

[silence]

Interviewer 1 [Distorted sound]: [Unintelligible], did you get anything after you retired, like a ring or anything like that?

Respondent 1: Oh, no, they didn't give me any appreciations or anything like that. You just went on the automatic pension. No, that wasn't, uh, that wasn't the days where they give you a gold watch or something like that.

Interviewer 2: Okay. Well, you saw a-a-a-a-a number of changes as far as the-the, uh, porter or the railway men's, um, working conditions were concerned then, didn't you?

Respondent 1: Oh, well, that was quite true because in 1924, I saw where, uh, sleeping car business, uh, was not yet at its heights. It was just, uh, beginning, and so I saw it up to the point, up to the peak, and then it starts sliding down and getting on the other side of its peak. So I lived through that.

Interviewer 1: Oh, right.

Respondent 1: Yes.

Interviewer 1: What were, uh-- say, what were the improvements that did come about?

Respondent 1: Oh, there was, uh, numerous improvements on the sleeping car and, uh, well, everything else. Otherwise, your dining car service got better or your sleeping car service got better with better equipment, you see, until the peak come and-- Well, just this local alone, where you got to travel local, um, we used to have 402 men to operate the trains out of Toronto that just had regular lines. And then, in the summertime, there would be about 150 or more that are needed for the summer. So we had 550 men out of this local-local division.

Interviewer 1: Well, what would you say they improved? What was the-the improved condition?

Respondent 1: Well, not the-- Well, the new, uh, modern cars. And what? Uh, they were easier to operate, I would say. And, uh, well, that was the improvement. With the improvement in working conditions, well, they didn't improve, working conditions didn't improve until after '46.

Interviewer 1: Is that when the union came in?

Respondent 1: Yes, yes.

Interviewer 1: Wow.

Respondent 1: But before that, we'd start-- we invited, uh, Mr. A. Phillip Randolph over here, which he had started. Uh, he had a contract with Pullman Company in the United States. So we invited him over here, uh, to see what he could help us out with. And so while we were about two years organizing before-- no, longer than that, four years before we come under the contract is that--

Interviewer 1: Was it easy to organize?

Respondent 1: No, no, not that time. You had to do it in a sneaky way. Yeah, I was threatened.

Interviewer 1: Really?

Respondent 1: I was threatened, yeah. Uh, a man from the office, not the superintendent, one of his office staff, he says, "I heard that you're organizing, uh, a labor union or getting started." I said, "Oh, no." And I said, "Oh, no." I said, "I'll keep away from that." So he said, "Well, good because, uh, we don't want you to get mixed up with the union. We wanna be able to take care of you." [laughs] So, oh, yeah, we had to sneak around to do that.

Interviewer 1: Really?

Respondent 1: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: Um, then how did you go about getting organized then?

Respondent 1: Well, uh, obviously, the King, the King and Queen come over and-and they made it legal, uh, the next year or two years after we started to get organized. And then, uh, and then the law is at the same as at the present time. They're not supposed to intimidate you if you're trying to organize, you see.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: Well, until that, we-we wasn't safe, you see.

Interviewer 1: I see, yeah.

Respondent 1: So we lived through that period about two years before this.

Interviewer 1: Well, that is such a gap.

Respondent 1: Uh, an organized group that would accept you, which at that time is early days that we're talking about. Uh, well, say that the train mans, they were organized. Trainmans, engineers, firemans, and brakemans. They were organized, but it wasn't easy to get in the unions. They called it a craft. And unless you belong to that craft, well, you was-- you wasn't eligible. And so that was true with a lot of, uh, big unions, you see, but the smaller unions didn't come up until later.

Interviewer 1: And is this why you had to, uh, approach Randolph in the States?

Respondent 1: Yes, yes, that's true. Uh, the Canadian National had a union of their dining cars and sleeping cars, uh, but they had-- you were classed. You had four different classes. And-and-and the porters was classed A, B, C, D, and E. I don't- I don't recall the E, but they were in D, you see. So we didn't like that wording.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: And-and it was true, all after many years that, I think, through some arbitration of the federal government, that they found-- a big investigation, they found that their own union was discriminating against--against crafts you see, like dining car, sleeping car, other craft, lending handlers or something like that. And it was on-only unions that made the difference.

Interviewer 1: Oh.

Respondent 1: So that was the reason why we invited Randolph over.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: And then it'd taken him quite a while to get organized with the government here, you see, to be able to represent union here. So he wanted his own unions and--and the government wished him to just use one of the unions that was already set up here in the-- in operation. But he insisted that he wanted his own, so then he'd become International.

Interviewer 1: I see.

Respondent 1: You see, before, he was just national, United States.

Interviewer 1: And the name of that union became?

Respondent 1: Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters which it was, so we just accepted the name, you see?

Interviewer 1: I see.

Respondent 1: But it went In-International, you see.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: We added the-- just another spoke to the wheel. [chuckles]

Interviewer 1: I see. Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: Yeah. [unintelligible 00:06:41] uh, our dues was volunteer, and so I was one of them. Uh, used to, every payday, go down to the station and collect dues, you see. And you'd get 10 to pay out and the 10 would fall back. [laughs] It was one of these things they kept on until the checkoff come into existence. So that was, uh, that was quite a thing. But I was, uh, we were so afraid that anytime the management would call for a-a check, if you didn't have 50%, 51% of members, well then, they-they could not honour your-your contract, you see. So we-we stayed right on the borderline pretty-pretty scared-scared sometimes, but they never did. They never did.

Interviewer 1: Um, what about the management after the union came in? What was their attitude towards the men?

Respondent 1: Well, it changed, it was like night and day too. They changed. They knew they had to recognize your contract, you see.

Interviewer 1: Right.

Respondent 1: Your working rules and so forth.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: They had the same book that we had and so that made quite a difference. Well, it's, uh, for a while that a few of 'em, they didn't want to recognize that, but, uh, they come into it after, yeah.

Interviewer 1: You held an executive position with the union too didn't you?

Respondent 1: I was on various committees. My first job was on the Sick Committee. And then I got promoted up to, uh, Grievance on the Grievance Committee. That's where we used to have the court hearings and other stuff, you know, and write statements for your fellow employee that was in trouble and help them out that way. And, uh, the next time, I run for Secretary-Treasurer, after one chap, our original Secretary-Treasurer, uh, he resigned and so I accepted nomination and I got it. I held that for six years. And, uh, Mr. Grizzle, he, uh, he would like to be Secretary-Treasurer, and so I didn't run against him. So he was Secretary-Treasurer until he, uh, he resigned from, uh, the railroad and he went into, uh, Labour Department, Ontario, Labour Department. And so I just accepted it back without even running. No one else wanted the job.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: So I accepted it back. [chuckles] So-- and still, I'm- I'm still Secretary-Treasurer.

Interviewer 1: Really?

Respondent 1: But this Sept-September, I didn't run anymore. This is convention year, and so every third year, we re-elect, uh, well, all officers, and so I didn't stand for re-election.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm. Uh, do you see a big change in the entire rail-rail-railway now?

Respondent 1: Oh, yes, I think, uh, as far as passenger service, as far as sleeping car service, I think that's gone forever. You know, I don't think that'll ever be back. Like short runs or something, like parlor cars, comfortable cars between Toronto and Montreal, daytime. But sleeping cars, uh, it'll take a hundred years if that ever come back.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: Not as long as the planes fly. Everybody, we're living in a different age now. Everybody wanna do things fast.

Interviewer 1: Right.

Respondent 1: And, uh, it takes too much time from Toronto to Vancouver. Uh, three whole nights-- uh, three whole nights, and four days. [chuckles] It's-- it's nice if, you know, if you

got time to relax, but the industry today, they can't afford to have a man, uh, leave his office for-- go to Vancouver and back just to do a half an hour's work in Vancouver.

Interviewer 1: Right.

Respondent 1: [chuckles] So, uh, the time has changed but I don't think sleeping car business will never be up to much anymore. [chuckles]

Interviewer 1: Yeah. How long were you--

Respondent 1: I started here in April, 1924, for the Canadian Pacific Railway, sleeping car department. Well, at that time it was sleeping, diner, parlor and news service.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 1: But now all that's been changed now, but that's the way it was, that department at that time. And, uh, I think I mentioned it before, that we had 400 and odd, uh, porters at that time out of Toronto. Now it's dropped down to, uh, 25 the year round, or less. [chuckles] So I think I mentioned it before, I think sleeping car business, as far as-as the Western world is concerned, uh, have just about had it. There'll never be sleeping cars like they were before.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 2: [clears throat] Yes, uh, there are. I know you've heard of 'em, the Oxford Group. Well, that was the time they, uh, just set up the Oxford Group in Canada. It's, uh, uh, England, uh, set up before. And so they were introducing it to Canadians, in which the Canadians had to had it set up. So [sound cut] that stopping all along the way, such as Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, overnight. And then I stayed with them for 21 days in Victoria and back. That-that was, uh, that was the nicest party that I've ever had, you know, like the whole party.

Interviewer 2: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 2: And the cleanest people-- I didn't have to do any work about anything. [laughs] And so, i-it-it was a pleasure, really, to handle such people. And I met so many of 'em since. In fact, I met one not too long ago-

Interviewer 1: Really?

Respondent 2: When I was working for Park Plaza, up on the roof.

Interviewer 1: Uh-huh.

Respondent 2: Yeah. Uh, so if I can think of his name, uh, you know, [unintelligible 00:13:10] to the session one-one evening. But something happened on the yards that we were in and we didn't get switched off, the car didn't get switched off 'cause they slept on the car. They used to come back. They used the cars as a hotel. And I couldn't get to go but, uh, I think they gave me a couple of books which I should have around the place. But, uh, the kids take away the books, you know.

Interviewer 1: Really?

Respondent 2: One daughter and two sons. [laughs] There it is. Uh, the year '31, the Depression hit, well, all-all-all of the world, I guess. But anyway, uh, I thought we had, uh, uh, a nice social life because the children was growing up. We went to Centre Island, um, May Island, Toronto Island, uh, Kew Beach, Hyde Park. We would-- you know, three, four of us get together, three, four couples and their families and-and go to the park on Sundays with the jars of, uh, potato salad. [laughs] So that's, uh-- I-I think, uh, our social life was fairly nice.

Interviewer 1: Mm-hmm.

Respondent 2: Yeah.

[silence]

[00:15:48] [END OF AUDIO]