

Interview: Marion Pollack (MP) and Micki McCune (MM)

Interviewer: Al Cornes (AC)

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Transcription: Jane Player

AC [00:00:04] This afternoon, on behalf of the Labour Heritage Centre, we are interviewing two CUPW [Canadian Union of Postal Workers] activists, Marion Pollack and Micki McCune, and they're longtime activists. They're going to tell us something about the history of the union and its significance to other unions in our country over a whole range of issues that have emerged within their work of this union. I'm going to start with Marion and ask when do you first start working at Canada Post?

MP [00:00:39] I started working in Canada Post in September of 1974. I was on afternoon shift, and I was—I remember, I made like \$4.24 an hour, and I thought I was a millionairess. I had never, ever, made so much money! I was rich beyond belief, you know. That was one of the things that taught me about why it was important to be a union job. Also, I mean, there were things that I only understood 35 years later that I was so glad for the people became before me in CUPW. Because when I started, it was mandatory to contribute to the pension plan. If someone had asked me, 'Oh, Marion, do you want extra money every month, or do you want monthly deductions to the pension plan?' I would have said, 'For goodness sakes, I'm not going to retire there. You know, like, give me a break. I want to, like, leave, go travelling, whatever.' I was so glad there were people wiser than me, you know, who really clearly said everyone who starts has to be part of the pension plan. It was mandatory, but it was different for people like Micki, because the pension plan—she started as a part timer.

MM [00:02:05] No, I started full time, then went part time and lost that timeframe.

MP [00:02:09] When did you start?

AC [00:02:11] Okay, well, let's go over to Micki instead.

MM [00:02:13] I started in September of 1976. My rate of pay was \$6.04 an hour. Inflation—the cost of living clause—had brought us in two years up to \$2 more. Given that we were both as rich as we'd ever dreamed of being when we got those jobs, it's like I never expected to get a \$6 an hour job, and it was like, 'yay for cost of living increases'. It was perfect.

AC [00:02:48] Okay, so for both of you—why don't you just start, Marion, and tell us, what was your first job?

MP [00:02:53] I was a mail sorter. I was a mail sorter on afternoon shift. When I started, we were broken into various work areas that corresponded with the geography of Vancouver. All the union people were in the North Vancouver sortation area. I really wanted to go there because I sort of had some admiration for them. I knew—but it was very clear the employer was trying to sort of break the union people there and they put people in—and it was very clear the three of us they put in were people they thought didn't function well in society. Then we have—you know, when I passed—we had a sortation test, and when I passed my first sortation test was like 95 or 96 percent accuracy. They were shocked. They thought there was something—yeah, that was—

AC [00:03:57] They thought you cheated or something or?

MP [00:04:00] Or, I was sort of "Rain Man" like, you know, (laughter) but it was really clear. One of the first issues that we had was stools—like stools to sit on. We were on an afternoon shift. There were a lot of workers. When you sort mail, letter mail (not so much big envelope mail) it's really nice to sit, and they did not have enough stools for the workers. It was quite bad because people would come in early to hide stools. People would—when we went on breaks, they would hide stools, and it created a lot of conflict on the floor with between co-workers because everyone wanted a stool. I was just so impressed that the union kind of intervened, and we had a campaign for stools, and we won.

AC [00:05:03] What about you, Mickey? When did you start?

MM [00:05:06] Well, when I started, it was night shift. I was a sorter, postal clerk. I was assigned to a station that needed another body. Mine was, I think, station T, which is Broadway and the west side of— one of the little chunks of the west side of Vancouver. Was it alphabetical sort at that point? No, you had to sort of know a little bit more about where you worked. Actually, I would have then started at the prime where, you know, you read a street number, and you sorted it to the alphabetical location. Not so hard. Yeah, no, we had enough stools. Stools had already been fought.

AC [00:05:56] The campaign had been won?

MM [00:05:56] The stool campaign had been won, and God knows you really need those stools. Standing in one place is not good for the body.

AC [00:06:05] Okay, so let's just talk with Marion about—what did you like about this job? You like the pay?

MP [00:06:10] I liked the pay. Mostly. I liked the pay. (laughter) Sorting mail is not a very exciting job. Right? I liked the pay. I liked the security. I also liked that there was a really great group of people I was working with as, you know. I had been a feminist when I started at the post office. I had an outlet to sort of, you know, do things. It really was that. I must say, I've always been a good and accurate and quick sorter, but it's not a thrilling job.

AC [00:06:54] Yeah. Your biggest challenge then was what?

MP [00:06:58] My biggest challenge was the employer actually. It wasn't the work.

AC [00:07:05] It was the employer?

MP [00:07:06] Yeah. While it's kind of boring I like sorting mail.

AC [00:07:12] Okay, let's go over to Micki. What did you find in challenges as a sorter?

MM [00:07:17] Oh, all the freaking rules. I was not good at rules. Sorry. It was clear that you didn't need a brain trust to sort mail. I figured the good wage that we were receiving was because we were having to park our brains. You hung 'em up. They were on hold because if you used them—well, especially if you're me—you weren't paying attention to the work you were doing. I wasn't the greatest sorter in the world because I was easily

distracted. Yeah, I can say that that's exactly the concern, and night shift was—well, it was a night shift.

AC [00:08:06] And that was a continuous night shift?

MM [00:08:08] Yes.

AC [00:08:08] Moving back and forth, you just worked every night?

MM [00:08:11] Yup. Although I discovered I thought that was better than what nurses had to put up with, which is rotating shifts and having to adjust to a new schedule every few weeks. Yeah, but it was still—

AC [00:08:23] Okay, so let's—

MM [00:08:24] Dead boring!

AC [00:08:25] Let's go back to Marion's comments about what were the attitudes of the managers and the employer of the day towards workers and towards women?

MP [00:08:34] You know, many of the managers who I started with were sort of—had been in the army in the war. They were very military like, and they followed the rules. There was no room for discretion. I think that was actually one of the things that I found most frustrating. I remember one of the issues I got involved with very early (because I became a steward right after I got off probation) was this woman. Her father died around Christmas Day. We have bereavement leave but who knew? At that time, they really didn't bury people if they died around Christmas until early January. It was just the way it worked. The employer refused to give her a day's pay when she took the day off to bury her father. I just thought, 'This is so wrong; this is so cruel.' If you had any discretion, you would have actually changed your mind. We organised and we got her the money from the employer. I would say—I mean, it was it was those kind of attitudes. It was attitudes of singling out people they thought were weak; singling out people they thought were vulnerable, and just picking them. Telling us that we couldn't talk and sort, telling us things like that, just being just being arbitrary. In terms of women, they were sexist. They wouldn't address a lot of our issues. A lot of the women on afternoons were part timers; that was where you saw the biggest collection of women. Until we got something in our collective agreement that allowed people to use their seniority to upgrade from part time to full time, it was basically on the employer's whim. All of these older, feisty women never got promoted to full time because they were so not—I mean, they were good workers—but they were so not compliant with the employer. They didn't—so, it was those kind of things. One of the issues that I got involved in, I think Micki did too, was—and I find it really ironic because, well, just recently in 2023, Labour Canada announced that they have to provide menstrual supplies for free in all the washrooms— but when I first started, we didn't—they built the post office for men, literally for men. There were no women's washrooms—like the women's washrooms had urinals because, of course, women would never work there. We didn't even have machines where you could get a sanitary napkin. We also did a campaign. It was probably a bit outrageous, (laughter) but we had the little red trails from the sorting areas to the bathrooms and things like that to put pressure on them. We were successful, but—

MM [00:12:26] I didn't know about that. That's a good story.

MP [00:12:27] Yeah, it was one of the things we did, but it really does talk about—the whole post office was not built for women. Really, the washrooms were just repurposed men's washrooms.

AC [00:12:40] This was the current main post office?

MP [00:12:42] 349 West Georgia. Yeah.

AC [00:12:45] Yeah. That building was built in the fifties or completed in the fifties, so women weren't really part of the workforce.

MP [00:12:53] No.

AC [00:12:55] Yeah. Okay. Micki, what about you? What your—

MM [00:12:57] Well, I was going to ask Marion because most of my memory was that (1) part timers got paid the same hourly rate as full timers, but you're talking about a time before that, right?

MP [00:13:08] No, I'm not talking about the hourly rate and talking about getting promoted to full time.

MM [00:13:13] And that there was seniority was—I mean, I think we improved it since I was there, but there was a seniority ability, and you could use it for a number of things. Again—

MP [00:13:25] I don't think it was—

MM [00:13:27] It might have been '77 convention that—or contract—

MP [00:13:30] Yeah, but I'm not sure you could—I mean, if you promoted, you would have—for a lot of the part timers—you'd have to go to midnight shift and things like that. A lot of these women just couldn't do that. They had kids and stuff.

MM [00:13:44] Yeah, got it. Because, yeah, I was able to convert to part time within eight months of starting and then back again two years later with only seniority. Okay, I'm just getting it straight in my own head. Yes, arbitrariness and—but also the chain of command kinda stopped at the superintendent level at that point. I learned to appreciate that because you could develop a working relationship with your superintendent so that when you were representing somebody, you could appeal to their humanity. Then at some point it just kept getting kicked higher and higher up the hierarchical ladder so that you'd talk to your superintendent, and he was basically, 'It's not in my hands.' It's someone who you'll never meet.

AC [00:14:37] The superintendents worked jurisdictions, is what, sorry—

MM [00:14:40] They had pockets of work, so there was them and then there was the supervisors under them. I guess we worked in city sort, right? That's what we called it. There was a superintendent for city sort. Yes. They came—him and the supervisor that I worked with were both from the army, but by the time I was there, I was noticing that there was a little—well, the fact that you could talk to them, you could talk to them as a human being. It wasn't a policy—that was just—that they were in charge of enforcing. They were

trying to get their work area functional, and yes, from a military point of view. There was some leeway there, except for their, you know, there were sexist attitudes, no question about that.

AC [00:15:28] Yeah. There were more liberal sexist attitudes.

MM [00:15:33] Well, and just the hindsight. It got worse, you know. I thought that was bad.

AC [00:15:39] Okay, well, let's—we'll come to that Let's come to that. Let's maybe just put it out there. The attitudes got worse. How did the attitudes towards women get worse?

MM [00:15:46] It wasn't just women. It was—but we did have to struggle for that. Did we start doing women's committees soon after that? I know—.

MP [00:15:55] Yes.

MM [00:15:55] It was fairly new, and I was fairly new, and I was on probation for a year, so I don't even know if that was allowed.

AC [00:16:02] Before we jump into the women's committee stuff, because I think we've got probably a longer conversation. For you, Micki, we heard Marion became involved in the union and that was at— what was the real trigger point that got you in the union? You're still on probation? As soon as you're off probation you became a union officer?

MP [00:16:24] No, a shop steward.

AC [00:16:25] A shop steward. Yeah, okay.

MP [00:16:29] Well, they put me in the area with all the union reps, so it was like, I had good mentors. I understood that the only—well, firstly, it helped make the job more tolerable, by sorta addressing the authority. I also understood that we could make little changes on the work floor that would improve workers lives, you know, and it was like getting stools. I mean, you're never gonna collectively bargain that, or things like that. There're little things. The women's washroom, the windows wouldn't open, and it would just really bug people because they wanted the fresh air. So, we—

MM [00:17:25] Smoked in the washrooms.

MP [00:17:26] Yeah. (laughter) We ran a campaign, and we got the windows to open. Not in full way, but it was just like these little things which talked about the power of the union and that's why I got involved. Yeah.

AC [00:17:49] Okay. What about you Micki?

MM [00:17:53] The post office was pretty much my first regular job. I'd done waitressing and swore on whatever was holy to me, that I would never admit to it because that I'd be stuck in that job. We had a strike. Which one was it? Seven? I was on probation for a year, so I did have a shop steward to turn to. People would say, 'Go talk to the shop steward.' So, there were—

AC [00:18:21] You had a strike in '78.

MM [00:18:23] Seventy-eight, thank you. Yeah. It was definitely not long after, but I got more involved with the union just probably because I was blabby and just felt, 'this isn't fair! but didn't know what to do. I also joined the union activists. I think I became a shop steward the year that I was taken off probation. I had to get support to be taken off because the employer was dragging their feet. It's just like. 'You will be assessed in half a year as to whether you've passed or not.' Well, a year passed before they even got around to talking to me, and you had less rights if you were on probation. Yeah.

AC [00:19:08] Okay, you've talked a little bit about you both became shop stewards. Let's go back to Marion and what were—some of the issues we already talked about—are there any other issues we've missed?

MP [00:19:20] There were everything. Unfair discipline was a really big thing. People were being singled out for unfair, for discipline, for crimes real and imagined and people would be singled out. We would go up for breaks. If you were a minute late coming back, no matter what the circumstances were, you'd be hauled in for a disciplinary interview. It was those kind of—if you took a lot of—if you took virtually any amount of sick leave you'd be hauled in for an interview. If you sort of talked back to your supervisor, you'd be called in for an interview. It was just sort of the amount, and the arbitrariness of the discipline. At a certain point, I did two or three disciplinary interviews and disciplinary attendance interviews a day, and I wasn't the only shop steward. It was just the amount and arbitrariness of them from the employer. That was a really big thing, you know. I would also say sexual harassment was rampant, and it wasn't only from the employer. It was also from the co-workers. We didn't even have a—when I started, we didn't even have a word for it. Right? Without a word for it, it's your fault because you can't identify it. It wasn't like, 'Oh, this is sexual harassment.' It was like oh—

MM [00:20:55] What did I do to cause this?

MP [00:20:59] Precisely. This is—I feel really uncomfortable. It must be my fault.'

MM [00:21:03] Yup.

MP [00:21:04] Yeah. And—

MM [00:21:06] We all thought it.

MP [00:21:07] I remember—

AC [00:21:09] If you feel uncomfortable, then it must be your fault.

MM [00:21:12] Yeah.

MP [00:21:12] Yeah. I remember I wrote one of the first articles, you know, in the Vancouver Local Postal Worker about it. The response was, if you hadn't been sexually harassed before that article came out, you'd even been more sexually aroused.

MM [00:21:27] It did increase.

MP [00:21:28] It really was, you know. The other thing I need to say is, I mean, I was immune from it, but there was a lot of racism in the post office.

MM [00:21:45] I think it's [unclear].

MP [00:21:47] Their first language was Cantonese.

--- 1 minute, 18 second break removed from video ---

MP [00:23:05] and have a little break, and the employer would do what we would call can raids, to get us out. We weren't in there very long, and they were they were really brutal. Often what they would do is—I mean, I remember really clearly, I would be up there, they wouldn't, you know, tell me to get back down.

MM [00:23:43] That was the stair one?

MP [00:23:44] Yeah. They would tell the people who spoke—it would really put pressure on the people who spoke Can—the women who spoke Cantonese. There was a lot of, in terms of job assignments and things like that, there was a lot of racism, from the employer as well as, I think, from some co-workers. I think that I have to acknowledge that, and I have to acknowledge that probably all of us could have handled it better. There certainly was racism. I remember raising this to a supervisor or superintendent, actually, and the superintendent said—and I still remember it because I just thought no one said this in real life, 'But some of my best friends are Chinese and I eat Chinese food.' I thought, 'Oh, do we have a long way to go.'

AC [00:24:39] Okay. What about you, Micki? What were some of the issues that you dealt with in the role of the shop steward?

MM [00:24:47] I think when you say the arbitrariness, that's definitely it. I sort of was able to notice that a lot of the higher ups' personal attitudes towards an individual. If there was a personality clash, that person would get targeted. They never took into account particular issues like the women's issues where you might be in the washroom a little more frequently than somebody else, and none of that was dealt with. I just found it like, why are they picking on X person? It's not like somebody else who the supervisor chats with hasn't done the same thing. It's the person that they didn't like. It was like, okay, there's far too much discretion in this. They get to be mean to the people they don't like and be supportive of the people they do like. That's not equal to me. That was one of the things that really stuck strong. Everybody was being harassed so often that it was just like, I can't stand around. I gotta step up. Being a shop steward allowed me to follow some of the rules as I was slowly learning them and know of the steps to take and give people a sense at least somebody was on their side.

AC [00:26:11] Mm hmm.

MM [00:26:13] Even the people I didn't like.

AC [00:26:14] When you say the harassment issue was the biggest challenge, if you look at—I mean, you've got a bunch of issues here. You got racism, you got subjectivity of how they view your business, you got sexual harassment, harassment of various kinds. You've got bullying. You've got—I mean, the list goes on and on. What's the biggest one, do you think?

MM [00:26:34] I think you just have to generalise the way that somebody with power—

AC [00:26:39] Yes.

MM [00:26:39] Can treat the people without the power and do the small categorisations in between. It was, you know, 'I got the power, you do what I say; you don't have the power, you do what I say.'

MP [00:26:51] It was also the arbitrariness.

MM [00:26:52] Yeah. It's just like I get to do this.

MP [00:26:54] Yeah. The unfairness and the arbitrariness of it.

AC [00:26:57] I can do this because I'm in charge. What was the attitude then towards the union and the union in the shop stewards. Was that any different from the rest of the workers? Did the supervisors look at the shop stewards differently?

MP [00:27:15] I never, except for when I participated in big union functions, I never got singled out by the employer. I think they thought really it would be a bigger pain in their butt, and that would be a more difficult situation. Right? I would say union people, we had respect from our co-workers because they saw us sorta taking on the employer and taking on the employer in terms of disciplinary issues, but also in terms of just like the day-to-day things that really matter, like having a window in the washroom or something like that. It's not sorta the grandiose; often it was just the little day-to-day things. One of the things that I found is a lot of the people who— especially ones whose first language was Cantonese—they didn't feel comfortable filling out a lot of the forms you had to do from Canada Post. They would go to the shop stewards for help. It was like really the shop stewards were there all the time in a variety of different circumstances.

AC [00:28:34] Mm hmm.

MM [00:28:36] When I started, there was a lot of shop stewards, and pretty much a level playing field as far as knowing what to do. The shop stewards supported each other with, 'this is how I handled this,' that kind of stuff. The local was smart enough to decide not to designate a shop steward for an area, but just go anybody who wants to be, can be.

AC [00:29:01] Okay. A lot of this then, isn't referencing the collective agreement at all. It sounds kinda like a whole lot like there's a bunch of workplace decisions going on and some pushback by the individual workers and the shop stewards and—

MP [00:29:17] Yes and no. We filed lots and lots and lots of grievances, I mean, a huge amount of grievances because the collective agreement was being violated in a whole number of different ways. A lot of it was, in terms of the collective agreement, around arbitrary discipline because— around the way they would call people for overtime, around health and safety issues, around virtually every issue. We filed grievances left, right and centre around—and the grievances had to be based in the collective agreement. They weren't just like management wasn't nice to me.

MM [00:30:10] Yeah.

AC [00:30:12] In all of this, what did you end up seeing as being the most effective of skills and strategies you developed in your roles in dealing with these workplace problems? Just for you two personally, what kind of things do you think were the effective skills and strategies?

MP [00:30:31] I would say two things. One is I think the employer, in fact, was our best organiser because people just got so frustrated with being treated unfairly. I learned if I keep telling the employer that they're jerks—and they were—that when someone does something really stupid, or really needs leave, that if I told them what I think of them, then when someone's really in trouble, I'm not going to get help. One of the things that I learned was that I had to treat the employer in a very—and my pay clerks, which—in a very civil manner, because if not, I couldn't resolve issues. I would also say, I mean, I think what transformed not only me, but so many of my co-workers, was the 1978 strike. What we saw there was the combined power of the employer and the government. They jailed our president, and it was it was shocking. So many of my generation of activists, we found that really transformational. You know, the power of the union and the power of the state.

AC [00:31:53] Okay, now that we've opened that door, let's talk a little bit more. This was a strike that occurred in '78, it's historic. The government introduces anti strike legislation. The RCMP does raids on offices across the country. The national president is jailed for defying parliament. It's definitely a national issue, and everybody in the country knows about it. Tell us a little bit about what kind of led to that circumstance that suddenly the sleeping giant arises or whatever it is.

MM [00:32:32] You'll know. I want you to start with this because you knew more.

MP [00:32:34] Firstly, I don't think we were ever a sleeping giant. I think we were always awake. One of the issues was technology. Canada Post was introducing massive technology into the post office and what they wanted to do is pay coders less. This is very gendered. Of course, the coders were going to be mostly women, and they may have been mainly racialized women because we—racialized women have more digital dexterity. People really found that very worrisome because they thought at any time, you know, you could lose, you could be downgraded in terms of your wages, or never upgraded. That was one of the really big issues.

AC [00:33:22] Just to talk about—what is the coder actually coding here?

MP [00:33:26] Mail.

MM [00:33:27] Letter drops down in front of them. They look at the postal code, they key punch it in, it goes into a then slightly rudimentary form of computer, and a barcode is sprayed on the letter.

AC [00:33:40] Okay, so that's read and sorted.

MP [00:33:45] If you had no other code, you didn't have to know learn that Gravelly Street, 1,700 block was in this zone but 3,800 block is in another zone. They wanted to downgrade it.

MM [00:34:00] The knowledge. Yeah.

MP [00:34:00] Yeah. We had a wildcat strike in 1976 around this as well. People very clearly wanted protection from technological change. People saw that as vital to keeping our jobs and keeping our job security. It was very clear to every single person on the work floor that if we didn't get protection from technology, our jobs would be terrible. That was so clear.

MM [00:34:33] Yeah.

AC [00:34:34] Mm hmm.

MP [00:34:35] Yeah, there was no, you know, nothing ambiguous about it. When you say they introduced legislation, I think we gotta also say, they introduced—when we went on strike, it was perfectly legal. Under the provisions of—under the Public Service Staff Relations Act, it was legal. What happened was it became—the parliament retroactively made it illegal. That was one of the shocking parts about it. The other thing that I think—one of my biggest memories is how much we had support on the picket line around that. We had a meeting, and I remember this very clearly. We knew we were going to defy legislation, but we decided we were going to have a mass meeting to talk about it. We had a big meeting in the Commodore Ballroom. I remember this so clearly, and the vote to defy the legislation was higher, higher than the vote we had to go out initially. We had this amazing parade from the Commodore to the 349 West Georgia. There was like—I've seen nothing like that since. It was just—it was all postal workers, and it was so spirited.

MM [00:36:02] I was so proud of our members.

MP [00:36:04] Yeah, but I also want to say that one of the things that was certainly not a highlight—a lowlight at that time—was then CLC [Canadian Labour Congress] President Dennis MacDermott attacked us like crazy. He called us dinosaurs and he didn't support us. It was really appalling, and it put a lot of the rest of the labour movement in very difficult situations because, on the one hand they wanted to support us, on the other hand you have the president of the CLC viciously and brutally attacking us. We were from another generation. We were dinosaurs. I can't remember what else.

MM [00:36:48] I don't see how we could be dinosaurs. He was way older than us.

MP [00:36:51] Yeah, (laughter) but it was really bad. It was really bad.

AC [00:36:57] Yeah, well, it was the conservatism of the CLC meets the militancy of CUPW.

MM [00:37:05] Seeds of the activists taking the CLC [gold? unclear] take the CLC and other labour feds in the more progressive direction. Quite a struggle.

AC [00:37:15] Tell me about the leadership both locally and nationally. What is it that gives you enough strength to do that because you're taking on the federal parliament? I mean, they're taking you on.

MP [00:37:27] We didn't understand that though.

MM [00:37:29] No.

AC [00:37:29] Yeah.

MP [00:37:30] We just thought this was wrong. We had to take it and deal with it.

MM [00:37:34] Well, we had done university level activists, people who chose to work in a industrial environment on principle. So. There was some brains behind history and all that kind of stuff, which I only picked up later. People were talking about rational ideas that just clicked with you. If you were a worker like, of course that makes sense.

MP [00:38:05] I would also say that because the leadership was so tight—we had full time staff, but they were all elected, with the exception of the admin workers, and because we had a very active shop stewards' bodies and stuff. Chief stewards were on the executive. People were very tied into the work floor, and I think that was part of it. People revered people like Jean Claude Parrot. He was our national president and people revered him. After the strike and after he got out of jail 'cuz he would come—we would take him on tours of the VMPP, Vancouver Main Postal Plant, and they would have to shut down the coding machines because people would be rushing to tell him he was their hero. It was amazing. If after that you went for a beer with him, you never had a buy beer because people in— just ordinary people would be sending beer over all the time. (laughter)

MM [00:39:17] Not good for his liver.

MP [00:39:19] It was true. (laughter) It was a leadership that we had that locally that had faith—the workers had faith in because it was tied in with the people they saw every day.

MM [00:39:35] Yeah, they were on the work floor.

MP [00:39:36] Yeah.

MM [00:39:38] They knew that they could turn to those very people for support. You know, that's my shop steward. They're here fightin' for me. They recognised it.

MM [00:39:46] And it was a national issue.

MP [00:39:49] Oh, technology, people were so freaked out about it. I want to say the 1978 strike, besides creating a whole generation of activists, in 1980—and this is when we were still just inside workers—we bargained, and we won a half hour paid lunch. That's quite amazing to win a— without a strike, without any job action. We won a half hour paid lunch. I remember the day we won it. I was on shift and rather than—I think I was on day shift by that time—and rather than leaving at 4:30, we all left at 4:00. You cannot believe how important that is! I don't know how to explain it, but it was very concrete. People saw it— like they got off work half an hour earlier.

MM [00:40:43] Yeah, they only worked eight hours, not eight and a half hours for eight hours' pay. It was like, 'Okay!' That's—yeah, that's tangible!

AC [00:40:52] Okay, so let's turn the topic a little bit. Now that we've spoken about the 1978 strike, we'll get to the next labour dispute shortly. I want to talk a little bit about involvement in the women's movement and the sorts of things in particular that Marion was involved in. What made you become involved? What stimulated you to become involved in the women's movement?

MP [00:41:19] I was a feminist before I started there. What made me really start in terms of the post office was I saw how women were treated differently, how men got to do the better jobs, even when we were all paid the same, but men got the better jobs. I remember I was on afternoon shift, and this is downtown Vancouver, and there was a spate of purse snatchings of women leaving the post office like on midnight shift.

MM [00:41:56] Right.

MP [00:41:57] It was terrible. I think you were part of it. We organised a meeting for women at the union hall. We brought in one of the local anti-violence organisations, and we had a packed house. Two things I remember about it. One is how ineffective the solutions they gave us were. It's like, 'Leave a little later.' Like, 'Oh yeah, I'm working to midnight shift and I'm going to—'.

MM [00:42:28] 'Isolate myself and go later.'

MP [00:42:29] 'Yeah, I'm going to sit in the cafeteria for another half hour.' Like, that's not gonna happen. 'Or leave a little earlier.' Oh, yeah, and I'm gonna—how is that going to happen? I remember we had to do that, but we also were organising nationally at that point to try and have a national woman's committee and national things. This is before—like phone calls, even though we were millionairess, were still prohibitive. We wrote letters to people all across Canada, women we had heard of in CUPW about trying to get a women's committee. We had been agitating admist talks close to the 1981 strike. It wasn't like all of a sudden, the national union came up with the idea of paid maternity leave. Oh, it was like we had been agitating for things like fairness for women and paid maternity leave, especially some women from the Victoria local, for a very long time. We had raised that at wage and contract conferences and things like that. And the national union very clearly saw the growth of women and women activism. People, especially like Parrot, saw that. He knew that he had to address our concerns somehow in order to make the union, you know, in order to grow the union. He understood that. In many ways, you know, the struggle for paid maternity leave comes from the organising that we did, but that was from, oh, '77, '78 onwards. It didn't just happen.

AC [00:44:20] So that was within the union, we were starting to see women's committees across the country.

MP [00:44:25] Oh no. (laughter)

MM [00:44:27] I think we were the first committee.

MP [00:44:29] Yes.

AC [00:44:29] Okay. Tell us a little bit about that.

MP [00:44:31] Yeah, I think I did. We started because there was violence, you know, because of the purse snatching. I remember also one of the paid officers. I'm there early and I'm really nervous because—I have no idea whose—an [unclear] takes me aside and says, 'Marion, some of the older women are mad at you.' I thought, 'Is it because I swore (laughter) in a meeting or something?' Right? He said, 'Oh, no. Some of them really don't like that you're organising around this because they like that attention from men.' I just thought you—

MM [00:45:07] Geez.

MP [00:45:10] To this day, we don't get along, me and this guy.

MM [00:45:12] Yeah.

MP [00:45:14] We had been organising. We were young, we were feminists, and we wanted a union. We had the sense of infinite possibilities. We wanted the union leadership to reflect the fact that there were women and women's concerns.

MM [00:45:30] Yup. I'm going to say that—I mean, I was a feminist when I joined the post office, but it was more consciousness raising, just becoming aware of my life as a woman within the world. It was good to have other feminists, and there were a few. You were definitely the person organising the stuff that needed to be done. I was a regular attendee, and I certainly learned a lot of stuff, and then I would spread it along. I wouldn't have known you to contact to have the assertiveness training workshop that we did. We had a few workshops for women and that took a small argument, but I think the executive was a lot of the North Van sortation activists. (laughter) They'd run and got elected to local positions, so it was easier than it seemed. For any of the women who wanted to be activists, it was it was empowering. It was really important. And you'd gone to the 1977 convention?

MP [00:46:37] No, I didn't get elected.

MM [00:46:38] I thought you had made it?

MP [00:46:40] No.

MM [00:46:41] Well, okay—because I thought that maybe—well, then some of the other activist men brought back contact names. It was the East Coast feminists that we mostly contacted with, and you communicated with them. I didn't write any of these letters—backing away from the organising part—Marion's strategic organiser.

AC [00:47:02] So Marion, you knew them doing connections with other people, other women across the country who were activists within the union?

MP [00:47:08] Yes.

AC [00:47:08] Promoting what Vancouver had been doing in Victoria and others?

MP [00:47:13] Also being influenced by people in SORWUC [Service Office and Retail Workers of Canada] and AUCE [Association of Union and College Employees]. I understood that rather than spending my time with SORWUC, I needed to work in my union and push issues that, you know, at both the Vancouver and District Labour Council and the B.C. Fed. There was always the issue about reproductive rights. The labour movement was really scared about reproductive rights and we young feminists saw that it's really critical that the labour would be an ally on reproductive rights.

MM [00:47:56] Well, a heck of a lot of women were workers.

MP [00:47:58] Yeah, and we kept pushing it.

AC [00:48:04] Tell us a little bit more about where was the resistance coming from, and why was the resistance coming—without reading a whole book about it?

MM [00:48:13] Well, I'm going to say, just like the leadership of the post office was from army, which had a male army point of view, the leadership from the union was a bit old school as well, pretty entrenched. I mean, even men who supported what they understood about women's issues, and they had a long way to go, but they were pushing against the entrenched old guard within the union.

AC [00:48:46] Mm hmm.

MP [00:48:46] A lot of people thought that unions should not touch these social issues, these controversial social issues. These were for outside groups, not for the union to deal with. There were some people who were anti-choice and other people would argue that it was divisive. You know that we're all workers here. You pushing women's issues, you're being divisive in terms of the union. That was a really big thing, and, you know, especially reproductive issues are even more divisive. Why should we—we don't want to divide the union, and we're saying, except it's our members who are getting pregnant, and having, you know—

MM [00:49:31] To pay the consequences because there was a financial penalty.

AC [00:49:36] Right. Yeah. Okay. That gives us a pretty good idea. That kind of moves us along a little bit.

MM [00:49:43] It was the working environment as well.

MM [00:49:45] The working environment?

MM [00:49:45] Yeah. I mean, it was a harassment specifically for women workers. Everyone could get, you know, 'I don't like you harassment,' but women just generally because they were women, got harassed no matter what they did.

MP [00:50:02] Some of the worst things I remember, and this is around women, is that the employer had a real crackdown on absenteeism, but they had like arbitrary numbers. If you were off more than six days a year, you would be interviewed, which means going into a disciplinary hearing for absenteeism. There was literally no discretion. If you'd been off because everyone knew you had like pneumonia or the mumps, it didn't matter at all. I remember—it was one of the worst disciplinary interviews of my life—going into a disciplinary hearing with someone who had a miscarriage at work and then took time off work. Everyone knew she had a miscarriage at work. She had it at work; she was taken out. The employer says, 'Yes, we know you had a miscarriage at work, but you still had more than six days off on sick leave, so we have to interview you. We're very sorry.' I just thought, 'Please, this is humiliating to her. This is so wrong.' This is so typical.

MM [00:51:20] Well, and interviews could be cumulative for risk of being let go. Even one was bad enough when you've got that judgement where you have to sit and be told you've been bad, but then you're open to the next one and the next one and then losing your job.

AC [00:51:42] Pretty soon you have a record and therefore something wrong with you, and we don't interview anymore.

MP [00:51:47] Yeah.

MM [00:51:49] It doesn't matter what's wrong with you or if it's fixable.

AC [00:51:51] It's all very arbitrary. Lock, step on their part. Does it matter, as soon as they trigger the six days, we don't really care what happened. We want to know, and we want to put you on—

MM [00:52:02] And we want to put it on the record.

AC [00:52:04] That your days here may be numbered.

MM [00:52:06] We figure fear is going to work really well with you (laughter) everybody.

AC [00:52:10] Let's move along a little bit on the—we've talked about the women's committee and pushing labour, well, within the union. What's happening external in the District Labour Council and the other [unclear]?

MP [00:52:28] Well, in terms of District Labour Council, you know, we raised issues like—there were some of us that are young feminists, and we raised issues like choice and things like that—reproductive choice. Mostly, we got support. Some of the leadership really didn't like us raising them. You know, they didn't like the whole concept. There were much more entrenched white male leaders, and the idea of feisty feminist at the Labour Council was a problem. It was also interesting, some of the men from traditional left organisations when issues of reproductive choice or pay equity, they wouldn't talk when issues are like inflation or things like that were raised, they would talk. It was one of my fervent hopes that they would talk on reproductive choice so I didn't have to, and I could talk on like inflation, even though I'm not good on inflation. Right?

AC [00:53:31] Yeah.

MP [00:53:32] Like, it's not my forte—

AC [00:53:32] You would do it for the cause?

MP [00:53:34] I would do it. I would take inflation for, you know, for the union, yes. (laughter)

AC [00:53:40] That whole conservatism is there within organised labour, and so it—

MM [00:53:47] Yeah. I learned of it through Marion and the other people who saw the value of engaging with the broader labour movement.

MP [00:54:00] In B.C., I think there were two things happening at the same time. One is people were really scared of SORWUC and AUCE, right? What they—so, they were afraid, and they saw all the sort of feminists and the unionist part of SORWUC and AUCE on the one hand. On the other hand, they recognised that they had to do something to contain us and to please us somehow because otherwise, it would be too hard for them. The BC Fed started women's committees in the early eighties because they understood sort of that dynamic, in partial contain and, you know, and try and go our way. I also want to say that there were a whole bunch of amazing women leaders when I started, but because they were much more traditional in terms of their ideas and their views, I was sort

of mean to them, and it's only as I'm older that in retrospect that I realise what courage it took for them to be union leaders at that time—

MM [00:55:16] Yeah.

MP [00:55:16] And how quite amazing they were, and I wish I could have said that to some of them.

AC [00:55:21] Mm hmm.

MM [00:55:23] Yeah. The disrespect of youth. 'You don't know what you're talkin' about.'

AC [00:55:27] Yeah. You two would be so easy to deal with, too [unclear].

MP [00:55:34] Yeah. (laughter)

AC [00:55:36] All right, let's move ahead a little bit then, to talk about what became the 1981 strike. You're talking about, in this case, we're talking about maternity leave. You also mentioned AUCE, which of course, as a provincial certified union, had already achieved a mat leave top-up at UBC [University of British Columbia].

MM [00:55:58] Those are both, you know, what I would call them local-organised unions, feminist-based.

MP [00:56:05] But so are the Common Front in Quebec.

MM [00:56:08] Okay, thank you.

AC [00:56:08] Yes.

MM [00:56:11] I think we need to go back. Firstly, we were all energised by 1978.

AC [00:56:16] Yup.

MP [00:56:18] Secondly—and women had been pushing this—at the 1980 convention, we had forced, you know, the young feminists and the union, we had forced a debate after hours (like 8:00 at night) on women and CUPW. One of the things I was—I still was the proudest—so not everyone attended, but every member of the Vancouver local attended, and there were way more brother delegates than woman delegates. I just thought, we've made some gains. We talked about what it was like to be a woman, and I think that was really important. It was really important for us to see that we had the power, and it was also really important for the leadership to see that we weren't—that we were really sincere what we're doing. We were committed trade unionists and that we were not going to—we were going to continue to push our issues. That's what led up to it, you know.

AC [00:57:24] Yeah.

MP [00:57:28] We put out this whole series of—the national union did—of backgrounders around paid maternity leave, and we sent letters to—nationally—to tons and tons of women's organisations asking for support before we went out. Because of a whole bunch of things and because of the traditional distrust between many women's organisations and unions, we didn't get a lot of support for that initially. It was only when we actually went out

on strike that women's organisations supported us. I remember being on the picket line and Bread and Roses, one of the women's organisations in Vancouver, came to the picket line, and people were really thrilled. I remember one of my co-workers—first language was Cantonese—who comes to me passes picket signs, 'This is for you.' I just thought, 'Oh, you know, we had done the work.'

AC [00:58:30] Mm hmm.

MM [00:58:32] It's an indication that they looked at you. They looked at the shop stewards and went, 'That person's on my side.' It hasn't remained that way all the time. I know that I've been on the work floor when the new people I worked with were sort of sneery about the shop stewards. They just didn't see the value. It comes and goes.

AC [00:58:56] Comes and goes.

MM [00:58:57] Yes.

AC [00:58:58] We've talked a little bit about the influence of Quebec politics on the national union, or at least in terms of modifying your opinion in leading up to the '81 strike. I'm not so much familiar with that part of the history, but this I take it was a pretty broad objective which was paid maternity leave that was well supported by everybody as a result of the work that had been done—

MP [00:59:22] And the research. It's not a very expensive demand.

MM [00:59:27] Plus, there would have been the ever ongoing fight against technology and protections against the impact of technology on people, on the workers lives, because everything the employer wanted was to make the working life worse. More badly paid, and the working environment almost unliveable.

MP [00:59:48] We needed better health and safety protections in particular.

MM [00:59:51] Yeah, so that was the—what do you call it—the ground pinning of the collective agreement. It turns out that the maternity leave was the headline maker.

AC [01:00:06] Yeah.

MM [01:00:07] Something everybody could either agree with or disagree with.

MP [01:00:10] We were out for 42 days.

MM [01:00:13] First long strike.

MP [01:00:15] Yeah.

AC [01:00:17] Forty-two days for a postal strike is a long stretch.

MM [01:00:19] Yeah.

MP [01:00:19] Yeah, and it was it was summer. Mostly, I helped do the sort of what we called, you know, the daily strike newspaper, "The Daily Picket".

MM [01:00:29] Yes. Oh God, that was important. I would come from my shift on night shift, and everybody wanted to have what we called "The Daily Picket", which was her [points to Marion] newsletter. Well, the information got passed on the day that it happened, and the people on the nightshift picket were reading what happened when they weren't there.

MP [01:00:49] We had some very important serialised issues. One of the things in the post office before we went on strike, people were being driven unmercifully by fleas. Like it was really, oh, it was bad! In the mail, in the mail. Who knows how they got in the mail, but it was it was bad. We did a whole series of things in "The Daily Picket" about the life of one of the flea picketers.

MM [01:01:15] Oh, I remember that now. Yes.

MP [01:01:16] Yeah, people loved that.

MM [01:01:18] That should be in the archive somewhere.

MP [01:01:20] Yeah. It was like—but even things like you shouldn't get bitten by fleas when you're at work.

AC [01:01:31] Tell us a little bit more then in terms of the actual strike you mentioned it's not costing much because it's E.I. top-up, or called unemployment insurance top-up, mat leave top-up. Why is there such a big resistance on the federal government's part?

MP [01:01:48] You'll have to ask them.

MP [01:01:50] Pretty much. I just think they wanted to reduce the amount of non—I'm going to call it elective— but you know, discretionary out payments because what we're doing is we're enshrining it. It adds to the cost regardless, and their goal is to take away from the cost.

MP [01:02:13] Also, I think it was ideological. The 1980s was more and more women were entering the workforce, not only in the post office but everywhere. It was very clear that working women were going to make demands. If we give in to CUPW, you're going to open up the floodgates for everyone. I think in terms of the federal government, it was also quite ideological, but it was also tied in with—and I think this is important—because shortly after the strike was over, I think it was '81 or '80, Canada Post became a crown corporation. The union had been fighting for the for the post office become a crown corporation for years because what we wanted really to do was get out of the restrictions in the Public Service Staff Relations Act and into the—under the of the Canada Labour Code. We also wanted, you know, a much more—we wanted the post office to be run less militarily and to have—and we had people who worked with the CLC [Canadian Labour Congress] really hard to sort of talk about the three objectives of Canada Post, which is good delivery, financial self-sufficiency, and better labour relations. It was really—I think it was the union, not only our union but the Letter Carriers Union and other unions, our continued advocacy for things like Canada Post Corporation becoming to crown corporation and other issues that really over the years saved Canada Post, but it includes the fight for the crown corporation.

AC [01:03:58] Separating the political—

MP [01:04:00] Yeah.

AC [01:04:01] Parliament's responsibility and parliamentary debates and everything else about every aspect of the collective agreement and what the workers are doing and—.

MP [01:04:08] Yeah.

MM [01:04:10] The argument was that it could be run like a business, which you know is a double-edged sword, but it allowed us to bargain for a heck of a lot more things too. However, they sure didn't want to give that up. They wanted that right to legislate us, and they continued legislating as much as they could, even afterwards.

AC [01:04:32] Yeah, it's a contradictory role, the government in. They're funders, they're the employer, and they're also legislators. .

MM [01:04:40] 'I'm the decider.'

AC [01:04:41] Yes, exactly, but they're playing all three roles.

MM [01:04:43] Yup.

AC [01:04:45] It creates a whole different thing. Anything else to say about that strike and what was achieved and how the workers felt about it?

MP [01:04:53] Well, I think that people were amazed that we won. What you saw was people go off afterwards and how important it was for them. They didn't lose money to have children. I think that was so important. [unclear] in the 2,000s CUPW organised RSMCs, rural and suburban mail carriers, people who deliver mail and very small towns. It was at the 2000 and I think eight, and I'm not sure that it was announced that we had won paid maternity leave for RSMCs and there were literally women crying there. They were pregnant. They knew that when they went off to have kids, they weren't going to lose money. It was just like so important. We know that now so many different workers have that. It really did set a precedent.

AC [01:06:01] It really created a wave at the time in PSAC [Public Service Alliance of Canada] following your conclusion and whole other areas of the federal sector.

MP [01:06:12] It also taught us that we could organise around issues and be successful—that we could organise around women's issues and being successful and that women's issues did not quote unquote divide the union or the labour movement.

MM [01:06:26] And that it's—a lot of that's just working conditions, and yeah, women have some difference—well, actually no, because later it became parental leave and fathers as well as mothers saw the value. Yeah, if you choose to have children, you shouldn't have to be prepared to risk the job that you're going to support them with.

AC [01:06:53] Exactly. Let's just reflect a little bit on younger workers, what's happening out there now within the system. How do you encourage and support women to get involved in your union, given all the things that women or all roles the that women are assigned socially? You know, we assign them the responsibility for everything—they're wage earners, they're responsible for the family. They have all the extra duties and responsibilities, and yet they're critical to the leadership of a union and it's critical to the support of the union that women are involved.

MP [01:07:40] If I had the answers for that, I don't know where I'd be, but I think that we need to talk about the other things, some of the things that the union did that are really important. To me, it was the trade unions, the unions at Canada Post, were critical in saving Canada Post. Saving Canada Post to be a universal public postal service, saving it from privatisation. There is no question that the government had embarked, you know, throughout the late seventies and eighties, on contracting out counter service. They used to have—they wanted to get rid of the profitable parts of Canada Post and things like that. If the union hadn't been there and hadn't fought back, there would be no Canada Post today. We bought parcels back in and all this stuff. I think that part of it is, well, when we look at the history of, you know, unions or even my history at Canada Post, it's much more broader than in terms of workers' rights. It's also in keeping, you know, saving a public service and keeping the public service for all people in this, from coast to coast to coast. I think that's what we keep on having to remember is that it's beyond the whole labour relations issue. It is, you know.

AC [01:09:19] Yeah, that privatisation isn't the quick and easy answer. In fact, it's the opposite.

MM [01:09:24] The post office is trying to deny that its network was connective tissue of Canada. That's how the rural areas were connected to the rest of the world. I heard more and more, as you know, this decade, this century, that really all they're focusing on is where's the profit made. It's in the big centres, and we really can't afford to be connective tissue anymore. It's like, how are you going to stand? (laughter) They constantly denied that, and we were constantly aware of it because our members and members from our co unions, our brother and sister unions, were always trying to raise it. We had—CUPW had huge numbers, and the rural postal postmaster centres didn't.

MP [01:10:24] There's also a couple of other points that, if we have time I want to raise. One is 1987 because I think, you know, we went on strike in 1987 and it was the first time nationwide that a large corporation had tried to scab us. It was brutal! It was not only brutal that they tried to scab us and that they would bring in buses and people's emotions on the line were really high and really distraught. What it did is it poisoned the labour relations totally for so long after. It also created a suspicion because any new workers that they brought in, people didn't know if they were scabs or not, and so, it didn't shorten the strike. It made the ramifications, the day-to-day ramifications, on the workforce so bad. It gave people so little faith in the employer. This employer just respects us so much that they can scab us. It was—I don't know how to—but it was appalling. They were bringing in—and a lot of the stuff they were doing was just to provoke us. They would bring in buses, and it actually turned out there was really no people on the buses, but we couldn't see. People I used to work with, quiet most mild-mannered people were up there hitting the buses and things like that. It was really bad.

MM [01:12:19] I remember on the night shift that there were people on some of the buses and I actually ran into one or two of them later. They had no idea they were going to be at an active, angry picket line, that that's where they were being taken. They were being treated as badly as we were. They just thought, 'Oh, opportunity for a job, I need work.' Then they are confronted with this, 'I'm already been compromised. I'm a scab whether I wanted to be or not.' Many of them may have known, but it was just people are disposable. Who cares.

AC [01:12:59] It was one of the worst national or federal labour disputes I'm sure we've had as a result of that. We had the police, we had the scabs, we had the whole that it was all in the mix.

MM [01:13:09] Yeah.

AC [01:13:11] I think Marion's point is following the dispute, it did nothing except deteriorate all the relationships between workers and the managers.

MM [01:13:20] There was more violence in some areas than others. I think we were lucky with the Vancouver police.

MP [01:13:25] I spent—I was president at that time—I spent so much time talking to the police, the RCMP. Beforehand we met with the RCMP, We had the RCMP labour relations office. I swear they were following because I would get into the office at 6:30, 8:30 in the morning, at 6:38 the labour relations RCMP officer would be there to chat. We talked to them; we worked really hard. They decided, the Vancouver police decided, they weren't going to be scab herders, but that wasn't in all the cases. It was also—and I think it was the '81 strike but it could have been the '87 strike. We had one woman—and it taught me a lot—who every day, every single day of the strike, crossed the picket line—every day. You can't imagine how mad that made people. We were really mean to her when she came back. When we came back—and really mean is probably a gigantic understatement, you know. Then, like five years later, she's no longer in Vancouver. She's in another local presumably transferred, and she's at a basic stewards course I'm facilitating.

MM [01:15:00] Oh my goodness.

MP [01:15:01] I could not—like so I had to say like, I'm not going to raise this in the meeting because, you know, so I went to her and I said, 'You know, X like, I don't get this.' She said, 'It still makes me cry. At that time, I was living with my husband. I had three daughters. He told me that if I didn't go to work every day, he would have killed me and killed the daughters, and I believed him.'

MM [01:15:29] Oh, God.

MP [01:15:30] You know, yeah. It taught me a lot about the violence against—don't judge—and violence against women.

MM [01:15:39] Yeah.

MP [01:15:40] You know, gender based violence. And I think that—

MP [01:15:43] Because that's got to be a very strong counter. Most people would cave to what the union was doing, their co-workers, and she stood up against it because the threat was even greater.

AC [01:15:57] Yeah.

MP [01:15:58] Yeah.

MM [01:15:59] Wow.

AC [01:16:00] Neither options were good, but she went the one that saved her life.

MP [01:16:05] And her kid's life.

AC [01:16:05] And her kid's life.

MM [01:16:07] Yeah. Oh, jeez.

MP [01:16:09] The other thing was 2011. It is—what happened was 2011, I think it started a precedent which large employers, employers large and small are still using. That's locking people up who are on strike. We were on strike; we were doing a rotating strike. The day before we were going to lock—they were going to lock people up. We were going to go on strike across Canada, employees, really small places like Sioux Lookout, Salmon Arm and—not places where—

MM [01:16:48] Your package will be delivered. It's not going through those places.

MP [01:16:51] Yeah, like not big places, and they locked us out. It was really clear that this was just a brutal attack, another brutal attack by the government. What was so amazing was the response by our members who pivoted really quickly, who—and you had to be really disciplined because—just showed immense discipline and immense solidarity not to go in and things like that, you know, back to work and not to cave. I was never so proud of CUPW members but during that time where they were being provoked and they were being pushed, they were being threatened, and they still stood their ground. It was pretty amazing.

MM [01:17:50] It took forever to get to the point back to work grievances for people to get the backpay they deserve, all that kind of stuff. The employer says one thing, and then tries to pretend it never said it.

AC [01:18:07] Yeah, they promise it at the time, but as soon as you make a promise, it's hard to deliver.

MM [01:18:11] However, we were good. We had the verbatim transcripts of all the negotiating.

AC [01:18:18] Okay. Anything else to say on disputes and, or any other items that we've left out? I'm sure we aren't redoing the whole history of CUPW.

MP [01:18:32] I would say a couple things. I would say—what would I say to young people? Solidarity is so important, and solidarity can be in so many different forms. It's not just one form. I would also say that even in our union, there's a whole scepticism of international solidarity: 'We should be helping people here, not people over there.' What I have learned is that we're stronger, far stronger because of international solidarity. We learn about really different ways that people are engaging the employer. We learn about, by looking at various postal administrations across the world, we learn about new trends that are happening so we can advocate for certain things, and we can be prepared when they bring in these new machines. We know exactly how they work, because we've talked to postal workers in Germany, or India, or whomever. We've learned. We've got a five minute coding break every hour for people who are doing the coding machines. We learnt from work, you know, working with people in other countries who already had that. We were better able to respond to employer's attempts to bring in new technology because we

knew what was happening in other countries. We said we want it done this and this and this way because we know you got messed up in these countries. Also, sort of the inspiration of the postal workers in Colombia, who under huge threats of repression, were still organising. It gets inspired, but it's also like just the day-to-day humorous stuff. We developed a relationship with the postal workers in Trinidad and Tobago. It was my first and only trip to Trinidad and Tobago, and I never saw the ocean—literally. It was like we drove by, and people said, 'There it is.' That was as close as I got.

AC [01:20:47] You had a meeting to go to without [unclear]—

MP [01:20:48] Yeah, I had a meeting to go to. We're doing a health and safety, and this is clerks and letter carriers, and the letter carriers start talking about their major—one of their major problems was dogs. The only response for us in the front was to break into laughter and say, 'Yeah, this is one of the major problems in Canada, too.' It was just those kind of moments when we know that when you're a postal worker, we have this kind of basis of unity that we can work together. It's pretty inspiring.

MM [01:21:28] I know that carried me since I've retired, too, which is like international solidarity is the main activism that I can do right now because I know that whatever they can, whatever low level they can crush workers somewhere else, then that's going to affect us. They can always threaten that they can leave Canada and get the work done by someone who we don't have to see the suffering of, and that the majority of other Canadians won't see it, so they won't care. Yeah, the struggle continues. I love our motto because I'm going like, 'Oh God, that's so correct. It's never going to end.'

MP [01:22:11] I would just say lastly, what being involved in the unions taught me is that we don't have—our lives can't be so clearly dissected as our lives inside work and outside work. I talked about sorta gender-based violence affects us really hugely, you know, at work. We need to be able to have protections at work because—so our members who are facing gender-based violence are protected. I remember going in one day and there was this woman. She came in and her husband was a supervisor we all didn't like. She had like a fist on her face. She'd been hit by him, and she was the quietest, most private woman on the floor. All these people—everyone was really upset, all the co-workers. They knew that was the only way you can get it was through violence. They kept coming up to me. 'Marion, you got to help her. You're the steward.' I thought, 'I have no idea what I can do.' Like, I literally have no idea what I can do. If I approach her, I don't know what to do. It really has taught me that we need to talk about those kind of skills, too. We need to talk about how our lives aren't separate. If we're going to—we need to address the whole worker, not just—because everyday people are facing that.

MM [01:23:52] The Port Elgin education programs, so the national education program to make good trade union activists, helped that a bit. They do have a component where someone talks about gender-based violence against co-workers and how as stewards or activists, how to react to it, because you're right, you're just stymied, just don't know how to approach it.

MP [01:24:18] I'm not sure they—I don't know now, but I'm not sure they still have it. At one point they cancelled it because half of the women would leave the classroom and end up in the washrooms crying.

MM [01:24:32] Crying. Oh. Yeah.

MP [01:24:32] Yeah. It was really bad.

MM [01:24:35] Which doesn't make sense to me, but okay.

MP [01:24:37] It was true right? Yeah.

AC [01:24:39] Yeah. A serious issue.

MP [01:24:42] We've got to do all of that. We have to keep fighting for our rights because if we don't, it'll be taken away. One of the things I love about CUPW is that CUPW in the 2000s has been fighting for gig workers. In Ontario we organised workers for Foodora. We gained collective bargaining rights through them and only to have Foodora say oh they can't afford to be in Canada and to leave.

MM [01:25:21] They just picked up and went.

MP [01:25:23] We're still organising to protect—we need to protect gig workers because all of our—especially now with postal work and delivery of parcels, we can see that all of our jobs can be gigified. We really do need to do that. One of the things that I just want to briefly talk about we organised—until 2004, there was this group of postal workers who were really badly paid and who were contractors. They were every two or three years they'd have to underbid themselves in order to get a job at the post office. That was our rural and suburban mail carriers, over 66 percent women. I remember talking to some of them because they had no rights. Their husband died, they'd go to the funeral in the morning and have to deliver mail in the afternoon. They would have to underbid themselves all the time. CUPW fought for them and fought for them. We fought for them and thoughtful. We made we made gains. Starting 2004, they started getting pensions, which is pretty amazing. It only started in 2004. We had this giant pay equity. We bargained in 2016, we bargained pay equity for them and we ended up in a pay equity committee with an employer. We didn't want to go to court because we saw our sister union, the Union of Postal Communications Employees, who represented the clerical workers at Canada Post. It took them over 20 years for, you know, to get a pay equity award. We knew that it was—that wouldn't work for us. We organised—through the hard work of many people in this committee, in 2018 and 2019, we won the pay equity award. People got like—so now RSMCs are paid basically the same as letter carriers.

MM [01:27:41] Oh good. That's past my retirement date.

MP [01:27:44] Yeah, they got huge gains. They have access to leaves and benefits. When we talk about CUPW fighting for women, people often just refer to the maternity leave. I think that actually the fight for pay equity for RSMCs—the organising of RSMCs and the fight for pay equity is also a story that needs to be talked about because we know that—what's the best way to improve a working woman's wages or working conditions is through unionisation.

MM [01:28:24] Yes. Well, and the thing is, I have heard co-workers say, 'it wasn't fast enough, it wasn't enough,' etcetera, that just haven't been around long enough to know that you start the fight, and it takes years. We couldn't just go out on strike and say these people who are, what, 15, 20 bucks an hour difference from some of the jobs, have to get that now. You're never going to win that fight. The stuff that we did, you know, the underpinnings, the important underpinnings, that's what I like about the union is that it thinks about what's going to have the biggest effect. We'll go for that now, and we'll have

to save some of them for later. It's harder. It's harder because as a worker on the floor you go, 'I was hoping for something more than that.'

MP [01:29:15] I know. It's like I want everything and my pony too.

MM [01:29:18] And my pony.

AC [01:29:19] And I want it now.

MP [01:29:20] Yeah.

AC [01:29:22] Well, with all of those challenges in mind, we are going to draw this interview to a close.

MP [01:29:28] This has been great. Thank you.

AC [01:29:29] Thank both of our sisters from CUPW.