

**Interview: Dave Pritchett (DP)**

**Interviewer: Sean Griffin (SG), Dan Keeton (DK) and Bailey Garden (BG)**

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**Transcription: Jane Player**

**SG** [00:00:04] Born. Where were you born?

**DP** [00:00:06] 1949 Vancouver General Hospital.

**SG** [00:00:09] What date?

**DP** [00:00:10] February 28.

**SG** [00:00:12] 1949. Another 49er

**DP** [00:00:14] A good year.

**SG** [00:00:15] Right? And any siblings?

**DP** [00:00:18] One sister. I was born on her first birthday, Lynn.

**SG** [00:00:21] Oh, OK. So she's born on the same day as you were?

**DP** [00:00:24] In 48.

**SG** [00:00:26] That's Interesting. Okay. So you come from a long line of union activists and leaders. Your grandfather was Harold Pritchett. He was a founding president, IWA, and later on became its Canadian leader here. And your father, Craig Pritchett, was the first president of the Canadian area of International Longshoremen, which are both in formative stages during part of your lifetime. It must have been a lot of stuff going on in your household at this time.

**DP** [00:00:57] To say the least. There was a lot of pressure. There was a lot of activities around organizing, but a lot of people don't understand the subtext to all of that. We talked earlier today about the chain smoking constantly in the kitchen with two and three hour meetings at the kitchen table. Two or three a week. And over the weekends and miss summer holidays. So, when I was ten years old, I went on my Dad's organizing drive to round up all the disparate locals on Vancouver Island and Prince Rupert and New Westminster. That was my two-week vacation.

**SG** [00:01:33] Just very local. Some of the ILWU.

**DP** [00:01:35] Yeah, because there was a history of the ILA and in Vancouver and Prince Rupert in Victoria and there was infighting between locals for jurisdiction. So anyway, he made a real good effort in the fifties to bring those together under one umbrella. I got dragged along for the ride, so that meant I got introduced to small town B.C. Ten years old, wandering around for two or three hours while Dad disappeared to have a meeting. So I understood this word meeting and they went on incessantly all the time. I got to go to a

meet. I got to go to a meeting. Can't go on summer holidays. Got to go to a meeting. So this played a big role in my early years. Yeah.

**SG** [00:02:22] What are some of the figures? Was, for example, Harry Bridges, was he a somebody that figured in your early life?

**DP** [00:02:28] Harry Bridges slept on our couch at 3622 Normandy Drive and had numbers of times as he drank milk and scotch, chain smoking at the kitchen table, giving me lectures about the working class and about how my Dad understood that. That's one of the reasons why Harry appointed my Dad as international rep and then fall into that regional director. Because Harry and my Dad had really profound conversations beyond the dollars and cents of organizing workers for benefits. They understood the class consciousness question. So I don't know whether all these people slept at the house, but most of them did. There was Jack Hall from Hawaii. He was the regional director and Bob Robertson from, I think, California, Oregon, Jack Cavacas, who was the editor of The Dispatcher newspaper. There was other officers of the union. I guess, to organize in those days, there wasn't a lot of money around for organizing. So when people went out of town or, you know, they visited Canada--we had a really small house, 730 square feet—they slept on the couch. You had a meeting all night and a few scotches and then you wake up to cigarette smoke and bacon at six in the morning and continue on. So, yeah, there's a lot of organizing there.

**SG** [00:03:56] A lot of kids kinda grew to resent that their parents were always away at the meetings with the union. How did you feel about it?

**DP** [00:04:03] Well, I understood the importance of it because we were surrounded, I mean, we spent every second Sunday at my grandfather's, who was the founding president, the IWA. The IWA had a split because of left-right politics within the union movement. There was meetings up at his house. It was just part of what we did and who we were. And as far as having money for holidays or moneys even to go to a café, the people didn't have the money. A lot of the unions and a lot of stalwarts from the Ukrainian community, the Swedish community, the Russian community, they had various halls around Vancouver. Guess what? They always put on banquets. So that's what I liked about being around trade unionists.

**SG** [00:04:50] Oh, to go to all these banquets.

**DP** [00:04:51] I used to go to all these banquets, man. My mom wasn't a very good cook and I ate heartedly. I was allowed to come back for seconds at those. I ate a lot of pierogies, a lot of cabbage rolls. I loved it. Yeah, it was good. Well, it was all about sharing, too, because this was a socialist ideology about sharing the wealth. I thought, well, I'll start with the second helping of cabbage rolls, right? Yeah.

**BG** [00:05:12] Your grandfather would have been organizing like during the Great Depression, which obviously had its own kind of interesting. Did you remember any particular like stories or anything that he would tell?

**DP** [00:05:24] I don't know whether I brought that book. Maybe I didn't. He was interviewed in his seventies. Tattam and Lembcke came up from University of Washington, Oregon. Oh, here it is, from One Union in Wood. There's some pretty harrowing stories in there. My grandfather gave me a copy of this before he died. I thought, jeeze, I've heard all these stories since I was a kid and I didn't read it till after he died and I couldn't put it down. I

read it in about, you know, two nights. You hear of labour organizing, but you don't always hear of the thuggery, the murder, the assaults, the scabs. There was the American Legion, you know, shooting up union halls and murdering union leaders. That was in the background where he was going around the United States to organize. I think they ended up with approximately 100,000 members at one point. Yeah.

**SG** [00:06:27] Was the understanding your father originally started out as an IWA organizer. He worked for a time with the IWA?

**DP** [00:06:34] Yeah. When he was younger, he worked in the shipyards, I think previous to going into the army as a tank driver. He worked over at Burrard. I think in the riveting shop over there. Then he went to war. When he came back, he became a delegate from the Mission area to attend ILWU convention. So he was a member and then he was elected to be an organizer and he did that, I think, for one or two years up in the Okanogan.

**SG** [00:07:03] For the IWA?

**DP** [00:07:04] For the IWA. Yeah. So he was firstly an IWA member, which is interesting because when I was working up from '68, it took me eight and a half years to get into the Longshore ILWU. I had worked for a year on and off in Prince Rupert as a spare board casual up there, and I decided I needed more work. I was 21 years old and I was thinking of getting married, so I ended up going to Holberg on Vancouver Island and within two weeks I was an IWA member. I actually was an IWA member first, as well.

**SG** [00:07:41] Just going back for a minute to your father, his wartime service also stood him in good stead in terms of getting him into the ILWU.

**DP** [00:07:51] That's an interesting story in itself. There was a lot of Cold War animosity. You know, the Soviets were our friends in crushing fascism, but then that sort of waned after the Churchill-Bretton Woods agreement or something. I'm not a great historian, but I know there's a lot of animosity that built and Cold War rhetoric built up, you know, with the politicians. That showed itself inside the trade union movement as well. My father was working his way up the green line spare board and he was, you know, ready to come into the union. I think there was some pushback, maybe from the right wing within the longshore locals at the time because of the history of my grandfather being denied entry into the United States for being like a communist. Harry Rankin was also getting rattled through the courts down in the States to get turfed out of the country for being an unwelcome alien. So this was a, I wouldn't say a tidal wave, but it was a very direct pressure on left union leaders, especially popular ones. I think my father suffered a little bit trying to get into the longshore union, having a known leadership from my grandfather, with the IWA. Right.

**SG** [00:09:10] He got some help from an unlikely source.

**DP** [00:09:13] I have a letter somewhere in his archives at home, which I'm just trying to organize. I think one of his sergeants in the Army knew of him to be a decent fellow and gave a letter to the shipping company and the union because he was engaged as a superintendent or an upper-level player, you might say, in the shipping community, and put in a good word for my dad that he should be accepted into the union. That helped my dad actually make membership into the union.

**SG** [00:09:44] It helped open the door.

**DP** [00:09:45] Helped to open, you know, the door. Back then, too, the employers were controlling the size of the union membership, but they were also trying to not let sons and daughters come into the industry. They wanted their people into the industry. There was a lot of things at play. There's a lot of things at play, you know, back then that made it real difficult, especially, probably, if they looked at my grandfather's history as a successful organizer. He was a successful labour leader and I could understand maybe the local leadership might be but a threat to have somebody who might come in the union as an organizer and their jobs in the union bureaucracy might be at stake, because somebody might want to deal with more profound issues than dollars and cents. It might be rank and file militancy because there's a lot of unanswered questions that a lot of leadership didn't have the ability, or the willingness, or the political expedience to really take those issues on.

**SG** [00:10:49] Well, you mentioned the Cold War, too, and this really was the time when a lot of Cold War issues were emerging in the labour movement. I remember as a kid growing up myself that the SIU had been raiding Fishermen's Union and was also, as I understand, involved in the waterfront as well. Any experience that you have?

**DP** [00:11:08] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It was a dark and stormy night. It was about three o'clock in the morning and my mother screamed her head off in our little house on Normandy Drive. My dad's hundred-dollar car we thought had been firebombed. My dad yelled at us in the back bedroom, 'Get on the floor, get on the floor'. As it turns out, he went out there in the morning. He was afraid to go out of the house. There was some railway flares underneath the car. At that time, Hal Banks, a known gangster who finally got run out of the country, and rightly so, he had an office downtown that had blazoned on the wall, his duty here was to smash Canadian autonomy unionism and run the communists out of town. This was trying times and there's a lot of threats and a lot of intimidation. The Canadian Seaman's Union was down on Terminal dock. I was about eight or nine, I guess, nine or ten, in around that time. You probably know better than I when that big uprising was in Terminal dock. Hal Banks made a mistake. He had his scabs in the SIU come on to do the longshore coast wise or the coast wise work on the docks and on the ship down below. But there was longshoremen, I think, driving the cranes at the time. Not only did he take on the Seaman's Union, which was in a struggle of its own and I don't know all the details, you'll know more about that. They were running the longshoremen off the dock as well. My dad phoned Harry Bridges. I love this story. I want to believe that it's true. My dad said, 'Harry, we've got a problem up here. Hal Banks is on our docks.' Harry said, 'You got any two by fours up there in B.C?' My dad says, 'Yup'. Harry said, 'Well, you might want to use them. We got your back. We got the lawyers down here. You're the organizer. Do what you have to do.' The word went out and a bunch of longshoremen went down there and run the scabs off the ship and they continue it.

**SG** [00:13:17] With two by fours?

**DP** [00:13:18] Yeah. With two by fours. I mean, back then, the shipping companies had used machine guns in San Francisco in the thirties. Now we're talking the fifties. My dad had come back from the Second World War and saw friends killed. They were not going to be run off the docks by scabs and gangsters. I like the continuation of the story, and I'm sticking to it. I love this story. The longshoremen, as you know, drink a few beer, especially back in the fifties. It was expected almost. The word went out and around all the longshore bars. 'Go in there, keep quiet for a while and after the place packs out at around 11:00 at night, make an announcement. Quite obvious that you'll buy any of Hal Banks's men a

beer for running them no good longshoremen off the dock.' Well, Marble Arch, the Commercial. A couple of these scabs said, 'We did. Do we get a beer?' And the longshoremen pounce on them and ran out of the bar and beat the shit out of them in the back alley. It really slowed down the scabbing on the docks after that.

**SG** [00:14:26] I can imagine.

**DP** [00:14:27] Yeah, it did. You know like I say, you come back from war and you fight fascists. You're faced with a history, a known history because a lot of the lefties in the union movement knew the union history going back to the great strikes. Eugene Debs, Harry Bridges, the needle workers, the Molly Maguires. You know, everybody knew the violence that the boss saddled up with right wing governments was prepared to use. Working people put their lives on the line to fight back. It wasn't a matter of being violent; it was a matter of there's nowhere else to run if they're going to bring in known gangsters to run you off your workplace.

**SG** [00:15:10] If you're going to school at this particular point, is this trade union activism become like a career path?

**DP** [00:15:16] No.

**SG** [00:15:17] Interest to you? How did you go from there?

**DP** [00:15:20] Well, I think when I was 15 I was more into drinking beer and saving up to buy a car. Listening to Bob Dylan.

**SG** [00:15:26] As were most in the [unclear].

**DP** [00:15:30] Popular culture began to play quite a role. Out of popular culture came the beatniks. Came the hippies. Came the yippies. A lot of those people I think meant well, but they didn't have an organization behind them like the union. I was more interested, because I wasn't a union member till I was in my late twenties, I was more interested in popular culture is how to push back. Popular culture, as we know, pushed back racism in the States. Popular culture, a lot of the push back the Vietnam War, university. I went to university for three months before they politely said, 'Hey, you're wasting your money. You want to continue?' And I said, 'Well, maybe not.'

**SG** [00:16:13] Was this at SFU?

**DP** [00:16:13] Yeah, because I wanted to be an architect from grade three, but then I found out in grade 11 physics, you can't write poetry. You're [unclear] a eight hour physics lab in 10 minutes and then expect to pass. Of course, I didn't pass--so on to the next thing.

**SG** [00:16:35] This is also a time when a lot of young people are coming out of university and going into the workforce. It seemed like there was a bit of a clash of cultures to some degree because there was an older, established workforce who had always done this. Here's all of us young upstarts coming out of university and going into the resource industries. Did you encounter that as well?

**DP** [00:16:56] Yeah, well, it's interesting you should, you know, bring it up because we're born after the war and the economy began to pick up as we entered the workforce when we were 17, 18, 19 years old. A lot of sons and daughters knew of union people, knew

what a union was. Well, you came out of school if you couldn't make it in university, you could go into pulp.

**SG** [00:17:16] Right.

**DP** [00:17:18] (unclear) Warehouse, Woodward's, Simpson-Sears, the docks, millponds, sawmills. It was all union jobs, so you had that ability to pay the rent. What those people brought in was their book learning from school, which a lot of the elders had rolled out in grades seven and eight. We had a lot of this intellectual power, or so we thought, that we were bringing that to the forefront. We also brought a change in lifestyle. A lot of people who were 18 and 19 were growing their hair long, and part of that was probably based on storming the Bastille how many hundreds of years ago. It was back to being communards and starting up communities. I know people up in Lillooet for 40 odd years that wanted to start alternative communities, not based on the industrial model and not based on flagrant consumerism. The older crowd and the union, who came out of poverty of the twenties and thirties, thank you very much, they wanted consumer goods. They wanted to get a newer car. They wanted to buy a house. They wanted to run around on a paved road, whereas a lot of the hippies were looking to find the end of the gravel road. Of course, there was a clash going on between, but we were all working class people. The hippies didn't know it, but the organized trade unionists and the left at least knew that much. I had a good cross-pollination and so that informed me into my later years.

**SG** [00:18:52] Yeah, but you went out to work, for example, in Culver you mentioned.

**DP** [00:18:57] Yeah.

**SG** [00:18:58] Which was pretty tough?

**DP** [00:19:00] Oh yeah.

**SG** [00:19:01] Tough, loving place.

**DP** [00:19:02] Well that was interesting.

**SG** [00:19:05] How did that go over?

**DP** [00:19:05] Yes, that's kind of funny because when I was up in Prince Rupert, I got threatened by a couple of drunken longshoremen. I needed a haircut. I was the only guy in the local with long hair, and they decided that I needed a haircut. Well, I decided I didn't. There's a lot of intimidation and I had to read out of the Constitution, which a lot of them were union members that hadn't read their own constitution about human rights, equal rights. I had to explain to them that as union members, they were obligated to allow me to express myself as a casual. Then I go over to Holberg. I'm thinking, well, I'm going out into the bush into the middle of nowhere. I'm thinking to myself, I'm not going out there with long hair, I'll really get more intimidation. I cut all my hair off short, which Gary Snyder would call a Bob's Creek haircut. I go out there and there must have been 100 odd people eating in the cook shack. Most of them had long hair and thought I was the RCMP dropped to spy on them. I couldn't win. So yeah, there's a little bit of humour, but I got rattled up, you know, there a little bit, but I knew what unionism was all about and so that was my backbone, you might say.

**SG** [00:20:22] Tell me more about this incident you mentioned in Prince Rupert where they were trying to give you a haircut. What exactly happened?

**DP** [00:20:29] That was more rhetoric, you know, than anything else. But my dad and my grandfather gave me a booming longshoremen's voice. I sort of talked them out of it based on threats that they would be up against the union that they were a member of because there was this, there was a strong belief in rank and file unionism, but you throw in a lot of alcohol it just gets rank once in awhile. The people want to be

**SG** [00:20:54] They didn't jump you or anything?

**DP** [00:20:55] No, but that happened in Vancouver.

**SG** [00:20:57] Oh?

**DP** [00:20:58] Yeah. Yeah, that happened in Vancouver at a later date. Yeah.

**SG** [00:21:02] For the same reason?

**DP** [00:21:03] Yeah, for the same reason. I got

**SG** [00:21:05] Tell me about that.

**DP** [00:21:05] I was on the ship, probably the Koto Passian at the asbestos dock called White Pass where we were handling bags of asbestos. Real dirty job. Asbestos, rained into the hatch on a sunny day like snow. There is an eight-man gang down below, and four on each side, and there's two guys on the other side. They're both dead and gone now, Aaron and Wells. I know them really well; we became good friends. They went out at lunch and had their six beer and came back with a gallon of wine. One of them pulled out a knife and decided I needed a haircut. They approached me with a knife down below. I mean, they weren't going to kill me. They wanted to literally cut my hair off. I wouldn't go for it, of course. I picked up a bag of asbestos and beat them into submission. I was 18 and weighed 140 pounds. They were 200 pounds, but they were drunk. At least I had that advantage. I was one of the few longshoremen that didn't drink.

**SG** [00:22:10] And so on. You're hittin' them with bags of asbestos.

**DP** [00:22:13] Yeah.

**SG** [00:22:13] It must have been flying around.

**DP** [00:22:14] Yeah. You know. And then after one bag broke open, the rest of the gang were throwin' snowballs around, and these guys said, 'Hey, leave Dave alone. He's, you know, he's one of us.' They backed off and went back to work.

**SG** [00:22:28] This asbestos is basically just free floating around?

**DP** [00:22:30] Free floating around, even without, you know, no gloves, no masks, no coveralls. I didn't know how dangerous that was. My mother died of mesothelioma and it could have been from me bringing that home on my Cowichan Indian sweater and toque which everybody, that was sort of one of the standard fare, you might say, of working on the docks. A lot of people wore mackinaws and Cowichan sweaters. They were warm but

they picked up a lot of asbestos. Of course my English mum doing all the housework, she'd be shaking out my clothes when I come home from work, living on Normandy Drive. I mean, she got bombed out of two houses in the Second World War in England, working in Peak Freans. There was asbestos in a lot of the shipping industry on the BC Ferries. So, you know, we were subject to that, but longshore personnel were on the front line of handling that stuff in a pretty raw form.

**SG** [00:23:27] Did this ever become an issue in terms of trying to, you know, control that this hazardous product on the docks, do you recall?

**DP** [00:23:34] Well, it was interesting because my father went up to Stewart. I think that was the terminus of the railway that brought the White Pass asbestos. They invited him up to the mine and gave him a sample, which he brought home that my sister and I were playing with in the fifties. The longshore position was if things were coming in and out of the country, Longshore wanted to handle it.

**SG** [00:23:59] Right.

**DP** [00:23:59] Everything--to grab jurisdiction was the name of the game. Health and safety issues become much later. I think it was probably in the seventies, early eighties, when I was on the safety committee of Local 500, I started to research asbestos back then and found out it was known carcinogen in the 1800s. It was suppressed by the company doctors and the bosses. It was a big export industry out of Quebec and White Pass. I think that actually drove a lot of the containerization as we know it on the West Coast because that was one of the first operations, if not the first, to actually put product in a container because that was to sort of consolidate it. It would come out of the mine in a cleaner form and it would come across the Vancouver docks on the, I think was the H.G. Browne. We were unloading containers years later. Yeah, there was a lot of longshoremen that have died from asbestos. You were reluctant to have autopsies. Their family thought it was a personal thing. Some longshoremen have lost lungs and some family members have actually lost their lives. My mom was one of them. You know, like I said, jurisdiction drove everything. Safety committees came, you know, quite a bit later.

**BG** [00:25:32] Thinking back to some of your early years, can you think of any other cargoes or jobs that now, looking back, were potentially a health and safety risk? I know that a lot of things were done by hand. Was there anything else that kind of stood out like that?

**DP** [00:25:47] Well, your friend Ken Bauder works here at the labour centre. Him and I did a lot of research like around the grain dust issues because a lot of people say grain is just an okay, an organic thing. Unfortunately the farmers to get, you know, better bushels per acre have bowed to the chemical companies like Roundup and so forth. Malathion. Keep that grain safe for export. We did a lot of research on hantavirus, malathion, grain dust in particular. As it turns out, one of the most toxic things in the waterfront is pigeon droppings of all things. It carries the most bacteria in it. People feed them down Stanley Park and there's millions of them on the docks that they create, you know, that sort of an environment. So we did a lot of work. The employer wanted to deny it, had no research on it. Bauder handed me at least five apple boxes worth of information he had brought in from universities and Agriculture Canada and around the world. Said, Dave, do something with this. I boiled it down into, I think, six or seven files. Then we had our first meeting with the employer. They didn't want to recognize the Grain Committee. They only wanted to go through the Joint Industry Safety Committee. We said grain is a specialized product. We



have a right. They still wouldn't meet with us. We went to the federal government and they agreed with us that we had a right because it was a specialized product. Out of that, the employer came to the first meeting, not even with a pencil. I was in shock. And one of the people on their committee wanted me, you know, to take me out for lunch for I guess the big schmooze. I said, 'I got six folders here. I've answered every question. You people have no questions, basically, no answers. And you want to take me out for lunch?' I said, 'Do some homework', and about a month later they came back with an apologetic letter. They gave us funding to complete our work. They paid for it. We got a grain safety book. We got coveralls, we got masks. We sort of really, you know, through activism on the job. As it turns out, longshore are creatures of habit like every other workforce. As we get used to doing things, a lot of the people we fought for in the grain section of the industry didn't want to wear coveralls. They wanted to come to work in shorts, didn't want to wear a mask. They couldn't breathe right. Some people are now dead. Their lungs got so congested with that dust. You know, there again, the union activists are sort of up against the wall in their own membership to bring new ideas and new thinking. Like Shawn had just earlier asked here, what in my background in sort of going to school and then even a little bit of, you know, university, it gave you that sort of impetus for research beyond your own experience. Whereas a lot of the old trade unionists, except for the lefties, hardly any had libraries that were actually analyzing where they were in terms of the class-conscious hierarchy. Yeah.

**SG** [00:29:04] What year are we talking about? Ball park where this

**DP** [00:29:08] The grain issue?

**SG** [00:29:09] Grain issue.

**DP** [00:29:10] I think that'd be the eighties, early nineties. Yeah. My time frames are, you know, are not the best.

**SG** [00:29:16] But you did bring about change?

**DP** [00:29:18] Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

**BG** [00:29:21] But certainly not until much later.

**SG** [00:29:23] That is the way it works. That is a very familiar pattern, the one where you try and introduce new safety measures in the workforce that doesn't want to use them because they get in the way or they don't like that they feel like on and all kinds of things. Yeah, that's true. Just to situate that moment, and I think most of us have one where you suddenly realize that you're working on a job and the union suddenly has become an incredibly valuable thing because of something that's happened. Did you ever have such a moment?

**DP** [00:30:01] Well, I am not going to give the gift to Ralph Nader, but I have a tape from in the seventies, early seventies. This was before I was in the union. He poses the question to the University of Victoria, 'When you leave high school, where do you have a place to meet, a podium, a table to discuss relevant ideas?' He said, 'You have that in high school, you have that in university.' Where else do you have that? In the union movement. You have an opportunity there to get together with your fellow workers and, you know, discuss things. I had this background of union activism. I was trying an alternate lifestyle. I moved out to the valley, bought myself a small farm, raised horses, cows, chickens, kids, cats,

ducks, one sheep. 'Shep The Sheep.' I was writing poetry since I was 18. I always wanted to have my own voice beyond the organization, you might say. All of a sudden I realized, even though I'd been reading a lot of beat poetry out of San Francisco and a lot of Zen poetry out of Japan, I realized that I had a voice in me that was starting to show itself in my poetry about human rights, workers' rights, those sorts of things. As I came into the union and I was able to access the meeting hall more and more and I began to attend meetings, I realized that there was some missing components because my parents had been strong participants, like yours were in the peace movement, in organizing, and I could see the union drifting to better conditions but not taking on the bigger issues like end the arms race, get out of NATO, rights for workers around the world. All of a sudden I found myself writing that in my poetry. Then I thought, oh, I can shift gears here a little bit, express that through the executive of the union. I became a pretty regular writer of resolutions going to the Vancouver District Labour Council, the BC Fed and the CLC, based on things I had learnt through my whole upbringing. I didn't know I had them at my disposal until such times that I began to be involved in the bigger organization because I became a delegate to the BC Fed, the CLC. I went down to the international ILWU in San Francisco to a convention there and I saw some of the older pensioners there who were bringing along issues in a very profound way. I thought, hey, I want to be part of that. It was like an amalgamation, you might say, of a lot of cross-pollination from working it as an individual, but having an opportunity to work through a profound historical organization like the ILWU.

**SG** [00:33:06] I'm just going back for a moment to your job in Holberg where you were immediately a member of the IWA. You mentioned to me an incident there that kind of galvanized your union's sort of realization as well

**DP** [00:33:20] Yeah we were working.

**SG** [00:33:21] Tell me a bit about that.

**DP** [00:33:22] Yeah, we were working in thigh deep snow. My rig employer was a guy named Matty Helms, never forget him. Hard working guy. I'd known that he was the highest production worker in the camp. There was 14 yarders up there. He would get anywhere from 60 to 80 logs out on a winter's day on side hills like that. One of the guys got hurt, twisted his knee, and we're out in the bush about 1200 feet but up and down, little gullies and crossing creeks. We got a 600-horsepower diesel yarder up on the hill. One of the guys I was working with, he had just started a few weeks after me actually, and I was getting my legs under me. He twisted his knee very badly. He said, 'Dave, I can't walk.' We're both rigging chokers and the rigging-puller was Matty Helms. So I said, 'Well just sit down here and I'll talk to Matty.' Matty was up just setting another tail block up on the hillside, which is very, very hard work. Matty comes up. 'Where's your partner?' I said, 'He's sitting over on that stump over there. He's twisted his knee.' He said, 'Well, tell him he can walk back to the machine.' I said, 'No.' I said, 'We've got to get him a stretcher out here to get him. He's really bad.' He said, 'It ain't happening on my watch.' And I went, 'Excuse me.' I knew for a fact that the Finns had got a deal with the Canadian government. If they came over to Canada and they had high productivity for a couple of years, they got first in queue to get a passport. There's a lot of high balling going on. Well, I came out of the longshore industry where it says right in the collective agreement, no individual speed up, all the men necessary, and no unnecessary men. An industry that hired 14-year-olds back in the thirties up to people who were 85. Everybody looked after everybody. I had that instilled in me, but I also had it instilled in me that my grandfather was the founding president of IWA and that was working class rights. Here I got another worker telling me that this guy hasn't twisted his knee. It's below zero. Thigh deep snow

and he's going to walk back to the machine. I said, 'That's not happening.' He goes, 'You hook up a log.' Then he started swearing at me into the camera. 'You fucking Canadians don't know how to work' and waving his finger. I don't do well with that. At all. And I said, 'You're acting like a Nazi, buddy.' I said, 'I'm not putting up with it.' 'What did you say to me?' I said, 'You heard me. You're acting like a Nazi.' I said, 'If you want any logs hooked up, you hook them up. I'm going to go up to the yarder', which would take me half an hour through the bush and through the snow. I said, 'I'm getting an ambulance up, you know, for that man.' I walked back to the guy. He was shivering. He was going into shock. I went back up to the machine, called for the ambulance, walked back out to where he was sitting and brought him a blanket, which we kept in inner tubes underneath the sheet, wrapped around the blanket. He was in so much pain and just shaking like a leaf. I said, 'I'm looking after you. Don't worry about it.' But I have to go back to work because that's all I could do, knowing that the stretcher would come out on the rigging. So then, Matty's on my case, yelling and screaming. Now we're down to one chokerman—me. Thigh deep snow. You throw a choker over a log, you crawl underneath the log, you're in rain gear, soaking wet, cold, hooking up a log. He's doing nothing to help me, but he's a good logger, so he's trying to intimidate me more. I'll just let it roll. Out comes the stretcher

**DK** [00:37:08] This fellow is union man, not a foreman, or anything?

**DP** [00:37:11] Well, I'm not sure if they allowed them into the union till they got citizenship, but I hadn't made the union. I'm still wearing my green hard hat. You've had about a three week.

**SG** [00:37:21] So you're a probie?

**DP** [00:37:24] Yeah, I was. Yeah. Good. Good point. Anyway, out comes the stretcher. We carry the guy in. Matty had to help and they brought some other guys from camp. We brought him in and got him in the stretcher, so the ambulance took off with him. The yarder was ready to go and now it's me and Matty. And he said, 'Well, you're fired anyway.' And he said, 'You can walk back to camp afterward.' And it's like five miles back to camp on logging roads in the middle of the winter. I said, 'That's not happening.' He said, 'You have talked badly to me.' I said, 'You talk badly to me.' He said, 'But I'm the rig employer here. I've run way better men off the job than you.' As a matter of fact, I found out later he had got three other guys fired over the last six months. He said, 'You're gone. Never to be back.' I went up to the yarder, I said, 'Get on the blower.' He said, 'What do you want now, Dave?' This is a machine operator. I said, 'Get a superintendent out here and bring out a truck because I need a ride to camp.' Because I said I'm not going back to work under these conditions, he said, 'Matty do you want a log hooked up?' 'Bye, bye. I'm waiting for the superintendent.' 'You're fired.' Not going to happen. The superintendent came out and said, 'Where you want to go?' I said, 'Back to camp.' He said, 'Well, I guess, you know you've tried for a few weeks, you might as well head home.' I said, 'I'm not going anywhere.' He goes, 'Yes, you are. You've been fired by Matty. He's the top [unclear] producer.' So we chatted and just as I was about to get out of the truck, this is about a ten minute thing, he said, 'Well,' he said, 'you won't be paid as of tomorrow.' I turned around to him, to the superintendent. I said, 'You have heard of a union?' I said, 'My grandfather organized the IWA and that entitles me to some rights. You get the union rep out here or I guarantee you I will help shut down your camp.' 'Let's talk about that. Get back in the truck.' So I pulled my grandfather's card out on the guy and he said, 'Look, we're going to give you another chance. Is that acceptable to you? Your friend's in the hospital. He ripped his ligaments up. Good call on your part. We're going to let you go back to work tomorrow. And you're going to go out with another Finn acceptable to you. And if you do well, you

can be in, you know, the camp. End of story. Good. You're on the payroll tomorrow. See you in the cook shack.' I said, 'That's all I wanted to hear.' So I walk in at 6:00 o'clock breakfast and here's Matty Helm. And I'm the first guy in two years that he's fired that not got fired. He turned as red as that flag over there. Well, I walk in and the guy I had to work with was the top marksman in the Finnish army for cross-country skiing. He could run circles around Matty and run up and down the hill like a spider. Could barely speak English. I worked with him for three weeks and the superintendent said, 'You're doing all right.' That was the end of that.

**SG** [00:40:32] Matty continued working up there?

**DP** [00:40:35] Yeah. He pulled in his horns. Well, I like to think he was a high roller, and he saved his money, went and bought a new Mercedes-Benz. I heard he rolled it on his way back from Port Hardy to Holberg. Somebody said, 'Dave he probably rolled it driving too fast because he was pissed off that you couldn't take the flack.' I mean, he didn't get hurt, but the story around, you know, camp was he got so mad at me being back in camp that he crashed his car.

**SG** [00:41:05] This must have had not only impact on your kind of union consciousness, but others as well.

**DP** [00:41:09] Well, I just realized

**SG** [00:41:11] Somebody stood up and

**DP** [00:41:12] Well, you know, the guy that twisted his knee, he was being told to die on the job. I know longshoremen that died on the job. The ship was so intent on sailing on the tide, they didn't bring the guy out till the job was done. The guy would lay in the wings dead and he'd call for a banana boss and ship them out. Here in 1971, I'm confronted with the same thing and the only thing that was the difference I knew how to speak up. The longshoremen I met up in Prince Rupert and the workers I met in the camp, a lot of people didn't know how to speak up. My grandfather told me when I was four years old, life is a struggle. Union organizing is a struggle. It takes leadership. It just dawned on me that I had the ability to read and to represent others other than myself. So that gave me some personal experience about momentum to push back what I call the bad giants. Sometimes those bad giants are the boss, the capitalist system. Sometimes those bad giants are right in your own organization, your own working buddies, because they're so busy trying to just make a living and duck and cover, they end up going backwards and forwards. Well, I knew, some of the answers to that, or so I thought because of my socialist background through the family. So yeah.

**SG** [00:42:38] Shortly after that, you actually went back into longshoring from a student sort of gig as a longshoreman.

**DP** [00:42:44] Yeah.

**SG** [00:42:46] Was it as much as it was, as it is today in terms of trying to get onto the union list? It took a long time before you finally made that board.

**DP** [00:42:56] Actually, when I came out of the logging camp in '71, I got married. Baby on the way. My ulcer blew out and I almost died in the hospital. I went from a logger who came in second on Loggers' Sports Day from, you know, setting beads. I was very proud

of that. They offered me a rigging pulley job, the same one that, you know, Matty had, if only I'd come back. I walked up to the superintendent and said, 'I got something better to do.' Came to Vancouver, got married, had a kid--no, the ulcer blew six months, you know, before my son was born. Basically, I was just hanging on for dear life. I was back to work weighing 130 pounds after being 165 pounds, you know, fighting form, you know, came back to the waterfront. Fortunately for me, it was during the American strike and the international okayed it for Longshore in Canada to work American cargo. The call was out and then the work kind of climbed, you might say, from '71 onwards. There was lots of requirements for new people, new training, new machines were being introduced, new technology. A lot of the students who got access through the father in the B.C. Maritime Employers Association or in the union, they could get access to work. A lot of those students now disappeared, but because I'd gone up to Rupert, then logging, I had kept my work number, so I was allowed to come back in on those lower spare boards. It took me about eight and a half years to make it in. About the same time, now I understand, you know, give or take a year, depending on what trade you're presenting.

**SG** [00:44:40] I guess the difference was in that time you actually worked for a lot of that eight years. Whereas a lot of them today.

**DP** [00:44:47] If you have a trade today, you're working quite a bit. The productivity has picked up immensely because of certain provisions in the collective agreement, which we sort of, you know, developed. Also, you know, the population is growing here and trade is growing with places like China. Even if automation was replacing jobs, the volumes begin to sort of--like it plateaued a little bit.

**SG** [00:45:12] This time working you're doing a lot of sort of old style offshore oil loading and

**DP** [00:45:18] Oh, yeah.

**SG** [00:45:18] And lot of things.

**DP** [00:45:19] Oh, yeah. Like the first eight or ten years they were handling, you know, stuff like--well, I remember it well. I came back to work after a month after my ulcer blew and I could barely hold a cup of coffee, let alone work. I got over terminal dock handling boxes of spring salmon, two in a box, and they were 100 pound boxes. I was with a total alcoholic who probably weighed 100 pounds. And him and I had to lift these over our head on a Monday morning and fill a container right to the roof. They were coming out of the, you know, the fish cold lockers there. I remember that job really well. He's dry heaving out the side of the container. My knees are knocking because I'd eaten an ulcer pabulum diet. It's not what you want to do longshoring--eat pabulum before you come to work and eat Tagamet or, you know, whatever.

**SG** [00:46:13] What other kinds of stuff you were unloading at this point?

**DP** [00:46:16] Well, another very, very bad job was--nobody wanted to do it so the spare board got that--was bull hides from Alberta. They were 80, 90 pounders and they'd come out in boxcars. The first wave of work, the warehouse guys would have to literally unsuction those off of each other because they had been shifted and shunted coming over the Rockies. They'd be stuck together. They've got a lot of rock salt on them, and a lot of slop, and they got burlap string around them. Well, nobody had gloves back then. Longshoremen weren't supposed to wear gloves. That was for sucks. Right? If you got on

the warehousing end, you were unloading the boxcars--real hell getting them on to pallet boards. Then those pallet boards would be lifted one by one into the hatch. If you were down below, you had to unload those pallet boards four people a side. Men at that time only pick them up and stack them like waist high, or, no I guess shoulder high. And then you'd move up onto the next tier and you'd fill a whole hatch with bull hides. The problem was they closed the hatches on a Friday. They didn't work bull hides over the weekend and I remember it well. It's my first illegal beer in the Commercial. Monday morning, they crack those hatches 10 minutes before we got there. The flies, and it was in the summer. It was already 75 degrees, and the stink and flies coming up there like a volcano. The people said that I was working with, 'We're going for a beer at lunch.' 'Well, I'm only 18.' 'Who cares?' You know, the drinking age was 21. We went up to the Commercial. Well we stunk like pole cats. You know, the waiter would come over 10 cents a glass of beer and yeah, drop them. He says, 'This kid got any ID?' These other guys said, 'He doesn't need none at this table.' The guy, 'All right.' I had, I think, two or three beer, and that's the only way you could actually go back and face that, because the afternoon is 80 degrees.

**SG** [00:48:15] Yeah, I remember, they used to talk about them coming in [unclear] smell [unclear] of the day that the union.

**DP** [00:48:20] Oh yeah.

**SG** [00:48:21] Everybody used to say, oh yeah, doing hides, you know.

**DP** [00:48:24] We also used to do 600-pound rolls of paper and they'd come down on rope snotters and then you'd have eight men you know, down below. Then you have to flop them over, roll them into the wings. Then, two or four guys, you put a rope and flip them up again and you have to sit down and push them into place. That took a lot of leg power to push those, you know, to get them all nestled in because the bosses want the stowage factor. They want to use up every square inch they can. Then like another heavy duty job, you don't see it too often now, was what was called fletchers. They were timbers that were, oh, maybe 12, 14, 16 inches square, maybe 24 or 28 feet long. Those would come up on deck to cap a deck load of lumber, and then you chain them down. Well the fletchers were there because they were longer than the packages, so secure the deck. They had to be hand handled, two people on each end with a peavey each, and you had to roll them off, say three, high, roll them off and then flip them across the deck and then stow them one tier across the deck. Well I didn't know how to use a peavey that well. The training programs didn't show me how to use a peavey. My peavey got stuck and that thing came around like a helicopter and caught me below the shin and took all the skin from my knee right down my ankle. I fell backwards on the deck of the ship and I couldn't even scream it hurt so much. The foreman, you know, like walked over and said, 'You got a problem?' He said, 'You can't handle it? That means you got to go back to the hull.' With a little bit of a groan, I said, 'Yeah, I can handle it.' He said, 'Well then get up. We don't work here lying on our backs.' No first aid. Nothing. Went back to work. Yeah. Yeah.

**SG** [00:50:12] Is this the time that mechanization is starting to happen on the docks at this point?

**DP** [00:50:17] Just around the corner. Yeah, just around, you know, the corner. We were doing hands stow rolls of paper, salmon, pulp, asbestos. Up in Prince Rupert, I did herring roe. That was, you know, quite the job, like just boxes of herring roe. We were doing rubber from overseas. That was a real dirty job. It'd come over in chunks and rope nets and you had to sort of, you know, wrestle them out of place down below. Because, don't

forget, the ships are coming over the ocean so any cargo is really settling, just like the railway cars coming here. Rubber was a dirty job a lot of people didn't, you know, wanna do. Handling barrels of orange juice from South America. We were loading, you know, bulldozers from around the world. We're unloading pipe that was bound for Alberta for the pipelines back in the--but in the early days it was a lot of hands stow lumber and sacks and it was unloading sacks of coffee from Brazil.

**SG** [00:51:29] What is the impact of mechanization as it begins? It must have started to get that particular segment of work pretty hard.

**DP** [00:51:37] Yeah, well see leaders like Harry and my Dad believed that automation was going to come no matter what the union did. So they wrote things into the collective agreement, the mechanization. They have an M plan. That was where that wording came from. All the men necessary, no unnecessary men, no individual speed up. So that protected the ranks.

**SG** [00:51:58] That was actually in the contract?

**DP** [00:51:59] That was in the contract. I remember when we went to England, my Dad as the regional director here in the West Coast, went down to the docks, which is now Canary Wharf. The docks don't exist there. He introduced that concept over there. They had a ten-man gang. We had eight-man gangs over here. He tried to introduce that. He basically, and not too politely, got told to leave--he didn't know what he was talking about. My Dad and Harry had decided they could see automation around the corner, and it was based too on this containerization I think of asbestos with one indicator and volumes. They were really good at looking at statistics and trends and because they were an international union, they were in, you know, context and contact with other unions around the world. Whereas a lot of unions got involved in parochial, you know, things, whereas Longshore had this overview. Part of them was understanding, you know, of mechanization. That lent itself to getting people trained, so training programs really picked up. [unclear] Away from the labouring, which a lot of people enjoyed, and put them in forklifts and cranes, and, you know, so on and so forth, you know, like that. Yeah, the hand bombing, we did everything from, I mean, you know, the cruise ships are probably the last bastion really of hand stowing because we load ships stores onto cruise ships. So you'll still be hugging boxes of roasts and, you know, cases of pop.

**SG** [00:53:29] When mechanization begins to come, how does the union deal with it? What kind of an effect did it have on both the union and the membership in terms of, sort of their activism?

**DP** [00:53:42] Well, I think it probably lends itself to a more concerted effort to see the coast as a whole organization. Interchanges between locals like, in other words, if loading logs got slow in Port Alberni because after '59 and the Canadian area was starting to act like a one big union you might say in Longshore. Before it was the checkers, and the coast wise, and deep sea and grain is separate pension plans, separate pay packages. The native Indians worked for lesser money. The people on Vancouver Island worked for less money. With my Dad's vision of seeing technology on the horizon, they knew they had to get the union under one umbrella, pension and wages, so people could sort of see each other as their brothers and sisters. Then we could do local interchanges. If things were slow in Vancouver, you'd have a contingent of people going to New Westminster because they still did--called hand bombing--the flour sacks that would be, you know, loaded out there. If the logs got slow, you'd have a few gangs come over from Vancouver Island to

work over here. There was animosity at that at first, but to keep the union strong, it was the union figuring out how to share the work amongst themselves rather than seeing disparate special interest groups within the union. I think that offset it. Then the volumes picked up and with the training of the new machinery that sort of lent itself to keep the union fair and square, you might say, in terms of hours.

**SG** [00:55:19] In other words, the union was able to get ahead of this by saying, okay, this can benefit us if we reorganize and restructure.

**DP** [00:55:25] Yeah. Well, you might have heard about the big struggle about maintaining when we went to containerization was to keep the container stuffing and unstuffing on the docks. Some of the more progressives thought we should let that go because the volumes are going to be there. You know, we don't have the real estate downtown inside of a city to accommodate the volumes. There was a lot of people in the union said, that's our bread and butter because we used to load and unload all the containers that were between here and Hope. In other words, you couldn't have a non-union warehouse up the valley and take Longshore work up there in a truck. If you want it in the container, it had to be loaded off a ship into a container by Longshore. If you wanted work, you come to the docks. It had to come down there for us to do it. The loss of the container clause, we actually gained because the volumes were, and it was based on real estate and because the international outlook, the leaders had seen what happened to the isolation of the docks in England. Now those docks are gone because real estate comes around. There's the Red Hook in New York got surrounded. There was traffic issues. There was people issues. I mean, I went to a public meeting here back in the nineties and it was about port development. A very well-spoken woman in her seventies got up and was talking about how she'd like to see a seawall continue from Stanley Park around all the inner harbour. I thought, that's incredible. I had to get up there and explain to her that Vancouver developed because it was a port. It didn't develop as a city and become a port. It is a port. It is the gateway to the Pacific, to Europe, to South America for the farmers and the manufacturers across Canada. Longshore had that perspective that we didn't--we worked the jurisdiction--we didn't own the jurisdiction. It was part of the Canadian working class. Right.

**DK** [00:57:29] I'm curious, when you said that, or you seem to be indicating that when you lost the container destuffing clause, I remember that, because Seattle actually got it there at the same time, which was ironic. You seem to be saying that it was beneficial in the long run to the union?

**DP** [00:57:48] Just because of the volumes, how it just worked out because, like I said, there was a lot of old ports and old docks really didn't have the facilities. Now, in China, for instance, we had a delegation go over there 15 years ago. They wanted to make a new container dock. They literally--we had Bill Kerrigan go over there--they cut a mountain, a third of a mountain off and pushed it into the water. Then they put a 14-kilometre dock and there must be 50, 60, 80 container cranes. Bill came back overwhelmed, he said, 'If I didn't go over there,' he said, 'I wouldn't believe it.' They had a crew of 22,000 people that could erect a container crane 28 hours or 48 hours, put it on a ship and send it to any dock in the world. Internationalism. We had Steve Bushell go over to Amsterdam and saw the robotics that were developing where the gantry cranes didn't have drivers. They had robots. One man could control three cranes. We were looking to more developed because don't forget, Vancouver is a fairly young city compared to Amsterdam and the trade that's gone on for hundreds of years over there. The technology-- we're a little kind of a one-horse town here in the thirties, forties and fifties. The leadership required that they looked around the world and they could see this containerization. The real estate, we weren't gonna start ripping



down houses in, you know, in the West End, or we weren't going to pave Stanley Park with containers down there. Where were they going to go? What we would have done by effectively holding onto the clause is we would have stalemated ourselves as an inlet port and the work would have went around us to Seattle or L.A. and now they're supposedly building new freeways across Mexico. I don't know whether they're up and running. We decided that we wanted to get the throughputs rather than trying to do that labour. Out of that, you've got a lot of warehouses. Some of them, I don't know whether the Teamsters grabbed up or who, you know, grabbed up. There's a lot of warehousing that used to be done in down on the docks.

**DK** [00:59:54] Yeah.

**SG** [00:59:56] Now it's being done in warehouses?

**DP** [00:59:58] Yeah. So at one point Tom Dufresne, ILWU Canada President, he actually made an effort to go out to some of these warehouses. I think we had some talks about jurisdictional, you know, matters about who would represent. Thee other big question was now you've got uptown and you've got a lot of ma and pa one man shows in container destuffing. Can we maintain the same Longshore collective agreement and pension going inland? That was another big question.

**SG** [01:00:31] You mentioned the leadership, too. At some point, I presume you became part of this leadership?

**DP** [01:00:36] Tried to .

**DK** [01:00:38] What leadership positions did you occupy?

**DP** [01:00:42] I started off I guess I was 20, 25 years on the executive and out of the.

**DK** [01:00:49] Executive of?

**DP** [01:00:50] Local 500.

**SG** [01:00:53] Explain to me here. Local 500 was originally local 501, was it not?

**DP** [01:01:00] Five hundred was the blanket number for grain liners, deep sea, first aid, coast wise and warehouse. They were five different locals, I think, with four or five different pension plans, different rates of scale. My Dad organized them under the Canadian area. They became one local 500.

**SG** [01:01:23] There had been 501, 502 and 503?

**DP** [01:01:26] No, those locals are locals in different towns; 502 is New Westminster. Then we have Prince Rupert, Chemainus, Port Alberni, Victoria.

**SG** [01:01:37] The old Vancouver local was 501?

**DP** [01:01:39] Yes, that was the old 501.

**SG** [01:01:43] Yeah, we try to sort out the numbers.

**DP** [01:01:45] Hey, at my age, I'm trying to keep it sorted out.

**SG** [01:01:49] Twenty-five years, you were on the executive of Local 500? Beginning when?

**DP** [01:01:55] Oh geez, that's a tough question. I didn't do all my homework. I would say probably when I first made membership was probably by--let's see I was logging in '71--eight and one half years. Yeah, probably about the late seventies, early eighties. I was into the membership and because I had gained this perspective of having a political, you know, voice through the union from Mum and Dad and Grandfather, I immediately ran for the executive and I was successful. I sat on the, I helped organize the political action committee, the grain safety committee, the local safety committee. I was on the membership and grievance committee. I did a lot of committee work, but also because I had the gift of the gab and I could write and I could read, which a lot of people--we had a very diverse membership, English as a second language. I was able to articulate some of the historical politics, put that in a written form, present those to the executive. I became a regular delegate to the Vancouver District Labour Council and also the BC Federation of Labour, the International down in San Francisco on occasion and the CLC. I was always a delegate to all of those bigger labour bodies and I was one of the main writers for all the resolutions, which I had to get adopted at the executive, at the membership meeting. Then I got to carry them forward to those bigger organizations. Then I ran for the second vice presidency of the ILWU Canada. Didn't make that, lost it by a few votes and then I ran for the vice presidency of Local 500. I became the vice president, you know, for a year. Then a few lefties advised me be careful you don't get caught up in the day-to-day machinery of the local. We like your voice at the bigger local earth, you know, the bigger forums. I talked to a few people--Dan Cole, Ken Bauder--and we decided to try and make a slate run for ILWU Canada. I ran against Tom Dufresne. I had been the whip at a lot of conventions and organized a broader fightback than just parochial interests. I thought I had something to speak to the larger labour movement as well, which I didn't think that Tom had, although he was very well connected by virtue of the office. I ran against Tom, but we both believe we were running for the union, so there wasn't any big animosity. That's why I ran twice against Tom and I was successful on Vancouver Island and local 500 by good majorities but the foreman's local and new Westminster and Prince Rupert voted Tom. I think there was a disparity of about 200 votes out of about 1800 or something like that.

**SG** [01:04:51] That's a reasonable showing.

**DP** [01:04:53] Yeah. It was a reasonable showing. To some degree, I mean I was happy doing my written work as well. I didn't really, you know, felt that I lost it. I thought I brought some good arguments to the table and because I have this firm belief in the sanctity of the rank and file, I thought every meeting that you present these things, it's an ongoing educational process.

**SG** [01:05:17] Well, that is one of the things about the ILWU. It has a very strong rank and file tradition.

**DP** [01:05:22] Oh yeah.

**SG** [01:05:23] They throw their leaders out regularly.

**DP** [01:05:24] Oh, yeah.

**SG** [01:05:26] You get fined if you don't go to meetings or you don't go to vote.

**DP** [01:05:29] Yeah.

**SG** [01:05:31] Is that part of your sort of outlook on trade unions as well?

**DP** [01:05:38] Some union leadership really doesn't want to deal with the rank and file. We all know that. There's different values, you know, presented in different unions but an ongoing real struggle. Inside Longshore, it came to pass, the guy stepped off a sailing ship named Harry Bridges. Some of his own stalwarts along the docks, because his sailing ship broke the keel off of Portland. He was on his way back to Australia. They had to bring the ship back down to Frisco to go into dry dock and he got off there waiting for the ship to be rebuilt. I guess the immigration policies were lax; so he got off the dock. No shoes to wear and started longshoring. He was a good speaker and I think he was a Marxist in waiting. I don't know what his book reading, you know, was, but he was actually had the gift of the gab. Before long he was the head of a negotiating committee. During the '34 strike, I think the '34-'35, he became the president of the new ILWU. He was a firm believer that what kept it safe, not only from internal wrangling and coups inside his own organization, was rank and file egalitarianism. Some of the people inside his union did not want him to organize the black workers in Oakland. Harry was a real egalitarian humanist and he said, 'No, you want me to be a leader, it's everybody or nobody.' He carried that forward, but he was able to face down the employers and say, 'Look, I might be able to agree with you.' But he said, 'Everything I present goes back to the membership,' and then he'd lay out both sides of the argument. He also gave a political overview of the struggle and they'd always vote him in, but with the proviso that the rank and file made those decisions. Over the years that I became involved, I actually felt a little bit empathetic and sympathetic for some of the unions here in BC because Longshore had a union hall. We could meet. We had a place to gather on a regular basis, eight, nine months, a year. We'd meet in the union hall, you know, three or 400 people. That kept a lot of momentum, political activity alive. What we call protecting our flanks. Whereas a lot of other unions don't really meet on a very regular basis. So they get a little bit top heavy, I believe, in terms of the rank and file participation. I've seen that over the years. I mean, I've brought here a handful of resolutions that I've written over the years, you might say, to the BC Fed and passed by my union. I've seen a lot of rhetoric over the years at of the BC Fed, but there's a lot of grandstanding and there's a lot of what we call guest speakers. I saw the time dwindling for policy initiatives generated by the rank and file. I was very disappointed with that because those issues should inform the government. The government should not inform the labour movement. That has been an ongoing issue and I think it's still relevant today. What keeps our union safe is rank and fileism. That's what I believe is the main thing.

**SG** [01:09:04] You mentioned also the dispatch role. That's been a key part of it.

**DP** [01:09:07] Yeah.

**SG** [01:09:08] Some time back, about ten or eleven years ago, there they were [unclear]. A lot of people choosing staff [unclear] an outmoded form of getting people down to the docks. What happened there?

**DP** [01:09:20] Yeah. Back in September 2007, ILWU Local 500 Dispatch History An Overview. I wrote this for the union. Talked to some old-timers. Read the read the

Constitution. Talked to some of the employers and realized that the dispatch is a grand organizing tool. It was a hard fight in the thirties to get equalization of work opportunity. It was called the shape up down in Frisco. The boss would come out there and expect to hand out a bottle of whisky. 'You go to work, you go to work. You're black, you're white, you're this, you're that.' After we developed the rank and file, how do you give them all an equal work opportunities? Everybody goes to the hall, but that creates a lot of interaction between people. Some of our younger members back--because they were getting introduced to new technology--they thought it might be a good idea to go onto a computer dispatch system and the employer was pushing for it. The employer knows full well it's an organizing tool. If there's a problem on one job--it's a rank and file union--the leaders can say one thing, if the rank and file decide that isn't a good way to go, they go their own route and they take all the risks that are implied with that. I had to stand up at a meeting once--I forget what the issue was--but it was generated through all the chit chat at the dispatch hall one morning. Going forward to a membership meeting, I had to get up in front of the meeting while the president of the local was speaking. I knew damn well he had to say what he had to protect us under the Labour Code, the possibility of injunctions. I got up and said, 'Hey, I'm one of your executive here. You know me.' I said, 'I know Rick. I think he's making a good point, but here's what he can't say, but I can.'

**DP** [01:11:13] How could you say that and not him?

**DP** [01:11:15] Well, because he's the leader of the Union. I'm just the lowly executive, but I'm representing rank and file opinion. 'Boys, I want to hear from you now. What do you think about the matter? So here's the issue as I see it.' At the end of that meeting, I found myself as an activist in the rank and file. People were agreeing with me, so that informs the leadership. That doesn't happen in a lot of unions. You don't get those vehicles available to make those hard decisions. I always believed there was more brains in the rank and file than some of the people we put in office, because a lot of people want to drink beer, play with their kids, go to a hockey game. They don't want to, you know, get involved. When it's a spirited issue about the worth of a dispatch hall, or the worth of international solidarity, I've always found that there's a good majority of our people that really believe in those things, but they can interface with those things every morning before work. That is an organizing tool that I didn't want to lose.

**DK** [01:12:15] You know, for sure.

**SG** [01:12:16] How did that play out?.

**DP** [01:12:17] We kept it.

**SG** [01:12:19] [unclear] Did it come to a vote or it was just?

**DP** [01:12:21] We kept it. What we did is we allowed screens to be introduced with our flipboard, flip plate, system. We allowed information technology so you can go online and see the information. We made some compromises with the proviso you couldn't be dispatched over the computer. You literally have to come into the hall and mix it up because other than that, we saw people manipulating that. Unfortunately, there has been a history of dispatching being manipulated for favouritism. We had a history of that. We didn't want to go back to that. If you all come into the hall and you flip your plate over, your plate is now registered electronically. You can look at all the job information. You could have studied it the night before, but now give everybody a fair shake. You're still literally talking to each other. Yeah, it just cuts down on cliqueism.

**SG** [01:13:18] It's never come up again?

**DP** [01:13:20] As far as I know, not. No, but if it does, I can I can always reprint this bulletin.

**BG** [01:13:29] Just to clarify the position that you held on the executive of 500 prior to being vice president, were you just a member at large. What was your position?

**DP** [01:13:38] Well, I think we had 20 executive and then we have officers. We'd have three business agents, the president, vice president and secretary. That was just part of the general machinery of the local. You could run for all those offices. I just chose for a lot of years to run for the executive because I wanted to get involved in writing policy for the union. Sometimes when you're in the day-to-day things, you can't always be clear headed about policy. I thought that was my strong point.

**BG** [01:14:13] Running against Tom Dufresne of ILWU Canada, was that for the position of president?

**DP** [01:14:18] Yup.

**BG** [01:14:19] That would have been eighties? 1980s probably?

**DP** [01:14:22] Good question. Probably the nineties.

**BG** [01:14:25] Okay.

**SG** [01:14:25] I think he became president in the nineties.

**DP** [01:14:28] Yeah, yeah.

**SG** [01:14:29] I think he became president when I was working at Fish.

**DP** [01:14:32] Probably the late nineties. Yeah. See, my father and I are of the same kind of mould in that I never, and Tom and I really respect each other for this, is we're more inclined to be involved in developing policy and good collective agreements. In terms of me memorizing what year I was there, that to me has never been so important as to keep the momentum alive. I mean, Christ, you know, we'd have an argument one day and be buddies the next day. Just because we have an election that doesn't change and we can put in new officers and then threaten to throw them six months later. I've seen it all. That's that rank and file like approach. I've always enjoyed being a strong rank and filer. Yeah.

**SG** [01:15:22] That rank and file tradition was very much part of ILWU's involvement in a lot of larger trade union activities like Operation Solidarity and the campaign against NAFTA, and so on. Any recollections of those campaigns that you have during your time at the union?

**DP** [01:15:40] Well, I think the most important thing to recall is that our union was, by grand majority, very much believe the welfare of our union is ensured by our community involvement, our provincial involvement, our national involvement and our international involvement. Actually, I was reading in the ILWU International's Constitution last night, thanks to Sean here, and I was rereading Local 500's and ILWU Canada, and we have a

lot of good clauses in our Constitution that they don't even have them in the States, that states specifically that we have to be part of the community. It isn't an if, and, or a but. It is in there that that's our duty. What a lot of our people understand and thank goodness our younger people coming in a lot of the big strikes, whether it's the Canadian Seaman's Union strike or strikes in Australia on the docks, when they tried to run them off, you know, down there and in Spain and in South America, you cannot do it alone. These ships go international. Our union has gone international, but we realize because we've got that in our back pocket, that international connectivity is that that's what's made us stronger than our numbers. I think that's an important thing, whereas a lot of other unions only exist inside the fabric of the community. Because we're community minded members, we do what we can to keep the community strong. That means backing Operation Solidarity or the teachers in a strike or the nurses or community groups and having our maritime labour centre available for community groups to meet. We live in this community, we spend in this community. We know that if push came to shove, we want our good name to prevail so that if ever we get into a real pickle in the way things are going down south, a lot of union busting is afoot and rolling back contracts and austerity programs. The only thing will prevent that is not individual unions, but individual unions based strongly in their community with all that connectivity.

**SG** [01:18:03] I recall that initially the hall was a big centre during Operation Solidarity throughout.

**DP** [01:18:07] Oh, right.

**SG** [01:18:09] How did that decision come about?

**DP** [01:18:11] That would have been easily accommodated just because of our international work. Somebody would have presented a letter to the executive. For instance, if you had a problem in the community, you were from a community group, you represented more than two or three people, you could approach our union through a letter to our executive. As a matter of fact, one of the committees that I was on, which I helped found inside the executive was the Education Committee. With the help of the local secretary, Barry Campbell, I went into all our records over ten years and we were averaging \$150 or \$180,000 a year giving to various community groups. A lot of them weren't union groups and that was just based on our belief in the community, not just our own organization. It would have been an easy argument. As a matter of fact, on a historical note, Dave Barrett addressed our membership on behalf of the future of the Labour Heritage. They had ideas. This is probably back in the eighties maybe, and our union came up with \$5,000 for seed money to set this up. They were looking for land at the time. It's too bad they didn't grab a hunk of land back in the day because now it's really a problem--you know, the price of real estate. We've always had our union open to internationalism. Speaking of which, this might be the time to show this flag I brought along here. Talking about internationalism, in 1959 was the founding of the Canadian area of ILWU, which my dad was the founding president. As you can see, that same year, Harry Bridges, Bob Robertson and a few other stalwarts organized the first All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference. My dad went over to Tokyo and that was part of that tradition that he had inherited and why the union is still strong today. We immediately formed into an organization here, a cohesive organization on the coast and work because he was the regional director, could make that go forward. When my dad died, I have a picture of him holding this flag out of the old folks home. He said this was one of his sacred things that was given to him as one of the organizers for this event. They honoured him and presented him with the flag and so I just thought I would bring it out today.

**BG** [01:20:59] That's fantastic.

**DP** [01:21:00] Back in the thirties, my Grandfather was the founding president of the IWA. It could have been the first or second convention where he was acclaimed, he was presented with this painting by Earl Fields. I went down to a few places in Vancouver. Nobody heard of Earl Fields. Somebody said, 'Well, head off to Seattle.' I went down to the Seattle Art Gallery and nobody on the main floor heard of him either. They said, 'Well go upstairs to the archives.' I had a picture of this painting on my phone and the woman upstairs says, 'No, haven't heard him, but I'll go back to the back room if you got a half an hour.' Yup. She came out and said, 'I'm kind of embarrassed.' Why? She said, 'Earl Fields was on the first board of directors, I think, of the Seattle Art Gallery.' Earl Fields was so admired the Group of Seven, that he started the Group of 12. They did nothing but labour inspired paintings and work and because of that he was never very popular. I went to a subsequent gallery in Seattle that same day and had it valued at about \$6,000. The person at the gallery had two other originals really like this one as well, suggested that I take it to the University of Washington. As you can see, it shows working people. Now, Earl didn't get all the details right. If you look closely and if you've been a logger, you know that there's some of the details in there. It is interesting that they had a group of 12 that were responding to the needs of the thirties of what working people were going through. My Grandfather left this to my father, Craig, and then my Dad left this to me. Now I have to bequeath this to the union movement somehow.

**SG** [01:22:48] Dave your interest as a poet as well as your interest in art and that sort of thing, you're saying that you kind of got started as a kid going to various places where everybody would be singing union songs or whatever. What do you remember of that?

**DP** [01:23:06] Well, just as a little bit of a background, I'm just going to present this as a book here, Securing the Union's Future, the '48 Strike.

**SG** [01:23:15] That's the '48 strike in San Francisco?

**DP** [01:23:18] I believe that's where it is. Yes. An injury to one is an injury to all. I have another book here, The Men along the Shore and the Legacy of '34. This is out of the International Union. I have my Dad and my Grandfather's favourite book, The Builders of British Columbia. Another book, The Molly Maguires, The Coal Mines in the Thirties, The Big Strike by Mike Quinn.

**SG** [01:23:50] That too was about the 34th strike.

**DP** [01:23:52] Yeah. Then we have Eugene Debs, The Bending Cross. I think he was jailed for a number of years and ran on the socialist ticket in the States and came up with over a million votes while he was in jail. He was a firebrand speaker, but he would have been around the union movement at the same time my Grandfather was shaking hands with Harry Bridges and helping found the CIO, because they were both the first members of the executive, Harry Bridges and Harold Pritchett. That led to the future of the Man Along the Shore and books like the IWA in Canada by Mark Lear, or a forward by Mark Lear by Neufeld and Andrew Parnaby. It led me into an appreciation, you might say, of the art and as Sean mentioned, the songs and the heritage. Here's me listening to Bob Dylan overlaid with all these old union songs, but it allowed me when I stepped into the union to bring those things together. When Harry Bridges died, I forget what year it was, I was able

to put out a poster to our membership: In memory and never forgotten, for Harry, a Labour leader, fought the raw deal.

**SG** [01:25:15] You would have posted that at the union hall?

**DP** [01:25:18] Yeah. This went all over the waterfront here in Vancouver. To me, I just realized then that a lot of people will enjoy going to meetings, but a lot of people get overwhelmed with the rhetoric, the politics. A lot of people fall back on singer songwriters and poets to actually bring along the culture. Early on when I was 18 and I was longshoring in Prince Rupert, I realized that I had to pay the rent. I wasn't going back to school, so I had to pay the rent. That was going to be longshoring. I always wanted to express myself along the great traditions of a cultural worker. I realized that Bob Dylan's got quite a good following, probably better than Harry Bridges, but you know, it's up for debate in certain circles. I realized that the culture was a real tool and because I was able to write and because I was in touch with international issues, I was able to sort of bring those together. I'm very proud of what we call a broadsheet. When I was hanging out with the punk rockers in 1990, 1991, the first war in Iraq, my kid Cody was 18 years old and I was afraid he was going to get drafted maybe. I wrote this is a broadsheet called WW Zero Casualties, Reasons and Anger at Heartbreak Hotel Activate the Malady. I was able to, I wrote this at four in the morning in about an hour and just wrote unedited. I published that the following day and I handed this out as a broadsheet around the union. I also handed it out in the streets when there was big rallies against the war in Iraq and it was really well received. I just realized that art, culture, trade unionism had a lot more commonalities. Backing up a little bit to Prince Rupert, I was at my little portable hi fi machine I took up to Rupert. I had Bob Dylan records and I was sitting in the window looking north, watching the crows, you know, fly around old McCracken's boarding house. I decided to be a writer and I wrote a number of what you call chapbooks. I got one in the public library called Out of the Missed, spelled m-i-s-s-e-d, Things We Miss in Our Lives. That was predicated on me seeing an old-timer somewhere south of the Trans-Canada Highway back in the eighties when I drove across Canada. I saw this old-timer, he must have been 90 years old. He was all twisted. His old house was twisted. You could see ten coats of paint shining through the wall. I just watched him walk across his yard of all the broken-down farm equipment. He looked pretty broken down. I thought, man, that guy's made my bread for me. So I thought, what things about me in my life that I wasn't really aware of? And then in '86, I went down to Nicaragua because my girlfriend at the time was working for CEDA, teaching the Nicaraguan women how to run tractors because their husbands were out fighting Ronald Reagan's Contras. I put my poetry and art together and I created a poster. I got a picture of a tractor. I had it translated into Spanish about how to keep--because I had some a little bit of farming experience--how to tune up the tractor, how to park it in the shade to save the tires, check the oil, check the water, because these women didn't know anything and a lot of the men didn't. Then I put a famous Nicaraguan woman poet on the bottom. Then I got spray bombs because I was hanging around with the punk rockers in the eighties. I put spray bomb red and black Sandinista colours around the poster and then I handed that out in Nicaragua after I accidentally stepped off the plane in El Salvador, which I could have got shot for having that poster in my bag, but that's another story. I've always seen art and culture as a powerful weapon, and so I proceeded with my writing. I like hanging out with poets to this day because for some reason, you don't make money at poetry. I think Leonard Cohen sold 400 books before he got into music. I always see poetry as the innocence of people. I see the profundity of people. I see it as unknown voices. I also see it as truth because you're not making money from poetry, so I always figure the poets must be telling the truth. I thought, I want



to be one of those. I was really happy to put out a chapbook. I thought I brought it here today.

**SG** [01:30:04] Ever been part of any, I mean, there's been various movements here in Vancouver and in Astoria Oregon where there's a lot of longshoremen involved in worker poet conventions and where they have worker poet readings and all kinds of things?

**DP** [01:30:19] I actually because somebody said when I retired from Longshore do I miss it and I said no and they said, 'Why is it I feel like I've been longshoring since I was two years old?' I liked being around a cultural, more diverse scene. I also was aware that to protect the union's flanks, we ought to reach out. I was proud to introduce myself as a longshoreman at poetry readings so that people around who didn't have access to union membership would think, 'Hey, they're okay, they're going out of their way.' In the eighties, I joined a group called the Black Wedge Poetry Tour, a bunch of anarchists and punks. I got an old school bus through my sister who ran a day-care service out of a school bus that became the famous DOA's tour bus. When they came back from tour, the Black Wedge Poetry Tour went down to Frisco. We did universities, community halls, and I read like a lot of poetry. I've even had DOA as a backup band because I bought them copious amounts of beer down at the Seymour Arts Club one night. Joey Shithead said, "We know what you're up to Dave. Get up here. We know you want to read something.' I wrote one punk rock song in my life called Get Dark, Get Drunk, Go Dance. They felt the danger in the news every damn day. Get drunk, get dark, go dance. People realized that I'm the guy that injects class consciousness into poetry. I'm very proud of that. Is it going to be popular? No. Will I persist? Yes. My first book of poetry hasn't been published yet called The Blue North Yellow North Rising, which I started when I was 18. That's pretty much ready to go into publishing. You'll probably see me in BC Book World within the next year or two. Dave puts out 30 chapbooks, and I've got poetry about a stack that deep that I plan on.

**SG** [01:32:17] Do you have a publisher, or do you plan on publishing on your own?

**DP** [01:32:21] A little bit of both. A little bit of both.

**SG** [01:32:23] I want to get back to this notion that when you were going to all these various meetings as a kid and whatnot, you would hear unions songs?

**DP** [01:32:32] Oh, absolutely.

**SG** [01:32:33] It fascinates me.

**DP** [01:32:34] Yeah.

**SG** [01:32:34] Do you recall any of them, what those songs were?

**DP** [01:32:37] Oh, yeah.

**SG** [01:32:38] Did you sing them?

**DP** [01:32:39] The main one, I think that really, really I admired and I really liked a lot and I've read a little bit of his history was Joe Hill. That seemed to me to be the culmination along with Solidarity Forever.

**SG** [01:32:53] So you're talking about the song I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night?

**DP** [01:32:56] Absolutely. That came out of the Wobblies. Right. That that was like out of a wobbly songbook written by.

**SG** [01:33:03] That song wasn't and that was written, Dan what was his name? The guy who wrote it.

**DK** [01:33:07] Which? Sorry.

**SG** [01:33:08] The guy who wrote Joe Hill.

**DK** [01:33:10] Oh, Joe. Well, that's Earl Roberts.

**SG** [01:33:12] Yeah, of course. Yeah. He wrote that song, in the forties.

**DK** [01:33:16] Yeah, but there was.

**SG** [01:33:18] Joe Hill was the IWW poet and songwriter.

**DP** [01:33:21] That's right. Yeah.

**SG** [01:33:23] We eventually got it right.

**DP** [01:33:25] Right off the top, because I haven't gone to--I've been retired for four years and also a lot of those old songs dropped by the wayside. We could probably collectively get together at some other point and we could think back about those, but those were the ones that were at the forefront, I would say.

**SG** [01:33:44] OK. One of the things we talked about earlier was when sort of looking at the time that you first began longshoring out of university and you're handballing everything with asbestos kicking around and the docks today. What are some of the significant differences, both in terms of the workforce and the work that you're doing?

**DP** [01:34:10] Well, one of them now is that the auspices of becoming a member of the Longshore Union has changed probably since the seventies, eighties. There's now many, many women in the workforce. The men were very skeptical of that. I had to remind them that there were pilots in the Second World War in the Soviet Air Force. We had Russian ships coming here in the sixties with women pilots. I had to explain to some of my contemporary macho longshore men that no, women could work hard, and in some cases more sober than you guys, with less damage. They also, because we recognized that there was a real huge divorce rate in the seventies and eighties, a lot of women were raising single families and they had a right to a job. It didn't belong to our union. It belonged to the community. So that was a big turning point for the union to adopt in the idea that women were going to be longshore.

**SG** [01:35:09] When does when does that take place?

**DP** [01:35:11] I would say that those discussions were happening in the mid-eighties. My calendar is always off a little bit, so yeah.

**SG** [01:35:21] But not that recent developments that did take place?

**DP [01:35:24]** Not really, no. The other development you might say is because the union secured the right to have the call go out for everybody. That included everybody in the community. We've now got a more diverse workforce in that I was the head of the Education Committee for a number of years so I would give the 15-minute educational for new members previous to coming in the union, which was compulsory to get in the union. You had to pay your initiation fee of 50 bucks, but you also had to suffer me for 15 minutes giving you some history. I always started those meetings by asking how many kids, young people were in those meetings, how many parents were union? Usually it could be 30, 40, 50%. It let me know that there was more people, this was going to be their first union experience. Whereas before, in days gone by, it would be father to son, grandfather to father, that type of thing. So that has changed. It's going to bring a different flavour to the union. That along with technology. We've had a lot of young people. Bailey, I think you mentioned about organizing in New Westminster. They're bringing new technology, research to bear. A lot of people that were coming into the union might have not be full of brawn, like people coming off of a fish boat or out of the logging camps where a lot of longshore would draw from, or the beer parlours. We're drawing now from people who read, write and are connected to the rest of the world. In some ways, it might be easier for the union to adopt in this more international approach to protecting our flanks. That could be a win for the union. The technology is changing, but we've really kept ahead. I was head for two years as the vice president in charge of training. We really opened up the training to all. We got a more diverse training. Before it was only captured just for union members only. With some argument, we allowed more and more training down into the casual sites and now you got people off the street for two or three years that are getting access to some top union jobs because a lot of people figure they're going to live forever. That's not how it goes. Even though we didn't mind to fight the boss on principled issues, we also believed in productivity as a worthwhile industry in terms of what we give the rest of the Canadians, whether they're manufacturers or farmers. We've had good rapport because of that from farm delegations have come out onto the grain ships to address that.

**SG [01:38:09]** That's going to change them. You've been retired now for what, the last four or five years or?

**DP [01:38:15]** Yeah, I'm going to be 70 in a few months. Six months, eight months. I don't know, you know, the birthdays roll by. I retired when I was 64. Yeah.

**SG [01:38:24]** Okay. At the same time, you were called upon not long ago to kind of take on a new task on your own hook, essentially with Longshore, to try and rescue the hall, which was about to be sold. Can you tell me about that incident?

**DP [01:38:43]** As you know, the Maritime Labour Centre plays a great role in the east end of Vancouver. That is a building for weddings, dances, cultural events. Other unions meet there. Solidarity groups meet there. The older people in the union understood that. Some people that were about to retire, Jimmy Brooks in particular, Dan Cole, had retired. He was actually the driving force to acquire that building in its infancy. Jimmy was still working. We found out that the young officers wanted to sell the building because there was problems with maintenance. There were some mentally ill people that had come into the office and raised hell with the staff. It was a security issue. Then somebody from one of the other organizations who was so disgruntled with their leadership threw in some mental illness, firebombed the building. The insurance rates went through the roof. The young people not having a sense of what it was worth as an insurance for international solidarity purposes, they thought, well, let's sell and move into a two storey walk-up. The older people, the

retirees, including myself, decided that would be a destructive, long term poor investment in the social security of the union. I was advised that it was a done deal. I had been out of town and I just come into town, so I organized a leaflet. Myself, I wrote it. I acknowledged another leaflet that came forward with Jimmy Brooks. I was talking to Dan Cole, who now lives out in Ontario, and he did an overview of the economics of the union. I was always good at stirring the ranks through my own personal style of rhetoric, you might say. I was able to sort of--and I'd written these posters calling out some imperatives, as I've already mentioned. I was able to leaflet the dispatch hall, which we've talked about as an organizing tool morning, noon and night. I was down there three or four shifts. I went around to all the docks and handed out those leaflets and then I attended the executive meeting of which I can speak if I'm allowed to by the executive because I'm a retiree. I put those leaflets on all the windows of all the cars in the Maritime Labour Centre. I addressed the executive. The President was very terse. 'Yeah, thanks, Dave, and I'll see you later.' I said thanks and then I went to the membership meeting, the rank and file meeting.

**SG** [01:41:23] How many people typically go to that?.

**DP** [01:41:24] Two to 300 on average. Because of the leafleting, there's a lot of anxiety stirred up, all over about a week and a half. As a retiree, I'm allowed to speak after all union members have spoken. I went to that meeting leaflet in hand and leafletted everybody coming into the meeting. As it turns out, it was standing room only. It's one of the biggest meetings we've had on record. Out of a membership of about 1,400 people, there were 620 odd people that attended. It was a very big meeting. The officers had brought in a polling booth saying yes or no, you want to sell the building? The membership hadn't met, the rank and file, to discuss any other options. One of the existing, John Bevilacqua, who's on the executive, got up there on an emergency motion, which was won by him and said, 'We haven't had a discussion here. Get the polling station, the hell out of here.' The officers were choked. They had a vote and it was overwhelming, get the polling station out. That was set aside. Now, there was 18 speakers. The first person up was a young native Indian kid who had only been in the union for two years, and he pointed to the mural at the Maritime Labour Centre. For those that don't know, that's all the industrial unions in B.C. painted by Fraser Wilson. All the left led unions, IWA, Longshore, Mine Mill, city workers, fishermen. That's in the background. The native kid points at the mural and said, 'You see that log boom. My Grandparents, my Grandfather, my Great Grandfather and the bows and arrows in North Shore in the 1800s worked those ships. He said this meeting is not going to, is always going to be in front of that mural to honour him. The applause just broke out. I thought, well, I guess I can leave now. Then a guy got up there so drunk he could hardly talk. I'm so proud of him. Yet, when he got up to the mike, he gave an impassioned, impassioned speech. Went on for two minutes, sat down. I couldn't believe my ears. I thought once again, I might as well leave now, like it's won. With that, 17 speakers and I'm waiting because I want to speak after all others have spoken. With that, there's three to go and then me. Then one of the speakers said, 'I defer to, Dave. I want him to speak.' And the President, Mark said, 'No, Dave already spoke and he's handed out leaflets and they're wrong and they're factually incorrect. And he's not speaking here. Next.' So the next guy got up and said, 'I want to hear Dave speak.' 'I've already ruled on that. No.' Well, the third guy was Joe Carrigan, and he knows Robert's rules. I'm just sitting there waiting my turn because I know the building is saved already. I don't have to say anything more because everything has been said. The firm belief that the rank and file, if given the information, which we did, between me and Dan and Jim, we gave them the information and I ratcheted up with a bit of rhetoric. I didn't have to speak. Joe Carrigan challenged the chair. In our Constitution, when the chair is challenged, he's got to hand the gavel off to the vice president. The president comes down onto the floor as

an equal member. Now you're with the ranks. You're in the scrum, you're in the mosh pit. So Joe Carrigan is the challenger. Mark gave an impassioned speech for about two or three minutes about why I shouldn't speak and on and on and on. Joe got up and I thought, oh, how you could imagine all that rhetoric? Joe said, 'Dave's been around for 45 years. We trust him and we want to hear from him. Enough said. All those in favour of supporting the chair.' Fourteen people were for the President, which is probably most of the executives and maybe some not all those in favour that want to hear Dave and support Joe. It was well over 200. Wow. Dave, you got the floor. Then I went up there [unclear] and in the history of that building, what it's worth to us for the next hundred years and there's a problem with the elevator, there's a problem with the deep freeze, there is a problem with staff, there's a problem with insurance. I said, 'Yeah, it's expensive right now, but I've longshored here since I was 18.' I said, 'I'm 67 now. So all those expenses,' I said, 'our forefathers faced scabs and machine guns and we can't pay the rent. We can't hire somebody to fix the elevator.' Then I lost it, went into Longshore style with a few swear words and said, 'Are you shittin me? This building is our home. I don't sell my home because my shed burned down.' All those in favour of Dave say "aye". It was about 600. All those in favour of Mark. There was less than the first vote on the split. You got to vote for votes. So the building is still safely in the hands of the community. Longshore, you know, pays the lion's share. Now ILWU Canada who moved their offices out. They were forced, I found out at a later convention of ILWU Canada they didn't want to come back. The convention decided that the officers shall come back. If you don't want to come back to the labour centre, you're out. Here's the rank and file telling the officers not only what to say, where are you going to say it? Come back to the, because that hall creates a momentum for the rank and file. Whether you started yesterday or you've or you're a retiree, you circulate through that building with our officers and it keeps everybody on their toes. They can't get away with stuff down there, you know. Like the old saying says, if you haven't heard a rumour, start one.

**SG** [01:47:28] That sounds like a good place to wind up with the rank and file secure in the future so to speak. Okay. So thanks again very much for your time Dave.

**DP** [01:47:37] I really really appreciate and I'm honoured by getting an invitation to come over here. I'm ready for about ten more hours.

**BG** [01:47:46] I'm sure we could. So I'm just going to stay for the record.

**DK** [01:47:49] The next shift then. Sorry.

**BG** [01:47:51] I was just going to say, for the record, the date today is May 22nd. This interview was done by Sean Griffin and Dan Keeton on behalf of the BC Labour Heritage Centre. Bailey Garden was doing the recording. Thank you so much, Dave, for sitting down with us.

**DK** [01:48:06] I really, really appreciate it. Thank you.