Interview: Tom Dufresne (TD)
Interviewer: Phil Legg (PL)
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Transcription: Jane Player

PL [00:00:05] Tom Dufresne, thank you so much for making time for this labour history project that we're doing. Maybe we could start with you talking a little bit about some of the early years of Tom Dufresne—where you grew up, that kind of stuff.

TD [00:00:22] Well, I grew up on the Island of Montreal, in the city of Montreal North, and went to school in the English Catholic school system. In Quebec at the time was, you know, like a severe downgrade (laughter) if, you know, if you were a French Catholic, one thing, or Protestant like, yeah.

PL [00:00:42] I think it's called corporal punishment.

TD [00:00:44] (laughter) Yeah, there was a lot of that going on. I started working, you know, after school and stuff early on in about—when I was about 14 or 15 and worked in a variety of jobs: the lawn chair factory making plastic lawn chairs, the fibreglass straps and all that, and making—a place called Compact Ladder, and where we made ladders and that made the redwood furniture. I saw some practices there that didn't impress me, to say the least, you know. I seen a lot of people get injured working there because it was all working on piecework and what have you. I got injured myself. I got pulled into a drill press and just about lost my arm. It was not very well taken care of, you know, for 14 or 15 years of age. Just thrown in the back of a car, taken to the local hospital, stitched the arm up, and bring you back to work and then fire you two weeks later for some made up excuse sorta reason, right. Because you don't wanna—they didn't want some guy walking around there with his arm not moving because it was bad for new prospects. (laughter) Half the people in that place only had three fingers, you know.

PL [00:02:04] Yeah.

TD [00:02:04] Yeah. [unclear] Things like that and worked a place, Markhot, you know, which made the baseboard heaters and things. Worked at Canada Dry, delivering pop around the city of Montreal and area. The interesting jobs—worked at roofing in Quebec, which is quite good because once you got a job in construction, you belonged to the joint council. Part of the thing with joint council is once you start working, you can continue to work once you get your card, the pink card, and you could then get jobs anywhere in construction and you'd always had a pension that was a mandatory pension plan, right?

PL [00:02:46] That far back?

TD [00:02:47] Yeah. Say about '66, '67. Yeah.

PL [00:02:52] Very good. What brought you out West?

TD [00:02:56] A sense of adventure, you know, rain and snow in Quebec in February or March. I come out here with a friend of mine named Sal Ferrara. Just one day, he had a job offer at one of the movie studios down in California. It was early into computers, and what have you, workin' for CN at the time, Canadian National Railways. He had applied for

a job and he got a job offer down there doing something—I can't remember, with computers, what have you. He needed a ride to California, so he said, 'Well, you want to go?' and he'd paid for the gas, so, off we went on the way to California. I never quite made it. My car broke down in Winnipeg (laughter) and, yeah—

PL [00:03:39] A lot of things break down in Winnipeg. (laughter).

TD [00:03:41] So I got—I ended up selling my car in Winnipeg, hangin' around there for a while, and then come out to Vancouver in about the beginning of June 1969.

PL [00:03:51] A nice time to be here.

TD [00:03:52] Yeah. Hanging around, you know. But back then, you know, wasn't seriously out looking for work or anything at the time, but what is that place—you know, lived on the beach at Third Beach for a while and then the bush there in Stanley Park and what have you. Got another car. Lived In the back of the car for a while and just things like that, you know, and hanging around. Then at a place called Pacific Hostel used to be on 535 Homer Street.

PL [00:04:19] Yeah.

TD [00:04:20] Yeah, stayed there for a while, you know. That was pretty good. One time, we stayed at a place called the Catholic Charities and I just saw a picture of it the other day that reminded me of it. At the Catholic Charities, you would get a voucher to eat at the White Lunch on Hastings Street. Now, there was two of them on Hastings Street and one up on Granville. You couldn't eat at the good one over by Victory Square. You had to eat it at the one over by Pigeon Park.

PL [00:04:47] Okay.

TD [00:04:48] The voucher is worth a dollar twenty-five a day, so, you didn't want to go—you didn't want to squander it all on breakfast or lunch, especially if you wanted to have something to eat before you went back to the hostel. One thing about the Catholic Charities was is that you couldn't get in before 6:30 at night and you had to be in by 8:00. If you showed up after 8:00, they wouldn't let you in. They'd leave you out in the street, and if you showed up before 6:30, you stood out in the rain and waited to get in the door. Of course, you could always get warm if you wanted to go in and listen to a sermon and get a cup of coffee while you're waiting to get in. Those were the rules there, you know. Pacific Hostel was much better.

PL [00:05:30] Just out of interest, the hostel was where?

TD [00:05:32] Robson and Abbott.

PL [00:05:36] Right. Sort of, close to now what is BC Place, right?

TD [00:05:40] Yes. Yeah. About two blocks from there. Yeah. It's still there actually. It's—Catholic Charities are still there.

PL [00:05:47] I know the building.

TD [00:05:47] Yeah. Pacific Hostel still there too, but it's—the building is still there, but now it's owned by, or run by, the Salvation Army.

PL [00:05:56] So then, looking for work here on the west coast, what you find?

TD [00:06:02] Not much. Ended up, I met my wife, Liz. We went back to Montreal, and I finished my high school in Montreal. Then we came back out here in 1970, November 1st, 1970, my birthday and got a variety of odd jobs at one place sharpening axes, you know, on Venables Street, in this factory. After a while, you felt like slitting your wrists with one of them (laughter) you know, such a terrible job. They had no safety equipment. I think they gave you a pair of glasses that was it. But you breathed in all the stuff as you were sharpening the axes and stuff like that. So—

PL [00:06:39] A grinding wheel for sharpening axes.

TD [00:06:39] Yeah. The grinding wheel, yeah. And they were for those heraldry things they were selling at The Bay and Woodwards, you know, the axes and the shield you'd hang on your wall, you know. It was like a foundry, right? Some good jobs. I worked at Bristol Myers for a while unloading boxcars. They used to be on Stuart and Victoria Drive. Little white building there. I made Javex and all that sort of stuff, you know, Clorox. I did that for a while.

PL [00:07:05] You just don't want to breathe it in.

TD [00:07:07] Yeah. That's why I didn't want to work in the factory. I was okay unloading boxcars, but I didn't want to go work in the factory because I see these people working on these fumes, you know, you see yellow fumes floating everywhere. We were actually down by the floor with chlorine, and chlorine gas and that. Anyways, I walked around, and I ran into a fella at the Pacific Elevators down by Point Pier and asked him if they were hiring. They had a big sign up, 'Not Hiring', but I went and asked anyway, you know, in case they forgot to take the sign down, right? The guy says, 'No, but they're hiring up the Longshore Hall.' He says, 'It's busy this couple of weeks'. I asked him where that was. I went up to the Longshore Hall and they told me, 'Well, come back tomorrow morning. Put your name on a piece of cardboard and throw it in the box. You have to be here by 7:00 in the morning to get your name in the box, and then they'll call you'. As luck would have, it was April 14th, 1971, and they pulled my name out of the box, and I went to work. It was very interesting. Did a lot of interesting types of work. Unloading boxcars of malt coming in from the prairies. If you recall at the time, there was a—people are starving in Biafra and what have you. The Canadian government had donated malt over there for the people. We were unloading boxcars and that, and then we would put it on pallet boards, put it down below the ships, because containers had just come in around that time, right. Sometimes you would be loading containers with malt, and you had to do 800 sacks a day, and you were done. If you could unload your 800 sacks by noon, you got paid eight hours for your amount of work.

PL [00:08:55] How much did the sacks weigh?

TD [00:08:57] The sacks were 112 pounds—50 keys, 50 kilograms.

PL [00:09:02] Not good for a back.

TD [00:09:04] Yeah. One person, you know, because if you had two but then you take all day, right?

PL [00:09:08] Yeah.

TD [00:09:08] You'd have coffee sacks. Coffees were 220s. Two hundred and twenty pounds. You need two people on those, except for some really big guys they could manage. After a while, like you said, they all ended up with bad backs. Excuse me. And hides. At the time Canada was shipping a lot of hides out to, I believe it was going to China, but it may have been Bangladesh, or something. Anyways, so the boxcars would come in. They'd be sitting on the prairies all summer, and then you'd open the door, and the hides would all be in there and you'd have to get in and load them on pallet boards. That was better than working down below on the ship where you had to throw them up (laughter) because you'd end up throwing up.

PL [00:09:51] Yeah.

TD [00:09:52] Yeah.

PL [00:09:53] I always remember hides were shed six at Johnson Terminals.

TD [00:09:58] Oh, yeah.

PL [00:09:59] Yeah. I don't know what that was connected to the waterfront. That was just—

TD [00:10:07] It may have moved there after it left the waterfront. Yeah. There's a lot of people that didn't want to do that job.

PL [00:10:13] [unclear]

TD [00:10:14] I mean, but after sharpening axes, I mean (laughter) it was a step up. Yeah, it was a step up. I got a lot of jobs like that, and then it got very slow around 1973. I had to go get a job at a place called a TubeCo. I mean, I was very fortunate. I ran into somebody at—it was Manpower at the time—part of the unemployment insurance. What had happened, in 1972 it got very slow, and there was a strike somewhere. I can't remember where in Canada, but we weren't laid off. You just—say if there was no work, you just didn't work, you know. We started—I started an unemployment insurance claim, as did most of the casual workers, and they—but they'd cut us off from our, for our unemployment insurance. We marched on the Manpower office down on Robson at Thurlow, and we took over the Manpower offices.

PL [00:11:12] When you say we, who is the we?

TD [00:11:14] We had a whole bunch of casuals.

PL [00:11:15] All Longshore?

TD [00:11:17] All Longshore, yeah. Marched all the way there and then milled around and went inside. Trudeau was—Pierre Trudeau—was the prime minister at the time. Lloyd Axworthy's brother—I think it was Tom Axworthy, actually—he was his executive assistant

or his chief of staff or whatever at the time. We were dealing with him and with Bryce Mackasey.

PL [00:11:44] Right.

TD [00:11:45] We took over the offices. They convinced us to okay, well, leave the offices and Mackasey would fly out and meet. What developed then is a thing they called a running claim. If you worked so many, a number of days. I can't remember what it was, two or three days, you know, a week you wouldn't get your unemployment but, if you only worked one day that week you would, you know, they'd give you unemployment for that for the rest of the week sort of thing. You could maintain—it's almost like a guaranteed annual income, isn't it, in a way? You know, if you look at it that way.

PL [00:12:17] You barked for it, I guess [unclear]

TD [00:12:18] Yeah, so anyways, that was my first involvement with the union. Also, then during the American strike, a longshore strike down south, I was involved partially in that with the—because the union members and the casuals who refused to unload American cargo in the Port of Vancouver in solidarity with the longshore workers down on the U.S. West Coast.

PL [00:12:43] Is that where you guys get the Fed to declare it hot or you just declared it hot?

TD [00:12:49] We just declared it hot. Yeah. Refused to work hot cargo. Yeah. Struck cargo.

PL [00:12:54] Yeah, so that was a big deal.

TD [00:12:57] Yeah, and seeing what the, you know, how solidarity worked and after being injured in it long time earlier, you know, nobody cared what happened. To see the people sticking up for each other, it was good and inspiring. Yeah.

PL [00:13:10] Yeah, that would have been neat. You did a bunch of different jobs as you worked your way through on the waterfront?

TD [00:13:17] Yeah. Well, just to touch one more time on that or continue on that. I happened to run into a very caring individual at Manpower and looking for jobs. You know, they had all kinds of different jobs on the board, but most of them were very low paying jobs. This individual said, Well, here, you know, we're going to bring you in for like an aptitude test sort of thing. They give you a little— putting square pegs in a round holes round peg in a square hole. Hit 'em hard enough with a hammer if they fit. (laughter)

PL [00:13:46] See if you can grind this axe.

TD [00:13:47] (laughter) Yeah. Anyways, so he got me signed up for the apprenticeship program at—pre apprenticeship at one of the universities, or at those times called community colleges.

PL [00:14:02] Which trade?

TD [00:14:03] Heavy duty mechanics.

PL [00:14:05] Oh, right on.

TD [00:14:05] Yeah. I was signed up to go to Terrace but then I was working at a place called TubeCo. He got me this job at TubeCo which paid similar amount of money and it was a United Steelworkers cert and it paid fairly well. Put my name in for the, take start the course. Then they phoned me up. Somebody dropped out of the course in Kamloops in January—well, hey phoned me around Christmastime 1973. Said, Well, somebody dropped out. If you want to start, you can go on the sixth of January. So I said, Sure. Away I went—sixth of January. I was up in Kamloops, took the six month pre-app course.

PL [00:14:45] Yeah.

TD [00:14:46] Then came back and worked out of the dispatch hall as a mechanic for a couple of months and then applied for a regular workforce job and got that in August 1974.

PL [00:15:01] This is connect the dots, you know. Start one place and—

TD [00:15:04] Yeah. You can move around. I worked at Pier B, B-C, which is down at C.P.R., which is where Canada Place is now. I worked there for four and a half years as a mechanic.

PL [00:15:14] Wow.

TD [00:15:15] Yeah. Servicing the ships, the cruise ships and passenger ships and what have you.

PL [00:15:20] Okay, so like overhauling the engines? Servicing?

TD [00:15:23] Yeah. I spent a lot of time fixing flat tires. (laughter) You know, they kinda discourage you when you first start the—you know, so you got all these all these tires, so you become very adept at fixing flat tires, and swinging that—so it's like a big sledgehammer, but with a broad face on it that goes down the butt to break the bead, right?

PL [00:15:42] Yeah.

TD [00:15:43] So, did a lot of that. Servicing forklift chain and put clamps on, take them off, put the forks on, put paper clamps on as opposed to pulp clamps. I'd go out and do standby—pick a truck and go out on standby jobs either in Squamish or Fraser Surrey docks, you know, as a standby mechanic because they were using forklifts on the ship, so you had to fuel them up and check the oil and all that sort of thing, right?

PL [00:16:08] Yeah.

TD [00:16:10] Yeah. That was a really good go.

PL [00:16:11] Yeah. That takes you—when did you start to get active in the union? Like active, active?

TD [00:16:18] Well, I ran for office four times for the executive. I was really impressed by a group of people that were in office at the time. One was fellow name Roy Smith,

Hamburger Roy Smith. That was his nickname. Don Lanneville, Lou Kaufman and a fellow named Bill Kemp was business agent. I attended some meetings and listened to them because you—when you start out as a casual, you're not guaranteed——well, you know, that's one thing about longshore is you're always casual, you're casual until the day you leave. Because you're never guaranteed a job unless you're on a regular workforce sort of thing. You're not guaranteed any wage. I liked the way that they handled themselves and the way they treated people. I thought, well, you know, I'd like to be involved in that on the executive. I ran four times before I got elected.

PL [00:17:13] Okay. Four years, four times?

TD [00:17:15] Yeah, four different times. Yeah. Ran off the floor one time and ran a couple of times in annual elections and finally got elected in '88, 1988. Yeah. After that I continued getting elected until my last term was 2010 to 2012 at the ILWU Canada [International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Canada].

PL [00:17:34] Wow. You're like the Babe Ruth of Longshore. (laughter) That's amazing. That's quite a run.

TD [00:17:41] Yeah, all different positions. Yeah. Business agent, vice-president, executive member, health and safety committee member and then president of the local, then president of the Canadian area for 16 years.

PL [00:17:55] I'm going to guess that in your time, both on the job and in elected positions that you were— there were some key issues that always came up for you that—so, I'm thinking too that—I talked about a lot on the waterfront. One is tech change and the other is health and safety. Let's start with health and safety. What did you see when you first got involved, and what changes were you pretty happy with?

TD [00:18:25] Well, I was happy initially, um—I got involved with health and safety. I took a course through the CLC [Canadian Labour Congress] and the Vancouver and District Labour Council. Those weekend courses they used to—they probably still put on. Actually, it was Gordie Larkin and Joe LeClair, yeah—

PL [00:18:46] Joe LeClair. Broadway Joe.

TD [00:18:47] That were teaching the course. Yeah, and that was on health and safety and a guy named Jim Beynon who—he was an officer with Labour Canada. Back then the health and safety was Part 4 of the Canada Labour Code. Now it's Part 2. Yeah. That was interesting. Then I took another course with Geoff Meggs who was there, and that was on putting together a newsletter. I started putting on courses on health and safety. I'd bring somebody in like Jim Beynon would come in or a couple of the other officers would come in and they'd speak for an hour or two to the members and what have you and get people interested in starting health and safety committees, because at that time we were always covered by the Workers' Compensation Board in British Columbia [WCB, now WorkSafeBC], but even though we were under the federal jurisdiction—

PL [00:19:38] But your claim would go through WCB?

TD [00:19:41] Through WCB and WCB officers had some had jurisdiction. There was like the Feds could turn the jurisdiction over to the province if they got to reach a mutual agreement. There was a fatality down at Canada Place, and, at that time, and—Brian

Mulroney had been just re-elected to his second term, '88, yeah, and they had—I gotta watch what I say here—but the people that they appointed to work for Labour Canada and the upper echelons of Labour Canada that weren't labour friendly, shall we say, and that they weren't big fans of, in my opinion, of enforcing health and safety. Anyway, so they took over and claimed jurisdiction, and what triggered it was this fatality.

PL [00:20:39] They took it back?

TD [00:20:39] They took it back off the province. Yes. They—a couple of people that they had appointed there, they had worked for Pat Carney, and, at the time, and I guess on her campaign and what have you, and then she appointed them, and they had really no background in health and safety.

PL [00:21:00] Didn't know what the hell they were doing?

TD [00:21:00] No. Their background was in working for some British election campaign—yeah—and that needed a place to land.

PL [00:21:07] So, the accident, what exactly happened?

TD [00:21:10] A gangway fell off. It fell off the ship between the ship and the cruise ship facility. A fellow standing on a dock was killed, was crushed. Yeah, and died. Died on the spot. Anyways, that then spurred more involvement in the health and safety aspect of it. You know [unclear] course but trying to get it enforced. Yeah. Because the federal Labour Code was actually better in some ways than the provincial health and safety regulations.

PL [00:21:43] You mean around right to refuse, that kind of thing?

TD [00:21:46] Yeah. Right to refuse. Right to know and right to participate in the investigations, what have you and participate in the health and safety committee.

PL [00:21:54] Effectively you could shut down a workplace if you felt that there was something—

TD [00:21:59] Unsafe.

PL [00:22:00] Unsafe things going on?

TD [00:22:01] Yes.

PL [00:22:03] You know, on the waterfront. Anything you shut down, that costs somebody a lot of money.

TD [00:22:07] Yes. Yeah. The employers had a—and we always had and still have a article in the collective agreement, called article 703, which deals with health and safety, where if you feel that the job is unsafe, you have the right to refuse work under the collective agreement. The employer always taking the position that if you were right in your assertion that something was unsafe, they would pay you for the time that you were shut down. If you were wrong, you wouldn't get paid. They would always go for this thing, and they would go to the arbitrator and call for an illegal work stoppage as opposed to calling in an expert or somebody to say this is safe or unsafe because they want it designated as a work stop, an illegal work stoppage, therefore, they wouldn't have to pay you.

PL [00:22:54] Yeah.

TD [00:22:55] We challenged that and were successful. I was a business agent at that time, and we ended up in front of the Canada Industrial Relations Board. At that time, it was the Canada Labour Relations Board, you know, that was changed under the—I think it was under—might have been Mulroney or either him or Harper where they changed the name of it in 2000. They changed it to Canada Industrial Relations, as opposed to Labour Relations Board, didn't like that labour connotation there. Yeah, anyways, that was my involvement with health and safety—another fellow was injured over at Vancouver Wharves and that was where the employers had taken the brakes off of a ship loader, the emergency brakes, and put the machinery back to work without the emergency brakes installed. They tried to, you know, have bogies to run 'em like a like a locomotive where they ran on the rails, and they tried to hide them. They tried to sneak them out in the middle of the night. Myself and my vice president at the time, Bill Kerrigan, tracked them down because they took and they loaded them on a barge, and then they hauled them around through the Fraser River, and they tried to unload them at a scrap yard on the Fraser River here to get rid of them so you couldn't have any evidence. Through some very diligent work on behalf on the ship safety branch [Marine Safety and Security] of Transport Canada, some very good officers there who were mainly retired ship's captains at the time who who'd had those jobs. They were concerned that somebody was trying to hide evidence on them, and they got involved. We successfully, or government successfully prosecuted Vancouver Wharves, even though the penalty wasn't that severe. It was just to show people that the lengths that some of these employers would go to deny responsibility or to try and hide evidence and deny you your—so, I had quite a bit of involvement in health and safety issues.

PL [00:24:58] Just on the article, right to refuse, how long had that been in the collective agreement?

TD [00:25:06] Oh, I would say probably since the inception around 1966 or so, and it may have even been before that.

PL [00:25:14] Yeah. It's one of those things where new members don't appreciate all of the history that goes into their collective agreement.

TD [00:25:24] Yeah.

PL [00:25:28] Let's talk a bit about tech change, because I know that that comes in waves on the waterfront. What was your experience with it, and what are the things that you think of [unclear]?

TD [00:25:42] On the tech change we have an article in the collective agreement, article 14, which deals—this is on the Longshore Collective Agreement because we have more than longshore. We have a multitude of other collective agreements that, you know, so I'm talking mainly about that aspect of it right now. We have a thing called the M&M, mechanization modernization clause, where if the employer had the right to introduce automation, and, in turn, that they would—you would get X amount of dollars per year of service from 15 years to 25 years towards your, like a retiring allowance.

PL [00:26:16] Yeah.

TD [00:26:17] Which is what it's actually called, the retirement allowance. I witnessed myself and many—everybody has witnessed a lot of changes that were tech change that at the time we didn't really recognize as such. You went from loading Fletcher's, you know, which is one chunk of wood, they're like 10 by 10 or 12 by 12 lengths of lumber and logs and single packs of lumber. [unclear] packaged lumber. Then it went to two packs and four packs. Nowadays, I think they're loading like 32 packs at a time on one lift, right. That's all a form of tech change. Then there was always a great fear that the checkers or clerks would be eliminated with the introduction of computers and that, and that goes back to the late sixties, early seventies. In effect, we probably now have more checkers employed than we ever had because everybody's got their—needs to have the information as to—that their cargo's been delivered and who it's been delivered to, who's received it. Somebody's got to sign off on it.

PL [00:27:31] [unclear]

TD [00:27:31] Yeah. We've never, as such, been afraid of technology, although nowadays what it looks like with these autonomous vehicles and what have you, that they could eliminate an awful lot of jobs. They've introduced some automated cranes and what have you, but they still, the longshore workers, still have control of the first foot of the lift and the last foot, putting it down on the ground or putting on a truck or what have you. It's really reduced the manning, or staffing levels, I guess, would be the correct terminology. I was just, as an aside, I was just down in San Francisco and they've just this month licensed 300 autonomous taxis.

PL [00:28:24] Yes, I heard about this. Yeah.

TD [00:28:25] Yes. We seen them running around and there's nobody driving. You could do it all on an app. Cab comes, picks you up, door opens. They're—most of them are electric cars and also, they can—they got all these little sensors going on the roof and on the doors, and what have you, that in fact, actually I said, you don't fall them too close because if they detect something they'll just stop suddenly, you know.

PL [00:28:47] Yeah.

TD [00:28:49] Anyways, that's the aside that—so, here we're now down to taxi drivers running around the city. They're only allowed to operate in the city of San Francisco. They can't take you to the airport yet. You have 300 of these things running around. Our concern—I wouldn't call it a fear but a concern—is that a lot of the equipment on the waterfront could be automated to eliminate the drivers and a lot of that work would go to programmers. The problem is you can program those things from anywhere in the world, or you could be on the space station and program these things to operate. There'd be no jobs in Canada, right, you know, on the waterfront in Vancouver. There has to be adequate compensation for that, you know, not only for the workers, but for Canada, I mean, for the taxes and everything else, right. And unemployment ins—

PL [00:29:43] Robots, the last I heard, don't pay taxes.

TD [00:29:44] That's right, and they do go on strike because as soon as somebody invents a new piece of software or a new piece of hardware to plug in, all of a sudden everything—you spend a billion dollars on is now redundant and you have to go and invest in the new widget. Right? We all experience that with our cell phones or laptops. Some new thing. You're all of a sudden Windows 95 or comes out.

PL [00:30:09] Fifteen!

TD [00:30:10] That's right. So—

PL [00:30:10] And they don't give it to you. You pay.

TD [00:30:13] That's right. That's the same with the company. A lot of them have found around the world. I was involved quite involved with that during my time in office. You know, looking at the different automated terminals around the world, like in Malaysia, in Australia, Southern California, and they haven't really taken off, and they haven't really improved on the productivity all that much when you look at the overall investment. Now, if you say yes, it's eliminated people. Yes, yeah, it has, but the cost to the companies in many instances is greater than it would be if they had people there because like I said, with us being casual workers, if there's no ship in, they're not hiring you. They're not paying you. When you buy that piece of equipment, or you're leasing that piece of equipment off of Xerox or whatever, you pay them for every day, you just don't pay when it's operating, and you got to pay. If you got no ships and you got no work, you still got to make your mortgage payments on that piece of equipment sort of thing, right. I mean, Musk found that out with his automated factory. Remember when it went down to computers? That's right. It was cheaper to have some workers there because he can lay them off when he had no work or had no parts.

PL [00:31:25] Somebody to abuse.

TD [00:31:25] Yeah.

PL [00:31:27] So what you saw of tech change in other ports, like it's varying degrees from 100 percent to—

TD [00:31:36] Yeah. To about 40 percent. Where it'd be 40 percent automated, you know, and as long as the cargo continued to grow, that would offset any loss in worker hours because there would be more cargo, more ships to service and that would be the offset. Now with what we're witnessing now, with the, you know, the decline of globalization, it's—what we're seeing is there's going to be less things coming from China and India, the Philippines and Korea, to the West Coast. There's gonna because they, you know, they're going to start making the toasters in Costa Rica or in Argentina or somewhere and coming up the East Coast, or truck or rail from Central America. That'll result in a real reduction in the work available for longshore workers in Canada.

PL [00:32:31] It also must put a dark cloud over somebody like Global Container Terminals deciding to—

TD [00:32:40] Yes.

PL [00:32:41] Put all their money into port expansion?

TD [00:32:44] Yeah.

PL [00:32:45] Risk is—

TD [00:32:46] The risk is that, you know, people think globalization is going to keep going, and it probably will in one form or another. Right now, with globalization people are blowing each other up. One fellow said to me one time he said, 'Well people will never give up their $9 toaster.' (laughter) That was his whole thing, you know, that this is going to keep going.

PL [00:33:10] Where did he find that $9 toaster because I can't find it? (laughter)

TD [00:33:14] That's right. And the cheap television set.

PL [00:33:16] Yeah.

TD [00:33:18] But people—well, the politicians will change the policies on where they want to shop or try to tell us where to shop, right. I know that a lot of people in the labour movement were opposed to globalization because they said, you know, the hollowing out of jobs in Ontario and Quebec and Manitoba or down south in the Midwest and what have you. It was a real boon for longshore workers, for railway workers, for truck drivers, Teamsters. You know, it created a lot of high paying jobs also.

PL [00:34:00] Yeah. Well, it's a mix and match.

TD [00:34:03] That's right.

PL [00:34:04] You know, remember the sop that Clinton talked about when NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] was first coming in? People put in some labour standards, and it was toothless.

TD [00:34:15] That's right. Actually, I went spoke on that about at an APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] conference called a colloquium back in Victoria, back when you were at the Fed or maybe before you got to the Fed, over in Victoria. That's right, yeah. This fella Mike McDermott used to be with—he was assistant deputy Minister of Labour. Yeah. He ended up being on that NAFTA panel and working, you know, in Texas where they were working on these labour standards. They were supposed to go into the maquiladoras and all that, right? Like you say, it didn't work out because—

PL [00:34:52] Like paper mâché.

TD [00:34:53] The companies, yeah, they just couldn't resist ripping off the workers (laughter). Right? If they would have paid them decently so they could afford homes and cars and all that, then you wouldn't have this mass of immigrants, in my opinion, comin' across the border to be in North America. They're already in North America, but to be in the USA or in Canada, right? They'd be happy to stay in Mexico or Costa Rica or any of these other places, San Salvador, if they were making decent wages and we were willing to share that work with them. Instead, if they can't there, they're coming here, you know. Also, like I said, it was a real boost for the work on the waterfront that the—after deciding NAFTA.

PL [00:35:38] Yeah. It does. I mean, you just look at Delta Port. That really came into full flight once free trade started to pick up.

TD [00:35:48] Yeah. That was designed on a napkin in Denmark. What—Don Garcia, Lou Kaufman, I think Doug Sigurdson for Local 514 and Patrick Reed, he was the, at the time he was—.

PL [00:36:07] Yeah, Canada Place Patrick Reed.

TD [00:36:07] Yeah, that's right. Yeah. He was an ambassador at one point in time also. Right? Yeah. That was all done on the back of a napkin late at night to—you know, the terminal wasn't designed there.

PL [00:36:21] Does somebody have that napkin?

TD [00:36:22] That would be interesting whether Don's wife might have that napkin. You know, Lyyli Ellip, she may have that napkin around somewhere.

PL [00:36:29] Frame it.

TD [00:36:29] Yeah. And the deal was done because at the time when Delta Port and Duke Point were being promoted by the provincial government at the time, which was Bill Bennett and gang, they were designed to be free ports.

PL [00:36:45] Oh, this was outside the jurisdiction of the labour code and all that.

TD [00:36:48] That's right. Yeah. That put an end to that part. They agreed at that point that they wouldn't interfere with the ILWU organizing that and that site, there Delta Port be covered under the ILWU BCMEA [BC Maritime Employers Association] Collective Agreement.

PL [00:37:06] Yeah. It's funny your point about (laughter) employers can't resist [unclear] workers.

TD [00:37:10] Yeah.

PL [00:37:13] But oh, there's more—

TD [00:37:15] Money to be made. Yeah, Don't give it to them.

PL [00:37:20] Okay, so let's talk a little bit about negotiations, and then I want to switch gears and talk about the labour movement. You've obviously been—you had your fair share plus a little bit of everybody else's when it comes to bargaining.

TD [00:37:31] Yeah.

PL [00:37:32] So takeaways from all of—from your many years at those tables.

TD [00:37:37] The employer, you know, as soon as the Longshore gets into negotiations, whether it's in B.C. or in on the East Coast, they turn around and they start screaming about all these work stoppages, all these strikes, and we can't afford— Since about 2000, there was one—two strikes now on the waterfront in all that time, one in 1999, which lasted about nine or ten days, and then just this most recent one, I think, which lasted about 13 days. I mean, it's not like there's a strike every year, you know, on the Longshore, and they always try to denigrate the union. I mean, we dug into the files going

back to 1948—and 1934 and 1948, in the States and in Canada in 1958, which was the advent of where the workers went on strike to get a pension plan and to increase the pension plan. The employer's position at that time was that you couldn't go on strike to increase the pension for retirees because they were not workers. They were no longer employees, so you did not have the right to strike and to increase their pensions. The union was adamant, and that was under the leadership of Hamburger Roy Smith. That's where he got the nickname. He says, 'They don't want to eat steak every day because they wouldn't mind hamburger once a week.' (laughter) So, they call him Hamburger Roy Smith. The Labour Board at that time—might have been the Canada Labour Relations Board at the time or had some other name at the time. Same group though. They took the position that you couldn't have a strike to increase the pensions of pensioners. The union was adamant and said, 'No, well, we're going to.' Yeah, we're going to go on strike and that we are on strike over that and negotiating that. It ended up going to I think it was either the Federal Court of Appeals, or maybe it might have been the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that, yes, so well, pensions were in fact, deferred wages, and you could strike today, or you could negotiate today for your pension going forward into the future. We did have the right to increase the pension for people who had previously retired, and so that was a win for not only Longshore, it was a win for federally regulated workers across Canada.

PL [00:40:05] Oh, big time.

TD [00:40:06] Yeah, so everybody got an advantage of that. That was all around the same group of people that were the officers of the union at the time and various locals. That and the negotiations over the use—if you remember ex parte injunctions used to be very popular. The employer would just go to court without union there, present, and say, you know, swear some affidavit, they'd get somebody to swear that things were slowed down or people were, you know, creating a disturbance and all that. A judge would issue an ex parte injunction for a hearing in three months from now sort of thing. The union—the officers of the union went to jail over that. They were sent to the forest camp out in Chilliwack—the seven officers. Don Garcia was the cook of the group, and that was where Don first got involved apparently in the union and came to prominence.

TD [00:41:02] It's always a struggle that, you know. The employer never says, 'Listen there's a big bucket of money there, guys, just help yourself.' Or, 'Hey, your pension not good enough? Ah, don't worry about it. Here we'll fix it.' Health and welfare benefits—it's only through the struggle that you managed to attain these things and then you managed to improve them. One of the big improvements was the parental leave provisions incorporated into the collective agreement in 2007. Not only in maternity and paternity leave, but also parental leave for people who want to adopt, you know, and you'd get funded. There's so many cents per hour goes into a plan just for that. What would happen, for instance, in say a typical situation where a person, you know, gets pregnant would be off work, then they would get their unemployment insurance, but they would also then not gain any seniority. We said, 'Well, that's not right.' You can't because what you're doing now is you're discriminating against the people. You know, in one case the women are pregnant, or if people are adopting kids where they got to take time off work, need to, you know, need some time off for nurturing a new baby, what have you, that to then tell them, 'Well, by the way, have a nice time with your kids, but by the way, you've got no income.' Or we're going to roll you back. We have had to put a stop to that.

PL [00:42:27] Yeah, you're losing your spot.

TD [00:42:28] That's right. That was stopped. Yeah, and you know, pensioners' benefits, like I said, we managed to incorporate in the 2007 round of bargaining for pensioners eyeglass coverage and dental coverage for pensioners and their spouses and you know, and extended health. Yeah.

PL [00:42:53] Good for you. Those are huge improvements. Yeah. [unclear]. The other thing that always struck me about waterfront negotiations is the employer and the government sort of grabbed the nearest farmer, put a gun to his head and say, 'You guys go on strike, and you're going to kill the—

TD [00:43:11] Yeah. Kill the economy. Yeah. Well, what we took out of that in 2000 when they amended the Canada Labour Code to guarantee that we would continue to work the grain and the grain vessels, and we would, if we were on strike we would service them, and we'd still continue to service cruise ships for instance. We don't wanna, you know, because they'd said, 'Well, you're ruining Phil's uncle's grandmother's, you know, big cruise sort of thing. We said, 'No, we'll keep working those, and we'll keep working the grain.' It's a constant struggle, and the employer always tries to paint a very bad picture of the workers. You know, they try to denigrate us and denigrate in people's minds, right, and cast you as this really bad individual or, you know, you're bad for the economy, you're a bad individual. In the last round of bargaining I was involved in, the employer, had my picture on the wall in their office, and where they had painted horns on my head (laughter) and they—yeah—and I was designated El Diablo. Whenever they had their pep talk in the morning, they would point to El Diablo on the wall, and he was target number one.

PL [00:44:27] Go get 'em!

TD [00:44:27] Yeah. I figured, well, I must have been getting to them if they you know, if they're going to go to that extreme. I mean, I don't care what they called me as long as they—

PL [00:44:35] You gotta be worried when you walk out the door you see one of those little—

TD [00:44:37] Yeah. Little red dot on your shirt. Yeah. I took that as a compliment that I must really be getting in their heads, right?

PL [00:44:47] Let's talk a little bit about the labour movement because I know that—I mean, it's not just about what happens on the waterfront, it's what happens in the province at large, country at large. I know that Longshore has from time to time been involved not just in B.C. stuff but in international stuff. Can you maybe say an example of something where Longshore kind of reached out and helped on an international level?

TD [00:45:16] Well, on the national level, the International Transport Workers' Federation [ITF], the ILWU is part of that. We have inspectors in the Port of Vancouver who go on board deep sea vessels. I mean, they are the world's worst employers, right? They've got you captured. You're on that ship; you're not going anywhere. You're not allowed to mutiny, or they can lock you up if you refuse to work or what have you, right. They're notorious for not paying their workers properly and not paying them promptly and for some pretty notorious conditions on board the vessels. You know, not supplying adequate food and what have you. Myself and to this day, the president of ILWU Canada sits on—it's called the Fair Practices Committee in the ITF, and where we meet once or twice a year, different places in the world to try and help workers obtain the right to negotiate and the

right to belong to a union and the right for respect and for proper health and safety conditions at work. You go to some of these meetings sometimes, and if you're there and you think things are bad here because the employer's calling you El Diablo or stuff like that, then you hear about these people who go to work and they get beat with canes and sticks and whips and, you know, they go and run people's houses over with bulldozers and all that. Then when they come to you and say, 'Well, how are things in your country?' What can you say? You know, it's a picnic compared to that, you know. Yeah, we've got some issues, but you know—

PL [00:46:54] Haven't been whipped lately.

TD [00:46:55] Yeah, Maybe not literally. (laughter) You look at that and we've supported them. Sometimes ships come into the Port of Vancouver and the workers will go on strike on the ship, and we've supported them—refuse to load cargo in the ships, refuse to cross the picket lines.

PL [00:47:16] Yeah. Vancouver's got that reputation as a place where you—if you're—

TD [00:47:22] A safe harbour, if you will.

PL [00:47:23] A safe harbour, yeah. If you've got a grievance, see if you can navigate—pardon the pun—

TD [00:47:29] Yes.

TD [00:47:29] Your way to get in here.

TD [00:47:30] Yeah.

PL [00:47:31] That's one way to resolve it.

TD [00:47:32] Yeah. Tommy McGrath. It was [unclear] him Tom McGrath. He was at one of the first ITF inspectors in the Port of Vancouver. He had a worldwide reputation for supporting workers. I mean, he's involved in the big strike in—after the Second World War, the 1950s, there was a Canadian Seaman's Union, right? They had a book out, "Against the Tide" there. Jim Green did. He recognized what happened, and he was a seafarer from a young age, so he knew what life was like on the ships and that these workers needed representation. He was a big mover in developing the solidarity between the longshore workers and ship seafarers, sailors.

PL [00:48:24] Other examples of that solidarity that come to your mind?

TD [00:48:28] Well, supporting the other unions in the world when they're on strike whether it would be in Australia when the Patrick's [Patrick Corporation] dispute was on. We helped coordinate solidarity with those workers like a ship to California. Canada, I think it was called, the ship, and it was coming down and they refused to load it in the port of LA, Los Angeles. It was—I think sat at sea out there for like 17 days, and they refused to load it. Then it moved up to San Francisco and the workers there offshore refused to load it. Then it was coming into the Port of Vancouver, and we had a call by the ship's agent at the time and wanted to know if we were going to be willing to work that ship. We had this great opportunity to create work for all our members. We had well what's the name of the ship, and he told us the name of the ship. We said, 'Oh, no, we don't welcome that ship here

anywhere on the coast of British Columbia. If it does come in, we're not going to work it. We think it'd be better for you, better for us if you'd steer that ship somewhere else.' It ended up going back to Australia and had to be—because they had loaded the cargo using scabs in Australia—so it had to go back to Australia, and then be unloaded by members of the Maritime Union of Australia. That was a great accomplishment there, you know, on a path of international solidarity. We saw the thing, what happened—that all arose out of the dispute with the Liverpool dockworkers, where they all got replaced. You know, they came in and—started out with a dispute with about eight or 12 people and ended up ballooning into a dispute affecting over 400 workers who all lost their jobs. They were all just replaced.

PL [00:50:16] This was under the Thatcher government? Yeah.

TD [00:50:20] Yeah.

PL [00:50:22] You know. Iron Lady [unclear]

TD [00:50:23] Yeah. Well, actually it might have been under Tony Blair.

PL [00:50:31] Oh God. [unclear] Blair

TD [00:50:33] Yeah, I can't remember who. Who was the prime minister at the time? I'll have to look it up. Yeah.

PL [00:50:38] I know that the Longshore had also extended a helping hand to some Polish crew.

TD [00:50:48] Polish fishing vessel crews. Yes. During the, you know, Solidarity Movement in Poland there Lech Wałęsa and the people decided to take on the government of the day and go on strike at the Gdańsk shipyards. There was Polish fishing vessels here and they were working out in the Bering Sea, and they would come in and unload in Vancouver and, you know, get the ship repairs done and what have you. They had very poor working conditions on there. They were catching a hake and some other kind of fish, and they would grind it down into fishmeal, which would then be used to make cat food and Lord knows what else—and fake crab. You know, you go to a place, you order crab. It was actually hake that was formed in a machine. With those vessels—about six or seven them come in here to the Port of Vancouver on a regular basis then. Some of the business agents, Jimmy Keith and Mike Marino, who was a vice president of the union at the time, they went, and they picked up some of the workers at these fishing, Polish fishing vessels and took them to some of the solidarity meetings that were happening around Vancouver. I think at the firemen's hall in Burnaby, Firefighters Hall in Burnaby. That was quite impressive. The people liked that. Then there was the Russian fishing fleet where it would come in also. That was an interesting thing.

TD [00:52:17] At one time, as another aside, being [unclear] sides, the—I'll have a side of that. (laughter) They turned around and when the Russian fishing vessels were coming in, they were loading cars, used cars to take back to Russia and different places over in the Soviet Union. They'd fix them up and sell them. Pick something, give them to the relatives. They's buy all these $500 cars or $125 cars, you know, and then bring them on the back of a tow truck, you know. (laughter) They'd buy them burning oil. They didn't care. Liked Lincolns and Cadillacs, right? That's a precursor of what's going on now, actually. We said, 'Well, listen, you know, being the union, we said, well, you guys, you people are loading all

these cars on using the ship's crew and that's longshore work.' They brought their agent, (and I forget the guy's name, but it's probably better I not use it), and he admitted that, yes, in fact, that these cars were cargo, but a lot of them were personal belongings. They have a right under the collective agreement to load their own personal belongings on the ship. We said, 'Well, we have a little bit of a limit here. You know, 40 cars on the ship.' We signed an agreement; it's still in existence. They call a black book document, Polish fishing vessel document, where they can load up to six cars using the ship's crew, but any cars over and above that, they have to hire longshore crews to load the ships. With the Russian ones, you had to be careful. At one time I was down at Ballantine Pier. I went down there, and the Russians were up to something going on. At that time, the people worried about the Russian mafia. I don't know if it exists or not. They were kind of upset at the ILWU and with me in particular, and—.

PL [00:54:13] [Unclear] El Diablo.

TD [00:54:13] But they invited me on the ship for a drink of vodka, so I said well hold on, let me park my car, which I did. I parked it in Coquitlam. (laughter) I didn't want to go where they went anywhere near—you didn't want to go on one of those vessels or nobody knew where you were because you'd probably get into the fish processing plant. 'Come see the plant.' Next thing you know, you're on the belt, you're in the fishmeal. Yeah.

PL [00:54:37] Somehow this mock crab doesn't taste that (laughter) [unclear].

TD [00:54:40] That's right. There's a shoe lace in there.

PL [00:54:44] Okay, Let's talk a little bit about the ILWU and the role that it's played in the Labour Council and the Fed, that kind of stuff.

TD [00:54:54] Well, yeah. ILWU has always been very active in like the Vancouver and District Labour Council, somewhat in the New Westminster and District Labour Council, CLC [Canadian Labour Council], BC Fed [BC Federation of Labour]. There's the Pacific Coast Maritime Workers Council, which is how the ILWU got a seat at the officers at the BC Fed. That's, you know, a group of unions, the Canadian Merchant Service Guild, the ILWU, the Grain Workers Union, the SIU [Seafarers' International Union of Canada] and the—George McPherson and the Boilermakers Union [MWBIU, Marine Workers & Boilermakers Industrial Union]. Yeah. Through that amalgamate—group of people together they formed a council which got recognized by the Fed. So, the ILWU—at one time—Jack Nichol, fisher from UFAWU [United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union] was—

PL [00:55:45] Was Fish part of the Council?

TD [00:55:46] Yeah, they were part of the council also because they were all small unions. That's before they joined the CAW [Canadian Auto Workers]—UNIFOR, yeah. Anyway, so that's how we were involved. Frank Kennedy at one time was the secretary business manager for the Vancouver Labour Council for a number of years. That was the full time position at the time; it wasn't the president, it was the secretary, right? We were all involved in that. Some of the locals like Local 400, which is seafarers local, you know, sailors, merchant sailors—work on the tugboats and the deep sea ships and what have you and various other industries. They were always been heavily involved in the Solidarity movement, involved in the Stop the War, you know, in Vietnam, the Ban and the Bomb. Remember when we used to have the Mayday rally and then it also had the stop the proliferation of—yeah, the peace march and all that. Yeah. ILWU was heavily involved in

all those things. That went back under the leadership of, like I said, Frank Kennedy, Lou Kaufman, Bill Kemp, people like that. Barry Campbell. We were always heavily involved in that kind of thing, and still are till today. Rob Ashton is the president now, and he's continued that trend, and that the union has developed a very good young workers committees and council that they have a meeting once a year, you know, a major meeting. They have different ones in different regions throughout the year. Also, you know, a very good education committee and education component. That's under, right now, Dan Kask, who's a second vice president of ILWU Canada, who's in charge of education programs. They do a leadership course at Harrison, plus they have other leadership courses throughout the province: health and safety, shop stewards courses, that sort of thing.

PL [00:57:53] Trying to build up the base.

TD [00:57:54] Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Encourage people to get involved. Don't be passengers, be involved, be part of the of people who are doing things, not somebody who's just a pie union member. You know, you get your card, so you get a piece of the pie, right? There's an old socialist saying for you, eh. (laughter) Old Wobbly saying that.

PL [00:58:16] Okay. So, let's wrap it up with what you think some—two or three big challenges that the labour movement faces?

TD [00:58:23] Well, one is going to be this artificial intelligence and automation. I think another big challenge that's coming up is we're seeing a real return to the right wing populist politicians. We're seeing that throughout the world. Hopefully, that trend breaks before we get back to that in Canada. I mean, we've had somewhat of it with Stephen Harper, but he was more of a libertarian than a populist. So, I mean, that was and—

PL [00:58:54] Now you got is mainly [unclear]

TD [00:58:56] Now you've got somebody new leading the party there. From all accounts or what you see of them, I think he could be quite devastating to workers right across Canada and not only workers, but pensioners—one of these people who likes to divide the country against itself, you know, like getting Alberta fightin' Ontario and Quebec, getting Quebec fighting here. Get workers fighting against each other because you always got to have a them, you know. Well, who's at fault? Well, it's them. It's those guys. Those people, you know. Never us, or you know, they're not offering us a better way of life or a way to get ahead. Their way ahead is to step on somebody else's hat.

PL [00:59:39] Yeah

TD [00:59:40] They liked it like they like NAFTA, like do with the companies they really couldn't resist. (laughter) Taken more than their share. I think the labour movement's evolved. What I think would be important is for like a UNIFOR to get back into the central labour body, the Canadian Labour Congress, because if we have opposing points of view, you can always solve them when you're together. If you're out working from different ends, you know, you may all have the same goal in mind, but if you're coming at it from two different angles or that are opposing points of view on it or opposing points of view on how to solve the issue, we'll end up getting defeated because we'll have too many—going on and too many fronts.

PL [01:00:33] They're playing into the boss's line which is pit—

TD [01:00:34] Yeah.

PL [01:00:35] People against each other.

TD [01:00:36] Yeah. I think education is important because I think workers need to know when they get their first job, they need to know their rights and also have to realize that the benefits of belonging to a union because you'll always get the people on the employers' councils and that who say, 'Oh, you don't need a union now. You already got sick days; you got dental plans. You don't need a union anymore. Why are you paying these guys?' They know that as soon as the union's gone, so do all those benefits, so do all your rights will be gone. I think it's important that people realize that even though you have it, you know, you've got to tend the garden. You can't just keep picking the tomatoes, you've got to go, and you've got to replenish the soil. You've got to make sure that it's healthy, and debate's healthy, and participation is healthy. Actually, another aside, just been down to San Francisco last week. I ran into a bunch of sisters that were going to a women's conference that were part of the ILWU down there. Liz, my wife, and I were down there just taking out a bit of a mini holiday. Anyways, they recognized me from my days as in the union, and also, I spoke at this young workers conference earlier this year. Here I am standing on a street corner in San Francisco. My wife and I just leaving a Japanese restaurant and the woman hugged me. 'Aren't you Tom Dufresne?' (laughter) Your mind starts going, Oh oh.

PL [01:02:13] Maybe? Depends. (laughter)

TD [01:02:15] Why would you like to know? Anyways, they were down there for a women's conference and all that and an education thing for women and people of diverse backgrounds.

PL [01:02:32] Yeah. That's very neat.

TD [01:02:33] Terminology the same. That all came about during my tenure. The advent of the women's committees and the sisters gaining a greater voice in the union and the labour movement.

PL [01:02:47] Yeah.

TD [01:02:48] I think that's a good thing.

PL [01:02:50] Tom, this has been terrific. Thank you for giving us your time and for sharing the stories because there are so many of them and they're—it's a great way to learn.

TD [01:03:00] Yeah. Thanks for inviting me. I think this is important. Also, that, you know, for these podcasts and for different—you know, for the history. What's that old saying, 'If you don't know your history, you're bound to repeat it,' and it hasn't all been good. That's right.