

**Interview: Harold Steves (HS)**  
**Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)**  
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**Transcription: Jane Player**

**KN** It's June the first, 2023, and we're here at the BC Labour Heritage Centre to interview Harold Steves. Good morning, Harold.

**HS** Good morning.

**KN** I wonder if we could start by getting a little bit of a background on your early life. Can you tell us first of all, when and where you were born?

**HS** I was born on the 29th of May 1937. It was just a couple of days back. I was born in St Paul's Hospital. My mother was from Mount Pleasant and that's where her doctor was from. If I had my father's doctor, I would have probably been born in the hospital in Steveston. Anyway, I was born in Vancouver.

**KN** Can you tell us something about the family that you were born into? What did your parents do? Were they progressive? What kind of an upbringing did you have?

**HS** Actually, it was somewhat of a troublesome upbringing, not from the family. My parents had lost the farm, most of the farm, during the Great Depression. It was a constant struggle to make ends meet. My dad was always looking to find ways to put bread on the table.

**KN** This farm was in Richmond?

**HS** The farm was in Richmond, yeah. The farm had belonged to my grandfather, and my dad had inherited half of it during the Depression, and my uncle had inherited the other half. The other half went for \$6 an acre—tax sale—and my dad was struggling to put a mortgage on his. It was about 40 acres, and so it was a constant battle. That's what I remember most about the family was this constant—basically living on the farm—lots to eat but living in somewhat in poverty. So, he got a government job. You asked about the politics. He never discussed politics. What he told me was he was always afraid for his job. What he told me was, 'When the Liberals are in power, I'm a Liberal. When the Conservatives are in power, I'm a Conservative, and when I go out of town to Prince George, I attend Tommy Douglas rallies.' That was his politics. Basically, as it turns out, most of the stuff he was involved in was quite progressive.

**KN** Your parents actually took an active role with the Japanese Canadians who were interned during the Second World War, and they actually had their property seized. The area in which you lived had a sizeable Japanese community. Can you talk a bit about that and the position your parents took during that period of time?

**HS** Yes. Basically, our next door neighbours—we didn't have any Caucasian neighbours nearby at all. The neighbour across the street was a Japanese family. The farmer farming the 40 acres that we lost was Chinese, and north of us was also another Chinese farmer, and the neighbour to the east was a Caucasian with a Cowichan wife. I didn't know any white kids at all. My playmate was Fumiko Kojiro who lived across the street. Her father

was the principal of the Japanese Language School, and they were close family friends. When the Japanese were evacuated, the first person that was picked up by the RCMP was Mr. Kojiro, right out of his office, along with two other of the Japanese leaders. Mrs. Kojiro came to our place for help from my parents. All I remember about that was—I was only five years old—but I remember my dad coming home one day and I guess he'd been arguing with the custodian of enemy alien property and that group that basically were responsible for moving them out. He came home one day and said, 'They called me a white Jap.' That's been etched in my mind ever since. That was sort of the early upbringing. On my fifth birthday my parents gave me a birthday party and—oh, they evacuated the Japanese just before I was five—and when my mother and my baby brother (in a baby buggy) went to Steveston and when they got—I don't know whether it was a train or the tram—Fumiko gave me her teddy bear, which I basically wore out. Right after that was my birthday and we had a birthday party. It was all white kids and I refused to play with them. I walked out and played on the lawn with my First Nations friend. That's the kinda—what was happening at the time. I think that's what sort of almost formed my life from that point on.

**KN** Can you talk briefly about your experience in the schools that you went to in Steveston and what subjects you were particularly interested in? What do you remember about your school years?

**HS** Basically, at school I was friends with First Nations kids the first few years until the Japanese came back and Ukrainian kids. Then when the Japanese came back, I became friends with the Japanese children. I remember the first day some of the Japanese kids came back, my teacher, Mrs. Hunter, introduced them to the class and asked us to befriend them, which I did, and they became my best friends. The courses I liked most were science, art and music and even went through university with those particular things in mind.

**KN** When you were a young person, you had a number of jobs. Can you talk about those jobs perhaps, and tell me if any of them gave you any experience with unions?

**HS** Actually, I started work in the summertime during school when I was about 12. That was to help the family out because we were short of money. I remember when I was about 12 years old, I made \$160 which I gave to my dad to buy hay for the cows, and he gave me two cows. That was a bartering system. I was working for Lum Poi. As it turns out, Lum Poi treated me like a son. He had a family in China and for some reason or other they couldn't come to Canada, so somebody wrote a letter and said, 'Well, you should adopt a white kid.' Well, I was it, and so he treated me like a son. I was getting 20 cents an hour when I was 12. I was getting 25 cents when I was 13 and I was foreman. All the pickers of pickling cucumbers and planting cabbages, they were all school kids. By today's standards, they were all underage. That's the way it was then. I used to go to Chinatown with him in his old truck and he would sell the produce to the grocery stores and restaurants. When I was 14, I decided I wanted to get a little bit better paying job. I lied about my age and got a job at the Imperial Cannery and became a member of the UFAWU [United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union]. I've still got my union pin from 1952. I wasn't active in the UFAWU except that we were on strike, I think, in the summer of '52 for a while. That's where I learned about unions. I became a lifelong supporter of the Fisherman's Union even though I was a member for only about five or six years—not active in the union until after I was out of the union. (laughter)

**KN** You actually became a member when you were 15 years old? That's amazing.

**HS** Yeah.

**KN** Once you finished your school, high school, you went to UBC [University of British Columbia]. Can you tell us a bit about that? Did you travel there from home? Did you live at home and go there every day to UBC, or did you live near UBC, and what did you do academically and politically while you were at the university?

**HS** I travelled from home. I actually sold my two cows and about three more and bought a car. That's part of the story. I went to UBC, and my Japanese friends and Ukrainian friends carpoled with me. They didn't have cars. They all paid me a couple of dollars a week for gas and that's how we attended. We all lived at home. That's when I first got involved, not exactly politically. I wasn't involved in any political party but for some reason or other—well, my background was poverty, right—when Wacky Bennett raised the fees, I got a bit upset. I organized a demonstration with mostly of agricultural students. The car I was using to carpool was a 1950 Dodge convertible that I bought second hand, and we loaded it up with half a dozen people and a whole pile of placards. We went to the airport and Bennett [W.A.C. Bennett] flew in on a plane. There was no security; we drove right out on the runway right to the plane. When he got off the plane, there we were, and everybody jumped out with their placards as he went to his car. He got in his car. We all jumped into my car, and then we hit it all the way down Granville Street to the Hotel Vancouver behind him. Every time we stopped at a stop sign raising our signs. My art took place at that time. I drew a front page cartoon for the UBC paper, and it was titled "Fee on You". I had Bennett, and I had Hitler with his hand on his shoulder and a few other things in it, and they were burying higher education. That was the front page cartoon. Unfortunately, in that issue of the paper also somebody else had put a couple of pictures that were anti-Christian and we all got suspended. It was only a short suspension. Anyway, I did get suspended from UBC.

**KN** From the newspaper?

**HS** Yeah. Because I was on the editorial board of the UBC paper that allowed this—I forget what it was—it had a picture of somebody standing in front of a totem pole or something with their arms crossed—said look at the nail holes in his hands or something ridiculous that was published. It was the Easter edition of the UBC paper. Anyway, that was one of the events.

**KN** What programs did you take? What did you do academically at UBC?

**HS** Actually, I was originally going into wildlife management, but eventually I ended up graduating in genetics. Other than being a political activist, I wasn't involved in any political party at the time. The CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation] club at the time was quite tame.

**KN** You eventually did join the CCF and the NDP while you were quite young. Can you remember what prompted you to take on this political affiliation?

**HS** Yeah, in 1959 the City of Richmond rezoned our family farm against the wishes of my family. They'd been struggling to get it back in operation and finally got a sizeable herd of cows. To get a proper milk quota they had to have a new dairy and a more modern barn. When my dad went in to get a building permit to build a new dairy and repair the barn, the City of Richmond wouldn't give him one. That's how he found out that the land had been

zoned for industry. The farmers—all the farmers of Richmond—found out about this at the same time. They'd been given no notice. It was just done at the council meeting one night. They had a big protest meeting at Brighthouse Racetrack at their club house there. There was a couple of hundred farmers there, but nobody knew what to do. One of my Ukrainian friends, Len Closier, said you know, you should join the NDP, or the CCF, because they're the farmers' party—and so I did. That became a long career in the CCF—NDP. I immediately started talking to other CCF members, and we ended up with an ad hoc farmers' committee in Richmond, Surrey and Delta of other young farmers that were concerned about their farmland being rezoned as well.

**KN** That's an interesting segue into your political life. One of the first things that happened to you politically was when the NDP came into existence, you actually were elected as the first president of the NDP youth organization in B.C. How did that happen? Can you talk about that a bit and some of the things you did in that role?

**HS** Yeah, what happened there, I had just joined the CCF a year earlier and we formed a CCF/NDP club in Steveston and Bill Sigurgeirson and a bunch of my friends organized the club. We had the biggest youth club, we had 40 members. When they had the founding convention, some of them didn't like the person that was running for president. They said, 'Why don't you run?' I said, 'No, no, I don't want to run.' Anyway, they talked me into it but (laughter) because we had such a big block vote, I ended up being president of the youth. It was simply because we had the most active group, and it was—a lot of it was due to the rezonings and the things that had gone on in Richmond, plus the fact we had a number of Japanese people, First Nations people, and that in the youth in Richmond as well. So, I became President. It was a tumultuous year because we had a lot of internal battles and the party thought we were too left wing and we ended up having eight people expelled from the party for attending meetings of the League for Socialist Action. One of the things that we did do, I remember, organizing Colin Gablemann's political party in the Okanagan. We drove up to the Okanagan, and I remember Colin and the group thought we'd be a bunch of stuffy politicians, and they found out we were real human beings. We had a good time. Colin became a good friend and when he came down for the executive and council meetings, he used to sleep on my couch when he was down here. However, we had a lot of problems with the group from the League for Socialist Action trying to run the whole organization and the party establishment expelled—actually about seven we did belong, and one of them Paul Sigurgeirson was dating one of the girls that belonged and that was the reason for his expulsion. They had Colin and I on the list as well, but we weren't involved with that group, so I guess they let us stay on. I don't remember much about it other than defending the people that were expelled. I remember Gordon Dowding was our legal—one of the persons legally to help us and another lawyer, whose name I don't remember now, that took up the cause that they shouldn't really be expelling these young people—but they did.

**KN** You continued with your activism through the sixties. First of all, you were involved in Ban the Bomb marches that was very prominent then, and then eventually the protest movement against the war in Vietnam grew, and you were part of that as well. Can you talk a bit about both of those?

**HS** Yeah. I'm not sure why I got involved in the Ban the Bomb movement, but I did, and quite often I was parade marshal. It was partly my music. I had taken up folk singing when I was at UBC and attended Pete Seeger concerts and stuff like that at UBC. I carried that on in the sixties, but I was doing a bit of it in the fifties, and I would take my guitar on the marches and help lead the singing. I was chief parade marshal in the last march against

the war in Vietnam. I went through my files last night to see if I could find any of the song sheets and I found one from the Ban the Bomb march, but I couldn't find any others. I'm not sure where I put it here. Okay, I guess I didn't bring it.

**KN** So music was always part of the protest movement.

**HS** Yeah, and actually, I was into music more than anything else. I didn't speak. The first time I ever spoke publicly was in 1968. This is probably your next question. I'm not sure. We had a petition out against dumping raw sewage in the river from all the houses that were being built on the farmland. We collected 10,000 names on a petition, but the Council ignored it. We didn't word it right, and in those days, if you got 10 percent of the population to sign a petition, you could force a referendum. We didn't put the wording of the bylaw number on the petition, and, therefore, they ruled it out as invalid. We set up an organization which was called the Richmond Anti-Pollution Association. I was first vice-president, and it was the first environmental group in Canada. My first speeches were about sewage treatment, and we ran candidates, and I got elected for Council. The same year I was chair of the environment committee for the NDP and as chair of the environment committee in 1968, I organized the first environmental demonstration in B.C. I had lots of experience from the Ban the Bomb movement and being parade marshal in the anti-Vietnam War movement that I took that experience. And we organized a demonstration at the Peace Arch. Again, I didn't speak I played the guitar. That was in '68; we had 4,000 people come to that demonstration. That's some of it. I'm not sure that answers the question.

**KN** That's good, and no, I think the other thing that leads out from your from your singing is that your connection with Paul Phillips, who was also a folk singer, and you got involved in an unemployment march in Victoria, and also you were involved with Paul in trying to organize a union at the art gallery. Can you talk a bit about that?

**HS** Yeah, that's right. I took a year out from UBC. Actually, I took a couple of years off from UBC before I finished off. I had a construction job in the summertime, and I belonged to a labour union at that time. I got a full time job working at the Vancouver Art Gallery the year I took off, and we figured the wages were too low. It was 200 bucks a month, and so Paul and I decided we'd organize a union, and we talked to all the employees. Well, the directors of the art gallery board, I guess, found out about it. On the day before Christmas, we got a notice that we were terminated effective January the first, (laughter) so that was that. I got fired. Anyway, I guess that was my first labour activity, and my first labour experience was getting fired for trying to form a union. Around the same time there was an unemployed demonstration in Victoria, and I was still working at the Art Gallery at the time, but I decided that I was going to join that demonstration. I guess I must have foresaw that I was going to be unemployed pretty soon. I packed my guitar without knowing anybody over there and grabbed—they had a free bus for people to go over on the demonstration—and I packed my guitar and went on the ferry with this guitar. Well, there were a couple of other guitarists there—one of them's name was Paul Johnson, I think—and they were the ones who were supposed to be leading the march. By the time I got to Victoria, I'd learned the words of Solidarity Forever.

**KN** Let's talk a bit about your teaching, Harold. You were a teacher. You started teaching in Richmond in 1964. As a science teacher, you got involved with some interesting community work involving the municipality as well. Can you talk a bit about that process?

**HS** Yes, a number of environmental things were happening. Actually, when the construction job I had was building the Oak Street Bridge, and it went right through the Lulu Island bog and a friend of mine, Will Pollock who was a conservationist, was concerned about it. We got together and tried to figure out how we could save the remaining part of the bog. Richmond had a garbage dump on the south side of the river. We went to the Council and suggested that they give the federal government the garbage dump because they wanted to develop a port and they could develop industry on the garbage dump and the federal government owned the on the bog and the council agreed. That's how we got the Richmond Nature Park. That was about 1965 or '66 I guess. Then I got elected to council and when I was elected to council, we got some grants from the federal government to hire young people to help set the nature park up. That was my first, I guess, that was my first political activity. That was actually before we had the petition on sewage treatment. I did that as the chair of the Richmond Science Teachers' Association. I did some other things like that. We had the first audio visual TV in B.C. We did a pilot project with the kids teaching a science lesson. The Richmond School board wouldn't go for it. The schools superintendent told me I was 20 years ahead of time, but all the other school districts adopted it, and eventually we did too. There was there were lots of episodes like that. Len Closier, my friend, was also a teacher and he suggested I put my name in to be a school principal. I did, and I was runner up for school vice-principal, and it would have been a vice-principal the next year. Then I looked at it and saw how all the administrations had to toe the line. I decided I never want to do that, and I never applied again. I had more fun rocking the boat than going along for the ride.

**KN** You mentioned that you had run for municipal council. That was in 1968 when you first ran?

**HS** Yeah, that's right.

**KN** Can you talk a bit about that? You got elected the first time you ran, is that right?

**HS** Actually, elections were every year, and I ran the year before, and I didn't make it and so that'd be '67. In '68, after we'd formed the Richmond Anti-Pollution Association. I ran, and I was elected. There's the headline, 'What a Shocker Pollutionmania.' (holds up newspaper) Trudeau had just got elected and they called it Trudeaumania. My main support came from the fishermen. The Fishermen's Union was all mostly Japanese fishermen, and they organized my campaign and ran the campaign and it's probably the best campaign I ever had for anything. So, because the fishermen and the union were so concerned about pollution on the river. It was unspeakable what they caught in their nets. You'd put your net down and you get all this, you know, toilet paper, everything was coming down the river. That's why we ran that campaign, and that's why it was run by the fishermen.

**KN** So, Harold, we'll come back to your involvement on council, which was very extensive, as we know. Before that, I just wanted to ask you a question about your involvement in the NDP, because I know that you became very active in what was then called the Waffle, which was a left wing caucus, a very broad left wing caucus within the NDP. Can you talk about that a bit and how it affected your overall role within the Richmond NDP, for example?

**HS** In the NDP—I'm not sure exactly when it was—we had a young person, John Conway, ran for the leadership and I supported him. I was a delegate from Richmond and the Richmond delegation didn't support him. When the votes were counted, I got up as the

only member of Richmond, give up a clenched fist salute and congratulated him. I was told I was finished in Richmond. When I ran for council, I had no support from the Richmond NDP whatsoever. It was strictly run by the fishermen, and I was effectively running on a slate, not against because they didn't run a full slate, but with no cooperation from Bob McMath and the others that were endorsed by the NDP. I got involved in the Waffle, but also because of my activities in Richmond, the NDP Richmond actually changed, and I found I had majority support after a bit. Richmond became quite progressive in terms of the NDP, and I was spokesperson for the Waffle. I can't remember who all the people were on the Waffle steering committee, but I know Cliff Anstein was, Peter Dent, a couple of women from the agricultural sector that—I called them the agrarian socialists, Nell Bedows and Ann Hamilton. I don't remember who the others were. There were eight of us at the time.

**HS** We ran candidates year in and year out for the NDP executive. Just before the 1972 election, we got a majority on the executive. When it came to set up campaign policy, we wrote the policy. Today it's run by the—I guess the policy is written by the Premier. At that time the party made up the policy and because I had been campaigning for years to get an agricultural land bank, I got to write the policy in agriculture. That took several years as well. Before the Waffle happened and before we captured the majority in the executive, we had set up an ad hoc agriculture committee that brought forward a resolution to set up a land bank, and that became party policy. The idea of a land bank—you would buy the land and the government would own it, and then you'd sell it to farmers. You'd own the land right around the perimeter of a city so that the city couldn't expand the way they do. After I'd been on Richmond Council for years, I changed my mind on that. When we adopted the policy for the election, it was a resolution to set up a zoning process that zoned all the agricultural land as agriculture. I wrote it down just for the record: "The NDP will establish a land zoning program to set aside areas for agricultural production and to prevent such land being subdivided for industrial and residential areas." That's what we drafted as an executive. I wrote it up for the executive and that was adopted and put out in a book called 'New Deal for People'.

**HS** When Barrett got elected, he appointed all the cabinet ministers were people who had been previously elected, so none of the newcomers were in the cabinet. Dave Stupich had a degree in agriculture, and he became agriculture minister. Barrett told his ministers to bring in the most important policies for your department and we all know the 100 or so of new bylaws and legislation that the NDP brought in—well, that's how they did it. He gave every cabinet minister free range to bring in the most important ones, and Dave Stupich brought in the LR [Agricultural Land Reserve]. When asked about it, he said, 'Well, it's our policy.' He pulled the little book out and held it up and said, 'Here it is', because the public wasn't aware about it. The newspapers didn't cover very much of what we were doing before the election. The night I was nominated Dave Barrett announced in Richmond that he was going to bring in the Agricultural Land Reserve. The headlines in the local the papers said 'Steves-Barrett to Save Farmland', but the city papers didn't cover it at all. It helped me get elected because people were very angry about what was happening to the farmland at that time in Richmond, but the rest of the world was shocked when we brought in the ALR.

**KN** Let's go to that election Harold in 1972. You are nominated on July 12th in 1972, to become the NDP candidate in Richmond, and the election was called later that month for the 30th of August. Can you talk about that election campaign itself? What was happening in your mind, in both your riding and in the province that we ended up with you getting elected and the NDP getting elected. What was going on in your view?

**HS** Well, as far as Richmond was concerned, I had topped the polls in '68 and we had elections every two years. I topped the polls again in 1970. I'd become extremely popular as a city councillor, largely fighting the sewage treatment issue, but also the agricultural issue. We had stopped—loco [Imperial Oil Corporation] was going to put in a super port at Garry Point in Steveston—we stopped that, and a number of other things happened in those years when I was on council. I was chair of the fire committee, and we changed over from volunteer firemen to a paid fire department with a union, and actually, I worked with the union to do that. That's another one of my unique experiences was organizing the firemen's union. All of these things were very popular moves in Richmond and so that all helped. We campaigned on those issues, but we spread them out to B.C. wide issues, and I campaigned for royalties on natural gas and oil. I remember Dave Yorke—I got Dave Yorke to be my campaign organizer. He drafted some great ads on why we should put royalties on coal. I'm not sure what the others were but I remember that one very well because we were battling with the ports over the coal port in Delta. All these issues were very popular in Richmond. Basically, province-wide there was total dissatisfaction with the Socred government, so Barrett played upon that, and basically, he low-keyed it. When Berger [Tom Berger] ran, Berger said, 'Ready to govern', and people were, 'Oh my God, they are ready to government (laughter)—we don't want let them in.' When he ran basically he said 'tell them enough is enough'. In other words, he didn't say, we're going to get elected, and but—'Just vote for the NDP guys. Just tell them enough is enough.' That's what people did.

**KN** Now, while you were an MLA, there was one notable event involving the new B.C. Labour Code that Labour Minister Bill King was bringing in, and you and two other MLAs, Colin Gablemann and Rosemary Brown, voted against particular aspects of this legislation, not against the whole thing. Can you recount what in particular you were opposed to in the legislation? What were the items?

**HS** There was a clause that restricted labour organization that we were concerned about, and so we voted against it, and there was a clause that restricted workers compensation, and in particular, fishermen were excluded. They were called independent businessmen. We voted against all the clauses, or several clauses, that we felt were not exactly pro-union, and so we voted against—myself, Colin Gablemann and Rosemary Brown. The workers compensation was interesting because right after we had voted against not including fishermen, a fishing family from Steveston was lost at sea off of Haida Gwaii, and the whole family, all the male members of the family, went down with the boat. Bill King who was Minister of Labour came to me and said, 'We've changed our mind.' He actually let me introduce the legislation as a backbencher to bring in an amendment to the Labour Code to give workers compensation to fishermen, which I thought was quite, you know, that was pretty nice.

**KN** Yes, it was.

**HS** We had other occasions—as I mentioned earlier, I helped organize the firemen's union in Richmond, and so I had a lot of experience with firemen's unions, and there was a stage where the government ordered the firemen's union back to work. There was a strike, and we voted against ordering the firemen back to work. Then, at the dying moments of the NDP government, they ordered, I think it was Safeway workers in Nanaimo back to work, and the three of us voted against that. Basically, wherever we saw something we thought was anti-union, we actually stood up and voted no.



**KN** Before we leave your time in office as an MLA, is there anything further you want to say about the Agricultural Land Reserve and about how that was?

**HS** Yeah, basically we brought in the ALR which was obviously hotly contested. There were huge demonstrations against it. I gave a two-hour long speech—a person that wasn't used to giving speeches—and I was accused of filibustering our own legislation with the opposition. I wanted to lay out exactly what was happening. What was happening was that realtors were actually out organizing the campaign against us, and they sent out thousands, we got thousands of postcards saying Stop Bill 42. The postmark all came from Block Brothers Realty, and so I raised that issue. Block Brothers looked at it and said, 'Holy mackerel, we don't own any farmland', and told their realtors stop because they owned residential land. Block Brothers realized suddenly that the residential values would probably go up, but that's one of the ironies of it all. It was mostly realtors that were opposing it and land speculators. Somebody leaked a report from a company named Western Realty from the U.K. who said right in the report they were going to attempt to buy 1,000 acres of unzoned land in Richmond and Delta, which they could get converted to residential use. I read that report into the record. Effectively, that's what was happening. We actually had the evidence of one company. We knew it was being done, but we actually got the evidence of one company that was doing it. They would buy the land, and they'd sit on it, and then they'd go in and get the land rezoned. With the Land Commission Act, they couldn't do that. One aspect of the Land Commission Act was also to have a land bank so that we would buy and sell and lease land. During the four years we were the government and a year after, the land bank provided 10,000 acres of farmland to young farmers. You're hearing it today that young farmers can't afford land. Well, that's how we did it. We either bought the land or we leased the land, or we worked out agreements with landowners that they would lease land to young farmers. That's what's needed today. When the Socreds got in they got rid of the land bank. We also set up a program—I forgot what it was called now—insurance, agricultural income insurance program for farmers. The blueberry farmers—the co-op had gone broke, and farmers were hurting in some areas. We'd sell crop insurance. That was turfed out after the Socreds got in as well.

**HS** There were a couple of other things I should mention that I was involved in. I mentioned that Dave Yorke had done these ads on royalties. I became quite outspoken in the government in favour of nationalization of some of the resource industries—and we actually did. It was natural gas. We didn't nationalize it at the wells, but we nationalized it at the border. If the gas was in the pipeline and what the gas companies were doing, they were selling the gas across the border for what it costs them to produce, so they paid no taxes in Canada. Then they increase the value in the United States and probably doubled it. We looked at it and said, we're going to increase it to the cost they're selling it for in the U.S.—and we did. I got sent by the caucus all across Canada on a speaking tour to tell how we did it—mostly to NDP conventions and NDP governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. While I was there, I met up with some other people in Ontario when I was speaking at one of the conferences in Ontario, and they were actually looking into energy alternatives. When I came back, we set up an energy alternative symposium at the PNE [Pacific National Exhibition] where we went into solar and wind and geothermal, all the things we're talking about today. We had it all on display in 1974, I guess it was. The Socreds got in, and B.C. Hydro did nothing.

**KN** Okay. After serving for one very exciting term as an MLA, you went on to run for Richmond Council again and again and again. In fact, you served on council in Richmond for over 50 years in total, I think 52 years. Can you briefly identify some of the highlights during that period of time for you?

**HS** Oh, wow. Actually, when I first got elected to council in '68, the mayor of the day told me I should be home raising a family. He put me on 29 committees to try and overwork me. I took it on and did it. I mentioned the fire committee. I was made chair of the fire committee. We brought in the union and organized a union fire department. I did the same thing—I was on the health committee, and we banned swimming in the Fraser River. We took the provincial government—pardon me—the city of Vancouver lodged complaints with the provincial control board that they were polluting the river. The Pollution Control Board just raised the rate of pollution that was permitted, but anyway, I did that.

**HS** I had battles with the entire council until I got a friend elected. His name was Ernie Novakowski. Ernie was my sponsor teacher when I took teacher training. He ran for council and that's the first time we were actually able to get things through. One of the things that we did at that time—it was really important and is still effective, but not quite today—we decided we wanted to develop community schools. Ernie, when he was teaching at, I guess it was McRoberts school, opened up the school for woodworking classes for after school evening sessions for parents and kids and stuff like that. We wanted to set up a community school, but the rest of the council wasn't too interested. We wanted community centres built at each school. They had a big referendum in—I'm not sure what year it was but it was after Ernie got elected to council—and they left out community centres. By that time, I was a newspaper columnist, and I wrote a column in the paper saying, you know, we should build all these community centres. That was so popular that the council switched and decided to build community centres by all the schools. That's one thing we did. They never became community schools like we anticipated, but we now have joint school park sites in Richmond.

**HS** We had battles to save the Terra Nova farmland. When Vander Zalm was premier, they took the land out of the ALR. We lost the battle. We had another 10,000 name petition against removing it. We ran for council and won a majority and bought the remaining land at a referendum for 26 million bucks. It passed and we bought the Terra Nova land. I should mention we ran as Richmond Civic New Democrats at that time. When I first ran for council, I ran as a candidate of the Richmond Anti-Pollution Association. When Ernie ran, we wanted to run as NDP, but the party wouldn't agree to it, so we came up with our own name. We called ourselves Independent New Democrats, and on the ballot, it was 'Novakowski and Steves IND' which looks like we were independents but it meant Independent New Democrats. Anyway, the party brass didn't like that too much, so they passed our motion to have civic groups in the NDP running in local government, which held until just about three or four years ago when at one of the recent conventions they said, no and the Richmond NDP is no longer affiliated—but that's another story.

**KN** One of the other things you did when you were a teacher, you got involved in a few BCTF [BC Teachers' Federation] committees and one of them was the Labour Affairs Committee. Can you talk about what that committee was all about?

**HS** Yeah, before I was elected MLA, I was on the Labour Education Committee, but we were all pro-labour people and we started agitating for the BCTF to join the BC Fed [BC Federation of Labour]. That's where I met Ray Haines was the leading spokesperson of the Fed at the time, and of course, I worked with him when we were against the government a few times. After the election they set up a Labour Affairs Committee, and I was on it. We were working to develop—to get enough support for the teachers that would join the Fed. When we tried in the sixties, we had a motion before the BCTF, two of us spoke in favour and then about 90 percent no, Anyway, we got to the point of 50/50 and

then Bill Vander Zalm came on and beat up on us and suddenly the BCTF became more interested in BC Fed politics. I was the BCTF rep at the BC Fed conventions at the time.

**HS** I forgot—I never finished off on the Richmond Council bit. I got off on a tangent there. The other things we did on all those years in council, we got the Terra Nova Rural Park, the Garry Point Park, because loco wanted to build a superport there. We ended up buying it as park and London Farm park [London Heritage Farm], Britannia Shipyard Park, which is a long story. The latest one in recent years was the Garden City Lands, which is right in the centre of Richmond. The vote was eight to one against and with another petition of probably 10,000 names. What I would do is, I would find some community leaders and say, 'Can you give me a hand on this?', and they'd organize the dickens out of the community and eventually get all this public opinion onside. It went from eight to one against. I had one of the persons that had been on RCA [Richmond Citizens' Association], before I was on the other group, joined me then and so it was seven to two. Then in the middle of the election campaign, three of the right wing candidates saw the writing on the wall and came and said, 'We're switching'—right in the middle of the election and, 'we're now in favour of it.' So, we bought the Garden City lands, and we turned it over to—part of it to Kwantlen University on the basis that they would set up a farm school—first in North America—and they would teach agriculture to young people that want to farm, and then the city would provide incubator farms, which is what the NDP was doing in 1974, They would be able to lease a piece of land, learn farming, and then maybe eventually buy a farm. The city of Richmond is doing that today. It was the exact policy we had for the government in 1973 when we brought in the ALR. That was my years on council.

**KN** Do you remember anything at all about the 1983 solidarity protests and teacher strike then?

**HS** Okay. That was the highlight of my career on the Labour Affairs Committee. I helped organize the teachers contingent on it, and I'll give you this picture. This is the only picture I've got of me doing anything. Somebody took it. It's been all over the internet. It's got Danny Blake on this side, and I guess he was probably on the Labour Affairs Committee because we organized the contingent.

**KN** He was.

**HS** We drew up a song sheet, and he was giving out song sheets. Over on this side I think, there's me with my guitar. I don't recall what her name was (pointing to women in the photo). I think that's Moira MacKenzie (I'm not sure) and that's Charlotte Diamond. We were the ones that led the solidarity contingent in Operation Solidarity. I remember when the march was over, we were all up in the stage singing the labour songs and that was probably the height of my career. After that, I became a labour singer. Once a year, we had a labour concert at La Quena restaurant where people came out to sing labour songs along with—I can't even remember his name now—with another fellow that was into labour singing. We did it annually for about another five or ten years until I got asthma so bad, I couldn't sing. Anyway, you can have that picture. That's the only picture I've got of me doing any of the singing and stuff like that.

**KN** Now, looking back at your long, politically active life, very politically active for a very long time, what things stand out for you as highlights, things that you were part of that you really feel good about when you look back?

**HS** Oh, boy, that's hard to say. I guess the ALR has to be number one because that's that's carrying on. I guess what we're doing right now in Richmond is number two, because it took 50 years, but now Richmond is doing what the ALR was doing in 1973, and it was discontinued. Strangely enough, the NDP today just doesn't see it. The NDP today should look at what Richmond is doing and what we did back in 1973 and say, 'Yeah, we should be doing that', but they're not doing it. As a matter of fact, I've got some strong differences of opinion with the present policy because they've announced taking 28,000 acres of farmland for so-called agricultural industry. Well, we said way back in '73 that industry like that should go on rooftops of industrial buildings in the industrial zone. You can have greenhouses on rooftops and things like that. That's quite a difference between the party today and the party, you know, 50 years ago. Anyway, that's number one. I guess all the parks in Richmond that I mentioned, Garry Point, Terra Nova, all those parks is probably number two in terms of Richmond and all the battles we went through to get them. It was quite heavy some. The latest has been—getting back to that energy alternative symposium I set up in 1974, I guess it was—Richmond adopted geothermal district energy. I was promoting it for years, and we're converting the entire downtown Richmond to geothermal so we're not using natural gas or electricity, just taking the heat from the ground. The pipes go under ground, and they heat the water that goes into the apartment buildings. That's designed to heat, I think right now the plan is for 66,000 new apartment buildings to be heated with geothermal district energy. That's led us into conflict with FortisBC and with BC Hydro. BC Hydro is countering with trying to convince people to get air heat using the heat pumps. Ours is a ground heat pump, and it's much more economical, except it has to be done on a wide scale. It's far more effective than air heat pumps, but Hydro is pushing the air heat pumps. You can get grants to that to do that, but you can't get grants to do ground heat pump because it eliminates the electricity entirely, almost, as well as natural gas. I see that as the future. We've got about ten or 15 international awards, being the first city in the world to do it. I guess that's the present day achievement that I'm really, really proud of.

**KN** You stepped down from council, I think—what, a couple of years ago—and announced that you wouldn't be running again. You've been essentially in political retirement. I noticed that very recently you had a visit from a researcher from China, promoting the idea of turning cow manure into useful soil. He visited you because you're well known in Richmond, but also because you farm, and have a farm. How did this all happen, and what will your involvement be? Can you talk a bit more about that whole idea?

**HS** Yeah, actually, it was it was basically sheer luck, I guess. He came to Richmond. His son went to UBC and stayed in Richmond when he went to UBC, and his son's best friend lives in Richmond now, and he was staying with the son's best friend, and he was going to go to Saskatchewan. They felt Saskatchewan was probably not the right place to do this. They came walking down the dike, and I guess maybe his son's best friend was the one that thought of it. They said, 'Well, here's a farmer that could do it.' They called me up, and I said, 'Sure.' I was already doing a demonstration garden, trying to convince people to save the soil. That's my number one object now is to save the soil. That means no—oh, the other thing we passed in Richmond was a bylaw that you cannot build a building on farmland other than a house. You can't build a greenhouse or barn, a closed structure with a concrete floor. It's got to be an earthen floor. That's the idea is you don't destroy the soil. Moe Sahota is trying to get that changed, but anyway, that's another thing. I've set up in my own yard the manure from the cows aged six years, and I'm now planting a garden on top of it. A hundred years ago, that was called a kitchen garden in the U.K. They would dig a pit about three feet deep, fill it up with cow dung or a horse or chickens, and let it decay, and then they'd plant the garden on it. Well, I didn't dig a hole in the ground I just left it

piled up. For the last three years, I've been growing crops on it. This fellow comes along, and he's found I guess the best example I give, there's types of yeast that will make bread rise. There's types of yeast that will ferment wine. Well, he's developed a number of bacteria and yeast and micro-organisms that ferment manure. You sprinkle it on the manure, mix it all up and it gets really, really hot and literally ferments and converts it into a usable fertilizer within a month instead of waiting six years. I've got my demonstration garden that I was working on already. It wasn't quite completely set up. This was going to be the year I was going to show it off, and now I got his demonstration garden side by side, so we'll see what happens. Right now, every day when we put the cow dung in the pile, we mix some of these bacterial mixtures in and it just heats it right up to about 70 degrees centigrade and it kills all germs and everything in it. In a month you've got fertilizer, you just crinkle it in your hands. It's quite amazing, so we'll see what happens with that.

**KN** We're on to the last question, and it's fairly open ended. I'm just wondering if there's anything else you'd like to say about politics, teaching or the labour movement, anything at all in all of your experience that you want to say? Here's your chance to say it.

**HS** Oh wow, that's something I haven't given too much thought about because I think we've covered most of it, and I'm not sure which things we missed. One of the questions you had was about my songs, and I think we missed that one when I was focusing about what songs I wrote. For every demonstration I would write a song. In 1968, when we set up the demonstration at the Peace Arch, I did it as chair of environment for the NDP. The NDP newspaper had my picture and all kinds of stuff about it in it. Two things happened there. One was that the committee that I set up, some were NDP members, and some weren't. That committee went on—Irvig Stowe was one of them—and Irvig Stowe and his group—everybody but me on the committee went on to form Greenpeace, which is interesting. They asked me if I wanted to be a founding member. I said, 'No, I'm going to get involved in politics, and we don't need to have an environmental group with a politician involved.' That was one thing. Anyway, the other thing I got a song that I wrote it was called the SPOILS Song—Stop Pollution from Oil Spills was the name of the demonstration. I thought, wow, I could sing this today. I can't sing because I've got my asthma bad now. 'We're fouling the air all around us with exhaust fumes, monoxide and oil. The best way to fight air pollution, is to keep the darn stuff in the soil.' Now, isn't that pertinent?

**KN** Very much so.

**HS** It sums it right up today. That's what we're saying today is just stop the pipelines, stop expanding oil and gas, and keep it in the ground.

**KN** Okay. That's a very profound way to end this interview, Harold. Thank you very much. It's very informative. Thank you.