

BC Labour Heritage Centre Oral History Project

Interview with Clive Lytle

Date: July 11, 2016

Location: Clive's home

Interviewers: Ken Bauder, Bailey Garden

Videographer: Bailey Garden

Running Time: 01:45:41

Key Subjects: BC Federation of Labour; Building Trades Union; Continuing Education (SFU); Dave Barrett (1972 provincial election); Feminism; Labour education; Labour history; Labour issues; Labour Relations Board; Labour Studies; Simon Fraser University (SFU); Strikes; New Democratic Party (NDP); NDP Youth Section; Women's rights;

Clive was born in Winnipeg in 1937. He went to University for his Bachelor of Arts degree, and was recommended to apply for a research position at the BC Federation of Labour. He went on to hold various roles, producing communication and educational material for a number of organizations.

00:00 – 05:50

In the first part of the interview, Clive introduces himself and his personal history. His father worked for the church and was a Conservative, and his mother (housewife and music teacher) was a “strong CCF-er” (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation). His first job was working a carnival game on the boardwalk. It was “an introduction to the system” – his employer tried to short-change him on his first paycheque. Most of his working life began in university, when he worked on a CPR dining cart, at various clothing stores, and Safeway. He attended University from 1954 – 1959, and took his B.A. and one year of law. He worked for the Vancouver International Festival (music), and became active in the youth section of the NDP. An acquaintance recommended he look into an available research position at the B.C. Federation of Labour, and so he did. Pat O'Neil hosted “a very unusual job interview” at his own home over dinner.

05:50 – 08:02

In this section, Clive details working for Pat O'Neil. He describes him as “a volatile, colourful, wonderful individual; he was like a movie Irishman – charming, eyes were always dancing, full of bullshit. He was wonderful on the convention floor – he could sell everything.” Clive says you had to “manage” dealing with Pat at times. He says Pat's later history is unfortunate, because he did so much for the BC Federation. It was more challenging being Pat's Communications Director, because he would often make announcements without consulting the rest of staff. He recalls one time when Pat

announced a “pie in the sky” benefit plan for London Drugs, and Clive had to field calls from reporters, buying time.

08:03 – 10:24

At that time, there was a collective agreement for the office staff of the BC Fed (covered by OTEU). John McNevin (Assistant Secretary) and Clive were not members of the union. Clive later joined the Retail Wholesale Union, which was more based on affiliation (their office was next door to BC Fed). Pat O’Neil always had a knack for “flair”. Clive recalls one particular incident in which Zellers workers were on strike, and Pat turned up at the checkout counter with a canary in a cage (representative of the coal miner’s struggle), which the media had a hay-day over.

10:25 – 12:10

Clive explains the bugging controversy which Pat O’Neil faced, in which he was accused of secretly recording a convention meeting – it was his “downfall”. However, one bit of information about Pat did not come out until years later: his real name was Tommy Joe Casey. He had illegally jumped ship in Vancouver, changed his name to that of a beloved uncle from back in Ireland, and got a job in a pulp mill. Within a year, Tommy (now Pat) was President of the local, and Secretary-Treasurer of the BC Fed within 5 years. It was quite an amazing story, but one that the RCMP may have used against him. Clive calls it “a remarkable tribute to his ability, his charisma, and everything else”.

12:11 – 15:35

In this section, Clive describes a 1964 meeting he had with Joe Morris of the Canadian Labour Congress, in which he considered a research job with the CLC. He called his wife and asked her about moving to Ottawa for the position. The next day, Jack MacKenzie called, Vice President of both the New Democratic Party (NDP) and International Woodworkers of America (IWA) respectively. Jack invited him for breakfast along with Tommy Douglas, and offered Clive a job as a Party Organizer in B.C., travelling around from town to town. He accepted immediately.

15:36 – 22:02

In this section, Clive describes some of the individuals he worked with at the BC Federation of Labour, starting with George Johnston (“a funny man” who came with an AFL background, but was influenced by some more progressive folks along the way). He tells the now famous story of Jack Munro attempting to speak at a BC Fed Conference in which the IWA was vying for new leadership in the Fed; “it’s like pissing in the wind”, said Jack. “Well,” George famously said, “Piss away”. He talks about the roll call process that happened during that convention which Clive attributes to the results. Normally, the voting process would be determined local by local. Instead, few members of the IWA locals ended up unexpectedly voting left, for Johnston and Len Guy. It was a close vote.

Clive also discusses working with Art Kube. There was a very “collegial” atmosphere working at the Fed, and it was “some of the best years” of Clive’s working life.

22:03 – 29:01

Clive reflects on working with Don Dunphy, who was a Steelworker by association and ideology. There was a memorable strike that occurred in Kitimat, and they asked for help from the Fed. While Don was wary of lending support, as they were not affiliated, and a fellow staff member Cy Stairs (later in Building Trades) said, “I don’t know where you came from, but where I came from, a picket line is a fucking picket line. You don’t cross.” Clive mentions other staff of the BC Fed – Don Crabbe, Al Staley, John Squire, etc. Jack MacKenzie, of the IWA, was “a gentleman of the old school”, well respected, trusted and loved. He had influence with the NDP. Clive first met Ron Johnson when he decided to run for local NDP office, and Ron (at age 15) campaigned on Clive’s behalf. They had many affiliations over the years, and Clive later ran political campaigns on behalf of Ron. They are friends to this day.

29:02 – 32:10

In this section, Clive discusses the issues within the BC Fed regarding the IWA. Four locals withheld their Federation dues, but ultimately they returned. It was always a “rocky relationship” in those years. He remembers Jack Munro, who was often quite differently aligned in terms of ideology compared to Clive. Clive says Jack was convinced he and others were “Commies” – it did not help when the BC Fed supported Tom Berger for NDP leadership, over the IWA choice of Dave Barrett.

32:11 – 36:02

Clive talks more about the 1972 leadership convention (Berger vs. Barrett) and the subsequent election. Ray Haynes, Clive, and others from the BC Fed were on board with Berger’s campaign, as he had proven himself to be a labour advocate. The irony was that Clive had a good relationship with Barrett from his time organizing with the NDP. Clive told Dave openly that he was going to support Berger over him. It was not unheard of for BC Fed executives to campaign for a certain political candidate – Pat O’Neil and others did so in the past.

36:03 – 40:10

Clive reflects on Paddy Neale. He was “good at what he did”, working for the Vancouver District Labour Council (VDLC). He tells another story about Pat O’Neil, where he learned a lesson about professionalism at the BC Federation conventions. A traditional poker game was started during the evenings at these conventions, and many of the players still meet today (Clive included).

40:11 – 42:59

In this section, Clive talks about his position as Communications Coordinator for the Fed. Some of the significant issues he dealt with included strikes, hot edicts, etc. Mitchell Press was one significant strike. Clive learned another lesson there. He had put out several leaflets attacking the company, and then the union came to an agreement. He had to consider a way to put out positive press about an employer that had been “the big bad guy” the day before. Another interesting incident during this strike involved a man who was otherwise a good trade unionist being removed from the picket line for making offensive statements and invitations to the workers on strike (a majority of whom were women). Lenkirk Electric was the picket line where Paddy Neale was arrested.

43:00 – 47:35

Clive discusses the women in the labour movement during his career. When he first became involved with labour, the only well-known woman to him was Josephine Hallock, of the Union Label Committee. She was in her later years, and there was not a lot of enthusiasm for union labels, but she “pursued that diligently”. He mentions Helen O’Shaughnessy of the Fisherman’s Union. Opal Skilling organized most of the union offices – she was disliked by some for this reason; “a boss is a boss”, Clive jokes. She was a very dedicated unionist, and was listened to. The BC Federation of Labour set up its first Women’s Rights Committee, chaired by Joy Lam (Typographical Union, later Member of Parliament) – but there were no women at the Fed to sit on the committee, so Clive was appointed Staff Representative. Clive was happy to do so; when he left the Fed, he was given a T-Shirt that said “Honorary Feminist” as a reference to this position. Joy had a lot of respect. As a committee, they were able to bring about some change, and more so when Ray Haynes became Secretary-Treasurer. Ray was open to different ideologies and “got it”, even in a time when women’s rights were not a popular subject. Clive recalls Ray as a guest on a morning show (Gary Bannerman), in which he was asked, “What about this nonsense, these women who want to get married and keep their own names?” to which Ray responded, “Well... I’m known a bit as Ray Haynes. If I was asked to change my name, I wouldn’t be very comfortable with that.” Clive later hired Astrid Davidson as a receptionist, and she became the first “real” Women’s Rights advocate at the Fed. Women became more and more influential as time went on – Carolyn Askew became Regional Director, and in the unions themselves, many strong women came forward. These changes came around the 1970’s.

47:36 – 55:25

In this section, Clive discusses the 1972 election of Dave Barrett (NDP) & and the relationship to labour. When the party was first elected, there was reserve, as the Fed supported Berger as a representative over Barrett. However, the NDP was still seen as the labour party, and there was a sense of “our turn”. People in the Fed quickly realized they could only influence the government to a degree. Bill King was Minister of Labour, with a background in Railway Unions. However, he hired a staff by the name of James (Jim)

Mackin, who many in labour felt was “the problem”. Clive spoke to Bill years later, and Bill asked why the Fed had called for his resignation during that time so long ago. Clive told him it was not Bill, but his staff members. Bill’s response was, “I spent my whole life on the ass-end of a train – what did I know about legislation? That’s why I had somebody who knew about it.” Clive says it was an “ill-advised call” for Bill’s resignation (he was not a part of that decision). These problems were exacerbated coming up to the next election, because Ray Haynes had decided to run for NDP Member of the Legislative Assembly in a 2-candidate riding in Vancouver. However, the other candidate asked him to step down on behalf of the party, as they felt the BC Fed/labour tie would be a hindrance. Ray chose not to run, to the dismay of his supporters. This left some bitterness between labour and the NDP.

55:26 – 59:19

In this section, Clive describes his transition from working at the Fed to working for Simon Fraser University. He was asked to help produce a Labour Studies program, which at that time was part of the Continuing Education studies. He moved on from the Fed after some staff changes. Art Kube was Education Director at the Fed, and was keen on starting something in the community. Jack Laney was head of Continuing Studies at SFU, and his father was an IWA member, prompting a desire for him to “do something for labour”. It was originally created as a resource for the trade union movement. Clive produced written materials as well as workshops, travelling to winter schools, etc. to educate workers on public speaking and more. There was no cost. Later, after Elaine Bernhard took over the program, it took on an academic model. Ken Strand, former President of SFU, was Clive’s advisor on the program.

59:20 – 01:03:03

In this section, Clive discusses moving on from SFU around 1982, to work in the Building Trades Union. Roy Gauthier decided the Building Trades needed a paper, which became Clive’s main role – *The Building Trades Banner*. He still has many copies. He recalls a battle with the Labour Board, in which the *BTB* put out a scathing headline targeting the Labour Board President Paul Devine – “Devine Justice at the LB”. When Clive later worked at the Labour Board, one of the first people he met was Paul, and he soon admitted he was the one who created the headline. Clive was with the Building Trades for 7 years.

1:03:04 – 1:05:13

In this section, Clive describes what he feels are the biggest issues facing labour today – namely, the changing nature of work. Clive says when they first considered technology as a labour issue, they were considering machines in the workplace, not the very workplaces themselves changing and evolving as they have. “The very nature of unions has always been dependent on people working together”, and with people working from home, “I

don't know what a union does". In the 1950's and 1960's, a method was developed to sign up individual stores – a local grocery store or corner store could be unionized, which Clive feels may be a potential solution.

1:05:14 – 01:07:42

One of the things Clive is most proud of is the social consciousness held by the BC Fed during the time of Ray Haynes. They participated in peace marches, gay rights activism and more. Clive and others feel that the Fed had “drifted away” on social commitment as of late. However, “things have changed again”, and Clive cannot comment on how it is today. He points to immigration issues as a modern social issue which labour should be advocating on.

01:07:43 – 01:10:30

Clive spent some time in England during his career, but the ILO and British/European union politics did not influence him too greatly. He tells a story of Joe Morris coming to visit England. Within an hour of being in a pub, Joe had a dozen working folks crowded around him – “he just build a rapport”, and Clive saw how Joe became head of the IWA.

01:10:31 – 01:18:50

In this section, Clive describes a book he wrote on the Sheetmetal Worker's history. They conducted Oral History style interviews with workers, which Clive reviewed. He has offered to give a copy to the BC Labour Heritage Centre. He recalls a “gem” of a story from one of the interviews.

01:18:51 – 01:26:58

Clive fills out the rest of his biographical history – after leaving the Building Trades, he moved on to freelance work. He wrote two novels (detective stories) which were not published. He did some contract work for Colin Gabelmann. Anita Hagen, Minister of Education, contracted Clive to work with local Boards and Unions around the Province to try and improve relations. However, the week he moved, Anita was replaced and so was his position. In 1994, he joined the Labour Relations Board as an Information Officer. He worked there for 10 years. The Board has had a succession of Directors since that time.

01:26:59 – 01:37:58

In the final section of the interview, Clive describes how Clay Perry was a historian himself, Research Director at the IWA, and was involved in oral history. He also talks about Lou Kaufmann and Frank Kennedy, of the ILWU. He talks about his colleague and friend Cy Stairs. He tells a story of John Friar and Jack Munro. Jack Munro was a good trade unionist but a “non-friend” to Clive.

01:37:59 – 01:45:41

Clive recommends some individuals to interview, and the interview is wrapped up. John Bowman is one, former Staff Representative of the CAW. He was fair and well-respected at the Labour Board. He mentions a few women who were associated with the Fed.