

Interview: David Yorke (DY)

Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)

Date: April 22, 2025

Location: Burnaby, B.C.

Transcription: Natasha Fairweather

KN [00:00:07] Okay, it's April 22nd, 2025, and we're here to interview David Yorke. We did interview David Yorke as part of the BCTF History Project in 2023, and covered his role in BCTF history from when he was hired in 1981 until his retirement in 2000. This segment of the interview, being done by the BC Labour Heritage Center, covers David's experiences since his retirement—largely covers his experiences since retirement. So David, in an earlier segment of this interview, you referred to the role you played in assisting the Hospital Employees' Union with your Supreme Court of Canada case on the right to free collective bargaining. The BCTF had launched a legal case for restoration of all provisions of their collective agreement stripped by the provincial government in 2002. Can you talk about any role you had in assisting with this case?

DY [00:01:06] Sure. Like you said, when the Campbell government stripped the contracts of the healthcare workers in 2002 they also stripped the contract and prevented negotiation of working conditions, in particular class size, from the teachers. And so both the healthcare workers and the teachers launched charter challenges to that legislation back in 2002, but the healthcare workers went first and it was thought that there was no point in both cases going forward at the same time. So the teachers' case was put on the side burner until the healthcare decision came down in 2007. When that happened, then the teachers took their case forward and that involved going to the Supreme Court of British Columbia and there was extensive preparation for that case. Victory Square Law Office ran that case for the BCTF and I was asked to do, in particular, a research affidavit that dealt with the importance of class size historically to teacher bargaining. And so I assisted in the evidentiary case and a bit of the discussion about some of the argumentation, but it was mostly on assembling the incredibly extensive history about teachers bargaining class size and class composition. And that affidavit went forward as part of the court case, and of course the teachers were successful in that case. It was very largely a replay of the hospital employees' case because it had the same kind of chronology in terms of the imposition of the legislation. And really the only difference was the subject matter of the bargaining that was interfered with. And so that's why we spent a lot of time making sure that the courts understood how incredibly important class size and composition is to the work life of teachers. So that was really the role that I had in that case. I was happy to have been assistance there and really happy with the way it turned out.

KN [00:03:56] Can you say a few words about the BCTF case after it was dealt with by the B.C. Supreme Court on two occasions and then ultimately what happened when in the B.C. Court of Appeal and then the Supreme Court of Canada?

DY [00:04:10] Well, sure. As I said, because the facts and the chronology of the BCTF case was so similar to that of the healthcare workers it was not exactly a foregone conclusion, but a fairly predictable result that the teachers would be successful in the first instance. But the B.C.—and for that reason I think, the B.C. government didn't appeal the Supreme Court decision in the first case. The theory of the government lawyer about both cases, the health care case and the teacher's case—putting the best case on a very substantial and significant loss for the government in the Supreme Court of Canada. The

theory was that all the Supreme Court of Canada had said was really that the government should have consulted a bit more and had put on a bit of a show about consulting with the workers before imposing the legislation. It really wasn't very substantive.

DY [00:05:35] And so what the government did rather than appeal the case was to go through an exercise with the teachers that had the form of bargaining and had the form of consultation about the kind of contract that teachers should have, but it was surface bargaining. They thought that was really all they had to do before they reimposed essentially the same legislation as they had imposed back in 2002. The only difference, really, in the legislation was that it was said to be not of unlimited effect in terms of time. It was time-limited, so they thought that the consultation effort they had made plus the time limit would make the difference. They introduced essentially the same legislation, which again eliminated just hundreds and hundreds of class size provisions and prevented the negotiation of those provisions while the legislation was in effect.

DY [00:07:01] The BCTF naturally launched a second case. I was not involved in that case. I, by that time, had been retired from the teachers for about a dozen years, and I thought it was time to step aside. And so, again, Victory Square just did an excellent job in carrying that case forward. But I do want to say that in that case, I think one of the real heroes of that case was the late Brian Porter. He was absolutely central in the process that the government engaged in before introducing the legislation. He was completely alive to what the government was up to. I think he did all the right things and I know that in the preparation of the case and in the preparation of the evidence that went to the Supreme Court, in the second case Brian Porter was absolutely central to it and I think the teachers of B.C. owe him a whole lot for his work in in that case, as well as the people at Victory Square, and particularly John Rogers.

DY [00:08:15] So the case went again before the same justice, Madam Justice Griffin, in the Supreme Court. And she, again, ruled against the government and had basically indicated that and found as a fact that the government had acted in bad faith in the negotiations with the teachers, and she again held all of the same provisions of the legislation to be unconstitutional. The government, now believing the advice of their council that they had sufficiently consulted in order to meet what they thought was a fairly low test, appealed to the B.C. Court of Appeal. B.C. Court Of Appeal heard the case and in a two-to-one decision reversed the case and held against the teachers. The dissenting judge was Mr. Justice Ian Donald and he wrote a very powerful dissent, again explaining the principles that the Supreme Court of Canada had established in the health care case. And that case—that dissent rather, was very significant because when the teachers then appealed the Court of Appeal decision to the Supreme Court of Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada very quickly and very decisively reversed the Court of Appeal, upheld the teachers, and adopted in its entirety Ian Donald's dissent in the B.C. Court of Appeal. And so his decision about the test for unconstitutionality in terms of collective bargaining ended up being in effect the final word in the matter. And so again, the teachers were successful in the Supreme Court of Canada, and that had the effect of completely restoring all of the provisions that the legislation had stripped. There was a monetary reward against the government as well. I thought that was the end of a very significant and positive kind of legal history for the teachers, but that's what I know about it. I wasn't there for the second part of it, I was just there for first part of it.

KN [00:11:12] Okay, thank you. Shortly after you retired, David, you were approached by Frank Kennedy, who was the president of the Vancouver and District Labour Council at the time, to become involved in the On-to-Ottawa Trek Historical Society. Can you tell us a

bit about this organization and some of the things that you got involved doing when you agreed to participate?

DY [00:11:36] Well, I think that Frank Kennedy thought that I was retired and that he should contribute to my welfare by keeping me out of trouble, by giving me something to do. So he was getting on and he was about to bow out of his work in the organization. And he was looking for somebody who had some of his skills, I guess, to carry on. The On-to-Ottawa historical society had been established in 1985, around the fiftieth anniversary of the 1935 On-to-Ottawa Trek. It had initially been established by veterans of the trek, a number of them—a fellow named Willis Sharpella and but very significantly a fellow name Bob Jackson who was a very feisty and very energetic and enthusiastic source of the history of the trek. And he put together a group of the surviving veterans of the Trek and friends to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the of the trek and they thought that rather than it just being a one-off thing that they should actually establish an ongoing society to work on projects about the trek.

DY [00:13:07] There were a number of events in 1985, including a pilgrimage to Ottawa, where unlike 1935 they actually did get to meet with the Prime Minister, and there was quite a lot of publicity about the trek at that point. Society carried on, and by the time I came along (which was after I retired) they had started to work on a website. They had actually, in the interim, produced a very successful video history of the On-to-Ottawa trek, but they thought that what they would like do is to establish a website. When I came along they were putting together the website and doing fundraising for the website and that's sort of what I was involved in initially. There was a lot of history in the website, a lot historical photographs, there was by that time quite an extensive literature about the about the On-to-Ottawa trek—starting with Ron Liversedge's initial recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, but also magazine articles and a couple of more books, and a number of videos as well. So we packaged that all up together and put it onto a website. For me, a website was a brand-new thing. I never was much of a techie, but some of the people in the On-to-Ottawa Historical Society knew stuff about websites and so they put it together.

DY [00:15:01] And then when it was coming up to 2010, it was going to be the 75th anniversary of the Trek, and the On-to-Ottawa Society decided that what they would like to establish was a permanent marker in Vancouver to commemorate the trek. And so we got together a committee, and we worked up a plaque that we wanted to put at a significant place. And the significant place turned out to be right at the foot of Main Street, which is where in June of 1935, the 1,000 unemployed men had gathered to get onto the boxcars to start the trek. Well, right at the foot of Main Street there is an overpass that overlooks that very site. So we thought that would be the very best place for the plaque. Overpass, turns out to be owned by the National Harbors Board and the Port of Vancouver Corporation, which was a federal entity. So after getting the funding together for the plaque and getting agreement on the wording and so on, we had to go through a process with the federal government to get permission to put the plaque up. Through a lot of hard work and a bit of luck we were able to do that and the plaque is, last time it looked, still there. And I think is a fairly fitting statement about the importance of the trek in Canada's social history. We had a nice event at CRAB Park, which immediately adjacent to this site, and there was a very fine commemoration of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, with the participation actually of one of the very, very last people associated with the 1935 trek.

DY [00:17:28] That was a very rewarding experience working on the trek. And the society carried on, mostly in terms of maintenance of its website, but at the same time the BC Labour Heritage Centre was starting to take on a very important role overall in BC's labour

history. And so eventually the On-to-Ottawa Historical Society merged itself into or became absorbed by the BC Labour Heritage Centre, and its work and in particular the entire website and listing of resource materials and some just wonderful videos of some of the old trekkers is all now part of the BC Labour Heritage Centre website. So that's, I think, pretty much what I had to do with On-to-Ottawa.

KN [00:18:33] Okay.

DY [00:18:35] Kept me out of trouble.

KN [00:18:38] You also, at some point in your life, became interested in the history of the Mackenzie-Papineau contingent of the International Brigades, who fought for democracy during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. Can you tell us a bit about your early involvement in this endeavor, including some of the Mac-Paps that you got to know?

DY [00:19:00] Growing up in the kind of family that I grew up in, one of the proud aspects of the history of the left-wing movement in Canada was the fact that in 1937, 1938, about 1,500 Canadians volunteered to go to Spain to fight on the side of the elected Spanish Republican government, which was the subject of a coup d'etat and a rebellion by the forces of fascism in Europe that were on the rise at the time. The Spanish leader was Generalissimo Francisco Franco, who was in the fascist frame of mind, and he was directly supported by the German government under Hitler and the Italian government under Mussolini. They supported the rebellion against the elected government. It was a tremendously important event in the world stage. It was one of the first real armed conflicts where fascism was resisted by force of arms. It was a very uneven fight because, by and large, the Western democracies stayed out of the fight or, to some degree, even assisted the wrong side.

DY [00:20:51] The Canadians who went to Spain, by in large did so, well, not by and large, completely against the wishes of their government. The government passed legislation eventually prohibiting the Canadians from going to Spain. Many of them just did so anyways, and like I say, there were about 1,500 of them that went to Spain. It was a very bloody and a very dangerous thing for them to do, and hundreds and hundreds of them died in Spain. And the ones who returned had gone through hell in attempting to resist a really overwhelming force against them at that point. And so the veterans who came back were really sort of honoured in the community that I was part of anyways.

DY [00:21:51] I got to know some of them quite well, in particular Lionel Edwards, who was a military hero in Spain, he rose to the rank of captain in the International Brigades. A very wonderful, interesting guy, and I was very proud to know him in particular. One of my neighbors was a fellow named Fred Mattersdorfer, another vet. There were a number of the vets that I got to know largely through the family connections that we had in the left-wing community at that point. They were a wonderful bunch of old guys, and they got together every once in a while and would have reunions and talk about their times in Spain, but relate it to what was going on. I was very proud to march with them in a number of the protests against the Vietnam War and they would show up with their banners and their medals from the Spanish Civil War and be part of that protest. No, they were, it was really a great bunch of people to know. Later on, I got to know through a sort of a different channel, a fellow named Arne Knudsen who was a Danish-Canadian who had got to Spain by a very interesting route and he was a wonderful storyteller, really a wonderful source of history of the war and had all kinds of connections and anecdotes and was always willing to share them with anybody who wanted to talk to him about the Spanish Civil War, and I

got to know him fairly well and spent some time talking with him, and I always treasured that.

KN [00:24:08] In 2013, David, you edited and had published a book on the Mac-Paps, heavily based on the memoir of Ron Liversedge, that you have these materials in your possession. Can you tell us about how all of this came about, how you ended up with these materials and how you end up doing the book?

DY [00:24:30] Well, sort of two streams came together. When I had been going through university prior to going to law school, I did a history paper on the left-wing unions during the 1930s in B.C. that were centered in an organization called the Workers' Unity League. One of the components of the Workers' Unity League was the Relief Camp Workers' Union, which was the organization that had organized and conducted the On-to-Ottawa Trek. At that point in the story, the only full-scale book about the On-to-Ottawa Trek had been written by Ronald Liversedge. And he wrote in the 1960s, a book called *The Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*. It was sort of self-published in Vancouver and really became the mainspring of historiography about the trek.

DY [00:25:45] I had written about the Workers' Unity League, and I knew that he had that connection with it through the trek, and so I went and interviewed him in his house in Lake Cowichan, about—well, it was 1971 or 1972. I had a very good time with him and his wife at their home in Lake Cowichan, and talking about, again, the On-to-Ottawa trek, and in particular trying to get further information about the Workers' Unity League, which at that stage in the game had really not been written about at all. I have to confess now that I didn't prepare for that interview like you've prepared for this interview. So I didn't know at all that Ron Liversedge had been, as well as a participant in the On-to-Ottawa trek, had been one of the volunteers for the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion that went to Spain. I had no idea.

DY [00:27:03] I finished having my interview with him and I'm literally standing on his porch saying goodbye to him and he said to me, 'Just wait a minute, I have something I'd like to show you.' And he went back in the house and came back with a brown envelope and he said 'I'd like you to read this and see what you think, and I think that it might be of interest to people if it were to be published, and it's about my having gone to Spain.' I said, 'Oh, well. Fine.' And so I took it away. I then immediately got wrapped up in other things, including going to law school. I didn't pay any kind of attention to it, and I didn't really know the background to it. The background to was that he had written up his memoir of his being recruited and going to Spain and coming back as a volunteer for the Mac-Paps. And there had been extensive attempts to get it published that hadn't worked. And he was sort of at the end of his tether about it. Very shortly after that, he died. And so the manuscript, or at least the original manuscript that I had, just sort of stayed in my basement for, I'm ashamed to say, 40 years.

DY [00:28:49] At the end of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, we were having a discussion about what to do next and the subject of Ron Liversedge came up and I confessed to people that I had this manuscript and so Joey Hartman and Am Johal and some of the others just sort of said well you better get onto it and do something with it. The first thing I did with it, actually, was to go and see Arne Knudsen and gave him a copy of it. And he said, best thing he's ever read on the Mac-Paps. Wonderful stuff, he really liked it. And that sort of gave me the impetus to look at it a bit more. And so I read it again, and I thought, yes, this is really good. I mean, it needs, it needs some work. It needs some editing, and it needs some explanation because it had been written 40 years earlier and I guess 40 years earlier

people knew some of the terms and some of events and so on. So I did an editing of it and did some notes for it and wrote up a little biography of Ron Liversedge himself and took it to New Star Publishers—New Star Books. And Rolf Maurer said, well, sounds great. So as a result of that, in 2013, it was published as "Mac Pap: A Memoir of a Canadian in the Spanish Civil War." And it's been quite widely received and is in most libraries now, as part of the literature about the Spanish Civil War. I'm really happy that I was able to do that finally a little bit late, but better late than never, I guess.

KN [00:31:00] It's a great book, David.

DY [00:31:03] Thank you.

KN [00:31:05] In 2013, rather, more recently, you became involved with an organization that seeks to annually, on November 11th, locate and identify the graves of Mackenzie-Papineau members buried in various graveyards of camp across Canada. What can you tell us about this project?

DY [00:31:27] I'm just one of many volunteers that's involved in this project. It initiated—it originated in Victoria. It came about as a result of two people in Victoria meeting each other, more or less by accident. One of them was a fellow named Ray Hoff, and he is the American-born son of one of the veterans that went to the Spanish Civil War from the United States. He was a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. He was very interested in it because his father had fought in Spain and he knew very much from his own father the history of it. I must say I don't know actually how he came to be in Canada, but he ended up living in Victoria. He ran into a woman named Pamela Vivian. Pamela Vivian found out pretty much by accident that she had an uncle who had gone to the Spanish Civil War and he had been killed very early in the Spanish Civil War at the Battle of Jarama. She became very interested in her uncle and the history surrounding his decision to go to Spain and started doing research on him and is actually still at this point attempting to put together a video presentation or a short movie about her uncle, and in the context of Spain.

DY [00:33:16] She found out that I actually had a couple of pictures of her uncle that she had never seen before and so she got in contact with me about that and that's how I came to know her and her colleague Ray Hoff. They, in Victoria, had in conjunction with Joe Barrett, had the idea that on November the 11th, when the veterans of the Second World War—which was a war against fascism—when it was being commemorated that the first fighters against fascism, the people that had volunteered for Spain, they weren't being recognized and they thought that something should be done about that. So eventually they came up with the proposition that they would go to the grave sites of as many of the volunteers as they could find and put the republican colours there and lay a rose in commemoration of the service of those veterans. And a number of people became involved in the project and it became an occasion when the stories were told about the particular volunteers that were in these sites. And it expanded beyond Victoria initially to B.C., but now every year there are probably 130 to 150 graves that have been identified as the sites of Mackenzie-Papineau and other Canadian volunteers in the International Brigades in Spain. And there are volunteers across Canada that, on November 11, go and, again, put the republican colours and a rose on the graves. And I've done that now for the last, I don't know, half dozen years, I guess. And I'm going to continue to do it. I think it's important to remember these people, and it's important for some of the younger people who are coming along to know some of their stories and to get a sense of the sacrifice that these volunteers made.

KN [00:36:16] David, you recently donated to Simon Fraser University Special Collections what is arguably the largest collection of union pins and buttons in Canada. Can you tell us how you got involved in collecting these pins and button?

DY [00:36:38] Well. Well, yeah, this is the story. When I was, I guess, about ten years old, my mother was a worker in the office of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union down on Cordova Street. That union, like a lot of other unions at the time, every year would put out a membership button. It was a standard sort of button that had the year on it, and it had, in the case of the Fisherman's Union, a salmon, which is sort of their logo. All of the members of the union would come into the office and pick up one of these buttons, and a lot of them would wear them. And so every year when the button was put out, my mom would bring home one or two for me. And so I just had a little jar and I sort of started doing, well 1954, 1955, 1956. And I just started collecting those, the very first union buttons that my mum brought me.

DY [00:38:11] Later in the 1970s, there were an awful lot of buttons going around about the issues in the 60s and the 70s, in particular the war in Vietnam. A lot of the buttons that had to do with support for the civil rights movement in the United States, some buttons about Canadian independence. And a lot people on the left would sort of have a cork board and they'd put all their buttons up on the cork board and so I did that and I had all my Vietnam buttons up one on the board and I thought well I've got a few union buttons like these Fisherman's Union buttons so I put them up as well.

DY [00:38:58] I don't know why it was, but eventually I started to realize that there were a lot of union buttons out there, and so I started picking them up as well, and whenever I ran into them, I'd add them to the collection. Up to about the time I started working at the BCTF, I really had a kind of a hodgepodge of political buttons and election buttons and civil rights buttons—but this little patch of union buttons, it was growing, and the others weren't. And so I—then something happened, which actually, I think is something that you probably wanted to deal with later, but about the time that I started working at the BCTF I was in a flea market in Vancouver. I came across a BC Teachers' Federation pin. It was, as it turned out, one of the pins that are given to the presidents of the BC Teachers' Federation when they have finished their service. And it's a gold pin, and it's very nicely done, and more than that, it is engraved with the years of service.

DY [00:40:46] So I was quite surprised to find this pin out there in a flea market and as it turned out, because you could tell which president it was because of the years of service, it turned to be the pin of a very significant president of the BCTF, John Sutherland, who had been the president back about 1939-40. So, his dates were there. John Sutherland at that time was still alive and he was really a kind of a significant inspiration to a lot of the Teachers' leadership at that time because in his day he was a progressive and an activist and interested in making the kinds of changes that were really coming onto the front burner in the BC Teachers' Federation at that time. He was regarded as a significant and a very interesting and important predecessor to the present leadership of the BCTF and people like Larry Kuehn and Al Blakey and Ken Novakowski and so on. And so I, number one thought, well I shouldn't have this pin. I gave it to Larry Kuehn, and Larry Kuehn presented it to John Sutherland, and John Sutherland got his pin back.

DY [00:42:31] But at the same time, I thought, my goodness, that's—I mean, is that—if this is the sort of stuff that is out there, it really should be kept together. I mean, it shouldn't be floating around in flea markets and so on. And I think that is really what impelled me to

take the collection of the social history that's reflected in buttons and pins a bit more seriously. Discovered that in addition to the sort usual pin-back buttons there were quite well made enamel cloisonne membership pins like John Sutherland's.

DY [00:43:17] There were, in the earlier periods quite elaborate membership ribbons, there were convention regalias with medallions, and a lot of material that reflected the history of the unions and in its emblematic aspect reflected aspects of the union movement. For example, the national aspects, whether there were patriotic symbols like maple leaves and beavers, or in the American unions great eagles and so on. A lot of the tools of the trade were reflected in some of the memorabilia that were there. Some of it reflected the sort of changes in technology that we're facing. I always remember the Longshoremen's Union. In the early days, there would be a ship with a fellow with a handcart. Later on, that was completely replaced by ships just loaded to the gunnels with containers. That is the sort of change in the industry that was actually reflected in the buttons and badges and pins that they wore.

DY [00:45:03] In the earlier stages, a lot of the interesting aspects of some of the miners' unions would be reflected there. In the Western Federation of Miners, there was a logo that they had, which was a pneumatic drill in the earliest stages. The leadership of—and that was more or less from the outset of the Western Federation of Miners about 1890. About 1900, the leadership said, why are we celebrating this machine? This machine is notorious for causing the deaths of miners when it bucks and causes caves and so on. And so they completely redesigned their logo to reflect their opposition to this machine.

DY [00:46:04] There's a lot of little aspects of unions' history, the changes of the names, the symbolism that they used, and so on. And just basically the existence of all of these things are a testament to the importance of the unions and the significance to the working people that made them up. One of the aspects, for example, is the phenomenon of a form of badge called the dues button. In the earliest days, the shop stewards or some official of the union would go around to each member of the union and ask them to pay their dues. They would collect the money individually, and when they did that, quite often there was a dues book that would sometimes have stamps, but quite often as well they would be given a button that indicated that the dues were paid for that period. People would wear the button just to establish to their fellow workers that they were union supporters and are paid up and were paying their dues, as they said. Workers today, I think, would be astounded if that were the procedure today.

DY [00:48:03] In the Second World War period, unions negotiated, to a very large extent, check-off provisions where it became part of the payroll process that the company then would be responsible for deducting the dues and remitting them to the union, and it took a lot of work out of the union's officials that were then freed from this business about going around and getting the dues from each and every person. Well, that's actually a little bit controversial in the trade union movements and there are some people who would say that that took away the connection from the union and the members and it was the opportunity for the members to tell the shop steward what was bugging them and it became a little bit more depersonalized and that there was sort of value in going around every year and picking up, or every month in some cases, picking up the dues. History was what it was, and the check-off provisions became more or less universal. And so the phenomenon of these dues buttons, which were sometimes issued every month, sometimes issued every quarter, that fell away.

DY [00:49:32] Some unions liked having these buttons, and members liked having the buttons anyways, and so that developed into a practice of putting out annual buttons with the year, and that's where my mom came in with the 1954 and the 1955 and the 1956 buttons. The Fishermen's Union carried on with that right up to the point until they merged into the Canadian Autoworkers. By-and-large that process as well has atrophied and as far as I know, at the present time there is only one union in B.C. that actually still does that, and that's the Local 500 of the Longshore Union. But again, that is reflected in these buttons and pins that you see going from monthly dues buttons, to quarterly dues buttons to 'I've had my dues checked off' buttons to annual membership buttons, to nothing, and that's the history and it's reflected. There's all sorts of aspects of labour history that are reflected in just these things that were made for people to wear and display and be part of the union culture.

KN [00:51:07] David, when you made your donation of your collection to SFU, you had 25,000 union pins/buttons in the collection. That's an awful lot. I'd be interested in hearing a bit about how you amassed such an amazing piece of labour history over many decades, I know, and tell us a bit about what was involved in presenting each of these items in the collection. My understanding is that you actually had a bit of history as well, written, to go with the pins that described a lot of that. It's an incredible collection. And also, let me comment a bit on the interest that has risen in the labour movement with respect to the collection.

DY [00:51:58] First of all about getting the items, people ask where they came from and the answer I guess is they came from everywhere. Some came from my mother, some came from being on picket lines, some came from being at conventions, some came from friends who knew I was interested and they would give me the buttons that they had. A lot of the older ones came from second-hand stores. We got them in flea markets, in the Sally-Anne and there are sometimes these shows of antiques and collectibles. Some very interesting ones came from that. I would do some displays at Labour Day and so on, and people would say, 'Oh, I've got something for you', and some of the old-timers would say 'Yeah, here's something for your collection'. Visiting union offices, often they would have something current that they had put out recently, but often as well they would say, 'Oh, my goodness gracious, there's some box in the back', and it's got something. They would go rummaging through the box, and something else would come up. So a lot of the earlier things that I collected came from those kinds of sources.

DY [00:53:47] A friend of my stepmother's was one of the organizers for the shore workers of the Fishermen's Union, and I did end up with a lot of very interesting things from the Fishermen's Union that came through her. But, on the other hand, she was gardening in her backyard in New Westminster one day, and her neighbour across the fence said, 'You're in the unions, aren't you?' And she said, 'Yes, I am'. And he said, 'Well, I've got something for you,' and he gave her, just across the back fence, two fancy ceremonial union ribbons from the B.C. Interior Locals of the Western Federation of Miners. They're actually some of the finest items in the whole collection, and they just came across the back fence to a friend of my stepmother's who gave them to me. It was, you know, things would happen in a very random way like that. Then, later on, particularly with the internet coming along—discovered that some of these items were also available through the electronic auction houses and listings and websites and so on. And so a lot of the in recent years a lot of the acquisitions have been through things like eBay and Etsy and so on. But, you never know where, where it's going to come from.

DY [00:55:43] Another source is from other people that are interested in collecting this stuff as well. There aren't a lot of us in Canada, but there are some avid collectors in Ontario as well, and we trade back and forth. In Great Britain, there is a very well-organized and very active society of trade union badge collectors that that I trade with sometimes, and so on. I don't have a lot of international buttons. I don't make that a focus, but the British trade union badges are really, really wonderful. They're really elaborate and really substantial, and I like to get them. So I have a fair collection of those. So that's where they come from.

DY [00:56:42] When I was at the BCTF, working away 80 hours a week, as you know, I was collecting, but it was more or less just amassing them. They would go into my basement, and there was only the very sort of roughest organization to them. When Simon Fraser indicated that they would like to get the collection, the first indication was that they would just take them all away and deal with them. The more we thought about it, the more we thought, that is kind of crazy. A lot of these things, if you don't know what the story is, you don't know where they go, how they fit with other things, and you don't know the history that's attached to them in some cases. And so we just sort of put the brakes on it, and over a period of about, I'd say—I guess the whole process lasted about seven years. I would take segments of the collection and do an inventory of them, write up a history of the union and the industry that the union was in, and did an organization of the pins within.

DY [00:58:28] And so in some cases there would be a history of an event that would be significant. In some cases, Some of the pins came from significant people within the labour movement. There are pins and badges from presidents of the Canadian Labour Congress. There are some items from the first president of the International Woodworkers of America. There are a couple of past presidents' pins from the BC Teachers Federation, of significant past presidents, and so on. And so where these, there's a story behind a particular item that is more specific. I mean, if I just gave it to them, they would never know that. So I thought it was worthwhile to take the time to write all that stuff up and to present the collection in an organized way to the university.

DY [00:59:41] I was always a little bit hesitant about donating to the university. I would have preferred to donate it to an organization attached to the trade union movement itself, but at least until the Labour Heritage Centre came along, I always had this feeling that the trade-union movement—it wasn't that it wasn't interested in its own history, but that it often didn't have the time to be interested in its own history. I think that trade unionists are really interested in their history unless there's a crisis going on that they have to really be dealing with and it turns out that that's most of the time. So I was worried about the about the stability of the collection if it were going to one of the one of the trade union organizations itself. On the other hand I was worried about the collection going to a university where nobody would ever see it again, and particularly trade unionists would never see it again.

DY [01:01:07] When I went to the university and talked to them about the donation, I said that I would like them to agree that, well first of all it is in a general way open to researchers and there's nothing restricted about it, so anybody that wants to go up there can go and have a look at it, but that's not really something that people do every day. But that where there was a trade union organization that would like to have access to items, either generally or more specifically from their own union, to present at conventions or meetings or history seminars or training sessions or whatever, that the university would cooperate with them and would release them. And so, that's part of the agreement that unions, and specifically the B.C. Labour Heritage Society was named as one of them, have access to take these items off-site and use in displays and so on. And that's been done on a number of occasions. The Hospital Employees' Union and CUPE and I think the

Longshoremen's Union is about do the same sort of thing. I think the Labour Heritage Center on a couple of occasions has had items from specific areas like I think, remember the asbestos issue at one of the B.C. Federation of Labour Conventions, is able to draw on the collection and take it to the trade union movement at their meetings and conventions and so on. And sou I hope that that continues and I think the people at Simon Fraser have been wonderful in cooperating and making the collection available.

KN [01:03:21] Okay, that's wonderful. You have also been involved in some of the work of the B.C. Labour Heritage Center, David. Can you tell us just a bit about that too?

DY [01:03:32] Well, not enough, eh?

KN [01:03:38] Your collection is a big part of that.

DY [01:03:41] I mean, I keep myself busy in retirement, so I have a number of other things on the go. And I haven't been as active in the supporting of this outfit as I might be. I think over the years, the main thing that I have kept involved in is the project to establish plaques commemorating various labour history events that—I guess I got on the ground floor of that with the On-to-Ottawa plaque in 2010 and that I think has sort of served as a launching pad for similar plaques for other labour events that are around the province.

DY [01:04:45] Those plaques are always an interesting exercise because typically they involve boiling down a significant and usually kind of complex story into a small number of words that give you a decent overview of the situation, that's accurate and will stand the test of time. And I guess I have some experience in trying to do that. And so I'm involved in checking out the texts and making suggestions about wording and following through on some of the plaque projects. I find that interesting because it makes you feel good if you can actually cobble something together that does a whole bunch of different purposes at the same time. I put together a small collection of pins that's on the wall at the Centre that the Centre inherited from Jim Young. Jim Young was a newspaper man and an exceptionally avid pin collector himself, and he had a number of pins that came to the Heritage Centre, so I did a little bit of a display of those. But I used to be involved with the walking tours, but I'm getting too old to do walking tours. There are some great people that are carrying on with the walking tours, so I thought I'd pass it on to them. But no, that's about it.

KN [01:07:05] Okay, just wondering if there's anything else you might like to say about your work or involvement in the B.C. Labour movement overall?

DY [01:07:16] Well, it's sort of strange, you know, I have never actually really been in the labour movement. I mean, that's the strange thing for me, is that when I was working with the teachers, the teachers (at the point that I was working with teachers) were not part of the labour movement. At the very beginning of it, I think they didn't actually identify with the labour movement that much. During the period of time that I was there, I think that changed very significantly. And I don't take credit for that. It just happened that way. By about the time I was ready to leave, I think they were ready to join the labour movement, and very shortly after that they did. It was interesting that I was sort of watching the labour movement from the outside. I've always wondered if it could have been different somehow, but life didn't work out that way. So I am a great admirer of the labour movement. I think it's done wonderful things for the people it represents, and I think it's done wonderful things to the people that it doesn't represent. The labour movement is a cornerstone of the quality

of our society and I am happy and proud to be a supporter of it. I wish I had had a history that allowed me to actually be more integrated to it, but I do what I can.

KN [01:09:08] Okay. Thank you very much, David. That was absolutely perfect.