

Interview: Judy Cavanagh (JC)

Interviewer: Blair Redlin (BR)

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Transcription: Pam Moodie

BR [00:00:05] Let's start with your early life. Where did you grow up and what was your family life like and where, what, how did that impact your views about labour later?

JC [00:00:21] Well, I grew up in Surrey and Newton, to be exact. I started my first five years in East Vancouver and then my parents decided they didn't want to raise their kids in the city, so out to the country we went. And it was very rural in that time period. Everybody had at least five acres of land on the street that we lived on. So it was very country, hobby farms, animals and all that kind of stuff. And my dad was a plumber, was a plumber, and my mum stayed home to look after the children and worked in the house, of course. So it was a typical childhood, running free, running from house to house, lots of backyard stuff to play in. Primarily it was bush, so yeah, it was good. It was good.

BR [00:01:06] Your dad was a plumber. Was he in a union?

JC [00:01:09] You know what? We never, it was a union household in that sense but there was never political talk at the table or politics or even unions. I wasn't aware of a union presence as such. He worked for the federal government at the military base in Ladner and at one point became the supervisor of maintenance down there. So when they closed that down, he went to Chilliwack and then ended up at the airport before he retired.

BR [00:01:41] Your interest in labour and working life sort of grew later?

JC [00:01:48] Yes, I actually think it's one of those developments where you watch your parents and their friends and everybody's working and they're all talking. And of course, in that time period, you know, there's building your own house so all the different men in the neighbourhood. And one aunt who had skills. Used to come in and do things. They were all very hands-on tradespeople, were part of our family connection and network, but nothing registered other than it was normal. It wasn't until I reached university that I realized there was this whole world of labour and unions and everything else that goes with that.

BR [00:02:29] But you didn't start university at Simon Fraser until you were in your mid-twenties. What kind of jobs were you, did you have prior to that and what impact did those have on your outlook?

JC [00:02:41] Those probably had a big impact. Right from being a teenager and working in the berry fields in Abbotsford and living in those cabins, picking beans, to the first job after high school was with BC Tel. They were on Seymour Street then. My girlfriend and I both really went after those jobs because part of their criteria was you had to live in Vancouver. It was a very good excuse to leave home at the age of 18. With parents who were freaking out about going into Vancouver. We did that and BC Tel, of course, was unionized and again, I was there for about 14 months or something, but I didn't have a strong sense of the union or what was happening with the union or any kind of contact. I think part of it may have been just because of my own excitement about living in Vancouver and working, but it was shift work. It was pretty tedious. Were we doing plugs in

those—no we were doing flips of switches or something for long distance. When I left there, I went over to a company, an insurance company, and they were actually training on IT, a key punch operator. I was able to get a lot of training in that field. That particular field carried me through with different jobs right through till even when I went and lived in Australia. I was doing it there and I was doing it in Vancouver. A number of four or five years or more. Ended up working with Macmillan Bloedel Head Office, and that's when I had my first real exposure to unions because I was working as an administrative person in the corporate training department. It was in the time period where corporate training actually was promoting 'Find Your Potential.' It's all these middle managers who were coming back and quitting and doing something else with their lives. But the women had contacted a union. I can't remember which one. We used to go over to the Hyatt Regency for lunchtime meetings until management got whiff of what was going on, that there was a potential organizing drive going on. Within a year they basically got rid of almost every woman that was involved in those meetings. It wasn't a large group of main organizers. I wasn't a main organizer. I was just an attendee, but it was enough for me to—and tied in with that kind of corporate training to say, "I'm out of here, I'm going to go do something else with my life." That's when university came.

BR [00:05:17] And that's when you went to SFU. Right?

JC [00:05:19] Mm hmm.

BR [00:05:21] And you majored in—

JC [00:05:23] Sociology and anthropology.

BR [00:05:24] And anthropology. Which particular professors or courses were most memorable or had an influence?

JC [00:05:31] I think the ones that had the most—I mean all of them had an influence on me because I'm a working-class kid coming into university. So just to be able to have that opportunity was good. Even though I took out student loans, but it realized very quickly that I didn't want a huge student debt. I started working part-time as a waitress in North Van and going to school part-time. Professors wise, I'd say, most them had an influence on me, but the ones that really opened my eyes were Hari Sharma and Mike Liebowitz. To Mike, who just passed away in the last week or two, I think it was. Mm hmm. It was because that was my first introduction to class analysis. I'd never thought of working class, other classes, whatever, other than school classes. You know. My brain just wasn't there. The whole Marxist analysis and the class analysis was really powerful. I started hanging out with other sociology students who are of the same bent and taking more courses. That led into more activism at SFU because at SFU, not just SFU, I think all universities were being swarmed and being circled by very left-wing organizations, the Workers Communist Party looking to recruit, the Marxist-Leninist parties, the Maoist parties, everybody was kind of like on campus, in struggle, all doing their best ideology to promote and recruit new students, new members, I should say.

BR [00:07:12] So there was a lot of meetings, potential and discussion?

JC [00:07:17] Right. It was the mid-seventies, mid to late seventies.

BR [00:07:19] I was going to ask when it was.

JC [00:07:20] So yeah, mid-to-late seventies.

BR [00:07:23] Some of that must've led to you being part of the student strike support committee.

JC [00:07:30] It did.

BR [00:07:32] In 1979, when the AUCE Local 2, the Association of University and College Employees was on strike.

JC [00:07:39] Right.

BR [00:07:41] And you were arrested at a demonstration?

JC [00:07:43] I was.

BR [00:07:44] Part of what was known as the SFU 18. So what happened there and what did that mean for you?

JC [00:07:50] Well, I think I'll start with what it meant. I think it knocked me off the fence of seeing both sides of the situation and what class analysis is all about in real time. There was a huge student strike support committee and that was just open to any students who were supporting AUCE in the strike. We used to meet regularly. How can we give support? Because they were setting up picket lines that people were crossing them like crazy. It was mainly other students crossing them. So it was, in our minds it had to do something with education. Why they shouldn't be crossing, all of that kind of thing, and of course, all these groups are also circling, trying to get their people in to these committees as well. At the time, I was flirting with the Workers Communist Party. I say flirting. I was trying to understand what they were saying. I really liked the people involved. If anything, I had tendencies more towards what they were talking about, but I hadn't gone or really committed myself at that stage, at any stage actually, in the long run. We decided there would be a big rally in support of the workers. Honestly, I don't know how I became the emcee, but out of this group I was nominated to be the emcee. It was just like, 'okay, that's what you do.' The day came, it was a big rally. There was 200 people involved or more, just in the—oh, its more than that—we had a flatbed truck for me, for the emcee. We had about six, seven speakers from the labour unions all coming up giving support. A number of students had come out also to provide support. We were picketing on the highway and letting cars go through, but very, very slowly. It got through to the afternoon, or a few hours into the rally, a few hours, not just half an hour or an hour. One of the labour leaders was very frustrated because he was almost the second to last speaker, or maybe it's even the last speaker. It was John Fryer, the head of the B.C. Government Employees' Union. He gets up on the stage and he starts to do his—but he is very frustrated because he's been waiting for so long as well and then also frustrated seeing all the cars still going through. So his final rally was, "The only way you're going to get this place organized is to shut it down. I'm going over to that picket line and everybody else come with me." So he jumps off the flatbed—I'm left up there as the emcee, of course—and goes off and everybody follows him over to the picket line. There's so many people on the road. It is like touchy whether it's a blockade now, or we're still letting them through. So, one of the labour leaders was still there and I said, "What am I supposed to do to keep this legal?" He said, "Just keep it moving." For the next easily hour, Fryer was only on the line probably for about 10 minutes and then he left. Everybody else—I knew I had to keep it moving. So my main thing was on the microphone just saying, "Just keep moving. Let the cars through."

Let the cars through." Well they were going through very, very slow. To make a very long story short, the police arrived. I let people know, the police arrive, they stand around, they watch, they let it keep going. Then all of a sudden I see them moving in on the line from—I'm quite a distance away—so I go to grab the microphone to—I had it—I go to warn people and it was been turned off. I turned around and there's two big police officers, plainclothes, just like this and smirking away and I used some words I won't say now, of course (laughs). Man, I was so mad!. I jump off, go running towards the line to say, "They're charging the line, they're charging the line. Stay calm." That was the end of it. They arrested 18 of us. Then we had trials and I ended up with the criminal conviction and one discharge. There were two charges laid. But my trial went on for five days and there was a murder trial going on at the same time that only took three days. Part of my, knocking me off the fence, I saw police officers—I'm from Surrey. I was raised in a good Christian family about values and respect, lying on the stand under oath about what took place. I was so naive. I was just floored. Just floored. So, yeah, that did it from that point on.

BR [00:12:18] But there was a lot of support work for the SFU 18.

JC [00:12:21] Oh, there was a lot. The unions came together. I mean, we had to raise money because there were almost 18 trials. Charges got dropped for a few people, but not for many. There was a lot of fundraising. There were music groups donated their time. Unions donated a lot of money for the defence. Of course, we put a lot of pressure on the GEU because Mr. Fryer was the main—he led the charge. He gave one of his lawyers, the GEU lawyers, to the defense for a long time, until I think he finished testifying. Then that was it. It was interesting, it was a very interesting time period. Just about everybody who was arrested became very radicalized after that.

BR [00:13:07] Yeah, you do that. Eye-opening.

JC [00:13:08] You can do that too.

BR [00:13:14] After you graduated and I'm not sure exactly how much past that, you went to work for the Canadian Farmworkers Union and you worked there for a number of years. How did your personal background lead you into that? What did you do for the Farmworkers Union? Do you have some stories from those days?

JC [00:13:37] Oh, how many hours do we have for this interview? (laughs) An hour. Okay, I'll take one story. How I got involved was, again the SFU were out talking about, and fundraising. So we had, I think it was a CUPW (Canadian Union of Postal Workers) meeting that we attended, where they were on strike and we had gone there and they had invited us to speak. So when I say us, it was at that time, I don't know sorry—the SFU to speak. I'm confusing myself with the organizing committee and the farmworkers organizing group was there. It was Harinder Mahil and Raj Chouhan and Charan Gill, and they also spoke about what they were trying to do with organizing farmworkers and I went up to them afterwards and it was Harinder that I spoke with and I said, "Wow, as a kid I worked in those fields and I lived in those cabins and we were doing it for fun and picking up boys in Abbotsford. So it's quite a different take now." And I just said, "I have a lot of skills", because before university I'd spent all this time in other jobs and picked up a lot of administration skills along the way. I said, "So if you need any help, give me a call." Well, I had a call within 24 hours. I should have known Harinder Mahil would call. (laughs) He does that quite well, these days still. So that's how I got started. Within 24 hours and then I just got involved with the organizing committee, helped them set up the office, attended

their meetings, went with them on all the demonstrations. So I learned a lot from them in regards to organizing. Along the way, there was so much support from unions because they over time got support from the Canadian Labour Congress in the way of monthly finance, financial stuff, a lot of fundraising, a lot of motivating, mobilizing their members for demonstrations. Whatever we were doing, our own fundraising. And then CAIMAW (Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers) at the time was also a union, a relatively new union in British Columbia. Most of the unions had been established for so many years. Nobody really knew how to—I shouldn't say nobody knew how because I don't really know that, but most of them didn't have any experience with starting a new union and all the hoops you had to go through with the Labour Relations Board just to first get the recognition that you're a trade union. It's actually quite detailed and extensive and I wish I could remember it all, but CAIMAW helped us walk through all of that and they lent staff support to that, and we were working with a group of lawyers who were all doing all the work for free and continue right the way through the whole Farmworkers Union to be able to get it ready to take it to the Labour Relations Board to get that designation. My story, though, is the women in the union, well, new women in the union. Pritam Kuar, one of the first demonstrations we had was at a farm out in Aldergrove where there were a lot of back wages owing. As the rally came walking down this rural road, one of the women came out of the fields and she was just shouting back in response to whatever calls were going out. One of our organizers handed her a megaphone and she started calling in Punjabi for the workers to come out of the field to join her. That was Pritam Kaur and she became quite a strong backbone source for women in the union. She was quite—I thought she was elderly at the time—she's probably only in her late fifties. (laughs) What do you say until you get there yourself and beyond. She was solid all the way through. Other stories were just that we had so many volunteers, we had an English as a Second Language Program. We tried a women's group. We had a lot of outreach going on and connections with not just the larger labour movement, but we went to church groups and just all over to get support to try to change conditions. The first focus really was on workers' compensation because of the amount of injuries, deaths, the way the labour contractor vans were just horrendous. I think we were quite successful in the legislative end of organizing, for sure.

BR [00:18:16] So there's your involvement, and you been an employee of the union, but taking a step back, looking at the importance of the Farmworkers Union for the labour movement of B.C. What is the historical importance of that, do you think?

JC [00:18:30] Oh, that's a good question. Let's see. I was so close to it, but I think that it was because it was organized and run and the membership were immigrants and not everybody was, hardly any were Canadian citizens. They might have had permanent residency or whatever. For the trade union movement at the time, if there were a lot of immigrants within unions, they were kind of like scattered in small numbers, not such a huge mass. I think it probably helped really raise the issue of being an immigrant worker in British Columbia at that particular time. So many people were so well-educated, but they end up in the—that's their first job, working in sawmills or in the farms just because of the way our society kind of like lumped immigrants together and in their own minds and workplaces. I think it probably had other unions starting to think about maybe the people within their own membership, organizing in areas where they do have a lot of immigrant workers. Hospitals have a lot even in that time period. I think it was just a marker to move forward.

BR [00:19:47] And maybe raising issues of race.

JC [00:19:49] Or racism. Yes, of course.

BR [00:19:51] Yeah.

JC [00:19:52] Yes. Yeah.

BR [00:19:54] You mentioned that CUPW was quite supportive. Were there other? And CAIMAW.

JC [00:19:59] CAIMAW

BR [00:20:00] Were there other unions that were quite supportive?

JC [00:20:00] I just remember it as a blur that most of them were.

BR [00:20:04] Most of them were.

JC [00:20:05] Most of them were. Either donations in kind, people or money. That took a while to build that up. It wasn't like, "Oh yeah, we walk through the door and blank checks were being written," but there was just continual work with—some of our supporters were already within unions. It was sort of like the private sector unions were very strong, IWA (International Woodworkers of America) very strong support. The public sector ones slowly came on because I think of just the racism angle too, where they themselves had a lot of immigrant workers. As it built momentum, it's hard not to get behind workers compensation and/or the deplorable working conditions. It was unbelievable that that was going on in that time period in B.C.

BR [00:20:56] Yeah.

JC [00:20:56] Yeah. Yeah.

BR [00:21:00] So I think you left there, the CFU (Canadian Farmworkers Union), in 1986 and you went to Saskatchewan.

JC [00:21:07] I did.

BR [00:21:07] And you're the Executive Director of the Co-operative Housing Federation. What did you do in that job, and how did your labour background contribute to it?

JC [00:21:17] It was my labour background that got me to, in my own mind, to switch to, or not to switch, to add on to an analysis of what really needed to happen, in my own little opinion, needed to happen. That was, I'd hit the point with the Farmworkers Union, we all had hit a point with the Farmworkers Union where it was sort of like getting stuck, not moving forward. When I left, other things were going on within the community of the membership that was taking their attention away. Things were like getting stuck. My larger picture was saying, "Okay, conditions aren't really going to improve much for many workers unless there's more economic power." The bottom line of it's fine to just have all this social justice stuff going on, which is important, but it really comes down to more economic power. I go, "Okay, how do you get that?" I thought, "Oh, workers' co-ops are one model for getting collectives more power." So where do we have that? Saskatchewan, where else? It's the heart of the co-op movement is Saskatchewan. So off I go. There was a job posted and I applied for it from B.C., and I got the job and I didn't know anybody in

Saskatchewan. I was like, "Oh, well, this will be—I'm going to learn about Workers' Co-ops." The Co-op Federation was not a co-op, but I figured by being involved with a co-op, I'll get involved with the larger world of co-ops, which that did end up happening for sure. That's how I ended up there. My labour background coming in was of course, it was a non-profit organization that wasn't unionized, but again it was all the people surrounding the development of co-ops were labour folks within Saskatoon, is where it was headquartered. I was able to, that became part of a social circle, a support circle within the co-op stuff. I don't think once you've touched on labour issues and it gets ingrained, more comes out of you because that was your background. It never leaves. Anything I touched along the way, I think for the rest of my life always has had a labour focus and when I say labour, I'm talking about the larger labour, but workers. Everybody's a worker in some shape or form and it's how you treat people wherever you are in that environment and make their workplaces—If you have that kind of influence—you can make sure the workplace that you're in is functioning better. Also then I think it just multiplies and keeps spreading out. The co-op movement itself was very, very active across the country at that time period because the federal government had a lot of money into co-op housing subsidies and the social aspect of co-op housing, it was pretty powerful and strong.

BR [00:24:12] A lot of those housing co-ops are. The ones that exist today were the ones funded and set up.

JC [00:24:19] Basically yes.

BR [00:24:20] Um, so later in the 1980s, you came back to B.C. and you joined the B.C. public service.

JC [00:24:28] I did.

BR [00:24:29] At the Employment Standards Branch. How did you make that shift and then what did you do at the Employment Standards Branch? What's the importance of that for workers?

JC [00:24:40] How did I make the shift? I needed a job.

BR [00:24:43] A job was posted and you applied for it?

JC [00:24:46] Yes. What had happened there was I had left Saskatchewan and gone to work overseas in a workers co-op position with CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas) in Mozambique. My partner got sick very rapidly. We ended up back in Saskatchewan in the middle of winter and it's like, "I'm not staying here if you're sick, I'm going back to B.C." One of my farmworker colleagues was already in the system as an Industrial Relations Officer, and he gave me the heads up that there's going to be a lot of postings because, during that time period this was, what did we say there the 1980s something?

BR [00:25:19] Late '80s.

JC [00:25:19] Late '80s. The Socred government had gone on a huge downsizing of the public service, but they cut too deeply so here they now were, about four or five years later, hiring like crazy in different areas because they'd cut so deep and the Employment Standards Branch was one of those areas. I applied, thinking, "They'll never hire me once they checked my background. Never, never, never, never." You know, it was so

intimidating, walk into a room with five people on the interview panel and I'm going, "For a government job. Are you guys insane?" My bubble thoughts going off, but anyway, I got hired as an Industrial Relations Officer. In those days, industrial relations officers did investigations for the Employment Standards Act, the Labour Relations Code and the Human Rights Code. So we had all three. It was actually quite an eye opener again, about thinking, "Well, now I'm in the system, so what does it mean to be in the system versus on the outside pounding away at it?" It was very valuable. My labour background there was of course in those days the management, or the panels, would try to balance their workforce in Employment Standards, so many from a management kind of background, so many from a union or some kind of labour background. We were quite a mix of employees, of backgrounds and the management there also had the same backgrounds. Some came out of unions and some came out of management positions. They would say, 'Well, those that came out of management positions were harder on management and those who came out of union or labour positions were harder on the workers,' in regards to investigations. It was a really good opportunity to learn legislation, to see all the difficulties that it takes for somebody to just file a complaint in any one of those three areas except the Labour Code, because the Labour Code had unions' support, except if they were organizing. In those days it was automatic certification if you had all the cards signed off. My role would be to go out and check the cards, the signatures, that sort of thing, and then it would be automatic certification. Under Employment Standards a complaint would come in and you'd have to just investigate both sides of it and make a decision. That decision could be challenged, and then would go to another level. Then Human Rights just had to learn everything about discrimination under the Code of the day and again, it was both sides of the investigation. I think bringing forth, coming from a farmworkers experience versus a traditional trade union experience enabled me to bring forward sort of a wider perspective on labour and keep expanding that perspective. I wasn't just, over time, on one side over another side, I had to see both sides in order to make a decision. But the labour side would definitely help cut through anything I might have been hearing on the management side based upon that experience with farmworkers.

BR [00:28:37] You get to the truth of the matter.

JC [00:28:39] Try to. (laughs) Don't ask me how many challenges of decisions I had because thankfully I can't remember. (laughs) Blank that one out, there were some, for sure.

BR [00:28:52] So after that, you joined the B.C. public service. You started to move to increasingly senior positions?

JC [00:29:00] Yes.

BR [00:29:01] You eventually became an Assistant Deputy Minister, and then a Deputy Minister. Could you describe the various positions, that arc, that you held, the position you held and some important or memorable projects that you contributed to.

JC [00:29:18] I think I've been reflecting upon that and it would take too long just to throw a title, so I'm thinking about some groupings. I started off as an industrial relations—I think the key one for this interview is starting off as Industrial Relations Officer. In those days there were a lot of secondments available. What a secondment in government meant was somebody was off on maternity leave, somebody was off on some kind of short-term or long-term illness, or a project had come in and there was a short-term position, short-term being like up to a year usually that they wanted somebody in. They would post—they

being the Ministries—would post these positions and it always was internal first. You'd see these positions coming up and if you're interested you could just apply. Had to go through the same interview process again as before and then if you got it, you shifted out. So after a number of years as Industrial Relations Officer, I was ready for something else. It was just sort of curiosity, getting a bit burned out. I forget how long I stayed as an IRO. It was a fair length of time in both Burnaby and in Victoria. I applied for a secondment in the Deputy Minister of Labour's office as an Executive Coordinator. Again, one of these big panel interviews. This is with the big guys, the Deputies and the ADMs. So they phoned me back and say, "Well, we're not going to offer you that position, but we'd like to offer you a position in our policy department." So I turn to my partner and say, "What's policy? You know, what do you do in policy?" He says, "What?" "I've just been offered this short term position in policy." "Oh, you got to take it. You got to take it." "But what is it? What do you do?" He said, "Oh, my God, it's an NDP government. You've got to take it, you've got to take it. It's going to be exciting. It's going to be, you'll be working your ..." What was I going to say, "You'll be working yourself to death." That's how I got started with secondments.

JC [00:31:12] The labour information came, I went into labour policy and it was at the time when—I'm going to talk about some of the key things I remember—the Employment Standards Act review was being considered. I went to the director of labour policy and said, "Oh, I'm an Industrial Relations Officer, I'm your new kid on the block and if there's a chance to be seconded to the Commission, I'd like to do that." It's sort of like a little gold mine for the Commission and them to have a practitioner on board. That whole process took three years and that's how I learned how to work within the public service, because I was with the Commission everywhere around the province, whenever they had heard things or had questions about any of those three pieces of legislation or the Employment Standards Act, then I was able to either get the information to tell them based on my experience, had to do a lot of writing, had to do a lot of research.

JC [00:32:05] Then the Commission took their report and gave it to government. So once it came back into government, there was a position open for Director of Labour Policy, which I had actually applied for, and I got that position and then it took us, I don't know, months to actually analyze that. I had Co-op students come in with MBAs that do all the financial crunching and the whole thing went off to the centre of government. I learned all about the machinery of government and what the centre does, the relationship of ministries to the centre, the Deputy Minister functions, I just loved, loved it, loved it, loved it. I thank Mark Thompson to this day, because we worked really well together and he was so full of knowledge about everything on labour and very, kind of like, I wouldn't say he was middle, but he was middle and he could see both sides. I learned a lot about how to advance an agenda, which was very important to me from a labour perspective still. How do you really advance an agenda? I think the rest of the time in government—because then from there I took a secondment to Women's Equality. We were dealing with child care, women's shelters, all of that stuff and the NDP at the time. It was Mike Harcourt who'd come in when I started all this shifting and they went on a huge training programs within the whole civil service on what is policy, how to write policy, how to write Cabinet submissions, putting in processes to try to get some order around decision making. It was powerful.

JC [00:33:46] The other two are the Employment Standards Act, I will always say, was one of my big highlights regarding labour, because at the time the NDP did bring in massive changes to that legislation, which unfortunately under the Liberals didn't all hold, but did for a number of years and that affected 80,000 non-union employees. Working with the union, almost any union could not touch 80,000 non-union employees in that way. I saw the power of working within a system if you can get into the right portfolio and you have an

opportunity to at least get the research done and get into the policy world of that particular issue.

JC [00:34:31] The other one was the ratification of the Nishga'a vote, and I had not been involved in anything at all to do with indigenous affairs, relations, nothing. At the time I had already been on secondment as an ADM. Once you sort of got into the ADM, Deputy Minister strata, the Deputy Minister to the Premier of the day used to use the ADM position to kind of like—what's the word I'm looking for—groom, train, get people into higher levels of not just management, but an understanding strategically of what you need to do. He often used those for secondments when there were openings. I went over to Intergovernmental Relations. That position was an Executive Director, and no sooner had I been there than the Nishga'a ratification came and he pulled me out of there for three months. That wasn't a secondment, that was actually my 'job job', I had applied for. He had pulled together this huge team. I think it was three months, maybe felt like five years but maybe it was three, maybe it was six months. I was on the community outreach team because that again brought in my background primarily with farmworkers again, because I did a lot of community outreach there. I had a team of 15 people just doing community outreach, which was basically anybody who wanted to know about the Agreement. People would go out, all over the place, church basements, you name it, they were out there doing whatever they could. I then was part of a big team that, where he had, you know, lawyers on there, media people, policy people.

JC [00:36:14] That was my other one within government, and most of all, I liked being a Deputy Minister because Deputy Ministers—no, I shouldn't say most of all—because I really enjoyed the policy work. As you move through further your hands come off policy more and you basically just have to start asking more questions than actually doing the work more. What I liked about Deputy Minister—and again it came back to what I said earlier—that you set the tone for the Ministry, the culture for the Ministry. I always felt like when I was—especially in Women's Equality, which was a lot of the ministries did not want to deal with gender analysis in their portfolios. 'What's that got to do with dirt ministries, like Forestry and Transportation?' That was the mindset. I was constantly pushing but as a Deputy Minister, you're the one who sets the tone. You set the culture and it has to float through to your executive who need to keep floating it through. So that's what I liked because I brought with me, I'm a practitioner, I've always been a doer and a worker, so I know how I want to be treated. I knew how I wanted to be treated when I was a secretary so I would treat my secretaries the same way and it would just float through. Whatever changes I can make at that level, I really enjoy.

BR [00:37:36] So you were deputy of Women's Equality.

JC [00:37:38] Women's Equality and Government Priorities I think were the two titles. Government Priorities was in the Premier's Office, but that was more of a co-ordinating role to when there was an issue going on, like a blockade or something happening somewhere. Those Deputies that were responsible for that would have to come together and work out their issues. Not issues, to work out how government was going to respond and deal with it. I co-ordinated a number of those priorities.

BR [00:38:10] Exciting.

JC [00:38:10] Yeah, it was. I really enjoyed work in government, much to my surprise. (laughs) Mainly because you can make change if you're in the right time and you can facilitate change, not make it but facilitate it.

BR [00:38:23] That motivates a lot of people in the public service to actually make a difference to the province and society.

JC [00:38:30] Yes.

BR [00:38:33] But you left the B.C. public service in 2001.

JC [00:38:36] I was fired by the Liberal government. Yes.

BR [00:38:39] Okay. You moved to international consulting?

JC [00:38:44] I did.

BR [00:38:44] Particularly in Africa. What brought you to that work and what are some of the projects you undertook, particularly in Ghana?

JC [00:38:59] I had always wanted to live in Africa right from the time I was 18. If you kind of roll up everything I've just been touching on it's like, "I did this, I did this, I did this." There's still a bigger world out there that I haven't touched yet, but I don't think I was that conscious because most of my changes along the line have been something that has interested me, and it's coming from a core set of values of—by this stage of the game for sure, not earlier—the whole class system, class analysis. Internationally it was like the writing was on the wall that there was going to be a change in government, probably about two years before it happened and I started thinking, "Well, I'm going to get fired because I've worked on this, I worked on this, I worked on this, I worked on this." So that was my thinking. I'm not sure, I wasn't sure that that would actually happen because I didn't see myself as a political deputy. I just happened to be a supporter of the government in power, but I still felt like I wasn't just swilling the Kool-Aid and giving them what they wanted.

JC [00:40:07] They were hearing—I hope—good information so they can make decisions. I figured I'd be fired anyways because that was kind of the chatter that was going around, so I started thinking about what I wanted to do next. I was interested in international labour, so I was actually thinking more along the lines of U.N. (United Nations) kind of work in maybe the I.L.O. (International Labour Organization) or something like that. I was looking around at that and at the time that I started thinking about this, I was heading up Cabinet Office and sitting in on Cabinet meetings and organizing all those meetings and workshops and everything else, so that was another thing that I learned a lot about—how government functioned, because that was not only in front, but it was also behind the scenes. This job came through at the time, C.I.D.A. (Canadian International Development Association) which was our international development organization—they used to post jobs that were in what they called the pipeline and under development—and I looked at this one, it was like, "Whoa, this is just written for my background. Do they know I'm out here," kind of thing. All had to do with Cabinet operations, setting up systems and processes between the civil service and the politicians. It was called a central governance project. I kind of tracked it and it wasn't really going anywhere, and then I was fired so I put together, "I'll just do consulting," not really knowing what that is and start it that way.

JC [00:41:36] At the time, a request for proposal went out, there wasn't—what do you call it—everything was hard copy still in those days and I had a nice little marketing package. I threw it out when that came out and had nine responses just like that. So I went, "Oh, I must be marketable. For what? I'm not sure yet." Anyway, long story short, I ended up

working on the project with the company that won that one, and I stayed in Ghana. It was in Ghana. It was a central governance project, which is what I just described. Now I'm forgetting your rest of your question on what did I do there.

BR [00:42:11] You're answering it. What did you do in Ghana?

JC [00:42:15] I was the Canadian project director. I went and lived there for three years. The project had about four different aspects to it. It had policy training with the civil service, some writing better submissions to Cabinet. It had designing processes for moving documents from their Cabinet secretariat through to the office of the president. Their's is a president model like the United States. They have both a Cabinet and a president and then a central agency. They had already set up a central agency, and it was information technology because at that time, it was 2003, there was hardly any email anywhere. It was pretty rustic what was happening, so the Canadian government was funding—and one was a human resource thing. The human resource angle was to actually train people to be policy analysts and have a title and get a change within their system for that. It was five pronged and we set up a core group made from the office of the president. We had deputy ministers who were called Chief Directors, all involved at various levels of the project and the head of the civil service and the head of Cabinet and just worked on all those five. Brought in consultants for some. Partnered with Queen's University and University of Legon to develop a training program to do policy analysis, which is still alive to this day. We trained, I don't know how many, five day training sessions. Then you come and go for a couple of weeks of different modules. It was a pretty exciting program.

BR [00:44:00] It would be an exciting thing to do. Making a concrete difference in that country.

JC [00:44:04] Yes. That existed while that government was in power. The next government came in and, that would have been about—because I stayed on the project, lived there for three years, came back to Canada and then continued to work there for another three years—as a consultant this time. So I did the policy arm of the training and just advice on the processes as a consultant in the latter three years. I did that all the way through but, I would bring in experts to do that from Canada.

BR [00:44:34] You eventually were working not only in Ghana, but other places.

JC [00:44:41] After I left Ghana, then I had to go broader, of course, so managed to get contracts in Malawi, Southern Sudan, Nigeria. A lot of it was based on central governance. They were all very interested in Canada's model and the model that I had at the time was when we used to do in-depth Cabinet memorandum. Now, of course, many, many years later they may be in-depth, but what goes forward to Cabinet, especially under the Liberals, were small documents and short recommendations, probably the same length we used to do policy brief notes on. This is what Ghana really wanted because it's also, when you do that kind of in-depth, it's really a training document, in thinking and analysis. So Malawi really wanted it, Ghana really wanted it, Nigeria thought they wanted it. So the labour part of it, though, was not in the centre of governance other than gender analysis and women, and having more women involved as bringing the women civil servants more involved in making sure women were all part of that, but unions weren't involved and non-union.

BR [00:46:00] You continue doing that 'til, I believe, until about 2010 and for a period of time you were Executive Director of Literacy B.C. What did that entail?

JC [00:46:17] It entailed learning about literacy in this province. It was around the time period of Expo, so Literacy B.C. had been around for years doing really good work.

BR [00:46:26] The Olympics.

JC [00:46:28] Sorry, the Olympics. I'm dating myself, aren't I? (laughter) It's my memory that dates me, my lack of memory. I was the Executive Director of that time, picking up an organization that had a really good reputation, going through some changes because under the Olympics, the Olympics had set up a parallel organization that was getting a lot of money. There wasn't enough room in this province for two organizations. Even with different government in power, this still wasn't under the Liberals or the NDP, there wasn't enough financial room for both. I was there for about two years and in that time period a lot of good programming had taken place under Literacy B.C. but there was talk about coming together. We did in the end merge the two organizations into one, and that's when I left there and returned to consulting, briefly, and I thought, "Well, maybe I'll do some work in B.C. again."

JC [00:47:28] I hadn't done any consulting in B.C. "Maybe I'll do something there." Scratched a few doors there and did some contracts. I really think I was an international consultant because it's just the flair, not the flair, the bigger picture on everything to try to see how that fits in with other countries' politics and dynamics. I was again looking around for work, I guess, and I had already made a bid on another project for the company and there was also a posting for an advisor at the B.C. Federation of Labour. So I thought, "You know, it would be really interesting to go back into labour after being away from so many years and just seeing what it was/is like now. So I applied for that position and got that one. That position was advisor to the president who was Jim Sinclair and I think it was late 2013 going into 2014. I honestly can't remember when I started, but I know I was only there for about 14 or 15 months because when he retired, and Irene came in as president. I left about two months after she came in, just a transition period. So in that time, I came back into the labour movement. There were a number of people who remembered me from farmworkers days and I remembered them. I was surprised that there were still so many people in leadership positions after so many years. My own thing is that you shouldn't stay too long. You have to define what too long is, but leadership needs to be refreshed. And what tends to happen is it gets entrenched and then, at the end of the day, it's usually an eruption that gets somebody out versus a nice smooth transition. That's just my own personal values.

JC [00:49:23] There's a lot of good things happening when people do stay in place for a long time at a leadership level. 2014 was a pretty hot year, actually, so I came in to basically just be another layer that went to the president, that kind of tried to coordinate the work that was going on that had to be funneled into him, so there weren't bottlenecks that were happening in regards to approvals and that sort of thing. The only thing that I actually worked on—I shouldn't say the only thing, I was involved in everything—but we were dealing with public sector cuts. The teachers had a wild strike that was going on. Not a wild strike, had a dispute that was happening that was pretty inflamed and pretty intense. The Fed was had started the \$15 an hour campaign. They were involved in an LNG (Liquified Natural Gas) committee. They, what else was going? Green jobs. For the public sector services, the group got together for that and really felt the need. There was a summit, a strategy about what to do and how to get this government to pay attention. Cuts had been pretty deep under Harper, and under Clark, and the public service was constantly taken a bashing anyways. I think it probably still goes on to this day, but

because of the cuts and cutbacks, it was worse for service. Making the connection between taxes and cuts again, even within own union memberships were really important to get support for public sector unions. So I worked on a discussion document, produced a discussion document with this group for the B.C. Fed Convention that year. I have no idea actually, over the long term, if it is made, not the discussion document, but the cuts still seem to continue under the Liberals and it's taken a while. Think about all those hospital workers that were turfed out. I think they're just coming back in now. How many years later is that? It's even taken the current government, how many years to get that to happen? I think that anything that deals with—that's what I was doing at the B.C Fed, coordinating, making sure that whatever Jim Sinclair wanted done was getting done. Although he could get all that stuff done anyways, he was a pretty active president.

BR [00:51:50] Very active.

JC [00:51:51] Very active president. Too active, some would say. (laughter) Other unions I'm sure would say, at the time, often too active.

BR [00:52:01] Thanks for describing the projects you were working on there. Then in 2017 you went back into government again, you became Executive Director of the Vancouver Cabinet Office, and did special projects there as well. Did you notice a difference in the B.C. public service then, as opposed to the 1990s?

JC [00:52:25] Yes, I felt like an old, old cart or an old, old buggy because technology and social media had really changed the way the public—to me—had really changed the way the public service worked. It seemed like at the Deputy Minister level, a lot of them were very tired. They had been there for a long, long time anyways and they were now dealing with a new government, so they had to overcome whatever relationships—or maybe unions weren't happy with some of them and wanted them out, but they were all basically kept in place. They started out tired and they must be really tired now after what's been happening in the last six years. What I found mainly was that I felt that the civil service, the public service, civil service internally was somehow faster and smarter. I think it's because I was older. No doubt technology, the use of Freedom of Information and the way it was used, I don't think was ever seen when it was first developed. Took a lot of time within the civil service. It took a lot of time on how people talk to each other, how they would send emails, how they would write things to make sure that they were not just doing something that could end up on the front page of a newspaper. When I say smarter, it's just because, honestly, I think their brains just move faster and the technology is faster when you're younger. The use of social media too, everything was instant. Twitter this, coming out, moving around, so the pace to me felt very fast. Because I was in the centre again, though, I didn't really touch on too many of the Ministries. I guess I'm talking about people who work in the centre. I mean it's always been a pressure cooker. It was when I was there, but it just felt like it was constantly a pressure cooker. Constant.

BR [00:54:30] It was a different government with Horgan, John Horgan as the Premier, than the governments in the '90s would do some—

JC [00:54:36] Well. I worked under Mike Harcourt. For premiers, when I was in government I had Mike Harcourt, Glen Clark, Dan Miller and Ujjal Dosanjh. The four of them and then John. I thought John Horgan's style was very much a common— his personal style was very much like, at least one or two of the four, composite of a couple of them. The pressure on him, I think, was to me, it seemed greater than what they would have to put up with because, again, social media.

BR [00:55:11] That's right.

JC [00:55:12] Yeah, and it's pretty— I would not want to be a Deputy Minister in this era.

BR [00:55:19] Non-stop, relentless.

JC [00:55:21] Yeah. Non-stop, relentless.

BR [00:55:22] The media, a public spotlight on everything you do.

JC [00:55:25] Yeah, everything. Absolutely everything.

BR [00:55:30] So then you took a board position. You were on the board of Technical Safety BC from 2019 to 2022. How was your experience with both labour and government? Helpful?

JC [00:55:42] I think that yes, it was. It was because it is an authority and it still reports to a Minister. So it's independent as such, a quasi-independent or, I guess totally independent because the government doesn't—the government only has two appointees. It doesn't, the rest of the board is appointed privately or by the organization. The relationship there was being able to understand government, so when discussions came up about working with the Ministry, working with the Minister, being able to add value there, there was a lot of HR issues going on, so worker issues. It is unionized and they have a good relationship with the union. When bargaining would come in, though, again there were two of us on there that had union backgrounds so we would be able to just give some advice, recommendations, whatever, based upon our own experience of how they're working with the union, or if they were going too far or not too far or usually not too far, it's too far in the wrong direction. I think it does add value. I think any of that kind of labour background definitely adds value on boards. Absolutely, because most of the boards are corporate in backgrounds.

BR [00:57:02] The work of Technical Safety BC also impacts unions and workers.

JC [00:57:08] Yes, it does. The investigations. To be an electrician, you've got to have your qualifications. They renew permits. They renew qualifications. As an organization it is quite worker focused, I find. They've done a good balance between worker focus and company focus in regards to the services that they provide.

BR [00:57:35] You'd be well suited for that position.

JC [00:57:36] Yes.

BR [00:57:40] An amazing career. Do you have any words of wisdom for someone who is just becoming active in the labour movement now, young workers? New workers. New activists?

JC [00:57:53] New activists in the labour movement. I'd say get to know your labour history. Really spend some time on labour history, not just within your own union that you're a part of, but the broader labour movement. Talk to some of the older people that are still around, whether they've retired or they might still be in different positions. There is to me there's different thinking between the youth of today and my age group for sure, in

the way of how they see the world. In order to advance, I always feel you need to stand on the shoulders of those that came before you, but you need to understand what they went through in those struggles. You can't just dismiss some of the decisions that were made in that time period unless you understand what was going on with labour in that time period. A really good example is Operation Solidarity too. I look back on that and I was one of the ones on the outside furious with the outcome because I wanted the general strike to happen. You look back at that time period now, and you kind of go, "Well, maybe it wouldn't have been the best thing at that particular time." Or maybe it would have been. It's understanding the context of what happened in labour history, the political context, the economic context, why some agreements were settled the way they were settled, and not just take it that nobody knew a thing. I say really know and understand your labour history on the broader spectrum.