

Interview with Jack Hanson

c. 1964

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Transcribed by Donna Sacuta

Interviewer [00:00:00] Morning with Mr. Jack Hanson, right? You're Mr. Jack Hanson. You came to Rossland in what year?

Jack Hanson [00:00:09] In the fall of 1899.

Interviewer [00:00:10] I see. At that time the union was just formed?

Jack Hanson [00:00:19] No, the union was formed in 1898.

Interviewer [00:00:22] I see.

Jack Hanson [00:00:23] And the union was formed by three men, one from Butte, Montana, by the name of Jim Devine.

Interviewer [00:00:32] How do you spell that?

Jack Hanson [00:00:34] Oh, I don't know. You have to do your own—I-N-E, I guess. The other one was a Cornishman by the name of Billy Willems, that died in, went to South Africa and died out there. And the other man was an Australian by the name of Tom Beswick.

Interviewer [00:01:06] Do you know how to spell that?

Jack Hanson [00:01:08] No, you do your own spelling.

Interviewer [00:01:16] Okay.

Jack Hanson [00:01:16] They formed the union in 1898, and the hall was built when I came there in 1899, the union hall, and it was built by the miners. Each took a share. I think each share was, as I remember rightly, but I'm not sure of this, was \$100 to each miner, and we paid that monthly into the hall.

Jack Hanson [00:01:52] And it was a very fine hall at that time. We all held dances and such like in it. I was in Camp McKinney in the fall, or in February 1899 when the eight-hour law come in. How we got the eight-hour law, the union was formed and a member from that district, by the name of Martin, come down to the union hall and asked for the miners' vote and support.

Jack Hanson [00:02:43] My brother was there at the time, and he told me the conversation that went on. Beswick, the Australian, said to him, "Well, one thing we want is an eight-hour day." The politician threw down his pencil and said, "There's no use in asking for impossibility." Beswick answered him, "To hell with you. That's a Britisher's birthright, and I'm asking it. And if you can't agree with it, we don't want to talk to you." Now, that was Beswick's answer to him. He took it down to Victoria and the lobbying and such like, and he needed his support to stay in the old 'Fightin' Joe' Martin. He needed Jim Martin from Rossland's support, and it went through. But for many years, it wasn't from

bank-to-bank. We practically worked nine hours because we had to go down on our own time and come up on our own time.

Jack Hanson [00:04:17] Now here there was a man by the name of George Dingwall that came into the picture in about, around 1911 or 1912. He was an old-country man and had mined in South Africa and he was well posted in the trade union process. And, he was the man that, whose instigation in bringing about the bank-to-bank law in British Columbia where you can't work a man any more than eight hours underground. That's about — now, what more do you want to know?

Interviewer [00:05:23] Well, what about this strike in 1901?

Jack Hanson [00:05:28] Oh, well, Frank Woodside, that—

Interviewer [00:05:35] Can I get an ashtray? You don't mind if I smoke, do you?

Jack Hanson [00:05:42] Frank Woodside was secretary of the Miners' Union, the man that formed the Chamber of Mines. We asked for \$3 a day for muckers, and the company refused it, and the men went out on strike. If I remember right, it was around the 1st of July. We were out for, oh, until way on in the following spring. I didn't stay around very much. I went to the Slocan and I worked there, and the strike had been there in 1900.

Jack Hanson [00:06:44] When that was over I went up there and I worked at the Enterprise all that winter. I come back and worked at, when the strike was called off, in Rossland. I come back and I worked in the five-compartment shop down the sink in the Le Roi mine. When that was done, I left and I went to the Boundary country, and the union was well organized in Phoenix at that time. A man by the name of Riordan, Jack Riordan was secretary there, and he was a pretty fine man, too. Woodside was all right, too. He was, he done the best he could considering that thousands of people weren't union-minded at that time. You know there was a lot of drifters and they listened to a lot of, a lot stuff that wouldn't impress a man nowadays at all, because any man knows that he'll get nowhere as a worker unless he belongs to a union.

Jack Hanson [00:08:17] Not that I'm, because I've been a mine manager and mine superintendent for years and I always prepared to talk to, to have the union because then if there was anything cropped up I could say to the men, "Well boys, what's your trouble? We'll let us sit down and find out what it's all about." We were, when I come back, here's something that you wanted.

Jack Hanson [00:08:50] When I came back from the Slocan, that was in 1902, I went away to the Boundary country and R. H. Stewart, which was commonly known as Pat Stewart, he was considered the leading mining engineer of British Columbia. Afterwards, he became general manager of CM&S (Consolidated Mining & Smelting) and him and Bill Guernsey completed the zinc process and put the first commercial zinc on the market. When he came to take charge in Rossland in 19, I think it was 1904, but I wasn't in the country at the time, but this is a word that came back to me afterwards.

Jack Hanson [00:09:55] When he came there to take charge, the manager by the name of Kirby, at the Centre Star Mine, handed him a blacklist of all us fellows that belonged to the union. [name unclear] looked at it and said, "Thank you, Mr. Kirby." Walked over and put the blacklist in the stove. Now, this is, you're getting the truth of the thing, because this all took place afterwards. Now, Kirby also had sued the Miners' Union, and there was \$7,000

in the bank of the Miners' Union. And Woodside was blamed for taking that money when he left and come here to the coast. Woodside was not guilty of taking one cent from there, because my brother Billy, a man by the name of Isaac James and a man by the name of Johnny Murray, those men are all dead and gone now, no one can hurt them. That money was taken and split up, taken out of the bank and given to those three men in person because they were very reliable men.

Jack Hanson [00:11:45] They took that money, and there was a liquor wholesaler there by the name of Dan Thomas who ran a wholesale liquor business. They asked Dan Thomas, they didn't want to carry this around and they didn't want to bank it and they did not want the responsibility of it. They asked Dan Thomas if he would put this money safekeeping in his safe for them. And he did. And it remained there for I don't know exactly, but three or four years anyhow.

Interviewer [00:12:29] They did this because, so they couldn't be sued? The company couldn't get the money?

Jack Hanson [00:12:30] Because the company couldn't get the money. You see it was a hideaway for the money. Now, there was a man by the name of Jack Scott, that was around, I think it was 1909. Come into parliament, and Scott was afterwards was killed overseas in the First World War, but he reorganized the union, got the union started again, and he came to those three fellows and they turned that \$7,000 over to Jack Scott. And he reformed the union again and that was the start. Then about 1912 or 1913 or 1914 along there, this man Dingwall come into the picture he ran for socialist member up there in Rossland one time. A very, very fine man was Dingwall. He's dead now. I come out here to see him and the history from that time is commonly known. You can get that from many, from thousands. Does that suit you?

Interviewer [00:14:11] That's very interesting. Now, what did they sue the union for? Was this the connection with the 1901 strike?

Jack Hanson [00:14:22] Yeah, it was the 1901 strike.

Interviewer [00:14:23] But the union lost that strike, didn't they really?

Jack Hanson [00:14:24] Yes, we were starved out. Something I want to bring to your attention. Mackenzie King was deputy minister of labour at that time and he was fetched out, was sent out, to Rossland to investigate the strike. The company's special car met him down in Nelson. Fetched him up to Rossland. He was wined and dined up in the company staff house. He never come down to see the miners at all.

Interviewer [00:15:11] Never saw any miners?

Jack Hanson [00:15:13] Only about an hour he spent with us walking up and down and asking us to go back to work or something and went back to Ottawa and said the strike was not justified. That's Mackenzie King.

Interviewer [00:15:29] I know of him. He also helped break some strikes in the States. He helped break some strikes in the States, in the oil workers. Were you in the meeting with Mackenzie King?

Jack Hanson [00:15:43] No, but —

Interviewer [00:15:45] Who met with him?

Jack Hanson [00:15:52] Woodside was one, but Frank is not coherent now. He's in a nursing home and he's 90 years old. But Frank was there, and Frank told me what took place. He said, "King done nothing, only suggest to us that we were out on the limb and for us to go back to work."

Interviewer [00:16:19] So, but if you didn't know at the time he was going to be Prime Min— you didn't know at the time he was gonna be the Prime Minister that— [talking over each other]

Jack Hanson [00:16:31] I don't know. I don't think that he'd make a good scavenger.

Interviewer [00:16:37] Did you pay much attention to him at the time? Did the unions pay much attention to him?

Jack Hanson [00:16:40] No, no, they knew that he was a stooge. There was some, mind you, things was rough and tough in those times. There was six men killed in one week because they belonged to the union in the Coeur d'Alene. Frank Woodside pretty near lost his life.

Interviewer [00:17:09] How was that?

Jack Hanson [00:17:10] Well, he was going down to Northport, and that was during the strike. The strike was on in Northport of the smelter towns too, you see.

Interviewer [00:17:22] What year? Do you remember the year?

Jack Hanson [00:17:25] It would be 1902. You see the strike— No, it would be 1901, because the strike was on that summer. It would have been in the fall of 1901. Frank was going to go down to Northport, and a chap by the name of Hafton, Charlie Hafton, that was killed in Los Angeles by an automobile about five years ago and his uncle was the manager of the Nickel Plate Mine. He had the phone call, he took the phone call from Northport, that the gunmen, company gunmen were waiting for Woodside in Northport. He got up to the depot in time for to tell Woodside to not go, to stay around. But they shot the secretary of the union in Northport, that day. And he died about, he shot him through the stomach and he died about a month or so after. Now, that's old stuff that's been forgotten, but you'll have it.

Interviewer [00:19:04] We want to have it all on the record. We want to have it all on the record you know.

Jack Hanson [00:19:09] I don't give a damn what you do with it. It's the truth, and it's just old stuff that I know about.

Interviewer [00:19:20] What about this guy, Billy the Pig?

Jack Hanson [00:19:24] Billy who?

Interviewer [00:19:26] This manager, assistant manager or something.

Jack Hanson [00:19:29] Oh, that is Billy Thompson. He was the assistant manager to old Barney MacDonald at the Le Roi.

Interviewer [00:19:43] They suggested that he was sort of hired by the company and once he came in, the union men, he was pretty notorious, and this got the backs up of the union men. Is that right?

Jack Hanson [00:19:58] I don't know that.

Interviewer [00:20:00] You don't know that, eh?

Jack Hanson [00:20:01] No, I don't know that at all. There's no one ever who went from the company to back up the union that I know of.

Interviewer [00:20:11] No, what I mean was that the company hired him, when the company hired him and people knew he was anti-union and that disgust the men's back up. They get annoyed at him being hired.

Jack Hanson [00:20:36] I don't think so. I don't know of anything of that.

Interviewer [00:20:40] You don't eh?

Jack Hanson [00:20:41] No, and I don't know the man nicknamed that. So it was a man by the name of Jack Hand had done a lot of dirty work there, he was a very strong union man, and went to work strikebreaking and got a cushy job of course while he was working for and wound up—he went away down to Arizona still strikebreaking the last I heard of him.

Interviewer [00:21:31] What about spies and so on? What's his name [unclear] I forget his name right now. It's a Jack somebody else. A doctor, he's an engineer, you may know him. He was telling me that there was a lot of spies and so on.

Jack Hanson [00:21:54] Oh yes, the company had it, the mine was full of it. This fellow, Hand was one of them. There was, you have to give Woodside credit, he handled the strike all right, because there was two [unclear] sent in from Colorado to kill Barney MacDonald, the manager of the Le Roi. Woodside, they came to Woodside and Woodside kept them hid up down in the miners' union hall for about a week and then got rid of them back down to the American side. Now, they were sent on purpose for to do that job from some Denver, Colorado, they came from.

Interviewer [00:23:00] From the union? Don't know, eh?

Jack Hanson [00:23:06] I'm not putting the union on the spot at all.

Interviewer [00:23:12] Well, were the meetings—I get the impression that the meetings pretty well had to be held on the sly, you know, secretly. The meetings.

Jack Hanson [00:23:24] Oh, in the Coeur d'Alene country, at the time when they were organized, they used to hold a meeting under a bridge way up above Boise.

Interviewer [00:23:34] What about in Rossland?

Jack Hanson [00:23:36] No, no. We were always too tough for them there. We met in [unclear]. No son of a bitch ever backed us down. And when I became more education and got better job, I never hired a strikebreaker, never allowed them on my job.

Interviewer [00:24:11] What about this election campaign? Do you remember this, electing Joe Martin?

Jack Hanson [00:24:19] Jim Martin. Old Joe Martin was the premier at that time. 'Old fighting Joe'. That was around 1918 or 1919 that.

Interviewer [00:24:27] Jim Martin?

Jack Hanson [00:24:29] Jim Martin.

Interviewer [00:24:30] What about the—you remember how you got him in?

Jack Hanson [00:24:35] Well, he got our vote because he promised it, I have repeated and told you that story, when Beswick, the Australian, asked for the eight-hour day. And he said, "We'll put it down," but he said, "I don't think there'll be anything that will come of it." Well, Beswick said, "That's the Britishers' birthright, and we want it, we're asking for it." Now that was Beswick's words to him. He took it down to Victoria in the government session and old Joe Martin wanted his support to stay in there as premier. In order for him to get Jim Martin's support, he had to give Jim Martin the eight-hour law because Jim Martin couldn't come back to us in Rossland without it. Because we had put him in. You get the angle now?

Interviewer [00:25:45] Well, I would say, was it just a matter of passing the word along? The campaign, was it just a matter of passing the word to all the miners and getting them out to vote?

Jack Hanson [00:25:57] Yes, we meet down there and we just said, "Well, we have got the proposal for the eight-hour law, and Martin says he'll support it, and we'll support Martin, and he got a solid union vote.

Interviewer [00:26:19] Was there any campaign that the union officially backed him?

Jack Hanson [00:26:25] No, no, no. The union just told them they'd, and we got voting to a man.

Interviewer [00:26:39] What about—Martin ran as an oppositionist, didn't he, or how did he run?

Jack Hanson [00:26:47] There was no party politics at that time. You would just run—

Interviewer [00:26:57] The candidate?

Jack Hanson [00:26:59] With the candidate. There was no party politics.

Interviewer [00:26:59] When did socialism, when did they start, when did the miners start becoming socialists?

Jack Hanson [00:27:13] Oh that didn't get into effect for until around the beginning—Marx's works and one thing or another. I read it a way back in 1909, Capital and Labor, and god knows where that book went to. It went to a hundred different men, passed from one to the other. I bought it, and the man, what the hell was the name of that man, he went through as a lawyer and he run as a socialist.

Interviewer [00:27:44] Pritchard?

Interviewer [00:27:46] No, that's not his name. He was a lawyer.

Interviewer [00:27:49] I know the one you mean. Lefeaux.

Jack Hanson [00:27:53] That's the man, you got him. Lefeaux sent me that book.

Interviewer [00:27:59] He did, eh?

Jack Hanson [00:28:00] Yes. I read it, and I gave it around to my friends, and they read it and so on and so forth.

Interviewer [00:28:06] And that just sort of passed around.

Jack Hanson [00:28:07] Yeah, and once it went around, I don't know where it went. I'd like to know where it went. When my brother died in Butte, Montana in 1959, I went over there and buried him. He's buried in Butte. That's Billy, the fellow that had that money of the union. In his old effects, I found his old union card and his badge, and I sent that over to, I gave it to George Dingwall. George comes to see me, and he told me he'd give it to a man by the name of Walker.

Interviewer [00:28:52] I want to write this down, because we're looking for old records.