

Interview: Sucha Deepak (SD)
Interviewer: George Davison (GD)
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Transcription: Jane Player

GD [00:00:05] Thanks for coming in, Sucha. I'll just start by saying that I'm George Davison, and we're on the unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh people. I've got some biographical questions to ask you, then a set on your working life, and then some politics at work, talk to the NDP, and then more general labour issues from your experience. So, we'll start by just asking what your full name is.

SD [00:00:34] So, my full name is Sucha Singh Deepak.

GD [00:00:41] And where were you born?

SD [00:00:43] I was—I'm born in India, Punjab.

GD [00:00:47] What year?

SD [00:00:48] 1948.

GD [00:00:52] Was there much, what was that, hmm, 1948 India, what was the situation there at the time?

SD [00:01:00] Well, in 1947, India got independent from British and, you know, I was born one year later. There was a, you know, the situation was not that great, I mean, in those days. My father actually joined the army, and he was in the army and so make, you know, life little better, but otherwise my family was from the very poor kind of, you know, I mean—

GD [00:01:32] So, was he at home a lot or away?

SD [00:01:35] Uh, I'm sorry?

GD [00:01:36] Was he—did your mum and dad live at home when he was in the army? Was he at home?

SD [00:01:42] No, my father was—you know, like that's a tradition in like India. People stay at home. And somebody go for, you know, I mean in the army, or in any other kind of service out of village. But my father sometime we, as a family, go with him too. When I was, I think, very young—might be in the first or second grade, you know, that time I was with the—I spent a couple of years with him outside, like from village. And then when I was in seventh grade, my father, he went in the Maharashtra for NCC [National Cadet Corps] instructor kind of, you know like that, you know, educating the students. So, that was in kind of civil, but not in the army, but in the civil. That time I spent some six months with him. And otherwise, I stayed in the village most of the time.

GD [00:02:50] So, you went to school in the village?

SD [00:02:52] Yes.

GD [00:02:54] And then what happened after school.

SD [00:02:57] Well, you know, I was, there's like system, the primary school up to fifth grade, and then go up to three classes for the eighth. And then I went to Jalandher. There's one small city, you know what I mean, for a high school there. Then after I went to university, the college, for my B.A. degree.

GD [00:03:23] So, what courses did you take there?

SD [00:03:25] There was, you know, economics, political science, Punjabi, English.

GD [00:03:34] So, after university what happened?

SD [00:03:38] Then there was a, you know, I was thinking to actually go out abroad, you know, but in the meantime, I teach one of private schools, ninth and tenth grade.

GD [00:03:54] Oh, okay.

SD [00:03:54] And, you know, for six months. And then, then I was thinking to come, you know, abroad somewhere, like, you know, go to Dubai or some other place. But the guy, you know, the agent told me, 'No, you know, Canada is best place, you know, I mean, you know, to go.' And so, I decided to come here. And then that was 1970.

GD [00:04:20] 1970. Yes. So did you come to Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver?

SD [00:04:30] No, actually, Canada is so big, I didn't know like how far is this. And actually, my first landing was in Toronto. But I did not stay there. I have landing there, but did not stay there, I came in Vancouver.

GD [00:04:51] So, did you fly over, take the train?

SD [00:04:53] No, I just, you know, actually they gave me a ticket. It's a very funny kind of story actually, they gave—if you want to hear from me what actually happened. You know, they told me, 'Okay, you will be landing in Edmonton, and so somebody will come and, you know take you home.' And—

GD [00:05:23] You didn't know anybody in Edmonton?

SD [00:05:26] [Nodding head] No. They gave me the picture of the guy, and so I didn't know that you have to go landing and have immigration, you know, where Edmonton or in Toronto. But, the plane came from, I think, New York to land in—the first land, you know, like you have to go to the immigration things. So, there was Toronto. Yeah, they gave me a ticket up to Edmonton. But I have immigration in Toronto, so I still have a ticket to come to Edmonton. So, when I came out, I didn't know like, okay, I'm free from immigration. They gave me a three-month visa or something, you know, and then I, you know, I was—I came there, and I got my luggage and all those things, and nobody was there. I could not see anybody, and I did not understand what to do. And I was afraid that these immigration guys said, 'Look, you know, the guy did not come so probably you go back.' (laughter) And one taxi driver, he asked me, he said (because he saw I'm sitting there, everybody gone.) And I said, 'I was waiting for the guy, you know, he did not come.' And he said—actually, my English was not any better. I can understand a little bit, and I can kind of convey my

message to the other person, too. Anyway, he asked me that question, and I said, 'You know, I don't know, the guy did not come.' He said, 'Look, there's one other taxi driver. He's Indian, and he can speak your language. So, I can call him, and you can talk with him.' And I talked with him and told him my story. He said, 'Why not just ask this guy to come my place. He knows my address, and then you can stay with me tonight, and then after that you can find your person.'

GD [00:07:46] This is the other cab driver?

SD [00:07:47] The other cab driver (laughter). So, I told him and give him \$10 or something, fare, whatever it was at that time. And I kind of went to his place and stayed with him overnight. The next day, he asked me where he wants, where I want. I said, 'I want to go Vancouver.' He said, 'It's that much, you know, far away and, and so on, and then he— anyway, we got, uh, taken from there, and then, you know, fly in Vancouver and then—

GD [00:08:28] You didn't know anybody in Vancouver, though, did you?

SD [00:08:30] I have the address, you know, like where to go, and then I—and that's also funny thing, you know. I talk, you know taxi, I got in, was sitting in taxi, and I said, 'I want to go on this address', you know. So, main market. He said, 'There's no main market here. Main street is there, you know. I said, 'Let's go look, you know, Main street.' You know, there it is —(laughter) I went there, I found those people there, and then I stayed with them, pay my rent, and all those things.

GD [00:09:11] So, did you work in Vancouver?

SD [00:09:12] No, I didn't work in—I was looking for work but did no work in Vancouver. I think I worked only one day putting insulation, you know, like—and, you know, I mean, I was so happy even I don't wear gloves, you know, kind of—I was young, you know, there was not that much, you know, problem. Then I came in September, end of September, 30th of September, I kind of have, you know, like landed here in Canada and—

GD [00:09:57] Winter is coming.

SD [00:09:58] Yeah, winter was coming, and there was not that much work out there. And then in May, June, then you know this farm work started, you know, coming and all those things. And then I have somebody I know him. I didn't know myself personally, but you know there was one of my class fellow, that was his uncle. And I asked him about this, you know, come and see me. He came, he was living in Quesnel. And he come and, you now like, you know best me, and then he told me that he's far away and so and so. Then I heard there are, you know, in the mills also, you no, maybe possible jobs. So, I have options, you know, going to farm or going to the sawmill, and I decide to go to sawmill and come to Quesnel, and I have a job here.

GD [00:11:08] So what was the job?

SD [00:11:11] Piling lumber in the sawmill. I worked there in the sawmill for two, three days, and then there was a big fight there. And fight, you know, there was a couple guys in the pub they were—and those are very kind of horrible stories actually, you know, I mean, uh, now is not that kind of story but, you know, but that that was uh—

GD [00:11:42] Happened every Friday night.

SD [00:11:45] Yeah. (laughter) Anyway, there was a couple of guys there following us. We were living in the one house—three or four bedrooms, I guess, about 20 people living. And so, we have groups and kind of making food and all those things. And so, their phone call came and, you know, like these people are kind of, 'Don't let us go,' you know, I mean you know 'They're bothering us,' and you know, 'save us' basically. So, me and my partner, my friend, you know, like, he—we both were eating, you know, I mean, our supper, and half of supper ate, and we heard about this, the cars are going there to, you know, see what's happening there, and he asked me, 'What do you think? Let's go.' You know, we just leave half—see, young people, you know, then like I might be that time I was 21, 22 years old. So, we went there. We saw there lots of—we tried to send a couple guys to find out inside, you know, like see what's happening. And they blocked them too. And then some of people were drunk at that time, you know in the evening time. And they start, you know, yelling loudly and beer parlour people are coming out. You want to hear this story? Really?

GD [00:13:16] Yeah, yeah.

SD [00:13:18] Those people come out, you know, and they want to see the fun, too. And some of people nice. They start yelling, you know, like our people, 'Peace, peace, peace.' [Sucha moves his hand with the peace sign] We have a problem with language and all those. 'No police. Let's fight.' (laughter) Then that crowd jumped on us. And then some of the people who were leading us, and they said, 'Oh, let's go little back up and we're gonna get some sticks.' We are not—we always feel like we are not good in the punching and stuff like that. We are more better with the stick or something, you know. (laughter) Then we get—people get there, you know, I mean, baseball bat or there's even axes, you know, and there couple of guys fall down, and later I found—anyway, then we run, we sat in one car, two-door car, people like me (laughter) and about 13 people. We parked the car in the, you know, the police—like, the bar, you know, you probably know Quesnel or not, I don't know. And there's a Barker, that Barker bar thing, you know, there. And it used to be RCMP on the other side. And we had parked the car in their parking. And we sat and then the car, the police, one guy was, you know, they start giving the light. You know, follow us. And the driver just keep, you know driving. And then one in the area where we came, we see the police cars and all over the place, they block us. And we said, 'Now you have to stop.' And then he stopped, and the guy had to come with the guns and, you know, they okay, they look at the, they look the—there's a, you know, like there was a—you know, like five, six people came out and they think, you know, that's not, you know there's other five, six people sitting in the car, and they took us in jail. We stay there for, on the weekend in the jail and then in the court. The court, you know, they asked, you know there will be bail, \$500. And I don't have, I don't have the \$500. Then the community collect the money for me, you know, and—anyway, that was the story. Then later, we got acquitted, you now, from there. And so we, I have better job, after that, because then our lawyer asked him, 'Look, you know, I mean, the mill, you know, these people should have job.' The best ways I had seen and there's quite a few other mills too. And they said, if somebody can speak English, then he can go to the planer. And the other people are going to go in the sawmill. And so everybody thinks, no Sucha can speak. Maybe he can go there. So, they took me there in the planers. In the planer, I was working the same way I was working in the sawmill. Like, sooner break down, we just picked the broom and just clean it, you know what I mean? And—

GD [00:17:17] So, how long were you there?

SD [00:17:20] There was for three weeks, that time after we got involved in this fight thing. Then planer, I started doing the same thing. And I was cleaning and then one guy, you know, one other worker come and said, 'Did foreman tell you about that guy?' I said, 'No.' 'Oh, okay.' Then he left. Then I look everybody lying on the bloody, you know, because there was no Indian, there was most of, you know, I mean non-Indian people, you know, and they were lying on the load. And 'Oh,' I said, 'Why, I'm doing this?' I threw the broom, and I just started lying down again, you know, saved like that. There was more money, more—everything is better, you know. Like, I have better job, you know, than before after fight I got. That much I'm promoted anyway. So that was in Quesnel I worked in a sawmill. There was no union.

GD [00:18:15] Oh, okay.

SD [00:18:16] At that time. And still they don't have union, I guess. And that time, then I, after—and I have, I can stamp, you know, I got my immigration and all those things.

GD [00:18:35] Okay.

SD [00:18:35] And then I'd gone on a trip for one year. I got this job, you know, in India. So, almost one year I had to spend it out, you know, and then come back.

GD [00:18:50] Back to Quesnel?

SD [00:18:52] No, I wanted to come. Actually, because my other friends, they went to settle in Vancouver. And that was the reason, didn't want to go settle that time, because I want to, that was my plan, I want travel around. And when I came back, NDP was in government that time and all mills were shut down. Most of, and there was no work there. And so—not even in Quesnel, like I find, you know, the work. And then I heard that there's a job in Fort St. James. I went to Fort St James, and then I found job there.

GD [00:19:34] So, what year was that?

SD [00:19:36] That was in '75.

GD [00:19:38] Okay. What was Fort St. James like in 1975?

SD [00:19:42] They have a quite good hustle bustle at that time because there was a—honestly, I never thought there will be any kind of layoff in Fort St. James. Our mill has two part, the Canfor have those both mills. About 500 people were working.

GD [00:20:07] So, 500 people working?

SD [00:20:10] In the both mills.

GD [00:20:13] Yes. Mostly, how many Indian versus white versus native?

SD [00:20:17] Well, when I was there, you know, that time, there was a big fights too, you know, like there was fight in Quesnel too, you know what I mean, but there was fight in Quesnel, different kind of fight. But when I first Fort St. James go out, and that time there was fight between native and the Indians. And because there was, you know, media started talking about that these Indians are starting, you know, taking them. You know, your jobs and stuff like that.

GD [00:20:51] So, was there a union in Fort St. James?

SD [00:20:53] Yes.

GD [00:20:55] The IWA [International Woodworkers of America]?

SD [00:20:56] Yes, IWA.

GD [00:20:58] So how did you get involved in the union?

SD [00:21:00] Well, you know, like there were situations, the union was not back, you know, people were not trusting that much because they think they are not doing anything. They most of time—I'm talking about the Indians, you know, I mean East Indians. They were inviting foremen at a home, for a job or overtime or giving booze to the foremen, you know stuff like that. And I said, 'Why are you doing those things?' Some reason, I was different, maybe. I don't know why I was different, but I was different, you know.

GD [00:21:38] Asking questions.

SD [00:21:39] Yeah, I said, 'Why are you giving these booze to these foremen for overtime or something?' 'Oh, you know, they are not giving us overtime. They're not giving us a good job.' You know, stuff like that. I said, 'Why not go to the union?' And they said, 'Nobody listening.' I finally, you know, encouraged a couple of people and I said, 'Why not?' Actually, before than that what happened, there was PPWC [Pulp Paper Woodworkers of Canada] and I mean they have set up the picket line. And that was in '76 or something, I guess, you know. They set up the picket line and I said, 'We should honour this picket line.' And some reason or other some of the leaders they, indirectly they were encouraging, you know, to cross the picket lines and personally myself I was so—and they crossed the picket line, and I was upset about that. And I told those PPWC people who were on the picket line, 'Sorry guys, you know what happened.' And then I want, I mean, organize some kind of aid against PPWC, like for PPWC. But then I talked with some of our other biased people, and they said, 'Look. You know, a union is not something sitting outside. Union is your plant. And you should—this is not right to be raiding each other. You should make union more stronger. Go and get involved in those things.' And then I, you know those—I encouraged those people to, you know, become [unclear]. And those people were suspended for something, the foremen suspended them. And they came to me, and they said, 'You were saying that you should be there, now they suspend us.' I said, 'Why don't you go to the union?' 'Oh, we went to there. And there was business agent sitting there too. And the chairman said, 'Well, you should not do this, this thing,' you know, I mean. We couldn't do anything. And that business agent said you're lucky that he did not fire you. So, see, in all things you need education and all those things. You could not go and start questioning people and, you know. And then this thing happened and all of those involved, then they asked me, you know, why not change this bloody plant committee. 'Okay.' You know I go around, and those people who were before involved in the union, they did not want to listen to me. (laughter) And finally, I found one Chilean fellow. I ask him, Juan Huidobro, I ask him if he wants to run for chairman. And someone, like myself, have always language problem. How are we gonna do this? And so, we can get him. He agree with me. So, elect him chairman, myself first vice, then other, you know.

GD [00:25:33] So, you got a slate elected?

SD [00:25:35] Yes, a slate elected.

GD [00:25:39] So, what did you do now with the power that you had as running [unclear]?

SD [00:25:44] Nothing. Then I was basically done things. After a couple of years, what happened, the company gave Juan Huidobro an apprenticeship for, you know, millwright and all those things and plus maybe they told him, 'Look, you're gonna get responsible for this, things which are doing this and that.' And then he told me, he said, 'Sucha, now you better run for chairman or find somebody else.' I, 'Why?' 'Because you are asking me before jump, and I will ask you how high. But now I'm going to ask you why.' (laughter) 'Oh, okay.' And then I tried to find a new guy. There was nobody there. Finally, the people said, 'Why don't you run for chairman?' 'Okay, I will run for chairman'. So, I ran for chairman. Other five, six years I was chairman.

GD [00:26:50] So, what kind of issues did you deal with as the chair of the local committee?

SD [00:26:56] Well, let me tell you this. I am very proud of one of the letters of understanding we have actually negotiated there. Later date, it apply on all IWA.

GD [00:27:08] Okay, what was that?

SD [00:27:12] Leave of absence. You know, there was leave absence up to maximum six weeks in the collective agreement—compassionate leave. But when—we have, you know, like Indians, like new Indian come, you know they, young people, they want to get married, go back India, get married and come back. You know that's kind of old tradition. And then six weeks it's not too much, you know, I mean for going India and you know kind of get it in and all those things. There was one of our friends, he wants to go to India, get married and all those things. I went with him. I asked the personnel manager. I said, 'You know, give him leave of absence.' He said, 'Maximum six weeks.' I said, 'No, give him at least three months. And he said, 'No.' I was so upset with the argument and all of those things. I said, 'He's gonna go.'

GD [00:28:28] He's going to go anyways.

SD [00:28:29] He gonna do anyway, yeah. So, he went, we told them and go and get sick and, you know, send us, (laughter) send us, I mean doctor's note and all those things. So, after six weeks they terminate him, and in those days we have telegrams, you know, not phone or anything—telegrams, you know. So, I asked him to telegram, authorize me to file grievance on his behalf. So, he did it and so—

GD [00:29:09] The contract said six weeks.

SD [00:29:13] Yup. It's quite compassionate leave.

GD [00:29:15] Oh, it could be longer before—

SD [00:29:16] It could be long for something like this, sickness or some other thing, of course. So, he, you know, like, we extend the time and, you know, when come and we will deal with grievance. So, he came after three months and all those things and, you know, marriage and all that.

GD [00:29:37] With a wife?

SD [00:29:38] No, like wife was still there, like got married but he applied for it, you know, I mean, his wife. So—

GD [00:29:50] Did he get his job back?

SD [00:29:52] Yeah, you know, then we have in the third step, then the company agree because they know they're going to be lose because we had medical, you know, everything. He got two months back pay and plus his job back, you know—everything.

GD [00:30:13] So, then you took that idea of an extended compassionate leave to the bargaining table in the next round?

SD [00:30:20] No. Even before that. No, yeah, bargained and we have negotiated the letter of understanding for the extended leaves of absence and so on according to seniority and all those things, you know what I mean? They should be. Then it apply on all the Canfor mills, you know, like Canfor mill for St. John, for Chetwynd, and you know they have in here, in the Prince George, you know, Canfor mills. You know, all over the place and then just go expanding in the other, you know, the mills, like they have this why not we? Like we should have this. So, basically apply on—I'm just—I'm giving you and one—this one we negotiated. We have negotiated on the question of overtime. The overtime should be given to the senior people.

GD [00:31:14] So, this wasn't people giving the foreman a bottle of booze, (laughter) this was a collective agreement provision?

SD [00:31:20] Yes. No, see—I said we don't want the foreman should have the authority to give whoever, you know, want.

GD [00:31:30] Yeah, favouritism.

SD [00:31:30] I don't give a damn which way you want to give. You can, you know, you want to give by the seniority. You want to give by the incumbency. There should be some kind of the system. I was (laughter) at that time, some of the union leaders, they were saying, 'No, no. They have a right to give overtime whom they want.' That's what they were saying. I said, 'I am not prepared to accept it.' And finally, the company—anyway, on the other side, Canfor was good doing these things. They said, 'Anyway they want to work.' They don't give a damn how one foreman, you know, think about it. You see, always there's good guys for—I mean, it's part of some foreman and, you know, they want to give some goodies to them. I remember John Luce was the guy, you know, the personnel manager. He wanted, you know, a seminar for his supervisors and they invited me too to say something. I said I only can say that don't favour to anybody. Whenever you are favouring somebody you are, you know, taking away somebody else's rights. As long as you are, you know, dealing fairly with other people, then nothing gonna—not going to be any problem. I'm talking about overtime, job letter of understanding, like how are you going to give the jobs. There was always check on those things. The guy gone on holidays for one week or two weeks, they pick union person, you know, to put on there. The senior guy 'Oh, no, no, only it's temporary.' You know the guy going like this you know. Then after that they post a job. You know, qualified, you know, I mean, who would, he can have that job. So, we're going to get the training. Where he gonna have those things? So, we put out that language there, you know, like you are not going to be qualified unless you are not getting

the training to the seniority from this mill through the training program. These things are like what I said, we made those letter of understandings. See, job posting, overtime, extended leave of absence—see all those letters we have made here and then expand to the other, the whole IWA.

GD [00:34:37] So, tell me about how the Fort St. James local fit into the big IWA picture.

SD [00:34:45] Actually, in those days, I don't know, because those days was IWA or Lumber and Dusty was one of the—Dusty, you know, B.C. was Lyon. Whenever we have walkout—we have one walkout a year.

GD [00:35:04] Okay.

SD [00:35:07] And whenever they—I'm sorry?

GD [00:35:10] What was the reason for the walkout?

SD [00:35:12] Like any walk out, you know, any problem happen, so we have at least to have one. So, guess where everything so—

GD [00:35:19] So, these were illegal strikes?

SD [00:35:21] Yeah, that's what it means. But when I'm talking walkout, I mean wildcat walkout. In bargaining, I'm telling you about this, the how important it was, there was a—you know, BCTV was sending always one of the news reporter with a camera everything to report, you know, that was—

GD [00:35:49] Up in Fort St. James?

SD [00:35:50] Fort St. James.

GD [00:35:52] And whatever the walkout was about, fix the problem that you were talking about?

SD [00:35:56] Yes, exactly. What happened—the first walk out, honestly, you know, we said, 'We've done everything, we didn't walk out.' The first walkout we should do something. Then what happened, you know, the foreman, when the maintenance guy was fixing and the lock and foreman come and open the lock and start the chain. Then a couple of other safety things—then there was some lack of understanding on overtime thing. Actually, we have first time brought that in and they agree that time.

GD [00:36:48] So, it was a very successful tactic to get what you want.

SD [00:36:50] I want to tell you this. It's a very, very, you know—we are proud of those things. What happened, we decide. It's easy to go and set picket line, and then people stop, not coming. But in the running, 200 people running shift, pulling people out is not that easy. And we have pulled those things. We decided the last coffee break, everybody will picket there, (laughter) you know, lunch gate.

GD [00:37:27] The bell goes and out you go.

SD [00:37:27] Yeah, they'll go. Personnel manager came to me. He said, 'I heard that thing. You know, what do you think? Did you hear anything?' 'Well, I don't know,' I said. 'I can look around.' He said, 'Go around and check what's happening.' Of course, I go around, tell, 'Look, just leave at that time.' (laughter) We have plywood, you know, on one other side, veneer department. We have sawmill, a stud mill. We have other mill. We have two planer, about 200 people. You know, last coffee break, everybody out. And that was our first walk out. There was a question about safety, question about overtime. And then they want to sit and talk. We said, 'No, we don't want to talk with you. We want to talk with somebody from the Vancouver, the Canfor (you know what I mean) from the head office.' And they come in a helicopter, and we have meeting up to 10, 11 o'clock in the nighttime. And we agree and solve all those things. And then next morning, you know, in the mill around. So, that kind of walkout we have.

GD [00:38:55] So, how did you get from Fort St. James to Prince George?

SD [00:38:58] Well, OK, I was just active in the union. And actually, I worked for the union, like the mills to organizing when there was a PPWC raid. And I go there. I was kind of firefighter for those things and go there and help. Like, for example, in Williams Lake, I went in, I think 1977. I went there. I talked with people. People were talking with me, you know, about the PPWC have the, you know, better wages, better protection, security, and this is—and I was telling them, 'Look, you know, it's not the PPWC or the IWA, it's you people. The union isn't, you know, are you, it's not anybody else.' And I told them, I said, 'When you go into negotiations, you can ask for those jobs with more money. It's up to you. It's not up to anybody else.' And so those people, I kind of changed them to voting to other side. So, we won those things. I was in Mackenzie. I went there to kind of fight against PPWC raid. I'm not against PPWC or anybody. We are organizing Labour Day and May Day here. PPWC can sit with us, no problem. And I think this is the only town we have where we all are sitting together. But I'm against the raiding, against dividing people. And so, I was—and second, you know, like because I've known, you know, Fort St. James as that kind of militant and, you know, negotiate better letters and all those things. And then in Quesnel that was in '86, '85 in, I think in December, or you know something. Anyway, Frank and Shiv [Garcha] asked me to come, you know, and look after Quesnel because they have problem there and that they wanted—actually, later I find out the story, you know, with—they were sitting discussing that there are problems in Quesnel. You know, we need somebody who can go there to look after—

GD [00:42:01] Troubleshoot.

SD [00:42:01] A troubleshooter, you know, right? And then, I didn't believe there was one safety director, you know, lady from Quesnel, and she, was sitting there. She proposed the name. She said, 'Why not bring Sucha here?' And everybody agreed with that, and then Frank called me, Shiv called me. And I decided, at that time I had one loss. My son was lost. He was elder than him [gestures to son in room] and with leukemia. And I didn't know, my family didn't want to stay in the Fort St. James, and I told them. They said, 'Why not come temporary then.' I worked here four or five months and then everybody wanted me to stay here and ask, apply for it. So, I run, you know, I kind of applied for it, being a [unclear] job. Larry Dockendorff, probably you heard his name or not, I don't know. He was president one time. He ran against me too. And I defeated him on the executive board. And then I got the job, so I moved here. What else, you know.

GD [00:43:17] So, that was about '86?

SD [00:43:19] That was in '86, yeah, I'd come.

GD [00:43:20] That was year of the big strike, wasn't it?

SD [00:43:23] Yes, and there was about four or five months strike then. Yeah. At that time I would say.

GD [00:43:30] So, then you became the safety troubleshooter?

SD [00:43:35] Yeah, then I—no what happened—

GD [00:43:41] What was the job?

SD [00:43:42] My, oh, no, at that I was a business agent.

GD [00:43:45] Okay, business agent.

SD [00:43:47] Apply for business agent, and then I work as a business agent.

GD [00:43:56] Frank [Everitt] was talking about the structure of the IWA. There was the south line and the north line and the west line and east line, and there were about nine business agents, something like that?

SD [00:44:08] No, not nine, I think. Yeah, because there was some officer we called, like the system is, there are some officers who are elected. And every two years or something, and there was a—and then business agent, you know, they are elected in the executive board. And so, there was agent, first vice, they were full time. And then other five, six, you know, other people, yeah.

GD [00:44:39] So, what did you do as a business agent?

SD [00:44:43] I was—same like the other—there's a line we dividing, like, you know, south line, north line, east line, and that kind of, you now, and then down line. And so—

GD [00:44:57] So, you like to put out fires and deal with grievances at the mill?

SD [00:45:01] Okay, but the practice is—you know, the first and second step they're doing, you know, like, job steward, plant committee. And third step goes to the business agent. And then after, you know, could not resolve, and we go to the arbitration. So, that's so I was as a— [background noise].

GD [00:45:31] Get the lawyers involved.

SD [00:45:31] (laughter) Yeah, go to them. So I was, you know, doing all, like in Quesnel. Quesnel is a little heavy line—used to be, not now—but, you know, heavy line because of there's 2,000 members, you know what I mean, in the one area, you have to deal those things. It's not that easy.

GD [00:45:55] So, you were driving back and forth to Quesnel a lot?

SD [00:45:57] Yeah, yeah, of course, yeah. Not only Quesnel, even—you see our local is quite big comparing Vancouver.

GD [00:46:05] The whole central interior.

SD [00:46:07] From Fort Nelson to, you know, now you have 100 Mile in there. And, you know, like in this side up to Smithers and stuff like that. And so, like those lines, know just be—we have to live in Prince George. So, we can, they can change around our line, you like Quesnel or, Fort Nelson or Smithers, or whatever. I, in 25 years at work, I'm here as a business agent here. Out of 25, I worked of Quesnel almost 15 years because most of them—Actually, you know, Frank put me wherever they have, he has a problem. 'Okay, why don't you can spend one year on this line?' (laughter) So, that's the way the system we have here. And I was most of this in me, even other business agents up there they asked me, 'How are you doing this?' I said, 'Yes, you have to build your trust.' Simple. You know what I mean. If you have trust, then the people— people should know that this guy gonna stand for us. Not gonna be compromised and that's what happened.

GD [00:47:45] So, looking at the bigger picture, how did the union change from the early years to now?

SD [00:47:57] Like, what's the difference you mean?

GD [00:48:00] Yeah. I mean the industry changed—modernization, a lot of the smaller mills shutting down. Frank talked a bit about the change from grievance handling to more policy issues like who gets the licenses to cut in the woods, doing more like forest renewal under the NDP. Those kinds of things.

SD [00:48:30] See, the problem is, like, I've been retired for the last 16 years, you know, and some of the stuff maybe I—

GD [00:48:39] —has happened since then.

SD [00:48:40] Yeah, you know, but I can only something say like in those days, it's change. Change in—I'm more kind of like work with the people. And when I was working as a plant committee member, I was like most often times, like whatever I lost in my hour, you know that one, they gave me. But I worked way more hours from my own grievance procedure and all those things or talking with the people. Even I was, when that time was not active in the union yet, I didn't like some of stuff. I don't know. I'm different maybe, crazy or something. Like when—there was one time wage, and the Trudeau have put wage control or price control and stuff like that. And I know the union, they want to shut down the mills, you know, for a protest or something, for one day. And our union said, like our plant committee said, 'Well, it's up to you guys.' You know, you want to, you know. And I was so upset about this, I just went around in the lunchroom and I said, 'Like, you guys, I mean, we should be doing this. These union guys are not, you know, they agree with us, this and that. But we should decide ourself.' So, we shut the mill down. The second thing—one thing the people, you know, like if you say look I'm gonna go, going out, it's up to you, and people will start following you. You have to take a stand. You know you could not say that somebody else to do and then you follow, you know, then nobody gonna listen to you.

GD [00:51:07] This doesn't happen much anymore though, does it?

SD [00:51:09] No, that's what I'm gonna tell you—like I was telling the difference. Like I was giving, I was taking risk. I was spending my own time into this, no problem. And this, now, like when I later did, before I retired, I noticed that people wanted that there's a two

hours meeting and they want the full shift off. (laughter) I mean, there are differences, you know, for those things. I think before our time, when I read some of historic books for our union, people give lives in 1935 and all those things. So, people were, going into camps and all those things you know talking people spending their own time. They lost their families. They lost their lives in the south; they done those things. So, that's what I was telling people. You guys are talking about, you have put that much hour—people give life for us. We should be, you know, remember those people. So, these are the difference I see. I was telling you about the Fort St. James and the one other difference, you know, so I was telling you over 500 people, how much production they were having that time. You bill 500 people and now the same mill is producing four times production.

GD [00:53:15] With how many of you?

SD [00:53:17] With the 200 people, and if they want to produce four time production that time and they need other 1,800 people. So, what I'm saying this, you know, like, there are difference. The difference of, you know, the production. Like in those days nobody cared about that much about environment and all those things. I know IW don't like, or Steelworkers, doesn't like too much about environment people, but myself, I expect those people at least—like I'm comparing in that time and today. If those people not stand up for those things, there would be no same kind of situation.

GD [00:54:10] So, what do you think the most important issue is for young workers today?

SD [00:54:19] See, my thinking is different. I know that B.C. is dependent on three industries: forestry, fishery, mining. And right now—like whenever before I look on Wikipedia and stuff like that, you know, and Prince George, you know like a one industry town, forestry, now you look Wikipedia and Prince George on Wikipedia is known for education and known for tourism. And this is not just Prince George, this is the whole B.C. is in the same situation.

GD [00:55:19] Yeah.

SD [00:55:20] And the people—young people, especially, you know like here too, like I remember we have, we organized committee, Stand for the North, that was when there was um—

GD [00:55:44] Under the Liberals?

SD [00:55:44] No, no, not Liberal. That time was pine, Pine Beetle, you know, that thing happened that time we organized this organization. That was about 15, 16 years ago, Bobby? [Bobby Deepak: 2006] 2006, and at that time we organized this one. And then after that we were looking for two, three things, and that's what I said. I said, 'First thing we should give the slogan,' and later even BC Fed accepted that slogan. "Save the jobs, save the community," I guess. We have, like you know, this slogan here. See, the best, our premier—what's the name—NDP, who's with Jim Pattison now? What's his name? Glen Clark.

GD [00:56:55] Oh, okay, yeah.

SD [00:56:56] Glen Clark, because he gave this—what I forgot the name—where the log ties with the timber—

GD [00:57:10] Appurtenance.

SD [00:57:14] Exactly. And that was the best one to save the community.

GD [00:57:19] So, keep the harvesting of the forest close to the community that it was harvested in.

SD [00:57:26] Yeah this way at least the community—see, I was telling them. Like these people don't, the big city people, don't understand. You know like situation in the small town. Fort St. James, if I live there with my family, I have a house. If the mill is working then everything's fine with me, no problem. If mill shut down, I lose everything. Nobody gonna bloody even live in my house free. In those, there's no job, you know, like [trails off]

GD [00:58:09] So, places like Mackenzie?

SD [00:58:11] Yeah, place like Mackenzie, Fort St. James, Vanderhoof, you know, these small communities. They don't understand. And that appurtenance, you know is the best thing, you know what I mean. When Liberals come, they bloody change those things. They change those thing, they have a—

GD [00:58:32] Send logs to China. Wherever.

SD [00:58:35] You know, they can not only this one, they can move around like, okay, Fort Nelson. They did not have—they have stud mills only, it could not cut the big lumber, timber here. The one time, because they make better money with the timber and other stuff, they moved the timber from, the logs to Vanderhoof. And they shut the mill down there. You know, the community should have some kind of importance. If they have the appurtancy laws in there, then they can then sit there, at least they have that mill, if they're gonna shut down, they're gonna lose their timber. Now, what happened, Canfor buy all this mills. Right now, in Prince George, only three mills running. There was 20 mills were running before there. It's same thing, you know, in the others, those small towns. So, that's the one thing is a problem. Second, we could not look into those sides. We could not have jobs. Then what do young people, the young generation do? You know, then live on these jobs—four hours in the Superstore or four hours somewhere else.

GD [01:00:23] Gig jobs.

SD [01:00:24] Exactly. So, you know, like even they have in the [unclear] now the base aid, you like used to be \$7, \$8, now it's \$18. On the other, look prices, where the price has gone. You know, there was the oil, the can, I was buying \$19 some, and now that's the \$52. It's not even double. It's more than double. And now you can have any other, you don't think you can price, you can compare those prices. How are we going to live here?

GD [01:01:16] So, obviously you think labour history is important. It's important for young workers to know what's come before. All of the work and suffering and fatalities that have happened to bring the working conditions that they have now, all relates to the work that you did when you were active in the IWA and then the Steelworkers.

SD [01:01:43] I remember every time when there was a Liberal or Social Credit was in power, we'd come and ask the government to stop exporting logs. Sometimes, even I feel in our NDP, like we couldn't stop. I know there are excuses. They're saying, 'Oh, they are coming from the private.' I mean, take the private. They can sell those things and this and

that. Why we could not stop those things? Why we want to allow the jobs to sell across the border? Why? Personally, I still have problem with that.

GD [01:02:39] So, the saga of the softwood lumber, you know, tariffs in the States affecting the B.C. economy and now Trump talking about putting more tariffs on products from Canada.

SD [01:02:57] Of course, now they, like first thing is these old mills, you know, Canfor or West Fraser, all those, whatever we have, they sold here. I mean they're buying mills in U.S. And, if they can take the logs from here, why then they (laughter)—

GD [01:03:23] Need us.

SD [01:03:24] Exactly.

GD [01:03:32] The last question is, what's the one thing you wish young workers understood about labour history?

SD [01:03:41] Like history is very important for everything. Actually, what we are living, we are living in the history, because whatever they do, we live today. Whatever we will do, they will live tomorrow. History gives encouragement to young people if you tell them what kind of sacrifices we're giving our elders. You know, logging, like in those days there was—one time, I was safety director too, you know, for a couple years for this local. At that time, there was a fatality—highest fatality was heli-logging.

GD [01:04:46] Oh, okay.

SD [01:04:50] The second was trucking, you know, industry. Before us, when there was the horses, they were pulling logs and all those things. I think Bob, he have, you know, picture of all those thing in his office. Right now, with the machine, just log they cut, even they cut the sides and send there. But in those days, there was not like that. You know, there—

GD [01:05:28] That's a lot of work. A lot of hard work.

SD [01:05:30] Very hard work. And still people were, you know, and they wanted—I feel like cold, I don't know.

NF [01:05:40] It's cold in here.

SD [01:05:41] Yeah, yeah, a little bit. I don't know. I can put my jacket on my legs might be (laughter). [Adjusts jacket]

GD [01:05:48] Well, that's about all of the questions I have.

SD [01:05:54] Yeah, okay. And so, if you're really asking me, on the labour side, I'm a little bit disappointed too. And on the other side, the system is, you know, capitalist system is more stronger compared to what we have as a labour. We are—you don't just—I think it should be more political actually, and the people should be more education politically. And history, of course, people should know what kind of sacrifices were given for us. And so we can, because they can—whatever we do, what sacrifice will be, not for us, it's going to go for the next generation. And we should be doing something on those things.

GD [01:07:03] Well, I've seen history take a nosedive in terms of how it's taught in high school. There is a BCTF labour history component, but it's optional for students to take. You know, at the college, we used to do 19 sections of history, and now there's like four. So, it's a huge decline in understanding where we came from to understand where we are now. I think you're right. The unions, they've played less of a role in public policy now than they did before. Part of it is because the union density has gone down so much. It's mostly in the public sector, as opposed to the private sector. And there isn't the kind of militancy that was a very effective tool to get change done at the local level. You know, we were talking about Operation Solidarity and the movement towards a general strike in opposition to the Bill Bennett legislation in 1983. So, you were likely, were you in Prince George or Fort St. James when all of that happened?

SD [01:08:22] At that time, in Fort St. James, I would say.

GD [01:08:23] Yeah. But of course, there were rallies all over the place. Jack Munro was the fellow—.

SD [01:08:31] Then he went to—

GD [01:08:34] He went to Kelowna (laughter) to settle it. Some people thought—

SD [01:08:37] I don't know. I do not mention too much about those kind of stuff because the reason I don't know you guys, like offended but I'm full of those things (laughter).

GD [01:08:46] Yeah, yeah.

SD [01:08:48] Yeah, there was Jack Munro, you know, went there and end up—that was, you know, those days were really—people have spirit. People wanted to change something, and but you know— (laughter).

GD [01:09:05] Now Glen Clark runs Jimmy Pattison's empire. (laughter)

SD [01:09:09] Yeah, yeah. No, like, okay, you know, somebody's—like let me tell you this, you know, this is my opinion. Bill, what's the name of Bill?

GD [01:09:23] Bennett?

SD [01:09:24] You know, I like his speech, always I like his speech. And, he was, he's a good speaker. And Glen Clark. He done two things, you know, that clause. And the second, when he stood for officially people there and against U.S. At least he has something, those kind of—he has some of those kinds of stuff, but later, it's the same thing. I remember when IWA, like we had, and then in that one negotiation, and we were negotiating, and I asked Frank, I said, 'You know, tell me where you're getting that information. You're just now you are getting the information from media or the company.' Media giving whatever company giving. We choose to have IWA, a research department. And there was one fellow named Smithy or something, you know, like he was working there. And he always, you now, come up with something, I mean, some information, because I remember first time when we were, you know like the companies are losing this much. Then he come up and he said one cent, you know, when the price goes down of the dollar, and so much in a million on the companies are making. And that they are still making money.

GD [01:11:07] A lot of money.

SD [01:11:07] And I said, why not—what happened when Dave Haggard came? He bloody removed [unclear] such centre. And then I talked. I said Frank, 'Why not call that, find that guy?' Frank said, 'I will find that that guy. Maybe we will hire him.' 'Okay.' He found the guy. He found him. He found the guy. He said, 'So, you know, you're not working for IWA, so are you free? He said, 'No. I left from there. The company hired me.'

GD [01:11:45] The company hired him?

SD [01:11:46] So, now he's working with the company. What they're going to be— that's what happening. I mean, we don't have, we union don't have eyes and ears. We just blind and we are deaf. Just listening to the media and media telling what the company want to tell. And you guys, how are you going to negotiate? Until we don't have our own research department, they can tell us how much companies are making, how much we need this time or that time. I mean, we fought for that we should have hard minimum wages. What happened? Prices have gone bloody through time. So, is it useful increasing this, you know, like minimum wages? Or we should be care about how we can look after the people?

GD [01:12:50] The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has the living wage report that comes out. They update the number every year. This was done a couple of weeks ago. It's \$25 or something an hour, and it would be the minimum wage for living in Prince George these days. And it's higher in Vancouver, and yet, what is it—\$18 or something. And so much part time gig work.

BD [01:13:19] There's not many jobs out there, making \$25 an hour.

GD [01:13:21] No.

SD [01:13:24] No, that's like bothering me, you know what I mean? When somebody come, oh, I have \$20, you know what mean, this, this. I mean, first thing is we are really going after the people who are on the pension, like me. Like when there was \$7 base rate, and at that time when I retired with my pension, I think everything is fine, very good. But after 10 years—

GD [01:13:55] It doesn't go as far does it?

SD [01:13:56] No, no. It's not the same, you know, like what I was thinking 10 years ago. Everything is go in another way. And so, it's, if you really, like I don't know what your job is and how you're going to end up in the stuff, but it's you know—

BD [01:14:16] I'm a pensioner too.

SD [01:14:21] No, see, the thing is—first thing is we have to look the politics.

GD [01:14:29] Mm-hmm.

SD [01:14:30] When we are—our members, we should be more mobilized politically instead of talking about, oh, get two dollars more or two dollars less, you know what I mean? Politically, we understand. Myself, I'm more conscious because I'm politically, you

know, try to understand. That's why I have better vision comparing other people. And I'm very proud of those things, and from this, we have under my leadership Fort St. James was the centre. The people they picked me for this job because of my reputation there. When I go to the membership, first things I was from a minority. You know, like there was 500 people, there was 80 people that were Indian. The rest of 420 people were non-Indian, and I was still—I win those elections with those people. Because they believe me.

GD [01:15:47] You stood up for them.

SD [01:15:47] Exactly. They believe me. And that was the first mill I know where people are saying, no, we don't need—like some of people, the company people, we should not have this committee because of, you know, they scared of the foreman.

GD [01:16:11] They had to do their jobs.

SD [01:16:13] Of course. No, I was telling them, I said they should not be scared. They should learn more how to handle the people, how to handle the problems. That's the only difference.

GD [01:16:32] Not much difference between the mill and the college. Managers who don't know how to manage it.

SD [01:16:38] No, Bobby is quite good, political, educated. (laughter) He's good, he knows—no, I'm proud of he's my son and he's quite good with the political and dealing with people and all those things. He's good. I'm proud of him.

GD [01:17:03] He's a good guy.

SD [01:17:03] I'm proud of him.

GD [01:17:05] Well, thanks so much for coming in. It's really been a pleasure.

SD [01:17:09] I'm full of all those things (laughter). You know, Frank, myself, Shep, Jack Higgins, all we were friends.

GD [01:17:26] Yeah, He started in Quesnel in '71, ended up here as a business agent, and then you came up from the Fort St. James side of things, but came together in here—

SD [01:17:40] Yeah, I remember I was a plant chairman, and he was—Bill Watt and he wants to run against Larry Dockendorf but some people mentioning, Frank. And then he came Fort St. James, he asked me, he said, 'What you think about I run against Larry Dockendorf? Do you think I can win him? I said, 'No.' Who gonna win? You know, it's Frank, I suggest. He said, 'Why?' I said just I'm telling you about it. I always—one other thing, I was always, you know, front.

GD [01:18:29] Up front, yeah.

SD [01:18:31] I was not never kind of double-faced or anything. I was always front and down. This is [unclear] this way. I was always in the front and tell you what I think is right. You can even ask Frank about me. Like when I retired I was talking to Frank about like—'Frank, what do you think about me?' or something and the Frank said, well, simple. Whenever we have a problem, we come to you, and you said, this is do this way. And,

because when you think politically, when you look, think people, you're not wrong. You always, it's straight-forward. When you look yourself, then it's a different story. Anyway guys, thank you very much for coming and all those things.

GD [01:19:26] Thank you.