

This recording is a follow up interview with Dean Johnson, a retired Local 502 longshoreman and former shop steward. In this interview he talks about '35 scabs and US army recruitment among longshoremen during the Vietnam War.

Interviewers: Pamela Stern

Interviewee: Dean Johnson

Date of interview: March 6, 2015

Date range of topics covered: 1935, 1960s-1970s.

Sound Recording Length: 05:33

Johnson was born and raised in New Westminster. He got his first longshoring work in Prince Rupert at age 16, but then when he was 17 he starting longshoring in New Westminster in 1961. In 1975 he began work at Westshore. In this interview Dean talks about '35 scabs and longshoremen being recruited to work in Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

0:00:00 – 0:02:13

- In this section Johnson recalls a conversation he had with one of the “'35 scabs.” Dean begins by saying he joined Clair McGrath’s (sp?) gang. In the first year, he made membership. Clair McGrath was a scab from the 1935 strike. He told Dean he held on as long as he could. There was no work, no welfare. His family was down to nothing. It was a choice between sticking with the union or keeping his family alive. He said he felt really bad about it. Dean said that as a result of knowing this he changed his opinion of scabs.

0:02:14 – 0:03:25

- In this section Johnson talks about the legacy of the '35 strike. Dean said that he did not hear much about that strike when he started or while he was working there, since by the 1960s the “conflicts were over with.” But it had nevertheless been pointed out to Dean and others that Clair and others were scabs. Also, the '35 scabs were also still able to rise within the union; indeed, McGrath had his own gang. Dean does not specifically remember any other '35 scabs.

0:03:26 – 0:05:33

- In this section Dean recalls the time the U.S. government tried to recruit longshoremen to work in Vietnam on a ship during the Vietnam War. Dean heard about it, and he and a group of guys went to Bellingham. Once down there, they figured out that if they had signed up and worked for ninety days, they would have made “big money,” but they also found out that if they had done so, after ninety days they would have “been IN the army.” As Dean said, he doesn’t know if that was exactly true, but that’s what they had been told. So they decided not to take the work.