Interview: Darryl Walker (DW)
Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)
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Transcription: Jane Player

KN [00:00:06] Okay. Good morning, Darryl. We're here this morning on January 21st, 2020, to interview Darryl Walker, who was the president of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union from 2008 to 2014. Good morning, Darryl.

DW [00:00:22] Good morning.

KN [00:00:24] We want to start by just asking you a few questions about your early life, like where and when you were born? Where did you grow up? Can you talk a bit about that?

DW [00:00:31] Sure. I was I was born in Nanaimo in 1949 to a family that wasn't particularly well-to-do. My father was not a good salesman, but that was his job. And we tended to move a lot, I think, simply because he was somewhat unsuccessful. The rent ran up too much. We owed two or three months and they asked us to leave. So, my early recollections are the Maple Ridge area called Webster's Corners, where we lived with my mother's sister, and Richmond. Finally arriving in Port Coquitlam, I think I was in grade two. And at that point, for some reason, my father found stability and I spent the rest of my entire school time there. Port Coquitlam is indeed my hometown.

KN [00:01:13] Good. So, you alluded to what your father did. Was there any talk of unions in your household or progressive ideas politically? Or where did you come by any of that in your younger years?

DW [00:01:27] So my father died when I was 13. So, you know, kind of young to sit down and have discussions with a father about what his politics were. I did realize later in life that my father was a CCFer and a New Democrat. He was indeed a friend of Bob Strachan's. And I think that probably comes from the years in and around Nanaimo. He knew a number of people. I've talked to Sihota and others about, you know, the people that my father would have known that Moe and others knew and Bob Strachan, obviously. My early recollection politically was the first time Dave Barrett ran in Dewdney. And gosh, I would have been probably about ten at that time. And so, I went to the, I think, the agricultural hall, the Aggie Hall with my father. And so obviously at that point, he knew what he was, he knew where he came from. And as a kid, I was just running around with the rest of the kids in the hall. I've actually told this story to Dave and at a couple of occasions for Dave. You know, a kid running around ten years of age, what do you care about what the adults are talking about? You know, you just want to play. But there was something about this man that just grabbed me and a ten-year-old kid stopped and listened to Dave Barrett the first time I had a chance to hear from him, hear about him. And of course, my father was just over the moon about him. So, yeah, my father was a New Democrat for pretty much all of his life, I'm guessing. My mother, on the other hand, was a conservative and really didn't like to talk about politics. So, the family table was not some place that politics was discussed. It was like, in later years, you start to put things together and oh, there you go. Well, my dad was one of us. So yeah.

KN [00:03:02] What do you remember about your early work experience? Did you have contacts with unions? Were you union member? Can you talk about that?

DW [00:03:10] Sure. My first job was with Safeway. I was 15. I lied about my age. I had to be 16. But my brother managed to get a friend of his to get me a job. And I think that was Retail Clerks International and that would have been back in the very early sixties. And so I worked for them during my school years. When I got out of school, I went to work for Alcan Aluminum on Vulcan Way in Richmond, and of course that was Steelworkers. And so that was my first kind of real-life job and I worked there for a good year or so. I was just there to put money together. I was on my way to Europe to go travelling to get out of this country and take off. So, while I don't recollect a lot about that first stint with Alcan. I went to Europe and then came back and they hired me again. In the second stint, I became a shop steward. By that time, I'd experienced the labour movement in Britain. I understood how important things like that were and I became a shop steward, started attending the meetings, which I think were down on Broadway at that time. I remember I actually used to bicycle from Port Coquitlam to Vancouver and go to these union meetings. And that's where I really started getting a sense of if we stood together, if we supported each other, we were actually able to get something done. As it ended up, Alcan went on strike. And so I and my family was in Port Coquitlam there was another aluminum plant there Indolax [unclear]. They were also Steelworkers. I was hired there and never did go back to Alcan, but at that point I also realized the importance of standing together. So, a certain percent of my wages at Indolax [unclear] I gave back to the Steelworkers so that the guys on the line would be able to have a bit better time of it. So, you really start to get a sense when you get that close of what the labour movement is all about and how we support each other.

KN [00:04:56] Great. You alluded to your travelling and your also unique experience in Europe and England specifically. You want to talk a bit about that.

DW [00:05:05] Sure. So, on the boat to Britain, I met a number of people. Obviously, we ended up in Liverpool. One of them was a Mancunian who'd been living in Canada for two years. His father was a French-Canadian, so he had had immigrant status, and so he invited me to Manchester for a couple of days to meet the family, and as he put it, we'll go watch a football match. And so, within a very short time I realized I was going to stay there for a while and the family, Old Joe and Young Joe worked at a bakery down by Old Trafford, so they were in the Bakers Union and so went and got a job down there. And within a very short period of time, it was a regular job and I stayed for six months. Young Joe was a Marxist communist, and so I probably was, perhaps, a conservative. If anything, I really didn't know what I was at that point, and I used to argue with the guy, you know, I'd like to wait till he stopped talking and then I'd argue. Then one day instead of arguing, I started to listen, and it all started to make sense. And so I learnt more and more. I became involved with the union there. I actually nominated Joe as a shop steward at one of the Saturday morning meetings. And I've got to tell you, there're civilized. Saturday morning meetings were 10:00 at the local pub. As it happened, the local pub opened at 10:00, so the first order of business was getting the beer in and then we'd get on with the meeting. So, I nominated Joe there and he went on to be become the General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union of Great Britain and was there for for 25 years. And we're still very close, very close friends. So that was like, again, the opportunity to learn. So, by the time I came back to Canada, I'd kind of gone to the left a little bit. And my brother used to--quite frankly--(and I lived with my brother and his wife) tell me to go back to Russia. Go back to Russia. Darryl go back to Russia. Not

Russia, brother. Anyhow, there you go. That was my experience in Britain and that's how I think really led to a lot of getting involved, not only with the union movement, but with social justice in general, about just helping people and making sure that people have an opportunity to get what they truly deserve.

KN [00:07:18] So you would have been around and probably active in a union, and I'm not sure which union, but you might tell us around 1983 when Solidarity occurred, can you talk a bit about your experiences there?

DW [00:07:35] So I was hired at Riverview Hospital, at Essondale, as it was at that time in about 1973 when I'd initially come back from Europe and I went to work on the wards. Mental health was my job for well over 40 years. And, so through the seventies, everything was fairly quiet. But at the end of the seventies, a young Bill Bennett came in. He was the premier that replaced Barrett. And they started, I guess, I don't know, you could call it austerity. I frankly believe they were trying to cut their enemies out of the process. So, they started cutting pieces of what was the group that I represented. In the GEU, each work group is called a component. So, there's one for social workers, there's one for liquor stores, there's one for highways. There was one for the government institutions of which at that time there were probably as many as eight or ten of them, major institutions throughout the province. Ours happened to be Riverview, and then I worked at Colony Farm, which was forensic. And so we in the early 1980s, Bill Bennett, I think, brought in Bills 1 and 2. This was something, of course, that was done in the middle of the night. They they packed the legislature. There was little debate. And they were designed to cut back on a number of things, including the collective agreements of some of the unions. And one of them was the BCGEU, and I'm darn certain one of them was the teachers, because the teachers in the GEU were amongst the very first that went and did job action. And so, the realization, as a new shop steward, was that they were trying to take our jobs away. They were trying to put the people we took care of into society without really creating the infrastructure that was required. And they were just going to lay off a lot of well-paid workers with good benefits and wages and pensions and so on. And they were simply going to put into boarding homes at minimum wage and effectively that's what they did. So, my very early years were that early fight around Operation Solidarity.

KN [00:09:37] Do you remember anything specifically about the events of that summer and fall of 1983?

DW [00:09:44] Well, the biggest one, of course, was the 50,000 people out at Empire Stadium. And that was, I mean, it was like your skin tingled to think of that many people watching people march in the marching bands, the pipers coming in with the firefighters. And there was nobody, from my perspective, that was left out of it, though. The police were there and they probably had two roles. One was to make sure the place was safe. The other was to also stand for themselves as well. And so, you know, it just was a sparkling day and it was an entire day. We got a number of people together that we worked with and we met at somebody's house and we all took two or three cars down and there were maybe ten or 15 of us. And it was just then all of the people that spoke and what they had to say. I think there was one fellow that climbed up one of the flag poles and put a solidarity flag up there. If I'm not confused, it might have been a guy named Tom Kozar who was the, at that time, I believe, one of the VP's of the BCGEU. And I didn't know him at that time. Tom and I became friends later, but it was like there was something about this movement that really, really grabbed us. And I think because OpSol was more than just unions, it was social justice, it was

seniors, it was students, it was environmental organizations, it was social justice groups. It was anybody that was being attacked and many were being attacked by the Socred government under young Bill Bennett. Everybody came together and so it was more than a labour movement. It was probably one of the most exciting things that I can ever remember in my labour lifetime.

KN [00:11:19] Okay. Now, during the Solidarity years, a person by the name of Norm Richards was president of BCGEU. But shortly after that, John Shields, who would have a significant impact on both the GEU and I think on on the union movement in BC.

DW [00:11:37] Yes, yes.

KN [00:11:39] Took over, can you, do you remember being active in the union while John was president?

DW [00:11:43] I do, as I indicated.

KN [00:11:46] Experiences that you might have had?

DW [00:11:47] Exactly as I indicated in the early seventies. That was when I came in as a steward. And very quickly onto the local executive. If you didn't say no, you got to do just about everything. And I just learnt never to say no, I can do that. I don't know what it means, but I'll figure it out before you need me to do it. And then I joined the component executive and that was the senior grouping for the institutions. And then I had the opportunity so starting to meet some of the senior players. I didn't know Norm very well. He'd kind of moved on and John had moved in during that time. What I remember about John, and it was interesting, a little bit of it came about because of a convention out of UBC. We used to have the SUB building at UBC and every two years we'd have our convention and there were two other fellows that ran against John for president one year. I cannot remember the year, but it would have been the early to mid-eighties and part of the concern that they were putting forward was the staff were running the union and that they maybe weren't necessarily doing a good job. But that wasn't the point. The activists and the members should have more say into it. Well, as it turned out, John won that election and a very different John Shields came out the other side of it. We started having more open meetings. We started involving the activists more when every two years we'd have a a strike vote because our contracts were two years long. Often every two years we'd go on strike. And the activists were the ones that started going to different worksites and talking about what the contract looked like, what we were asking for, and asking them what they were prepared to do. That put me into Corrections. That put me into jails, that put me into working with social workers, obviously opportunities to get into the liquor stores and health care. And there were two levels of health care at that time. And so that was something that I believe John did to open up our union. He literally gave the union back to the activists and gave it back to the members. And for myself, I will, you know, basically ever, ever be thankful on on that particular thing. John was my mentor, an amazing man. Of course, John and Diane and George, Georgetti, were all charged with I think it was seditious conspiracy by the Bennett government for the Operation Solidarity. And Georgetti to this day said I kind of wear it as a badge of honour. I ask them if they could send me a certificate saying that. So that was what, you know, these individuals were willing to do to go that far, to be able to fight for the rights of workers and everyone. And as I say, John

really opened the union up to the average person, the activists and so on, and a huge piece, as far as I'm concerned.

KN [00:14:25] Just to correct the charge of seditious conspiracy was respect to the 1987 June 1st general strike. The BC Fed called a one-day general strike on that day, and that's when they were charged with sedition.

DW [00:14:41] Then I stand corrected. Thanks for that Ken.

KN [00:14:44] But all the rest of that is there.

DW [00:14:47] Yeah, yeah.

KN [00:14:48] Okay. Now, after John Shields, of course, came George Heyman, and he was there, I think, for about nine years. So, can you talk a bit about those years? Yeah. You must have been on the provincial executive.

DW [00:15:07] I was, as a matter of fact, it almost the moving within a system almost mirrored itself. He was president for nine years. I was vice president for nine years. So the year that George was elected president, I was elected VP, and almost kind of like took over from Tom. That was Tom's. He started backing away at that time. Obviously, he was involved in a lot of other things. But yes. And so that the years where George and I are contemporaries, and yet in a lot of ways, again, another mentor. He, again, is one of the most thoughtful people, you know, that that I knew. What struck me the most about George was that he took us through one of the toughest times that our union was going to have to go through. And that was 2001, after Campbell was elected. I was of the belief that we were absolutely going to get shattered, that we were the one they were going to come for. We were the closest to them. We were kind of the government union, you know, like probably almost 100% of our membership was paid through tax dollars and so on. And somehow--and I believe George had a lot of the responsibility for it--we didn't. George managed to find ways to, I guess, consolidate our gains but not allow any losses to be to be brought to us. And we continued to build relationships with a government that wasn't a particularly friendly government, but we did that. And I think in order to try and find ways of saving ourselves. Indeed, we signed extension collective agreements specifically in the master not long after Campbell was elected. And again, that put what was at that time probably 40% or better of our members out of jeopardy. Now, there were others such as health care and social services that we end up there was damage done to them. But we managed to somehow survive that and I believe have started now and started under my watch a little bit under George's, but under my watch, and certainly under Stephanie Smith, now, to rebuild that and continue to get rights back, that health care and social service workers were lost. So, George was a very thoughtful, thoughtful man. I'll give you an example of something I was working on. There was an organization that was put together by the government in the nineties that was to do with health care, occupational health and safety. And, and so there were a number of unions that were part of it, HEU, the nurses, ourselves, HSA and so on. And, and I got into a little kerfuffle one day with another union representative who was kind of the leader of the group that we were working with. She wasn't my boss, and I wanted to point that out to George. And I was asking her to do something. And she said, before you contact anybody, you contact me first. And I didn't like that. Why should I do that? So anyhow, I went to George and he said, okay, Darryl. He said, I want you to sit on it for 24 hours. And he said, if tomorrow at the same time

it's just as important, then you send your email back to her and tell her what you think. Twenty-four hours later, it wasn't anywhere near as important, and her and I went on to become very good friends and work very, very closely. And that was the OSHA organization that I think did great work for the labour movement and especially the health care sector for many, many years. And of course, it was undone by Campbell. So George had a way of just kind of finding that middle ground and making sure it worked for most people. And in essence, what I think he did was he built relationships with the other side, even though the the other side were, in some cases, nasty pieces of work. We needed to do something with them. If we just kept on spitting in their faces, we were going to lose. We didn't have the punch. So, I was really impressed with that piece of George's advice.

KN [00:18:55] Okay. So, you were vice president during that period of time when George stepped down in 2008, you obviously stepped forward to run. Were you contested?

DW [00:19:07] Yeah, there was four others. There were five of us in total ran for that particular position and I was successful on the second ballot.

KN [00:19:14] Okay. And can you talk a bit about your experience then as president? You were president for six years. During that time, you had a major strike in September of 2012. Talk a bit about that.

DW [00:19:31] Yeah. And that was the first public service strike, public sector strike in probably I'm going to guess 14 years back to the late 1990s. And so, a lot of people said, oh, there goes the union on strike again. And of course, our line was, please have a look at our strike and how often we've done it. You'll find that we've got collective agreements consistently over the years. So, I think one of the things that was important, I think George, you know, kind of taught us that and I tried to carry on was the first thing I did after I was elected. Within the first week was went to Victoria and met a number of ministers and deputies and went and met the representatives from PSEC, the Public Sector Employers Council, and started to build that relationship with them to understand who they were as people. They weren't just a name that we knew we were going to fight with. They were somebody that we went and broke bread with, had coffee with, talked about, made sure that we were in contact on a regular basis. And again, thanks to George, I believe that's an important piece of what we did. And you probably would know yourself from negotiations, that often the employer will take you out into the hall or in the back room and say, look, we can't get this for you. You're going to have to get it. And this is how we think you should. And so, we had that type of relationship. How far can we go on this one? Is this something we actually think we can get? Or is this that's an absolute no. You have to be able to to be honest with each other. And so, they would often say and we would, you know, parrot it. Okay, you don't have a mandate. We're going to go get you one. And so, the relationship was such that we knew how far we could go and where we had to stop and be able to kind of get back to whatever normal was. Talk a little bit more in a bit about the relationship with the other unions. But frankly, the relationship with the employers was as important as the relationship with the other unions, because we were kind of the centrepiece in a lot of what was done. There were maybe, in the public sector, and this included the teachers and all the health care sector and all that type of stuff. But there were one or two that were kind of, you know, kind of were asked to go forward and take a little bit more of the responsibility on and the GEU was one of them. And we used to sit down and talk to their negotiators about where we could go with this thing and whether it was a two or three or a four-year collective agreement, what we thought

wage would look like, what other pieces were important. So, we had a sense from both sides where we might be able to go before we even went in. And then if we took the lead, knowing full well that the other unions and the GEU would work together to say we're not going below this figure, this is it. And nobody would do that. Nobody would jump out ahead until everybody knew that we were all going to get the same amount. And I think it I think it did very well for the labour movement at that time. And in cases where we could have been fighting with either the Campbell government or the Christy Clark government, we managed to find middle ground and we managed to get collective agreements. They were not unreasonable collective agreements, but there were added pieces to it that the average public wouldn't necessarily really understand. If somebody looked at 2%, they'd say, that's not bad. But we got a little bit more on pensions. We got a little bit more on benefits, we got a little bit more on holidays. We got a little bit more on our, you know, the health care and that type of stuff. And so, you kind of had to know where you could go. And if you could find somebody that we would work with, then that made it a little bit easier to do that.

KN [00:23:05] So given all of that you said about how you worked through that period of time, what was the strike about then?

DW [00:23:14] They wouldn't go far enough. We needed to get them that mandate, and I can't remember what the difference was. I don't think it was that much. It was salaries, yes, absolutely. And it was, and effectively, I think they knew that the bottom line was wherever they were got in the public sector, in some cases, we were then bumping them up in health care and social services. And that was the other important point. Those are the ones that had been hammered in the early 2000s and they were knocked down from what was 20 odd dollars an hour with good benefits back down to almost minimum wage starting over again. And we knew that we had to have some plan to get them up. George started that plan so that there was 2% in general for the public sector, it was two plus another percent per year, over three or four years for each of those sectors so that we could start moving them back up to where the rest of us were. And that was you know, that was the solidarity piece about how do we make sure we get for them what they what they need and try and get them, you know, kind of out of the hole that's been dug for them.

KN [00:24:16] And you alluded to the unions working together basically in the public sector. How did that work? Who coordinated?

DW [00:24:24] That was primarily through the Federation of Labour. And Jim Sinclair, of course, was the Fed president of that time. And, you know, early in the piece, if we were going into bargaining, it was often at the beginning of the new year. So, you go in in January to try and get some kind of a March or April deadline. By the fall of the year before, we would have sat down as the, you know, the senior folks within the movement and start in the public sector and started talking about what it was we thought we needed and what the importance were to each of the different unions. So, I mean, wages was the relatively easy one. Everybody wanted more wages and we could almost always agree on that. But there were other pieces that say the HEU wanted, and it was more important to them than it was to the HSA. And so, we'd have to find out, you know, what that looked like and then try and, you know, piece it together and then try and take it forward, you know, kind of as one of the unions, which one was going to start it, which one was going to go in first. They were all going to be bargaining, but we understood that we were going to do it at a certain pace so that we could get whichever one was, you know, the kind of the the lead one so they could get, you

know, the early stuff, more of the early stuff done before, and the rest of them had to worry about it.

KN [00:25:37] During your years as president, you were also served by virtue of that as a senior officer of the BC Federation of Labour. Do you remember anything during your period of time on the BC Fed officers that was significant in terms of the BC Federation of Labour and what was happening there?

DW [00:26:00] Yeah, I think that to me I started seeing, first of all, I'm a socialist and that's where my beliefs come from and and the rest of it just flows from there. And that means, from my perspective, everybody is treated equally and everybody is treated the same and and fairly. And so Operation Solidarity to me was close to my heart because it wasn't just the labour movement. By the time we got into the, you know, the late 2000s, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 we'd already fought a hell of a battle against Clark. And, of course, Christy was on her way in and... sorry, Campbell. And then Christy was on her way in, and we needed to stand together on more than just the labour movement issues. And at that point, I think we were doing a fine job. I think Jim Sinclair helped to lead us down that track. We were already starting to talk to environmental organizations. The Labour Environment Alliance was something that had come, come about through Mae Burrows in the late nineties. Once that was created and I was a VP, George assigned me to that. We started working with a lot of groups and organizations that were fighting for those that weren't particularly able to fight for themselves. That was available from, you know, like the 2001 to basically 2014 when, you know, I stepped aside. And I believe that we were pretty much all on the same slate with that one. If there were groups that needed it, the labour movement and the Federation of Labour was there and wanted to work with it. And I think, you know, some of our conventions really showed that the people we brought in and talked to were not just the politicals and the labour movement. There were a lot of other groups that that came and, you know, spoke at our conventions that did workshops at our convention and so on. I think we were trying to give the training to new people coming in and even the seniors like ourselves about what some of the problems our society was facing.

KN [00:27:55] Okay. So, is there is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience as president and the GEU, your experience with unions generally?

DW [00:28:04] I think I think we pretty much covered it. A lot of a lot of what I learnt, I learnt it, you know, from, from John and George and the senior folks that were around. There were some tremendous negotiators and, you know, the people at the GEU and in the labour movement in general, I think did a wonderful job. I think the labour movement, British Columbia, is second to none. That might not be fair because I may not know as much about Eastern Canada as I do, but I believe there's a reason that we are considered an organization, or a group of organizations that push the envelope and stand up for for things that not necessarily everybody can stand up for. Beyond that, I think we pretty much covered it.

KN [00:28:46] So after your six years as president of the BCGEU, you got involved in civic politics and in 2018 you were elected mayor of White Rock. So I was just wondering, can you talk a bit about that experience and what do you like most about that job, your new job?

DW [00:29:08] So starting in probably 2017 or so, there were two organizations that were kind of created or developed out of the South Surrey-White Rock New Democrats. A fellow named Gord Savard, who you probably know very, very well, his home is kind of NDP central in our area, and we're all part of it, whether it's the federal or the provincial constituency. And so, at that time, you know, Gord suggested that maybe we might want to have a look at a couple of things. One was forming a civic party in Surrey and one was forming a civic party in White Rock. And so obviously separate entities. But we had the energy and lots of interest in it. Gord had the contacts and we started holding meetings to bring people together to talk about what Surrey would look like and then, you know, what White Rock would look like. Unfortunately, Surrey kind of didn't survive some, I won't say shenanigans, but changes in direction by some of the people we thought were going to be excellent candidates for ourselves, and that one, it died a quiet, silent death. White Rock, on the other hand, created founded an organization called Democracy Direct White Rock that had been operational for probably well over a year. There was a mayor and council in White Rock at that time that the people really didn't think too highly of that were doing a lot of things behind closed doors, or at least that was the belief, and so Democracy Direct White Rock started to having a look at that. And once a month we'd come together at the local library and people from the community were welcome. Come on out. Tell us your story. Well, they're doing this in my area, well they're doing this in my area, well, this in my area. So, you started, you know, like building a list of things that you could hold up against folks. And at one point it was suggested the New Democrats maybe want to go out and have a look at it. So, I said, well, I'll go out one night and I'll join. It was ten bucks, no big deal. And I told them I was a New Democrat and the reason I was here was because I was looking to see what these folks were all about, but also trying to sell our product as well. So, you know that when I speak, I speak as a New Democrat. And so very quickly, they asked me if I would kind of take over the chair position of the group because it was somewhat haphazard. There were people yelling and speaking over others and so on. There was no agendas. There were very few minutes. And so, yeah, absolutely. And so we started putting, you know, I guess a proper organization together and we started getting people that were seriously interested in running. We put proposals, policies in place that Democracy Direct believed in, voted on by the members of Democracy Direct. And then at one point, it was suggested to me that if we wanted to win this, we needed a spokesperson and that that I might be that spokesperson. So, and I didn't want to I was quite happily retired. I'd been out of work for five years. And I was enjoying life. But at one point I decided that if we were going to do anything, they were right. We needed to do it and do it right. So, I finally said, yeah, I will take that responsibility on with the full understanding that we weren't going to win anyway. We had five untried municipal politicians, None of us had ever run before, but all of us were involved socially within our within our community. And all five of us, you know, swept to victory along with two incumbents that had been offside with the former coalition. So, you know, there we are today walking in and honestly, didn't have a clue what to expect or how this process worked. I'd been on advisory boards. I'd sat through council meetings, but I didn't have a clue what the responsibilities were. And so, you know, the day after the election, it's like, okay, here we go. Somebody is going to tell me, I'm sure they are. And then I'll get to go down there. And so, you know, here we are today, basically about 14 months later, I think I think we've done relatively well in that time. Some of the concerns were just lack of transparency and openness. Last night we had a gathering at our community centre. We have what we believe to be about $13 million in funds, community amenity funds that can be spent on a number of things. And we just ask the general public to come on out and tell us what they want to spend the money on. And people are now coming up to us at streets and supermarkets and coffeehouses and just saying, thanks very much,

you're opening it up. And that's really what we intended to do, but we don't agree on everything. But for the most part, we understand what we want to do as the people that are part of this. And sometimes we're successful and the vote goes the right way. And sometimes, you know, as they say, sometimes you get the bear, sometimes the bear gets you. But it's all good.

KN [00:34:06] Can you comment at all on how your union experience might have prepared you for this job?

DW [00:34:13] My belief is the union experience is like an apprenticeship. It's like learning the skills from the bottom up. And so everything I learnt, including my ability to, I guess, do a discussion like this, my ability to talk in front of people, my ability to probably think, you know, off the top of my head, I think I learnt from the labour movement. When you spend enough time in rooms with members that are absolutely frustrated, I may say pissed at what's going on, and you have to try and talk to them about what is important that they're saying, and what you maybe can't do about what they're saying and come out of the room at the end of the evening with them shaking your hands and thanking you. That's an important piece of what I learnt in the labour movement. And so, it gave me the ability, without any doubt, to stand up and say, look, this is who I am. Second largest union in the province for six years as president. How much? You know our strike fund is worth, number of offices we own around the province. Number of staff that I was strictly speaking, responsible for. And people started realizing, wait a minute, this guy is more than just some guy from Maple Street. This guy knows his stuff. And I think the labour movement gave me that. That opportunity I have, I have little doubt of it.

KN [00:35:35] So, we're getting close to the end of the interview and I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions of a general nature. Do you have any words of wisdom to someone who might just become becoming at this time, active in their union at this time in our history?

DW [00:35:53] Yeah, I think I said something earlier that really resonates with me. Don't say no. You could probably do just about anything you want. And I'll tell you and I've said it over and over again to people that we want to become shop stewards. You're not going to be alone. That's the process. We're all in this together. The "you" in union is all of us. And so that's from my perspective, to take a chance, learn some stuff. The union has an array of courses that they will provide for you. And beyond that, most unions will spend money on you if you want to go out and get involved with an environmental organization. I'd be more than willing to bet that the union would help you with that particular piece. Look around to other pieces of the movement. I spent, from the time I became president, nine years at the Vancouver and District Labour Council with the likes of Fitzpatrick and I mean a huge learning curve. Every union that was affiliated in the Vancouver and District area was there. I got to understand so much more about all of the unions around and the people that I work with. I built that relationship; take advantage of everything the union gives to you and expect to put in some long hours and expect not to get paid for some of those long hours. I worked in an institution when we took a strike vote in the institution, we were often there at 5:00 in the morning and we'd sometimes get a break during the day and at 12 and 1:00 the next morning, because that's when we could get the strike votes. We didn't get any extra pay for it. We did it because we believed. Do it because you believe. Make it a calling, not a job.

KN [00:37:30] Thank you. I have one last question and that relates to labour history. Do you think it's important for young people, young union activists today, to know something of their own union history and the labour history and their problems generally? And if so, why?

DW [00:37:47] I absolutely do. And the old saying, you know, like history is something that's going to give you a number of opportunities. If you don't learn from it, you're going to repeat the mistakes. We need to know where we came from. Don't ever forget that people died for your right to walk a picket line, to have a union card, to have a vote on something. People died for that, right. We're beyond that today, but not too damn far beyond it. They can take our rights away just by their signature on a piece of legislation in Victoria or in Ottawa. And they have in the past and some of them may well like to again. So we need to understand who we are and where we came from. We also need to have an idea of where we want to go to, and there's a lot of places we can continue to go to. Fortunately, the labour movement in this country is a little stronger than it is with our friends south of the border. But it's never going to be strong enough that we can take it for granted. Nor are your wages, nor are your pensions, nor are your benefits. So, understand what it took to get those and also understand what it's going to take to keep them.

KN [00:38:53] Great. Thank you very much.

DW [00:38:56] Pleasure.