

Interview: Ivan Limpricht (IL)

Interviewer: Phil Legg (PL)

Date: June 21 2023

Location: Burnaby, BC

Transcription: Cathy Walker

IL [00:00:06] I was born and raised in the Fraser Valley, British Columbia, lived in the Langley area, actually grew up in what is called Aldergrove and went to high school there. I went to North Otter Elementary and then went to Aldergrove High School. When I finished high school, I went to work at a warehouse in Burnaby. Before that, when I was living and growing up, my parents owned a small trucking company. It was called Limpricht, the Manure King Ltd. That was always a bit of an albatross in some ways around my neck in terms of how other people would see me. It was a point of humour at school. That was challenging. I worked with my dad quite a bit. We cleaned chicken and turkey barns. I learned how to operate the equipment and drive truck, class three truck, and run a front end loader and clean barns and ate a lot of dust.

IL [00:01:23] A lot of dust. It's pretty dirty, but it taught me the need for hard work. I would shovel a lot and drive and tarp and load and do all those different things. All the while, of course I was going to school and it was not particularly involved in anything at school. I was an average student. I wasn't anything great. I was just a regular person. When I graduated in 1975, my Dad was still running his company. He said, you have to go and work somewhere else. Before you can come work for me, you have to work somewhere else. That was fine. My cousin was working at that time for the trucking company that did the trucking for Overwaitea Foods in Burnaby. He knew the people working in the warehouse. It was a very well-paid job at the time. It was a really well-paid job and it had about eight or nine weeks a year off, paid right from the start.

PL [00:02:34] Wow.

IL [00:02:35] Full benefit package, so I started to go and interview for that about six months before I graduated. I'd go in there every second week and meet the guy because you're young and they want to, ...After I graduated, they still hadn't hired me, so I went to work at a gas station at 232nd Street, a Chevron station. It's still there, although it's been rebuilt. I worked there for about a week and then I went back into Overwaitea to meet the manager and he said, 'Well, we're going to hire you.' We're going to start you the next day or whatever. I said, 'okay.' Then I made arrangements at the gas station, so the first week I was at the warehouse, I was working double shifts. I would work all day during the day at the gas station from eight until four and then I'd go and drive into the warehouse and work from four till 12. My first shift at the warehouse was ten kg. sugar bags, unloading them. B.C. Sugar was on strike at that time, so there was sugar being brought in by transport truck from Ontario with Redpath Sugar. The first day I think I unloaded with another guy two full loads of sugar. It was hot. It was July 5th, 1975. I remember that because it's my daughter's birthday. I did that. Then after that, (we got the work done way more quickly than they expected), you got to sweep floors. I did that for the first little while and got to know the people there, did the work that that was required, learning how to pick orders and stock and all that type of stuff.

IL [00:04:31] After a few years, you get to know people and friends of mine were shop stewards. Being part of the union at that time was viewed quite positively within the workplace, so there was a competition to become shop steward. I ran once or twice, with

no success. A few years later, I found my way on day shift, in 1984. That was my third run as a shop steward. I was successful and I ran against my best friend who also worked at the warehouse with me and won the shop steward position by a small margin. It was still 50 or 60 people voting but I beat them up by one vote or something like that. After that I started to become a little more involved. There was some challenges at the local union. I think it was a couple of years later the local had gone into trusteeship and of course we had a chief shop steward structure in our place. There was lots of turmoil around that. The then-shop steward was trying to get things riled up, wanted to get things straightened out. I ended up getting more involved from that perspective. I got to know the head trustee who at that time was Brooke Sundin. I got to know Brooke a little bit. I was the day shift steward at that time and started to get more active. The then-shop steward went on temporary staff with the union. He was the chief shop steward, so I was asked to take over the chief shop steward position.

PL [00:06:20] Okay.

IL [00:06:22] That was an hour a day that was paid for by the company. It was negotiated in the agreement so I started to do that work. At some point in there, there was an election for union officers as well. I was elected to the executive board after a campaign. It was a full blown campaign and I actually ran on a slate that was opposite from what Brooke and his group was. I was fortunate enough that I was successful in being elected. That was a challenging time. I got to know Brooke really well. We became good friends and we worked hard on doing things. There was a lot of turmoil in the workplace. I originally wanted to be a shop steward because I wanted to help people that really seemed to get into trouble, they didn't know what to do. They'd get themselves into the worst situations and you never know what was going to come. With the turmoil at the facility, the employer wanted to make some major changes with respect to the warehouse. We were opposed to that because the changes they wanted to make meant that we would have to give up significant benefits, mostly time off.

IL [00:07:41] But some money. Then they wanted to...we wouldn't agree. It was a long fight. Ultimately they decided they were going to get rid of us, so they started contracting out our work and it became a very acrimonious workplace. I continued—at that point, the chief shop steward became a full time position. There were so much stuff going on.

IL [00:08:14] Because the collective agreement allowed for us to be able to utilize whatever time was necessary to do the work, it was taking a full day and more. I was spending a lot of time. You're counselling people, you're talking to people and there's a lot of anxiety. At one point we had over 400 members. They reduced that down to about 230 or 240. Over the period, the one period, I think I filed 500 grievances in two days. We were pretty angry. They were unhappy with us.

IL [00:08:51] Ultimately, they sold the warehouse facility to an independent operator, a third party logistics operator. We ended up working with them. We signed, I signed, negotiated and signed my first ten-year collective agreement. People thought I was nuts and maybe I was, but it was under, I had the guidance of the union executive at that time, the support for doing that and it was supported by the membership. We signed basically a rollover agreement with escalator clause. It had wage increases in it and had a reopener for basic elements. The employer actually gave us, give me personally, the first right of interpretation. I argued with them and they'd want to.

PL [00:09:39] What?

IL [00:09:39] What does that mean? That means that they can still do what they want to do, but you get first shot. We didn't have a lot of grievances. There was a great deal of mistrust. The guy that I worked with at that time, his name was Jeff Allen. We built a good relationship and we built some trust. They needed to operate to be able to have a profitable operation or else they wouldn't be able to continue. Once we accepted that we were part of a separate operation, then we had to try and figure that out. We worked with them and did that. That was '92 when I signed that agreement.

IL [00:10:19] By 1994, Brooke asked me to come to work on temporary staff, so I went to work on temporary staff. I worked for about a year and a half, temporary staff. I was servicing. We did what we call the membership servicing program where I travelled the whole province with basically with members. We would just go in and do a meet and greet throughout the province in every location, primarily retail. We would go into every location where we had visitation rights. That was to help increase the profile of the local union. We had to stay away from collective agreement questions, which is always a challenge. When you go in and you talk with members, they want to talk about the collective agreement. We're just there to say hi and can I help? If there's any issues to say, we'll bring it to your union representative, but not to deal with any issues. We did that. I did a number of other special projects.

IL [00:11:20] Then I was assigned to north Vancouver Island for about a year and a bit. That was in '97. There was a labour dispute right around that time. I was on the island during that time and working from Nanaimo all the way up to Sointula and the north, Port Hardy and everything in between. I did that through the strike, worked eight, ten weeks straight at times. During the labour dispute I think I was home once. Home for a day. You'd come home, you'd do laundry and you go back on the road. It was a pretty busy time. I enjoyed it. It was great. The members were great. Members will always respond if they knew you cared about them, and I did. I always have. That was the most rewarding part of the job. Even members that got themselves in a huge pickle, it was always a pleasure to meet with them and talk with them. They're respectful and they're honest for the most part. You'd run into some difficult people at times, but at times things happen, you just can't explain. People do things that you have no way of figuring it out. You know that.

IL [00:12:48] After about a year and a bit, I got a posting back to the Lower Mainland and I started servicing out in the Delta-Surrey area. I had a territory there. While I was on the island, I continued to service my old facility. I was the servicing rep for there. There was another facility called Venice Bakery and I also inherited that. I had a membership of about 2,000 members at that time that I was servicing.

PL [00:13:22] How many units?

IL [00:13:25] Probably about 25. I mean, the big units, Venice was a couple hundred, Overwaitea, Loman was about 210, 215. It varied a little bit. The balance was on the island.

PL [00:13:40] It was all retail or was it just a mix of?

IL [00:13:44] I had the bakery, which was Venice, I had the warehouse, which was the Overwaitea or Loman warehouse. Then I had everything on the island. I had co-ops, I had gas bars, I had retail, I had all different manner of whatever we represented on the island. Primarily it would be retail, grocery on the island. There were all these little...there was a

place I negotiated a new agreement for. It was called Farquharson Farms. They're no longer there. They closed after a few years, but they were just on the Courtenay, where the bypasses are today.

IL [00:14:19] I negotiated the first agreement at Sointula Co-op. That was an interesting event. I remember I presented the agreement to the staff. It was a bit weird even negotiating because they had the board of directors come in and represent them at the bargaining table. They were very much about, talked a lot about family and how they wanted to build a partnership. To me that was odd. I'd never experienced that before. We did reach an agreement and my chief shop steward at the time, she was great and so was her assistant. We worked really hard. It took two or three weeks. We had a guy from Federated come out and negotiate, and he was pretty challenging to deal with because they have a very rigid process. In any event, in the last week or so, we worked from eight in the morning 'till midnight and we got an agreement. Then we do the ratification meeting. I present everything and they said, okay, we want to take a break. We were in a house where I happened to be staying, at the same house that the negotiator, the company negotiator, because there's no other place to stay. He was gone. He wasn't there. They said, well, we want to take a break. I said, okay, we'll take a break. They took a break and they all went outside and they all smoked a fat one. Like, really? They came back in. Anyway, the agreement passed with very good results. They were very happy.

IL [00:15:57] Shortly after that I posted into Vancouver and as I said, started to work in the servicing of the territory in the lower mainland in the Surrey-Delta area. That was primarily Safeway and Overwaita Save-On. I say had the warehouse and Canada Bread. That was all, that was mine. I did that for, I'm going to say a year and a bit, might have been 18 months, might have been two years.

IL [00:16:31] We had settled the new agreement with Overwaita Save-On and Safeway. Overwaita had come into the pension plan and we were also creating a health and welfare trust. Brooke asked me to come in and to work with the companies and with the legal to develop the text for the health and welfare trust. Also to transition the pension plan into a divisional structure where we had a company, not a company, we had one union plan that had one benefit level. We were going to create a multi divisional plan where we had the Overwaita division, the Safeway division, the miscellaneous division, and the terminated employer division. We did that. I had also, when I negotiated the Loman agreement, had negotiated a Loman pension plan that was an appendage to the pre-existing. There already was a little deviation to the plan before this divisional structure came in. I was put with the task of pulling all this together with legal counsel and with the companies. That's a year and a half I'm not getting back. It was wicked. The companies wanted basically exactly the plans that they had at the time, but they had things in it that you and I wouldn't agree with, but that was part of the deal. They got to keep the same benefit level. We just got to oversee it and there were some other triggers in it. We did that and I was successful at that, relatively successful. Brooke would tell you that I made an error or two, although he didn't hold that against me. We reached the successful conclusion to that. Those plans continue to operate today. There have been improvements because as time goes on and legislation goes on, the things that we thought we should have had, we got anyway. You know, paternity leave, mat leave. Birth control, that was one of the things the employers were definitely opposed to putting within the agreement. We did that and then I worked on that for I was a director, I guess, for about three and a half years.

IL [00:18:51] Our secretary-treasurer, who had been ill, decided that he was going to retire. He retired and Brooke asked me in and if I would stand and I said, yes, I would. He took my name to the executive board. After some fairly significant discussion, they approved me as, and elected me as secretary-treasurer. I served as secretary-treasurer for about eight years. There were some challenging times as secretary-treasurer. We didn't have a lot of money because the way things had just worked, it was hard to do. One of the first things I did as secretary-treasurer is I put some real serious limitations on some of the interior spending. Nothing could be ordered in the office for office supplies without my approval. It sounded silly at the time. There were bills all over the place that I didn't know that needed to be picked up because it was a bit of a mess. We didn't have a lot of assets. We owned our building on Kingsway, but we didn't have a lot else. I worked on that pretty hard under Brooke, and Brooke's total support and managed to turn that around and paid off a lot of the things that were outstanding. Then we started to build our asset base up a bit and worked on that.

IL [00:20:21] After about eight years, Brooke decided that he was going to retire. He talked to me and said he was going to retire. He was going to retire a year before we actually made the decision. We talked about it and he realized that it was a pretty monumental event. My wife was pretty stressed and so he decided that he would not do it right then. He told me this after the fact, not at the time. Then he retired and I was elected the president by the executive board at that time. I served for about a year and a bit and ran for election. I was opposed, but it was okay. I was elected quite well. Then I served as the president, worked on... Within a couple years we had Overwaitea Safeway bargaining, major set of bargaining for both employers. We were at loggerheads with Overwaitea. It was Overwaitea Save-On, very challenging. It was very hard. That was kind of a carryover from my days with them at the warehouse. Of course, they had some misgivings about me, about being the leader, because in the last set of bargaining before Brooke retired, he actually had me lead, not chair the set of bargaining with Overwaitea Save-On even though he was still the lead. The employer, when the first meeting that I chaired they said, well, where's your fearless leader because they really didn't want to have to talk to me because I was like the guy with the black hood.

IL [00:22:12] -e reached an agreement and it wasn't perfect. I mean, at the time they had negotiated in '97, they negotiated a start-up agreement for new hires. It was a much lower rate. There was a lot of turmoil in the organization from the members. There's no doubt that there was turmoil there, but it had to be done for everybody to survive. By the time we got to 2002, 2003, there was a lot of pent-up demand for improvements because there was serious limitations on what these people could do. They were at nine bucks an hour, no benefits. It was very restrictive. They were limited to 20 hours a week. It was just not good. Being the person that was in charge of benefits up till that point, I said, we got to get these people some benefits. The employer said, well, no, these are just transient people. We're not going to...that was Safeway. We beat on them at the table because I was at the table. This was Safeway. They finally relented and said, well, we'll agree to some level of benefits, but you have to, it'll be based on the money you negotiate. I mean, it's a start. You got to start. We were successful in getting that. They didn't agree right away. It took some time and they actually gave the point at the table, but they said there'll be a transition. The guy who was in charge of the Safeway bargaining met with Brooke and Leif after the bargaining about six months later and said that they would agree. He wanted to make sure I wasn't in the room when he said that because he knew I was the one driving it.

IL [00:23:52] We did that. After Brooke retired, there was still a lot of unmet demand. We still had this damn 20 hour limitation, which really stuck in my craw. For the rest of the staff, we had what was called daily seniority. This is important for part time people. If you had a shift, if somebody was junior, you had a shift longer that came up, you got to claim that shift. It created some havoc for the company because there's a lot of a lot of moving around and people have lives, so there's a lot of moving parts. We argued with them and fought with them. We got them to agree to lift the 20 hour cap. We couldn't get them to agree to the schedule on daily seniority, but we got them to agree to a modification of it where people could actually get up to 40 hours a week because the criteria to get a lot of benefits, the issue was either 24 or 32 hour threshold, so you got to get the hours. We finally got there and we worked on that and we lifted the restriction, that was huge to get the restriction from 20 to 40. That allowed people to find a pathway forward.

IL [00:25:08] In 2013, I'm moving ahead a little bit, we met with both Save-On and Overwaitea, and Safeway and ultimately concluded the deal with Overwaitea Save-On and it took over a year. I'm really glossing over what happened, but we reached an understanding with the company. We agreed that we would do our best to make sure that we would help to make things run, but they had to provide the needs that our members had. They had to meet those needs. That's on balance. It's never perfect for everyone. We reached an agreement where there were significant increases for the junior scale that moved it up. I don't remember what the rate was, but it was very substantial. They were able to capture more hours. They were able to capture benefits and they were able to capture a lot of things. There was also a commitment on the part of the company to expand and grow. The company committed I don't remember how many million dollars, but it was substantial. It was in the neighbourhood of five stores a year at one point.

PL [00:26:27] This is Save-On committing to.

IL [00:26:31] Yeah. We got a commitment that they would make major investments and they did. We've seen, I've seen since I've even retired Overwaitea Save-On has probably grown by, I would say 35, 40% in British Columbia. It's massive. When I retired, I think we had 55 main stores. There were gas bars and stuff. That's pushing 85-90 in B.C. today. There's a lot of stores. Of course, if you have more stores, you have more members. Members are able to capture more hours. There were transfer rights between stores. They didn't work as well as I would have liked, but there was more opportunity. That was because we had a commitment from the operations side of the company, because we purposely said, look, we need to have operations involved at the table. We can't just deal with labour relations because in the past we dealt with labour relations and there was, I'll say there was double-talk at times. That doesn't get anybody anywhere.

IL [00:27:37] We fought with the people from the company in the management, the top management fought. We argued vigorously for our positions and we both identified what we needed. We found what we had to have and they found what they had to have. We reached that agreement and we signed that agreement and it was ratified. It was ratified on a pretty high basis. I don't remember the numbers, but it was over 70% for sure. It may have been higher than that. We moved forward from there. We worked and things went okay. There were a few bumps along the way, as there always are. They had to close some stores at times because they're tired. They have sort of redevelop them. Those always created challenges. There were some buyouts and things that caused harm to people, which I really didn't like, but I didn't see any way around those things.

IL [00:28:35] We had a clause in the agreement that was really to deal with situations where they had to close or they felt they had to close. They would make an argument and then we would end up usually with Ready where he would come in, make adjustments to a store that was under that umbrella. They had a, I can't remember the term that we used, but there was an umbrella. There was a group of stores where they put us on notice and then there was a process that we would follow and we would, of course, try to delay the process as long as we could, because we didn't want to have members benefits adjusted. Sometimes it adjusted the number of full time top jobs to the others, then those people would be distributed within a zone. Sometimes within a zone, you may live in Mission, but then you got to work in White Rock to maintain your pay. There was a lot of heartache by a lot of people. It was hard on people. Overall, I think it was the best thing that we could do at the time. I think the proof is in the pudding. If you look at what's happened with Overwaitea Save-On the expansion over the last ten years, it's been significant.

IL [00:29:51] Safeway was another story. I had major discussions with Safeway right up 'till two months before I retired and I could not prevail upon them. Sobey's bought Safeway out. Sobey's treated it like a real estate play. They wanted to have an agreement that looked like something that I was not prepared to agree to. We ended up taking a bit of a haircut there. It was referred to Ready. He made decisions that I wasn't particularly happy with.

IL [00:30:30] That was where we ended up. There was a lot of turmoil around that. I know people were very upset, including me. That's not why I retired. I retired because my daughter had been quite ill and we thought we were going to lose her the year before I retired. It just made me do a reality check. I just said, as much as I love this job and I love being president of the union.

PL [00:30:56] And you don't want to lose that one.

IL [00:30:59] No.

PL [00:31:00] That's a tough one.

IL [00:31:02] That was the best job I ever had.

PL [00:31:04] Yeah. Well, it's an important, it's played such a huge role in the province. There's no doubt about that. Let's talk for a moment about UFCW and some of the work that UFCW did around migrant farmworkers, because I know that some of this was back east.

IL [00:31:22] Yeah, we did. We were involved here as well. We did some work with farmworkers that was sponsored by the national office, and we had a farmworkers organizing group out here. We had some temporary staff that worked on that during each season because they would come, they're temporary workers so they would come in seasonally. We would have responses to that and we would help them with EI claims, and other, and WorkSafe claims and things like that. It was very challenging and difficult. We were never successful to the way that we would have liked to be. I remember we organized a few farms. The first farm we organized, I thought, okay, well this is good. We're going to start to make headway. What happens is the employer picks those people up the next morning, takes them, puts them on a van and takes them to the airport, puts them on a plane and sends them home.

IL [00:32:20] They have to pay for the plane fare themselves. It comes out of their pay. In the future, when I got calls about whether we applied for an application for a farm unit, I'm, we're not helping these people.

IL [00:32:36] It would make me sad. We pulled back on the organizing a little bit and we still provided support and assistance. Ultimately, I think that it just wasn't coming together. I think UFCW decided after, they're at it for ten years, I think they decided to pull back and not, because legislation across the country is different and legislation in B.C. is different and you've got a three-party agreement, right? You got an agreement with the government of British Columbia, government of Canada and whatever country they come from.

IL [00:33:16] It builds in a minimum wage and some other ancillary pieces, but to get beyond that was exceptionally difficult. They were vulnerable.

IL [00:33:28] They are vulnerable. It's horrible to see the conditions that those people are in. It isn't right. We shouldn't allow temporary foreign workers to be in that position in this country. It shouldn't happen, but it does. I'm only one voice among millions, and it doesn't matter. But it does matter. I see these people even today when I go into the grocery stores. You can see who they are. They're three or four men, usually young men. They're a lot of Mexicans, some Guatemalans, some, and many other different countries that I can't even remember. They're all very nice people and they work very, very hard. Some of them are treated okay, but they're not treated in the way that they should be. Temporary foreign workers, if they're going to be temporary foreign workers, should have a pathway to citizenship. That's what I argued when we were fighting for them. That's what should happen today. If we're going to utilize these people basically under indenturement, there should be, at the very least, a pathway to citizenship because what are they doing? They're working ten, 12 hours a day. They're sending the majority of their money back home to take care of their family. They want to take care of their family. That's what should happen. I don't know if we'll ever get there. We see huge transitions within the economy today. We see mechanization. We see computerization and all those things are starting to take over many different things. I was watching the news this morning. Kubota has come up with this combine that the farmer will drive it around the square of the field once, and then he just turns it loose and it'll harvest the whole crop. That's partially to get away from having people do the work. You think about nanobots and all the other things that are going on. Ultimately, a lot of the things that we're doing, the little tasks will be done by machinery in some way.

IL [00:35:33] You're going to ask me what's the biggest challenge going forward? The biggest challenge going forward in my mind is to manage what happens to people. You look at what happened during COVID and all these programs come out and I've got friends that are very wealthy and some that aren't. My one good friend in particular said to me, it doesn't really matter what programs they put in because he says the wealthy will figure out the best way to utilize that. Now some would say take advantage. I said it the way I think it's the right way to say it. They've got a room full of accountants, they understand all the nuances and all the trigger points so they're going to utilize them, the grey, to get the best benefit. If you look at the concentration of wealth during COVID, the wealthy got wealthier. The world over, the wealthy are getting wealthier.

IL [00:36:35] I don't think there's any way to stop that. What we need to do is we need to take care of the people in society. I mean, should we have, and some people say it's communism, but should we have a basic social safety net? I think we should.

IL [00:36:53] On the same token, I don't think it should take away from people's ability or willingness to work. Willingness, it's more than willingness. Desire. I didn't become the president of the union because I wanted to be the president of the union. I became the president of the union because I wanted to help people. I wanted to do things. I got up in the morning, pretty well every day at six or 6:30. There's no question that I wanted to go to work. I want to get things done. Even today, even though I've slowed down, people say to me, well, it's like you're still working. I'm doing half what I used to do. You get up and you go and you need something to get you up and make you go. I don't know how to build that into people. Some people don't have that, and that's unfortunate. We need to make sure people have the opportunity.

IL [00:37:43] Sometimes opportunity comes because you push, too. I'm fortunate. I'm a white male and I get more opportunity than women and I get more opportunity than people of colour. I know that.

IL [00:37:57] I didn't become president just because I'm white.

IL [00:38:00] I became president because I work bloody hard and I want to do the right thing, but so do other people. Women work hard and different people of different colours work hard. Indigenous people work hard. They need the opportunity. We need to support that. How do we do that in a holistic way? I don't know. It's very confusing. You listen and I've listened carefully at times. Many of the labour leaders that I'm friends with are women.

IL [00:38:29] You listen to the suffering that they go through and then you run into the odd person that's very radical on the left side of it, to the exclusion of men. I'm going, well, wait a minute, that's not going to help us move forward. We need together to move forward. Should we take some lumps because of some of the stupid stuff we've done? Yeah, we should. I think men have done some stupid things.

IL [00:38:55] We don't have exclusivity on that. It doesn't matter what group you're from. It doesn't matter where you're from in the world or what strata in society. There's people that are good, people that will work hard and people that want to do the right thing. And there's people that aren't as good. I like to think that I'm on the side that want to do things right and do things good. But I'm not perfect, like nobody is. The only way we get better is by to continue to learn, to talk, to listen to people, and to see what ideas they have, and what bothers them. How can I help them?

PL [00:39:32] Interesting. Several people that we've interviewed have touched on this, the issue of inequality as being a problem that needs to be solved. I'm wondering, too, if because you've obviously played a role in terms of politics and promoting NDP stuff. Has that been, do you see that sort of as part and parcel of what the labour movement is about as well?

IL [00:40:03] I think the labour movement needs to play a part in politics. I'm always mindful of, I'll call it the different stratas of politics. There's politics wherever we go.

IL [00:40:13] There's politics within the union organization. There's politics within the companies. There's politics within whatever you do. I think the most important thing is from my perspective is I always try to treat people with respect. It's hard. At times you're being really put upon and yet you still have to treat people with respect. You really don't have to. But I've found that if you get in the mud and sling mud with anybody that's slinging mud at you, nobody wins.

IL [00:40:47] The only way to move forward is to have a stiff upper lip and to say, okay, how do we resolve this problem? Whatever the problem is, how do we deal with that? What do you need?

IL [00:41:00] What do I need?

IL [00:41:03] What do the people I'm representing need? How do we get to yes? It sounds...it's one of the basic principles I learned a long time ago when I did some other stuff about sales. Getting to yes is really important, but getting to yes just for the sake of yes, isn't it. It takes a lot of dialogue. People used to say to me, we used to have an executive board of 30 people, it's a small convention. I said, if you let people discuss, and I never used really strict rules of order when I chaired meetings, because I didn't believe in that. Sometimes people would ramble and while that can be frustrating at times, that's also how you get those little kernels that help you find the different ideas to a solution to solve problems. Ultimately what we want to do is we want to solve problems. We want to help people. There's a million different perspectives. How do we do that in a collaborative way?

IL [00:42:07] Politics, some of the elected leadership today, the NDP leadership, I'm proud of the work they've done. I am. I helped them get in and I'm proud of that.

PL [00:42:18] You did some work on employment standards, right?

IL [00:42:21] I was appointed to the Fair Wage Commission by the labour minister, Harry Bains appointed me to the commission. We did a lot of work on that. We were successful in making a report to government that I like to think that helped to see the improvements to the minimum wage over the last six, seven years. I think it's been helpful. Now when you look at inflation, it's still not enough. I mean, we were working on the Fair Wage Commission, which we only recently concluded on 'what's a living wage?' Well, there's no definition in living wage anywhere in the world that's the same. They're all different.

IL [00:43:04] Some people call what's a living wage, it's actually a minimum wage, and it shouldn't be legislated. It should be. It's all over the map. So when people start to talk about a living wage, first thing you need to do is, define what that is. When you say minimum wage, people know what that means. They know. But living wage, it means a thousand different things.

IL [00:43:28] It's been treated differently in virtually every part of the world. Every part of the world has a different application. Then there's little exceptions, and so it's very troubling. One thing that's clear is that politics does play a huge role.

IL [00:43:45] We made recommendations about the farmworkers, about them being paid minimum wage. Unfortunately, that wasn't accepted. I think that's political to some degree. One of the lobby groups, the farmers will say, well, we have to be able to compete against our competitors, which is fine, I understand that. Yet their major competitor in farming in B.C. is Washington state, and the farm workers in Washington state get paid the minimum wage. The minimum wage in Washington state is higher than ours now. Sometimes it's a bit of smoke, and then a statement. A lot of times people don't really drill down to, what are the real facts? Sometimes it's a perception you can't get past. A lot of times people make decisions based on what I believe this, it's based on the emotional. It's not based on any fact pattern.

PL [00:44:46] Yeah. In terms of politics, I guess the important thing is, in the case of the fair wage work that you were doing, it's one thing to develop a report, it's another thing to be giving it to a government that actually wants to receive it.

IL [00:45:02] Right.

PL [00:45:02] Yeah. The importance of having a government that's prepared to listen to working people is.

IL [00:45:11] Well, I think, first off, that to start with, I don't think if you had had a different government in place that they would have even asked for the report.

IL [00:45:19] I think that's a signal. They might have asked for a report on minimum wage. I don't know that they would have asked for a report on the living wage. Would they put the same weight on it? Probably not. It's important to have that advice. I worked with the chair and the business person on the commission. We spent a lot of hours just listening to people about what their concerns were on minimum wage and again on living wage.

IL [00:45:58] There is a lot of concern. It's important that you have government that's prepared to listen, prepared to implement some of these things. That kind of, in my mind, goes without saying. If I didn't have somebody who I think would listen, I don't think I would have even agreed to sit on the commission.

PL [00:46:17] Yeah. Let's talk a little bit more about some of the challenges that you see the labour movement generally facing in the years ahead. You talked a little bit about inequality is a big one. Are there others?

IL [00:46:30] Inequality is a big one. The ability to organize and the misperception about what unions represent is...and that sort of underpins how you can organize. I remember talking to different friends of my parents, usually, because those are the people that would speak to me the most about it, and they'd say to me, well, when are you going to get a real job? I would say, well, I'll stack your work up against mine any day of the week. There's this perception that people that work for the union or that are union members don't work hard.

PL [00:47:05] Yeah. Yeah.

IL [00:47:07] That's not true. There are some, but I don't care if it's union or non-union, you're going to have some people that are working hard and some people that don't. I don't think it has any difference. If you have a union, what do you get? You get a process, if there's challenges, you get a process where they can't say, well, I don't like you anymore, so you're not going to work here anymore. There is a process where if you want to go, if you think I'm not up to standard, there's a process in place. Some will say that that's too cumbersome. I think it's enough that you're able to have that discussion where somebody is kind of put on notice. You better step it up or there's going to be some problems. That was always enough for me. If I ain't heard my buddy got disciplined, I'm going to go, okay. I always work hard, but you still... People need that. I've got a friend of mine that's, he's the same age as me and he's still working. He was independent for a lot of years, and now he's working for somebody else. He really at one point thought, that's a sweet touch. You just, you don't have to work that hard. I said, there's nothing to do with that. You have to work hard.

IL [00:48:33] Working hard is about who you are. It's about me right in here. It's not because I belong to a union.

IL [00:48:43] I don't know what else to tell you. It's pretty basic. Some people are going to step up and some people aren't. Are there going to be challenges? Yeah, there's going to be challenges. My worst fear is that we get things into place that are so bureaucratic in nature that the people that are really working don't get recognized.

IL [00:49:05] That people will game the system. That'd be my biggest concern.

PL [00:49:09] Yeah. So just in terms maybe to wrap it up because you've touched on the organizing and some of the challenges there. Two or three that stand out for you. I know that people's perceptions of unions are a bit of a roadblock. Anything else?

IL [00:49:27] To me that is the biggest roadblock, because it goes up and down every strata.

IL [00:49:36] It goes with the working person just starting out, what they were taught in school. They don't learn about what unions are about. The government has removed a lot of the barriers that I was concerned about before, card check and those types of things. There have been some decisions that have come down where if there was employer interference, they've changed the laws around that. They've even changed the, put more horsepower behind even the Employment Standards branch, where people don't have to just self-advocate. It's maybe not as good as it should be, but it's much improved. You're still going to have people that say, well, I'm Wayne Gretzky and I'm going to do better than everybody else.

IL [00:50:24] How many Wayne Gretzkys are there?

IL [00:50:28] I know everybody thinks they work hard, but the proof is in the pudding.

IL [00:50:37] There's lots of circumstances where employers think if they fire somebody, it's just going to push everybody to go faster.

IL [00:50:47] How do you prove that? I don't know.

IL [00:50:52] In my mind, our members are honest, hardworking people, and they always have been. Do they need checks and balances to make sure everybody stands up straight and pays attention? Yeah, I need that, too.

IL [00:51:05] I need somebody to say, hey, Ivan, you're being an asshole. It makes you wait a minute. What am I doing? What's going on? If you don't have somebody to represent you that can represent you without fear of reprisal, most people don't have that discussion.

IL [00:51:28] They're fearful to go and ask their boss for a raise.

IL [00:51:31] Yeah, exactly.

IL [00:51:33] If they can do that without fear that's good.

IL [00:51:37] Not everybody can.

IL [00:51:38] Not everybody can.

IL [00:51:38] Yeah.

IL [00:51:39] Right.