

**Interview: Bonnie Pearson (BP)**

**Interviewer: Phil Legg (PL)**

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**Transcription: Pam Moodie**

**PL** [00:00:06] Bonnie Pearson. Thank you so much for making yourself available for the Labour Heritage Centre as we're doing oral interviews with people who've been active in the labour movement here in B.C. and you're certainly that in spades. So, what I'd like to do is begin by asking you to talk a little bit about the early years, where you grew up and some of these early influences.

**BP** [00:00:28] So I grew up in rural Saskatchewan, on a mixed farm. My parents were farmers, so we had grain and cattle. My father was very involved in the community, had been an early organizer with the CCF and the Saskatchewan Wheat pool and all of that. So I was sort of a late arrival in their life. My older siblings were, with the exception of one sister, were away from home by the time I came along. So, there was no leaving Bonnie at home. Bonnie got taken to all of the events so, I think, I didn't know a time when people in my life were not involved organizing something. By the time I was old enough to sort of understand more clearly what was going on, they were very involved in the National Farmers Union, which was a thing in the day. Dad was not as involved any longer with the Wheat Pool. That had sort of been created and was stable and was ticking along and turned his attention to. And mum was also very much engaged in all of the Women's Auxiliaries as they were back then. So, it didn't mean they didn't have an opinion and a view and an influence. So I think that was, I mean, really early influence was my parents. We were in the Weyburn constituency, interestingly enough, so Tommy Douglas was our MLA, and Dad, I can't even remember Dad not working an election campaign until maybe after Tommy went east, Federal. Yeah. Yeah. So it was, it was all of that.

**PL** [00:02:18] That's amazing!

**BP** [00:02:18] Yeah. And so it was an interesting time. So when I entered the workforce, I didn't work initially in a unionized workplace, but when I went to work for the City of Moose Jaw, which was a CUPE workplace, then I got involved. I was a shop steward within a very short period of time.

**PL** [00:02:42] You know where the pulse is.

**BP** [00:02:43] Yeah. That was sort of it. And then, you know, just involved from then on. That was in the mid '70s.

**PL** [00:02:51] So how active within the CUPE network in Saskatchewan did you become?

**BP** [00:02:55] I was, I was on the division executive. I was Provincial Secretary for—I want to say, that was back in the day when we had annual conventions—so I think three terms, maybe four. And then Grace Hartman was National President when I got involved and was very adamant that more women should be hired as staff reps with CUPE. So I was offered a position as a national rep with CUPE and I went to work for CUPE in 1980.

**PL** [00:03:37] Okay. You're still in Saskatchewan at that point?

**BP** [00:03:39] Still in Saskatchewan. We did not move to B.C. until 1993.

**PL** [00:03:43] Okay.

**BP** [00:03:44] I left CUPE in 1983, simply for family reasons. By that time my kids were just becoming teenagers. Those were also the days of one year contracts. I had 34 locals. I started on the Manitoba border and I ended on the Alberta border. So I asked for a reassignment that was more geographically appropriate. Like, I'd looked around at all my colleagues. There were two women who were staff in Saskatchewan, well three actually, but one was on leave. We had our work—our assignments were disproportionate, shall we say. So I asked for an assignment that allowed me to spend some time with my family, and that was left to the regional director of the day who chose not to grant that request. And I had been asked by Grain Services two or three times to consider coming and working for them. They represented people in the grain gathering industry in Saskatchewan. So I left CUPE—not because I didn't love the organization, and not because I didn't support all of the objectives, and we did a lot of organizing. It was a lovely, you know, lovely is probably the wrong word, but it was a dynamic organization when I was part of it. I just felt that my family also deserved some of my attention.

**PL** [00:05:34] Oh yeah.

**BP** [00:05:34] I did have some political differences with the regional director, so the assignment was not without some thought on his part. [laughing]

**PL** [00:05:48] I mean, the labour movement can be tough on families.

**BP** [00:05:50] Yes.

**PL** [00:05:51] Politics can be tough on families.

**BP** [00:05:53] Yeah. Well it was 34 locals, mostly municipal school boards, and then I organized a couple of daycares. So we were negotiating first contracts and it was, as I say, national policy, one year contracts. So you literally finished and started over again. And the roads were, you know, not always that friendly.

**PL** [00:06:23] Yeah.

**BP** [00:06:24] Because you couldn't say, "well I'm only going in Saskatchewan." You couldn't be, "I'm going to only be on the road when the weather's nice," because you would never get your work done. Then the other woman who was on staff at that point ended up also on sick leave. And so then I got added a couple of her locals, which is what took me to the eastern side of the province. And that was just the straw that broke the camel's back. I couldn't do it.

**PL** [00:06:56] Oh, yeah.

**BP** [00:06:57] You negotiate till five in the morning and then you were expected to be on the complete other side of the province the next day. Because you couldn't not schedule meetings with any expectation of getting anybody a contract in any reasonable period of time.

**PL** [00:07:17] Remind me of the politics within the Saskatchewan provincial government at the time. When did, when was the changeover?

**BP** [00:07:28] When I went to work for CUPE, it was the Blakeney government. Our health care provincial agreement went on strike, which is what caused some of the strife in the organization of the day. There were those who felt that that shouldn't have happened. We were blamed, after the fact, for Blakeney losing the next election. He may have lost it anyway. I'm quite certain he would have, it was, you know, people were looking for change. It was a younger demographic were starting to be more engaged on the right. They were chafing against the national, the Canadian Wheat Board and the Crow rate. And people wanted to—so that was the starting that, so it laid some of the foundation. And then, of course, there was the direct payment of funds and the election campaign, that was the changeover then.

**PL** [00:08:45] So how did some of that work its way into workplaces in the latter part of the '80s?

**BP** [00:08:54] By then I was working in the private sector because grain was federally regulated, but there were massive campaigns. I was on the executive of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour as well. So, there were campaigns then against the Devine government. They took on the building trades by creating the language around double breasting. They made it so much more difficult for anybody to organize. Forced more sectors into mandatory arbitration, those kinds of changes. They had sold off anything that had any value. Highways were privatized and they're still a disaster, by the way. You only have to drive there to know that. Just anything that had value was—so they were really early models, I mean. Of that privatization bent that kind of swept the country eventually.

**PL** [00:10:06] Yeah, yeah. There was versions of it in the early part of the Socred regime in the early '80s.

**BP** [00:10:13] Yes.

**PL** [00:10:14] And it just—

**BP** [00:10:15] It just rolled. It just rolled. Yeah. And it was Alberta—so it just kept going. I think it was particularly difficult for SGEU, with the direct government service, they saw a lot of reductions. Contracting out wasn't as much, it wasn't as big as it became but they dipped their toes in that. You know there had been—Saskatchewan had, and has, a vibrant crown sector. There was also a technology crown that had done some really interesting work. That got privatized. They turned their mind to Hydro or, you know, Sask Power as it's called, Sask Energy, SaskTel. But even their supporters would have little to do with that. I mean, Douglas had electrified the province. He took electricity into rural Saskatchewan, which is hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miles of lines. Farms had electricity, farms had telephones. We had a telephone before we had electricity. I mean, I was in grade four before we got electricity. So that's how late in the piece. I'm dating myself now or ageing myself but electricity wasn't part of my childhood. We never did have a TV. Dad thought it was God's word or the Devil's work. Right? So, you were going to read and you were going to study. Full stop. And you were not watching TV.

**PL** [00:12:07] Yeah. But you're right. I remember electrification was a big political issue.

**BP** [00:12:12] Yeah. So quite different in terms of the culture of the place. I don't recognize it now when I go back. I mean our daughter and son both still live in Saskatchewan with their partners. Neither of my grandchildren are in Saskatchewan anymore, but I don't recognize the political landscape of the province. It is so nasty. It's just that horrible—you know, you can argue with people about conservative values versus social justice and progressive values but the nastiness of it is what's really hard to fathom. Like what happened to just being able to disagree and understand that there is another thought of—but yeah it's not there.

**PL** [00:13:18] Yeah. Yeah. No, it's the vein of bi-partisan governance, it's non-existent.

**BP** [00:13:26] Yeah. So of course when I got really involved in the labour movement, Dad was—because he was a dyed-in-the-wool social democrat, in the CCF model—he considered me too Left. We had long conversations about, "Are you sure you're not a communist?" You know, that was his big worry, that his daughter was going—. Because of course, I was part of a faction that was agitating all of the time and we were red baited. That was also part of the labour movement of the day, right? Said "No, Dad, I carry no cards except an NDP one." As it was then.

**PL** [00:14:15] So what drew you out to the West Coast?

**BP** [00:14:18] I had been approached by HEU. I had spent ten years with Grain Services. Some people have said, "What, you can't keep a job here or something?" I said, no, maybe it's just I have a shorter attention span or something. I'm not sure. I'd had a number of approaches from different organizations, but I was approached by HEU to consider a position actually in the Kelowna regional office. And, interestingly enough, when we were first married Don and I had talked about moving to B.C. and then it just didn't make sense, didn't make sense economically even then. He was a member of the UA, part of 179 out of Regina. It just made sense that we stay there. I wasn't working full time at that point yet and I was raising the family. So I came out for an interview and thought, "That'll be it," you know, there's too many other candidates that are probably more qualified and so on and so forth. But, was offered a position and I just said, "You know, I think I'm ready for a change. I think I'm ready to try and learn a whole new, a whole new culture."

**PL** [00:15:45] Life west of the Rockies. Yeah.

**BP** [00:15:47] Yeah, yeah. And it was eye-opening.

**PL** [00:15:51] So this would have been what year?

**BP** [00:15:53] That was late 1993 when I came to B.C.

**PL** [00:15:58] So, new government.

**BP** [00:15:59] New government.

**PL** [00:16:01] Trying all sorts of things in health care.

**BP** [00:16:02] Right. And HEU by then had just started assertively organizing in the community social services sector, right? Because they hadn't looked at that area initially. So it was sort of shared jurisdiction between BCGEU, as it was then and HEU. CUPE a bit. CUPE had some locals, but I don't know that they necessarily focused on it. HEU was not

affiliated with CUPE yet when I came. Which was one of the things that I really had to think about because I'd never been part of an organization that wasn't part of a Labour Central. I couldn't quite wrap my head around that piece of it. But they reassured me in the interview because they had started talking at that point about some kind of an affiliation agreement which eventually did come to fruition.

**PL** [00:17:09] So HEU leadership at that point, is this—

**BP** [00:17:13] That's Carmela and Chris. Fred Muson on was already Provincial President and Mary Laplante was Secretary Treasurer at that point. And they were looking for people who had bargaining experience because they'd had provincial agreements forever. Well, not forever, but for 10 or 15 years. Not sure exactly when they were able—I mean, they were still putting bits and pieces of the long term care—or there was the PriCare and — CCERA (Continuing Care Employee Relations Association) and PriCare, those things, back in the day. They were putting those together, still, but they didn't have a lot of—they had a lot of really competent and well trained, experienced reps on the provincial agreements for enforcement, for grievance handling. They had good, great organizers, but they didn't have a lot of people who had a lot of background in collective bargaining.

**PL** [00:18:19] Interesting. So at the same time there is within the provincial government, within health care provincially, there's a move to try and consolidate.

**BP** [00:18:30] Well, they were—I think that came a little bit later, Philip. When I came they had just created—the government had moved to the closer-to-home model. So there were the health boards and then there were the, I can't remember all of the terms, but they had just negotiated also the Provincial Labour Adjustment Agreement that allowed for the closure of Shaughnessy and other smaller facilities. So there were lots and lots of changes. So yes, I think they were trying to get things sorted out at the same point in time were (pause) diversifying, if you will, the decision-making process at the governance level, right?

**PL** [00:19:27] So the authority model hadn't quite come into being yet?

**BP** [00:19:32] It was there. It was there. But we were in the process when I was hired. One of the other things was identifying people within locals who could sit on the local committees. Right. You know, not the Board, but there was the—what were they called? I'm just drawing a complete blank on what those were called.

**PL** [00:19:52] Community health boards.

**BP** [00:19:53] There were community health boards, but then there were the, there were like tripartite committees at a local level. What you saw in Kelowna, there were, what were they called? It may come back to me. Anyway, that was the other place. And so, you know, BCNU had somebody on that, HSA had someone on there, HEU would have someone on there, depending on how many people GEU had or how many people—IWA had some locals. So it was a different make-up, generally through the Labour Councils, I think those appointments came a lot. But the unions pretty much named their people and they were just appointed. I mean we were never appoint—well, I guess that was partly one of the motivating factors around the agreement with CUPE, that and other things, but it allowed them for that endorsement at a Labour Council level.

**PL** [00:21:00] Yeah. Right. Yeah. All of this is going on in health care. You were now based in Kelowna.

**BP** [00:21:10] I was based in Kelowna and then I was seconded. There was a provincial bargaining team, eventually. So I had again a workload that was interesting. And then they created a provincial bargaining team, which I was part of. But not relieved of my servicing assignment, which came later, after I had a hissy fit. And then I was seconded into provincial office in Vancouver for another project and, seconded or reassigned, and spent some time there. And while I was there, then CIEA (College Institute Educators' Association) approached me.

**PL** [00:22:01] Right, <unclear> and Company.

**BP** [00:22:02] Yes. And I thought, "Oh, that sounds interesting." So I did that. So I left HEU in '96, went to CIEA, and then I went to CEU for a period of time.

**PL** [00:22:14] CEU? Oh Compensation Employees?

**BP** [00:22:15] Compensation. Yeah. And then back to HEU for the last ten years of—

**PL** [00:22:22] This in the period prior to 2017?

**BP** [00:22:26] Yeah. Oh, yes. I went back to CUPE in 2006. It was after the failed agreement. And, yes.

**PL** [00:22:36] Right. So because Chris moved on, so—

**BP** [00:22:41] Judy was hired as, Judy Darcy was hired as SBM and asked me to come, again in part, because of my bargaining experience.

**PL** [00:22:52] So I can only imagine that from 2006 to 2016, I mean, that's a huge rebuilding period within HEU.

**BP** [00:23:03] Oh, yeah, yeah. It was a lot of work, but it was also probably one of the more interesting periods of time, for me. I don't know, I wasn't there when people were contracted out, just tossed aside. Ten, twelve thousand people contracted out by the stroke of a pen. I went back in 2006, which was the Carole Taylor round, or the Olympic round of bargaining, four-year agreements with the signing bonus. And then we had—the challenge to Bill 29 had been winding its way through the courts and the Supreme Court decision came down in either late two thousand— was it seven or eight?

**PL** [00:24:00] Something like that.

**BP** [00:24:02] And so then Judy and I, then there was that to deal with, because while they enshrined the right to strike, they did not say, "Oh, and all of the terms and conditions of the Collective Agreement are reinstated as well." And so we then negotiated a settlement with the provincial government.

**PL** [00:24:27] Take me through that, because and I'm confused and certainly others would be as well, the thousands who were contracted out and went to Sodexo and—

**BP** [00:24:38] Some did. Those who were eligible took early retirement.

**PL** [00:24:49] Okay. Right, Right.

**BP** [00:24:53] There were very few activists hired by any of the privates. They concentrated largely hiring a lot of new Canadians. And then there was—IWA had made an agreement. That was challenged, I would argue successfully, as it should have been. But it was an acrimonious time in the labour movement, as you know. There were, I think, too many trade unionists in B.C. Thought HEU deserved what it got. That was not an uncommon comment. I know that more from before I went back to HEU, because when you were arguably the response to that legislation and Bill 97— not only did they contract everybody out and they turn around and they roll everybody's wages back nineteen percent, they undo the agreement that had brought the long term care sector into the master, or what we always called the master agreement—the Acute Care Facilities Agreement, as it was by then. I was stunned because there was so little reaction initially from the labour movement. And I remember listening to one of the prominent healthcare leaders of the day saying, "Well, I've instructed our members to go, to report for work as normal." I'm going like, "What happened to a picket line is a picket line is a picket line?" But anyway, there was eventually a response and it did not restore the fifteen percent. But, a provincial strike was averted. But again, not without acrimony.

**PL** [00:27:02] You're right to describe it as there was, the conflict wasn't just between employer and union, it was within the labour movement and there was lots of that, and it took years for that to sort itself out.

**BP** [00:27:20] Yes, it did. Absolutely. Some of that I think resulted in—and you can decide whether you leave this in or take it out. The decision later on after the settlement of Bill 29 and all of that, then almost immediately on the heels of that the Nurses made a decision to raid the LPNs.

**PL** [00:27:51] Yeah.

**BP** [00:27:51] And so that entire decade that I spent with HEU from 2006 to 2016 was one filled with one—

**PL** [00:28:03] Civil war after another.

**BP** [00:28:04] Exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

**PL** [00:28:08] You really got the sense that people were pouncing on what they thought was—

**BP** [00:28:15] A weakness. Yeah. They really underestimated the union and I, not saying that there wasn't good leadership in the union. There absolutely was good leadership in the union. But that membership is remarkable. I mean, that membership. Yes, we had our detractors and there were, government can always find a pocket that will work on their behalf. Hostile governments, I'm talking about now. But when you think about it, I mean, even the new people hired by Sodexo, Aramark and all of those new Canadians, I mean organized and reorganized and reorganized and reorganized. They just kept flipping those contracts in long term care and you'd go and reorganize them and reorganize them. I mean, it was exhausting work. Absolutely, it was exhausting. But when you think about, there was only a handful of locals in the province that eventually remained unorganized. I

don't know if they're organized now. I kind of lost track, I followed it for quite some time after I retired and then I just thought, okay, you need to let it go.(laughter)

**PL** [00:29:30] Like in the Buddha. (laughter)

**BP** [00:29:31] Yeah, exactly. I said this at my retirement: I never cease to be amazed by the resilience and the strength of the membership of that union and not just that union, but the labour movement generally. But I think HEU, love them or hate them —and there are people who do both, sometimes at the same time. They are an amazing group of people. They never lost their social justice values. They never lost their focus on bettering people's—

**PL** [00:30:16] So can you think of, I'm going a little bit off topic here, but are there demographic characteristics that help explain some of that resilience? Or is it the nature of the work that they do that?

**BP** [00:30:35] I can't speak to the demographics. Before, when I worked with HEU the first time, before the Campbell government and then the frontal attack on on health care, I might have said it was largely demographics, but I don't— when I went back in 2006, I think it had more to do with the work that they did, because one of the things that the Campbell government did was denigrate the work that non-professionals in health care did.

**PL** [00:31:17] Yeah, MLA from Kamloops. His name was —

**BP** [00:31:19] Yeah, Kevin Krueger.

**PL** [00:31:20] Krueger. Right. Yeah.

**BP** [00:31:24] He, you know "they're toilet bowl cleaners." Well they do a hell of a lot more than that. And I'd like you to get into a hospital without the work of an HEU member. Just try. You know. But that's never recog— and it's not recognized today. I hear the ads. If I have a criticism, or a complaint maybe is a better term, is the Ministry of Health continues to speak in terms of the professions and the regulated bodies, the colleges. Whether it's physicians, whether it's nurses, whether it's pharmacists or whatever, there is a whole group of people that keep the system running literally day and night. And I would have hoped to have heard more in support of them, publicly. I'm not talking about bargaining or anything like that. It's just that recognition in a more vocal way that that's a body of work. That people who deliver care in mental health homes and group homes, would be more recoged. Those are not just HEU members, those are also BCGEU. What are they now? They're not BCGEU anymore. They're service.

**PL** [00:33:10] They are. They just call themselves General.

**BP** [00:33:12] Something else. Yeah. The general workers. Yes, there are CUPE members, many CUPE members still in that cadre. I don't think, and I'm talking about someone sitting out there as a member of the public now, but that's not generally it. Rather than debunking some of the media things about there's only shortages of nurses and there's only shortages of doctors, I would have hoped to have heard more that there are also real challenges for people who do a lot of the caring.

**PL** [00:33:55] Yeah.



**BP** [00:33:56] When I left, when I retired, our care aides, health care assistants, or some of them, had some of the highest injury rates in the province, soft tissue mostly. And I will say that the Health Authorities, in many cases, attempted to address it by more equipment, better training, all of those things. But at the end of the day, it remains that there is just a chronic shortage of staff and people work short all the time. And you can say, "Well, you don't lift Bonnie unless somebody is there," when Bonnie is screaming in pain. Your your inclination is to help, to care. So anyway, I'll get off that hobbyhorse, but it's one of my frustrations. And I have lots of health care professionals in my family, and I don't know any of them that would disagree with what I've just said to you.

**PL** [00:35:03] Yeah.

**BP** [00:35:04] And none of them are in those, they're all in the other classifications. If I have a criticism of the labour movement, and this is a criticism, is that the other organizations no longer speak in support of the unregulated workers in hospitals.

**PL** [00:35:28] Right.

**BP** [00:35:29] Which is not true. That was not the case when I arrived in B.C. There was a very tight working relationship amongst the three big health care unions, BCNU, HSA and HEU. And there was recognition. I'm not saying there wasn't tension on the floor sometimes but there was recognition that everyone had a role. And somewhere along the way, Campbell and company were very effective in dividing that coalition, that solidarity.

**PL** [00:36:09] They stressed the system, and knowing full well that by doing so you (unclear) to get people to turn on each other—

**BP** [00:36:16] Oh, yeah, it was not benign. It was not benign and not unintentional. Yes absolutely.

**PL** [00:36:25] A method to the madness to be sure. Talk a little bit about your time with the College and the CIEA folks.

**BP** [00:36:30] I went there in '96 and the locals, some of the locals, were interested in building a provincial agreement. I had never had so much time on my hands when I got to CIEA, I had three locals (laughter). And I think two committees that met. It was just the difference. The locals were pretty self-sufficient. I mean, most of the presidents were full time. They called the office when they needed something. That's also probably not going to be well-heard by people. But anyway, it was the case. I eventually filled it, but initially it was sort of, "Wow! Nobody can complain about workload here."

**PL** [00:37:37] Which locals did you have?

**BP** [00:37:37] I had Douglas and I had College of the Rockies and I had Malaspina for a very short period of time, and then they changed that out and I had Langara for a short period of time.

**PL** [00:37:52] Interesting.

**BP** [00:37:53] Yeah, very different. And then I had Kelowna and Kamloops, which were both university colleges. They were not universities yet, they were university colleges. So I

had two colleges: College of the Rockies and Douglas and then eventually two University Colleges.

**PL** [00:38:21] The taking steps towards a provincial agreement—

**BP** [00:38:28] Jack Campbell was there, had a long history in, was it CEP? I think. Yeah. He was on staff when I was hired, so Jack and I in the—I guess it would have been in the '96 to '98 round. And I say Jack and I, it was largely Jack because he had been working toward building that. So not every local signed on to being part of the provincial agreement, but we did what was called a framework agreement. We spent as much time negotiating what could be negotiated provincially, what should be in a provincial agreement versus what the locals could negotiate locally as we did the actual language of the agreement. But we did come out with the first provincial agreement for CIEA.

**PL** [00:39:30] Interesting.

**BP** [00:39:30] And then Jack retired following that. And then I did the '98 round and we bargained jointly provincially with the GEU. I think there were seven GEU components in—

**PL** [00:39:50] I thought it was components.

**BP** [00:39:52] Yeah, I think it's components. Yeah. Anyway, so it was Debbie Offerman and I. negotiated that round.

**PL** [00:40:02] Wow, there's so many crossover points. So when you say Debbie Offerman I think of Klaus Offerman, I think of the IWA.

**BP** [00:40:09] Yes. Yeah it's a big province but it's very small in many respects.

**PL** [00:40:18] One little footnote, but I know that this is me interviewing you and I shouldn't be adding too much here. I do remember at the height of this, that that terrible stuff at the IWA under Dave Haggard did to HEU that I was getting reports back from locals in the Cariboo. The IWA local in Caribou thought that what Dave was proposing to do was the wrong thing to do. And why was that? Because many of the activists in the IWA were married to people who were HEU members.

**BP** [00:40:55] Exactly. Absolutely. Same in the Kootenays. You know, there was a certain amount of overlap with Steel there as well. So, yes, it was not universally embraced by IWA, and I would never leave the impression that IWA members necessarily agreed with that. It was actually a bit of a stain on what was a pretty significant proud history to have been captured in that way, was a bit unconscionable. Yeah, so that was my time. I mean, again, wonderful folks. I mean totally different issues. I think I've benefited by having a glimpse inside so many different sectors of the public sector in B.C. The same with Compensation. I mean, it's its own world, right. And they also got hit really hard. CEU got hit really hard, the Act changed so significantly. You know, they closed the rehab centre. There was all of that.

**PL** [00:42:06] Yeah, they got devastated by that.

**BP** [00:42:09] So that was another acrimonious round of bargaining. It seemed like from 2001 on, every round of bargaining I was involved in, and I don't take this personally, but they were really horrible.

**PL** [00:42:24] Yeah.

**BP** [00:42:24] I mean soul-destroying experiences. There are names that I won't use on tape, but there are people that should never be allowed to say that they were ever, ever, ever part of the labour movement. Ever. Because you could not have one ounce of principle and behave in the manner in which some folks behaved.

**PL** [00:42:53] Wow, that's tough stuff. so just want to finish off the CIEA stuff.

**BP** [00:43:01] Yes.

**PL** [00:43:02] I know that, that regularization, or the process by which someone moves from being part-time faculty to full-time faculty has always been a tough knot.

**BP** [00:43:12] So contentious. We chipped away at language, Phil. Sort of created a process but that was an area that there was not unanimity within the membership. There were those who felt that if you had taught the course for five or eight years in some cases and a position became available, even if it was less than full time, you shouldn't have to compete for it. It should be considered your program. And of course, there were others who was absolutely not. They had the selection committee, which was usually made up almost entirely, but for one or two of the bargaining unit members took an alternate view.

**PL** [00:44:10] Yeah.

**BP** [00:44:10] So the language was always, you know, less than pristine. (Laughter) And it was predominantly women that were affected by that. The same as pension service in CIEA, was a huge issue when I was there. We looked at whether we could bring a class action lawsuit, and we worked with Leo McGrady on that. While the part time were always entitled to participate, it was often the case—or non-regulars were entitled to participate, it was often the case—the unofficial condition of the contract was that you had to decline to join the pension plan because then the employer didn't have to pay the contributions. So we had women who had worked in the system for 20 years, and this is not exclusive to CIEA, it's very much part of the—. Teaching assistants in CUPE can have long service and very little pensionable service because of the way the work is allocated and the way the work is. The hours, and the lay-offs in the summer. And so women were really disadvantaged. The college had its own pension plan, and still does. It was the case that there was from, I suppose the mid '70s to the early '90s, so many women who would basically get no recognition for that because the employer could produce a document where someone had declined to join the pension plan. At the end of the day, our assessment was that we did not have a strong enough case. We had pockets or individuals, but we did not have a big enough, a strong enough case that we would even get certified as. And of course, then there'd be the whole argument about it's a grievance, right? Even though the pension wasn't part of the agreement. But one of the things that I was involved in when I was at CIEA was negotiating the joint trusteeship. So we actually did the first trust agreement, which again was not universally embraced in the labour movement.

**PL** [00:47:00] But it was revolutionary.

**BP** [00:47:02] Part of it was because we did not do a trust agreement if we were part of the legislation. That's different now. So that was how government chose. But Tony Penikett

was advising the government during that period of time. And that was a big part of the settlement. I mean, they were mutually exclusive, but they were part. What were those agreements called?

**PL** [00:47:35] I think some people would refer to it as a wink-and-nod agreement.

**BP** [00:47:39] Yeah. But there was language around all of them. So that was the other big part.

**PL** [00:47:47] Accords.

**BP** [00:47:47] Yeah. Ours was pension plan was our accord, remained part of our accord.

**PL** [00:47:57] Yeah. Fascinating.

**BP** [00:47:59] And I think it was brilliant. Not that the language was brilliant. That's not what I'm saying. But to have embraced that, for the labour movement to have embraced it when they did and moved to trusteeship, because most of the plans were in surplus at that point in time.

**PL** [00:48:20] Were or weren't?

**BP** [00:48:22] Were in surplus. So, if people had not successfully negotiated joint trusteeship, there's not a doubt in my mind that those surpluses would have disappeared in 2001. Well, I mean, every other public entity that had money got stripped, right?

**PL** [00:48:43] I think it was called contribution holiday.

**BP** [00:48:45] Yes.

**PL** [00:48:45] Yeah.

**BP** [00:48:47] That would be the best outcome, Philip. Never mind the fight over who owns the surplus.

**PL** [00:48:53] Exactly. So from a policy perspective, it was a brilliant bringing together of worker ambitions—

**BP** [00:49:04] Yeah. John Calvert and Tony Penikett were doing the accords. The foundation had been—joint trusteeship had been talked about from the time I came to B.C. in '93. I remember having conversations with Steve Pollock and others in HEU, saying, because I'd come from grain, we had a jointly trustee pension plan in grain. And there were those who felt that the pension committees of the day were a stronger model and they were able to use more political leverage. And that at the end of the day, it was the employer's responsibility and government's responsibility to do the pension. And why were we going to lock workers into owning some of that responsibility? To this day, I hold the view that it was one of the smartest things the labour movement did in B.C. And quite frankly, every government, as far as I'm aware, since they were put in place, has relied on those joint agreements as part of their credit rating. I mean, it's seen as a major asset in the province, right?

**PL** [00:50:20] Yeah, and you can sort of see it kind of working its way up to the BCA—IMC— BC Investment Management. Yeah.

**BP** [00:50:30] Yeah. I was on that board for a while.

**PL** [00:50:32] Yeah. You know, this idea that workers should have a voice.

**BP** [00:50:36] Exactly!

**PL** [00:50:37] It's worker money.

**BP** [00:50:37] Exactly.

**PL** [00:50:38] Yeah. Don't be shy.

**BP** [00:50:40] Yeah. No, exactly. Sometimes I think we don't yell loud enough about where some of it gets used, but that's, you know, that's a debate for another day.

**PL** [00:50:51] The stick that's often used against that point of view is, this is a professional undertaking, you need to have actuaries and—

**BP** [00:50:59] Oh, yeah. You rely on your professionals. Absolutely. And I agree with that. ESG for me is fascinating right now because I think that it's another version of workers actually having some thoughts about what's appropriate use of their money. Right. And you know, for so long the argument was always "It's best financial returns." That's a statute. That's what it says in B.C. That's your fiduciary responsibility as a trustee. So you don't have a lot of wiggle room on that. But there were those of us who argued from very early on that investing in politically unstable environments, investing in companies that would exploit the workforce, those were not good long-term investments because the political risk is too high and there will be a cost. And I think that's been borne out time and time again. I don't think we hold very many of those now. You know, I think IMC has done a very good job of—. Back in the day, there were people, when the province started doing P3s, there were lots of people, some trustees who thought, some labour plan member trustees who thought that, you know, P3s were a good investment. This is just solid gold. It's backed by the government. True. I mean they, financially, they were odious. Odious in terms of stripping public money and handing it off to the private sector. So I think, I think the extent to which there was no investment in the Port Mann Bridge, there was no investment in long term care. I think that was positive.

**PL** [00:53:05] Yeah, that's interesting. Well, this has come full circle. I mean, we started in Saskatchewan and the roots of the labour movement there and talking about collective action amongst farmers and we come back to pensions and collective action amongst workers. I like it. Well this has been good. And I just want to thank you again for making time for doing this interview.

**BP** [00:53:30] I'm happy to do it. I probably ate up all of my time.

**PL** [00:53:37] We're just up to 2:24. So we're good.

**BP** [00:53:40] Stop for a minute. You did save what I thought might be a concern going forward. And I've actually given some thought to that.

**PL** [00:53:51] Okay, so the labour movement in general.

**BP** [00:53:53] And social movements in general.

**PL** [00:53:55] OK, let's go for this.

**BP** [00:53:56] Well I'll tell you and then you can decide whether it's worthy of the tape or not. I think it's twofold. I think apathy and disinformation is, and income inequality. I think that those are two huge threats to the labour movement, both in different ways, in the sense of the undermining of trust in institutions and, and then, income inequality, that sense of grievance that builds and we see it. So I think those are problematic, but they don't have to be on tape.

**PL** [00:54:36] I like it.

**SP** [00:54:37] You know, and also, like a lot of times some of the interviewers say, what do you think about the labour movement now and what recommendations would you give, and that really fits in.

**PL** [00:54:51] Yeah, let's do it. We're back at it. We're still recording? So just by way of summary, from your perch now in retirement, looking out at the labour movement. Any thoughts about the challenges that face us in the years ahead?

**BP** [00:55:11] I think there's a couple of things that are a real challenge for the labour movement and social movements generally. And the first I would say is, is sort of the undermining of truth, the amount of mis- and disinformation that circulates. And so the undermining of faith in leadership and. When you're built on a collective view, you have to have the collective interest at heart. And the other part of that is income inequality. I mean, I'm stunned when I look globally, but I don't have to look globally. I just have to look within my own community and at the degree of income inequality. And those are real challenges that the labour movement is going to need to speak to, and to hold its membership and to grow its membership.

**PL** [00:56:10] Interesting. And you touched on a really important point, this notion of grievance on the part of working class folks. Legitimate grievance, as they see the world around them becoming more and more unequal, to your point about trust and the degree to which they rely on.

**BP** [00:56:31] Brings us full circle to Tommy Douglas, and his "why do the mice vote for the cats?" I still have, I have it on vinyl, actually.

**PL** [00:56:46] (laughter) It's coming back.

**BP** [00:56:47] It's coming back. But it's true. And you watch it. You watch it in the US, but you don't have to go to the US. You just had to look at the election in Alberta last week to see like how, how could that be?

**PL** [00:57:00] Yeah, it's disheartening.

**BP** [00:57:02] Some of it's gerrymandering, but it's not all that. It's not just that. One of the wealthiest provinces in the country and there's just this sense of grievance. And that's what I feel in the labour movement. That's what I started to feel as I was retiring, because

even within the movement that there was this income spread, you know, there were the preferreds and then there were the others. And it's growing.

**PL** [00:57:34] Yeah.

**BP** [00:57:36] Yeah. So, on that note. On that cheery note, yes.

**PL** [00:57:41] Thanks so much for doing this. This is really—

**BP** [00:57:45] It's been fun. Well it's been yeah.

**PL** [00:57:48] It's more than a walk down memory lane.

**BP** [00:57:49] Yes, for sure. Absolutely.