up, I was allowed to run and I was elected. Didn't know that Pete went down that time to the convention of Calgary, I believe, wasn't it?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:40:04] Yeah.

[00:40:04] Didn't know whether we'd be seated or not. Went down and be seated and I'm quite sure it was the position that Mahon took at that time. As far as the autonomy was concerned, we had almost full local autonomy. He said several times that we could do anything we wanted to do that was in the interest of the membership. The only time that the international would take action as long as he was president was if there was an appeal from a group that the constitution had been violated. So we had no pique with our organization at all. We think it was one of the most liberal-minded AFL unions, and still is.

**Interviewer** [00:40:48] How radical, if I can use that word, was your own local, 101?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:40:54] Well, they were quite militant. I think that would be a better word. They were quite militant. Very militant. There used to be an old saying in the

Division that we never won an arbitration or lost a strike. So I think that sums it up. We generally went up in negotiations. We'd take a strike vote first. Then we'd up and negotiate. The business agent or whoever was in charge of the negotiations he'd tell the company that that's what we want, and we have a strike vote in our pocket, so figure it out yourself. Think it over for a few days and then, generally speaking, we didn't have to go out. We had the strength behind us.

**Interviewer** [00:41:49] Well, yeah. It's a good point, but I was thinking more in terms of political. The fact being, of course, that MacInnis was one of the early parliamentary radicals, and all through I noticed in the minutes that the Street Railwaymen were donating money to things like the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion and all this, and passing resolutions for the nationalization of all the resources and industries of the country. Was this a pretty left-wing union?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:42:32] It was.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:42:32] Oh yeah, it was generally a bit left -wing union.

**Interviewer** [00:42:36] Did you take any political activity, except as individuals, of the union itself?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:42:45] Well, in what way? You mean, well, we take May Day parades, for instance. We've taken part in that as a union plenty of times. That's quite a radical thing, you know.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:42:58] Yeah, we were officially represented on the May Day parades.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:42:58] I was one of the delegates myself.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:43:05] I got a kind of disillusioned myself. There was one time, during the war years of course, and we had a business agent and he participated in the May Day parade. I would say the only thing he did that for was to get the support of the left-wing, both in our union and other unions. The election was coming up for the secretary for the Trades and Labor Council and he was elected and I am pretty sure that his participation in the May Day parade was just for that purpose. I had a different idea always of May Day parades before that but I thought well the people that could use this law to go. It was Roly Gervin.

**Interviewer** [00:43:55] Roly Gervin. He's now with the —

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:43:57] He's manager for the building contactors.

**Interviewer** [00:44:00] Exchange, yeah.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:44:02] He's on the opposite side now.

**Interviewer** [00:44:05] Why do you feel your Local was radical?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:44:10] Why was it?

**Interviewer** [00:44:12] Yeah.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:44:12] Well, one of the main reasons is what Pete said, was that during the years that a great many people came into the Street Railwaymen, from the Longshoremen, from different building trades where they had a fairly good knowledge of the trade union movement and the socialist movement. A few IWWs (Industrial Workers of the World) was in there too. All these things, associating with the other young people coming on the job had an effect on them. They knew that it was the left-wing element in the organization that they gotten the conditions that they were working under. They realized that, and that's had a great effect. Many fellows that they might not accept your political ideas, they did support you in the trade union. Some of those fellows, they haven't changed their mind yet. I would say in politics, they're quite conservative-minded, but they still have a great respect for the left-wing that was in the union in those days.

**Interviewer** [00:45:20] Did you hold any offices in the union other than delegate to the Council?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:45:28] Yes. Pete, you see, we were quite ultra-left, not only us but the majority of the class-conscious workers at that time. We wouldn't stand for to go to a convention or anything. We gave the delegates that went there hell for not doing what we thought they should do when they went. So it was after one convention that the international board member was there. He says, "every time," he says, "I come, I hear those fellows talking the same way." "But, he says, "It was a strange thing they never stand for anything themselves." I think that same night was the nominations, Pete. We decided to run, and we run all the time after that. We found that instead of being an official opposition in the union, you could do more by being in the union and trying to give leadership. We found that to be correct, and we found that we'd been very wrong over the years.

**Interviewer** [00:46:27] What positions did you hold?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:46:29] Well, I myself held the position of vice president for, I don't know how many years.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:46:36] Quite a long time.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:46:36] A long time, anyway. And then I held the position of acting-president, business agent and financial secretary. Long time. So, I pretty well was in all the positions over a number of years.

**Interviewer** [00:46:53] What about you, Mr. Stewart?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:46:55] I was in the same category. I was business agent for three years. President for a short time before I stood for business agent. Prior to that, we were representing the platform men on the executive.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:47:13] Quite a few years too.

**Interviewer** [00:47:20] You were employed all through the Depression too, right?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:47:23] Oh yeah.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:47:25] Yes.

**Interviewer** [00:47:27] How well off were you people that were employed?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:47:32] Well, I would say we were better off during the Depression years. That's another job than everywhere before or since, taking everything into consideration.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:47:41] That is from outside, but I know my wife used to say that we were just about as bad as unemployed during the Depression, because we had so many friends in Vancouver who had been here so long, and they were all out of a job. So there's nothing for the wife to make a dinner for 10 or 12. [unclear] as they call it, was an open house. The unemployed came there by droves, and there'd be no way to turn them away. So sometimes, we were almost as bad off as unemployed, let's put it that way.

**Interviewer** [00:48:20] Well, one thing that seems to me in the minutes of the Council is that during the thirties, the Council got more and more and more conservative.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:48:35] [Coughing] Well, that happened about the twenties, actually.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:48:39] Yes, and we'd kept these too.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:48:41] Yeah.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:48:41] I wouldn't say that the Council as a whole got more conservative but the some of the board men.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:48:51] They're going to fear that their control over the workers was being jeopardized and they put an extra drive on to oppose everything that the left-wing would raise, even though it was in the best interests of them and the trade union movement as a whole. I'll tell you one thing, the press gave these fights, it was carried on quite often in the Trades Council. They gave them prominence that the majority of them didn't really bring to the forefront at all the constructive things that was done in the Council. The best newspaper reporter we had that was in the Council there was Barry Mather. I think it was for the morning newspaper at that time. These battles between the different groups in the Trades Council was secondary as Barry Mather was concerned. The issues that came forward was to help labour generally, at least what he concentrated on. Barry would never, if there was a fight between two factions in the Council, he would never put that report in unless he spoke to both sides and showed them what he was going to put in the paper.

**Interviewer** [00:50:18] How permanently organized was the left-wing caucus in the Trades and Labor Council?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:50:26] I wouldn't say it was very well organized.

**Interviewer** [00:50:31] You don't think so?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:50:32] No, except in ideology that was all. Insofar as any structural form of organization, I don't think that existed.

**Interviewer** [00:50:46] Well, I mean, how regularly did you meet? I mean, was it just every year before elections, or was it?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:50:55] Oh yes, before election time, we quite often did have a meeting, and build the support.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:51:04] But that was quite broad, any meetings that we did hold before the election were quite broad. People like Bill Wilson, and Bill had been a road man, even before that, he was sitting in those offices. And nobody could say that he was a left-wing radical, that he was a good honest trade unionist. Over the years, you see, we'd begun to realize, most of us, people could think differently politically than we did and still be doing a good job for their membership. In the early days we didn't think that. We thought we had to be as politically conscious as we were before they could do a job.

**Interviewer** [00:51:44] You can go back to the —

**Interviewer** [00:51:47] Finishing this up I'm just trying to find out, what about the right-wing? What about the caucus there? Do you know anything about their caucus?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:51:57] I don't know anything about them. I never even heard of them meeting but I'm quite sure they did. [laughter]

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:52:10] They had a slate drawn up for every election for the union and the Trades and Labor Council and all that.

**Interviewer** [00:52:15] I just want to go back a little bit to the particular political organizations. There was the Federated Labor, the FLP, and the ILP and of course the Socialist Party, and various organizations. Now, particularly after the break-up of the Canadian Labor Party, were you supporters of the ILP or the FLP?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:52:42] The Independent Labor Party?

**Interviewer** [00:52:43] Yeah.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:52:47] Well, if you ask us, were we supporting that as an organization, of course we'd say no. But as individuals, we would support any progressive person that was running that we had thought would get a chance of election. That was our policy. But as a trade union affiliated to the American Federation of Labor, of course, we couldn't do that as an organization.

**Interviewer** [00:53:18] Did you maintain any sort of close relations with the CCF when it formed?

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:53:26] Well, the CCF manifesto that was drawn up in Regina was a very good one. I myself supported that. I think that you would too, Charlie. But since that time it's been watered down now, so you wouldn't know it was the same manifesto. In other words, the CCF long before the New Democratic Party got in, they had tried all these years to become respectable, you know. So when you become too respectable, then you don't get the word of the working class. I think that's the trouble with the majority of the members of the New Democratic Party, too. You see, there's an old-country saying in Scotland, 'you're neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring' and I think that sums it up.



You've got to be one thing or another before you're going to get support from the working-class.

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:54:45] Although the establishment of the New Democratic Party I think was a big step forward for the Canadian working people.

**Interviewer** [00:54:56] The establishment of the NDP was?

**Charles McGregor Stewart** [00:54:57] I think so.

**Peter Campbell Munro** [00:54:58] Oh, yes, because Canada is a very backward country politically, and they haven't even learned to work for themselves as a class yet, and that's something that the NDP yet might help to carry on workers to do.