

Stanley [Grizzle]: [silence] So when you returned to the cars-- What's that?

Oliver [Oliver Davis]: When we returned to the cars, we went to bed-bed hungry that evening.

Stanley: Really? You were refused food?

Oliver: Yes, sir.

Stanley: And you went to the restaurant? And what did they tell you, huh?

Oliver: Just right out, "No, we don't serve you people."

Stanley: Okay. [unintelligible 00:00:27] Now speaking of deadheading, do you remember deadheading and-and being- the car- the car you-you were assigned to for the subsequent trip, you'd have to make your own heat, provide your own heat with a baker heater?

Oliver: Exactly.

Stanley: Um, how do we heat those cars? What-what was put in the baker heater? I just forgot--

Oliver: Yes, the cars were set up by servicemen in the yards.

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: In-in-in-in those days every time a car would-w-would stop off anywhere-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -someone in-in-in-in the department would check the furnaces.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: And if they had been used, they would reset them.

Stanley: With what?

Oliver: That is charcoal-

Stanley: Oh, yeah.

Oliver: -uh, paper. Uh, uh, then the amount of coal that would fall would be set in a way-

Stanley: Mm.

Oliver: -where by the time the paper and the charcoal get ready, this coal would fall down on it.

Stanley: I see.

Oliver: And it was done very, very, um, scientifically, really...

Stanley: I seem to remember it being in uh, on the siding in Sudbury, and waking up, and the car was very cold. Can you remember being in that position?

Oliver: Oh, many, many times. That-that-that particular night-

Stanley: Uh-huh.

Oliver: -the particular night, when I say we went to bed-- When-when I say we went to bed hungry, we didn't only go to bed hungry, we couldn't take our clothes off-

Stanley: Yeah, right.

Oliver: -because this was the night, two nights before New Year's.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: And-and half the yardmen, the guys in the yard, were drunk. They didn't hook us up.

Stanley: [laughs]

Oliver: They didn't hook us up.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: So we went to sleep with just blankets over us, with our grey--

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: I remember having uh, grey coats on.

Stanley: Yeah, right, right.

Oliver: Great big coats, everything. [crosstalk]--

Stanley: What happens-- So I have a faint recollection of that, but I went into the army after that, you see, for four years, and then that experience sort of wore off.

Oliver: Yeah.

Stanley: When I came back, things had changed a bit. But uh, that's why I'm asking to get my memory refreshed on-on this conditions that we had to go through, yeah.

Oliver: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: Yes. Okay, a member of the committee which helped to found the union in-in Toronto? The organizing committee?

Oliver: I was a member. I was not a member of the organizing committee. [crosstalk]

Stanley: Oh, I see. Okay.

Oliver: As I recollect.

Stanley: Oh, I see. Do you remember who the leaders were organizing the union in Toronto?

Oliver: Yes, Charlie Baldwin-

Stanley: Uh-huh.

Oliver: -was the first that comes to mind.

Stanley: Uh-huh.

Oliver: I believe the very first who had anything to do with contacting the President of the Pullman Porter's Union at that time, um--

Stanley: Randall?

Oliver: Randall.

Stanley: Well, uh--

Oliver: If I recall correctly, it was uh, it was Charlie Baldwin who made contact with the New York Office.

Stanley: Do you believe Charlie Baldwin was--was--

Oliver: I believe that Charlie Baldwin was not an intellectual. He may not have had the uh, the educational background of most of the men around the leadership at that time. But Charlie was dedicated. He was a guy that had no fear. And he knew and believed deeply that it wasn't right for us to be treated, as employees of the railroad, the way we were.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Before I forget--

Oliver: And-and-and-and I want to say this, that Charlie was not the type of guy that would make sure things are in writing, and that they would be kept for posterity and that sort of thing. All Charlie thought about was accomplishing something at the moment. In all probability-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -Charlie probably made his first contact by telephone. As a matter of fact, I believe it was.

Stanley: Okay. Yeah, well I-I uh-uh. I was trying to get that- to get that point straight, because I've heard three stories. Harry Gairey was the- was the founder of the Union. Charlie Baldwin was the initial contactor with- and then this man in Montreal. And I've been through everything, and I can find--

Oliver: W-when was Harry Gairey the-- Harry Gairey was what?

Stanley: Didn't you read his book?

Oliver: Oh, man, you know, that-that-that-- Harry Gairey, at that point in time, stayed as close to, the porter instructor's name, who's just-just escaped me for the moment.

Stanley: Cyril.

Oliver: Cyril.

Stanley: Woods.

Oliver: Woods, as possible. He wasn't doing anything with the-- As-as a matter of fact, his early-- Between you and I, his early outings, where he came out to meetings was under suspicion by many of the- of-of-of the members at that time.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: As to whether or not he was doing some spying.

Stanley: Well, how come Lenny Johnson said that he did have something- he was an organizer? Lenny was here too. He was?

Oliver: No, Lenny wasn't on the road yet.

Stanley: He wasn't?

Oliver: I'm talking about-- No, no.

Stanley: Oh, he wasn't on the road yet? Because I was talking to him one day and he said, "Yeah, Harry was involved." Yeah, he was-- **[unintelligible 00:06:44]**.

Oliver: Well, I don't-- I-I-I--

Stanley: You started the year, '41? '40?

Oliver: '39.

Stanley: Oh man, yeah, I started at '42. '40, no I started at '40. That's right, '40. And Johnson, he started at '40. He was behind you, yes. [crosstalk]--

Oliver: Well, I'm talking about my earliest recollection of-of-of the union and the movement-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -and-and-and so on-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -was, I remember the first thing I can recall hearing about it, Stan, was that uh, we had tried. A group of-of porters in-in-in Toronto, I believe. Now that might not be so, it

might have been Vancouver or-or Winnipeg or even Montreal, I don't know. But had tried and applied for membership in the Labour-- Canadian Labour Forces- Railroad Forces at that time, and were denied entry.

Stanley: I see.

Oliver: And it was after that avenue was cut off to us, that we- an attempt was made--

Stanley: Like I- like I got that all documented. Yeah, I know- I know what you're talking about.

Oliver: Yeah.

Stanley: There were no-no labour laws at the time. And that's, that's- that's the key. It wasn't until the war that the Queen-

Oliver: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: The Queen came here and okayed legislation which would give worker's protection. I mean--

Oliver: Is that right?

Stanley: Oh, yes.

Oliver: I didn't know.

Stanley: Yeah, I got the documents. I think [unintelligible 00:08:19] alluded to it in his speech to the convention when he went to the first convention [unintelligible 00:08:24] his whole speech within- in the, uh- in the uh, what I've written up. Oh, I want to ask you one question before we go on. Did we, in-in the early days before the union, in the dining car, was there a curtain separating the porters from the- from the passengers? [crosstalk]--

Oliver: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: Pardon?

Oliver: Yeah.

Stanley: There was, wasn't there?

Oliver: Yes, there was.

Stanley: Yes, okay.

Oliver: But-but-but-but shortly after the war-

Stanley: Mm-hmm

Oliver: -came the practices [unintelligible 00:08:53].

Stanley: But that's when the Brotherhood came in. It was after the war that the Brotherhood--

Oliver: I-I-I-- you know--

Stanley: The Brotherhood was established in '43. The war didn't finish until '44, '45.

Oliver: '45.

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: Uh, oh no, it didn't last that long. I-I-I-I-I think- I think somebody, some official-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -who--whoever would have that kind of authority-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -to stop or continue that kind of thing-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -at that time. Seeing the handwriting.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: I think-- I don't think it came down to-to-to a-a situation, Stan, where, "We demand. We want these curtains taken down." I don't think it-

Stanley: No.

Oliver: -ever got to that. Not to my recollection.

Stanley: Well, that seems to-- [chuckles] I can already-already accept that because, I'm-I'm going over the seniority list across Canada, and I find that the first White porters were hired by the CPR after the Brotherhood started organizing. You know? So things began to happen, because as you used to say, the-the handwriting was on the wall. Okay, so much for that, um. So who all were the other organizers of the union? Between-- Charlie Baldwin was, you said, the leader...

Oliver: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: you've indicated, you even used that word he was "The leader," but uh, who were the others who helped to organize the porters in Ca- in Toronto?

Oliver: Well, of course, there was- there-there-there-there-there-there-there-there-there were so many supporters.

Stanley: Not supporters now, I'm talking about the key men who were-

Oliver: The key men?

Stanley: -signing men up.

Oliver: Uh Ted, it would have to be Ted Grey.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: Um.

Stanley: Keep talking.

Oliver: Uh, uh Stenson. Um, my goodness ... Chevalier.

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: I'm not sure about McNichol whether McNichol was active at that time. I-I don't know.

Stanley: Uh-huh. Alright. Was there any resistance to organizing the porters in their uh, uh, uh, amongst the porters? Uh, uh, the atmosphere, how was it? Acceptable to--?

Oliver: There-there-there-there-there was- there was resistance. Now whether or not the resistance was real or imaginary, I don't know, but it was there. It-it-it existed. You could feel it.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: And-and-and-and the consensus was to keep, in-in the early days, was to keep this information to ourselves.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: Don't tell anybody about it, even those that might be considered porters, but outside of the interests of-of the organization.

Stanley: I saw Benny Green at George McCarthy's funeral, and he was telling me that he recalls his first trip going West, Cyril Woods came to him and told him, "They're gonna approach you out West to join the union. Don't join." Do you know anything about that?

Oliver: By-by-by, um, no. No. But I'll tell you though, it-it-it-it-it kind of strengthens, and-and I don't mean this in honest to goodness in any derogatory way at all, but concern, kind of consolidates my-my point about Harry Gairey's early-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -workings in the- in the organization.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: I don't know, if-if-if-if-it took place. I don't know.

Stanley: Do you recall?--

Oliver: I-I-I know- I know we had early meetings. I remember- I remember one meeting we had. We had a meeting at the Mercury's. The reason we-we-we-we had it at the Mercury's is-is--

Stanley: Mercury family?

Oliver: Yeah.

Stanley: Oh.

Oliver: We met at their- at their house and uh, I can't remember the exact circumstances, but there was reason to believe that the-the authorities knew we were gonna to have this particular meeting, and the meeting would-would have taken place down the street at what-his-name's place. Thank goodness. They just lived down the street from-from the Mercury's. They-the-the we were going to have the meeting at Kirkwood's, see?

Stanley: Oh, yeah.

Oliver: And-and-and as I talk, it comes to me even more-- I think, I think Kirkwood got a little--

Stanley: Scared.

Oliver: Yeah. And-and-and-and it was arranged to-to have the meeting at the Mercury's.

Stanley: But Mercury wasn't on the road though, was he? Mr. Mercury?

Oliver: No, but Mercury was working in the yards, you see.

Stanley: Oh, I see.

Oliver: For the- for the company.

Stanley: Do you remember a fella by the name of, uh- of, uh, Bell? Cousin of, um, Bev Salmon, being involved? Arthur Bell.

Oliver: Arthur Bell?

Stanley: He was going to university at the time.

Oliver: Arthur Bell? No.

Stanley: Well, I-I've got some correspondence which reveals that the following three people were involved who weren't porters were BJ Spencer Pitt, was encouraging in the movement. Um, BJ Spencer Pitt. Um, Alan Moisten and his family were very supportive of-of Randolph and the movement. And uh, Arthur Bell had a small hand in [unintelligible 00:14:55].

Oliver: Was that right?

Stanley: Yeah. Have you seen him since he's been here? Arthur Bell? Art Bell? Well, he's back here now. He was living in Europe for a long time, he's back. [silence] Okay--

Oliver: Well, I could certainly believe that to be true of--of Alan Moisten, I'll tell you that.

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: Well that's--

Stanley: Do you know of any uh, the names of any organizers in--in the other districts? Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver? Any idea who the organizers were?

Oliver: Yeah, of course I got to know them. I got to know them as--as time went on. Um, my problem is I--

Stanley: You're doing okay.

Oliver: --my--my memory sucks. I--I can't--

Stanley: You're doing fine.

Oliver: --I can't think of the names of these people that-- But, yes, I--I got to know them in every-- in every main city, which is Montreal, Toronto uh, [crosstalk] Winnipeg, Calgary.

Stanley: Dash, Marcus Dash. Yeah.

Oliver: Marcus Dash um, and of course uh, even my cousin came into the union. He became president of--of the Canadian--

Stanley: Blanchette?

Oliver: Blanchette.

Stanley: Oh--oh yeah. That's Winnipeg. He was in Winnipeg at the time.

Oliver: And um--

Stanley: I see.

Oliver: And uh, I wish I could remember the name of the guy who died shortly after the union got started. He was very active in Winnipeg. What--what was? A--a great supporter. And I believe, the man that, uh, Blanchette has admitted to helping him a great deal.

Stanley: Oh, you mean his--his uncle? Robinson?

Oliver: Robinson.

Stanley: Oh yeah. Yeah, he retired, yeah.

Oliver: He was very influential.

Stanley: Well, I've got him in the record, yeah.

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: You know, I'm turning this off a minute. [sound cut] **[unintelligible 00:17:03]** Yeah, especially amongst the older men who had been through it, yeah. Okay, so much for the organizing, and were there any- were there any problems that you can recall during the organization? Were there- were there any threats or intimidation made by management, do you recall?

Oliver: Uh--

Stanley: Even today I might point out that when organizers, with my experience at the Labour Board, management very often gets involved and threatens employees if they join. Do you recall that happening?

Oliver: Oh, yes. There were- there were uh-- I-I-I'm trying to think of the- I'm trying to think of the-- It's a-a problem that had arisen in Winnipeg with, uh- Goodness, what's those brothers' names- one or two--

Stanley: Walker? Walker brothers?

Oliver: No, not Walkers.

Stanley: Williams?

Oliver: Williams.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. You know Roy died, eh?

Oliver: Yeah. But Williams, now I don't know which one it was-

Stanley: Carl?

Oliver: -but there was- there was- there was a-- No, no, not, not Carl. Carl's the oldest boy, they were a bunch. One of the younger guys had-- Oh, I wish I could bring the circumstances to me, but I-I-I can't. But he was-- he was threatened-

Stanley: By whom?

Oliver: -and-and, um, by management-

Stanley: Oh yeah.

Oliver: -in Winnipeg.

Stanley: Mm.

Oliver: [silence] He was threatened. He-- he was a quiet- one of the quiet boys, but he was a good- he was one of the best organizers in terms of putting things on paper-

Stanley: Oh yeah.

Oliver: -and-and-and getting it together for organizing.

Stanley: There's three more- two or three more areas I want to cover, and that is the benefits of the union to the porters; the benefit of the union to the community, the Black community, and the benefit of the union to the White community. Do you have any-- Can you comment on the first point?

Oliver: What?

Stanley: What benefit do you think that the porters union brought to the porter ranks?

Oliver: Well, if nothing else, it certainly gave us a feeling of dignity and independence, and-- I don't know whether you can measure the benefits, but if you could there-- there were many Stan, in that it-it-it brought us together. It created an awareness in most of us. We developed confidence. We felt that we were doing something for ourselves, and our-- our uh, uh, co-workers and their families. And I don't know how you can measure that kind of thing. It was just enormous. It was uh, uh, uh, a tremendous uplifting.

Stanley: Right. Do you think that the going beyond the porter rights, do you think the Black community benefited by the porters' union being present?

Oliver: I-I-I think so Stan in that uh, those things I mentioned, along with many others would benefit, if it benefit-- Uh, well-well, the porters were the majority of-- of Black employees in the Toronto area at that time, unlike today. And, of course, the Black community or-- or-- or the-- the-- the railroad porters and their families, and their friends, and their relatives--

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -all benefitted by this-- this protection that was developed by this.

Stanley: What about the White community? The White trade unions and the White community in general, do you think they had anything to gain by having the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

Oliver: In that again, it's difficult to measure, but in that, that as a result of-- of-- of-- of the porters' union coming on the scene and being recognized--

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: -by other organizations, we-- we were often asked to be part of other organizations' affairs--

Stanley: That's a good point--

Oliver: For-- for-- for-- for-- for example, I can recall when, um, when Bellefonte came here as a speaker in uh, at the uh, what's the name of the great hall down there at the street?

Stanley: Massey Hall?

Oliver: Mm-mm, no, not Massey Hall down-down on Front street there.

Stanley: O'Keefe?

Oliver: O'Keefe Centre. O-O-O-O'Keefe Centre. And I remember again, Bob Willis couldn't be in town, and-and he asked me, would I represent the-the union and be there? And this is when I met uh, Bellefonte. And he came here to speak to this Jewish organization. B'nai Brith was another thing.

Oliver: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: Uh, about the-the-the-the situation in-in-in the States at that time, regarding discrimination.

Stanley: So, in summary, you think the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters did uh, or did not make a positive contribution?

Oliver: I would say in every sense of the word they did. Yes.

Stanley: How about in the area of civil rights and human rights, labour uh, legislation, you think they--?

Oliver: Well-well all of that led into these other areas, because we, for the first time-- And I guess this is sad to say. And-and-and-and-and I'm just assuming this, that the vast majority of us had not been aware of what was going on around us and to us.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Right.

Oliver: To the same degree that we, we were after we became aware as-as a result of the, uh the porters' union in a way. You've heard the name Fadeaway, have you not?

Stanley: Fadeaway. Yes. Who was it?

Oliver: Fadeaway? I can't remember Fadeaway's real name. That's all we ever called him was Fadeaway.

Stanley: Yeah.

Oliver: But Fadeaway was kind of a street type guy, you know, who looked after his job, and did what he was supposed to do in order to-to get along. But uh, we had a very long train this day, terribly long train. Man, that thing was middle of the war. People were moving and everything was at a premium. And this lady came to Fadeaway's car, and she said, "Porter, for God's sake, how much farther is it to the dining car?" Now we had just got up, you know, and we're-we're-we're shifting around. We don't know where the dining, you didn't know where they're gonna put the dining cars in. You didn't even know if there was dining car on at the time.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Oliver: Sometimes, in some trips in those situations, we would pull out, don't have no damn dining car. We have to stop somewhere, and let these people g-g-get off and go up into town and get something to eat.

Stanley: Mm.

Oliver: All sorts of things happened, unusual things. And uh, he told her that he just didn't know. And she says, "Well, what do you mean you don't know where the dining?" And she kept arguing with him, and he's putting away these beds. And-and-and at one point he got a little disgusted with her, and says, "Well madam, look, if-if-if-if you'll just wait, I'll call you a cab."

Stanley: [laughs]

Oliver: Would you believe Fadeaway got fired for that?

Stanley: He did?

Oliver: Yep.

Stanley: [laughs]

[pause 00:26:46]