

Interview: Colleen Jordan (CJ)
Interviewer: Keith Reynolds (KR)
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Transcription: Warren Caragata

KR [00:00:05] My name is Keith Reynolds, and I'm here today with Sharon Prescott. And we're here to interview Colleen Jordan, former Secretary treasurer of CUPE BC and former Burnaby City Councillor. And we're going to talk about your life and your life in the labour movement. And let's begin at the beginning. Can you tell us about where you were born and raised?

CJ [00:00:30] Good morning, Keith. Great to be with you again and Sharon. Yeah, it's 40 years in an hour of labour, activism and community activism, but we'll try. So I was born in southern Alberta, a small town, Fort MacLeod is where I was raised and went to high school, graduated high school there.

CJ: [00:01:06] Unions, I knew nothing of. I guess about as political as could be—my dad did run for city council for one term and that was enough of that as far as he was concerned. But I think my family, the Jordan family, were the only Liberals in town. So, in Alberta, you know, that's about as far left as it got in those days. And so my dad and his brother were the Liberal Party in Fort MacLeod. I guess I had some involvement on the fringe in politics growing up in that area. And also, I had some progressive teachers, shall we say. One of whom is 97 and I still communicate with her. So it's interesting. And she and her husband were very good family friends and also very influential on my growing up.

KR: [00:02:08] Did you have any contact with the labour movement over that time?

CJ: [00:02:12] Nada. No. Had no idea about anything about unions at all.

KR: [00:02:19] When you graduated from high school, you decided not to go straight on to higher education. How did you then end up working in Edmonton and what did you do there?

CJ: [00:02:30] After high school, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do, so I took a few years off, came actually out to Victoria and lived and worked in Victoria for a couple of years. I had an aunt and uncle there and I worked for the provincial government and had a night-time job as a waitress at the Strathcona Hotel in Victoria. And there, I started to learn about unions because the bartenders and the guys were in a union. But the women and servers in the restaurants were not. So I started to figure out a few things about that. And then eventually, I got tired of living in Victoria, travelled a bit in the States, ended up in Alberta and got a job for a year or two, I think it was. In those days you could pick and choose what kind of a job you wanted. And I had a job at a electrical company, Bruce Robinson Electric, and my job was dispatching repair guys for home appliances. And I shared a little office about the same size as this with a young man whose job it was dispatching repair jobs for commercial. So, commercial refrigeration, air conditioning, that kind of thing. And one day I found out that he made \$2 an hour more than I did. And we were basically doing the same job except I was speaking to women about their fridges and washing machines on the phone and he was dealing with, you know, commercial big stuff.

CJ: [00:04:28] So I thought, well, this doesn't look very good. And I tried to see if I could get a raise, get the same pay as he did. Oh, and by the way, he was in the union, as were all the guys in the shops, obviously. And they said, well, no, you make more than the rest of the women who work here, so no, that's not happening.

CJ: [00:04:48] So I kind of decided then that maybe I needed to get some higher education. So I quit and went to U of A, and I ended up with a Bachelor of Education degree because it was the only faculty that would have me because I didn't have French. So I didn't exactly want to be a teacher, but I knew I needed higher education.

KR: [00:05:11] What can you tell us about your university years at the University of Alberta and then later at UBC?

CJ: [00:05:18] So, as I say, I took education, towards a Bachelor of Education but I took as few teaching-related courses as possible. And I actually did a sort of double minor in fine arts and anthropology. And those were turbulent times, shall we say, on university campuses. There was, you know, the end of the Vietnam War, student activism, all of that sort of thing. And I actually got involved through one of my teachers in anthropology in the anti-apartheid movement on campus. It's a kind of a thread that has gone through my life ever since then. And also, I did Fine Arts, which as one of your questions, Keith, I ended up getting an offer of a scholarship after I graduated in Fine Arts, but I got married instead. I ended up married. My husband then was an aggie. He was doing his master's in agriculture and we ended up on a summer vacation out here at the coast.

CJ: [00:06:48] I dragged him into the personnel office at the government in Victoria and he applied for a job in the Ministry of Agriculture, anything that might come up. And we weren't back in Alberta two weeks and they phoned him and said, We have a job for you in Cloverdale.

KR: [00:07:04] Back you came.

CJ: [00:07:06] So back to British Columbia, and I've been here ever since. Unfortunately, one of the reasons we wanted to move here is because we had that NDP government going on and we arrived about three months before the Barrett government was defe— (laughter)

KR: [00:07:25] Good timing.

CJ: [00:07:25] Good timing, yes. (laughter)

KR: [00:07:29] I don't think there are a lot of people who get offered a full-ride scholarship to Yale on art. Can you talk a little bit about art as an aspect of your life?

CJ: [00:07:40] I got pretty good at printmaking. So that's basically what I got offered a scholarship in. I was taking various fine arts courses. And if you can't do, teach, if you can't, right? And so I've always been interested in art. And I guess according to my professors and teachers, I was pretty good at printmaking and also camera work and media work and things. I'm terrible with a brush in my hand—that's not an option. But other kinds of creative work and I even got some prizes for sculpture that I did at that point in time. So mixed media and that sort of thing. Right. And so I guess I was pretty good at it because they did offer me a scholarship to study it.

CJ: [00:08:36] But I also thought, I'm already 25 years old and it's like I'd like to start earning some money and studying fine art doesn't look like an opportunity to, you know, have a career and earn a decent paycheque. So I said thanks, but no thanks. But art has always been an interest even following after that.

KR: [00:09:06] So back you came to British Columbia?

CJ: [00:09:08] Yes.

KR: [00:09:08] You end up working for the Burnaby School Board.

CJ: [00:09:10] Right.

KR: [00:09:11] How did that happen?

CJ: [00:09:12] Well, when we did come back to B.C., B.C.'s university system being a bit different than Alberta, I had a three-year degree from U of A. And in order to get a qualification here, I had to take an extra year. So I ended up taking library courses so that I could qualify as a teacher-librarian. I did that and got credit for that. But again, I wasn't sure I wanted to teach. I wanted to be in, you know, the non-classroom side of education. I saw a job application in the newspaper, ended up working at the Media Resource Centre for Burnaby School Board where we had all the film and there was new things called videotapes and multimedia resources and those kind of things. That was a district-wide library. So I watched every National Film Board film ever made while I was in that job because I purchased them. It was my job to buy media that would be shared around the district. So I learned a lot about small animals.

KR: [00:10:36] So that's when you became a CUPE member?

CJ: [00:10:38] I did indeed.

KR: [00:10:40] When did you get involved with the union?

CJ: [00:10:41] Oh, within about a week, because my co-worker who sat beside me was vice-president of Local 379. She—You must come to a union meeting. And of course you come to a union meeting and there's always a vacancy on the executive for someone. And so they end up hooking you in and reeling you in to help out, be a part of it.

KR: [00:11:09] When did you go to work for the Burnaby School Board?

CJ: [00:11:11] '76, I think it was, yeah.

KR: [00:11:17] What was your first position on the executive.

CJ: [00:11:20] Oh, probably recording secretary, and I couldn't spell. So that's another issue I've always had. Not very good at spelling, typing minutes, always spelt 'business' wrong. And new business is something on every agenda, right.

KR: [00:11:37] Good thing you didn't become a business major.

CJ: [00:11:38] No. (laughter)

KR: [00:11:41] 1981 was a year of major strike activity in the Lower Mainland, including school boards. Can you tell us about your involvement in that strike and why it was important?

CJ: [00:11:50] Yes. So in those years leading up to '81, I think I ended up being vice-president of our local. And the issue of pay equity was bubbling up around that time. Short precursor to that, I attended I think my first CUPE national convention in maybe '78. And they talked about that every local union should have a women's committee and talked about women's issues. And so when we came home, I spoke to the president of our local, who was a guy, a tradesman carpenter, and I said, well, we should have a women's committee in our local because CUPE said we should have that. He said, "Over my dead body."

CJ: [00:12:51] So, then a whole group of us women ran for the executive, and he wasn't the president any longer. And the whole executive of the local was women. So we kind of took over and we started pressing issues like pay equity to be on our bargaining proposals. And then by '81, the school board locals in those days basically had a me-too agreement with the municipal locals in CUPE. So we would get whatever the muni locals would get. But the muni locals weren't doing anything about pay equity, but the school boards were. So the school locals were taking this up as an issue in bargaining over and above what the municipal locals were doing. And so our local—I think the municipal locals in '81 had been already out on strike for five weeks. And then my local, 379 and Surrey local, went on strike. And the interesting thing is that even though that was '81, the teachers in our districts were honoring our picket lines, which didn't used to happen, but Surrey and Burnaby teachers were more progressive than some others and they were honoring picket lines. So it was a pretty scary time. And I think the third day of our strike, the B.C. Federation of Labour came to our strike headquarters and said, "You didn't fill the paperwork right. Your strike is over. You guys have to go back to work."

CJ: [00:15:02] I know you have a curious look on your face. So all the municipal locals had been out for five– six weeks. The TWU [Telecommunications Workers Union] was out with Telus. There was some smaller unions that were on strike. And we had a Socred government. And I think the federation of labour was afraid that because now we're having this spread to school districts and the schools are being closed because there's no teachers. I think they thought the government was going to step in and legislate us and there was going to be big trouble, right. So, we had two really, really big guys come to the door of our strike headquarters and tell us that the strike was over. I later became friends with both of them, but they were told to do that. And so I dashed in my car down to CUPE office, head office. And Mike Kramer was in those days the BC Fed representative from CUPE and he called Jack Munro on the phone and said, What is going on? The Fed has just told the CUPE local that their strike has to be over. And Jack said, "Okay, give me a couple hours, I'll get back to you." And so Jack got back, and Mike said to me, Colleen, you need to get your people to not picket the schools anymore for three days. Can you do that? So that's a pretty big challenge. You've got 300 workers who are on strike and you have to go and tell them, Oh, by the way, we're not going to be picketing anymore. We're just going to be marching around the city. So we did that for three days. And then the powers that be got it sorted out that we would have rotating strikes. So between the BCTF [BC Teachers' Federation] and CUPE, they worked out this arrangement that we would have rotating strikes. I think we were out for three weeks and then the munis settled and then we settled. There was a big meeting down at the labour board with all of the unions and labour relations board and all those things, and we finally settled, right. But it was pretty hairy times.

KR: [00:17:45] But you've got some pay equity?

CJ: [00:17:47] But we got some pay equity. We did indeed. One of the women who worked at the resource centre where I was, she got over a three-year deal, she got a 7-zero, 70 percent, wage increase because we also eliminated some increments, right. Because that was another thing that only applied to women. Guys didn't have increments and the outside workers didn't have increments. And we also got a change from having flat-rate increases, which is what the outside workers got, and percentage increases, what the inside workers got. Now, if you're a high-end inside worker in city hall, a planner, percentage is lovely. If you're a low-end person, percentage is not so good. So we negotiated a floor for the percentages equal to the outside workers, right. So kind of gradually started to lift everyone up, which is the objective, right, lift everyone.

KR: [00:18:59] Now, that was also a time of pretty broad activity in the labour movement, in the 1980s. There was Operation Solidarity, there was a province-wide walk-out in 1987. I understand you were primarily involved in your local in those activities.

CJ: [00:19:14] Yes, but I was also getting more active outside the local. I was in CUPE Metro Executive. I think I was probably by the mid-'80s on the CUPE BC executive representing Metro area and involved in the labour council. Every night of the week there was some kind of a meeting going on, right. So, involved in those things too.

KR: [00:19:46] That was going to be my next question, that was the time when you also began to get more involved with CUPE BC.

CJ: [00:19:51] Right.

KR: [00:19:52] And with CUPE National.

CJ: [00:19:52] Right.

KR: [00:19:53] Can you talk about that?

CJ: [00:19:55] So I guess what I saw was, and again, coming out of the '81 strikes, and the pay equity, as I said, pay equity really wasn't an issue in the municipal locals throughout the sector. So I started to see that if you're going to take on really big challenges like this, you needed to have, you know, more people on board, right. So just my local saying, "We're going on strike for pay equity" is like, okay, good for you. What you needed to have is support of the rest of the organization, right. So you needed to have resolutions at convention that are supported by everybody, you needed to be involved in bargaining strategy. Pay equity is just not a bargaining issue. It's a legislative issue and a human rights issue. So you needed to be involved in politics, right. All of those things. So, that kind of led me to say, okay, well, you need to be active in the provincial executive. And when you get active there, you get involved in national union, those kind of things, too.

KR: [00:21:07] So you were elected secretary-treasurer of CUPE BC in 1991.

CJ: [00:21:11] Exactly.

KR: [00:21:12] But in the 1980s and even the 1990s, you weren't just involved in looking for pay equity from employers. You were also looking at pay equity issues within the union. Can you talk about that for a minute?

CJ: [00:21:25] Well, I was looking at equity issues within CUPE, and, for example, one of the things again was CUPE's financial structure and the dues structure was based on a flat amount. So everybody paid the same deduction off your paycheque every month for your dues was a flat amount, which also meant that for the union's behalf was, every time you went to a convention, you had to get a dues increase, which was always a difficult thing to pull off. So we started a campaign out of CUPE BC to have National Union changed to a percentage on dues structure so that low-paid workers paid the same amount relative to higher-paid workers in the union. There's a lot of internal issues like that that we brought forward within CUPE, within CUPE National, things like the rainbow issues, right. CUPE BC was the first of all of CUPE, I don't know about other unions, but we had a rainbow committee to recognize LGBTQ and minority ethnic workers, we had that in the early days, before the '90s even. So we would take on a lot of those internal issues as well.

KR: [00:23:12] Now, you were you were elected in 1991, and so I think was the NDP government.

CJ: [00:23:17] Yes, it was pretty much the same day. (laughter)

KR: [00:23:22] Can you talk about the union's work with the NDP government during your time in power?

CJ: [00:23:27] I think that's a big piece of my career was pushing political action within CUPE and the broader labour movement too. And I think it basically started again in the '80s and I was on the CUPE BC executive and the City of Richmond decided by one-vote majority to contract-out the garbage. And even though CUPE had a campaign and, you know, did all the right things and everything to keep, but one vote on Richmond City Council, and 130 workers lost their jobs. So I thought, well, this is not very good. We need to be more active. We need to make sure that next time, there's one vote goes the other direction, right. And so I actually chaired the provincial political action committee. And we started getting involved in endorsing candidates. So having the local union endorse candidates for election to school board and city councils. And this is like way before labour councils got into the game. And then we did trading lists of candidates, so that we started a mailing list for every CUPE local in the province. And because Burnaby workers live in Surrey, so we needed to have those workers know who they should vote for in Surrey because they didn't necessarily know or pay attention to that. So we started this whole system of sharing—the local who works there would share with all other CUPE members who live in that community who they think they should vote for in the civic elections. And that has blossomed into way, way more than that over many years. And labour councils now do that work and the Federation of Labour, other unions got involved in it. So it wasn't just CUPE. Then we would reach out to other unions and say, "Would you tell your members that CUPE would like them to vote for these people in your city," right. So that was the kind of start of all that.

CJ: [00:26:09] And then plus also we were getting more involved in provincial NDP politics. And hoping to, you know, get an NDP government. And so CUPE BC actually affiliated because it could be done then—can't be done anymore. But we became an affiliate of the NDP, and I think we're the only public-sector union to ever do that. And some people at the time said to me, "Why would you want to do that, Colleen?" Well, it is

because, again, we could take a resolution to the NDP convention to say, you get in power again, we want you to bring in pay equity legislation and we want you to be against contracting out or privatization of public-sector services, (laughter) right. Protect public-sector jobs, protect public-sector work. And we don't have to worry about, you know, getting a local constituency, we're there legitimately on behalf of our members, right. So that was unique, and I think, it was pretty successful, actually. But then things changed many years later, and that's not permitted anymore.

KR: [00:27:34] Well, things did change in 1991, the NDP was coming into power and by the end of the decade, they were coming toward the end. But in the year 2000, while they were still in power, there was a school board strike.

CJ: [00:27:51] Right, yes. Province-wide.

KR: [00:27:54] Can you tell us about that strike and the significance of it?

CJ: [00:27:56] So one of the things, as you know CUPE, but somebody in the future looking at this won't know so much about, is that CUPE sort of has two separate structures. One has to do with the bargaining and grievance handling and the day-to-day operations of the collective agreement, right, that whole process. And that's CUPE National. And then CUPE BC, which I was one of the leaders of, is the political arm, the policy arm, the political arm that facilitated, right. So in these big strikes and in these big things, CUPE BC didn't have a huge role except perhaps in the role of coordinating, information sharing, that kind of thing. And also, we also paid strike pay. So that was a big part of my job was making sure there's enough money in the bank to pay the workers that are on strike. And actually, in the old days, I remember literally signing hundreds of cheques every week. But it would have changed now. Anyway, and so the bargaining piece when all the locals would go on strike, the bargaining piece is not something that CUPE BC was actively involved in, at least not in my job. The president is the spokesperson. So the CUPE BC president often became the spokesperson and the media person. And as Brother O'Neill, who was my colleague for many of the years, the hood ornament, he would call himself, as you know, he had a much bigger role than I personally did. And sometimes when there were big strikes, in negotiating, trying to finish them off, but I actually hate bargaining. It was not something I really enjoyed.

CJ: [00:30:24] But I liked the administration and finding ways to bring people together. So that was more the role I played. It was my idea to have all-presidents meetings. Like we have this diverse number of local unions spread all over the province. How do we get all these people on the same page, right? Between conventions, if a big issue comes up, legislation comes down—so why don't we bring all the presidents together and have a meeting just of the presidents and then they can go out and they can spread the word and the message. And I think that's something that still goes on. I think they still have all-presidents or sectoral presidents dealing with issues. And it's something that's spread across CUPE, across the country. And I've heard of other unions that also now have presidents' councils and things like that, right. So those are the kind of things that I championed.

KR: [00:31:32] It as also very much a political strike, though. I believe it ended up with CUPE walking out of the BC Fed convention when Premier Dosanjh was speaking.

CJ: [00:31:38] Yes, that was one of my bad days. Yes. Oh, it was an ugly day, not only for the politics of it, but the weather. (laughter) It was very, very cold and rainy and windy day

at the Fed. But the irony of that is, even though it was a bitter strike, even though it was the NDP government that was still in power, at the next CUPE convention—and we did this every year—we voted, we maintained our affiliation to the NDP. So I think it was probably about a two-hour long debate. But at the end of the day, the delegates at the convention said, no, we still need to be in the house, right. We're not taking our backbone and going home and we're still going to stay in the house and make a difference. So that was—some people just couldn't even believe that that had happened. So after half our membership had been on strike against an NDP government, we still stayed affiliated to the NDP and still said no, that's the way we make a difference.

KR: [00:32:57] Well, in 2001, there was another big difference and the Liberal government got elected. How did that change the situation for CUPE and how did CUPE respond?

CJ: [00:33:09] (Laughter) That was, I think, was when we did the injury-to-one is an injury-to-all policy. So that if they—because the new government was basically picking on unions, like personal attacks. If they had an issue against an individual labour leader, they would go after their union and leave another one in the same position alone. So we had this policy, we established a [unclear]-type communications, that if they attack one local, one region, one thing, then we would have escalating job actions in support of them, by regions, and established a whole structure of how we would push back against all of that. And I think we came out of it pretty well. We ended up with the big HEU [Health Employees Union] illegal strike. So that was pretty trying times, too. But eventually, they proved they were right. Thanks to the courts. But takes a long time. So it was more a question of looking at the long picture than direct sanctions to start with.

KR: [00:34:46] But one of CUPE's first big labour actions after the Liberals got elected was the UBC strike in 2003.

CJ: [00:34:53] Yes.

KR: [00:34:55] Can you tell us about that?

CJ: [00:34:57] Again, my individual role was more of a support role. And actually, UBC was not affiliated to CUPE BC at the time, right. They weren't members of CUPE BC. But that didn't really matter, we were still out there at seven in the morning, in the dark with burning barrels, and helping them and supporting them again. So that's, you know, that's kind of the role that we played was, what do you need? How can we help? How can we coordinate and again, with the locals at UBC—and it's kind of reflective of UBC itself, isn't it, that they kind of really weren't part of—they kind of isolated from everyone else. But that brought them around because of the support that they did get from us, from the division, as we call it, CUPE BC division, and also Brother O'Neill as CUPE BC president—he was great on those kind of things.

KR: [00:36:08] So the next big thing that happened was in 2004, with the HEU going out on an illegal strike.

CJ: [00:36:15] Right.

KR: [00:36:16] Supported by much of the labour movement, including CUPE.

CJ: [00:36:19] Right.

KR: [00:36:19] Can you talk about that?

CJ: [00:36:21] So again, my role in those kind of things is more coordinating and helping, making sure that we have our locals on board to support them and back them up and going to rallies. Making sure we have enough flags and the backup support staff. And then again, at that strike, Barry was—O'Neill was very active in doing work between the government and the unions and helping. Because I don't think at that point HEU was in CUPE yet, were they? They were still an independent union, right. So I think that was also part of perhaps them moving towards eventually becoming an actual equal affiliate to CUPE BC that was part of CUPE, right.

KR: [00:37:35] Well, you retired in 2005, but even before then you were active in a number of different areas—the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, international solidarity work, credit unions, health services, municipal politics. But before we talk about any of those individually, could you just give us your thoughts on why you think it was important to be involved in all of those different areas?

CJ: [00:37:58] So, I think that we talk a lot in the labour movement about organizations and activities that are of the same values that we are. But then we just leave them go, right. And so, you know, there is always motions at the Fed conventions or whatever to say, oh, credit unions are really important, and we need to support credit unions. But then, credit union boards get taken over by people that have no support for the labour movement. And it's not union people that run for them. So that's something that I've always thought was important, that we tried to encourage members, and encourage by example, that we need to get people involved in those things. And it also helps in your community that, for example, we have a lot of CUPE social service workers work for non-profit organizations. Well, who runs those non-profit organizations? Who sits on the boards of those nonprofits, right? So those are the kind of things that our political action was not just about, you know, provincial politics or local politics. It also involves you being active in your community where there's an opportunity to run for a credit union board, to run for a not-for-profit-sector board. And it doesn't necessarily mean that there will be CUPE members there, but it could be organized workers there. So it's something I always saw it was important to do, and you lead by example.

KR: [00:40:11] You were really important in the founding of the B.C. office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. And you were also on the founding board.

CJ: [00:40:21] Yes.

KR: [00:40:21] I wonder if you could talk about why you felt that was important, and why the CCPA is important for them to have a B.C. office.

CJ: [00:40:30] So when Ken Novakowski phones you up—Okay, Ken, what do you want? And he and I really got along very well and CUPE and the BCTF got along very well. So, basically, the CCPA was established in Ontario, but there were people on the progressive side of politics who thought we should have a CCPA office in British Columbia. So you need money. So some of those people under Ken's leadership, said, Well, phone up CUPE, maybe they would like to join with us. So we got together some money and hired a person. His name was Seth Klein. And I remember doing the interviews. I think he was the only one we actually interviewed. But we did do an interview with him before we hired him. And I remember telling him that, "Okay, your first job, Seth, is to go out and get more money." So to get other unions to become supporting contributors to join in order to pay for

your salary and perhaps maybe even, you know, another person to work with you. And so the organization began. We had community members and I think originally just the BCTF and CUPE were on the board of—not the founding board—we were the only two unions. But, then eventually I do believe that the Hospital Employees Union came in, some other unions came in and joined and became sustaining members, kind of like Labour History Centre, same model, right. So first of all, you've got to get enough seed money to hire a person because none of these things work off the side of your desk. And that's one of the things I've tried to be the champion of. Everybody's got great ideas about causes and things that we could take on. But you know, they don't work unless you have dedicated resources for them.

CJ: [00:43:13] And the idea behind the CCPA was to press the NDP government at the time from the left. Because, you know, as I was thinking about this over the last few days, I thought, whatever happened to the B.C. Business Council? Remember that? They were always hammering the NDP government from the right, and they were very effective. There was all kinds of business organizations back in those days that were loud and vocal voices from the right side of the spectrum. And so some of us thought that, well, we had to, number one, counter those voices with legitimate research and arguments that could be put forward in the press, and that also, to press the NDP government from the left side of things and say, wait a minute, you shouldn't be going down that path. You need to go in another direction or you need to, you know, talk about budgets and those kinds of things, from an arm's length perspective, not just the unions talking in self-interest, but an organization that would develop respect on economic and policy issues like I believe the CPA has become. And I guess maybe we drove the B.C. Business Council out of business. I don't know. You never hear from them anymore, but you hear from the CCPA all the time.

KR: [00:44:48] Part of your work with the labour movement, and even after you were with the labour movement, was your involvement with credit unions and Blue Cross. Can you talk about why it was important for someone from the labour movement to be involved with organizations like that?

CJ: [00:45:06] So again, as I said previously, it's like in some instances, which is the case with Blue Cross, it was CUPE members who were the workers there. So having somebody from CUPE on the board, although I was on the board before they were CUPE members, I was on the board of the founding organization, which was actually the equivalent of MoveUP now. But when the two, when MSA [Medical Services Association] and CU&C [Credit Union & Cooperative Health Services Society] merged to become the big Blue Cross, then CUPE won the representation vote there, right. So I was on pre-that, but, again, some of these organizations had a long history of coming out in the '40s and that part of the century, of the progressive movement, which was the history of Blue Cross and CU&C and credit unions in B.C.

CJ: [00:46:09] Did you know that actually Vancity was a part of CU&C? It was like, credit union and they were together. And so the CEO of Blue Cross always rues the day that whoever it was decided way back then that they should separate, because it would have been credit union and benefit provider all in one organization, and a very big one at that. I think it's just important to have labour folks represented on these boards and all kinds of boards. And I was on the Workers' Compensation Board. Mike Harcourt fired me from Workers' Compensation Board in the '90s. (laughter) There becomes, and I think it's happening even moreso now, that you have to have some sort of expertise to be on Crown corporations boards, community boards, credit union boards, that you, you know, you have

to have a diploma from an organization back east that charges \$10,000 for your corporate training. And, no, you just have to be able to ask questions, which is the big thing and be able to stand up to, sometimes, the administration of organization that's trying to take you in the wrong direction, right. But it's important that everyday people, working people, have this chance to be on those boards and represent those points of view. And so they're not just always in the business class and, you know, the higher-ups. They need to have the look at what regular people and the regular members of those organizations have as a point of view.

KR: [00:48:32] Is that part of what moved you in 2002 to run for the Burnaby City Council where you continued to sit for, I think—

CJ: [00:48:41] 20 years.

KR: [00:48:42] 20 years? That's right.

CJ: [00:48:44] (laughter) Can you believe it? I've always had the idea of like, go before you're pushed. So I'd been secretary-treasurer of CUPE for, would be coming up to maybe 15 years and I thought it was time to retire. And so I thought, well, I could run for city council. Keep myself active and involved and retire from CUPE. So in 2002, I ran for Burnaby City Council. But I never expected to get elected. I thought I would, you know, get my name up there and then I would stay with CUPE for another two or three years and then run again. And then I would get elected. But I got elected the first time. So it was kind of a shock to me, to CUPE, to my then-colleagues on Burnaby City Council, who were very accommodating, since I still had a full-time job, and now I had a full-time job and a half-time job. And basically through my work at CUPE, I loved civic government. It's the closest to the people. It makes the decisions that most impact people's daily lives. And, you know, I am a political junkie and obviously have been for 40 years. So I thought that's an area where I could give back and use what I've learned through CUPE to continue that in Burnaby, and Burnaby had obviously a progressive council history. And I had some experience in areas like protecting public services, stopping contracting out, and through my role in CUPE as a financial secretary, although I never had any financial training—I had Bookkeeping 11, one year in high school. I learned a lot about finances over the years. And so that's also been a factor in, you know, budgets for cities and all of that sort of thing. So rather than raising taxes, finding other sources of revenue was something I focused on, those kind of things, right. So yeah, so all of a sudden 20 years had gone by. And I did not seek re-election this last term.

KR: [00:51:38] Was there anything over those 20, any things that particularly stand out about the sort of things you worked on?

CJ: [00:51:49] It's interesting. I was thinking about that myself. So, some of the kind of things that you achieve are the really little things, but that will carry on for a long time. We had the Burnaby Village Museum. You used to have to pay to get in the door. It was \$9 for a person to attend to the museum, which is right in the middle of a park. And so, we were talking about expanding some of the services there at council. We had a little discussion one night, and one of my colleagues on council said, 'Well, I come here every day' and I said, 'Well, of course you come here every day because it's free for you'. Council gets in free. But ordinary people costs them \$9. So I got staff to say, Okay, how much is it actually cost to run the museum? Well, it actually costs us \$18 a person to run the museum. So we're subsidizing the people that can afford to come. And we're making it so that people that can't afford to come can't get in the door. So I said, 'Well, how about if we don't charge

anything?' 'Oh, well that's going to cost us \$300,000 a year.' I said 'Well, let's try it for a couple of years just to see'. And then we could still sell carousel rides, and we still sell ice cream. Like, maybe, it might work all out in the end. So it's permanent now. No one will ever take it back. The museum is free. Sure, you spend money when you get in the door at the gift shop and things. But that's kind of the little changes that will last. No one's going to undo that and, you know, make people pay to enter the museum again. And we win awards. And the number of people that have the opportunity to go to the museum now and the tourists that come to the museum. It's like we're at number three on the list of most attended attractions for tourism in B.C. Our little museum. Because it's free. So those are the kind of things that, you know, they may seem small, but they have the lasting impact on your community and they're cool.

KR: [00:54:23] Colleen, you spent a lifetime in the labour movement. And even after you left being a full-time officer of the labour movement, you still stayed involved in labour-related issues.

CJ: [00:54:34] Right.

KR: [00:54:36] Could you talk about your most satisfying accomplishments of the work that you've done over those years?

CJ: [00:54:42] Well, I still keep an eye out on a lot of those issues. I forgot to mention before, you see my pay equity pin? Dennis McGann. Dennis designed this pin with the big chunk out of it representing how much women's pay is versus men's. So it might have gone up, might have filled in a little bit of that hole, but we still don't have it. We had pay equity legislation, Sharon can say, maybe for six months in British Columbia. Premier Dosanjh's government, we brought in the legislation, and the first thing the Liberals did was get rid of it. So we still don't have it. So I still keep an eye on issues like that. So keep an eye on city stuff. It's very hard to remove myself from looking at some of the issues in our city that I've championed over the years.

CJ: [00:55:40] But I think one of the longest threads going back to my days at University of Alberta was solidarity work and international work. And even that flowed over into the city because in Burnaby, we had sister cities. We had relationships with cities in other countries. And because of COVID, of course, all of that, you know, has happened. But, you know, establishing worker relationships with our sister cities in Arizona and we would have exchanges, you know. So those are the kind of things that are a thread that goes through all of it.

CJ: [00:56:37] And especially within CUPE, I think, (long pause) how do I tell this story? Unions are kind of structured the same way that the governments are structured. And international work used to be seen as the purview of the federal arms of the labour movement. So in my early days of involvement in the Lower Mainland in the '70s and early '80s, apartheid. Anti-apartheid was like huge internationally within progressive communities. With the labour council, we were not allowed to speak of such things. We got that letter from Shirley G.E. Carr, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, saying, 'Shame on you, Vancouver Labour Council. You had a speaker about apartheid at your labour council meeting and that's the CLC's jurisdiction. You're not supposed to be involved in international things like that.'

CJ: [00:57:59] Can you imagine?

KR: [00:57:55] Yes.

KR: [00:57:56] Yes, you imagine. Okay, So anyway, so some of us said, 'Sorry, Shirley, we're doing our own thing here,' right? And so we formed a SACTU [South African Congress of Trade Unions] Solidarity Committee and there was people working and parading outside of Shell stations on Saturday morning on Burrard Street with picket signs and being active in that. There was a small group, oh, Jeff Keighley—I can't remember some of the names of the other people back in the day, a fellow from the machinists union, John Fitzpatrick. You know, people like this. We met at the (gasps) labour council office, don't tell Shirley. We had our meetings at the fisherman's hall and the labour council office said it was all off the books, because it wasn't allowed. So the trade union peace group, all of those kind of things.

CJ: [00:58:52] And CUPE was the same. CUPE, Oh no, we we're not touching that international stuff, that the CLC's jurisdiction. So finally we got a resolution through CUPE National to have a national solidarity committee. Then we had a CUPE BC solidarity committee because we couldn't do it 'til National did it. And then we started working with international work with Co-Development Canada, and we had projects in Nicaragua to support a women's group in Nicaragua. And we had relationships in Cuba with the public-sector unions there. My one road trip was to Cuba on an exchange in workers there. But that all costs money, so. Only the Steelworkers had a fund directly related to funding international work. And so we said, okay let's try that in CUPE BC. And so we started a fund where you actually, a portion of the dues that every member pays, 0.01 percent, so one cent of the dollar of the dues that people pay goes to a special segregated fund for, we call it humanitarian because it's solidarity work, but it's also for crisis and those kind of things. And so that fund, I actually looked up this statement from this year's convention, it has over two million dollars in it. And now the way the CUPE BC folks use it, it's like an endowment. And so the return on that two million dollars every year is what they use to finance projects and things like that. So that's something I'm pretty proud of that. Again, that's something that's going to be ongoing and that work is ongoing. And the relationships that we established, it expanded to work with workers in Colombia. And one such, Sharon can talk about that. That happened after I left the union. So I think I'm most proud of contributing to that. And I did have the opportunity to travel to South Africa. And though I didn't meet Mandela, I did meet Bishop Tutu, and I did go to Robben Island. So some of those are kind of highlights of my career.

KR: [01:01:54] And I understand that as part of that, you personally played a pretty big role in getting that first resolution through at the national convention to begin this process.

CJ: [01:02:03] Oh, yes, yes. I think it's funny because the current president of CUPE Ontario, who was young and a rookie delegate at the time, apparently he was really, really impressed with my speech. And Jeff Rose was the national president at the time. And we used to have some battles because the national union was slow to move sometimes. And so, yes, with the convention in Quebec, they had to turn around. Eventually we got a solution back on the floor. And that wasn't the first time we tried, but that was the time that it was successful.

CJ: [01:02:52] Likewise, we had a president of my local at the Burnaby school board had said to me once after a national convention, 'You know, why doesn't CUPE National have trustees? We all have to have trustees at the local. Why doesn't CUPE National have trustees like us?' That's a good point. Why doesn't it? So my local sent in resolution to convention, one local, one resolution. Forget it. Aha. CUPE BC sent a resolution to the

national convention. Oh, okay. Well, we'll just put it in that pile. And then, I think it took four conventions of the National Union to actually get the National Union to have trustees who are elected at convention and to oversee the finances of the National Union. And surprise, surprise, I got elected as one of the very first trustees. I remember Jeff Rose hammering the gavel and saying, 'Colleen Jordan, six-year term.' (laughter) So that was the first round of trustees that were elected. Bang! It kind of sounded like a sentence.

KR: [01:04:21] So just briefly, what does it look like, the kind of organization that goes on, bringing other areas onside and other locals onside to support international solidarity and trustees and things like that? What does that look like?

CJ: [01:04:39] So again, that's the kind of a role that CUPE BC could do. So for example, we would—CUPE National has the schools. So you have the week-long schools at Naramata where we're teaching rank and file members bargaining, et cetera. So what we would do, we would bring a delegate from Cuba to Naramata for the week and they would sit at dinner. They would come and speak in the classes. They would get to know the people individually. I remember I actually drove a brother from South Africa up to Naramata myself one year for the conference, right. So they speak to the delegates, so you have that real solidarity and identification between—you actually know somebody who's a union activist in South Africa, who's a union activist in Nicaragua, and having them come and speak at convention, be part of it, you know, those kind of things to convince the locals. And it's not charity, it's solidarity. You're supporting their work.

CJ: [01:06:08] Here's an example, one of my favourites. In the SACTU days and the boycotts and all of that, one of the things that we were encouraged to do was go to our city councils and school boards and those people and get them to say they will not handle goods from South Africa. So we took a letter to the Burnaby School Board and of course the Burnaby School Board were like, 'What kind of goods from South Africa are we ever going to be using?' Okay, no problem. Pass a motion: the Burnaby School Board will not use goods manufactured in South Africa.

CJ: [01:06:55] 'So 7:30 in the morning, one day a couple of months later, my phone rings and it's the maintenance director at the school district. He said, 'Colleen, the grounds guys will not go to work.' I said, 'What the heck is going on?' He said, 'They say you said they're not supposed to touch stuff from South Africa and we have chicken wire that they're supposed to put up around the grass and it says 'Made in South Africa.' And they say they're not touching it.'

CJ: [01:07:28] I said, 'Yep, that's right.' And the school board, Mr. Maintenance Supervisor, has a policy that the school board will not have goods from South Africa. Well, what am I supposed to do? I said, 'You better go get some chicken wire that's not made in South Africa because we're not touching it. And your employer, the Burnaby School Board, has said they will not handle goods from South Africa.' So. Okay. So, you know, amazing. It worked. It really, really worked. So that's the kind of thing that makes one little piece of a puzzle that eventually changes the world.

KR [01:08:18] And that's a great place to conclude. Just before we do conclude, is there anything else you'd like to say about your time in the labour movement?

CJ [01:08:26] Oh, I think I would just about run out.

KR [01:08:31] Well, thank you so much.