Interview: Carmela Allevato (CA)
Interviewer: Blair Redlin (BR) and Ken Novakowski (KN)
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BR [00:00:05] Welcome, Carmela. This is an interview with Carmela Allevato. I'm Blair Redlin and this is Ken Novakowski, and we'll be doing the interview here on October 3rd, 2022.

CA [00:00:20] Okay.

BR [00:00:23] Great. We'll start and ask you if you could please describe a bit about your early life?

CA [00:00:29] I came to Canada when I was 11 with my mother. My father had already arrived, and he sent for us. My family is—I was born in Southern Italy in a little town, and that would be the centre of the bunion on the Italian Peninsula. It was high up in the hills in the Apennines and to the west of us was heavily forested countryside with a lot of forestry work, and to the east of us was the road to the coast. I left, as I said, when I was 11; my early childhood was spent mainly in the countryside. My grandfather was a "guardian", an overseer for a big landowner, and he was responsible for making sure that nobody else worked the farms unless the landowner approved it or stole the timber. My dad worked in the forest as well. He was—he measured trees, so he was a log scaler, right? My mom—oh, he was, he had 11, 10 brothers and sisters. My mom's family was in town. My grandfather had a little business. He was a muleteer. He drove carts and carried, you know, things from the mountains to the coast and back. She was an only child, which was very unusual for the time. My grandfather, my father's mother, couldn't read or write. He couldn't even sign his name, but my grandmother could. She sort of ran him—or not ran him, ran his business. Yeah, it was a very interesting life. I learned a lot. I mean, stuff stayed with me. I wasn't aware at the time, but because my town was very progressive, it had peasant revolts and things like that.

BR [00:02:33] Yes. I'm just wondering what year you came then If you came in 11, what year was that?

CA [00:02:38] It was 1962 and my parents were part of the mass immigration from the South, you know, post-war, the rebuilding of—like all the money was going to the North and the Northern Countries. In the South, they did some land reform, but there was no work. In the mid fifties, everybody who, you know, every young man and woman left to go to other countries. My mom and dad went to Switzerland and left us with our grandparents and this huge extended family. I don't even think I notice that they had gone (laughter). There was just so many people around. But it was—I mean, the town was actually depopulated of its, you know, that layer of young men and women. Yeah.

BR [00:03:26] It had a progressive tradition, history, but with your father wasn't unionized as a log scaler?

CA [00:03:31] No. It was mainly the, as I recall, the communists were very strong in town. In fact, my mom told me a story about when she was a little girl. My mom was born in

1932, so when she was a little girl during the war and during the Mussolini era, there would be—the little girls in her church had to take on the role of altar boys because on Sundays all the boys would be with their dads in the piazza demonstrating.(laughter).

CA [00:04:12] We used to have an annual festa de l'unita, which was the Communist Party feasts, and it was all over every town in Italy that you go to had one of those. It was just huge. Everybody knew each other. Everybody was related. Even when the fascists were in power, it was, you know, it was like—it wasn't—I mean, it was horrible. You know, my mom tells stories of people being beaten and that, but it was all in the family, if I could put it that way. After the war, they did quite a bit of land reform. One of the things that happened was there was this baron who owned this huge property in the town and that was divided up. My grandfather bought a couple of apartments in it, but it was like it was like a big palace, but it wasn't really a palace. It was an old rundown castle, almost. Yeah.

CA [00:05:15] The story—so just to talk about what influenced me and, you know, whether there was union activity. My family—and actually, I think there was an undercurrent in the whole town, was quite anti clergy. There was a very healthy disrespect for, you know, organized religion for the wealthy, who would say to the poor—well, I remember one story about this wealthy landowner who was complaining that, you know, the poor ate much better because he had to eat all this fancy stuff and it would make him sick. I mean, those are things you pick up as a kid, right? My grandmother used to talk about a big demonstration in the piazza where actually the police opened fire on the demonstrators, and it had to do with an increase in taxes on flour and bread. Everybody in town just threw up their hands. She would have been about 23, 24. It was actually 1923 and about 12 people were killed. Yeah, so that's the only thing. When we came to Canada. My dad wasn't a union man or anything, but I mean, I remember poverty, right? I remember people coming to talk to my grandfather and saying, 'Can you give us something? Cause my family doesn't have anything.' They were the years of famine, right? Cause everybody lived off the land. There were the rich, and then there were the others. Yeah.

BR [00:06:51] Where did you come to in Canada?

CA [00:06:55] Well, the reason we came to Canada is my parents couldn't bring us to Switzerland because guest workers couldn't bring their families. Of course, going to America was really the dream. My aunt, who was quite a rebel, actually, she knew somebody who had emigrated to Canada to Fernie, and she asked them to find her a husband. Didn't matter who it was; she had to get out of that town because there was no work. She had been engaged and the engagement broke up and nobody was going to marry her. What do you do? Right? Anyway, so she got married, went to Fernie, she sent for us, and my dad came first. He would not work in the mine or the forest. My dad had, you know, that was a life he had left behind and he just wasn't going to do it again. He had worked in Switzerland where there were factories. Anyway, so he sent for us, and we arrived. The trip was another story altogether because the guy in our hometown who arranged the flights had us land in Montreal, change planes there and go to Toronto in the middle of the night, land in Toronto, change planes there, go to Winnipeg, land in Winnipeg, change planes there, land in Regina—every capital right? We finally—I think it took us like four days to get to (laughter) anyway.

CA [00:08:27] We went to Fernie for a few days and it was very disappointing. It was just, you know, yeah, it was very rustic. Small, but also where my aunt lived, they still had outdoor plumbing. It was just terrible. Right. Anyway, so we lived in Calgary. I learned English, a little passable English, in about, I don't know, five months. Then we drove in the

end of February—like, who does that? My dad packed us all in a car and we drove across Canada to Toronto. The prairies weren't too bad, but then you get to Northern Ontario. It was pretty rough driving. Anyway, it's a long story. I've been reflecting on that time. We all came; then my dad, my mum and dad got jobs. My dad in a shoe factory and my mom in—across the street from where we lived, there was a factory that dyed, printed on towels, and she had a night shift there. There were four of us and my youngest sister was three, so she would be home for her during the day while the rest of us were in school. It was tough; it was hard. She made 75 cents an hour.

BR [00:09:55] Good grief.

CA [00:09:56] Yeah. 1963, I think, or late '63.

BR [00:10:02] In Toronto?

CA [00:10:02] In Toronto? Yeah.

BR [00:10:05] Were they unionized jobs?

CA [00:10:06] No. Then my dad got a union job when we moved to Rexdale. Kimberly-Clark. It was one of the—oh, what was it—oil, chemical, and something worker. They were part of CEP [Canadian Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada] eventually.

CA [00:10:27] You know, there wasn't a lot of union activity. My dad was telling me the other day, my dad has dementia now, right? I asked him, I said, 'Why did you work shifts?' He said, 'Oh, yeah, I could have had a job working on the line or driving something or other.' He said, 'But I didn't want it.' He was, like he was in charge of—almost like a custodian, you know, a maintenance man. That let him walk around, not have a direct supervisor, so, yeah, so that's what he did. He worked there until—I think he worked there 30 years. He retired from there, but he had a hearing injury as well as back—a lot of back injuries, so he retired, disabled. He's 92 and he tells me he's going to live to 100. My mom worked at a whole bunch of different jobs, factory jobs. She had a really good job. It must have been union, but I don't remember at [sounds like] Salada where they made pies. (laughter)

CA [00:11:43] She got a nice little pension from that, plus she went on LTD [long term disability] as well. She injured her shoulder. Those things, you know—and then like when my parents were doing that as soon as I could, I graduated from high school, I went to U of T [University of Toronto]. I actually was able to convince my parents and they were, you know, it was like southern Italian, there a lot of external pressure about morals and stuff like that. I got them to agree I could live in residence at U of T because I went to live with the nuns, St Michael's College. Now, Jim, my husband went to Victoria College, and he was in residence as well, so we had a lot of fun.

BR [00:12:35] So what did you study?

CA [00:12:37] I studied English and Italian. I was going to be a high school teacher, you know, teaching Italian primarily. The year I applied to OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education], there was a story in the media that only a quarter of the graduating class had jobs. This would have been '74, '75, so I thought, I'm not going into a profession where I won't have a job. I wrote the LSAT [Law School Admission Test] and then got into law school out at UBC [University of British Columbia].

BR [00:13:08] Oh, you UBC [unclear]

CA [00:13:11] Yeah. I studied law at UBC.

BR [00:13:12] So you moved here.

CA [00:13:14] I moved here in '75, yeah. In university, I met Chris Allnutt and Jeanne Greatbatch, and remained good friends here. They came here as well. It was a very lefty group, particularly in Jim's residence. They were a quite a cohort. We participated in the sit in of the president's office when they—I forget what they were going to do, but I remember like all of our friends were there. I went home to Rexdale and I got lasagne and sausage chips and a jug of wine from my parents and brought it back to the occupation. Yeah.

CA [00:14:09] I remember like looking back now, I remember Judy Darcy giving a speech. At the time, I was just having a ball, but, you know, it was it was there in terms of, you know, what side are you on?

BR [00:14:26] Student activism?

CA [00:14:27] Yeah. I wasn't a student leader. I was part of, you know—I think that came later with the burden comes with that. (laughter)

BR [00:14:37] So you studied law at UBC? When were you called to the bar?

CA [00:14:42] I was called to the bar in 1979. Well, it's interesting. When we came to B.C.—see, Jim and I didn't know anybody here and I didn't even know I'd gotten accepted to law school—just got in a van and drove out. Phoned them from Winnipeg, phoned both UBC and UVic [University of Victoria], and UVic hadn't finished their, you know, their stuff, but UBC had. They said, 'Oh, now you're in.' I said, 'Great.' So, we came out. (laughter)

CA [00:15:12] Jim was going to take a year off. He was going to go to graduate school, but he decided he'd take a year off. When we got here, we rented a flat on Fraser and 12th and this was in August. That summer Rosemary Brown had run for leader of the NDP and I'd seen her on TV. Then like two days later we get an invitation to a fundraising thing for Rosemary and Norm Levy, who were the dual MLAs [Members of the Legislative Assembly] in our ridings. We went and I was hooked on B.C. politics. Yeah, I almost failed my first term in law school.

CA [00:15:53] Yeah, because then Barrett—I don't know if you remember, but Barrett called the election for December, right? I just stopped going to class. Just went—I met so many wonderful people in that campaign. Clive Lytle. Joe D'Onofrio. Colleen, Colleen Boss—Colleen Fuller—she was Bostwick at the time. Of course, Rosemary and Robin Geary, Vanessa's mum. Yeah, it was just like, mind blowing. I had no idea it could be like that. Yeah, it was wonderful. I did my law degree, and then Jim kept coming to my classes and all the parties. First year parties are great. We were part of a little lefty clique but not the Law Union folks, but, you know, more pragmatic. Yeah, more pragmatic folks, which has always been my politics. He joined, he came to law school the following year, so we were quite the group. I graduated in '78; I articled in '79 and was called to the bar. The fellow I articled with had been—was it Basford—I think it was Basford. He was a liberal, this big liberal. Ron Bass was a friend of Basford and he, at the time, I was very, very engaged politically at the municipal level and the arms race and stuff. He was kind of

proud that he had a lefty in his law firm. He used to say I was more red than he was, so, (laughter) which was very true.

CA [00:17:42] I stayed with him for a couple of years. Things were going well and he asked me if I wanted to be a partner, you know, like that was the—and I said, of course, right? The proviso was that I had to devote all the energy and time that I was devoting to COPE [Committee of Progressive Electors] and the peace movement to the firm. I said, 'I think I can do that.' Two weeks later I said, 'I can't do that.' I left, put up my shingle; then I got pregnant, and then I worked from home, and then I ended up at HEU [Hospital Employees' Union]. The HEU stuff—how I ended up at HEU was really through, you know, through COPE, through the political movement, through the end the arms race, because that was the universe I moved in and they were there.

BR [00:18:30] Talk about ending the arms race.

CA [00:18:33] Okay, let's talk about end the arms race.

BR [00:18:35] In the peace movement that's where your roles with [unclear].

CA [00:18:41] If you trace back, it's all because I was active in a universe that had a lot of progressive people, a lot of people from the Communist Party of Canada who were like absolutely fantastic pragmatic organizers. I met some people from the peace movement through COPE, and through COPE I became part of the BC Peace Council and there was this wonderful woman called Rosaline Ross. I don't think that you met her. She had been a nurse during the Spanish Civil War and she was really—she carried the Peace Council. She was just amazing. I worked very closely with her. One day Frank Kennedy phoned me up. Frank Kennedy was the secretary-treasurer of the Labour Council [Vancouver & District Labour Council], an outstanding trade unionist, some person. He phoned me and he said, 'I want to go for lunch with you and Jean Swanson.' Jean was, at the time, very active in DERA [Downtown Eastside Residents Association]. We go for lunch and he said, 'I think we need to put together a coalition that fights for peace.' It was actually to address the, you know, increasing armaments trade and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We said, 'Sure.' I think that the first meeting we had was maybe '77, maybe '76. I had so many stars in my eyes. Everything was possible.

CA [00:20:29] What we did is, we sat down. It wasn't like, okay, let's do it and then it happens. Of course not. We sat down. We made a list of what are the communities that should be involved in this, right? I mean, the big coalition like Frank and Jean had lots of experience in coalition. We identified students, churches, unions, community groups, education groups, right? We made a list and we just went down the list and of course, he was very well connected through the labour movement. I had done—the peace movement, had the B.C. Peace Council had its own like connections through the various, you know, Voice of Women, other peace groups, and the rest of the province. I remember, you know, the Fisher Union, the folks down there were amazing. We went to meet with Jim Kinnaird at the BC Federation of Labour—again, another one of the great presidents of the Federation, ever. He was very open to supporting. We went to the list and, you know, we got the students. What we created, though, was an organization that had like co-chairs. I ended up being kind of the visible public face, right? I also worked for them. I just stopped practising law for a while. I practised law off the side of my desk and did the organizing together with Joseph Roberts, who was in the environmental hippy type of movement. There was Frank Kennedy, me—he and I were kind of the lead co-chairs. Then we had Gary Merchant, who was from the students. He was an amazing young man. He teaches

at the University of Texas, somewhere in Texas, I think, now, Lois, I can't remember her last name, but I can just see her. She was from the United Church. David Lane, who used to be active in the tenants' movement. You may know him. His father was the pastor of the Baptist Church on West 16th and Burrard. They gave us space. They also reached out to the other churches. We would have like, you know, coalition meetings of our coalition. It wasn't like the membership meeting, but we'd have 30, 40 people, you know, and we'd have meetings once a week organizing this. The key was we finally came up with a slogan, which was the name of the organization, End the arms race; fund human needs. Everybody agreed to that slogan and you parked your divisions at the door. You can disagree on everything else. We're not going to have that disagreement in this room. You can have it out there. When you come in this room, we're talking about organizing the Walk for Peace. It was, you know, it was just an amazing thing. The first one we did, we couldn't, you know, the politicians were kind of, you know—and then we had like 13,000 people. Next year, they wanted to be at the front of the march.

BR [00:23:51] Do you remember when the first one was?

CA [00:23:53] Yeah. I think it was 1977 and it was really—it was a hard thing building it, you know, because what we had people who were in it who wanted to be like, who came to the meetings and wanted to be part of it, but they wanted to argue about nuclear energy, nuclear technology. Because of the nuclear weapons stuff, what would happen was, you couldn't focus, right, and we wanted to focus. I learned a lot from Frank Kennedy on how to chair meetings and how to, you know, guide the discussion. You come out of it united, rather than divided. It was an amazing experience. We had, through the school board, you know, we ran a contest like peace essays and poetry contests and teachers—the BCTF—I think, had teaching materials on it. I was going to tell you that the winner of the first poetry contest that we ran was Emily Lau, or Evelyn, yeah. Evelyn Lau. Yeah. I remember, like I was on the group that picked the winners, and there she was, right? I still meet people today who were there as kids, as little kids.

BR [00:25:30] So these demonstrations were huge and—

CA [00:25:33] Oh, yeah, 100,000 in 1986—100,000.

BR [00:25:37] Why was it so successful in Vancouver? Why was Vancouver taking the lead that way?

CA [00:25:42] I think it was clarity of purpose. I think it was sort of the history of Vancouver with—you know, I think it had more of a history of coalition building. I think that, you know, there wasn't as much sectarianism. The Communist Party of Canada had a big role to play in the peace movement and they, the B.C. branch I think, branch or whatever section, was well-experienced in coalition building, in working with groups generally, and had a way of moving people along and finding commonality, which was very hard. There was a lot of red baiting outside of—anyone within the organization. I mean, I've lived it and you know, you guys know. We were able to rise above all that. It came from just really hard work and just showing that it's—I mean, I think, too, it wasn't just this little island, right? The world at large was concerned about it. With the cruise missile, all the sort of new technology that seemed really—and was—really horrible, I think people became more alive to it. Also, we have good weather and people are used to being outside. (laughter) No, I think it was part of that and the whole history of, you know, labour's involvement. The Labour Council was key to making it happen and then just capturing, you know, capturing

people's imagination about it. Where we had the rally, you know, having it on the beach like—

BR [00:27:46] At the bridge?

CA [00:27:48] Going over the bridge—I remember the first time going over the bridge. There was nobody in front of us, and that was fine, and then coming out under it, and they were still coming over us. It was just—yeah, gave me goosebumps. We had—that wasn't the only—see it wasn't just a one once a year event, we had events throughout the year. We'd have—one time we brought—oh, he was the famous Greek artist—Vastille [sounds like]—whatever, I don't remember. We had a big public meeting about the cruise missile and he was there and it was a lovely event. It was at the Planetarium. Also, you know, we engaged, right? We engaged. We went out. The people who were in the leadership, the activists and the volunteers, were so committed. It captured people's imagination.

BR [00:28:49] An amazing time.

CA [00:28:52] Yeah. I think it was easier then to pull together big coalitions. I think the world's more—well, I'm talking like an old person. (laughter) I'm reflecting. I mean, I think things are more complicated now because—I don't know if it's just social media. It's just everything is so divisive, right? Even if you go into a room where you agree with people on a particular objective, all this other stuff comes in. I think it's almost like there isn't a hierarchy of priorities anymore. Maybe we're getting there with the climate crisis, but for me, the fact that there's sort of a lack of recognition of the importance of class. That notion of the class struggle is—you know, we're all the same— well, actually, we're not. There's the ones who profit off of you and use all these other things to, you know—anyway, that's my—it's getting better. There's amazing young people working on very important things.

BR [00:30:13] You've emphasized in your reflections about unity and it was a constant focus of the coalition. I think that's really important.

CA [00:30:23] Yeah. You have to be flexible, too, right? You have to—it's almost like finding the common denominator. Sometimes in finding the common denominator, you don't get everything you want; but, by having unity around this one point, it advances everything else. I remember saying to somebody who got involved in the NDP before we had the string of victories—what I said to this young fellow was, 'Okay, you gotta, you have to get used to losing. It takes quite a while to win.' (laughter) Then we won, so that was good. (laughter)

BR [00:31:16] Maybe we can switch to your time at the Hospital Employees.

CA [00:31:20] Great. Good.

BR [00:31:21] When and why did you begin work there?

CA [00:31:25] As I said, I wasn't involved in unions. Although, when I look back, I guess I was. Anyway, at the time that I was, I didn't realize I was—let me put it that way. In 1985, they decided to create a position for—to bring their workers compensation cases in-house. I was recruited to do that; but that came from my involvement in the progressive movements. I realized how would I ever know Jack Gerow? Of course, not—different worlds. I came in to do the WCBs [Workers Compensation Board cases], and very soon I headed up the arbitration department. I decided what would go forward to arbitration. I

started there in '85. It was like May 2 or something. No, it was in March. Then a couple of months later they were in the middle of a long term care strike. A couple of months later, I went to the table with him just to help negotiate the return-to-work agreement. That was the last strike in health care that had open picket lines. There used to be open picket lines in health care, which meant that if the BCNU [British Columbia Nurses Union] was out on strike, HEU [Hospital Employees' Union] could go into work. If HEU was out on strike, the other health unions could go into work. That was the end of that practice. Someday I'll write a story about that.

CA [00:33:10] Jack left in '88 and the union went through a really difficult period. We tried to recruit from outside because there wasn't really anybody internally at the time that the—I don't know if they indicated interest or anything. We hired somebody; actually, Jack helped to recruit Sean O'Flynn, who had been the president of the Ontario FL [Ontario Federation of Labour]. He'd been very involved in, I think in '81 when there were trade union leaders going to jail. He was part of that. We had a strike in '89 and it was a horrible strike. The nurses settled for 14 or 15 percent. HEU was given 6 percent, which was like what the BCGEU had settled, but you know, in those contracts you get this, but there's all sorts of other processes that—anyway, so the members were very, very upset. At the time, I had been part of the—during the period when we were without a secretary-business manager, they created a position for me to be assistant to the elected officers, but I didn't have any bargaining responsibility. The relationship with—then Sean moved on and we tried to recruit other secretary-business managers and it took a very long time. Couldn't find anybody. I was part of the group that was trying to do the recruiting. Finally, Bill McDonald, who—I just loved Bill McDonald. He was the president of the union. He said, 'Why don't you do it?' I go, Me? I've never negotiated a provincial agreement.' It was very divisive; my appointment was extremely divisive. The senior staff was—there was another member of the senior staff who wanted the position. The majority of the senior staff supported that and the executive was also very divided. I'm gonna say this because it's been like 30 years or more. Bill told me later that he had to cast the deciding vote because it was very split. The announcement was made at the staff PE [provincial executive] Christmas party in December 1989, so half of the room cheered, and the other half of the room sat on their hands. (laughter) In the fall of 1990, the executive's recommendation to the convention that my appointment be ratified, passed unanimously! There you go. That's a long story, but it's kind of fun to remember it. Then we had to rebuild the union.

BR [00:36:42] What was the highlight of your time in that position and some of the great challenges?

CA [00:36:45] Oh, my gosh! Oh, wow! Well, the challenge was to rebuild the union, build unity within the leadership of the union, within the membership, because—build unity in the sense that the members had become extremely disillusioned in the union. We set about—and actually one of the highlights is this program that we put together. I had a really great senior staff team; Geoff Meggs was communications, Chris Gainor and—they were just amazing—and Chris Allnutt was on my team. We put together a one-year program to rebuild the union, rebuild the membership's trust in the union. I went to every single local in the province, everywhere. In every major centre, we had a cabaret that told songs about the members, and they had participated in giving us those stories. Rebuilding the union, and the big rallies we had during our strike, and then winning pay equity. I remember some executive members telling me members will never go on strike on pay equity and we got like 92 percent vote in favour of a strike.

BR [00:38:19] What year was that?

CA [00:38:21] The strike was in 1992. In 1991, we went to the table on Valentine's Day. Everything had a theme, so everybody had buttons. That's what you do, you give people the opportunity to express their solidarity. We went to the table. We had "Six Steps to Fairness", which included pay equity comparability with the government employees because we'd fallen way behind, a whole bunch of other stuff, but those were the key ones. I remember the very first bargaining session. We show up and the employer was already there. It's a big room, but there's a little table and there's like six of them. I had 13 members in the bargaining committee and we're all squished in. I go, 'I think we're going to leave and come back and get a bigger table.' So, we did. I remembered in the Vietnam War, [unclear] the shape and size of the table. I thought, 'You bastards, I know what you're doing.'

CA [00:39:37] All that aside, we started bargaining in 1991. At our convention in the fall of 1991, we hadn't gotten anywhere. When the government dropped the writ, we adjourned our bargaining and redirected all of our resources to electing the NDP. Mike Harcourt came to our convention in the fall saying, I think it was—I forget—yeah, it was the convention, saying how he supported HEU. 'There was going to be a good deal for health care workers.' After he got elected, we went back to the table and the head of HLRA [Heath Labour Relations Association] said, 'Nothing has changed.' We said, 'Oh, yes, it has! We have a new government' He said, 'We don't have any new instructions.' We went to Victoria. We took a strike vote, we went through all the things. There was a lot of pressure on us not to take a strike vote, not to engage our strike, to stop calling for—to stop making it difficult for the government essentially. You know, of all people, what it's like when a new government gets elected and you've got to deal with the bureaucracy and everything, all the mess that the last governments left you. We couldn't wait. We went through all that. Harcourt invited us to Victoria to tell us that really, we shouldn't be going on strike because there's going to be a deal. He heard us. It was all going to be fine. I thought, 'Great.' We come out of his office and the media is there, and the first words that come out of his mouth are, 'There will be no special deals for friends and insiders.' I am from Southern Italy and I thought—and even if I hadn't been, I'd make a joke about it—but, you just don't do that. We said, 'Okay.' We went on strike and we won. It and it was unfortunate, but we won.

BR [00:41:41] How long was that strike?

CA [00:41:42] It was, let's see, two weeks or three weeks, I can't remember. It was brilliant. Again, I had this amazing team of executive members and the leaders of the union. We didn't do it all on our own. We talked to the members about what would work. One of the things we did is we started out, we gave every local one hour of picket pay for every member, and they could use it to take out any department at any time, whatever they wanted. They of course, at mealtimes, you take out the dietary line because management's got to come in and do work or, you know, they knew. It was fun. We did that and we increased it. We actually, the day we were going to take out the big hospitals—we did a hospital per region. It was very phased in. They appointed— they tried three times to get us to stop. The first time I was—we served strike notice. Oh, that's another thing. HLRA, at the time, didn't agree that we could serve them, the organization, strike notice—insisted we had to serve strike notice on each of the hospital and facilities administrators. We said, 'Fine.' We had our members, our local officers, every single facility under the provincial agreement went and found the CEO. Somebody got served on the golf course; somebody else got served at home. That was an organizing opportunity. I forget where I was. We'd serve strike notice, 72 hours. What did the other side do? The

government was involved, right. The Labour Board said, or the Minister directed the Labour Board to do essential services because we hadn't done essential services yet. Of course, as soon as you do that, you can't go on strike. There was this big—I think we spent $1,000,000 just on legal fees and doing essential services. They appointed Vince Ready, who (laughter), poor Vince, brought us the employer's final offer. We just sat in the hotel room and wouldn't even acknowledge his presence. (laughter) Poor guy. He became a good friend after. He brought two boxes of—because, you know, we had a large committee—two boxes of proposals. I think he forgot to give us the whole thing because when we actually went to the final offer vote, there was a second section attached to this big package.

CA [00:44:48] It was roundly turned down. He just dropped it off and left. They appointed Steve Kelleher as a special officer or something. We just kept having big rallies and then we went on strike after Steve Kelleher. Three weeks later, after they just, I suppose, couldn't talk sense into us. By that I mean get us to agree that we would stand down based on some potential promise, a promise of some potential outcome. Then we had an understanding about what the outcome would be, and they appointed Don Munroe to do some binding mediation with us. For me personally, and for the union, it was the fact that we were so betrayed. We were told in the room—I mean, we were used as a prop, essentially. We were told there would be a deal and then there wasn't. After that, they lost our trust. The members were amazing. We had this huge rally at Plaza of Nations, and we had members gather outside of St Paul's, and then another group, huge group at VGH (Vancouver General Hospital), and the two met together coming over the bridge. It was just—I don't know if you've seen the poster—but it's just so moving. It was wonderful.

BR [00:46:23] You made significant pay equity gain in the contract that you got?

CA [00:46:25] Oh, yeah. Gordon Campbell had to pass two pieces of legislation to get rid of it. (laughter)

CA [00:46:35] The pay equity. The union is 85 percent female. It's a caring—you know, the work they do is working to provide care to people. Within those structures, you had orderlies and licensed practical nurses. Same job. Very same job. The difference is one is man, one's male, one's female. The women were making 15 percent less than the men. That was the history. The trade—and it's not that the men were overpaid; it's that the women were underpaid. Historically, that's been that pattern there and we broke it. Entry level jobs—building service worker, a man, entry level, a woman dietary aide—and there was a gap. No reason for the gap other than gender. We didn't go for the traditional. I was not enamoured with the gender neutral job evaluation plans that were making the rounds during that time. What was happening there, you actually did have—you had internal comparison only. We wanted to compare the whole unit, or the whole sector, to what were they making outside. We didn't use our trades. Our trades were making less than what they would be making, even working in an industrial setting outside—not just working on construction. Why? Why was there a two dollar difference? It was because of the nature of the workforce. We made those arguments as well. Our pay equity plan, or how we implemented it, actually increased everybody's pay as opposed to increasing some and even reducing others. We didn't go that kind of technical route. It was more money in the pocket, and how are we going to get your money in the pocket?

BR [00:48:47] You had a shorter workweek?

CA [00:48:49] Oh, yeah. That came in '93. You had asked me what was the highlight in, what was the big achievement out of the strike—I don't think you asked me that, but I was thinking that the '92 strike, the big achievement was that the government had to take us seriously. When it came to doing health care reform, restructuring, reducing the number of acute care beds, they knew they couldn't do it without—if we were on the outside. That led to the Health Care Accord. They negotiated a reduction in FTEs [full time equivalents], but protection of employment for HEU members, with great retraining, early retirement bonuses.

CA [00:50:02] What it did, though, it set us up. There was restructuring going on everywhere in Canada. The NDP government here was doing what the Ontario government was doing, only with a nicer face. We were able to get them to agree that workers wouldn't be thrown out onto the street; that they would be retrained for other positions; that all the jobs in health care would go to the central agency; and, all the displaced workers would have their name at the central agency so that people would land on their feet. That was really important. We got the Health Accord, job security—amazing job security—and lots of other stuff that went with it. That happened in '93. What was outstanding was that, again—and this comes from the experience of having worked in coalitions—until I became secretary- business manager, there was huge division among the three health care unions. HSA [Health Sciences Association] was—members, HEU members, were moving into HSA. There was a lot of resentment against the nurses because they went out on strike and were 100 percent essential, and we were carrying—all that sort of stuff. Well, we threw that—we parked all that baggage, and we created a tri-union committee that had the leadership of the three unions that had been at each other's throats, working together. We had a common letterhead. We had a letterhead with the three unions on it. It was me. It was Anne Harvey, when she came to the BCN[U]. Peter Cameron, when he became the executive director—and whenever I say his name, I wanna—because he went to the dark side after that. It was amazing. We had somebody who was disciplined at Peace Arch for—I forget what it was, it was in Peace Arch, Surrey. We had three unions demonstrating, you know; it was it was outstanding. There was that—building solidarity among all the workers in health care—that we were able to achieve because for that brief period, we were able to park our differences.

BR [00:52:32] Unity.

CA [00:52:33] Yeah. Solidarity and unity.

BR [00:52:36] During that time when you were secretary-business manager was when the HEU returned to CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] and the—

CA [00:52:43] Oh, yeah, I have a story about that too.

BR [00:52:45] Yeah. How did that come about?

CA [00:52:48] The return to the House of Labour started with Solidarity in the early eighties. HEU very active, very prominent in that fight. Jack was, you know, Jack Gerow, the secretary-business manager at the time, was very involved in that. After that, there was a servicing agreement with CUPE, and so you would send people to CUPE educationals, to CUPE conventions. Through that we were able to participate in the Federation, at a reduced level and so on. That lasted—I think '84 were the first discussions, and then '87 there was—because I remember being there when, oh, what was the name of the president, CUPE president? Jeff Rose and Randy Sykes. Randy was

great. I was there when we were negotiating that. Then in '94, Judy [Darcy] and I—Judy was there and I was there. I spent a lot of time on the airplane going to Ottawa and back, and we negotiated the deal. Again, you know, you had to cut through all the personalities because while HEU was one of the founding unions of CUPE, because it was NUPE [National Union of Public Employees] and the other one. NUPSE [National Union of Public Service Employees] (laughter)

CA [00:54:34] The first secretary-business manager of HEU ran for president of CUPE and lost by six votes or something, and always felt that there had been some stuff happening, that really, he had won. In any event, be that as it may, then in 1970, on the basis, I would say pretext—what the hell—on the pretext that there was this huge increase in dues, which I don't even think that was the case. That's the story I heard—and a desire to kind of get involved in the internal, no local—to undermine local autonomy. HEU withdrew from CUPE—1970—and then went off on its own. When it went off on its own, it started to raid CUPE locals. I remember even when I was SBM [secretary-business manager], UBC [University of British Columbia] had just become an HEU local. There's a lot of history and it wasn't happy history, right? It took, what, 14, 24 years, to be able to overcome that. There are still people, both sides, both committees, who had those long memories. I think that CUPE's committee was more difficult, actually—yeah, Judy's committee was more difficult to deal with and things to overcome, but we did it.

BR [00:56:19] The leadership of Judy Darcy and yourself, it sounds like—

CA [00:56:21] Yeah, and Bill McDonald. Bill McDonald was an amazing president. He passed away last year.

BR [00:56:32] As a consequence of HEU rejoining CUPE, it also meant that you were, HEU was back in the Federation of Labour and the CLC [Canadian Labour Congress].

CA [00:56:39] Yeah.

BR [00:56:43] What time period were you on the executive [unclear]

CA [00:56:45] Of the BC Fed? Yeah

BR [00:56:47] What was it like to be an officer at the Fed at that time?

CA [00:56:52] It would have been a couple of years. No. HEU. Let's see. We got to be in the Fed, active in the Fed, and also have an officer before '94 because we had this arrangement, this formerly servicing arrangement, but we got to go to convention. I was on the executive when I became SBM. That would have been '90 I was a BC Fed officer.

CA [00:57:29] I thought it was great for HEU. I think it was very good for the labour movement to have HEU in-house, back in the house of labour. At the time, we were the largest union that represented women workers in one bargaining unit. CUPE had a lot of women and the leadership there was female at the time. At a personal level it was really hard. That was the worst part of my job. I think it was difficult for some to accept that a union could have female leadership that could lead a provincial strike and win it. I think there was some concern about that. I think I told you I hated those meetings so much that my staff did a button for me that said, 'Your approval is not worth my silence.' It was tough. It was hard.

CA [00:58:40] Even though there were other women at that table, it wasn't a friendly place for female labour leaders. I think also because I had not come up through the ranks. Everybody at the table were elected officers of their unions; although when Jack was there, or when John Fryer was there, they hadn't come up through the ranks either. They were appointed, but I was a lawyer, I was hired; they didn't know my background. They didn't know I was an immigrant kid, first one to go to university out of 30 grandchildren. It was a tough time, but I learned a lot. I had to use all of my coalition building skills—and it was good. It was good for the union. It's very good for HEU to be in. It was good for the Fed to have the HEU there.

BR [00:59:45] Very good. To switch again to COPE, which you mentioned earlier, but this is later time with COPE, you co-chaired COPE when it won a [unclear] majority on city council, schools, and park board.

CA [00:59:59] We swept—we elected 21 people.

BR [01:00:02] How did that come about? What were the key accomplishments for that [unclear] from your point of view?

CA [01:00:07] How did it come about? Coalition, big tent, and also being at the right place at the right time, at the right point in history. In the city, you'll recall, there was this big issue about four pillars. How do we deal with the drug crisis? We got Larry Campbell. He came to one of our meetings and said, 'I want to get involved.' He was motivated to get the four pillars approach and to actually have a safe injection site. Philip Owen had also promoted four pillars and I think Larry had worked closely with Phillip Owen. The NPA [Non Partisan Association] was in shambles because they pushed him out. The other side was—it's this thing about being at the right place at the right time. The other side was in shambles. There were issues in the city that demanded to be addressed like transportation, housing—same things that we talk about today. Creating as broad a coalition as possible, having all sorts of people being reflected in the candidate selection. We won a huge majority. Much has been written and will be written about that, but it was, I think, the world had started to change. People couldn't park their pet issues at the door when they came into the room and couldn't make room for each other. You asked me what was the achievement of that. There were a lot of good, great things that were done in schools and education, also policies at the city. I think the best thing that came out of that, and people are going to cringe, some people are going to cringe when I say this, was the creation of Vision Vancouver. It was the demise of that formation of COPE into creating Vision Vancouver, and which then governed the city for almost ten years. A lot of great things were done through that. It was impossible for COPE to continue after the victory.

BR [01:02:38] You were involved in the formation of Vision Vancouver?

CA [01:02:46] I came into politics through Rosemary Brown and the Burrard NDP and then was completely immersed in municipal politics and end the arms race. I cut my teeth in electorally and COPE. I took opposing view from a lot of my friends and colleagues, but it had to be done.

BR [01:03:16] You were a school trustee in the COPE majority?

CA [01:03:22] We were elected in 1984. We were fired in 1985. We were re-elected in December of 1985, and then we were defeated in 1986. (laughter) It was great. Oh, I loved that time on the school board because I was the youngest and I was given—because we

five—when we were first elected five COPE, four NPA. Everybody got to chair a committee and I was the youngest and had two kids, so they gave me the maintenance committee, I think it's committee three or something. It was the most boring—the most boring God-awful committee meeting. The most exciting thing you did at those committees was, what are we going to paint the inside of whatever, whichever school. At that time, we didn't deal with playgrounds, which to me doesn't make sense. Why weren't we dealing with playgrounds? But we didn't. It was a really boring committee. However, when it came to passing our needs budget, it was the most important committee because we were going to close schools to meet the budget. To do the budget cuts, we had to close seven schools. It was my committee and so we organized public meetings in each of the schools, each of the school communities, and I had a ball. It was so much fun. (laughter) I remember the morning that a sheriff was at my door. 'Are you Carmela Allevato?' It was 7:30 in the morning. Sure. Here's the letter. I still have it from Jack Heinrich saying you're fired, essentially, the board is dissolved.

BR [01:05:18] The Minister of Education?

CA [01:05:19] Yes.

BR [01:05:20] And why were they firing?

CA [01:05:23] Under the school act—it's the same today—you have to pass a budget to have a balanced budget and we would not pass a balanced budget. I needed six people. Here's another little tidbit of history. In order to pass a budget, you need six people—a minimum majority doesn't do it. We had four. We had five and Polly Weinstein was the chair. She assigned the other four of us one of the NPA people to convince them to vote with us. I got Ken Denike. I convinced him (laughter) and he has regretted it ever since. I remember years later—at that time he was a liberal, a big L and small L liberal. He's just gone over—another one has gone to the dark side. He told me years later that he regretted that decision ever since because it created a structural deficit in Vancouver. What that means is that if they had to do the cuts now to be at the same place where everybody else is who has done the cuts, they'd have to cut huge amount more. We saved schools, we saved teachers. There were 175 teacher jobs that were saved. It was just crazy because the fellow they appointed as trustee, the province appointed as trustee, to run it said he came and looked at all the numbers[said], 'So I couldn't do that' because he would have been run out of town. We had everybody up in arms about it. That was a fun time. I really enjoyed being on the school board.

BR [01:07:14] You worked for CUPE as an in-house counsel. When did that commence and what were some of your projects or legal cases or campaigns?

CA [01:07:22] I went to CUPE in 1996 and it was actually the longest I've been at any one place. I was there for 12 years. Initially, it felt really awkward because here I am, I've been the head of HEU, all that stuff and then I'm going back to being in-house counsel, but my assignment was HEU. I provided legal services to HEU and I had a lot fun, did a lot. One of the most important cases is when Gordon Campbell brought in Bill 29 [Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act]. I was part of the HEU legal team. There were three of us at the legal department. Jim Quayle, my husband was also there, and we organized the public sector health unions to hire Joe Arvay. We worked on the argument. We developed the litigation plan. By the time it got to the Supreme Court of Canada, of course, I had left that assignment. We did another case where even though the legislation says you can't have bumping rights, (you know, Bill 29 took away bumping rights), we did

this huge case at the Labour Relations Board where we got a modified bumping. We actually got bumping for people so they wouldn't have to be moved from, say, Kelowna to Cranbrook. Among the 12,000 documents, pieces of paper the employer gave us—HEABC [Health Employers Association of British Columbia] at the time—we found the smoking gun. We found an email between some H.R. people and a manager who talked about a worker, a unit clerk in Kelowna that they didn't like, and they were going to move her to Cranbrook. Under the legislation, she either went to Cranbrook or, you know, she was fired. And we found the—anyway, it was amazing.

CA [01:09:36] It was great. That's, again, HEU work. I had so many wonderful opportunities at CUPE. I loved working at CUPE. I was able to take initiatives. For example, I had the opportunity to work with Neil Bradbury. He and I and some other staff put together a bargaining strategy for the Lower Mainland to kind of regain the leadership pride and solidarity. Again, this thing about work, getting people together and working—working with them in a united way. I also had the opportunity to be the legal and legislative officer. I worked very closely with Barry O'Neill on legislative changes saving E-COMM. I had an amazing experience with the ambulance paramedics. I got to do an inquest in Kimberley. They hired me to represent the family of some ambulance paramedics who had died on the job. I wouldn't normally have that opportunity, but it was there. I met so many wonderful people. I got to work with Jane Stinson and Morna Ballantine. I was part of the staff group that came together to put together the material for introducing the organizing model, the training of staff. Amazing. It's wonderful. I had a really good time.

BR [01:11:26] Not necessarily sequentially, but you worked for the BCTF [British Columbia Teachers' Federation [unclear].

CA [01:11:30] Sequentially, yeah. It was after that. I left I left CUPE in 2008 and for about four months, I went to work at PIPSC [The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada]. That was a really different feeling. I was there four months. It wasn't suited to my character, (laughter) my personality, not my character. (laughter).

CA [01:12:00] Ken Novakowski was on the interview team. He gave me a big hug afterwards because a lot of the questions were questions I would have asked. It was all geared to the kind of work that I had done and was interested in doing, and kind of an understanding of the what's the role of staff, and particularly legal staff vis-a-vis the leadership of the union, be they elected members or other staff leadership. Sometimes it's very easy as lawyers, labour lawyers, to kind of have this idea that you've got the answer. My approach has never been not to labour law; it's always been that the law serves the greater purpose. The practice of labour law—what we do as labour lawyers has got to serve the overall objective of the union, building the union using cases as an organizing opportunity, and recognizing that sometimes you may not win but just standing up is a victory. How you frame something—I remember we did (Jim and I) did two cases at HEU where we actually needed to lose in order to move forward. You might be the expert in your area, but you're not expert in labour. You might be the expert in law, but not in labour. It's a labour law; it's not the law of labour. I don't know if I'm saying that right.

CA [01:13:46] At BCTF, even after Ken, left I had a great time there. (laughter) I worked with fantastic people there as well. I just loved teachers. I made very good friends there. One of the things that I enjoyed—I enjoyed doing all the training, I did that at all the unions I've been at—but one of the cases that I really cherish was the essential services hearings in 2012, I think it was. It was so delightful. We just creamed them. It's so wonderful. On the other side, they think they're smarter than you. (laughter) Especially when Peter Cameron

came in. He thought, I know their members. I know their members better than they do, but they don't. If you look at it as an organizing opportunity, as a union building opportunity, even when you lose, you win.

BR [01:14:45] You're strengthening the union and the union [unclear] membership behind.

CA [01:14:48] Yeah. Beside you. Beside you. Right.

BR [01:14:56] You were at the BCTF until, when?

CA [01:14:58] Until 2014. Then I left and went—I wouldn't have left, but because it was right across the street, I had great friends. The work, actually, if you want to be a labour lawyer with an emphasis on practicing pure law that's an opportunity there because you get to go to court. I did more court work; I went to the Court of Appeals three times. As in-house legal counsel anywhere else you really have to fight to get those opportunities and they're just not there. That's where I saw myself kind of retiring eventually, but then my husband, who had been in-house at MoveUP [Movement of United Professionals], Jim Quayle, he left MoveUP and started his own law firm. His partner, the woman he started it with, then had to take mat leave and parental leave. He was on his own and the practice was booming. I thought, why not? I left and went and joined him. Then a couple of years later, our daughter Susanna, joined us. Now the practice is booming and she and Rachel Roy, her best friend, have got it. Jim is working half time. I'm retired, although they drag me in from time to time.

BR [01:16:27] Working as a partner in a union side law firm like that, one of the important [unclear] provided legal support for was the hotel workers from 2020. It seems like immigrant workers, BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of colour] workers are becoming more—who are often in those kind of jobs—are becoming more and better organized than previous years. Why do you think that is?

CA [01:17:00] I think part of it is the great work that the union does. My background is with public sector unions where you get—once you become part of the union, there are essentially standard wages and benefits and provisions, and the employers understand there's a collective agreement. Generally, they've got organizations that represent—except for the period during Gordon Campbell when he beat the crap out of public sector unions. In the private sector, particularly with that group of vulnerable workers, very precarious work—they just opened my eyes to a totally different world. The vulnerability that they have is just amazing. The union it's built on the organizing principle. That's all they do. They organize them. They spend a lot of time with their members. The strike itself was amazing because the workers were running it. It reminded me of the early HEU stuff that we did. They would provide solidarity to one another from the Westin to the Hyatt. You'd see, it didn't matter, they finish at one picket line and they'd go help out their friend down at the other. There's also a community. There's a community that's not just in the union. A lot of the workers are immigrant women primarily; there's that community as well. They bring that into the union and outside as well. There was also a lot of international solidarity from the other locals of UNITE HERE. The Hawaii, no Chicago local I think, sent them this great big Chinese drum that they would bang on the picket line, which drove everybody down in the TD Centre crazy—everybody who worked there because you could hear this drum all hours of the day. Also having rallies and involving their members, using them, using the legal work we were doing also as an organizing activity. There's that, and I think also people have had enough. In that sense, maybe social media is empowering to some extent because you hear about other people who are taking on the power as well. I think

that's part of it. I think the union's approach—you know, Zailda Chan is the face of the union, and she's a really good face for that union. The picket captains really smart, really tough people, because if you're in that environment where you're vulnerable and then suddenly you can say no to the boss because you've got a strike vote. If the boss tries to bring somebody in to do your work, you've got a union that will say, you can't do that. We did so many anti scab cases at the board, like over and over and over again; that was the thing, that they had support not just outside on the picket line, but also inside because we knew everything that was going on inside. That comes from coalition building, unity, solidarity. I don't know if I answered your question.

BR [01:21:18] Working with your firm and your partners, are there other legal cases or campaigns that are a highlight?

CA [01:21:27] Yeah. Temporary foreign workers. My daughter Susanna is on the executive of the Migrant Workers Centre, so we do quite a bit of work—or did, I did, they do it now. We do a lot of work, class actions for workers, primarily migrant workers. We do a lot of work for CUPE locals. I did a very important case on drug testing and duty to accommodate. We've done that. We also do quite a bit of work for the CUPE transit workers and that group of folks who actually run the Skytrain, they're so invisible. You see them as the Skytrain attendants, but you have no idea what goes on, how they keep it running.

CA [01:22:30] A very important case to me personally was a case I did for an education assistant who was fired because they thought she had pushed a child. She was looking after an autistic child and the employer was so sure it had happened. It reminded me of one of those teacher cases where somebody thinks they saw something, but it wasn't that at all. One of the things that we did in that case is we did a site visit of a common room that this woman had created on her own, with her own money for this child. Sometimes as lawyers, you come in, you deal with the problem, you go on. You deal with the problem usually at a hearing room in some hotel and if it's out of town. To actually go on site and kind of experience the lived experience of the people there, it was really eye opening. What was more important was the realization that on the ground there are not adequate supports for these kids and the people who work with these kids—there just aren't. Ultimately, she was reinstated, but the ordeal she went through, the worker, was so much that she didn't go back to work. Then what happened with the child is that they couldn't accommodate her, so the child had to be at home because there aren't enough supports in the school. That made a big impression on me—working with that in that particular case. It was it was a little case in the scheme of things, but it was a huge case for the people who were involved.

BR [01:24:46] At a broad level—because it's not always apparent to union members why legal support is useful—why is legal support so important?

CA [01:25:00] Okay. We had first started when it was supposed to be quick and dirty. In the old days, the boss did something wrong, you down your tools, you went out, and it actually happened. When Jim was working at General Electric as a student, high school student in the summers, they did that. That was in the seventies. Well, sixties. Now everybody's lawyered up, the employers lawyered up. How do you respond to that? You know, you have to have expertise on your side as well, because the system belongs to them.

CA [01:25:54] The labour laws have not been created for us. They were created to ensure that there would be labour peace so that production could continue uninterrupted. That's the exchange rate. What we get in exchange is, instead of downing our tools or leaving the workplace, we get arbitration. It was supposed to be expeditious and not costly, but it hasn't worked out that way. I think that's unfortunate; however, it's the world we live in and so it's important that we, that workers, have the best representation possible. The best representation possible isn't—can't just be in the law, can't be in the courts, it can't be at arbitration. It's got to be—it's the workers that have the power. You can win at arbitration but end up with nothing if the workers aren't there to enforce it. You can negotiate the best collective agreement, but if the workers aren't there to enforce it—the two go together. I think, too, with the Charter [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms], what the BCTF did and what HEU did and the BCGEU, and even the nurses were involved in that case—to cut through 25 years of jurisprudence that said the Charter doesn't protect your right to strike; therefore, you can have, your right to collective bargaining; therefore, you can have all sorts of arbitrary decisions made about you, and things done to you and to your collective agreement. I think that it's important for workers to use every tool available. The Charter was a tool that was available to push them back, but I don't think it's an end in itself. I think it's a tool in the toolbox that workers have, that human beings have, citizens have. That's how I have approached it and I continue to approach it in that manner. It's another tool in the toolbox. You want to make sure that your tool is as finely honed as the one on the other side. I have to tell you, it's easier to be on the other side because they own the system. It's theirs. Nothing is given to us. Nothing is. We have to fight for every single bit of it. When I teach, I like to do a circle. The circle is like the workplace. Without the union there, the management rights, and there's just external laws that govern it. Then you draw a circle within the circle, and that's the collective agreement, and that's the place that the union is in. It's occupying space that employers would have free rein, subject to external law, to do whatever the heck they wanted. At the edge of the circle, the inside circle, is where the grievances happen, where the fight happens, because employers are trying to squish that circle, make it smaller. We're trying to, I think too often, we're trying to keep that line to be firm and clear. What we should be really doing is pushing it out so that we take as much of their ground as possible. That's my visual. I should have brought it.

BR [01:29:53] Do you have any words of wisdom for someone who is just becoming active in the labour movement?

CA [01:29:59] Oh, yeah. Just do everything. Everything. Take, every opportunity. Talk up the union. Just go do everything. It's not possible sometimes, but find a way that you can be part of the movement within the ability that you have to do it, and take every opportunity. There are a lot of amazing people who end up being in the labour movement. They're being part of the elected leadership, other staff leadership. If we don't grab those people to our side, sometimes they end up being lured to the other side. Not because they're bad people or they wanna—some of them do want to go to the dark side, don't get me wrong—but because there aren't opportunities for people to express their creativity and their leadership abilities. Be patient, sometimes the old folks don't want to let go. It's hard to let go. I know that. It's very hard to let go. There's so much need for people to be active and stay active. The thing I say to people is, 'If you are the union's representative, you are equal to your employer.' Equal. That's a way to get power. Be a shop steward; you're equal to the employer. Take every training you can. The union movement is part of the broader social justice movement, so it doesn't end there. Even if all you can do is work within the union movement, you're advancing the interests of the whole of society. You're not advancing just your own interests, or the interests of your fellow members. Have that kind of perspective and if you've got the energy to do it all.

BR [01:32:12] Why is it important for young activists to learn about labour?

CA [01:32:18] It's very easy to believe that this is the way it's always been, or that this is the way it's always going to be, which is even worse. If you don't know that kids used to work—there was child labour, or there was no safety protections, or there were no hours of work, and you couldn't turn down overtime. If you don't know that it's possible, then you think this is the best it's going to be and it's not.