

**Interview: Cliff Andstein (CA)**  
**Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)**  
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**Transcription: Patricia Wejr**

**KN [00:00:05]** So, Cliff, I wonder if you could start this interview by telling us when you started your life and where and what kind of family background did you come from? And tell us a little bit about your early life.

**CA [00:00:19]** Well, I was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, a capital city. My dad was an immigrant from Finland. He grew up on an island at the end of the archipelago out into the Gulf of Finland. Eleven children, two room house. My grandparents slept in the kitchen. The kids all slept in the other bedroom. They were basically self-sufficient. I visited the place, saw the foundation, saw the things that they made. They made a lot of their own stuff. He emigrated in the '20s, went to as with all the rest of them, went off into the woods, worked for a while, ended up as a machinist and a welder, and subsequently in later years, member of the Machinists Union in Fredericton. Typical Scandinavian.

**CA [00:01:05]** My mother was born in a family that were rural folks -- English, Irish, Scotch, peasants that emigrated to Canada. She had to quit school in Grade 8 to go to work. And my dad never finished past elementary school. But they were both strong leaders. We moved a lot when I was a kid, but settled down finally when I was about 10 or 11 and my mother ran a boarding house. So I grew up in a boarding house, which was interesting. You learn a lot of things from different people living there. Coming and staying, construction workers, working on the camp, building the Camp Gagetown, student teachers and students at the University of New Brunswick. Various people. A lot of good experiences.

**CA [00:02:02]** They were not overtly political in the sense that they weren't socialist as such, or NDP or CCF in those days. My dad's family, being peasants in Finland on a little strip of land working for the larger landowners, were basically Whites, like all the peasants were in France and Scandinavia, Russia. But they weren't politically active one way or the other. But what they did have was a strong sense of their class, of class awareness. My mother was very generous. We grew up... When I was a kid, going to Grade 1, or Grade 2, the Chestnut Canoe factory across the street from where we lived was on strike. My mother was always providing sandwiches and soup to the picketers, the strikers, and took us on the torchlight march through the city of Fredericton and down to Maggie Chestnut -- she owned the place -- her house to demonstrate. So there was like that social justice without the CCF but the ideology. But we grew up with a strong feeling of being careful of authority. They didn't like authority, external authority. So I grew up with kind of an anti-authoritarian, feeling, background and a strong class consciousness. I knew where I came from. We would have been called working poor, I guess, didn't feel poor, but we felt really strong and had a strong sense of self growing up.

**KN [00:03:44]** You have siblings?

**CA [00:03:45]** I've got a brother in Toronto and a sister in New Brunswick. Again, I follow her Facebook page. There's somebody else with a strong sense of self. Her children, her grandchildren, all working class. You know, it's all three, my siblings. My brother was president of postal workers in Halifax, Nova Local, and my sister was president of her

CUPE local. So we were all involved in the labour movement one way or another for various periods of time.

**KN** [00:04:19] Okay Cliff, just a couple more things with your early life. When did you start your life? When were you born? And tell us something about what you remember your school experience and what you did after you finished school.

**CA** [00:04:30] I was born '42, 1942, went to elementary school in Fredericton and actually did very well. I was always at the top of my class in those days. First, you know, in terms of marks one, two, three. There were two or three of us went through school together. I was always at the top. That started to slack off a bit when I got into junior high and slacked off even more in high school. I didn't like school. I finally dropped out of high school after Grade 11. I went to work as a high rigger, on the Princess Margaret Bridge, setting scaffolding for the painting crews. It was a job very few people down there would take. At that time, it was really good money for New Brunswick. Dangerous work, non-union, no safety standards. We didn't wear safety harnesses, rope belts or anything. Lucky we made it through.

**CA** [00:05:27] Then with no future in front of me, out of high school, not able to go to university, wasn't going back to school, couldn't stand school. I joined the Air Force and spent five years in the RCAF. Spent a year getting my electronics education, technical [unclear]. They had very good training programs at that time in electronics in the Air Force. I spent a whole year in school. Got out of the Air Force, worked for CP-Tel and I applied for a job at IBM. They said, "Well, you've got to have high school math". Oh, God. So I went back to night school and that was when they set up the Community College system in B.C. So rather than taking Grade 12 or Grade 13, ended up taking first year. I took two or three courses, ended up liking it and took English, took math...

**KN** [00:06:25] Where was this?

**CA** [00:06:26] In Vancouver here, Vancouver Community College. It was the first year of the Community College system and so I ended up taking english and math for two semesters. I got a C on both of them and then I decided I really like this school thing. I was working at IBM, talked to them about working part-time, going to school. They agreed because I was a technician and then took an economics course, history. I really got interested in economics and one thing piled onto another into the fall, went to Simon Fraser University, got active in the student movement at Simon Fraser. Did very well in my academic in Simon Fraser. There were some really interesting instructors, Mike Liebowitz, who many people know, particularly on the left. Mike's a good friend. Larry Boland, who's a bit of a strange guy, but made you think. Mahmood Khan, who is a left-wing development economist. Brilliant. Robin Blaser, the poet. These were the people who influenced my life at Simon Fraser. Graduated, got a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, ended up at UW, Madison, Wisconsin. Couldn't stand living in the States, dropped out of the PhD program after getting an M.A., came home and one thing leads to another again.

**CA** [00:07:58] My life is kind of serendipitous that way. One thing leads to another. Came home with a degree, no prospects, didn't want to teach, didn't want or wasn't going to go on and get a PhD. So I started doing some workshops on economics and wage and price controls for local unions, IWA. Worked for the PPWC local on their pension plan, did a few things like that. And then when Barrett was elected, I got active and I was active in the NDP, active in the Barrett election. Active in the Waffle, I was on the Waffle steering

committee here in Vancouver, B.C., very active. So active in my own constituency in Burrard, Vancouver Burrard. On the left of the party, of course.

**CA** [00:08:44] And then Barrett brought in bargaining legislation for the BCGEU of which I was a member because I'd gotten a job teaching at BCIT for a year just to make some money, everybody needs to buy food. So I was a member of the BCGEU. The government brings in this bargaining legislation and there's this big debate about it going on in the union newspaper and other things. So I find I'm fairly naive in those days. I wrote John Fryer a letter, said Dear Mr. Fryer. Brother Fryer -- I don't know if I even called him brother Fryer, I may have. I'm just a member. It's a bit of my background. If there's anything I can do to help in this time of transition, getting bargaining rights, preparing the union. They hired me, [laughing] treated it as a letter of application and that was my start in the labour movement.

**KN** [00:09:39] That was in?

**CA** [00:09:40] 1973. I got a call from his secretary, Joyce Fehr, said Mr. Fryer would like to see you. Can you come? I said sure. So I go out to the office in Burnaby. We sit and chat for a while and we get interrupted by a personnel officer who John was trying to talk to about getting some truck driver back to work. And so I listened to that and then he turned to me and says, 'Would you like to work here?' I said yes. When can you start, he said, 'can you start on Monday?' I said sure. So Monday I started.

**CA** [00:10:16] Now the problem with that is that at that time I was involved at the [unclear] program at Vancouver School of Art and I didn't withdraw. So the instructor gave me an F on my transcript. So I ended up leaving photography, going to the BCGEU starting as a research officer. Then the big changes started happening in the BCGEU. With bargaining rights, there's this whole thing about the structure of the union. Like most provincial government unions, the BCGEU at that time was built on geographic branches. In geographic branches they tended to be dominated in different regions by different trades, either the highways, forest service, corrections, whatever. You had all these geographic branches. There's nothing there that fed naturally into collective bargaining.

**CA** [00:11:16] So one of the things I liked about working with a guy like Fryer, notwithstanding all the people he pissed off over the years, but he was a brilliant strategist and visionary. He saw the structure for the union going into bargaining -- because he had just started in '69, I went there in '73 -- about changing the structure of the union along occupational lines so people could focus on their relationships across regions, across the province based on their occupations in the union. So in '73, bargaining legislation is down. In '74, January it comes in. We then go on the road, the staff. We were so happy, so motivated, so driven to make all of this work. I mean, we were driven. We spent every weekend, all summer in Dawson Creek, Fort St John, Prince George, Trail, Castlegar, any place else, in meetings setting up the new local unions. The whole staff was on the road all the time and our families kind of suffered. The work-life balance wasn't a big issue in those days. And if you raised it as a big issue you're slapped down. Times have thankfully changed.

**CA** [00:12:38] So the BCGEU was a very exciting place to be. Hired a lot of people, new people. For example, when I got hired, I would've qualified today for the Young Workers Committee. I would have been sitting around saying, 'Can you help me?' 'Can you help me get going?' Instead, we got hired. Other people who were younger than me, who were active in the union, got put on staff to be part of this team. So a young team plus some

people who had been around for many years to just to try to rebrand, restructure the union. And I think it worked.

**KN** [00:13:15] So can you talk a bit more about that, that whole component structure? That's when it started and talk from there?

**CA** [00:13:24] Yeah, it started in 1974. We rebuilt the structure of the union in 1974 and then based on a special convention, to authorize that, to change the Constitution and authorize that. Then you got to go out and have everybody elected to these positions. So it meant we had to go out all summer long and meet with the members themselves. There's 12 regions, I think, in the province, so 12 different meetings. So Terrace, Prince George, Peace River, Williams Lake, all those places and set up the locals, get people elected, everybody gets sworn in and start talking. And then start doing a little bit of officer training, steward's training, because with the collective agreement coming down, you got to train stewards. Before this, stewards are basically message deliverers that hand out bulletins. Now they're going to have a new job. So you've got to train and put in education programs. So we did all of this at the same time and in '74 we opened negotiations for the first master agreement between the government of B.C. and this is where troubles happened.

**KN** [00:14:49] This is where?

**CA** [00:14:51] Troubles took place inside the union. John's chief negotiator. He's actually the Chief Executive Officer. At that time, as a lot of the public sector, provincial unions, the CEO was a staff person hired by the executive. The president...

**KN** [00:15:06] It was the power position in the union...

**CA** [00:15:07] Power position in the union. Ran the union, hired the staff, reported to the executive. In essence, stronger than the president who chaired meetings and stuff. Although our president had strong influence -- Norm Richards -- but he needed an assistant at the table. I was brand new. I hadn't been there a year, but his admin assistant [unclear] had been around a long time. A couple of other senior staff had been around a long -- and when I say senior, they'd been there five, ten years active in the union or on staff. They all wanted that job. He gave it to me. So I spent about a year fighting, pulling the knives out of my back. [laughter] But that's what started, from that. And he was a good negotiator. So I learned all my negotiating tactics about what to do and what not to do from John.

**CA** [00:16:07] So I was his assistant through that. We wrapped up that master agreement. Then we did ratification meetings across the province and in those days you went on the road. We'd all be on the road to do ratification meetings. The bargaining committee, the staff, meet with as many members as possible. I mean, hell, I went to McBride, to Jaune Cache to do ratification meetings with people, just to meet the members, get them involved. So it was always member-based, member-based and meeting with the members. And then following that, the components negotiated their own subsidiary agreements on issues specific to those components. And that went on for another few months. That, again, involved a whole different group of people on bargaining committees and in meetings. So all those and then we just finished that agreement in '74 we're back into it about six or eight months later for the second collective agreement...

**KN** [00:17:07] It was a one year agreement?

**CA** [00:17:09] No, it was 18 months, I believe. It was 18 months but it took us a while to get through it, you know, between doing the master agreement in the fall and then getting the component agreements completed and going into the winter. We were back into it six, eight months later.

**KN** [00:17:39] So throughout the '70s then you were in this very important position as the Assistant to the General Secretary of the Union. And what did that involve specifically as being his number two person?

**CA** [00:17:52] Well, I wasn't his number two as such. He had a number two, Jack Adams and Jack had been around a long time. So then he created a position of Assistants to the General Secretary. Three positions -- me, Jack Adams and Marg Arthur. We had different responsibilities. Jack was basically membership services. Marg handled the administration services side and I handled all the stuff to do with bargaining and research, you know, those tactical areas. So we never had an actual number two. It varied. And we were a triumvirate. We did work together. We had to work together. And occasionally there were jealousies but not much because the areas were fairly different. Jack and I used to have sometimes significant disagreements about tactics or about doing this, about doing that. But it had to be worked out. He'd probably just say work it out. So he was not daddy to us. I don't know what else to say. I mean, I think it worked very well.

**KN** [00:19:03] Is there anything else that happened in the '70s of any note?

**CA** [00:19:05] Well, wage and price controls, we had to work our way around. That's where the next collective agreement we managed to negotiate and get the master agreement settled just before the wage and price controls came in. So we had a COLA clause all through the wage and price control period which pissed -- who was it Brian -- the guy who used to be with the Public Service Alliance and he went off to the Wage and Price Control Commission. I forget his last name right now. It really irritated him that we managed to sneak in under the wire. On the other hand there were stupid things too, you know, like the components went into negotiations, they had an offer on the table. They rejected it. They went back in and negotiated a lower offer under the wage and price controls. There was room for across the board so...

**KN** [00:19:54] What resolution method did you have for the components to reach their agreements?

**CA** [00:19:59] Well, initially they had the theoretical right to strike but none of them ever did it. Basically what it was, what was it -- jawboning, if you might call it that way. The old Lyndon Johnson, you just talked about it. I'd get assigned to a set of negotiations. If they were difficult, if they were breaking down, they weren't going ahead I generally got assigned to go in and work on those negotiations and find a settlement along with maybe a senior rep on the employer side. Because often they broke down because of inexperience. We had reps who didn't have a lot of experience in bargaining. Or I didn't have a lot, but they didn't have a natural inclination for it. So quite often they'd get into a situation where they'd open -- it's like a chess game, the opening game, a middle game, and then you gotta conclude the deal. Concluding the deal is the toughest part of bargaining because you've got to make those tough decisions. I'm going to make a decision. I'm going to make a recommendation here that's going to affect all my members for the next one, two, three years. And it's irrevocable once it's made. So they couldn't make that. Many of them couldn't get themselves to that. So quite often it was that or there were just some things on the table on the other side and sometimes it was the same on the other side. So they'd get

me and somebody from the other side sent in to do it. It's a form of mediation with a bit of oversight. That was a theoretical right to strike. The government took it away for the components a little while later.

**KN** [00:21:34] So let's move forward a little bit then to 1982, February 18th, the Bennett government brought in what he called restraint, the first view of restraint. What's your recollection of that and what impact did that particular action have, if any, on your union? Do you recall?

**CA** [00:22:04] Yeah, it meant we got a lot lower wage increase than everybody else in the public sector under the restraint legislation. And people weren't happy but...

**KN** [00:22:15] This was the Compensation Stabilization...

**CA** [00:22:19] Stabilization, yeah. And so, I mean, the nurses, the people that all settled for larger wage increases and we come in and bang. I think we got six per cent or something like that. There was tension inside the union because we couldn't produce what the members deserved. In a sense they deserved it because everybody else had gotten it. And we couldn't produce it at the table and there was no way to produce it at the table. You couldn't strike for it. There wasn't the willingness to strike at that point against that type of legislation. So we worked on a lot of creative other things in the collective agreement. We tried to create a good collective agreement in terms of other areas, whether it was leave provisions, education, things like that. Things that looked kind of non-cost but would cost the government, that expanded the union's right, that expanded workers' rights, expanded the members' rights. I can't remember them all now. It is a few decades ago, but I remember that being our focus. Let's build up a collective agreement here where we take advantage of the fact that we can expand rights issues in the absence of being able to get more money at the table. And I think it worked because that master agreement is a touchstone agreement. I'm looking at things people are putting on the table today. I'm doing a set of negotiations for a non-profit group now. The union's put something on the table that I remember negotiating for the first time ever during that period of time, you know, and it's still making its way through.

**KN** [00:24:06] So looking at that time period, '82 even moving to '83, can you tell us a bit about who the membership of the Government Employees Union was at that time? Were they all provincial government employees?

**CA** [00:24:21] Generally speaking, yes, in '82. They were still mostly provincial government employees. I think a couple of crowns, BC Building Corporations had been spun off. BC Systems Corp had been set up. We were organizing. BCIT staff. We were organizing in the community college sector. That had started earlier in the mid-to-late '70s. So we were building up. They were all in the kind of a general services component, this one group, very heterogeneous group. Crown Corp, community colleges, long term care centres. Different reps were organizing different things in different areas. There was no overall organizing strategy at that time. So we'd be picking up—you'd pick up a few things, then expand. Home support picked up a few home support agencies, long term care centres. I think the transition houses came a bit later. I know they came a bit later... We held our bargaining rights in the crown corporations and at BCIT. So we were expanding but it wasn't as significant then as it grew to be in later years.

**KN** [00:25:47] Okay, so let's go to 1983. Do you remember anything at all about the May 5th election in 1983? Barrett had been defeated in '75 and Bill Bennett was elected and re-elected in '79 and now this is '83 after a year of his restraint program.

**CA** [00:26:10] Oh no, we didn't expect anything significantly different, that things would be tight. Typical conservative right-wing government. There were a few of those old populist principles, don't like big business, don't like big labour. Outside of the typical type of restraint programs we hadn't had a hard time with them. We were able to get things resolved but there was no indication of what was coming down the pike.

**KN** [00:26:44] No indication of what would happen on July 7th, 1983. Do you remember that happening?

**CA** [00:26:51] Yeah.

**KN** [00:26:51] Where were you when it happened?

**CA** [00:26:53] Montana. I was on my way to Indiana to Marianne, my late wife's farm. And I phoned back that night to say so what happened in the budget? We weren't expecting anything. That's why I was out of town. We weren't expecting. I would have been there. What happened in the budget? So I returned. Marianne was a good union activist and just decided to get to the farm and I'd fly home. We were driving across so she had the car and a friend came down and helped out a bit. I just flew back. That was Thursday, budget day. Was it Thursday? Thursday. Monday I landed in Vancouver. Sandy Keddie picked me up, handed me a binder, briefed me on the way to the office and we just went into meetings with other unions. By the end of the week, we had what we called the Solidarity Committee which later spun into Operation Solidarity.

**KN** [00:27:59] Do you remember the Operation and Operation Solidarity at their founding meeting?

**CA** [00:28:03] Yeah. I mean, whatever the founding meeting was, we had this group of senior people in the unions and we said, we've got to call ourselves something. I said well how about solidarity committee, so we'll just be the solidarity committee. And that later spun into Operation Solidarity, which involved a lot of other unions. You know, the PPWC came out. Other non-Fed affiliates. It became a more formal operation than just a group of people who were generally putting back.

**KN** [00:28:40] What do you remember were the most significant things about the budget and the legislative package that...

**CA** [00:28:48] The brutality, the viciousness. It was such a break with what had been called the post-war labour-capital [code], where people would at least exist. The attack on collective bargaining rights, I mean Bill 2 devastated the BCGEU collective agreement, master agreement, all the rights of the union to do anything. As you know, Larry and others, the attack, Bill 3 eliminating seniority rights basically for layoff and recall in the public sector, the firing of 600 members, which they called layoffs. I mean, our president, our vice-president, the two vice-presidents of the union were fired by the government. That's just totally unexpected. I mean, I don't think --nobody's done that in Canada since then. That bad. Again, the BC human Rights Commission, the entire Human Rights Commission, the body itself, the director, Hanne. Tenants Rights. Tenants Protection. The attack on people with disabilities. Poverty issues. It was just such an incredible... I think

that's what motivated the province. I mean we'll talk about some of this later today. But it just got people angry.

**KN** [00:30:30] So you began organizing in the GEU and in Operation Solidarity. Were you active in Operation Solidarity?

**CA** [00:30:44] Operation Solidarity was to some extent at that point, a creature of the Fed, with the Fed leadership. I was not part of that and a lot of us weren't. I don't know who was the president, but was Larry president of the BCTF then?

**KN** [00:31:00] Yes, Larry Kuehn.

**CA** [00:31:01] Yeah. But BCTF was not an affiliate, so he was not on it. So that's something that you can either... but I will deal with later tonight is that the people who are on the front line doing the fighting with their members on strike and with others coming on, were not part of that decision or not part of putting that package together. So my role just within the union started to expand because the focus... It became clear through the summer. Well, first of all, it was clear by August the government was not responding to mass demonstrations of a size and intensity that hadn't been seen.

**CA** [00:32:03] When we called our first one in Victoria, BCGEU called one with the Labour Council. We didn't expect anything big. Six thousand people. That was within a week of the budget coming out. Six thousand people were out on that one and then later, 20,000. Victoria of all places, out on the legislature. Fifty thousand, 35,000 in the two in Vancouver, tens of thousands across the province. By August the government wasn't responding to any of that. In not responding to that, it forced us into another area and in discussions, CUPE, BCTF it became clear we had the right to strike on November the first, BCGEU. A week later, the BCTF had the right to strike. So our bargaining strategy was to try for a strike. We took a strike vote while we're still in bargaining. Screw the government. We tabled our package and then started a vote. But we negotiated seriously at the table. We demonstrated very seriously and we knew there was going to be a strike.

**CA** [00:33:22] So there's an internal thing happening with our committee, with our members who are building up to support for a strike and an intense strike. Then there's the work with all the other unions about a strategy. What is the purpose of the BCGEU strike? Well, it's to be a kickoff. We had --since we could strike, we could also picket other places that couldn't strike, which is what happened initially in some of the education things. Teachers and BCGEU members cross-picketed and we had to work that out with CUPE. We would picket their worksites. They could picket ours. Nobody gets into trouble. You can't picket your own worksite. But most collective agreements in BC, you know, people had the right not to cross the picket line. So if the BCGEU puts up a picket line at Burnaby Municipal Hall, people don't cross it. Those workers can go off and picket down a government building. Nobody can do anything. So we were working on that type of a strategy through that September and October, also during the bargaining.

**KN** [00:34:33] During the summer, though, you alluded to a number of demonstrations and protests and stuff. I'm just wondering whether there's anything in particular that sticks out in your mind or memory?

**CA** [00:34:44] Yes. The fact that everybody had to speak at the Empire Stadium rally. That's one of the faults of the labour movement. You know, 20 speakers, I mean people get bored. And no focus. I remember me looking at Common Cause. Art saying, 'Mr.



Premier', something about the right, the right of protest, the right of petition all of that stuff for all the 26 bills. I felt all along that's a stupid demand. They're not going to do that. What's the most important issues out there? Bill 2, Bill 3, the human rights stuff, tenants rights, disability rights around disability pensions, one or two others. Really important human rights issues, issues that affect people. We never focused on what might be possible to get. In my mind, the leaders of the labour movement at that level, Federation level, did not apply to Operation Solidarity proposals and demand what they would do in collective bargaining. What you, others, BCTF do all the time. IWA do all the time. What do we want? What can we get? What do we need? What's our support for this? What would it take to somehow make a breakthrough here and get a settlement? What do we need to do with the coalition allies to keep the support of the community? What can we put on the table to keep that support and move it forward? And some of the stuff that was in those 26 bills wouldn't have any impact on anybody. If they'd been brought in by themselves, people would object to them but they would be nothing. Five or six really horrendous bills in there and we never focused on them. There was no discussion at the Fed by the Operation Solidarity leadership, what's possible to settle here? And in my mind, because that discussion never took place, what happened at the end was not surprising.

**KN** [00:37:05] We'll get to the end and we'll...

**CA** [00:37:07] We always get to the end.

**KN** [00:37:08] ... have an opportunity to talk about that. But before we do, I'm just thinking, Operation Solidarity developed an action plan which had the GEU going out on the 1st and then the teachers and [unclear] on the 8th and then others would come out on the 14th...

**CA** [00:37:31] Municipal. Transportation sector for the [unclear]

**KN** [00:37:34] What did you think about that at the time?

**CA** [00:37:35] I thought it was brilliant and I thought that on that Sunday, Monday, we were going to shut down the transportation system in the province and we caved. I had a meeting with a federal cabinet minister off the record who had flown out. We met in his room at the Bayshore Hotel.

**KN** [00:38:01] When was this?

**CA** [00:38:03] Earlier in September, October, as it got close. Federal Cabinet was worried about what was going on and that's when we had this discussion about don't start sending RCMP and troops and all that stuff in here, you know. We can handle the prisons, we can handle that stuff. Don't worry you know, the police aren't going out, the prisons won't. Essential services will be covered. Hospital and essential services, everything to come. We've had strikes in all of these places and so I felt when he left, there was a reassurance that there would be no federal intervention as that strike built through that week, the next week, and it went through on the 12th, 10th, 11th. You know, 13th. It was high stakes. Ahh, so disappointing.

**KN** [00:39:12] Yes, I'll just repeat that question I asked you about the deal. Can you talk about how you ended up getting the deal?

**CA** [00:39:19] We just knew that if we settled without Bill 2 being gone, there'd be no sense settling. There'd be no sense being around. The impact of that on our bargaining

and our right to bargain and represent our members was so severe that we made it clear at the table no settlement unless Bill 2's gone. And if you recall, they had put Norman Spector in, the Deputy Minister to the Premier put at the bargaining table and then we went through this song and dance... It was as political as it was at the table. We had to convince them that there would be no settlement. And Vince was mediating, I think. Yes, he was. So it was just straight power and with the government willing to take it on of legislating us back to work in the context of what was going on in the province at that time around this issue of taking away fundamental rights. I think that it was straightforward, there was no trick to it. There's no actual skills of bargaining skills of this back and forth because it's very simple, Bill 2, no Bill 2. And eventually they agreed that Bill 2 would die on the order paper.

**KN** [00:40:59] That became part of your agreement?

**CA** [00:41:01] Yes, that was part of the -- it's not in the collective agreement. That was part of the precondition of settlement. An actual commitment not to consult on Bill 2 but an actual commitment to let Bill 2 die on the order paper, which I think happened to a couple of the other 26 bills as well. And then in Bill 3 we managed to negotiate language around Bill 3 as did the BCTF as well, eventually just negotiated language around it. How we got around Bill 2? We had in the collective agreement no employee with more than two years seniority could be laid off. Period, full stop. They could be laid off from their job but not from employment. That's very tight language. Bill 2 would have got rid of that unfortunately. That and a lot of other things unfortunately. What we ended up with at the table, because you always got to negotiate something, is nobody with more than three years service could be laid off except through this process that we had developed, which effectively meant nobody could be laid off over three years with a process. But by the time we got through it, nobody would ever be laid off. So the functional result was basically a move from two years to three years on seniority and the government accepted that as their face-saver. For us, it didn't make much difference at all.

**KN** [00:42:42] So you got the deal over that long weekend, I believe.

**CA** [00:42:46] Sunday afternoon, yeah.

**KN** [00:42:47] Sunday afternoon. Was that when you finally...

**CA** [00:42:51] Yeah.

**KN** [00:42:52] ... got the deal and is that when the Fed officers sent Jack Munro off to Kelowna?

**CA** [00:43:00] Yeah. We knew something was going on and it wasn't going to be good because Spector's involved in both sets of negotiations. So we picked up some stuff that something's going to be happening and we weren't going to like it. God, you know, we're staying on strike. Our bargaining committee made the decision. We have a settlement here, but we're still on strike. Part of our strike and we told the government that. We're staying on strike. We're not going to resolve this strike until the whole matter is resolved. And Spector kind of says, well it's going to be resolved tonight. And that didn't make me happy at all because nobody knew anything. It could be resolved on what grounds? Who's been consulted on this? Me, Larry Kuehn who were leading -- both had members on the picket lines, are the people fighting the battle. CUPE's coming on stream. None of the

people out there fighting the battle were consulted on what should be in that final agreement.

**CA** [00:44:05] In fact, I believe, as you know, those negotiations didn't happen in Kelowna. That was a piece of paper that Bennett handed Jack, said here it is. I'm sure there were telephone conversations earlier in the day. Mike Kramer had the good sense not to go. He was the Treasurer. He should have been part of the group because Art was sick. He just said, no, I'm not going up there. So Jack leaped in and I don't know who negotiated that agreement but it was done in that afternoon because, you know, when you're in bargaining with somebody and they're moving back and forth, they're doing other things. There's other meetings going on. It was done by the Premier's office that afternoon. Premier's in Kelowna so Spector flew up, had a piece of paper in his hand. Terrible it was. And the Fed leadership were so eager to get out of that whole Solidarity thing, to get out of this whole mess that they basically...

**KN** [00:45:13] Why do you think that?

**CA** [00:45:13] A number of reasons. One, I don't think they appreciated this whole thing around the neoliberal agenda, around what was happening in the country, Reaganism, Thatcher, because it didn't affect them initially. Reaganism, Thatcherism, the movement. You know, Bennett brought that to Canada. For them, well, so you got 600 people "laid off". No, they were fired. Not "laid off". I had fights with IWA guys about that. Oh, everybody gets laid off... The government referred to them as layoffs. So that's part of it. I don't want to be personal about this, but some of them aren't very socially progressive. You know, and their comments about the coalition folks, about the role of the coalition in all of this. They couldn't understand that we have a responsibility to the broader society. Their bargaining rights weren't affected. By and large their members weren't directly affected, except if they ended up in a, you know, a human rights complaint or if they ended up in a tenant's dispute. That was the only way their members were affected. And they didn't, like us. You know, they just didn't like the public sector.

[00:46:49] The government framed it as an attack on the public sector. I believe there's another aspect. If I can use the phrase generation gap, the public sector was largely a lot of new leadership that came out of the student movement, the women's movement, the anti-war movement, the growing environmental movement. They were used to a different type of politics. They were used to dealing with governments. They weren't afraid of government. They weren't -- they might respect the government, but there was no difference there. Just because you were the premier didn't mean anything. I think it was a new type of leadership. I think people like Larry, me were part of that leadership with our backgrounds. You, others who were willing to challenge things, who were also more inclined to build coalitions when you work through, you know, all that anti-war stuff, all that, all the student movement stuff, environmental stuff. The women's movement, the leaders in the women's movement, you know, a lot of coalition building there, a lot of supporting other people I think brought a different type of leadership to the labour movement, particularly in the public sector.

**CA** [00:48:16] We were willing to challenge the government on its right to bring in legislation affecting us, and they weren't. And they just didn't understand where they were going. They saw chaos, it may have gotten chaotic. I don't know where it would have gone on Monday. Part of the problem is there had never been a discussion at the leadership about a strategy to settle the thing. And when you settle, you're going to make compromises. Kube wouldn't make a compromise. Withdraw all 26 pieces of legislation.

Well, God, I mean that's not trying to negotiate with the government and nobody was taking that on. And that's what happened -- you know BCTF and the BCGEU negotiated directly with the government. We were negotiating with the Premier's office in our bargaining and I don't know what the line was between the Premier's office and BCTF bargaining but [unclear] with the ministry. The negotiations were taking place with the Government at those tables and that's why Bills 2 and 3 were essentially gutted. Bill 2 directly and Bill 3 essentially. It was an old, tired leadership.

**KN** [00:49:36] So the Kelowna Accord obviously had a very chilling effect on the Solidarity Coalition.

**CA** [00:49:46] Yeah, we sold them out, quite frankly. I mean, I remember Bryan Palmer's book, Operation Sold Out. I don't agree with everything Bryan said. You know, we're friends in later years, talk to each other often. But we sold them out. We just bloody abandoned them. There was no attempt to work, on the part of that Fed leadership to work with the Coalition to build stronger community support for where we were going, for what we were doing.

**KN** [00:50:26] What did you see of the longer term effect of that Kelowna Accord then in respect to...

**CA** [00:50:33] It kind of broke the trust for a number of years. It was difficult to rebuild it. If you were interested in rebuilding it and I think a number of the public sector unions certainly were, but it made it very difficult. People didn't trust us.

**KN** [00:50:52] Soon after Solidarity, I'm not sure exactly what year, you might remember, you took on a job with...

**CA** [00:50:59] Oh, it was a year later.

**KN** [00:51:01] ...the BC Federation of Labour, Secretary-Treasurer.

**CA** [00:51:02] It was a year later.

**KN** [00:51:04] 1984

**CA** [00:51:06] It would have been '84 election at the end of '84. You may remember, the government brought in, in '84 further amendments to the Labour Code.

**KN** [00:51:18] Okay.

**CA** [00:51:20] And the Fed blustered. I've said through my career, I'm never going to threaten and not follow through. If I say to you as an employer, our members, if they don't get this are going to go on strike or they're going to do this or do that. They will do that because I will have worked with them to know what's going on. I never made those types of bombastic threats. And that's what the Fed was doing. I mean Jesus, after the collapse, you know, the previous year of Operation Solidarity, you know, they go out and government [unclear] more? They were fairly narrow, we managed to live with them. So there was a problem. A lot of discussions went on about the leadership of the Fed. People didn't like Art and I was willing and I was asked to run. So I said I'll run but only for Secretary-Treasurer because I remember, you know... And they said, oh, we got a candidate lined up. The candidate lined up was not somebody I could work with. So I said,

I'm not going to do that. I think we need to send a message so I'll run for Secretary-Treasurer. Personally I'm always more comfortable. I never want to be president of anything. Assistant to the president, executive assistant, chief negotiator, secretary-treasurer, whatever. Because you can do a lot of work there without having to always [unclear]. So that was an interesting convention. Two things happen. I won for secretary-treasurer and part of that was a dissatisfaction with what happened in...

**KN** [00:53:32] Was is a contest?

**CA** [00:53:35] Oh yeah. Mike ran. Ken was the incumbent, I ran against the incumbent. I had nothing personally against Mike except you know, he could have done more, I think. Although, you know, he could have done more. But he didn't.

**KN** [00:53:52] And what happened in the president's race? Was there a contest for president?

**CA** [00:53:58] Did Joy Langan run against Art? I can't recall.

**KN** [00:54:02] I can't recall either. Was Art re-elected?

**CA** [00:54:06] Art was re-elected.

**KN** [00:54:07] So you were secretary-treasurer with Art.

**CA** [00:54:09] Yes and two things though. There was that and then Jack Munro did not get re-elected as vice- president and Art Gruntman did. So the IWA withdrew from the Fed. So when I took over as secretary-treasurer in January, we had lost our second biggest affiliate, we were running a deficit and had a debt and lost all that revenue. So it was an interesting job as secretary- treasurer. And we also agreed to have the Fed give 20 grand to the miners, the British miners at the convention that year. So it was an interesting start.

**KN** [00:55:04] Elections at that time were every year?

**CA** [00:55:06] Two years. So I had two years with Art and finally I had enough. And he wasn't a team player. I'll say that to him any time. He went off on his own and so people were very dissatisfied and they were all talking about and finally they settled on Georgetti. And notwithstanding the perception of Georgetti being a right-winger, he's not as left as me, and he's basically a bit centre right. But he was a good leader. He built the Fed, he built the strength of the Fed, he built the credibility of the Fed. And he was a consensus builder. Art was not a consensus builder. You have a vote, he'd go off and do what he wanted. Georgetti was a solid consensus builder. And so he built the Fed into a strong force in the province.

**KN** [00:56:07] Yeah. Did Ken run against Art or did Art not run?

**CA** [00:56:12] Art didn't run.

**KN** [00:56:12] So Ken...

**CA** [00:56:13] Was basically acclaimed.

**KN** [00:56:15] And did you stay on?

**CA** [00:56:15] Yes, I stayed on for another couple of terms before I left. Which was nothing to do with Ken, by the way, because it was a really good job at that time.

**KN** [00:56:26] At what point did you go back to work at GEU?

**CA** [00:56:32] It was my third term and I went to the BCGEU convention, constitutional convention and it's not speaking out of school, there were clearly troubles in the union. The convention was disruptive, didn't know where people were going. People were, they challenged the president. People I personally thought did not have a lot of credibility. And one of them came very close to defeating John Shields, which would have been disastrous for the union. And it was at that convention that Madeleine said, I think you should come back. John needs you. And it was his wife. John Shield's wife. So I did, but not before I did a number of things. I went and talked to some folks, went and talked to some senior staff that I'd had good working relationships with. What's wrong with the union these days? What would it take to fix it? And they all came up with a bit of a summary of things, filling staff positions, replacing senior staff, doing a few other things.

[00:58:05] The problem was John was very good, tried to build a consensus all the time. But he tried to, I don't know [unclear] he tried to social work a lot of things. And sometimes you've just got to say to people, no, not I hear you, but just no. So it's like good guy, bad guy. He needed a bad guy in a way. So basically I sat down along with Patrice Pratt, who was on staff there, and I said Patrice, I said, we'll take on the job as directors under certain circumstances. One, the staff report directly to you. To us. They don't -- staff don't go around us because one of the problems was some staff going around the existing managers at that time and a few other things. You've got five vacancies here that are really irritating all the staff. Fill them. They've been empty for six months, a year. Fill them. So he moved through that and we went back to work there. A few other people were asked to leave or re-assigned some other place in the province. And we went back and then I started to work with Gary Steeves. It was working in organizing to develop a strategy where organizing and bargaining worked together rather than having an organizing department here and a bargaining department here to make it a sort of symbiotic relationship between organizing and bargaining. And Gary later became the third director of the union. And it worked really well over the...

**KN** [01:00:02] [unclear] general secretary?

**CA** [01:00:04] No, no. Norm Richards became president during that period, I forget, maybe '84 I think it was. '84 convention. In fact he had been the acting general secretary since '82 when Fryer went off to NUPGE to be president of the national union. So we had a strong organizing strategy. We had a bargaining strategy and it worked all through that period of '89 on through the '90s. The union really grew.

**KN** [01:00:54] And how did it grow? Like talk a bit about this organizing strategy because I think it really dramatically changed the BCGEU.

**CA** [01:01:01] It changed the whole nature of the BCGEU. One was a focus in areas. So as part of the bargaining strategy there was also -- see part of the problem with organizing all those areas, I mean when you organize a new one, you got to negotiate a new collective agreement. So long term care centres, we had a number of long-term care centres. We had a strategy to work to produce. But there were centralized bargaining agents for the employers in the public sector set up by the previous governments to try

and control the public sector. But it also worked in another way. And that is to say we're going to negotiate one collective agreement, we're going to amalgamate all these collective agreements into one agreement. So we have one agreement for long term care centres. We have one agreement for home support. We had an eight-month strike in home support to set a standard agreement. And then one of the conditions of that settlement was that any new home support agency organized would be put directly into the agreement and get those wages. That makes organizing a bit easier and also cuts the expenses of the union and the resources of the union are put into bargaining small agreement by small agreement by small agreement with every two-bit employer out there. So it led in that direction.

**CA** [01:02:18] We were doing the same thing over on the community health side because community health and wages and benefits was way behind the acute care sector. So we were building these up. The government then in the late '90s brought in these amendments to community health to set up a new -- when they brought in the Health Labour Relations amendments. They created four separate bargaining units: nurses, paramedical professionals, home supports facilities and home support community. BCGEU represented and you had to have a bargaining council get certified for each one of those four. So the Nurses were the majority in the nurses unit, HSA the majority in that unit, HEU the majority in the facilities unit and the BCGEU was the majority in the community support unit. So it worked very well in that way that each of the four health care unions had a majority in one of the four sectors. Great balance.

**CA** [01:03:26] So we put together a committee and over two summers, a couple of strikes, we built a master agreement in community health services with significant increases in wages and benefits, which have just been recently, after going into a wealth of decline over the last decade or so -- I don't know why -- they've come back up. There's some headline of \$11 million redress for that area of public sector. We worked hard in community health, Community Social Services. We focused social service agencies with transitional houses, community living agencies to build first regional collective agreements. We had an agreement from Vancouver Island for Community Living, one for northern B.C., one for the Lower Mainland, one for the Interior. Then the next round of bargaining, we negotiate those into one collective agreement, one standard agreement with the same condition. You get a standard agreement, you get organized, you get that agreement. And eventually the government, after I left in '99, the government, the Socred government, put that structure into legislation, which was a benefit for those workers as well.

**CA** [01:04:57] So it required long term planning and working together as a team and the ability to use the resources of the union. So I think we very nearly depleted the union strike fund in the last half of the '90s but out of it we got a lot of really good collective agreements. We got a lot of protection for workers. Last BCGEU convention I was at, they were talking about how great the strike fund is. We haven't spent any money out of the strike fund in years. We have \$60 million in it. I thought wow, that's great. [laughs - unclear] I know when Stephanie see this she's going to be irritated.

**KN** [01:05:44] So that takes us to the end of the '90s then and somewhere around that time you again went into a different role?

**CA** [01:05:57] Yes. Significantly different.

**KN** [01:05:59] Significantly different. Do you want to talk about that, what was that role?

**CA [01:06:03]** It was a great role because I could walk down the streets of Ottawa in my neighbourhood and nobody knew who I was [laughs] for a change. My role was assistant to Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress. I had worked with Ken for about close to three terms when he was president of the BC Fed. We got along well and we had our frictions but we worked well, I think, as a team overall. And he said, okay, he said, look, I'm willing to let you come and work here because I had a personal reason to go to Ottawa. My partner at the time had got a job there so I wanted to encourage her to develop her career and then follow her. So I went to Ken and he said sure. He says but I need you to guarantee three terms. So five terms later or whatever it was. Two terms, yeah it was only two terms because they were three-year terms. How long? Two terms. Five terms later we left.

**CA [01:07:06]** Being assistant to the president of the Canadian Labour Congress was interesting because the Congress was in shambles. Everybody, Bob White was a good president in terms of public relations, in terms of the international work. Congress did significant and impressive international work, human rights work around the world. Internally, the administration was in shambles. Every department ran independently. We had two departments had their own bloody letterhead. They didn't use the Congress letterhead, they used their own letterhead like they were separate agencies. At least a couple of them defied it. They defied us for a while to use the Congress letterhead. So part of it was to say, okay, first of all, we're having regular meetings of the directors from different departments, they're going to share their work. We're going to try to... I'd sit down at a director's meeting, a director would come in and say, okay, we're instituting a... I am launching a campaign next week on this issue to be distributed to all of the regional offices. The person in charge of regional offices had never been, hadn't been discussed with this. He never had any information. Never been told. He said what?

**CA [01:08:25]** So there was no communication. We used the term silos. All the departments were silos. Individually they did good work. But as an organization then weren't effective. We'd had no major, any major victories with the government. I said to somebody in one department, so what's your relationship with the people in the ministries you deal with? Well, we don't have a relationship with them, you know, they're Liberals. But they're the government. Our job at the Congress is to deal with the government. Well, a letter to a Cabinet minister would we have CCs that long. Leader of the opposition, leader of the NDP, this person. If you're writing a Cabinet minister, you're trying to influence a Cabinet minister and get a meeting with the Cabinet minister there's no reason to involve the NDP at all. You're trying to affect government policy. And so the government used to dismiss us. Ken and I had one meeting with Chretien and he simply said listen, you guys, we like you guys but you're an arm of the NDP so we don't pay much attention to you. And I could see why he thought we were just an arm of the NDP.

**CA [01:09:48]** So one of the things was to try to change that perception. Support the NDP strongly but get some results directly with the government on health and safety issues. All this stuff on violence and, you know, at work and discrimination at work in the Canadian Labour Code was Congress initiative and was well done. The improvements to the CPP that I mean, Ken basically drove that issue himself and we were able to achieve that. The first major improvements to the CPP in decades by focusing on what we were supposed to do. Get everybody working together and become credible and be very credible. So it took one term just to get the ship turned around and another term to start to get some results. And then we found out we could have an impact on some cabinet ministers in some meetings. We could get some legislation amended, others they didn't care and it was a little difficult.



**KN** [01:11:01] So how long were you with the CLC then?

**CA** [01:11:01] I went there in '99 and I left in 2014, 15 years.

**KN** [01:11:05] So during that whole period of time was there any one highlight, event that occurred that you were part of that you think that was significant, that you remember fondly?

**CA** [01:11:21] I think the CPP, having that go through the House. I mean, we didn't do any big demonstrations because as a friend of mine once said, what is it -- Bob Doer, Paul's brother, but Bob Doer at a meeting we had in Winnipeg -- so what are we going to prove by going down and yelling at buildings? Unless you get 50,000 people on the street and then the government just ignored us in BC. So I think doing the work to get those, to build the support in the community, to build the support in the business community, to build public support, to build support amongst the labour movement. That's the work that the Congress did. And then to get support in Cabinet and the Ministry of Finance. That's the work the Congress did to get those improvements to the CPP. It's not as, you know, "sexy".

**KN** [01:12:25] What were those improvements. Do you remember that?

**CA** [01:12:26] Yeah, more money? Yeah, the benefit level went up. I don't have the exact figures with me in my head but the benefit level went up 25% I think.

**KN** [01:12:37] Significant.

**CA** [01:12:37] Yeah, fairly significant. We were looking for 35 or 40. But I think it went up 25% over... So it will have an impact on people retiring in the next few years. I hope we can create a scenario where in another three or four years the Congress will re-address that situation, say, okay, it's time for another increase because it hadn't been addressed for many, many years. They're not giving out the CPP or it's slipped [unclear]. I think amendments to the Canada Labour Code were also critical during that period.

**KN** [01:13:19] So if you look back at your whole life, whether in the BCGEU, the BC Fed, the CLC, a fairly significant role that you played in many ways, when you look back at everything that happened during that period of time, what stands out for you during that whole time? What do you feel is [unclear]?

**CA** [01:13:52] I don't want to be Pollyannish about this and I'm not I've never been Pollyannish. If you do the work and represent the people who hire you, who elect you, if you do the work with them, they will support you. You can get their support. I mean, we've run some -- BCGEU -- some big battles and the BC Fed. One of the largest general strikes in Canadian history over that legislation and at the Fed, developing -- and this is something I am kind of proud of. Georgetti and I sat down and said, what are we going to do about this legislation that's just come in? Wage control legislation [unclear]. First of all, had a one-day general strike to launch a campaign of boycotting the legislation. So for a year or two we convinced the unions not to submit their collective agreements to that board for review. To boycott the board, Compensation Stabilization Board I think it was. But that got leaky after that. But for five years we held onto that under Vander Zalm and that took a lot of work. Working with union leaders who'd prefer -- 'oh it doesn't mean

anything'. Well, it did mean something. It continued to show the government we have determination.

**CA** [01:15:30] It's like in the '83 situation with the BCTF and the BCGEU continuing to push the issue of legislation. It's like -- I forget the year when the BC government decided they were going to amend the cost-of-living clause in the pension plan. Every public sector union here in the province didn't do anything. We said we're going to protest this. So we started a series of rotating one-day strikes in communities across the province. We started in, I forget which one it was, I think the Kootenays and the northwest, northeast, central interior, Prince George. One-day strikes, shutting the province down, shutting those regions down, all government services for one day to protest what the government was doing unilaterally to the cost-of-living clauses in our pensions. And as we got closer to Victoria and Vancouver for that shutdown, we got a phone call. And so I ended up being a negotiator, on the phone all the time with a negotiator from government. We negotiated an amendment to the cost-of-living clause in the public service labour relations pension plan. Unfortunately, it didn't apply to the teachers plan or the municipal plan, but we maintained our cost-of-living clause as it had been there before. And that was done again, after a whole series of meetings with the members. We went out on the road to talk to them about the importance of the pensions, about the importance of fighting for these things and that you can fight government.

**KN** [01:17:19] Cliff, you alluded to the general strike. We're talking about the June 1st, 1987 general strike.

**CA** [01:17:26] Yes. Yeah.

**KN** [01:17:27] It was a very significant event and most people, if you were to ask them, if they've ever participated in a general strike, they will say, no. They don't they don't seem to think of that.

**CA** [01:17:43] It was only one day. It was a quarter of a million people.

**KN** [01:17:46] So it was very significant.

**CA** [01:17:48] It was significant as well as sending a message. And it's like earlier back in '83. I don't know about the education sector but certainly in the provincial government sector, everything we heard after that was that every other government was a bit more nervous. If BC had prevailed, if we had never gone on those strikes, never put together Operation Solidarity, that program would have gone through every province in the country. But it didn't. I mean, there's always been restraint, things like that, but not that same vicious, brutal way did it go through the rest of the country.

**KN** [01:18:35] Okay, I want to ask you one...

**CA** [01:18:37] So in the short form, the short answer to that is, I think in my career I've been involved in a lot of important issues which have helped improve the rights and standards of living of workers in Canada. I've sat with staff in my own union, BCGEU who've talked about the impact of bargaining home support services, long term care centres, female-predominant bargaining units, and how quite often the divorce rate goes up when women become independent. They've got sick leave, they've got pensions, they've got good salaries, they've got vacations. It changes the whole nature of the

relationships of who they are in the world. And I think we've done so much good and to have been part of that and to have fought the good fight, as they say.

**KN** [01:19:47] Okay. I do have one final question and it pertains to the whole issue of labour history. Why do you think it's important for people who are say active in unions today to know something about the history of their union, the history of the union movement overall?

**CA** [01:20:16] Because you don't know who you are if you don't understand that, you just don't know who you are or why you are. Why are you in a union? And that's part of the whole thing where we always want more labour history in the schools. We want more here. I'm not sure what ways there are of doing that. We need to be more proactive. One of my areas of study was social history. EP Thompson, "The Making of the English Working Class." Fabulous book, and Canadian labour history. Too often it's part of the problem... Too often the books written by unions themselves about themselves are pretty... they're PR pieces or puff pieces which is unfortunate because in the union there's a lot of debate, lot of struggle. But if you don't know your history, you don't know why you didn't get a collective agreement, what went on before you, what struggles people made to get you what you now have, and why you should be appreciative of it. Labour History. If you don't know your history, like I say, you don't know who you are. You don't know why you are.