

Stanley Grizzle: Continuation of, eh, interview with Robert Jamerson of Winnipeg on the 5th of November 1987. Right now, em, can you tell me who were the-the key organizers of the union in Montreal?

Robert Jamerson: I don't know.

Stanley: You don't know?

Robert: No.

Stanley: I thought you knew.

Robert: Uh-huh. That's too far away from me.

Stanley: I see. How about Calgary?

Robert: The key organizers in Calgary? Let me see who was it now? I did know who was in Calgary and also in Montreal. I mean, uh, Vancouver.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: But it's been so long I done forgot.

[pause 00:01:00]

Stanley: Uh, did any of the White porters who were hired subsequently to the union coming in ever object to paying dues to the-to the union because of its Black leadership?

Robert: huh? No, I don't kn-- None in Winnipeg, uh, 'cause they knew that if they didn't pay dues, they wasn't a paid up member. The Brotherhood wouldn't, uh, wouldn't-wouldn't recognize you and the company could just fine.

Stanley: Mm-hmm, I see.

Robert: So they have the protection, they are, uh, they are, uh, they, uh-- You see, they have the protection of the-of the-of the, uh, union. You see, you know the reason the White man fought too hard to-to get in the-to get, uh, in as a porter?

Stanley: What's that?

Robert: You know the reason the White man fought so hard to get in as a porter?

Stanley: Why?

Robert: That \$500.

Stanley: [laughs]

Robert: That's why he fought.

Stanley: It must have gotten--

Robert: Here-- Th-th-the White man knows that th-th-that tips was-wa-was-- Th-that roughing had put out the right thing, and he wanted to get some of that. That was just a gift.

Stanley: Mh-hmm.

Robert: \$500 a month give to you [laughs] and the White folk has sense enough to try and get in on that.

Stanley: Right.

Robert: He wouldn't like it to go to a darky. Uh, he didn't care. But the White porter, you see, there wasn't no way for him to get to that. You know what-you know what, uh, George Pullman said?

Stanley: What was that?

Robert: You don't know what George Pullman said?

Stanley: I've forgotten.

Robert: Huh?

Stanley: I've forgotten.

Robert: You've forgotten?

Stanley: He probably said a lot of things, didn't he? [chuckles]

Robert: I don't know, but George Pullman said when you take the Black man off as a porter, take my name off. When you take a Black man off as a porter and put a White man on there, take my name off the car.

Stanley: Is that right?

Robert: That's what George Pullman told 'em.

Stanley: Mm.

Robert: Take his name off of them cars. But them White porters kept fighting till they got in there to get some of that \$500. That's what they were looking at. Th-th-they wasn't, uh, they- [chuckles] they wasn't worried about what George Pullman said, [chuckles] they're worried about that \$500 and they wasn't getting none of it.

Stanley: So, you think the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was, uh-- Did a good job for Black people in Canada?

Robert: Mm-hmm.

Stanley: In what way?

Robert: You mean the organ there-- Organizers?

Stanley: Yes.

Robert: Wh-what did you say?

Stanley: Do you think that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was a good thing for Black people in Canada?

Robert: Yeah.

Stanley: Why?

Robert: Because they showed 'em, they taught 'em that, uh, they had to be organized to fight back when they was accused of something that they hadn't done.

Stanley: Right.

Robert: They had to have some kind of way to protect themselves.

Stanley: Right.

Robert: That's why a Black porter wanted to be organized.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: See, that Brotherhood was-- Did a big thing for the Pullman.

Stanley: Mm-hmm, right.

Robert: Pullman porter.

Stanley: How?

Robert: Hm?

Stanley: In what way?

Robert: I don't know, but you, sure did helped them. They-they got organizers before we did.

Stanley: Right. [background noise]

Robert: Moose Jaw. And I carried two cars from here into Moose Jaw.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: 'Cause the porter on one of the cars I had, one of the cars was my car and the porter on the other car, uh, he got off here and they asked me would I take that car on into Moose Jaw 'cause car was cutting out in Moose Jaw.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: And I said yes, and he said. "We will see that you get back on number four." I said okay. So I come on, I went on to Moose Jaw and turned over the two cars to the platform man there.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: And, uh, and they told me, said, "There'll be a pass there for you to come back." You see, th-- I didn't have work back, it'd be a pass to bring me back on number four that night, that evening. So, when I got there, the man said to me, he said, "Bob," he says, uh, "I got a car up at, eh, Regina, uh, a lake car." And he says, uh, he says, "I ain't got no porter for it." He say, "Will you-- It's going to Saskatoon, will you take it to Saskatoon for me?" I said, "Listen, mister," I says, "They told me in Winnipeg if I take them two cars into Moose Jaw, that they would have me a pass here ready for me to get on number four and come on back to Winnipeg." And I said, "I ain't takin' no lake car to, to outta Regina." He said, "Bob, we ain't got no porters" and he was a-a-a good-good platform man. Jack, uh, Connolly was his name. He said, "We ain't got no porters." I said, "I don't care." He said, "There's some big English man is on that car." I said, "I don't care nothing about no big English man. I don't care whether he big or little. I ain't thinking about him." I said, "I'm going back on number four." He said, "Well you go on over to the bunk car and get you bags and get some sleep and come back and let me know how you feel." You see, he didn't get tough and say, "Well, if you don't do so and so, we-we'll see you on the porters no more." He just talk easy to me.

Stanley: Right.

Robert: Jack-Jack Connolly was his name.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: [chuckles] And-and after I got over there and I said, "Well, he didn't get rough." [chuckles] I said, "I think, I'll take that car over for him."

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: And- [chuckles] and when I c-come-when I come back from the-the bunk-bunkhouse that evening and- [chuckles] and he said, uh, he said to me, he said, "How you feel?" I said, "Where are your keys?" There are keys to that lake car you see.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: He said, "You don't need no keys." He says, "There's keys at the car." He says, "You just go on to Regina and the keys is already on the car." He says, "Thanks for [unintelligible 00:09:06], okay?" He said, "I'll see that you get out of-of, uh, Saskatoon to Winnipeg." I said okay. See, because he was so-so nice and didn't get rough or nothing, I-I couldn't turn him down. So I took the car on in to-- He said, "Now don't worry, Bob." He says, uh-uh, "I'll see that you get out of Saskatoon to Winnipeg."

Stanley: Right.

Robert: And that car went on in to Winnipeg, you see, they cut it in something else out of Saskatoon-

Stanley: Mm.

Robert: - a-and they left me on it, and I went on into Winnipeg.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: And after that, you never couldn't tell me nothing about Jack Connolly,-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: - 'cause he was a man that, uh, didn't believe in bullying.

Stanley: Right. Did you know Cyril Woods?

Robert: Yeah.

Stanley: Was she-- Did he help to organize the union?

Robert: Huh?

Stanley: Did Cyril Woods help to organize the union?

Robert: Mm, Cyril Woods.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: Oh, he was the man trying, wasn't he?

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: Yeah. Uh.

Stanley: He helped to organize the union?

Robert: I think so.

Stanley: I see. Um. [silence] so is there anything else you'd like to say about the-the-the good work that Blanchette did or Bla-- Randolph or Benny Smith?

Robert: No. Well, you see, lot's that's that, uh-- You see, it's been so long that that's that stuff I done forgot.

Stanley: Mm.

Robert: It ain't use to me telling it, when I don't know for sure-

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: - is that's the right message I'm putting out, you see.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Robert: But, uh, the Brotherhood did a big, good thing for-for the porter.

Stanley: Right. Mm-hmm.

Robert: I don't know how they come out, what they did after we-we the Brotherhood, uh, was you know, co-come out, you see, after I was-I was, uh, you know, after Shaban waited.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: And one tough another, I don't know how they got along.

Stanley: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. All right, thanks so much. Thank you very much.

Robert: Mm-hmm. That woman and her daughter that I was telling you about that give me the \$20?

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: I, uh, I, uh, she said, when she got to Winnipeg, she said to me said, "Gee, porter," she said, "You sure treat this nice. I wish I could take you home with me."

Stanley: Mm.

Robert: [chuckles] I said, "We-well, maybe I'd be a--" I told her I might be a minister. She said, "No, no." And she said, "Well, I see you got White porters now." I said, "Yeah." She said, "They can't never start to do the job that you fellas did."

Stanley: Right.

Robert: I said, "Whoa, we got some ni-- some good White porters."

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: She said, "They ain't like you and they ain't gonna to be like you."

Stanley: Right.

Robert: She said, "I wish I could take you home with me." Her name was Prish. She wasn't no relation to these person, you know, that run this-run this cleaning plate thing here, but her name was Prish. That was the woman and her daughter that gave me the \$20 when she was in the drawing-room.

Stanley: Mm.

Robert: And she said-she said, "Well, the White porter ain't got no chance along with you."

Stanley: Right.

Robert: She told me, you see.

Stanley: Mm-hmm.

Robert: You can't-you can't make me believe, she said. that he's going to [chuckles] take your place. She's not with me.

Stanley: Interview with Bob Jamerson on this fifth day of November '87.

[00:13:22] [END OF AUDIO]