

Interview: Dave Wilson (DW)
Interviewer: Phil Legg (PL)
Date: April 19, 2023
Location: Burnaby, B.C.
Transcription: Jane Player

PL [00:00:04] Great, Dave. I'm so glad that you were able to join us today. What I'd like to do is start by asking you to talk about your early life, where you grew up, and some of the stuff that you got into when you were young.

DW [00:00:22] Well, I grew up in Winnipeg and my grandfather was active with Canadian Cartage, which was— anyway, so he was active in the Winnipeg General Strike. He had a stroke early in my life. I tried to spend a lot of time with him. He told me a couple of things. He said, 'I want you to get a union job and I want you to give to the Red Feather campaign,' which was turned into the United Way. I did those things my whole life. I started with Manitoba Telephone System, and I got pissed off about the—oh can I say those things? Sure.

PL [00:01:07] Absolutely.

DW [00:01:10] Okay. I got upset (laughter) with the way us apprentices were being treated by the foremen on the job. My first union meeting, I got up and bitched about, you know, this whole thing about—because they were coming, not talk to us. Then we would only find out bits and pieces of what was going on. I went to the union meeting and people told me, 'Ah, sit down and shut up.' I said, 'Look, I pay the same percentage of my wages to this union as you do.'

PL [00:01:42] Yeah.

DW [00:01:43] Yeah, which was an IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] local. One of the guys said, 'Well, if you're so worried about that, why don't you be a shop steward.' I said, 'Okay.' So, I became the shop steward for apprentices for the local.

PL [00:01:57] Yeah.

DW [00:02:00] Which was kind of intriguing because I was like 19 years old.

PL [00:02:04] Yeah.

DW [00:02:05] I had no idea about what I was supposed to do. One of the jobs of the shop steward in those days was to collect the union dues.

PL [00:02:16] Seriously?

DW [00:02:18] You had to go round every month and collect the union dues. I used to work in a big compound, and there was a bowling alley, had a liquor store, and we used to go there for beer all the time after work. On payday I'd go, I think, 'Oh, it's the perfect place to collect union dues.' I'd go around always guys collecting union dues, and one of the guys says, 'Hey,' calls a waiter, says, 'This guy's 19. He shouldn't even be in here.' I went, 'You asshole.' I waited for the asshole outside in February in Winnipeg, (laughter) and

confronted him to get his union dues. I thought, 'This is bizarre.' What it did was it made sure that the shop steward talked to people.

PL [00:03:06] Yeah, everybody—

DW [00:03:08] Then we got automatic dues check off, and that changed the whole thing. All of a sudden, shop stewards became invisible. I thought, this is wrong, you know, because we were so active. You know, talking and finding out stuff and implementing change in the workplace. Most of these guys that I worked with came through the war together.

PL [00:03:33] Yeah.

DW [00:03:33] They were all buddies—my management guys, all the foremen that were all friends and shit. One of my jobs was to go and open a manhole and set up a guy in the manhole, like splicer, would go down. My job was to be up top most of the time standing in the fucking freezing rain and melt lead, which is because we used to pour wet sleeves and all the rest of that stuff. I'd be up there and if water hits the lead pot it explodes. It's like, wait a minute, this is all wrong. You need a—they had a little tent that covered the hole, but it wasn't big enough for the pot to get in, or me even.

PL [00:04:23] Yeah.

DW [00:04:24] We had to kinda find a [unclear] complaint so they end up with bigger tents in the street. It's pretty good, except that everybody drank then—everybody—and used to tie a string around a bottle, long sleeve bottle, and shove it down the duck line. You put a 24 down there and you want a beer, just pull a thing and out come another beer. Clunk, and they'd sit there and drink all day. My role was to go and buy the beer because I had the truck. I'm 19 years old. Drinking age was 21. 'Dave, go get me a 24.' I'd wander over to this hotel that had a drive through, Cambridge Hotel, and drive up to it by telephone truck and order four 24s of beer, pay them and deliver them to these guys.

PL [00:05:18] No questions asked?

DW [00:05:19] No questions asked. They'd sit there and drink all day. It was—and you gain some respect from the guy because it was like shop stewards were pretty important in the IBEW chain of command.

PL [00:05:37] It's interesting about the collecting dues, one-on-one like that.

DW [00:05:40] That was really critical. I ended up being president of the local a few years later, which in building trade stuff, you just chair meetings. You really don't have a—you're rank and file and then. It's fairly big local. It covered the whole province.

PL [00:06:05] Yeah.

DW [00:06:06] A few years later and I got on as an assistant business manager. The business manager was so far up management's ass that it was just terrible. He was a real asshole. Then operators—we got a collective agreement—and then the operators, which was another IBEW local, went on strike. With the structure of the telephone system, guys reported to buildings or they reported to manholes and stuff, so the only way you could not get through was you had to go and pick up an operator, bring them to your site, park her in

front of a door and say, 'Oh, a picket line,' and then leave. Then legally you were out of work.

PL [00:06:59] Yeah.

DW [00:06:59] As president of the local. I thought, 'This is bullshit. I'm just not going to do that anymore.' I go straight to the office and I just did—because I worked in the hydro building.

PL [00:07:10] Yeah.

DW [00:07:10] Reported there every day. It became an issue for a whole bunch of people because some people would—for instance, two brothers. They were both shop stewards. One of them was working in a telephone building, so he was picketed off automatically and the other one had to go through all this bullshit. The wives were all fighting saying, 'Well, how come he can't—he's working and you're not.'

PL [00:07:34] Yeah.

DW [00:07:37] We thought, 'Well, how can we solve this?' Earlier, I had worked in Ed Schreyer's campaign. I helped him get elected. A buddy asked me if I'd go and do some stuff with him out in Beausejour when he was running for MLA and I thought, 'Oh sure, why not.' I go out there and I had no idea that Beausejour was mostly Ukrainian. I'm wandering around with Schreyer, he's talking Ukrainian to all these people. I'm just nodding in my head. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We had a good time and then he became premier. I thought, 'Well, we've got to solve this thing.' We try and set up some kind of stuff about getting the strike ended earlier. We ended up with a couple of techniques. In those days, long distance stuff was all step offices, you would, you know, clunk, clunk. The TransCanada network ran through Winnipeg into the States and back up into Ontario.

PL [00:08:41] Okay. Yeah.

DW [00:08:42] We decided that at 11:00, I forget the date, but 11:00, everybody was supposed to pick up the phone and phone their MP. When they did that, it crashed the whole TransCanada telephone system. MTS, the employment, had a dial impulse recorder and wiretaps on most of the people on the union side stuff so they nailed a bunch of guys for what's called felonious mischief.

PL [00:09:15] Yeah. (laughter)

DW [00:09:17] Which is nothing to laugh at. (laughter) Jail sentence shit—because we're under federal—telephones were federal. Luckily, I had asked my wife to go next door because I figured they had a wiretap on me. She goes next door and makes the call. About two days later, I get a call from a guy named Dick Martin, who was a Steelworker up in Thompson. He said, 'Dave, I just watched a TV thing and there's—I watched those assholes go and pick up their telephone trucks and walk right by their wives in Brandon.' They were on strike up there—the Steelworkers. He said, 'We're sending two busloads down to straighten out those assholes.' 'What? When?' 'Well, they're on their way.' I went, 'Oh, shit.' I get in my car, drive out to Brandon for the morning. I'm there because I know that they're going to get off this bus and there's going to be a fistfight. I drive up to Brandon and I—'Look, you assholes. Don't you dare go in.' There's two busloads of drunken Steelworkers coming in. 'You're going to get in shit.' 'Okay.' The bus drives up and they

have a little party and shit, and everybody's happy. Meanwhile, on the roof is TV cameras. The next thing we do is we think we got to change this stupid thing of people having to go somewhere.

PL [00:10:50] Yeah.

DW [00:10:53] Somebody thought, 'Well, we got to get Wilson out of there, out of the hydro building.' They didn't know I wasn't in there. They throw a picket line around the hydro building on a Friday of a long weekend.

PL [00:11:04] Oh, boy.

DW [00:11:07] They're an IBEW local. All the signs says, 'IBEW on strike.' They were in bargaining, so the hydro guys didn't go in. Now the hydro local is going to sue me because they figured I did it. I go, 'I think, well, we got to solve this fuckin' thing.'

PL [00:11:26] Yeah.

DW [00:11:27] Oops. There's another swear word, But anyways—

PL [00:11:29] They're good. (laughter)

DW [00:11:31] I get a hold of Schreyer, and I said, 'We're gonna come to your building, the legislature, and put a ring around it. We want to solve this.' Manitoba Tel was government. Anyways, we end up with this massive picket line right around—ringing the whole building. Schreyer comes out with Pawley, who was the labour minister—

PL [00:11:58] Yeah.

DW [00:11:59] —and invites in the operators and a couple of people from my local and we sit down and said, 'Well, you know this—' He says, 'What's going on with the strike?' The operators explain the shitty working conditions. They had to put their hand up to go to the bathroom, and then an operator would come along and say, 'You have to go to the bathroom?' 'Yes.' 'I'll get somebody.' Then they bring somebody else. Meanwhile, you've already messed up your seat and shit. It was brutal. Anyways, he said, 'Well, how can I solve this thing? How can I help you, Dave?' I said, 'Well, you could have our—us reassign all of our people to telephone buildings, and then we won't have this other issue of shutting down hydro buildings, or the Richardson Security, all the rest of that stuff. All this because we had no secondary picketing. He says, 'Well, we should have that.' Pawley says, 'We should have that.' I said, 'Well, but we need it today.' Anyways, they make a phone call and all of a sudden, we're having everybody assigned back to telephone buildings.

PL [00:13:09] Yeah.

DW [00:13:11] We get a settlement about three days later. In the settlement, it's a back to work agreement. In the back to work agreement, there's three guys—two that had got nailed for the phone call, and myself for inciting a riot because of the Brandon thing. Malicious, felonious mischief. We go into—and Harold Warren, business manager, says, 'Dave, we're in serious trouble here. You know, these guys, I can get them off, but not you.' I say, 'What do you mean, not me?' He says, 'Well, they're stuck on that.' He says, 'You, you're in trouble, but I've got you a job in Edmonton Tel, which was another IBEW local. I looked at him and I said, 'You're an asshole.' I left, and I thought, 'I'm not going to

go work in Edmonton.' A guy had phoned—OK Tel was hiring, so I phoned OK Tel [Okanagan Telephone Company] because the guy there was one of my bosses, and he was the H.R. guy. I phoned him and I said, 'I'm looking for'—and he says, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'Well, I'm redoing the hydro building to this new model, this new equipment.' 'It's so perfect—we got a job like—we need you. Went, 'Okay.' I drive out to Penticton—or to Vernon, where the head office was, and I look at the job, and I think, 'Yeah, okay, I'll take it.' I drive back and I quit the telephone company. I thought, 'Oh, this is good.' We move.

PL [00:14:52] Yeah.

DW [00:14:53] I go there and I'm welcomed in as an apprentice. Not an apprentice, but I'm—seniority is pretty critical in telephone business.

PL [00:15:02] Yeah.

DW [00:15:03] I'm a low guy on the totem pole. I get all the shitty jobs. I'm there a week and we walk out on strike.

PL [00:15:09] What year is this?

DW [00:15:11] '75.

PL [00:15:11] Okay, great.

DW [00:15:14] We go on strike.

PL [00:15:15] Yeah.

DW [00:15:15] OK Tel—over the pension plan.

PL [00:15:18] Right. Yeah.

DW [00:15:19] Which was, you know, and I'm thinking I just spent two months on strike, and I come here, I get my first paycheque—I don't even get my first paycheque—and I'm back on the street again. I'm thinking, 'Wow!' (laughter)

PL [00:15:32] What did I bring from East to West? (laughter)

DW [00:15:37] I really enjoyed working for—because we had a really good local, and I became the president of that local—

PL [00:15:44] Yeah.

DW [00:15:45] —of OK Tel, which was—and my politics was pretty straightforward for these guys that were, you know, most of them were old Saskatchewan Tel guys, so politics, NDP shit, right? Became really active in the party in the Okanagan and the TWU [Telecommunications Workers Union]. Then later, we go to—and we were called the Federation of Telephone Workers at that time. The Canadian Labour Congress [CLC] had decided that they would—you could only belong to the labour movement to CLC if you were a—belong to a nationally-chartered company, union, I mean. We weren't—us, and about four of them were independent.

PL [00:16:40] Yeah.

DW [00:16:42] We're fighting to stay independent because there's no way we want to join IBEW.

PL [00:16:47] Been there, done that.

DW [00:16:47] Yeah. Well, and the first local in telephone was here in B.C., was here, and was IBEW back in the late 1800s.

PL [00:17:00] Right.

DW [00:17:00] The operators. Then they got shit on and left the IBEW. There was no way we were going backwards. We started with doing a whole bunch of lobbying and stuff and with what was called the CWC [Communications Workers of Canada] at the time. Yeah.

PL [00:17:21] Yeah.

DW [00:17:22] See, I threw a picket line up around, 'cuz when they were on strike out here at—forget what electrical company—Philips, I think. It was where Dairyland is now. They were on strike. They moved a bunch of equipment into cable, into a telephone building. I threw a picket line around to honour the—to stop this hot declaration. I knew those guys. Boris Mather and—I forget the other guy—Frank Hyde. Anyways, we got a hold of them and said, 'Look, if push comes to shove, we'll join you guys'. We go to the Winnipeg for the NDP convention.

PL [00:18:13] Right.

DW [00:18:14] I get a call at my hotel room. 'Dave, we need to talk to you,' from the president and the business manager of the telephone local there. 'About what?' 'We want to merge with you.' 'What do you mean, merge—you mean raid?' At that time, the building trades were outside the Congress.

PL [00:18:37] Oh, okay. Yes.

DW [00:18:40] I meet with them and they said, 'Look, we'll come over; we'll join you guys.' I go to our president at the time, which was Bob Donnelly.

PL [00:18:49] Bob Donnelly, I remember him well.

DW [00:18:50] I said, 'Bob, I can pick up Manitoba Tel, the plant division of Manitoba Tel, tomorrow if you want it.' 'Raid them?' I said, 'It's not a raid. They're not part of the building trades. We're not part of the building trades. We're liberating them.'

PL [00:19:09] (laughter)

DW [00:19:10] He says, 'Wilson, you're an idiot. We'll fight for our lives with the Congress, and you want us to go and piss off some people?' I said, 'Well, yeah.' Anyways, it didn't happen. We go to—so move Mather along and do all the stuff and TWU becomes—. In those days, that was probably the second strongest union in British Columbia behind the IWA [International Woodworkers of America]. They were powerful because we had a fairly

good collective agreement, good wages, and a strong union executive. We used to have two week-long conventions a year.

PL [00:19:59] Yeah.

DW [00:20:00] You bring in a hundred delegates from around the province twice a year. One to argue about elections and the other want to argue about policy. Became a—you know it's polarized right. We ended up being too diplomatic and too political.

PL [00:20:22] Yeah.

DW [00:20:24] We had—votes were 50-50. We have 50 delegates for one president, 50 for another one. Then the chair had to decide at one meeting. It was an interesting time to be a TWU member 'cuz—.

PL [00:20:44] It was also—just on that, the BC Tel—some of the disputes that the TWU got involved with BC Tel were landmark disputes.

DW [00:20:57] Oh, yeah, for sure, 'cuz at the time we always made the decision that we would never go out on strike over money. It had to be a bigger issue than money. The first one was pension. That was the OK Tel strike, because Bill Clark wasn't president then, but he was a business agent, and he wasn't even vice president, but he'd had a heart problem and he was off. He thought pensions were shitty because we had good pensions, but the company kept the money until you left.

PL [00:21:34] Yeah.

DW [00:21:36] You make your contribution. They would take their contribution, put it in general revenue, and when the person retired they'd move it over. All we're getting on the pension was— you know, be able to invest, the pension—was our money and not their money. That strike said, "No, we want control of the pension."

PL [00:21:55] Yeah.

DW [00:21:56] We took control of the pension and years later it turned in to be Concert Properties, and all the rest of that. It was the beginning of all the labour invested money—was TWU money.

PL [00:22:09] Yeah.

DW [00:22:09] You know, because we had a shitload of it.

PL [00:22:11] Yeah. So, the other dispute?

DW [00:22:15] The next one was over technological change. The tech change clause said that—and that became part of that letter that we talked about—oh, we were off camera then. In those days, BC Tel was a fairly good employer. They were really good employer, it turns out. They always respected the union. They made a mistake of putting out a notice in the paper listing everybody and said, 'You can come back, and we guarantee these people will have their employment. Come back to work. We're guaranteeing all the employees.' We went—oh, Bill Clark, 'Oh, that's perfect. We can use that later.'

PL [00:22:55] Yeah.

DW [00:22:55] Anyway, they guaranteed employment. We're going to bargaining and he says to the human— 'Look, everybody that works here is guaranteed their employment, so you need to address tech change.' At that time, they were—the mostly central office stuff was moving from a mechanical to a digital electronic stuff, so lots of jobs gonna go. We ended up bargaining a technological change thing that said everybody was guaranteed their employment. They had to give them training to keep them on. You couldn't move. If you were living in Kelowna, then you had to find a job for them in Kelowna.

PL [00:23:41] Right. Yeah.

DW [00:23:43] They're at the table and the man—somebody from H.R. said, 'Well,' on the other side of the table says, 'What about those areas where we really don't, you know, we don't have a lot of workers, how do we control that?' He said, 'Well, we'll go regionally. I mean it doesn't matter, we'll go regionally.' The guy says, 'But we have another issue. If we're doing stuff, we go to the lowest bidder.'

PL [00:24:12] Yeah.

DW [00:24:13] We said, 'No, wait a minute here. We'll go to, if you want, we'll have a contracting out clause. We'll allow you to contract out things like, well, cuttin' the grass, doing that stuff, major upgrades like painting, but we got our own staff to do it so they can bid on site.' They went, 'Oh, that's a wonderful idea.' Then the bargaining committee says, 'Oh, and by the way, it has to be union, where applicable.' They went, 'Okay.' We ended up with this contracting out clause that guaranteed everybody employment. It guaranteed that every job that they let out was going to be, go union, and technological change. They couldn't get rid of anybody unless we went through—'cuz we had a tech change committee—

PL [00:25:07] Yeah.

DW [00:25:08] That they would have to send it to. Then we had a—I forget who the guy was—an arbitrator that would decide—and I can't remember—

PL [00:25:14] Morley Short.

DW [00:25:15] Oh, yeah.

PL [00:25:17] Morley Short was your lawyer?

DW [00:25:18] Yeah. Everything went to him. It was wonderful. It's the benchmark one for everybody in Canada. The tech change one. It was good times. We had a fairly good union.

PL [00:25:33] I remember Bill coming. At this point, he was president of the union, and it was the 1980 dispute in which you guys were occupying the BC Tel offices.

DW [00:25:47] Oh, yeah. (laughter).

PL [00:25:49] You came to the IWA convention and, of course, everybody was enthralled with what you guys were up to.

DW [00:25:58] It was a bunch—around the province, we had guys do all kinds of interesting things. One of the guys who took over the building completely over in—small, I think was up Sunshine Coast somewhere.

PL [00:26:16] Yeah, right.

DW [00:26:17] Just kicked out management, took over the building. He said, 'Get out.' They left and then Bill Clark and the rest went, 'Wait a minute, we've got to protect this guy.' We said, 'Okay, we'll occupy all the buildings.' We occupied all the buildings and we just went in. I was in Penticton at the time, so we go into the building and all of a sudden, we're the operators, we're taking over, kicked out management. Now I'm a long distance operator. The first thing we did was reach up and take those little flags. They used to have a little flag, a mechanical flag, to go to the bathroom. I said, 'Well, this is not—this doesn't work for me.' We tore them off and then we did all of our little things that we need to do to make sure that—

PL [00:27:04] Yeah.

DW [00:27:04] That, better we would answer the phone like—oh, forget—but anyway, we took over and we started talking—we did the jobs that needed to be done—long distance stuff and all the rest of that. Then Harrison was on. I was already committed to teach course at Harrison. I drove to Harrison and Jim Kinnaird was president and I was one of his buddies that went around to make sure he didn't get in trouble. 'Cuz he loved—a great guy, but he loved to drink. Same with Kramer, the secretary treasurer. Barry Thorsteinsen was looking after him and I was looking after Jim when they went on a tear—

PL [00:27:56] Yeah.

DW [00:27:57] And keep them out of trouble. Kinnaird was easy because all he did was start singing.

PL [00:28:04] Yeah.

DW [00:28:05] Kramer was—he'd make up little stories about people and do a little shit twisting around. Anyway, good guys. Kinnaird comes to me and he says, 'Dave, can you come with us? Munro and I are going into the telephone building downtown,' and I went, 'Oh, okay.' I drive in from Harrison with the two of them. We walk into 768 Seymour 'cuz it's going to shut down. They're going to come out. Bill Clark wanted to make sure that there was no damage done. There was independent people like Munro and Kinnaird going in and I went in. It's like—and all the rest of these guys, 'So, what the fuck are you doing here?' 'Oh, I don't know, I'm with him.' With Kinnaird. (laughter) We go into the building and then they had a big—outside they had this huge stage out there and a little talk about the strike and coming out and all the—and Munro's up there. Munro says—I can't remember the quote. Anyways, the guy was the president of the company.

PL [00:29:24] [unclear]

DW [00:29:27] Yeah. Munro says, 'That fucking'—and I'm thinking, 'Oh, this ought to be good, he'll bleep that shit.' I go home to watch the news that night and they didn't bleep it. First time I ever saw the word fucking on TV. I said to Munro, 'Wow, that was cool, you

got—' he says, 'I use that all the time. He says, 'Whenever he sets a microphone in front of my face and I don't want to talk to him, I start swearing.'

PL [00:29:53] (laughter)

DW [00:29:54] Good move. (laughter) That became a—and we took over the building. That strike ended up with—it was kind of like the highlight of the BC Tel, the TWU thing. They were a really good employer. We've got to admit that BC. Tel was a wonderful employer until Telus took over.

PL [00:30:18] Yeah.

DW [00:30:19] When Telus took over, all shit, it fell down, became like an Alberta local, or American local. The relations went into the shitter, just terrible.

PL [00:30:35] Darren Entwistle, that was, [unclear]

DW [00:30:36] MacFarlane was the guy.

PL [00:30:37] Oh, MacFarlane was the BC Tel guy?

DW [00:30:39] Yeah.

PL [00:30:40] Darren Entwistle was [unclear]

DW [00:30:42] What happened there was BC Tel was always 51 percent owned by GTE, an America outfit. When the mandarins in power of BC Tel decided to get into video broadcasting, they had to be—you could have not more—you had to have a third America foreign ownership. That's when they got a hold of Telus Alberta and said we'll merge. They brought this dipshit in out of California named Petty. He came in as the—'cuz GTE wanted their—so they flew him in. Then he started flying people around the province, firing all kinds of shit, of BC Tel stuff—management—'cuz they had a—we had a different way of working than Alberta did. Like for instance, when we would build a system, the print key on your laptop or your—anytime you wanted to print something, it went to clerical automatically. It didn't go—so these Alberta guys came in and they typed up a little letter and they want to send it, they go, 'I can't print.' 'No, no you can't print. That's bargaining unit work.'

PL [00:31:57] Yeah.

DW [00:31:58] It pissed them off, right. Anyway, so Telus guys. They become a horrible employer. Just horrible.

PL [00:32:05] Petty was, didn't he? He went on to become CEO of some other BC company, do you remember?

DW [00:32:13] I can't remember what he—'cuz I know he was—his wife wouldn't leave California, so he lived in California. He would take to take the company jet down to California and then come back. If you decided to have a meeting in Calgary or Edmonton or whatever, he would just send people a little memo, 'Be tomorrow morning at 9:00 o'clock in Calgary.' I'm thinking, 'What kind of an asshole is that?' I'm at the airport and I'm catching a flight to (I forget where) and one of the vice presidents of BTE, or my bosses,

was at the airport and I said, 'What are you doing here?' He said, 'Oh, I'm going to get fired.' I said, 'What are you going to do fired?' 'I got to be in Calgary and I'm on a waiting list for my flight and I went, 'What?' He says, 'I got to be there. If I can't get there, I'm done.' I went here, 'Well, take my seat.' You know, I didn't give a shit. I could be late. Anyway, he was forever thankful. What was his name? Nice guy. They never fired him. You know, they kept him, but later they fired a whole shitload of management people.

PL [00:33:24] Let's talk about the—okay, so your time with the TWU ends with you taking the buyout. What was—the buyout started—when did they start doing the buyouts?

DW [00:33:37] In '84. It was part of a bargaining package we got. They wanted to downsize because the economy, so jobs were—in some areas where they had too many people like the Okanagan. Our collective agreement said that if they had a layoff, it was seniority. They wanted to layoff people, had to be by seniority. If they got rid of people in the Okanagan, there were going to be people from here go there, and there was lots of work here. We said, 'Look.' I don't know if it was Clark—one of them anyway—came up with a wonderful idea that—and the argument was pretty simple. If you're staying here, you've got seven weeks holidays, you got 13 stacked days, you got 12 ATO [accumulated time off] days. You have all those, you got to pay them anyways. Period. Whether they're working or not. Why not give those, and a ten year period, in a buyout? Pay them ten years. It worked out to about 80,000.

PL [00:34:51] Yeah.

DW [00:34:52] They advertised, said anybody wants a buyout can go at 55 with 25 years in at full pension.

PL [00:34:59] Wow.

DW [00:35:00] I was at the—we were holding a convention at the Inn at the Quay. I think it was just at the same time as the vote was going on about the merger vote with Alberta. The trustees came and approved it. I put up my hand, I said, 'Excuse me, take me off the bargaining unit. I'm not going to be here'.

PL [00:35:26] Yeah.

DW [00:35:26] I'm gone. That was in February, I think February, and I was gone the next month. The sad thing is that Rod Hiebert could have gone at the same time as me. He was the president at the time, but he decided to stay, stick around for the vote.

PL [00:35:45] Yeah. And next thing you know he's [unclear].

DW [00:35:47] And then stick around for the next round of bargaining.

PL [00:35:50] Which went on—

DW [00:35:51] Oh, man. Well, when he did leave, the buyout was off the table.

PL [00:35:55] Yeah. You move from, TWU and working for the phone company to Union Label. Let's talk about that.

DW [00:36:05] I was always involved in—my whole thing about—working in the private sector ended up being critical about jobs and was in the Okanagan and not a lot of jobs there. There were some, but not a lot. There was a couple of trailer companies and stuff. The Labour Council there was—I was on the Winnipeg District Labour Council executive for years. When I moved to the Okanagan, the labour council in the Okanagan was one labour council, Kelowna and Vernon, and I got involved as a delegate. I got pissed off going up to Kelowna, listening about parking metres in Kelowna and parking metres in Vernon and thought, 'Piss off with this shit. We'll build our own local, our own labour council. We built the labour council. Then it became critical that we were looking at local employment. The trailer plants were suffering—the unionized ones—because they had about four trailer plants, but they were suffering. It was like buy Canadian, buy local, and our local little labour council keyed on that. Then, all of a sudden, I get involved with B.C. Union Label whose meetings we're all down here. I had to kind of shift my priority, you know, and show up. Then, I thought, well, and then I got delegated to the Canadian Labour Congress Union Label Department. I thought, this is something I can really sink my teeth into, so I did and became president of both B.C. Union Label and Union Label nationally, and started promoting Buy Union, Buy Canadian. It really took off in those eras 'cuz before that the Liberal government had programs that, like boot and shoe for instance, because they would put together a trade commission and invite the union to go with them. Especially on boot and shoe because those guys were, it was UFCW [United Food and Commercial Workers Union] local, and they were losing all kinds of jobs to offshore stuff. The Canadian government put a lot of money into trying to create—the Liberal government, the old Trudeau government, tried to put a lot of money into creating Canadian jobs, and Union Label took advantage of that and used it quite a bit. The sad thing was it was well driven by the private sector unions. Public sector unions didn't give a shit, could not talk to them. They just—it's way beyond us. The UFCW, Steel, amalgamated. All kinds of stuff we were trying to get people to buy union and buy Canadian.

PL [00:39:24] Yeah.

DW [00:39:25] I put a lot of effort into doing that. It was like—and I enjoyed it. It was fun—a lobby with some politicians, and have little draws and booths and stuff in trying to raise awareness in the labour movement. A lot of people didn't understand what we did. They thought, 'Oh, all they ever do is go on strike.' Well, one of the things we did with Union Label was move into a program with a bunch of young high school kids and drag racing. A guy got a hold of me, Len Worden, kind of the building trades and said—he was pissed because the people of building trades—kids come out of high school. They leave high school in Grade 10, Grade 11, get fed up, because they're really not into computer shit or any of that stuff. They quit, go out there to work, and then they go to try and get into the trades. Trades are require Grade 12 education.

PL [00:40:25] Yeah.

DW [00:40:28] New Westminster had a thing on the news about—had the highest dropout rate in Canada. New West high school and my kids went there. Worden got a hold of me and said, 'We should do something about this. We need to get these kids active and back into working with their hands in the schools.' New West had dropped off—dropped their automotive, they dropped their woodworking, dropped their—all the trade stuff. They dropped it all. The only thing they kept was the band. Everything else was academic, but they're out in the band. It was like the school board just decided to drop everything, and that was happening all around the province. We put together a program of stay in school

initiative. Ended up being—and the kids decided that they wanted to have, out of New West. We met with them, put a team together and a race car. They wanted to say no to drugs because they want the drug use to stay away from them at school.

PL [00:41:31] Right.

DW [00:41:32] It became a Say No to Drugs racing team. We travelled the whole province with a bunch of high school kids talking about union. We'd go to a—and at Safeway. We picked up Safeway as a sponsor and a bunch of other ones, Teamsters, UFCW. We'd go and we'd set up at a Safeway store or whatever and hand out trade union stuff. The back of the things said, 'Union Yes.' Then we'd talk about what the labour—I would. Kids would talk about the race car and I would talk about (with the parents)—[unclear] 'This is a good thing you're doing.' I'd say, 'Well, the labour movement does good things. The labour movement is more than just collective bargaining. We're in your community. We do all this stuff.' Became a real—it was really—it got a lot of good publicity for the labour movement, for it, and a good feeling from a bunch of labour people. Yeah, we had good fun.

PL [00:42:29] The tie in to sort of getting people back into the trades and ladder into the trades because there were the barriers.

DW [00:42:40] The Socreds killed it. I mean they just hated—they got rid of anything that smelt of union, which include the trades. It became a real political football for these politicians and especially in the outlying areas. Lower Mainland, kids could find other things to do. Some of the vocational stuff stayed where it was, but not a lot. Most of it was gone.

PL [00:43:04] Yeah.

DW [00:43:06] Kids still [unclear] couldn't get into—well, for instance, one of the kids came that was with me a kid named Alfonse, and his dad was a plumber, and he wanted to become a plumber. I found out that he was illiterate and in Grade 11 and he had—I went to the teacher. I said, 'How come he can't read anything? You know, can't read a damn thing, I'll give him something and you'll have to have somebody read it for him.' He said, 'He's only got a grade six reading ability.' I said, 'What the hell. How did he get to Grade 11 and have a great—' 'Well, he's a nice guy.' A nice guy! Hello!

PL [00:43:45] Yeah.

DW [00:43:46] You keep passing him on and then—anyways, I got him in into—and UFCW had a English as a second language thing that they were teaching. I got him into that program so he could learn how to read and then he ended up graduating—because I told him. I said, 'Alphonse, what are you going to do, [unclear] a plumber? Can you read the schedules?' 'What do you mean, schedules?' I said, 'It's right down on the bottom of the blueprint, where the thing says schedule. You have to know that it's 3/8 pipe, and it has to be this and that.' 'I didn't know that.' 'Yeah, you do to be a plumber. It's not all just about fixing the toilet'.

PL [00:44:35] Yeah. (laughter)

DW [00:44:39] The program worked a whole bunch of ways. It was really good. We ended up with a bunch of young kids that end up knowing that the labour movement is not—most of those kids in that thing ended up going into the trades, like tool and die, and different

trades. It became critical for the labour movement to be involved in those programs as well as their own stuff.

PL [00:45:08] Yeah. It transforms the person because it makes—their life just really blossoms. It also connects the labour movement back to the community in a way that is really important.

DW [00:45:23] Well, yeah. For me, the labour movement became twofold. One was at work and the other one was at home where the politics became intertwined. I became an NDPer early in my life and stayed there. I became a trade unionist earlier and stayed there. I was more of a trade unionist than an NDPer.

PL [00:45:50] Yeah.

DW [00:45:52] I ended up fighting with some of these enviro terrorists that were at convention. I had the ability to be able to go and speak to them. When the IWA, for instance, was doing their reforestation program, Munro and that program. Munro came to me and he says, 'Dave, I want you to be the floor worker on this issue'. I went, 'Look, I'm not IWA.' He said, 'I know. You'll sneak up on 'em.' (laughter) I went, 'Oh, okay.' He buggers off on his boat.

PL [00:46:27] Yeah.

DW [00:46:29] He didn't have to get involved with the media and all the rest of that shit because you knew there were—he would not—he'd be able to speak nicely on T.V. He takes off and he leaves the lobbying to me. I go to the NDP convention and these enviro guys that I knew—I don't want to mention names—(laughter) I shouldn't mention names. Anyways, they line up people at the mikes and I had people lined up earlier at the mikes. Svend got really mad at me because I had a couple of guys in front of him to speak on the IWA's policy on reforestation. Those guys just wanted none—no, you can't cut a tree in the province—and it didn't fly. That was the good part of being in a trade unionist. You always had friends somewhere else that you could talk to.

PL [00:47:35] Yeah, the community, eh?

DW [00:47:39] A huge community. I had the privilege of being in the first Governor General Study Conference, which was made up of labour, management, and others. The others were things like priests and educators and then there was management. My little thing was—I went to Southern Ontario and was—vice-president National Bank on there, manager from Hydro here. They were on the employer side. I went to my union and I said, 'Look, I need some lapel pins'. 'Oh, sure.' I get about 2,000–2,500 lapel pins. We go to the first job we're going to. First place we went was Thunder Bay, go to a pulp mill, and we're talking to people. I take my lapel pin. I go, 'Here's one of my union lapel pins.' 'Oh, okay, great'. I talk to the workers and I find out all kinds of shit. The management guy—and then you have a little meeting at the end of the evening, sit around and talk about what you saw, and pick each other's brains. These management guys would bring nothing to the table. I said, 'Well, you know what? We went through that pulp mill. You know that piece of building that was missing.' They said, 'No. What happened?' I said, 'A big—'. They had a big crushing stones that the timber comes down in a shoot and this thing crushes it, makes pulp out of it. Well, one of them broke loose and went through the building, up the wall into the parking lot. (laughter) We're on this little tour and you're

wearing a helmet with a little microphone and we're going along and all of a sudden, the guy takes everybody to the left.

PL [00:49:26] Yeah.

DW [00:49:27] I'm looking forward and there's a guy there, he's going like this, one of the workers. I keep walking. Then we're talking, and it's so loud in there. He's yelling at me and he says, 'See that?' I go, 'Holy shit!' It's missing this huge [unclear] about the size of this building. It's missing.

PL [00:49:47] Yeah.

DW [00:49:49] He says, 'Yeah, wheel bearing broke.' I went, 'Wow!' He says, 'All the rest of them are going to go soon too.' We go to that, at night, we're sitting there talking and I said, 'You know that big hole that was in the wall over there?' 'Yeah, we were wondering about that.' I said, 'It was one of those rocks took off and went out there. The wheel bearing broke. They're too cheap to shut down the building and x-ray the rest of the bearings.'

PL [00:50:19] Okay.

DW [00:50:20] 'The next one goes. Might take out more people. It didn't kill anybody.' 'How do you know that?' I said, 'I'm a union guy. We talk everywhere. I can talk to any union guy anywhere. You management guys are so screwed up. Nobody wants to talk to you.' It was the most incredible experience of my life. You met other people and they had something to say.

PL [00:50:51] Yeah.

DW [00:50:52] They would say it because you were a union guy.

PL [00:50:54] Yeah. There's lot of trust there.

DW [00:50:56] Oh, yeah.

PL [00:50:58] We've got a few more minutes left, but I wanted to finish up with talking about credit union stuff because you were very active in what was first the IWA Credit Union, and then IWA Community, and then Community Savings.

DW [00:51:14] First I was a member of Pioneer Credit Union since I was 16 years old in Winnipeg.

PL [00:51:23] Yeah.

DW [00:51:24] My dad was a police officer, so he was part of the police union. The guy across the way, his dad was controller of Manitoba Telephone, so he talked me into becoming part of the Pioneer Credit Union. I signed up with that, pissed my dad off. I said, 'Well, I don't know.' Then when I went to the telephone company, one of the first things that foreman did was they drive you around. They would give you a collective agreement and introduce you to the shop steward that was in your area and then drive you to the credit union and sign you up. I said, 'Well, I'm already a credit union member.' He says, 'Which one?' I said, 'Pioneer.' 'Oh, that's good. We will go there.' That's what it was,

telephone. When I moved to the Okanagan, I thought, 'Well, I'll join,' and became OK Tel. I joined Van Tel credit union, which was here. In those days, there wasn't a lot of—well, there was no Internet banking and there was no Internet, and there wasn't a lot of ATM stuff and that. It was kind of like just deposit stuff. Then I became active in—when I moved down here, I became more active as a member of Van Tel. Then I got on their board and then Terry Smith, who was chair of the IWA Credit Union, came to me and he said, 'Dave, I want you off of that board and come join us.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'You live right across the street, so that's a good thing.' He says, 'We want to change the name of it to IWA and Community and we want to get away from—. I said to him, 'I'm not IWA.' He said, 'Yeah, but anybody can join. I said, 'Oh, I didn't know that.' He says, 'Yeah, nobody does. I want to get away from having—I want to get people more knowing that it's more than just IWA members, it's a community credit union. He got myself and Brian Nasu—

PL [00:53:42] Yeah.

DW [00:53:43] Who was active in the UFCW and in the credit union, the Safeway Credit Union.

PL [00:53:49] Yeah.

DW [00:53:50] We got the two of us on there so we could balance the vote out to become more IWA and then finally get the name changed to Community.

PL [00:54:00] Yeah.

DW [00:54:03] Those were good times. Then we started looking at going—too bad we didn't, but we tried to get it going as a virtual credit union around the province. That didn't happen. Maybe it was just money wise. We didn't do that stuff. I really enjoyed it, but then they went to Zoom and I went, 'I'm out of here.'

PL [00:54:28] Yeah.

DW [00:54:31] I (used unclear) up my head and my—even at work. I started off in the business as a lineman or a cable splicer, and then I ended up in the telephone thing as a technician doing wireless stuff and building all these networks and things. I'm thinking, and all of a sudden they wanted me to do this voiceover data stuff in a course down in Dallas. I went, 'Nope, not going.' 'You got to go.' 'No, not going.' Then this idiot dipshit at the credit union had decided that, 'Oh, we'll go there.' (laughter)

PL [00:55:08] That's really funny. (laughter)

DW [00:55:10] I said, 'I'm sitting at this board meeting saying—.'

PL [00:55:12] He who shall not be named.

DW [00:55:14] Yeah, I'm sitting there saying, 'You can't go there. That stuff doesn't work yet.'

PL [00:55:19] Yeah.

DW [00:55:21] 'You all know we're going to be the leading edge.' I went, 'Okay, So.'

PL [00:55:24] More like bleeding edge, I think, yeah.

DW [00:55:26] I think so. He orders the thing and comes out of Seattle.

PL [00:55:30] Yeah.

DW [00:55:30] Guys come up to do this thing, and all of a sudden, he goes to the board, and the board said, 'What do you mean, you went non-union?' (laughter) It cost the credit union a fort—not a lot—it cost them a lot of money to get out of it.

PL [00:55:43] Oh, yeah. For the longest time it was [unclear].

DW [00:55:47] Technology just caught up to me. I had used all that shit up and I'm so glad I'm not—I mean, I can do all that other stuff. Whenever I get a new phone, I have to get my granddaughter to come and program it for me. (laughter) It's like I don't wanna to learn anymore. I'm old school. I enjoyed being in the labour movement. It's sad that we didn't do more for—Jack Munro was one of my heroes, as a lot of other people, and him and guys like Don Garcia and that had a lot of vision—and Bill Clark—about pensions when most of us didn't give a shit about pensions. Now that we're all got them, thank Christ, holy smokes! Those IWA guys, a lot of them retired with dipshit, bad pensions. When that asshole tried to steal the one out of the mill, on the Island, the American, people don't understand, young people don't understand that. Then I get involved with guys like Dave Porteous, a brilliant mind of him. He knows about the insurance business. He knows how critical it is for medical insurance. They get these flex plan stuff that these assholes decide they don't want. 'I don't need that. I don't have any kids.' Hello! Now all of a sudden you got five kids and you got no dental plan. Oh, man, you're in trouble! People like that in the labour movement, you need more people on that side of the labour movement advising us. We had, we lost, I forget his name. I'm really bad at names and I always have been. The labour movement lost a guy; he died playing golfing. He was some—the money guy.

PL [00:57:48] Oh, right.

DW [00:57:49] He did everybody. He was brilliant. He'd come to TWU convention and talk about money management and—

PL [00:57:58] Bruce Rollick.

DW [00:57:58] Bruce Rollick. Yeah. Incredible! Advise the labour movement on all kinds of stuff. Said, 'Don't go here, go there.' He was really sharp and it's a shame. You end up with guys like that that you don't really pay much attention to them—think, ah, they're not a union guy.' Well, yeah, they were.

PL [00:58:17] Absolutely. I mean instrumental in shaping so many pensions.

DW [00:58:21] When I retired, I went to work for UFCW in the Discovery to Apprenticeship program.

PL [00:58:29] Yeah.

DW [00:58:30] Which I thought was really good. I could talk to young people about staying in the labour—getting a union job, and show these people what union jobs were out there

available. That worked for a while. Then it didn't work after that because the guy running it was a nut case and I can't say names.

PL [00:58:55] It could be a bit of a drag.

DW [00:58:57] He's phoning me at three in the morning with some idea that he came up with. It's like, 'Leave me alone. I'll see you in the morning.' 'No, no, can I tell you now?' [unclear] 'Go away.' Then the opportunity came to run the old Barbers and Beauticians Union [Journeyman Barbers', Hairdressers', Cosmetologists' International Union] which you know was part of—and I took over that, had like 25 members, lost ten of them when we dropped a dental plan because it was a waste of money. Ended up with 12 barbers left. That's an interesting story about corruption in the labour movement. Barbers and beauticians were a huge union in the old days. When I take over the local, and I gave them the books, but I had all these books from, from 1893 and 1894. I read them. I read through the minutes, found out the most important thing to the membership. One of the things, they spent six or eight months trying to get up from a penny to two cents for a coffin fund because everybody that died in the local was going to get a coffin.

PL [01:00:08] Yeah.

DW [01:00:09] A big deal in those days. You needed a coffin. Nobody had any money. I'm thinking all that debate over a penny. Then I'm thinking, well, they never made a lot of money. It wasn't a lot of money. I took over the local and I worked at trying to find different members. People like Cathy Wutke from Community Savings, she was involved in it. Dave Moulton from, was money guy. There was about six professionals in this thing. I'm thinking, who are these people? They're not labour, they're management. I'm thinking, but they are labour. They may not have a collective agreement because you can't, you're single. The barbers never had a collective agreement because they sat the chair that they were. They couldn't have a collective agreement. I had to run around and collect the union dues.

PL [01:01:16] Right.

DW [01:01:16] You know, and stamped their little card. I thought this is nonsense. Then I started talking to some other people and people had left the NDP government at the time and then were still trying to deal with unions. They'd phone the Fed and they'd say, 'Yeah, I got a proposal.' You want a film done, they'll do that. Then Weir, John Weir from—he'd phone me, he'd say, 'Phone Dave Wilson.' I get a call. Say, 'Dave, I need to join a union.' 'Oh, okay.' If they fit the criteria that they were a labour-minded, union-minded, helped if they were NDP, then I sign them up into the union.

PL [01:02:02] Okay. That would be there.

DW [01:02:04] Then we end up with things like Now Communications, and Dave Porteous was vice president of the thing from Working Enterprises. We ended up with a bunch of professionals in this little union and it was interesting—incredible how many people were involved in that little local.

PL [01:02:27] Yeah.

DW [01:02:27] Right.

PL [01:02:28] Well, Marie and Par.

DW [01:02:30] Both of them. Yeah. And then all [unclear] hell later.

PL [01:02:33] Yeah, exactly.

DW [01:02:35] You know, and—

PL [01:02:36] I love the fact that the circle comes back to you going around and collecting dues [unclear]. (laughter)