

This recording is an interview with Brian Ringrose, a retired longshoreman and former president of ILWU Local 502. Major themes of the interview are trade missions, the reputation of the New Westminster port, and mechanization.

Interviewers: Michelle La & Liam O'Flaherty

Interview Date: June 18th, 2014

Date Range: 1960's – 2000's

Sound Recording Length: 1:47:10

Brian Ringrose worked as a longshoreman on the New Westminster waterfront for over 40 years. He was heavily involved with the union, and served as President for a period of time. While president he participated with the Fraser River Harbour Commission in trade missions to promote the New Westminster port to international shippers. He thinks that these were useful trips. He also discusses the union and mechanization.

Section 00:00 – 07:07

In the first part of the interview, Brian talks about 3 major trade missions he went on with the Fraser River Harbour Commission – in 1987, 1989, and 1993. They travelled throughout Asia, staying 2-3 days in each country and meeting with trade missions and shipping lines. The main purpose was promoting the port and improving the reputation of New Westminster. They appealed to the steel and car shippers, along with others to ship through New Westminster. Apparently, people were hesitant to send their ships to the New Westminster port, as they were known for safety, and ships in poor condition were shut down.

Section 07:08 – 13:48

In this portion of the interview, Brian talks about how steel has been a specialty in the New Westminster port (Fraser Surrey), since they have worked with it so often. They would emphasize their experience and reliability when advocating on trade missions. He says that the lull in work in the 1980's might have been attributed to ships avoiding the port.

Section 13:49 – 19:25

In this section, Brian talks about how some longshoremen were wary of negotiating with the bosses in situations like trade missions. The trade missions were approved by a vote, and those who went were paid while they were away, usually about 3-4 weeks.

Section 19:26 – 21:00

In this portion of the interview, Brian talks more about the promotional material they would provide on trade missions, such as pamphlets and annual reports.

Section 21:01 – 29:25

In this portion of the interview, Brian explains why the Local started working alongside the Fraser River Harbour Commission. It was largely a response to the rumours of ships going elsewhere. Later trade missions had less resistance than the initial trip.

Section 29:26 – 33:28

In this portion of the interview, Brian talks more about the promotion on the trade missions. He says that the European trip was more intensive than the Asian trip, but they used the same methods to promote New Westminster to shippers. The third trip he took was to Australia.

Section 33:29 – 35:36

In this portion of the interview, Brian describes how the work of longshoremen is basically the same all around the world. He was disappointed when the Fraser River Harbour Commission amalgamated with the Vancouver Harbour Commission.

Section 35:37 – 37:20

In this portion of the interview, dredging of the river is discussed.

Section 37:21 – 40:24

In this section, Brian talks about trade missions in later years, such as a trip regarding containerization and DeltaPort in 1993. Vancouver was the first port to switch to containers.

Section 40:25 – 55:35

In this section, Brian talks about the importance of securing the Asian shipping market. He tells a funny story of trying to be polite while trying local foods. They never had to hire a translator, as most people they interacted with spoke English. They were instructed on the customs of each country they visited by the Harbour Commission. He tells a story of singing karaoke in exchange for a beer.

Section 55:36 – 57:09

In this portion of the interview, Brian talks about how they would report on their findings upon returning from a trade mission to the executives and the union membership, and they tended to go over well. There was talk of visiting other continents, such as South America, but he is unsure if it ever happened.

Section 57:10 – 1:08:05

In this section, Brian speaks to other reasons that longshoremen might have to travel, such as for union business. He has travelled for ILWU conferences and conventions in the U.S. before. It is common for longshoremen to show solidarity with other ports, and he has heard of some even travelling to the port itself. He talks about respecting picket lines when international crews were striking.

Section 1:08:06 – 01:11:40

In this section, Brian speaks to political issues in longshoring, such as refusing ships from certain companies. He doesn't remember any in particular in New Westminster, but he knows that it has happened before. He describes demonstrations against uranium and nuclear material shipping.

He recalls tension with Russian ships during the Cold War. He remembers being told by WWII veterans to stay off a ship that was flying the Japanese flag.

Section 01:11:41 – 01:18:45

In this portion of the interview, Brian describes the jurisdictions of Local 500 and 502. Local 502 members essentially worked the length of the river, from the mouth all the way to Mission. The new PCT terminal in Port Moody was Local 502 at first. There was a contestation with Local 500 over and which jurisdiction DeltaPort fell under.

Section 01:18:46 – 01:27:00

In this portion of the interview, Brian talks about how the gang structure has changed over the years, due to mechanization. He also describes various commodities that were shipped. The gang has been reduced to 6-9 people.

Section 01:27:01 – 01:36:20

In this section of the interview, Brian describes the look of the waterfront in the 1960s. He describes the berths, grain elevators, and other landmarks. He also describes the dispatch system at the hall, and how it has changed over the years, from the “shape-up” to the modern pin system. He describes the various “ratings” that people can get. He says that the loss of the “hall atmosphere” has reduced solidarity.

Section 01:36:21 – 01:38:08

In this portion of the interview, Brian describes the Alaska Train Ship.

Section 01:38:09 – 01:40:05

In this portion of the interview, Brian talks about the strikes he has experienced in his time on the waterfront. The longest one he recalls was in the 1970's, and said they usually only lasted 2-3 days.

Section 01:40:06 – 01:44:08

In this section of the interview, Brian discusses when the grain elevator was torn down, in order to increase dock space. He also discusses wheat, flour, and fertilizer deals. It was a good job to be assigned to.

Section 01:44:09 – 01:47:10

In the last portion of the interview, Brian discusses the former “Gangplank” Local 502 newsletter, and political activities of the union.