George Burt

Oral History Interview

Conducted by

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Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs

Wayne State University

This is July 10, 1985. I'm Glen Ruggles and I am interviewing George Burt in his home in Kingsville, Ontario.

Ruggles: Mr. Burt, we could begin in a number of places, but let's take a look at the 50 years since you began in the UAW, back in the 1930's. Has the UAW, looking back, gone in the direction which you originally thought? I'm thinking of the fact that today presidents of the UAW like Doug Fraser who are on the Board of Directors at Chrysler, you began in the 1930's fighting for the working man's rights in Oshawa. Has it gone the way you thought it would go?

Burt: Well, if you go back that far, we didn't know where it was going to go, to tell you the truth. The union started in a body shop which was my department. We were on, what they called a bonus efficiency plan of piece work. The bonus efficiency plan provided for a base rate and you were timed, stopwatch timing, of course, which is still in effect, by the way, you were timed to do 120% over your base rate. I had a base rate of 60¢ an hour. I could do one fifth of 60. I was timed to do that much. But we found some short cuts in most of the operations, especially in the body shop group where I worked. I was a torch solderer and metal finisher. I had two trades. I learned the plumbing and heating trade when I was a kid, too; so when General Motors used to lay us off about May, and you were off until September, October then, a long period of changeover, I went into the plumbing because in the warm

weather the plumbing was busy. Now they go at it all year, but in those days you couldn't do any plumbing when the frost came, so you were laid off in the plumbing. So, I had two jobs, and they worked in very well for me. General Motors--their bonus efficienty plan was always a problem for the people in the plant. The company had a system of group leaders, we didn't have any union. We had a committee, however, we called it a company committee. That's what it was, it was proposed and established by the company and, in effect, it was the old company union. In each major department, we had a representative--a committee man. One committee man, for our department, whether it was about 500 workers, was a busy man and he had a job to do as well. He was a metal finisher. This was the best we had until the union came along. Of course, I had been a union man in the plumbing and heating. I helped organize the Sudbury plumbers, up in Sudbury in 1930 when things were really rough.

Ruggles: Can you explain the rough conditions in Sudbury?

Burt: It wasn't only Sudbury. It was rough all over. As a matter of fact, Sudbury was going ahead. The nickel mines were really going ahead--they were just opening up, really. So I had no trouble getting a job in Sudbury at the plumbing. I helped them join the union. The first contract gave us a dollar an hour and time and a half for Saturday and double time for Sunday. This was the old AFL building trades system. They were pretty

much all the same--the carpenters and the plumbers and the building trades--the brick layers and so on. The brick layers are probably the highest paid in the group, but that's in the building trades. So I came to Oshawa to work at the plumbing, not to work at General Motors. I had answered a ad in the paper for a plumber in Oshawa and I went down to see him and he gave me a job right away, because I was pretty good at my trade. I had gone to technical school in Toronto for several years while I was learning my trade. I learned the trade in Mimico. Then, we learned plumbing and hot water and steam heat, as well...

Ruggles: You were talking about the working conditions at Mimico.

Burt: Yes, well, of course at Mimico there was no union in the shop where I worked in. It was an open shop. We worked 10, 12 hours a day and I worked at my trade, when I first started, for eight dollars a week. I had been working for my father and he'd been paying me 55¢ an hour. But I told him that I was only a laborer for him. He put in cement walls and cement floors and cement sidewalks, and I mixed the cement by hand on a mixing board. At that time I was going to the YMCA in Toronto--the West End "Y", and I was getting lots of exercise, all right. I was mixing cement in the day time and at night I would go to the "Y" three nights a week. Then at the "Y" I became interested in tumbling and hand balancing. I have a lot of pictures here showing the tricks we used to do--hand to

hand balancing. The fellow I worked with wasn't satisfied with his job; he worked in the lumberyards. His father had given him money and he took a special course--typing and shorthand and he got a job in an office. I've spent a lot of my time that way, and I'm drawing dividends from that now, because ... well I take a drink now and again of wine or something at suppertime, but I never did drink very much. For a long time, until I got with the union...then I hit it pretty heavy for awhile. My wife didn't like it. So I came down one morning with a big head and I said, "Do you know what I'm going to do?" She said, "No, what are you going to do." I said, "I'm going to quit drinking and smoking." She said, "You've got a whole carton of cigarettes in the drawer." That was in our house in Windsor--we owned a house in East Windsor, then, and we hadn't bought this place. So, I said, "Well, leave them there." She said, "In addition to that you've got a bottle of whiskey in the cupboard, too. Do you want to quit that?" I said, "Yes, I want to quit them both." Well I quit them both and I never took a drink for 25 years. Nothing! Nothing strong. And I quit smoking and I never smoked since and I don't smoke now. So I've been a long time without smoking and I have no desire to smoke, and very little desire to drink. I've been pretty darn healthy.

For awhile I worked with the circus. I worked with a German circus as a tumbler. That was what

I did at the "Y".

Ruggles: This was before you went to work at Oshawa?

Burt: Yes.

Ruggles: Could you tell us about the year...

Burt: Well, we went to Oshawa, my wife and I. We weren't married then. I was going with this girl and she came from down east in the country from a little place called Madock. I'd been working at a boy's industrial school in Mimico, which I was qualified to do with my YMCA experience. I had charge of fifty boys, all whom had been put there by the courts. So, I wanted to get out of there. I wanted to get back to my regular trade, because all I was doing was maintenance work--fixing pipes at the school. The school was about 50 years old then. I went down to Oshawa and took her with me and I got a job right away. I anwered an ad in the paper, and I went to see this guy and he said, "Can you do lead work?" I said, "Yes, I won a prize at school twice--first prize." That was a reunion prize. I won twenty five dollars twice for what we call wiping joints. That's joining pieces of lead together. It was a technical job. You had to be sharp to do it. They don't do it anymore now. They use copper. Copper is what we used to call sweat joints, but, anyway, I got the job in Oshawa. Then at Christmas time, about two weeks before Christmas, the boss laid me off. We had a baby coming in June, and he laid me off two weeks before Christmas. I went home and said, "I got laid off." She said, "What are you going to do?" I said,

"I don't know. Let's go down on the farm." That was where she was. We spent Christmas down there. So we went down on the farm. I had an old car and we went down to the farm. We spent Christmas down there and I came back and I was invited to a New Year's party. I walked into the party with her and I said, "Hey, do you know where a plumber can get a job?" One of the guys said, "Yea, they got a sign up on the board in General Motors Employment Office-- 'Plumbers Wanted'." So I was first in line on the second of January, 1929. I met the employment manager and he said, "Well, it's really not plumbers we want. It's torch solderers we want." I said, "Well, I can do that work." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "I'm sure I can do that work. I know solder. I know how to make it." So he said, "You go up to see Mr. Brown in the bodyshop and if you can't do the work expected, you get laid off right away." I said, "Okay, that's suits me." I went up and I watched them for awhile and old Sandy Brown, who was going to be my general foreman, came along and I watched them. I noticed two or three things they were doing wrong. They weren't plumbers. They didn't know solder. He said, "Can you do that work?" I said, "Yes, but I can stand back here and throw it onto it better than they're doing it." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, first of all, you're not using the right kind of solder. You're using half and half instead of sixty-forty. You need 6 and 4, not half and half. You're

getting too much tin in your solder." He said, "Oh! What kind of solder to you mean?" I said, "I'm talking about plumber's wiping solder--to wipe it on lead pipe." He said, "What else?" I said, "Well, you've got the wrong kind of tools, too. You need treated wiping cloths--plumber's wiping cloths, because what happens is your solder is sticking to your cloths." He said, "Where do I get them?" I said, "You have to make them." He said, "Will you make us some?" I said, "Sure." So my wife and I sat up until midnight that night making wiping cloths for General Motors. The next day I went in with a treated wiping cloth--a plumber's wiping cloth--made out of moleskin and you have to fill the pores up and the final thing you put on is talcum powder. You rub it into the cloth and it fills up the pores. Talcum powder, you see, it made of rock and it won't burn. So I wiped a joint and it was as smooth as that table over there. He was watching me and he said, "What a difference!" "Holy smoke, did you make any more wiping towels." I said, "Yes, I've got three or four." I gave them to him and I showed the guys how to use them because you had to be careful not to burn them. I got along real well. Then they gave me 32¢ a corner. I could do ten of those things as easy as pie in an hour. Ten times 32¢ is $3.20 an hour, and boy, that was big money in those days. I was just married too. So the first year I was married, I bought a car--and Old Star 6 touring

car. We had one baby--Barbara, the oldest girl--she's now 56 years old. She was down here this week. She lives in Oakville with her husband and has three kids.

Ruggles: So you started in '29 at the General Motors Plant?

Burt: Yes, I started at General Motors in '29. I worked there until ... well, I got fired a couple of times for union activity. But the guys sat down in the bodyshop, and the bodyshop is the root of production in an automobile plant. If the bodyshop isn't going then nothing can go. Trim shop can't work and the assembly lines can't work. When they come to the end of their bodies, then they're done. Most of the guys in the bodyshop are skilled workers anyway. It was ourselves on the torch solder line and I was a group leader of it. So we were in constant communication with the company. As group leader, you acted as kind of a committee man. Actually, you were representing the company and they gave you 10¢ more an hour for being a group leader.

The depression came along, of course, in the '30's, then we were only working part-time and then I would go into plumbing. There were a awful lot of poor in Oshawa, as well as Windsor. Wherever the automobile industry was, they weren't selling cars either. So the companies would just lay you off and you'd be off for months while they'd take their time changing over. So, I used to take the kids and put them in the car--I had two girls--I'd go out in the country and see a farmer digging potatoes.

In those days they didn't have a potato digger either. You dug them by hand. I'd go to the farm and say, "Listen, tell you what I'll do, I'll dig three bags and you give me one." He said, "You've got a job! No pay?" I said, "No pay. Just give me a bag of potatoes for every three." I would go home with the back of my car loaded up with bags of potatoes and the kids sitting on the top of them. In those days...I rented a six room solid brick house on a beautiful street--College Avenue--in Oshawa, for twelve dollars a month. I got it for twelve dollars and a farmer owned it. He said, "I'll give it to you for twelve dollars." I said...No, he wanted eighteen dollars. I said, "I'll give you twelve dollars a month and give you three months rent in advance." He said, "That's a deal." I got that house for twelve dollars a month.

Then I took sick. I worked in the torch solder group and I got lead poisoned. I spent three months in the hospital. They had no treatment for lead poisoning in an ordinary hosptial. I went to the Ontario Hospital because that was the only place where I could get treatment. Boy, they really gave it to me. I was put in hot baths for two hours twice a day. I had a special diet and that hospital ...I'd swear by the treatment that they gave the patients in that hospital. I got myself better, looking after some other guys too, in there. I was in the reception ward where everybody comes through. I never got past the reception. I was there for about three months. I helped in

the treatment room where the guys were crazy. They're crazy...really out of their minds. I remember one guy... this is off the beam, I guess, but this fellow came from Sudbury and he was a doctor. He never thought he should have been in there. Of course, nobody who is crazy thinks they're crazy. They think they're sane--you're the one who is crazy. I made friends with him. He and I were talking one night in the recreation room...they had a beautiful place over there for you to...big recreation room. They had pool tables and tennis and all kinds of games outside in nice weather. I started to look out after the patients. I remember a doctor from Sudbury. He and I were talking one night in the recreation room when one of the nurses came in and said, "Doctor, there isn't any doctor on the ward right now and I have a restless patient. I wonder if you'd look at him." He said, "Sure, I'll look at him." He was bitter about being in there. He went in and took a flash-light and looked behind the guy's eyes...that's what they always did and he examined the guy. She said, "What do you think, doctor?" He said, "Oh, he'll be all right in the morning." She said, "He'll be better in the morning?" He said, "He'll be dead." And he was...he died that night

Ruggles: Let's jump ahead to your active involvement in the UAW in 1935. Is that correct?

Burt: No, the UAW was formed in Windsor about 1935-1936. The first plant to belong to the UAW was Kelsey Wheel. I wasn't the director, then. That was before my time. As a matter of

fact, we hadn't formed a union at that time. The Kelsey Wheel fellows had only about 150 people in the plant. They made wheels for the auto industry. They never had a contract. They did without collective agreement entirely. They went on on the basis of minutes that they took at every meeting. They had a meeting every week with the management and they kept minutes. The management looked after that with a secretary, and the committee got copies of the minutes and could make corrections if they wanted to.

Ruggles: So they didn't have formal union recognition.

Burt: No. There was no law in Canada, except for the old Industrial Disputes and Investigation Act. That wasn't available to ordinary workmen until the war broke out. Back then, McKenzie King was the author of the Industrial Disputes and Investigation Act and he put it into effect for the purpose of creating a cooling off period with the railroads and public utilities, which the Canadian government had control of. You weren't allowed to go on strike until you went through the very long procedure of the conciliation board. Sometimes it took six months. The chairmen they used were judges of supreme courts, sometimes, or county court judges...they used them. Those guys made more money, working at that, than they did as a county court judge. So they liked the work. You couldn't blame them for that. That's what we ran into, of course, in 1939. We ran into the same thing because when the war

broke out, the government applied the Industrial Disputes and Investigation Act to all industry who was engaged in war work. All of our plants were at war work. Ford motor company lost their domestic trade, because Ford depended about 75% on... . The Ford Motor Company had a plant in India and one in South Africa, in Singapore, and in Australia. They belonged to the Ford Motor Company Canada Limited up here.

The reason Ford came over to Canada in the first place, was to take advantage of the tariff. For importing cars into Canada, they had to pay a 32% tariff on those cars. So, it put the cost of a car to Canadians, hundreds of dollars ahead of the American, and we were always wondering why that was. This was the reason. It was going into the coffers of the Federal Government, you see. So, it wasn't until the union came in that we started to investigate some of these things and, as a result of that, and I was very active during that time, we ran the auto pact. The purpose of the auto pact was to level off the prices between Canada and the United States. This was the avowed purpose. I went before the Cabinet of Canada--I went before the Cabinet several times when Prime Minister Diefenbaker was in office. I had a submission to make, a written one, and I had a publicity guy, Jerry Hartford was my guy. Jerry was a writer who wrote for the Star. He got fired for union activity at the Star. He went over the river, then I got him in Canada--he was a Canadian. But, we had brought copies

of our submission, special copies for the members of the Cabinet. We were going to meet, you see. Jerry had forgotten them. He left them down at the hotel--it's only down the hill from the Parliament Building; it's not more than a half a mile. Jerry had suddenly remembered what he'd done. I wanted to give a copy of the submission to the Cabinet, so Diefenbaker said to me, "Well, first of all, we want a submission, that's for sure." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do Mr. Diefenbaker, I'll collect enough copies from our delegates." We had about 200 delegates in the railway committee room; we had it full. I said, "I'll collect enough copies from the rank and file to give you a copy." In the meantime, Jerry Hartford ran out the door and down to the hotel and grabbed his copies and came back with the copies that had a special embossed cover on them for the Cabinet. Diefenbaker said to me, "I don't want one of those. I want one of these rank and file copies." He said, "They're the same, aren't they?" I said, "They're exactly the same. You just have a better cover on your copy." He said, "I don't care about the cover. I'll take a rank and file copy." So started on my submission. He said, "Before you go any further, George, you better come up here and sit beside me." I said, "Well, I'd sooner be down here and face you." He said, "You better come up here and sit beside me." I said, "Well, you are the boss down here aren't you so I guess I better go up and sit beside you." And I did. There was a girl on the other side of me and she was the Minister of

Health and Welfare at the time. She came from Hamilton. She was well-known and a nice woman. We were after a Royal Commission to study the auto industry. She whispered to me, "Mr. Burt, you've got your Royal Commission." I said, "How do you know, we're just asking for it now?" She said, "Well, I talked to the old man this morning and and he told me he would give it to you." So, that brought about the Rand Formula.

Ruggles: Was that the Tribunal to Handle Labor Disputes?

Burt: No, the Rand Formula was there for the purpose of an agreement between Canada and the United States. It involved our Prime Minister, Diefenbaker, meeting with President Johnson. They met down in Texas and they came to an agreement on getting an agreement between Canada and the United States to eliminate the tariff against the importation of cars into Canada. It was to the advantage of the United States to ship more cars into Canada. But there was also some numbers qualification on that the States had to absorb. We were entitled to a certain percentage of the Canadian sales.

So, they set up this Royal Commission and I was a member of it. I met a very clever guy--a very smart guy that was right with us, because he had made a proposal along similar lines, previously. He went down to Texas too, and stayed down there. He went to British Columbia first. But he was one of the Ministers of the Crown at

that time. Of course, Diefenbaker lost his job anyway later on. We had to deal with Lester Pearson. I found that Pearson wasn't a bad guy either. What we used to do was to go down and make a general submission to the Government of Canada on everything. A very important part of that was our proposal for the auto pact. It didn't receive the support of the Left-Wing people in my own union in Canada. They thought that we were getting too close to the United States. At that time, of course, the Left-Wing were supporting the Soviet Union. Also at that time, the Soviet Union had made a pact with Hitler, if you remember. They made a trade agreement with Hitler. Later on, however, not too long after that, Hitler invaded Russia. Then all of the Left-Wing in Canada, the members of the Communist Party and so on, turned the other way. They turned their back on Hitler and then they were in favor of a "no strike" pledge in Canada. Now, Meany, President of the AFL/CIO, his country went to war when Japan occupied all the strategic islands from Japan to Hawaii and put their troops on them. So, America was at war. We put our Navy in the Pacific too--the Canadian Navy operated in the Pacific. I remember Dennis McDermott had a very peculiar episode in his career in the Navy. He landed on Japan. So he and a friend of his wanted to see a Japanese temple. When they went to go in the temple,

they couldn't get in unless they became Buddists. So they became Buddists and they got into the temple. When they were coming home, the Navy required them to fill in a questionnaire. One of the questions was religion. The two boys put down Buddists. So Dennis was telling me that one morning they were lined up on the deck, and their officer-of-the-day said, "All right, all right, will the two blankedy blank Buddists take a step forward, so we can take a look at you."

So when Woodcock was retiring, I was invited to go down there and introduce Woodcock to the group to say a few words. The hall was packed that night, too. So Dennis McDermott, had gone to pick up Woodcock and brought him to the party--Woodcock's retirement party in Toronto. Dennis walked in with his wife, Claire, and I couldn't help but ... we were just in a small group then waiting to be called in to the head table ... Dennis walked in and I said, "Dennis, what religion are you?" He caught on right away. He said, "I'm a Buddist." I said, "Dennis McDermott, you are not." He said, "I am. I'm a Buddist." I've never forgotten that.

Ruggles: I'd like to get back to some earlier topics. Back in the early years in Oshawa, you said you led the work stoppage at...

Burt: ...in the body shop.

Ruggles: How did you arrive at that position of leadership in

the union.

Burt: Well, I was a group leader and I led a group of about forty people--forty six people in the body shop. We were all metal finishers, torch solderers, welders--we did a little bit of welding. There were forty or fifty of us there in that group. So I spoke for the group, as a group leader. I wasn't a committee man, there was no union in the plant. But they had group leaders in the various groups. We were supposed to represent the company, really, before the group. We're responsible for telling what their production standards were--so many jobs an hour--that kind of thing. We had very little control over it, but we used to argue about whether the lines are going too fast, or there wasn't enough men. I told our group, I said, "Get the men in the group. You've got guys laid off here--laid off for months. Get the men back into the group. We'll get the money in the group if we get the men in the group." The company had to pay you according to their own standards. They had to pay you so much on the bonus efficiency plan anyway. So it had to apply to the whole group. We followed that policy until the company caught on to it. That got pretty close to the time when the union came in. The union came in in March 1937, in Oshawa. It already had been formed in Kelsey Wheel in Windsor and they had a group in Chrysler that was

organized. But the Chrysler guys went on an abortive strike. They lost their strike. About forty six men were fired. I was in that group. We were put in jail. I went to jail with them. They put up about three hundred Provincial Police and they surrounded us. We didn't have enough people. There were only about...a lot of the workers didn't support us--they stayed in the plant. The result was that the people who came out were exposed. We were in the police car at first and we were charged. We were charged under an old English criminal law that hadn't been used for about one hundred years. It was called "Watching in the Setting". Originially, it was put into effect in Britain to prevent poor people from looking over the walls to look at the rich people to see what they were doing. They used to climb up the walls and this was called "watching in the setting" and you could be arrested. The term in jail, at the time when we were arrested, under our Canadian Criminal Code, which is taken from the British Code anyway, was seven years in the penitentiary.

Ruggles: What year was this?

Burt: That was in 1939.

Ruggles: This was after the walk-out? You've already been Director?

Burt: Yes, I was elected in Cleveland in 1939.

Ruggles: Let's talk about that election in Cleveland in 1939. You ran against a Mr. Watson?

Burt: No, Watson wasn't there then. He was the boss in his plant.

I ran against Charlie Millard. Charlie Millard was the first Director of the UAW in Canada. He was not really elected, either. He was appointed by the President--the President that we finally kicked out of office--Homer Martin. Did you ever hear of him?

Ruggles: Yes.

Burt: Well, Homer was a spellbinder on the platform. He was a Baptist preacher. He was brought into the union by John Livingston. John was the Vice-President. He was the Director, then, when I was first in the union. John was the Director of Region 5--around St. Louis in Kansas City. He had his offices in Kansas City. That's where Homer Martin came from. He worked in the plant down there, even though he was a preacher. John Livingston promoted him for President of the International Union with his spellbinding tactics on the platform, he was easily elected as President of the International Union. I don't know whether Homer had any opposition or not. I don't believe he did, because the union was formed in South Bend, Indiana in 1936 and Homer Martin became the first President of it.

Ruggles: You were elected during 1939. Was this primarily due to your activities in Oshawa--you had earned yourself a reputation?

Burt: Well, yes--really Millard supported Homer Martin. Homer Martin got himself into all kinds of trouble. He was in so much trouble, he didn't bother going to the '39

convention. He went to work for the Ford Motor Company. He took a job with the company. So, Millard's nose was out of joint because he supported Martin too long. I really went to that convention with attentions of supporting Charlie Millard for re-election. I went over with Tommy McClain, who became a very good friend of mine, who died only about two or three years ago, and a guy by the name of Cassidy from my Department, who was a group leader as I was. They talked to me about Millard, and they said "We've got to get rid of him, George. You're the only one who could beat him, because you were elected with the highest vote in our Local--we've got the biggest Local in the region." I said, "Well, I don't want the job. I'm satisfied with working at General Motors and working at the plumbing and live with my family. I don't feel like travelling all over hell's half acre to be the Director." So I told them I didn't want it.

So when I got the convention anyway, these fellows weren't satisfied with that. Tommy McClain was going around with a hump on his back and he said, "George, you're the only one who should be running." I said, "How about you? Why don't you run." He said, "I couldn't get elected. But you can." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you can convince me that Millard can't be elected, then I'll consider it." He said, "You will?" I said, "Yes." So they just

organized the delegations from Windsor, Oshawa, London, and Brantford, of course. They organized those delegations to all come up to see me and pledged their support. So I knew before I went into the convention elections that I was going to win and that Charlie couldn't win. So Tommy McClain came to see me and said, "George, we have it in the bag, no doubt about it now eh." I said, Well, there's only one thing." He said, "What's that?" I said, "Well you've got to tell Millard." "Oh, Jesus," he said, "What kind of a politician are you?" I said, Well, there's such a thing as being an honest one, you know. Charlie Millard thinks I'm going to support him at this convention. I am the Chairman of the Canadian Delegation,"--I was--they had elected me as Chairman of the Canadian Delegation from Windsor and all over the place--I said, "We've got to go up there tell them." He said, "Well alright, if you insist, George." I said, "I insist." So I got a hold of Charlie and Charlie was all smiles at that time. He thought that there was no problem. I said, "Charlie, we want to see you." "Okay George." He had a nice room in the Hollandin Hotel in Cleveland--a beautiful suite with all the drinks--Charlie didn't drink or smoke at all. He had all these drinks and smokes and everything there. We all went up to his room and finally we got settled down with a bottle of beer or whiskey or whatever they wanted So Charlie finally said to me, "George, what is it

that you want to see me about." I said, "Well, I want to tell you Charlie, as Chairman of the Canadian Delegation, you're going to have opposition at the convention." He said, "Oh, who?" I said, "Me." He said, "You!" Then he proceded to insult me. That was the worst thing. Tommy McClain was sitting there. He knew my personality and I wouldn't take any crap like that.

Ruggles: Do you recall what he said?

Burt: Yes. He said, "Why you haven't got the education or the experience to handle a big job like this. You're alright as a shop steward in the plant or a committee man or something like that, but you're not qualified, George, to handle this job. Just get it out of your mind." Well, I got mad as hell, as he said. I said, "Listen, dammit Charlie, if I did nothing for the whole year,"--we were elected for one year terms then, now there's three or four--"if I did nothing for the whole year, I'd be doing as much as you've done for guys in Canada." He said, "George, I was building the union." I said, "You were helping Homer Martin. He didn't even bother coming to this convention. So, you lost all the way around. No, I'm running against you Charlie, and that's all there is to it."

Then, all hell broke lose. The CIO was involved in this thing. Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman were involved in this thing. They got a hold of me on the

telephone and they said, "Brother Burt, we'd like to see you up in our room." I said, "What's this about?" They said, "Well, it's about the election in Canada, of the Director." I said, "Yea, that involves me." He said, "Will you come up to the room?" I said, Are you going to be alone?" He said, "Well, I'll have Sidney Hillman with me." Hillman was head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. I said, "Well then I want to bring Tommy McClain with me." He said, "Then you won't come alone?" I said, "No, no, you're not alone." So he turned to Hillman and said a few words to Hillman and he said, "Alright, bring McClain with you." So Tommy McClain and I went up to see them and he said, "You know, Brother Burt, we have the utmost confidence in the ability of Charlie Millard to run the Region." I said, "I know, and I know what you did, too. In order to get Charlie Millard's support, pulled away from Martin, you promised him a job. But you didn't promise him this job. Now, to get out of it, you're promising him the job of Director in Canada. What the hell are you doing interfering with our elections." I said, "If you don't quit interfering with our elections, I'm going on the floor of this convention, tomorrow, and I'm going to expose what you're doing at this convention. I don't care how big you are, either, I'll do it!" He said, "Well, we're not really interfering, but we think that Millard is best qualified. I said, "That's

not what you did. You promised Millard a job, if he'd pull away from Homer Martin. This is what you did. You're carrying out that committment, at my expense. You're not going to get away with it. I'm running and you can go to hell!"

They left the convention. Both Hillman and Murray left the convention. Murray made his speech and he was a great speechmaker. So was Hillman. When people are trained like that, and they're making speeches every day, they do become pretty good at it. I ran and I defeated Millard. Tommy was tickled to death because I'd beaten Millard, of course.

Ruggles: How close was the vote?

Burt: About two to one, I'd say. It wasn't as good as I thought it was going to be. I've got the figures here, somewhere. I've got the Convention Proceedings. But it was a substantial difference, alright. You only need one vote to win, you know.

So, I became the Director, and Millard went back to my Local union and raised hell. He said that I had support of the Communist Party at the convention. There were no Communist Party members that I knew at the convention. I wasn't very well versed in Communism at that time. As I used to say, I didn't know the difference between Communism and rheumatism, which is about true. But I wasn't a Communist. I never have been and I never was. There was a time, of course, in the history

of our country, when we were on their side in the war. I chaired a meeting in the Maple Leaf Gardens, one time, to try to raise money for the war effort. We were involved in it by that time. I was trying to raise money for the war effort and there were ten thousand people in Maple Leaf Gardens. The Premier of the Province was there. I don't know if you remember the Russian sniper. She had accounted for about one hundred and fifty Germans. We got her to come to that meeting in Maple Leaf Gardens. So, the Premier of Ontario then, who was Hepburn--he became Premier again--we had no love for him either; he tried to keep us out of Canada, if you remember the history of it. The Russian was dressed in her Russian uniform, and she was a sniper. Well, the stupid Premier gave her a beautiful Winchester rifle. She got the rifle and all of a sudden she turned it right on him. God, did he duck in a hurry!

Ruggles: Lets' go back to that split, for a second, between the UAW/CIO and the UAW/AFL in '39, just about the time that the war is breaking out. What effect do you think this split had upon the Canadian Region?

Burt: Your question is--when did they come together. I'm trying to remember.

Ruggles: The UAW split into the UAW/CIO, led by R.J. Thomas in 1939? Then the UAW/AFL, led by Homer Martin.

Burt: They formed another union of the UAW. Then we lost a number of members. For example, we lost a local up at Port

Huron. We lost quite a few. We lost some in California. We lost some in the midwest and I think we lost one big one in New York. In Canada we lost plants rather than local unions. We lost the General Motors Plant in Walker Road--we lost that. Then I went after that when I got back. I remember what I did too. The Chairman of the plant--he wasn't sure if he'd done right anyway... . We had a party one night at a club in East Windsor. We had CIO buttons on. We used to wear CIO buttons to be distinguished from the AFL--the UAW/AFL--and I pinned one of my CIO buttons on him, and the whole committee changed over in that plant on Walker Road. It was no job at all. We didn't really have much of a problem in Canada. It wasn't the first time that the Canadians attempted to withdraw from the union what they're withdrawing now, which I didn't agree with, by the way.

Ruggles: I was going to ask you about that.

Burt: I didn't agree with it. Anything to weaken the union is bad, especially when you're with an international union. The only really successful Canadian union is CUPIE, and they're only organized in Canadian institutions. There's no international membership at all. Now, we're left with a Canadian union, with an international management, and they're going to continue to come over here. Bob White said that he should have stopped it--stopped them from coming over. He can't. What General Motors will do, they won't come into the meetings, they don't have to.

They'll have a room up stairs and they'll direct their management from the room, and they have to do what they're told. If they don't, they'll get somebody that will. I know General Motors, I've dealt with them for years. I know Louis B. Seaton, who was the Vice-President of the Corporation, and Guy Roch, who was killed in a hunting accident down near Wallaceburg. I knew George Morris, who was a very smart guy. I used to hate to meet that guy across the table, he was really a clever guy, and mean too.

So, one night they came to a meeting and they had been drinking. They just about gave me everything that I wanted. They were really drunk. So I told Morris and Seaton, I said, "I'm not going to take advantage of you tonight. I don't drink. I'll check with you tomorrow with what you did. I don't think that you really know." We had been meeting with General Motors, and the next day I checked with the Company and they withdrew a lot of it.

Ruggles: What year was this? What contract negotiation...when you say that they were all drunk?

Burt: They were drunk all the time. Another group that used to drink quite a bit was Massey-Ferguson. They were the same way. I wasn't drinking and our guys on the committees--we had a standing order that while we were bargaining we wouldn't drink. That went through the General Motors Committee. They didn't drink. A guy could be kicked off the committee if he did. Then the Chairman of the whole damn com-

mittee for the plants--Gordy Lambert from St. Catherine's--got into the drinking and he used to take a wire and put it around the bottle and where we were meeting he'd take it into the toilet and hang it in the tank in the back on this wire. He'd go in and have s shot every now and then. I could see that he was getting drunk. Every time he'd go in there, he'd be drunker. So I got a hold my staff member, Courtney, and I told him about it. He said, "I'll fix that, George." He went in and got the bottle and dumped it down the drain and put it back where it was. Gordy was so damn mad. But Gordy quit drinking later on and he became absolutely sober. He never took a drink after that. Then he died.

Ruggles: Do you think the pressure of negotiations was the cause of this drinking on both sides?

Burt: Our guys drank anyway. You get a committee of seven, eight, nine, up to ten people up in a room in a hotel, where they're not used to being, and they drink on Saturday nights anyway. They don't have a chance to drink during the week because they have to go to work. If the company catches them drinking, they're fired right away, and boy, I'm telling you, the worse guy to get back to work is a guy that's been drunk. I've been on several cases. I was even on one for Hiram Walker--one of their guys. I got him back to work only because I knew the management at Hiram Walker. The guy had been there for over twenty one years or twenty two years. His father blew into Windsor. They went out and

they got drunk and he got back in the plant and he sampled the company's wares at Hiram Walker. That was immediate discharge from the company. They knew it! So, he got fired, and I went back and pleaded for him and he got back to work. I was well acquainted with the company because I'm a member of the Greater Windsor Foundation. I was Vice-President for years. The Hiram Walker's were as responsible as anybody was for the formation of the Greater Windsor Foundation, which is an organization that dedicated to do good things for Windsor. We did a lot of good things for Windsor.

Ruggles: You've been involved in a lot of civic organizations.

Burt: Yes, I was Vice-Chairman of the Board of the University of Windsor for nine years. That's as long as you can serve. You can only serve three three-year terms and put in the whole bit for them. I enjoyed every minute of it. I met a lot of real nice people, who, normally, I met across the bargaining table.

Ruggles: Looking back to the time that Millard said you weren't smart enough to be the Regional Director, I couldn't help but notice that in 1968 you were awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Windsor. That must of given you a great deal of satisfaction.

Burt: I felt very proud about that. I worked pretty hard for the University on the Board. I was a member of the Board--they played a trick on me. They made me the Chairman of the University Committee on Faculty

Salaries and Conditions. You faced all of the guys on the other side of that table. You had Ph.D.'s, and the whole works. So the University said we'll fix that, too, George. We'll give you the best one--they gave me a doctorate. I go down to the University even now and they always call me Dr. Burt. I said, "You know, that's pretty good for a plumber." I was very proud of that and I was also very proud...I don't know whether you know this...I'm an honorary Chief of the Mohawks.

Ruggles: How did that come about?

Burt: I did a lot of work for the Indians in Brantford. They have a lot of members in the plants. They had people working in the plants uptown. We had them organized under contract. So, one guy was a Chief. He said, "George, I've got to quit." I said, "Why, you're Chairman of our Committee of the plant." He said, "I know, but I've got a farm down on the Reserve and my wife is working that farm while I'm up here doing union work." He said, "I've got to quit." He was responsible for inviting me down to the Reserve. I had made some of their presentations in Ottawa. What the Indians wanted to do was something they wanted to achieve and never achieved it yet. They wanted to govern themselves on the Reserves. They got into some trouble a number of years ago. They put a Royal Canadian Police on the Reserves--it's Federal. One of these cops

raped an Indian girl. They found him drowned in the Grand River and they never found out who did it, either. Those guys know how to keep their mouths shut. When I went down there, I'd done a lot of work there in Ottawa for the Indians--I tried to help them achieve their goal of self-government, but it wasn't to be. They did establish a committee and they put the brakes on their representatives on the Reserve, particularly after the rape thing. They tried their damnedest to find out who did it but they never found out and they never told me--I didn't know. I've been down to the Reserve. My wife has been down there a good many times. The night that they made me an honorary Chief of the Mohawks. There's my bonnet. It's a dandy. These things are made by the women.

Ruggles: This Honorary Chief Award was the result of your efforts to help them?

Burt: Yes, there's no doubt about that...My name means leader._

Ruggles: Speaking of being a leader, Mr. Burt, is it safe to say that most of the UAW gains in Canada came while you were Regional Director.

Burt: No doubt about that. That was only normal because when Millard was the Director--see, I was the second Director. There was none in-between. When Millard was the Director, he wasn't there long enough to achieve much more than organizing a few plants, and even those dropped out. We had an organization at Chrysler when I was elected. I

went through the Region, and, at one time, when we were first organizing Oshawa, we organized practically everybody. We had a fellow by the name of Hugh Thompson, who would come over from Buffalo. We was a spellbinder on the platform. He and his wife were there and they signed up the whole damned plant in Oshawa in a matter of a few days. The guys paid their dues. Then, Homer Martin came down and spoke at a great big meeting of over two thousand people in the high school in Oshawa, and we were over the top then. We never looked back as far as Oshawa was concerned. The only thing that Thompson did that he shouldn't have done was he took the whole per capita tax out of our first or second month's dues and left us broke in Oshawa. Then Homer Martin got up onto the platform, we were on strike, then, and he said, "I'll send in hundreds of thousands of dollars to make sure the workers in Oshawa don't suffer. He never sent us a dime.

Ruggles: This is going back to the 30's?

Burt: I'm going back to the 1937 strike. I went to the bank--to the Canadian Bank of Commerce--and told the banker that we'd have to have special places here to pay out all of this money that was coming over--we never got any money! The bank agreed. They said that they would have extra staff on hand.

Ruggles: I want to show you a picture of the 1937 settlement or a group of people at least. Do you recognize anybody in there?

Burt: Yes.

Ruggles: Are you in there?

Burt: Yes, I'm in there. Malcolm Smith was Chairman, and Dick Courtney...this is the President of the Local--Johnny Brady who's Chairman of the Committee. That's Bill Wecker who's President of General Motors of Canada Limited. The funny part part of General Motors of Canada Limited--the plant at St. Catherine's was part of the General Motors Corporation--part of the South Bend Corporation. It wasn't part of General Motors of Canada. I don't know whether it is now or not, but I know the sign on top of the plant said "subsidiary of General Motors Corporation". The rest was General Motors of Canada Limited. They had different presidents. Harry Carmichael, [he's not there in the photograph]--Harry Carmichael used to be the president of the St. Catherine's Plant. Then he was the first to become President of both. Bill Wecker followed that, too. He was over at St. Catherine's too.

Ruggles: Do you recall the meeting in that room [in the photograph], or what that meeting was about?

Burt: We were bargaining with the Company.

Ruggles: Was that a bargaining session?

Burt: Yes. There's the table. There's the water...no doubt about it. There's all the cigarette butts, too. Yes, we were bargaining there. This guy, here [in the photograph] was the Personnel Manager. This was a committee man--

Johnny Brady who was President of the Local. Courtney was my staff member, and that's me--I was Director. Malcolm Smith was President of the Local.

Ruggles: The date on the back says '37. You wouldn't have been Director yet. Is that a mistake on the back?

Burt: No, I wasn't the Director there. Charlie Millard wasn't there.

Ruggles: You were Treasurer, though.

Burt: I was Treasurer of the Local.

Ruggles: Do you also recognize this photograph? It's in 1937, I believe.

Burt: Well, the guy on the left is Millard and the guy in the middle is Homer Martin. They fellow on the right is Hugh Thompson. They were the originals. Charlie Millard had quite an impressive war record. He was a Major in the Armed Forces. This was a spellbinder on the platform--that's Charlie Millard and this is Hugh Thompson. Hugh Thompson was, likewise, a very powerful speaker. They all were. I was just a lowly Treasurer.

Ruggles: I was looking at the record in 1968 when you wound up your career. In 1968, you were the only person left out of the '39 group, except Walter Reuther. Was there anything special...

Burt: That was on the International Executive Board, wasn't it?

Ruggles: Right. There must be something special about George

Burt. You say you didn't have the talent of these other men or the skill.

Burt: I didn't say that, they did. Well I'll tell you what I did do.

Ruggles: What explains your longevity? You spent about thirty years on that Board. You must have some pretty good skills and talents. You've made some good contributions.

Burt: I had a lot of friends. Well, what happened, I nearly got defeated by Watson, Local 195.

Ruggles: That was at the local level.

Burt: No, that was international. He ran against me for Director.

Ruggles: Watson?

Burt: Yes, Earl Watson, the President of Local 195. He ran against me in 1947 because I was not in Reuther's camp. For a long time, I was considered to be in the left-wing camp. And, of course, Reuther applied the Communist tag to everybody who didn't agree with him, which was a very good tactic at that time. Then the war came along and changed it a little bit. At that time we were friendly with the Soviet Union, too. Then the "No-Strike" pledge came along. When Japan attacked the United States, the "No-Strike" pledge came along. So we had a convention in Buffalo. I think it was in 1942 or 1943. At the Buffalo Convention, Victor Reuther was the Chairman of the Resolutions Committee that proposed a resolution for the No-Strike pledge to be applied to the UAW. I asked

for the floor and I got the floor. I said, "On behalf of the Canadian Delegation, brother Reuther, I want the Canadians to be excepted, and not be a part of your No-Strike pledge over here in the United States." Victor Reuther was a sarcastic son-of-a-gun. He still is, too. He said, "Oh, you don't want to help win the war, George?" So, I said, "I'd like to speak from the platform and get on the same level as you." I walked up to the platform and I said, "Victor Reuther makes me laugh. You know, we blew a bugle in Canada in 1914 and the Americans didn't hear it until 1918. Not even then, until the Germans sunk the Lusitania, a Canadian ship, and you lost a whole lot of American lives, then you went to war. Then we blew another bugle in 1939, you didn't hear that one until 1941, and not even then, until the Japs bombed the hell out of you at Pearl Harbor, and then you went for the support of the British for all you could get. I'll remind you also that when you went to war in 1917, it was British ships that took you overseas. You didn't have enough ships of your own to take your troups overseas. The ones that you did had refused to use their ships for that purpose because they were making more money elsewhere." I really shot the hell out of him.

Ruggles: How did Reuther take this?

Burt: He didn't take it. He didn't say much. So I said, "Don't tell the Canadian Delegation, here, what it means. Some of these Delegates have been overseas and have fought

in those wars."

Ruggles: Let's go back to the differences between you and Reuther. In 1946 when Reuther was first elected...

Burt: Well, Reuther was elected President in 1946, but he only took four Board members with him. He couldn't do anything, so he ran around all year claiming that he was stopped from carrying out his beautiful programs because of the "mechanical majority" of the Board, is what he called it--the "mechanical majority". Then, in 1947, the following year, he completely reversed the numbers and we we left with four. I was one of the four. Reuther had the eighteen that we had previously, out of twenty-two. So, Reuther had the majority of the Board and he came to me before the convention was over that year and he said, "George, I want to talk to you." I said, "Okay." So, he said, "Your Region was split." Well, I was elected by one delegate -- eight votes. That's all. He said, "Your Region is split." I said, "You're not telling me anything. I know that. I was elected by one Delegate and since that time every delegate that had eight votes and has voted for me is claiming that he saved my hide." He said, "Well, I think you're the best man for the job. I don't agree with our guys over here that carried on that campaign against you at the convention. I want to help you put the Region together." He said, I'll talk to our people over there--my supporters over there and tell them to get behind you on this." Well, I lost the support

of the left-wing group in Canada. But not them all. As a matter of fact, I carried my own local, with the help of Courtney. Courtney refused to go to that convention because he said, "I'm not going to run for delegate because I won't vote against you, George." Harry Benson was another one. He didn't go either. The two of them said, "We're not going to the convention." They could have been elected easily. Harry was President of the Local--or Courtney was--one of them was. No, Courtney was Chairman of the Bargaining Committee. Anyway, I wasn't defeated. Of course, at the following convention, Reuther made good his pledge to support me. I never had any trouble after that. Most of the time when I ran for re-election as Regional Director, without those tough times, I was elected by acclamation.

Ruggles: You were the only one left that had supported R.J. Thomas in 1946, yet Reuther...

Burt: Thomas was defeated, though in 1946. But what he did was he dropped back and ran for Vice-President and was elected.

Ruggles: You were the only one of the non-Reuther group that went on to work very closely with Reuther.

Burt: Yes. Reuther offered to work with me, is the best way to put it. Had it not been for that kind of support, I probably wouldn't have survived. I told Reuther, "I'm not going to carry on this fight between you and I during this term. It would wreck the whole damn union in Canada. We're too even. We can beat the hell out of one another

and we wouldn't even be victorious against the other. I'm not going to carry on the fight." Reuther said, "Well, I'm glad to hear that, George. I'll do everything I can to make sure that it works out." Well, I never looked back after that because he did what he promised to do that was for sure. Then I became Vice-President of Canadian Labor Congress. What Reuther did was divorced me from the left-wing people that I supported and who supported me for a long time. They turned against me, of course.

Ruggles: Because of your association with Reuther?

Burt: Yes. They were anti-Reuther.

Ruggles: Who were some of those people?

Burt: All of the left-wing--what we called the left-wing. That would include people who were members of the Communist Party. But the trouble with the Communist Party is that nobody knew for sure who their membership were. You don't know if they're members or not, until some time when they were exposed, then you had the surprise of your life, because one of them dies and then the Party comes out and admits that he was a member of the Party. They did that with the President of Local 439 in Toronto at Massey-Ferguson. I didn't know he was a member of the Party. I had no idea. I did know some of them. I knew one in Windsor who was a long time member. I tried to change him over and he told me, "George, you and I are damned good friends. We have been for many years." He was the Chairman of a truck plant--Godforson--Ollie Miller.

Ollie died a couple of years ago. Ollie had a very bad sickness--a heart attack. He was working in in Windsor, and he nearly died. He got over it. Then he got a job in the local union as their financial secretary in 444 for the Chrysler guys. He was there until he died. So, Ollie told me, "George, don't try to change me. I'll still be your friend, dammit, but you can't change me over." He was a member of the Communist Party.

Ruggles: In one newspaper article, I read, you did attack the Communist Party.

Burt: Yes, I attacked them. You see, it was a mutual thing. They attacked me when I didn't...I never did seek their support. The trouble with the Communist Party... and they did this with Reuther...they had to throw their support someplace. In the States, they usually supported the President of Local 600, Carl Stellato. He was elected President of Local 600 without any effort. It was the biggest Local in the International Union. One plant had 50,000 members in it and the bomber plant had another 50,000 members. It had 100,000 people there. They weren't all in support of Reuther, nor were they all against him. That's why I told Walter, I said, "I'm not going to carry on this fight in Canada. I'd just sooner quit."

Ruggles: But you were attacking the Communists. You mentioned that some of these people were your long time frinds.

Burt: They weren't my friends. As I say, they threw their

support to Reuther, too, now and again.

Ruggles: You never knew which way they were going to go.

Burt: No. They went according to their Party dictates. That was their trouble. We had a very knowledgeable guy in Toronto. I met him on a number of occasions, Joe Salzberg. Then we had Tim Buck in Toronto. Both of them ended up in an internment camp, and some of the guys in the union, like head of the UE, Jackson, and Harris, is Secretary-Treasurer...the UE was a big union in Canada at the time. They weren't as big as we were but they were big. They went to the internment camp during the war, both of them. I was never threatened with that.

Ruggles: This was because of their Party affiliation?

Burt: Sure. They came out in favor of...the No-Strike pledge is one of the things I wasn't in favor of in Canada, and I reasoned with Victor Reuther too, because we had no law in Canada like they had in the United States, governing collective bargaining. We had to way of gaining recognition from the management. There was just no way. They would have just said no. You have your Labor Relations Act, and you can go through that and you can force the companies to recognize the union and they have to bargain with you. We didn't have anything like that. We didn't have anything like that until 1943. When the first collective bargaining act in Ontario was an act of the Legislature. It was passed

by the Legislature and it had a lot of force in it, too. It also provided that there would be no strike nor stoppage of production until all of the terms of this Legislation are completed. That meant you had to, number one, apply for certification of the unit. You had to win the certification and you had to wait thirty days thereafter before you could go on strike. That took months and months. So the end of the damn term, the delay was the worst thing we had to suffer, Most of this came into effect in Ontario after the war was over, and the Government of Canada no longer had jurisdiction of labor matters over the Provinces. They took it over during the war under the War Measures Act. When the war was over, they lost it. So, then the Provinices that didn't have a Labor Relations Act, had to get busy and form a Labor Relations Act. That's what they did in Ontario. We went down there and the Ontario Government called meetings also, to find out what our imput was. Of course, we made it as tough as we could for us. For some reason or another it didn't appear in the Legislation, what we did. We weren't allowed to go on strike until the terms of the Legislation were met and thirty days had to lapse. That meant going through a conciliation board. Then they took that out. They had to make some changes. You didn't have to go through a conciliation board, but you had to go through conciliation. That meant a conciliator only.

You and him. I used to have a beautiful way of by-passing it. There's nothing in that law that said that you had to go through conciliation. I found it out, in Section 44. No, Section 44 of the Act provided that if one of the sides didn't use legal council, the other side wouldn't be allowed to use it either. Well, we were way ahead of the opposition, because usually, it was a group of people encouraged by management who came in against you and fight your certification request. They'd show up with a lawyer. The Lieutenant Governor of Ontario who presented me with my degree, Keeler McKie, he was the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and he was Chairman of Board of Conciliation in the Ford Motor Company Office. They showed up with a lawyer. I read that Section to them. Keeler looked it over and he said, "What Section is that?" I said, "Forty-four Mr. Chairman." He looked it over and he said, "Well, bless my soul, that's what it says, doesn't it Mr. Burt." I said, "Yes Sir." "Yes, no doubt about that. Well, gentlemen, you will not be able to represent your clients at this hearing." There was one guy there, he was from Paul Martin's office for a long time. He was quite a drunk too. He said, "Mr. Chairman, I want to tell you that I went through high school in the city and I graduated from the University of Windsor and I took a post graduate course in Edinburg Scotland. Then I went to the Sorbonne in Paris, only to come back here to Canada to find out that I can't even practice

in one your courtrooms. Surely there's something wrong here." Old Keeler said, "Yes, there's something wrong. It's you that's wrong." He said, "Mr. Burt is right and I want to tell you something now. I've got no right to be in opposition with this law. The law says that you can't have a legal counsel representing your people if the opposition doesn't have a legal counsel and raises an objection. Mr. Burt has raised an objection properly, under Section 44, and I'm sorry, you will not be able to represent your clients at this hearing." Well, the poor guys that they had there were not trained the way we were at making presentations. Anyway, we won the right to bargain for office workers at Ford and they were forced to bargain with us. Ford Motor Company hated us for organizing their office. Office workers, as a group, are generally much closer to management than other groups of people and they are much harder to organize. This wasn't true in Ford. We had a few guys like Dan Cassey and the guy who became the Registrar for the University later on, he died too, down there of a heart attack. They had some real smart guys. Cassey has a university degree. I was talking to Dan Cassey last week. Mazey gobbled him up and took him over to...he became head of our Financial Department in the International Union. He worked at Ford and had a good job at the Ford office. But he worked for the union for many many years later on.

Ruggles: I noticed that the pattern of labor improvements in

Canada seems to follow the American trend. Every time there was a gain made for the workers in the United States the pattern was that Canada would follow. But there was one exception where in the mid 50's the UAW in Canada got a bigger settlement than the United States. Do you recall that? Was it at General Motors?

Burt: In what regards? We didn't follow their patterns in the United States. In the United States, they went after money in the pay envelope. We didn't. We went after fringe benefits. So we went ahead of them in vacation pay. We went ahead of them in our pension, except that your social security was higher than ours, and that made up for that. But in other areas of money, we took fringe benefits rather than money in the pay envelope. Americans took money in the pay envelope. As a result of that, they got ahead of us in cents per hour. So, our demand in 1968, the last time I was in collective bargaining for the UAW, we demanded wage parity with the Americans and we ended up having both. We had better fringe benefits than them, mainly because, in Canada, we had better legislation than you did. We had legislation covering hospital-medical. The Ontario Government passed legislation because as a result of our push in management in negotiations with Ford, Chrysler, GM, Massey Ferguson and a host of big companies, the companies got worried about it. They went to

the government and they demanded the government pass legislation because this was something that applied to all people in Canada. Therefore, the government ought to do something to make sure they got these benefits. The government did do it. So we got the Ontario Medical-Hospital Plan. You didn't have anything to match it in the states at that time. I don't know what you've got now.

Ruggles: Could you explain that medical plan to me?

Burt: Well, it was passed by the Government of Ontario. It was applicable to all people without any cost. What we did...we negotiated with the company for more and subtracted the cost-free part of it. We still made gains on that, too. So, we were quite a bit ahead of you in that area. We had twelve months hospital benefits. You didn't have that. The same with the medical benefits. We had the hospital-medical from the Province of Ontario. We were successful in getting that applied to all people in Ontario. They all got free medical. The doctors raised hell about it. They're still raising hell, by the way, because the Provincial Government set a rate for them so they wouldn't go over it. Today, the doctors are raising hell and asking for the right to charge people aside from what is paid by the Province. We're opposed by that, of course. So far we've been successful. They're doing it

again, right now. They're trying to get extra pay for doctors who are not part of the medical hospital system. I don't know what you've got over in the states. I don't think you've got it as good as we have in that area. We've got full payment...see, I don't pay a damn cent for my medical. I don't pay anything if I have to go to the hospital. While my wife was alive, she didn't pay anything either. She got her medical free. She was sick for a long time.

Ruggles: At lunch we were talking about the Thomas/Addes/Reuther combination back in the mid 40's. I'd love to get it on tape, about how you felt that Addes might have made a good president for the UAW.

Burt: Yes, I felt that way. I supported George. Apparently, George didn't want the Presidency anyway. He just refused to run for the Presidency against Thomas, and he supported Thomas.

Ruggles: In '47 you reached an understanding with Walter Reuther that you didn't want to carry on a fight with him.

Burt: What happened, of course, Reuther just swept the board anyway and we ended up with only four people in our whole group. I was one of them. The guy from California was another. He'd been an old Board member before that, and he came back to run and he was successful. That was Michener. Then we had Charlie Kerrigan in New York. Charlie was on both sides of the fence. He was,

what was called a left-winger then. Then there was the other one...Paul Miley from Cleveland.

I got told off one night by Paul Miley's wife. She was so mad. She blamed because Paul Miley quit in the middle of his term. He was a Regional Director, and he resigned. He had a deal with Reuther and Reuther made him a staff member. That was the deal. So, Paul became a staff member. She blamed me for it. I said, "I've got nothing to do with it. Paul never took me into his confidence." We had another guy by the name of Reisinger in Cleveland. There were two Cleveland Board members when they didn't need them. Their total membership wasn't as big as my region. Of course, they weren't nearly as big as Region 4 with one Board member at that time, or Region 3, which was Indiana, with one Board member, Ray Berndt. They were complaining about it. What the hell are we doing with three Board members in Ohio. We had Reisinger. We had Miley and Gosser in Toledo. Gosser was the strongest one of the three. He was President of Local 12. Local 12 ran the Toledo region at that time--Region 2. That was the situation. Then Miley resigned to become a staff member. That's when his wife met me one time at the convention and gave me a hell of a dressing down because she blamed me for Paul's resignation. I said, "I've got nothing to do with it. He never even talked to me about it. I didn't know what he was going to do!" She said, "Well, you were alright. You were re-elected as

Regional Director." I said, "Yes, but Paul Miley didn't help me. You never helped me. What the hell are you complaining about." I got into a fuss with her. Finally I walked away from her.

Ruggles: But you came to terms with Reuther. In fact, for twenty years you were pretty close.

Burt: Yes, I had no problems from 1947 right through until the time I retired in 1968. I had no problems. I had no problems with my own people either.

Ruggles: Being Director of such a large region, as the Canadian Region, did you have a little more autonomy than the average American region?

Burt: In what respect?

Ruggles: In running your own affairs without international interference.

Burt: Did they have international interference over in the states?

Ruggles: I don't know. I just wondered if it seemed that ...

Burt: You put it a different light. You asked if I had less or more interference. I don't what you had over in the United States except this. I do know that politics were much more acute in the United States than they were here because...the problem in the states was that you had a lot of regions that were taking one side of a position. You had a lot of regions that were taking another side of a position. In Canada, we only had one region. You could only take one of two sides.

Fortunately, for me, I guess they were all on my side. I had some trouble with members of the Communist Party, but I managed to overcome that. I can remember one guy in Oshawa, Bill Rutherford. He was always giving me a shafting. I got up one day at our big council meeting...see, we had something that you didn't have in the states. We had a properly credentialed and properly set up under the Constitution--a district council. They had one other one in the United States, in Chicago. They did away with that one later on. They used to have seven or eight of them in the regions. What happens, when you have one of those, you use your district council as a political sounding board for your politics. I set up...well, I didn't for years, I didn't need anything. Then, one of my staff came to me...he wasn't on the staff then...his name was Ted Alanla_ from Motor Products. He came to me and he said, "George, you better start thinking about setting up a caucus." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you're going to need it at the coming convention." That was in 1947 when I nearly lost my job. He said, "You've really got a lot of opposition. I'll start the caucus if you want me to." So I got thinking about it and I said to Ted, "Okay, start it up, my boy. We'll have one here and one at the district council meeting, too."...because that's where the delegates all showed up, you see. Every three months you had a regional meeting at our district

council. They didn't have them in the states. So they used to call meetings over in the states, what they called regional meetings, but they didn't any significance because they weren't chartered groups. Our's was chartered under the Constitution as a regular district council. They had the right to make recommendations to the Regional Director, and I had the right to turn them down. But that would be a very foolish Director who would turn down the proposal of somebody who really held the power in the whole damn region. I didn't turn them down very often. I made damn sure I was a party to what they were doing. So, we never had any trouble that way. I controlled their executive...at least I didn't control it, I put my two bits worth in there and they generally accepted it. So I really didn't have any trouble in getting elected and re-elected and so forth. I remember I guy who was running for President of your country, and he got up on the platform one day and I remember what he said. He wasn't elected either. I can't think of who he was now. Anyway, he got up on our platform and spoke to our convention and he had our support, too. He got up and said, "I want to be like Walter Reuther. Walter Reuther is elected and re-elected and elected and re-elected. That's the way I want to be." But he wasn't. He got defeated.

Ruggles: Do you remember what year that was. Maybe we can guess who he was.

Burt: I don't know what year it was. Maybe you can guess who he was. I'm not familiar enough with your people over there.

Ruggles: The Canadian Region must be 4,000 miles wide from New Foundland to British Columbia.

Burt: All of that. But the division of membership in those out lying regions are very small.

Ruggles: But the travel...you mentioned the amount of work that...

Burt: Well, I didn't travel very much in the west. I used to go out there about once or twice a year, if they had trouble. But I had staff members strewn all the way out there. I had one at British Columbia and I had one in Regina, Saskatchewan. I had a couple in Winnepig, where we had more membership. Then, of course, you're right back in Ontario. Most of our membership are in Ontario and Quebec anyway. Quebec is were we had the problem, because you had people who spoke French.

Ruggles: The resurgence of the French culture and language has caused some trouble?

Burt: Yes, they demanded that all meetings be held in French. So I appointed French guys. I had one from France, for that matter...no he was from Belgium and he spoke French, of course. I never learned to speak French.

Ruggles: Did this have any effect on labor negotiations?

Burt: Well, they demanded, for a long time, that negotiations be held in French. But the management from the states and General Motors, they couldn't speak French. So, I

told them it was impossible. I said, "The people I send in here to talk to you and to represent you before management--they don't speak French. So, what's so important about speaking French. You won't get anymore. What we're in business for is to get something for the workers. Not to be able to speak the damn language." I said, "I wish I could speak French, but I can't and I'm not going to learn it now."

Ruggles: You mentioned you were also, aside from your Regional Directorship, active in the Canadian Labor Congress?

Burt: As being a Canadian Director, I was automatically a member of the Canadian Labor Congress Executive. But then I was elected to be a General Vice-President of the Congress, too. I had to elected at their convention--the national convention, the same as you have in the states. So, I was elected a number of times, as a General Vice-President. First, as a Regional Vice-President of Ontario, then I became a General Vice-President. That's when the Congress made use of my services and sent me to other countries. I was all over the damn place--Holland, France, Germany, Czechoslavakia, the Soviet Union and Austria--all over the place. I didn't like that kind of travelling. I was away from home too much. I can remember one time coming home and my young lad, he was only about seven or eight years old then, was sitting on the front porch, I came walking up the steps and he said,

"How are ya dad? When are you going away again?" I thought holy mackeral, I'm going to stay home for awhile. I stayed home with him for a month and a half and took him out to the lake and went swimming with him. They just had a glorious time up there, and, of course, I had my wife with me too.

Ruggles: So, sometimes you were travelling at the request of other people, not on your own wishes.

Burt: I was travelling at the request of the Canadian Labor Congress then I became the President of the Ontario Federation of Labor, the largest Federation in the Congress at the time. I was President of that for about three years. I had a wild time with that, too.

Ruggles: Is the Congress a power in the Canadian Labor Movement?

Burt: Only in the same kind of power that is exercised by the United States. It is not a power that supercedes the convention of its affiliates in respect to collective bargaining, or something of that kind. It's more, like it is in the states, the approach of the labor movement to your respective government people. In your place, it's the state federations that approach the state governments and ask them for better legislation for labor. Then, it's the national federations that approach the national government, and they go to Washington in the states. We go to Ottawa

in Canada and we have a long shopping list that we ask the Government to give us. Most of, of course, taken with a grain of salt. After you get through reading your presentation, they say, "Well now, this is certainly a voluminous presentation, you can expect the Government of Canada to give every consideration to your proposals." That's it, that's all you get. We used to call it the cap-in-hand session. I made the proposal, a few times, to the Government, and I got pretty mean with them a couple of times. They got mean right back with me too.

Ruggles: Could you explain how you got mean with them?

Burt: No, they explained how I got mean with them.

Ruggles: What did they say?

Burt: They said that...the one guy, he became the top person in Canada in Great Britain...at that time he was Prime Minister of Ontario. His name was Colonel Drew. A great big guy with grey hair. He said, "I want to tell you, Mr. Burt, you do not represent the people of Ontario, I do!" I said, "Yes, Mr. Primere, and that's exactly why we are here. You made such a hell of a hash and a mess of it, that somebody had to come and tell you what to do." He walked off the platform, he was so damn mad. He just flushed right up, in his face. I said, "Well, you don't have to be so cowardly as to leave the room." He stopped at the door and made a motion to come back, but I knew he wouldn't. He didn't. He couldn't have come back to save his face, so he didn't. He was

moved, anyway, out of there.

Ruggles: The CLC made the decision in the late 50's, to form a political party known as the New Democratic Party?

Burt: I don't know just when it was, but they made that decision at a convention in Winnipeg, to form a new Party and asked the old parties to join them. Nobody did, except the CCF Party. the CCF Party was the Canadian Cooperative Federation, which was a social democratic party. They were the only one that agreed to join us. We formed a new NDP at that convention. I was the chairman of the convention. The funny part of it was, there was a guy in Windsor who wanted to become a Senator in the Canadian political arena. Our Senators are not elected, they're appointed by the Government. He wanted me to recommend that he become a Senator. He called me up here at the house, and I said, "I can't do that." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I was Chairman of the Resolutions Committee at the convention recently, where we requested a resolution that I presented to the convention to abolish the Senate. How the hell can I agree to make you a Senator?" He said, "Did you do that, George?" I said, "Yes." He said, "That's too bad." He did become a Senator, but it wasn't with my recommendation. I had no recommendation to make. I couldn't.

Ruggles: The New Democratic Party was not really a labor party. The issues were much more broadly based.

Burt: In what way?

Ruggles: Such as nuclear weapons, nuclear energy. I'm not saying they'er weren't. I'm just saying there were broader concerns.

Burt: There is a labor party in Britain. Aren't they against nuclear weapons?

Ruggles: I'm saying the issues were more broadly based than just the concerns of the UAW.

Burt: It wasn't a UAW party. Of course not. None of yours are in the United States either. What's the difference?

Ruggles: I was curious as how broadly based it was.

Burt: It's the same as yours is.

Ruggles: Some people like to...

Burt: You affiliate yourself or you become a party to the Democratic Party in the United States. We don't call that a socialist party. It isn't.

Ruggles: Because it grew out of the Canadian Labor Congress, some people might think it was a labor party, strictly for the UAW.

Burt: It wasn't for the UAW. It was for the whole nation. It is a social democratic party. In other words, it is a socialist party. We believe in ownership of... all of Canada's natural resources should be vested with the people. What's more socialist than that? You haven't got that in the United States. You haven't got that in your party, because you have a lot of right-wingers in your damned democratic party. You

tried to form a labor party in the states and it was successful for awhile in New York. I don't know what other state it was successful in, unless it was California. Do you remember the labor party you had in the United States?

Ruggles: No, I don't recall where it wound up.

Burt: It was really strong in New York. It's certainly not the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party in the United States is something like our Liberal Party in Canada. The Republican Party is something like our Conservative Party in Canada. But then we divert from you. We then have our own social democratic party. We tried to get the liberals to join us and they turned us down. They wouldn't do it. Some of them did, but damn few of them. So we remain a social democratic party.

Ruggles: So, today, it is a viable third party in Canada?

Burt: I don't know. They're awful hard to become really viable in the sense that you're going to take over a majority of a government. We certainly haven't done that in the last few years. We made some very substantial progress in electing more members to our party--our New Democratic Party. We're getting more individual memberships, too. We've made some success. It's enough to scare the Government.

Ruggles: Can we talk for a minute about some of the things that you've been personally involved with, like

the Research Department, the Education Department and your concern for the development of Port Elgin and housing for low income senior citizens? What is the Research Department. Can you explain the Research Department?

Burt: We've got an office in Toronto. You've got to remember that I've been away from this thing for a long time. I don't know how Bob White runs his office in Toronto, I've got no idea. He doesn't confide in me.

Ruggles: When you were active...

Burt: Well, we had a Research Department and I had one guy in it. Peacock...do you know him?

Ruggles: No.

Burt: I think he's head of the Research Department now in Toronto, thank God. Very clever guy, too. He went to the University and is well-trained and is a Social Democrat and is a very strong member of the Party. As a matter of fact, he was my research representative, and during an election campaign, he ran around so much doing the Party work that I stopped him. I told him, "Hell, you're here for research in this office, not for running around for the New Democratic Party." He said, "Well, it's all part of the system." I said, "You'll do what I tell you, mister."

Ruggles: Did the Port Elgin program grow out of the Education

Department or are they two separate entities?

Burt: No, I think the Port Elgin situation grew out of meetings held by the local union educational committees that decided that we needed a central place; that we needed a summer school and a place where we could meet and provide education for the membership. The whole thing was part of a common denominator, you might say, in respect to the formation of it. It got the support of Walter Reuther and Victor and the people over the river. They plowed in some money into it. The Port Elgin thing was something started by the local unions and they assessed themselves so much per capita per month to pay for Port Elgin. Then we tapped the international resources, too. So, Port Elgin, in my opinion, a big success. At first it was in a swamp, when I first went up there. It had a main building that wasn't worth a damn. It had no dining room. It had just a place to eat your lunch. You were supposed to bring your own meals.

Ruggles: If I were to ask you of all the gains that the UAW made, pensions, guaranteed annual wage, wage parity, and so on, what do you think in your mind would be the greatest accomplishment during your tenure in office?

Burt Well, I think the greatest accomplishment, of course, is to secure the right to bargain collectively with

the employers. I think that was the greatest accomplishment we made, because we didn't have any legal right to bargain with the employers. It was only with the joint efforts of the UAW and other unions in Canada and Ontario, that we won that right. We won the right during the war, first of all, then when the war was over, as I've said previously, that right reverted to the Provinces. They were in charge of bargaining. They were required to pass legislation at our insistence, covering our right to bargain with the employers without the necessity of going out on strike. That's the kind of legislation that we obtained from the Government. It was only after a great deal of struggle that we got that legislation, because we used to ask the company to bargain and if they didn't do it we'd close their damn plant down. There was no other alternative. At that time, fortunately for us, there was no legislation against closing our plants down. Except during the war. When the war was over that went out the window. So, we used to ask companies to bargain for us and when they wouldn't do it, down went the plant. I told the company in more numerous occasions that I can recount that if you don't bargain with us before such and such a date, your plant won't be open the next day. I never disappointed them. That's the one

thing I found out you couldn't do. You couldn't bluff.

Ruggles: You had to shut it down.

Burt: You had to carry out your threats and shut it down.

Ruggles: Of all the strikes, what one was the toughest one you had to deal with, looking back?

Burt: We had a couple of them. We had one at General Motors for 149 days to obtain wage parity with the United States. That was the last one. We had a Chrysler strike...was when?

Ruggles: Was that one in 1945 at Chrysler?

Burt: No, that was Ford. The Ford strike in 1945 was a tough one, because there was no money involved. Our money was still dictated by the wage control order that they kept in effect, even though the war was over in 1945 and 1946. The Government released price control but they kept wage control in effect until the wages started to spiral and we had no place to go, because wage control was still in effect. You had to argue your head off to get 3 cents an hour out of the War Labor Board in Toronto. So we fought to abolish the Board, because the war was over. We were successful in doing that. We did make some real gains in wages then. We asked them for an astronomical amounts of 25 cents an hour across the board, at the time. We fought strikes on it, and we started to win the strikes too, because the companies, after the war, were anxious as hell to

get back into domestic production. They wanted to made automobiles. We knew that and we said, "If you want to make automobiles, you better give us more money, or we won't make them." So, we closed their plant down. Oh boy, at that time, they were so anxious to get back into production that it wasn't even funny. So, we got some real good settlements out of that one.

Ruggles: You must have had some good organization.

Burt: Yes. The Canadian union people are always willing to fight, if they've got a case to fight on.

Ruggles: Are the Canadian labor movements more militant in that respect than the United States?

Burt: No. I don't think so. I think they're about the same. You can always find people in the states are ready to put up a fight too. You have to have the issue and it has to be explained properly to the membership so they can understand it. Otherwise they won't go with you. You have to convince them that there is going to be something in it if they go. Quite often, we don't get what we went after, and quite often we disappoint our membership in that respect. But that isn't done on purpose, it's done as a matter of security, because you can't always prophetsize what you're going to get anyway. It's just impossible for union leaders to say, "Well, if we go out now we'll get 25 cents an hour." We don't know if we're going to get 3 cents, no cents

or 15 cents or what. I didn't fool the membership. I used to tell them that I didn't know how much we're going to get but we are going to try. That's the best thing a steer can do, is try.

Ruggles: I want to ask you about the Auto Trade Pact and how you felt how it had impact on the Canadian economy. There was some concern about dislocation of workers, and the so-called "brain drain" to the states with skilled tradesmen. Was that the result of the Auto Trade Pact?

Burt: "Brain drain" to the states?

Ruggles: The term was used referring to skilled tradesmen leaving Canada and going to the United States in large numbers.

Burt: Yes, I heard something about that, but I can't recall just how important it was. I'm trying to think if we lost any production as a result of the Auto Pact to the states. I do know that the Americans were the people who complained...because before that, they were shipping cars over to Canada and they were overcoming the effect of the tariff arrangement between Canada and the United States. What Canada had done was placed an exorbitant tariff against the importation of American automobiles. At one time it was 32 percent! That only meant that the Americans, with their volume of production, and their expertise over there and their machinery and everything, were able to overcome, even that 32 percent, and still ship cars over to Canada.

It also meant, however, that in Canada, they used that 32 percent and they just upped the price of cars to the Canadians. Boy, we were paying hundreds of dollars more for the same car, produced in the United States by the same company, using the same kinds of machines and everything else that they did in the United States. The only thing is, we didn't have their productive capacity. In other words, they could absorb what we needed without hardly increasing their damn speed at all over there. So we took a licking on that.

That got me interested in the Auto Pact, because I talked to Dr. Kindyside from Ottawa. He sat down with me one day and talked to me about it. He said, "You know, what we need, George, is to level this thing off. We need an agreement with the United States and Canada which would guarantee Canadians X-number of units of production and X-number that we could ship over to the United States on the same basis as they're shipping them over to Canada." I thought that was a hell of a good idea. So, I had more meetings with Kindyside. Then I had meetings with the Canadian Labor Congress on it and they set up a committee in order to study the whole thing. They had a couple of experts from Ottawa and a couple of experts from over the river. We sat down and worked out a program which had as its objective, wage parity and price parity. Well, we never did get the price parity,

that's for sure. But we did get the wage parity. Some of the guys now are saying that we haven't got wage parity. Bob White is one of them, because he's using the difference in the exchange rate, now. I talked to Bob about this not too long ago and I said, "Yes, but don't forget, we don't live on the American exchange rate, we live on the Canadian money. Suppose the American exchange means that our dollar is 15 or 10 percent less than their's. It doesn't bother us any, because we're not paying out money for that purpose. Unless you want to go over there to buy something, then it does." But otherwise, you can buy most of their stuff over here in Canada. If you can't buy it, they ship it over here.

This is about the area we're in now. They're still talking about the exchange rate and our money isn't as good as the United States and therefore we're suffering here in Canada. Quite frankly, I don't think we are. Not to that extent. I don't know what extent we are suffering, because I don't have access to the same kind of information I used to, so it's pretty hard to analyze something you read out of a statement of Bob White's in the newspaper or this guy's statement from Toronto. It's always pointed towards an advantage for them. So you don't know what the hell to believe and that's where I am now.

Ruggles: Have I touched on anything that we should go back over? Some of the people involved--we've talked a lot about

Walter Reuther, we mentioned Addes. Do you have any opinions or views about anybody in the union that you care to share with us?

Burt: Well, I got along pretty good with them all. Of course, my activity was over here, not over there. I had to set on the International Executive Board. I held some pretty important positions on that Board, at times. One of them, of course, was being Walter Reuther's chief hatchet man, I guess, when he was coming up for re-election and the re-election of the officers. This is what I was interested in at the time of our politics was concerned because I handled that part of it, and I handled it before the convention, too. I chaired the convention for the elections.

Ruggles: When you say hatchet man, that connotates certain things.

Burt: We had caucuses--the whole International Executive Board was a caucus, with the exception of one or two guys who jumped the fence and didn't get very far. A couple of them were defeated completely. They lost their Board membership, too. Tom Starling was one. He got himself into trouble. The guy in Buffalo--I can't think of his name now. He was Regional Director from Buffalo. He was defeated. Quite a few of them were defeated. Reuther wasn't fooling, you know. Reuther had, really, an uncanny command of his own politics. He knew where the hell he was going politically. I became his chief cook and bottle-washer, I guess, in that respect.

Ruggles: He must have had a lot of faith in you.

Burt: I guess he did for awhile, I don't know. But I was proud to be associated with Walter. It made my job so much easier. When I came so close to defeat, he said, "I'm going to help you put this region together." He did, and it went together. I had no problem after that. I used to chair the election of officers. The guys that got mad at me, at that, were the officers. They thought that the chairmanship of the convention should be rotated. So they came to me about it and I said, "Well I don't give a damn. I don't care. Do you think I like this damn job? It's the worst job in the world, standing up here for three or four hours and conduct nominations and elections of officers." It's no easy job. You have to watch the roll call vote. It's all by roll call vote, you know, so many local unions, so many votes. Dan Cassey looked after that. He was a real wow at it too. He was perfect. But I said, "I don't care. If you guys want the job just say so and I'll turn it right over, but you've got to get Reuther's concent." So they went to Walter and Walter said, "Like hell I will. George is doing a good job, so leave him there." So, I chaired the convention on the election of officers for about 10 years. It wasn't an easy job it was a rough job. They guys would get up and argue about their votes and argue about their local union. You

had to have their votes right down to the...our roll call vote...you had votes like 9.643 votes per delegate--in decimals. They had to be all calculated. Of course, we had the calculaters right up in the front. I enjoyed it, but it was a rough job. I liked to work with Walter when I finally found out the kind of a guy he was. He was probably the greatest President of any union in the United States or Canada.

Ruggles: You'd set him in front of all of the other famous labor leaders--Lewis, Phil Murray?

Burt: Oh yes. Phil Murray was in a different category than Walter Reuther. He was a different kind of a guy. I knew Phil pretty well. I was with him down in South America when he had his daughter Catherine with him. We were at Rio de Janeiro.

The University of Windsor was going to grant a degree to an outstanding person and I recommended that they consider Phil Murray. So, Phil was in Windsor and who do you think was Chairman of the meeting? I was, and I had to introduce him. Boy, that was a thrill--to introduce Phil Murray. He was such a wonderful guy anyway. Very quiet spoken man, but a very effective speaker.

I remember one convention where we were at in Portland Oregon, to a CIO convention, and Phil Murray was Chairman of that convention. That was CIO. This guy got up and he said, "Mr. Chairman, that last speaker here insulted our international union at this convention." "Oh," Phil

Murray said, "is that so." "Yes, Mr. Chairman." So Phil said, "Did he insult you?" He said, "No, Mr. Chairman." "Sit down!" said Murray. He sat down and you'd think he'd been shot and he never said another word. Phil was quite a guy and I took a great deal of pride in introducing him to the people at the University of Windsor--the Board of the University was all there on the platform. I introduced him to receive the Award of Merit from Assumption University, and he was a devout Catholic. He came to me afterward and he shook my hand and said, "George, it's the best award I've ever received." I said, "Gee, I'm glad to hear that." He said, "I had the best person I could possibly select to make the presentation - you. I'm really proud." He was, too. He had his sister there with him that night--Catherine. But Phil was a great guy. I knew him pretty well and I thought the world of him.

Ruggles: But you still place Reuther as one of the finest labor leaders?

Burt: I think Reuther was more forceful than Murray was. But Murray was in an entirely different position, because Murray was head of a Congress and the Congress' function was different from the UAW function. Of course, Reuther was the President of the CIO for awhile.

Ruggles: Do you see Reuther differently than you see his two brothers?

Burt: Yes, they were in different categories. Roy Reuther, his

younger brother, was the head of our Political Action Department. He did a good job, but his job was primarily in organizing. Then, of course, he suffered a heart attack and died. Then Victor was something else. Victor was head of the Foreign Affairs Department--the International Affairs Department. Victor was probably a little smarter than Walter was, and a great speaker from the platform. But he was kind of a sarcastic bugger, and he could ride you pretty easily. I didn't care for Victor nearly as much as I did for Walter. I had a great respect for Walter Reuther when I got to know him. It was a wonderful experience anyway.

Ruggles: What would you think Walter Reuther's outstanding quality would be if we could pick one. There has been so much written about him.

Burt: What are you looking for?

Ruggles: I don't know. You knew him quite well. Democratic? Loyal? Perserving?

Burt: He was all of those things.

Ruggles: Honest?

Burt: Yes, I think that his honesty was beyond question. One thing I'd say that he didn't have in quality was that he couldn't stand opposition. He just got fed up if you opposed him on an important issue. He'd just about talk you down, because he was President of the union and he had a little bit of leeway there, too, on the Board.

Ruggles: Could you give an example?

Burt: One of them was Black Lake. Members of the Board, including Emil Mazey and I, were kind of worried about Black Lake because it was going to cost us 20 million dollars. Walter had a lot of talking to do to justify that. That was a lot of money at a time when we didn't have that kind of dough. Mazey and I were in the same corner on that. Mazey thought that it was going too steep to lay out 20 million dollars on Black Lake Educational Center. I guess it's been justified now, after all these years. I suppose 20 million dollars has gone down the drain, anyway, now. It doesn't make any difference. It was a beautiful spot.

Ruggles: Was it decided on a Board vote?

Burt: Yes. But Reuther, with his usual influence, put it over on the Board. Yes, they decided--the Board--to go ahead with the idea. Some of the Board members were in favor of it. There were a couple who weren't. One was Gosser, and Gosser wasn't in favor of it because the Toledo local, Local 12, had already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on a summer school of their own--for their own guys. That was a big local. Local 12 was a hell of a big local. It was a big amalgamated local. It had about 120 plants in it. So Gosser had the money and he spent the money. Then Walter came forth with this idea and so Gosser was opposed to it, because he thought it would affect the summer school in Toledo. He said, "Ours is

big enough to handle the whole international, why don't you just climb into bed with us and let's go ahead with one school." Reuther raised objections of it being at the wrong place and not being suitable and a number of other things. So the Board went along with Walter and the upshot of it was that we purchased the Black Lake summer school from a group that owned it. They used to have their foremen and their friends up there. Their's was a flowing whore-house, I think. It had all these cottages and all these buildings--they were beautiful places to stay. Beautiful beds and bedrooms and everything was there. The guy who owned it before we did just had the girls there and brought his salesmen up and had them for a good time and left the wives at home, was what he did. We didn't buy it for that reason. To my knowledge, it was never used for that. Walter Reuther certainly wouldn't have agreed to anything like that, or allowed that at Black Lake. I never saw any evidence of that. I used to take my wife up there and the other guys on the Board, I know, took their wives up there. There may have been a few guys who took their girl friends up there, I don't know. You asked me what outstanding thing Walter did?

Ruggles: I asked you about outstanding accomplishments during your tenure in office.

Burt: I think gaining the first agreements in the auto in-

dustry in Canada, was an accomplishment. I think wage parity would have to stand out as a major one. Our agreements with the Ford Motor Company--that was a rough one. Chrysler was bad enough. They sent me to jail twice for Chrysler.

Ruggles: There was a conspiracy trial.

Burt: Well, that was a conspiracy to "watching tar setting" was actually the charge in the United Kingdom, but out here they added conspiracy. The conspiracy one was the one that called for the penalty.

Ruggles: This is the one where Harry Rooney and Tom McClain were involved?

Burt: Yes. Tommy McClain, Harry Rooney and I were involved. The strange part of it was, when the decision came down from the jury, they let McClain and I go free and they held onto Rooney. Boy, Rooney broke into tears and so did his wife when they heard the decision. They didn't let Rooney go free. They let McClain and I go, but not Rooney.

Ruggles: What did he get?

Burt: He didn't get anything because Dave Kroll came along and said, "You don't have to worry about that, George." I said, "Why not?" He said, "George Burt, you ought to know that one man cannot commit a conspiracy. It takes two, at least. As soon as the jury thinks of that, they are going to let Harry go." I said, "Well, you're smarter than I am." He said, "Of course I am. That's

what I'm trained to do." So he said, "Just wait here a minute." So we kept Harry and said, "Don't worry, just calm down and don't forget that if they send you to jail for five or seven years, we'll go down and see you. I'll take your wife out and give her a good time." Harry was in a hell of a mess. Sure as hell, the jury came back and we went back in the session and they said, "Harry Rooney will be freed too." That was all they said--he was free. He couldn't conspire with anybody if the other two of us were free. It was just impossible. So, was Harry was freed too. That ended that thing. That was the thing that Chrysler brought against us. I never forgave Chrysler for that.

Ruggles: Do you think they were playing dirty?

Burt: Well why not. Why should they charge us with conspiracy to "watching the set" of all things. They had all of management in Windsor chiming in with them. The headlines in the paper--and I went home and my kids are crying because I was put in jail. I had two little girls going to school. They go to school and come home crying, "Your daddy's in jail." It was a suffering and I didn't forgive them for it either. I told them when they let us go, I said, "It's pretty near time for you people to apologize for what you did, and I'm going to tell you the effect of it." I told them, "Why don't you go out to my place and apologize to my little girls for what you did. Putting me in

jail for no charge at all--for what turned out to be nothing. Go on up there to my little girls and apologize to them if you have any guts." I was mad. So, Dave Kroll said to me, "You'd better go slow George, or they'll have you in for something else." I said, "Alright."

Ruggles: One final question. What would you say George Burt's outstanding quality is?

Burt: That's too personal. I don't have any. I'm not one to make that kind of a self-analysis. You'll have to try somebody else.

Ruggles: I was thinking of things like dedication, loyalty to the cause...

Burt: There is no doubt when you have to do the things that I had to do, you'd have to have a certain amount of dedication or you wouldn't do them.

Ruggles: Loyality to the working man that you set out...

Burt: You're not thinking about that everyday. What you're thinking about is the job you have to do to pull some people out of a hole. That's one thing you're thinking about half the time. Workers do just plunge themselves into one hole after another, there's no doubt about that. If you don't watch them, they can get you into trouble. I know that was true with the Ford workers and true with Chrysler and true in General Motors, with Massey-Ferguson. Wherever you go with the big plants are, where they have watchful people on the look-out for your mistakes. Of course, we did the

same thing, too. You meet these people across the table, and they've got the very best of lawyers there, trained people and you've got to be their match. So, I didn't like having lawyers with me at the table. I didn't like the way they operated somehow. We had one of the smartest lawyers in the business--J.L. Cohn. He was a real smart guy. I told you about him telling the management when they come half-way with an offer one time and he said, "You can't become a little bit pregnant, you'd better come the rest of the way." I thought that was good.

Ruggles: Looking back, do you think you'd do anything differently than you did in the labor movement?

Burt: I don't know that either. Yes, there are a lot of things I'd do differently, because I made mistakes and suffered for them. I didn't like going to jail, but I went anyway. I had to go. I was sentenced and I had to go. I didn't like it. I think what we did do, we paved the way and prepared the way to make it a lot easier for the guys who followed us. I don't think it's nearly as hard to be the director now. Bob White wouldn't agree to that. Bob White has a great big staff now and a great big office in Toronto. I had a little store on Erie Street when I started, in Windsor. Our Regional office was right across from City Hall in Toronto. We never had a member in Toronto. Now, what in the hell good was a regional office doing in Toronto? So, I sat down

and I thought that I would make an inventory of the whole region to see what I would come up with. I went over to St. Catherine. St. Catherine's used to be a real militant local. They had a girl in the office, and the financial secretary was a friend of mine. He was a great guy, too. He'd been in the Royal Navy and he saw action in the North Sea. I asked the girl to see the dues records and the books. I found out that in the St. Catherine's plant, there were 2200 people working and we had 75 people paying dues and the President was behind in his. So, I paid his dues that day. I saw him that night and I told him about it. I said, "You know something?" He said, "What, George." I said, "I paid your dues today. You were more than 3 months behind. You were a suspended member. You have no right to be President." He said, "Oh my God, I'll have to resign." I said, "No, your up to date now, but you'd better get after a bunch of other guys like that, because the total dues collection for the month of April was 75 bucks and you have 2200 people in this plant." I said, "We can't bargain with a company like that and they know it." Then I went over to another local, 676. They weren't too bad off, except that the financial secretary was stealing some of the money and I found that out, too. So, I called him in. He said, "Well, I'll admit, George, I was short and I borrowed some

of the money and I'm going to pay it back." I said, "You'd better pay it back tomorrow, or I'm going to have you suspended the next day." I said, "I'm not going to have you in a suspended category in the union and acting as an officer." He said, "Alright, I'll pay." He paid up. Then I came down on my own local. My local union had 5,000 people in the plant at the time. I told the girl in the office that I wanted to go through her dues records, and, my God, there were only 700 and some odd paying dues, in my local. I went up to Windsor and that was worse. Local 195...I checked their records and they had Chrysler...We didn't have any membership at Ford. We hadn't started to organize it. We had Kelsey Wheel and a number of parts plants in Windsor. Their total dues were about $300. The trouble with that was that the financial secretary had taken all the money out of the treasury and gone back to Scotland with it. So, they were broke! I went over to the International and George Addes said, "Okay, we'll advance Local 195 about $1,000 to get them going again." So, he gave them $1,000 and he never got it back from them. I never asked for it back. We got the thing started, anyway. Then the bank came to us to pay back the amount of money that this guy had stolen to go back to Scotland. He'd drawn it out of the bank and it was union funds. It had

been the practice, for the financial secretary--he was a full-time officer--and the Treasurer to sign the checks. So, the Treasurer worked in the plant all the time and couldn't be up there all the time. He used to leave a few signed checks with his signature on them. All that was needed was the financial secretary's signature or the President's...I forget who he was now, and the checks could be cashed. That's how he got the money out of the bank and went back to Scotland with it and the local was absolutely broke! I went before the Executive and the only thing that they could talk about was the brand new oak table in the executive room. They had that thing polished up as bright as anything. I made the mistake of putting my foot up on it. Oh, did they get mad at me. I said, "Well, you're going to have a lot of other things to get mad about when I get through you'll understand what they are." I told them about this guy. I said, "You haven't got a dime in the bank. I'm going to have to get the International to replenish your funds because this guy ran away with the money and he's gone back to the old country with it. Unless the bonding company is prepared to get it back for us, we won't get it." Then I found out they hadn't paid the bonding company. So, we weren't bonded and we had to replenish their supply of money, a little bit, to get them started again.

That was the thing I ran up against. So, I went home and layed down on the couch in our living room at home and I said to my wife, "I don't know why the hell I took this job. It's full of pot-holes. I don't know how I ever took it, and I don't know how to work my way out of it." I used to go over to my own local and used to discuss these problems with the Executive of my local, because they were the strongest local in the region. They'd say, "Well, George, why don't you do this and why don't you do that." We'd kick the thing around, and it was good advice. So, I took their advice and we did work ourselves out of it, finally. Then, a great thing happened that raised us right up. A guy by the name of Hitler solved the unemployment problem. He came along and our companies were just bulging with people. We had contracts and we organized plants. The guys lost their fear of joining the union, because the war was on and they could go down the street and get other jobs as easy as pie. They joined the union in hundreds. That was the start of our organization coming back up again. We got it up to several thousand members. We finally became the biggest union in Canada, at one time. I think we had about 70 thousand members when I retired.

Ruggles: We may give Hitler a little bit of the credit but I think

George Burt was a good administrator. I sounds to me that you did a good job of keeping those locals in line getting them to ...

Burt: I was our job to do that, too. I got hell out of that, not only out of that damn oak table that I put my foot on. There were a whole lot of other things that they complained about. Then you'd go into a local union, like Montreal, and dammmit all, they were giving all their...they were on strike and they were a big local down there, and they were giving their money...instead of the strike fund...they were giving it to their committee men and the Executive. None to the worker! No strike fund to the worker. The International was plowing strike money in there. That was when we had a strike fund. So, I told Mazey about it. I said, "I'm pretty sure that these guys are just dividing the money up among the Executive and the committee men." He said, "We'll soon find out, George. I'll go down there with Dan Cassey and we'll over their books and find out what happened." They did. They laid charges on a half dozen of them. Dennis McDermott was so mad at Emil Mazey for doing that, that he went up to Port Elgin and Mazey's picture was there because they'd named a hall after me in Port Elgin, but they named one of the class-rooms after Emil Mazey. Mazey's picture was in the main hall. McDermott went up and turned his picture to the wall. The manager of the camp told me about it. I

went to McDermott and I said, "You couldn't have done a lower thing than that, if you had tried. I can't match that guy's contribution to our union at no time. I'm telling you, Dennis, either you go in yourself and you turn that picture around, or I'll have your god damn hide and I'll hang it out on the fence to dry!" So, he turned the picture around. But it was a dirty rotten trick to do it to a guy like Emil who had given so much to the union. He did. Emil Mazey was in jail more times than anybody else in our union, for strikes in Detroit many years ago.

I remember going over to the Ford management, one time, when we were organizing Ford, and R.J. Thomas said "We'll go over and see Harry Bennett." Harry Bennett was a gangster that Henry Ford had hired from the American Marines to come up and get rid of the UAW. Instead of that, he came over to our side. So, we went over to see him. He looked at me and said, "I don't know what I can do for you, Burt. I have nothing to do with that Windsor plant. The only thing is that I don't like that son of a bitch of a president over there, he's too proud a guy for me. He's got a swelled head. I can't do anything with him." Then he looked at me and he said, "Say"--this was a time when they had strikes every day over the river--he said, "You're not thinking of asking Thomas to close down the Rouge to satisfy your demands in Windsor, are you?" I never even thought about it. I said, "No, not exactly Mr. Bennett. But, I am thinking about asking Thomas to

shut off all materials going from here to Windsor and to the plants in Canada. That would have the same effect." "Yes," he said, "That would, wouldn't it." I said, "Yea." Then he said, "You wouldn't close the Rouge down here? You wouldn't close the Rouge down?" He said, "Yea, that would do it." So, he went to the phone and he closed everything down going to Windsor--Harry Bennett! He said, "This is Bennett speaking, close all material off going to Windsor. If you've got any freight cars loaded, or busses or trucks, unload them and throw them back in the plant until further orders." Our plant started to go down. I went home and I no sooner got into the office, when my secretary said, "You got a call from the Minister of Labor in Ottawa." I said, "Oh, I wonder what it's about." I knew what it was about alright. I called him and I knew him, too. He'd been a former union man from Hamilton. He said, "Our Ford plant is closed down, George, in Windsor." I said, "Yea." He said, "I understand that you were over the river and they've shut off all material coming over to Windsor." I said, "That's right." He said, "What are you going to do about it?" I said, "What are you going to do about giving us collective bargaining in that plant? We're entitled to that, too." He said, "Yea, but you know, we haven't got the legislation for that." I said, "Well, you can damn soon get it. In an Order of Council you can pass it in a half an hour, and you better pass it, or you won't get

any more material from the states and that Windsor plant is going to be closed down." He said, "George, you know that that is a war plant." I said, "I know it's a war plant." He said, "Well, aren't you interested in winning the war?" I said, "I'm more interested than you are, apparently, because you could settle this problem and procede with winning the war and we wouldn't oppose it." He said, "Listen, we're sending a RCAF plane after you and we want to see you in Ottawa to talk it over." So, I went down to Ottawa and we had the company down there and we settled our problem.

Ruggles: This is how this kind of pressure brought about collective bargaining, through Order of Council?

Burt: Yes, the company agreed. We didn't have any legislation yet. That was the trouble--no legislation. The company agreed and we agreed and we sat down and negotiated the first contract and signed it on 15th of January, 1942.

Ruggles: What do you think Bennett's motives for going along with you on that?

Burt: He was afraid that I could close his plants down in the United States.

Ruggles: He'd rather just shut the Windsor one down.

Burt: Hell yes. He didn't care about the Windsor plant. But he was afraid that I was going to shut the Rouge plant down and the bomber plant. There were 50,000 workers in each one--100,000 guys would be--God, he was scared about that. He'd just finished talking to some people

from the Army from Washington. They were getting prepared for war at that time anyway and they knew it was coming. So that's what happened and we got our collective bargaining through the back door.

Ruggles: Is this on record anywhere else?

Burt: I think I've made statements about it, yes. I'll tell you what I have here. I have a memorandum on the UAW in Canada if you'd like to have a copy of it.