

Interview: David Chudnovsky (DC)
Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)
Assisted by: Al Cornes and Lesley Harrington
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Note: This interview is presented in two parts. This is Part 1; Part 2 was recorded on a separate day.

[00:00:10] KN: We're here today to interview David Chudnovsky, who was president of the BCTF from 1999 to 2002. Today's date is July 22nd, 2016; and the interview is being conducted by Ken Novakowski with Al Cornes,

[00:00:25] KN: the technical

[00:00:27] KN: assistance from Lesley Harrington. Good morning, David.

[00:00:30] DC: Good morning!

[00:00:32] KN: So we're going to start off our questions by asking you a bit about your life before your life at the BCTF; so start by telling us by where and when you were born, and where you were raised. And then you might want to move onto telling us a bit about your family, about your family background, any progressive family background, what was it like? Could you talk a bit about all that, please?

[00:00:57] DC: I was born in Toronto, in 1949 and grew up in Toronto. We lived in a number of different places in Toronto; and I, of course, went to school in Toronto, and to university. First at York University, where I got a BA in History and Political science; and then at the University of Toronto Faculty of Education, a few years later, where I got my Bachelor of Education degree. My family were a progressive family. My parents were always pro-union, they were both, for a time pretty sure, both of them—in the Communist Party; but eventually, left

[00:01:48] DC: that.

[00:01:49] DC: And there's a whole story about that, but they rejected some of the orthodoxy and Stalinism, and the craziness of that movement. But they never stopped being progressive, they've never stopped being socialist, they described themselves as socialist; and they taught me that, you never cross a picket-line. I remember, as a kid, in the car, with my Dad, for sure—I can't remember if my Mother was there—driving along a street in Toronto, and there were some people outside a factory with picket-signs, and I didn't know what that was. And I said to my dad, what's going on there, and he said, that's a strike, and those are union people. And, still

I didn't really understand what he was saying. And he says, there's one thing you need to remember—you never cross a picket-line. And I said, why? And he said, because it is like stealing. And he was right. That is what it's like, when you cross a picket-line—like stealing from the workers. So, it was a political household, we talked politics, we marched in Ban-the-Bomb demonstrations, and my parents took me to a demonstration—or didn't take me, asked me—

[00:03:20] DC: there were demonstrations in Toronto in support of, in solidarity with people in Southern States, who were marching from Selma to Montgomery for civil rights, and human rights. And there was a demo outside the American Consulate in Toronto to support those people, and I remember hearing on the radio—a news report, 30 seconds about that demonstration. And I said to my—so I must have been 14—

[00:04:00] DC: I said to my parents, we should go there. And they said, Ok, let's go. And we went. And I kind of think of that event, as my first, independent—it wasn't really independent—but it was the first time I decided to do something public and political. And then the Vietnam War came, and they were appalled, and we all together went to dozens of demonstrations and meetings. And eventually I was in university, and was in the student movement there, and so—political background? Yeah.

[00:04:40] KN: Ok, do you remember at all anything at all about your school experience; primary, secondary school and, maybe, some of the teachers you might have had, and... anything like that?

[00:04:53] DC: Well, two things I remember—when I got your question, I sat for a while and let the memories, kind of, wash over me. And there's two things that came to me. The first was, when I was in grade 3, we rode our bikes to school then, and I came out at lunch time one day to ride my bike home, there was no air in the tires. And I looked around, and there was another kid there, whom I knew, who said Joe and Billy let the air out of your tires. So, I went to the school, and I went to the office and I said, Joe and Billy let the air out of my tires. So, the principal said, OK, go home and come back to my office after lunch. So, after lunch I came back to the office, and there was Joe and Billy in the office of the principal,

[00:05:47] DC: and me. And the principal took a big fat strap out of his drawer, and he had Joe and Billy put out their hands, and he strapped them.

[00:05:57] KN: In front of you?

[00:05:58] DC: In front of me. And I know that it hurt Joe and Billy. But I will never forget that event, and I wasn't inclined to corporal punishment before, but it had a profound impact on me. That was inappropriate violence against those kids, and even though I was very angry with them, even then I knew there was something wrong with what happened in front of me. How old was I in Grade 3? Eight, I guess, or something like that. The other thing I remember, was that—I remember lots of stuff—but the other thing I would point to, is at the time when we were in high-school, it was the time of the Vietnam War.

[00:06:39] DC: And so, there was a lot of talk, and debate and discussion in class about that. And I had a friend; a good friend, who I still see from time to time; who was convinced by reading Time Magazine, that everything that was happening in Vietnam was OK. And he used to say it like that, he'd say, well, they must be right. Americans must be right, I read it in the Time Magazine, well... And he was a good guy, and turned-out to be a very progressive guy over the years,

[00:07:15] DC: but I couldn't convince him! I couldn't convince him that he was just reading lies and propaganda. And we went to one of our teachers, whom we liked a lot; Len Peebles;

[00:07:29] DC: an

[00:07:31] DC: English teacher, who taught me English 3 out of 4 years of high-school, or four out of five... Great guy, very bright guy, an old CCFer; and he patiently explained to my buddy why he should be sceptical of what he was reading in the mainstream press. And I saw that teacher—he taught us in Toronto—years later, in 1983, when we were involved in the Solidarity struggle. I was at a meeting at the Surrey Teachers building, at that old church that you guys will remember, and it was a Solidarity Coalition meeting. It was the unions and community people, who were angry with the legislation. And who was there in the corner, but old Len Peebles! Retired and having moved to White Rock, and, not that night—because I couldn't get to him, but a couple of years later, but somehow I found him, I can't remember how, and he used to visit my classroom, and come to events in the class, and we re-connected; so...

[00:08:52] KN: So, what about your university years; after high-school? You said you went to the University of York to do an arts degree, and then to University of Toronto for the teaching degree. Could you talk about your university years, and experiences at university?

[00:09:01] DC: Sure.

[00:09:10] DC: I started university in the fall of 1968. So, you remember what was going on in the world in 1968?

[00:09:21] DC: The world was being turned upside-down in 1968! There were the events in France,

[00:09:28] DC: there

[00:09:30] DC: were cities on fire in the States, and the Vietnam War was still raging.

[00:09:41] DC: And I went to university; and on every campus across the world there were students' movements. And there was one at York University; and I became immediately involved in that student movement; and became a leader... Hmmm... a little bit of a leader, not the leader; but one of the more active activists in the student movement. It might be interesting to note that one of the first people I met in that student movement, was a woman who became

the president of Canadian Union of Public Employees, and then secretary and business manager of the Hospital Employees' Union, and is now an MLA

[00:10:33] DC: in

[00:10:34] DC: Victoria, Judy Darcy. And many others of the people, who I was active with—mainly on university; some silly university-type issues, but some broader issues as well—went on to become union activists, and progressives. And so, that was at York; and I think it's fair to say, that I, along with many, many others spent more time dealing with my political activism, than I did with my studies, although I did fine. And by then I was together with Ruth Hermann, and we went away, eventually, to England for a year, and came back. And I had a couple of

[00:11:26] DC: different jobs, and eventually decided to go back to the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto, which would have been 1975 maybe, 1974... And what I would mention there, just to keep the union theme going, is that the year that I was at the Faculty of Education there was the big strike

[00:11:52] DC: at the University of Toronto—the library workers were on strike for weeks. I think, it was a six-week strike, if I'm not mistaken. And there was a student support committee in the faculty that I joined and was part of, and very active on. The president of the union that was on strike during those years, was the same Judy Darcy! And, I learned a lot from Judy in that strike, because we were permitted to come to union meetings. I don't how they worked that out, but the members of the support committee were able to attend union meetings.

[00:12:39] DC: And the university twice made offers to the workers that were rejected. And then they made the third offer, and it was brought to the members. And I was at that meeting, and the executive of the union recommended rejection of the offer. And, there was a debate, the executive spoke, and Judy spoke, and then they took the vote, and it was a secret ballot vote. And she came and made an announcement of the result. And the result was that the members had gone against the recommendation of the executive, and they had accepted the terms of that offer.

[00:13:22] DC: And she made a magnificent speech, about the need for unity; and the fact that she didn't agree with what the workers had decided. But it was up to them to decide; and that the union and the membership should be united in there and go back to work together. And it had a tremendous impact on me, that speech, and that wisdom; and the depth of the understanding of what you do as a union leader.

[00:14:00] KN: Ok, so when and where did you first start teaching?

[00:14:08] DC: I taught for a part of the year in England, when Ruth and I lived there. There was more union stuff there, this is going to take for ever! You know, like many young people, we got up and moved to an exotic place—London, England. For a year. We were very young, and I got a

job working for the Inner London Education Authority; because there was shortage of teachers at the time, because they paid them virtually nothing.

[00:14:52] DC: I think, my salary at the time was £

[00:14:53] DC: 1478

[00:14:54] DC: a year. So, maybe the Pound was \$2.50 at the time. So teachers got nothing! In the rural England, £1478 a year was not a good salary, but you could live on it;

[00:15:16] DC: but not in urban England. But I didn't need to make very much money, we were having fun, we weren't building a life there. And I taught in a school in South London, Kingsdale Comprehensive School. So I taught there; and learned a ton, and worked. I was very involved with the activists and the militants in that local union.

[00:15:41] DC: And we had all kinds of issues—mostly around what they called the London Allowance. At the time the National Union of Teachers was fighting for a bonus for teachers, who taught in London, because it was so expensive to live there, and so there were demos and this and that. Our boss at that time was Margaret Thatcher! She was the Minister of Education in Britain at that time; and that was the year they cancelled milk for kids.

[00:16:15] DC: Up until then, as a result—I think, it had been brought in immediately after the war, WWII—by the then Labour government; that kids got a carton of milk every day for free, at school. And, Margaret Thatcher cancelled that. That was the year that I taught in England, and they called her Thatcher Fatcher Milk-snatcher.

[00:16:37] DC: So—lots about that. Then, eventually we came back, I went to the Faculty of Education a couple of years later, and I got a job at a suburb of Toronto, teaching high-school, at Vincent Massey Collegial. A good school. And I worked with very fine people. In those days there was no union contract, there were no rules, there was nothing. There was a salary scale, that's about it. There was an organization, the OSSTF, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation;

[00:17:19] DC: and I really didn't get much involved in that. I went to the union meetings at the school. And at spring break that year, the principal came to me—and another guy—and said, that you're going to be laid-off at the end of the year. Oh, you'll be laid-off after spring break, you are going to hear about that, but don't worry, I've got you covered. You'll get your job back. And I said, OK. And sure enough, that's what happened. I got a lay-off notice and then, the last week of June he came and said, it's settled,

[00:17:57] DC: you're coming back. So, that was great. And he was actually, a very good principal, as far as principals go; he saved my job. The next year he told us the same thing. He came to the same two guys; youngest guys on staff. And he said, you're going to be laid-off again; and I am not sure that I am going to be able to save your job. So, think about the difference between that process, and what we have now, which is all written-down and you know what is going on. And you have some rights.

[00:18:39] DC: And, once again, he was right. We did get laid-off. We were in touch with friends here in Vancouver—I was just talking about this the other day. We were in touch my mail! By letters! That you put a stamp on, and you'd send it, and they got it a week later. And I got a letter from Bob Rosen, who you guys know, who was a very active member of the Surrey Teachers, and the BCTF saying, there is a job in Surrey you'd be really good at, why don't you apply? So, I did, and I got the job, and we moved to Vancouver at the end of the summer in 1978.

[00:19:28] KN: So, can you tell us about that job when you started teaching, and your other teaching experiences in Surrey?

[00:19:36] DC: It was an amazing job. It was a teaching position, but it was a community development job. They had, at the time, in Surrey, community schools, and each of the community schools had an additional staff-member, a community-school co-ordinator, whose job it was to connect the school to the community, and the community to the school. And I taught at Bridgeview Community School—I don't know if you know Bridgeview.

[00:20:09] DC: It is a tiny—they called it a semi-rural slum—kind of under the Pattullo Bridge, on the Surrey side, in the flats. It's a peat-bog actually, there. And I worked there, and I did all kinds of stuff. I ran a big night-school; that was focused on adult basic education. We ran 30 or 32, eventually, sessions of adult basic education, for people, who were adults, but couldn't read and write. Not like, high-school completion, but basic education for adults. And it was a great venue for that kind of program, because people, who can't read and write are usually embarrassed about that, and are usually very shy about trying to deal with that challenge.

[00:21:14] DC: And a little backwater elementary school was a really good venue for those people. To even come in the door, is a challenge for those folks, and there were some wonderful, wonderful teachers. I should say their names, so they're recorded in history. Gail Smyth was a fantastic—heroic—woman, who worked incredibly well. Audrey Goodridge. Some fantastic people, who were so committed to those students, and we did a whole bunch of other programs.

[00:21:54] DC: Summer camps for kids and programs for seniors. And we did a program—we got a grant from the Federal Government; they were giving grants in those days—to hire some people to help people to fix up their homes. Some people lived in these kinds of squal-like—some people! Some people's homes in that community were terrific, and they've been there for years, and years, and years; but some people lived there because it was the last gasp for them, and they lived in pretty rotten circumstances.

[00:22:24] DC: And we got a grant to hire some people to help folks fix up their places. It was really, an incredible job, and of course, it was that 6 or 7 years later there was cuts—Bill Bennett cuts, I guess, and those jobs were eliminated. I worked for a couple of years for another program that was attached to that community school, which was a re-entry program for kids who had been out of school, who'd been in trouble of one kind or another. (It was) for high-

school kids; they had to have been at least 15 years old, and they had to be out of school for a year.

[00:23:04] DC: I did the language arts piece of that, very hard work, very challenged kids. And then I got elected to go into the office of the Surrey Teachers' and stopped teaching for a while. I went back to it, but I worked for the union.

[00:23:25] KN: Could you talk a bit about how you got active in your union and in your local, in the Surrey Teachers' Association, and then, subsequently, in the BCTF?

[00:23:35] DC: Yeah. When I got to Surrey, I virtually immediately got involved in union, in the STA—Surrey Teachers' Association—work. First of all, I was interested in it; secondly, my friend, a good friend, Bob Rosen, was all caught up in the work of the Surrey Teachers. I also knew a couple of other people in the local, whom I met immediately when I got there—

[00:24:12] DC: Jim Edmundson, whom you guys know, whom I had met previously, and he was very active in the local. And then a couple of other community school co-ordinators, who were, as well, very active in the local: Sharon Goldberg, who you probably remember, and a couple of others involved in the local.

[00:24:37] DC: So, it was kind of natural, that I went to the meetings, and there were a couple union reps—staff reps—at our school who were the old-time staff reps. They were great people, but they didn't have a political perspective; they were doing their bit for the union. And really, those are the people, who made our union; the people who had the loyalty to the union. So, anyways, I was immediately swept-up in the union. And at the time, the president of our local was Peter Thomson. And I would go to the meetings and I was very impressed with Peter Thomson.

[00:25:25] DC: He was—

[00:25:26] DC: you know him—he's a kind of an old-time STA guy and a very... he spoke in a very measured and moderate way about everything; but he had politics, which is great. And his mentor was Wes Janzen, who was a president of the BCTF, I think, in 1965, went back to...

[00:25:40] KN: 1960–61.

[00:25:54] DC: 1960–

[00:25:56] DC: 61! Went back to being a principal in Surrey, and was the president of the STA for a time; and was an obvious mentor for Peter Thomson at the time—the next president. So, that was my first year. The next year, Peter Ellis was elected president. They called them Pete and Re-Pete in Surrey. Peter Ellis was president and he was

[00:26:29] DC: also... there was a lot to learn from Peter. He was incredibly, as you know, a very charming guy, and easy to talk to guy; and very comfortable in going to the staff-rooms and

talking to people. And he came from Princess Margaret Secondary school in Surrey, which was a hot-bed of lefties and radicals and activists, and militants. They called it Ho Chi Mihn High for a while, the Princess Margaret school. And people like Lloyd Edwards taught at Princess Margaret, Kerry Gibbs taught at Princess Margaret... should I be mentioning these people's names?

[00:27:16] KN: Yes, yes.

[00:27:17] DC: Both of whom had been presidents of the STA—Lloyd played a very, very important role. Although, we should talk about him, when this is done. And Peter Ellis had a bit more of an edge to him, than Peter Thomson—their politics was not that different, but a bit more of an edge. He was a bit bolder in his politics. And that was when, the STA, kind of, began its 35-year-long affiliation with the left of the BCTF.

[00:27:56] DC: Gibbs before, and Lloyd before—Lloyd Edwards—had been very progressive guys. But Surrey wasn't kind of integrated. It was a Surrey thing. In the years of Peter Ellis, and then the next president, who was Moira Mackenzie, Surrey kind of became more integrated—much more, in my view, at least—in the activities of the Federation, the politics of the Federation. So, there was Thomson, and then there was Ellis for two years, and then Moira Mackenzie, as she was elected president of the local. And that was the first year I sat on the Executive of the Surrey Teachers. As the anti-racism chair.

[00:28:46] DC: I was always very involved in the anti-racism program at the BCTF, it was my first involvement in the BCTF. Eventually I became a member of the anti-racism committee. And I sat on the STA Executive, so, just to stop speaking about the bureaucracy and to start speaking about the politics,

[00:29:14] DC: that year, the Surrey Teachers, under Moira's amazing leadership—she was an amazing—still, the best local president that I ever saw anywhere. Under her leadership, there was a big Kindergarten class-size campaign.

[00:29:41] DC: There was a commission that investigated the conditions of class-sizes in Kindergarten; there were meetings at the board, there were demonstrations, there was a whole mobilization, to try to reduce class-sizes in Kindergarten. And there was a young Kindergarten teacher, Sheenagh Leggat, who was the face of that campaign. And I need to say that—so when was that? I guess that was in 1981 or 1982, you should check with Moira...

[00:30:21] KN: It was in 1979, the year of the commission. She initiated that before she was President.

[00:30:28] DC: There you go. You know it better than I—she initiated it before she was President. And there's a million important things about that for me personally—I learned a lot, I watched a superb local president at work. Ellis was great too, and so was Peter Thomson, but I wasn't on the Executive in those years. But what was the most important, was—so that was

started in 1979 and it ramped itself up in 1980 or 1981; we haven't stopped fighting for improvements in class-sizes for kids, for one minute

[00:31:03] DC: since that time. And, it was started before—there was that famous Surrey walk-out to Victoria before that. I'm sure you've talked about it. But, in my time, in the BCTF and in my time at the Surrey Teachers there was never a minute that teachers stopped mobilizing and organizing for improvements for kids in their classrooms. And that's for me, you know, formative. It is incredibly important, and it underlies all my activism in the Federation.

[00:31:45] KN: And you eventually became the Surrey Teachers' Association President. Can you talk about that?

[00:31:49] DC: Yeah, I joked about it, because it went Thomson, Ellis,

[00:31:56] DC: Mackenzie,

[00:31:58] DC: Porter,

[00:31:59] DC: Chudnovsky. And, fortunately, nobody ran against me, so it was possible, but the names were pretty simple, until they got to me. So I sat on the STA Executive non-stop from the time that Moira Mackenzie was the President, for two years; and then, Brian Porter, another tremendously important person in our local, who brought a whole other sensibility. Brian, as you know, was not as political, as some others of us. You wouldn't call Brian Porter a leftie. He's not reactionary,

[00:32:47] DC: he is a progressive guy in lots of ways. But he's a kick-ass teacher unionist. That's what Brian Porter is. And he brought a kind of sensibility that said, I can remember him saying, over and over again, in various times he'd say, never apologize for asking for more money for teachers. We never have to apologize, and he brought that kind of confidence about our organizing for ourselves to the job. And he was hysterically funny; you guys know, he used to... if people didn't come to the general meeting, which they didn't—people don't come to general meetings of the whole, he'd put a little thing out saying, we're voting on whether we should do a 10% rebate to the board of our salaries. And people wouldn't be sure whether it was true or not, so they'd come to the meeting.

[00:33:50] DC: So, I was his Vice-President, Brian's Vice-President; always learning from all these wonderful people, who went before: I learned a lot from Peter Ellis, who became a very close friend; and Moira, as I said, and Brian. And I think, the second year that Brian was President, I think, was the first time that we had a half-time Vice-President in the office of the STA. And it was me. And it was a real learning experience, being in the office with Brian, watching him operate, and he'd give me stuff to do. He was very skeptical about me at the beginning; I think, he'd say that. I think, he thought I was a bit of an ultra-left crazy person, I think, he thought, but even when I was an ultra-left guy, I wasn't ever really crazy. So I think, we got along very, very

well. I guess, though, the one thing I would add, if I could jump back a couple of years, in the middle of all of that was Solidarity.

[00:35:17] DC: And that was another moment, where I was then on the Executive, Moira was the President of the local in 1983; and my job in the Solidarity strike was --- We broke Surrey up—Surrey's big! I think, there were at the time 70 schools there, and there's over a hundred now, but there were at least 70, maybe 80 schools in Surrey, and so the district was broken up into zones. And I was one of the four zones,

[00:35:57] DC: for the mobilization for the strike. And I was in charge of my zone; and that was a qualitative change in my involvement in the local. I guess, it was for everybody. Prior to that I went to the Executive meeting. In those days, I think, it was every second Tuesday—I went to the Executive meetings, and there were stuff to talk about, but this was on the ground, organizing, and it was fun, and it was incredibly interesting, and it brought me into contact with a whole bunch of amazing people. I think, and I've said this before to people, that in 1983 one of the results of the strike in Surrey, and I don't know if it was the case in other locals; was that the centre of militancy moved from the high-schools to the elementary schools. There were dozens of women. Dozens of young women, and some not so young, actually, who became the activist core of the STA in the Solidarity strike. And I got to meet those people, so what did I do? Well, what do you do—you're the zone captain of 20 schools,

[00:37:27] DC: and you have to phone and you have to meet all these people, every single one—and I can't remember them all, but I bet you that those union reps in those 20 elementary schools, the staff reps, were all women. They were all women, who didn't think that what the government was doing was fair. And, they became—and I will give you one example, oh, well—two!

[00:38:04] DC: One of them was Joan Thornthwaite, whom some of you probably know, who's very, very ill... terrible, terrible story. Kelly Shields, and a whole bunch of others, whom you wouldn't know, who were local people; they ran that strike in the schools. They were the heroes. Nobody thought that teachers would go on strike, and they were the ones, who made sure that that would happen. And that was a huge shift. And so, for the 20 years after that, when I think about activism—there were lots of guys who were active in the STA—but those women, who organized those schools at that time... and if you think about what was going on in the world for women, and with women at that time,

[00:38:50] DC: there was a kind of social change happening, and it was reflected in the STA. At least, with this generation of young activist women, who for the next 20 or 30 years were all active in the Association; within the core and heart of the Association. Then I got elected President!

[00:39:14] KN: Just before you go there, David, you referred to earlier, about a meeting of the Solidarity Coalition in Surrey that had happened at the STA office.

[00:39:26] KN: Could

[00:39:27] KN: you talk a bit about that particular formation, and what sort of things they did?

[00:39:39] DC: I don't really remember what they did outside of the meetings, to tell you the truth. Well, I kind of infer some of it. So, you can imagine, a meeting in Surrey, and it's 1983. Surrey is still pretty suburban, and also a bit rural. In 1983 there's still a lot of farms in Surrey. And if you recall there were two structures during the Solidarity strike; there was the Operation Solidarity, which was the unions; and then there were loads and loads of people around the province, who were not in union, but they were appalled by what was going on: they (government) were going to get rid of the human rights commission, and all kinds of other crazy stuff. Most of which, they did... And so, there were all kinds of people either attached to organizations, or not, who involved themselves in the activities. So, that meeting I am talking about was at the Surrey Teachers' office; there were other trade unionists in the room. Pretty sure there were UFCW people there; who may have still been Retail Clerks' Union at the time; then

[00:41:07] DC: there were IWA people in the room;

[00:41:13] DC: there were CUPE people in the room. Gord Savard, I don't know if you know him—a wonderful activist, and there's another story that goes with that, later—wonderful activist in the CUPE municipal union there. There were all kinds of Gidoras, there were more Gidoras than you could shake a stick at.

[00:41:39] DC: And then there were all kinds of community people, who were there. They walked on our picket-lines, when we eventually went on strike; they were wonderful. There were some schools in Surrey, that weren't—90–95% of our members went on strikes, but there were a couple of schools that weren't and didn't do so well. I mentioned Joan Thornthwaite before; at the Old Yale Road School there was a very conservative and powerful principal who kind of intimidated people into... and maybe that's not fair. Who knows why?—maybe convinced, maybe intimidated, maybe he had already chosen people to work at that school who were much more conservative. Anyways, there was a small number of people who went on strike at the Old Yale Road School. In fact, on the first day, and I am not sure what happened the second day, but I went to join 3 people at their picket-line. The picket line at the Old Yale Road School

[00:42:35] DC: during Solidarity was Joan Thornthwaite, Gladys Bittner and Bruce Rutherford. That was the picket-line. So, these are heroic people—it wasn't easy to do in those days. So, the Solidarity Coalition; I remember, there was leafletting at the malls of the area; it was a great time. It was a bit—even at that meeting, it was a bit—you know there were some of the bigger meetings that I attended, where there was some tension, obvious tension between the unions and the community people. There wasn't so much tension between the union and the community people at that meeting in Surrey, and there was a bit of a disorganization, because, unions are very structured organizations. And the people who came in, who weren't part of the

unions, weren't used to that kind of thing, and it was a bit higy-pigry, and a bit not efficient. But it was a fine... the feeling was really good.

[00:43:44] KN: Ok, let's go back to talking about your presidency at the Surrey Teachers' Association. What were the years, do you remember?

[00:43:56] DC: I know that 1987 was one of the years. And the reason I know that, is because there was another strike. On June 1st, 1987. So, it must have been 1986–87; or 1987–88. And it was the years of Bills 19 and 20. Which were Bill Vander Zalm bills, right?

[00:44:36] DC: So, what happened? I mean, I loved that job, and I think I was pretty good at it. I loved visiting teachers in schools, and I loved the interaction. I was never a particularly good orator—I can make a speech, but I'm not... that's not my strength. But I loved to be in the staff rooms and to meet with people and to try and solve problems and, really, and I really enjoyed that two years. My Vice-President, should be noted; First Vice-President at the time was Stewart Schon, whose gone, wonderful guy, who brought tremendous strengths to that job—we'll talk about that later when we get to the three rounds of bargaining, the real bargaining. So, Bills 19 and 20—and again, you have spoken about them with other people, and the (issues) were: the College, the principals and the unionization. Those were the three issues. To tell you the truth—and this is a secret that will be now un-secret: I don't give a shit about the College, really. I went along in our fights about the College.

[00:46:01] DC: It was never a big issue for me. On the issue of the principals—they must have influenced the legislation, and we had an opportunity before it was passed, or there were rumours about the legislation, I can't remember the details. But I remember meeting with the Surrey Administrators' Association, a group then, inside the STA, who represented the principals and saying—and I remember some of the people, who were representing the principals at the time—Gord Wellington, who's a very fine guy; he later became a Superintendent—and saying, look you guys (and it was all guys, so, unfortunately, at the meetings) if you want to leave the BCTF and the STA, let's talk about that. You want to have a divorce, let's negotiate a divorce, but don't let Vander Zalm do it to you. It fell on deaf ears. They were... Tom Russel, remember Tom Russel, and some others, they were long past it.

[00:47:25] DC: They didn't like two things: they didn't like our politics, but that wouldn't have mattered; but what they really didn't like was the fact that we were in charge, that the members kept electing progressives to be the leadership of the Association. When, just like in the BCTF, they were electing principals to lead for decades, and decades, and decades; it was the same in Surrey teachers, except for Doris Hahn, who was elected; a very fine person, very conservative—talk about her in a minute. They didn't like the politics. They didn't like the fact that we were fighting for teachers' salaries over principals' salaries, for percentage dues—fees—rather than flat fee. And the outside politics they didn't like at all. And the third issue was the unionization. You remember, Vander Zalm came up with this goofy “you could be an association, or you can be a union” type of thing; and we re-organized the Federation? And I am

sure, you talked to people, who were very involved in that. Just one or two things to say about that campaign in Surrey... Well, first of all, there was a one-day strike. One-day general strike, on June 1st, 1987, which was real successful in Surrey.

[00:49:03] DC: We closed down not only the schools, but a lot of other stuff, because we were working with other unions, and we put picket-lines in front of Safeways.

[00:49:13] DC: And the workers came out, and it was really, a very exciting day. The unionization campaign in Surrey was a marvelous and tremendously satisfying experience. The same Joan Thornthwaite was one of the Vice-Presidents of the STA at the time. I think, she was the Second Vice-President. And she was asked to organize the administration of this campaign. Remember, there was more than three thousand members of the BCTF, in Surrey. That's a lot of people to organize into a union. You have to talk to every single one of them, a lot of them you have to convince;

[00:50:07] DC: I don't have to tell you how complicated it was. I think, by then, we were the biggest local, or pretty close to the biggest local. And somebody had to keep it in the scoop—wasn't going to be me—putting me in charge of keeping track of all of that would have been disastrous! But Joan took that on and she did an incredible, incredible job of keeping it all straight, and making sure that it all happened appropriately. We put—this was my idea, it was a good idea—we had two honorary chairs of the campaign for unionization: Wes Janzen and Doris Hahn. So, what that meant was, if you're a conservative old-time teacher in Surrey—but loyal—or a progressive activist; old-time, or new-time in Surrey; there was somebody right at the top of the page, who you could relate to. It was a smart move and it helped us a whole bunch! We'd go to people who were a little iffy, and we'd say, well, Doris and Wes—and they'd say, OK, and they'd sign the thing. It was a wonderful campaign,

[00:51:23] DC: 91%, I think, we got in Surrey, and it was

[00:51:28] DC: tremendously successful. And—yeah.

[00:51:35] KN: OK, so that would have been prior to the whole local collective bargaining, and I think you were the President during the first round of collective bargaining in Surrey. Right?

[00:51:48] DC: I guess..

[00:51:49] KN: In 1988?

[00:51:54] DC: Yes, I guess, I was President the first round. Which was a good round, but it wasn't that successful in Surrey. We got... Was the first round the 7 times 3.5 round?

[00:52:03] AC: It was 7 and 7.

[00:52:12] DC: So, salary was good. I was co-chief negotiator with Stewart Schon; so we spoke to the Association. We were up against a guy named Bob Bowman, whom, you all will remember;

whom we were too young to understand, too immature to understand, how good he was at what he did. He wanted to get a deal. And he was not an anti-union guy. He came out of CUPE. But we were young and immature, and snappy with him, and I always regretted that. He was a very good guy to bargain with—his word was his bond; we didn't—and I will tell you a story about that in the second round, in a minute—appreciate him enough. Stewart and I sat together with a great group of folks in our committee, and Stewart was always in charge of all the money stuff, and the economic welfare stuff; and I did the rights and working conditions stuff and it was a really good division of labour. He was very successful the first round, I didn't get anything particularly helpful, but that's the way it goes.

[00:53:31] DC: And Stewart was—I wanted to say a word about Stewart—I know this is a BCTF thing, but I think these are really important...Well, and he was a BCTF activist, a very important local guy. Stewart used to confound me in bargaining. I did not know what he was talking about half the time. He'd start telling a story—it was like heading into a barber shop, you know. He'd start telling some endless story about who knows what when he was dealing with his side of the things. And it wasn't till the years later that I understood, that what he was doing was very important. What he was doing, was developing a relationship, he was schmoozing, he was finding a way to connect with Bowman, who he had worked with for years before I did. He was passing time; he was passing the buck, he was pouring lubrication... It was like a lubricant for the discussions. And I didn't understand it, and I didn't appreciate it enough at the time. And it was very important,

[00:54:45] DC: and he was a very fine, loyal, tremendously loyal guy, who cared so much about the Association. He was great. So, the second round we got class-size and composition language. There is a couple of things to say about that. First of all, there was some consternation about our class-size and composition language.

[00:55:26] DC: Especially, composition.

[00:55:28] DC: We had some pretty hard numbers on class-size. But on composition there was pretty iffy and soft language. And we came to the General Meeting to ratify the contract; and we got scolded by some people. You might be interested to know who one of them was... We got up and presented the contract. The first contract that we presented the members loved; they were over-joyed—there was duty-free lunch hour in the first round of bargaining, which was... I could still feel the "Oooh" in the room, when we announced the duty-free lunch hour thing! But in the second round we got some class-size (language), which was pretty good; and we got composition language, which, even we thought was pretty lousy. Kelly Shields got up and tore a strip off us. And another woman, Della Myers, whom you probably don't know, became a principal, she was a toughie in those days, a hard one—and they went after us. And Stewart was ready to run into the audience and pound them out, I think. I had to calm him down. And there was some truth in their criticism, but, you know, you get what you get, you do the best you can.

[00:56:49] DC: It turned out that that crappy language won us a couple of arbitrations later on. We were able to use even that lousy language to get some improvements for teachers and kids. The other thing I wanted to say about the second round, was—and this is a lesson, that I am sure you guys know as well. Our staff-person, advisory staff-person for the second round of bargaining was Lynne Sinclair. And we were coming to the end; and Bowman had never agreed to a salary figure. And we put it to him, it wasn't on the last day, it was within a week or two before the end of bargaining. We put it to him, and Bowman said—and I remember exactly—he said: “I know what is going on around us”. And Langley had got 3.5 and 3.5, and 3.5, and 3.5 (%); and somebody else—and it was everywhere, that's what was going to be. He said, I know what is going on around us, and we had a caucus shortly after that. We went downstairs at the old STA church, and Stewart and I high-fived each other when we got into the room.

[00:58:15] DC: And Lynne said, what's going on? And we said, well, we got 3.5 and 3.5, and 3.5, and 3.5. And she said, what are you talking about? There's no paper, nothing. He didn't even say, 3.5 and 3.5, and 3.5, and 3.5. And we said to her, he said, I know what's going on around us. She says, well, what does that mean? And Stewart said to her: “It means, we're getting the same as everybody else”. And she was pissed at us. She was incredibly angry with us, that we would buy this pig in a poke; that we would think that we had something, when she was convinced we didn't have anything. So, what do you learn? And, of course, we did. It was done. What you learn from that? You learn, that bargaining is a relationship, for one thing. It is about learning who the people on the other side of the table are, and learning what their language and understanding is. If you're on the ground in your local, you have more information, than you do if you're not.

[00:59:31] DC: I wanted to tell one more story about that round of bargaining, if I can,

[00:59:33] DC: cos

[00:59:34] DC: it's a funny one. At one point—remember Ralph Sebastian?

[00:59:40] DC: Ralph Sebastian was a guy, who was an activist in the Surrey Teachers, not a political guy at all, again, not a reactionary guy, but he was a union guy and he was a numbers and paper kind of guy. He for years kept the papers straight, cos there's a million pieces of paper going back and forth... Ralph comes to me one morning, and puts a piece of paper in front of my face. And Ralph was a bit annoying. He was a bit of a noodge, we'd say in Yiddish. He was a bit of a pain in the butt, kind of guy. Great guy, but... He sticks this piece of paper in front of my nose, and he says: “Look at this!” And it's got numbers, and I have no idea what I was looking at. So, Ralph, what is this? He says, it's \$2.1M. I can't remember the number exactly, but it was like that. I say, what do you mean? Ralph, what are you talking about? He says, well, look, in the corner it is initialed. By Bowman.

[01:00:53] DC: I say, yeah? He says, it's the elimination of Category 3. I said, Bowman never agreed to the elimination of the Category 3. What are you talking about? He says, yeah, I know, but he initialed this piece of paper. I said, well, that doesn't count! And he says, well, what are

you going to do? I said that we are going to give it back to him, what do you mean what are we going to do? He says, no, we can't, and he's all excited. So, Stewart comes in; and he goes through the same charade—he sticks that piece of paper in his face, and Stewart says, what's that, and he says it's \$2.1M, and Stewart says, what do you mean, and he says, it's the elimination of Category 3, and Stewart says, Bowman didn't agree to that, and so we're standing in there and we're having to argue with Sebastian, and say, he can't do this, Ralph, it was an accident. Somehow he signed a piece of paper that he didn't want to sign.

[01:01:57] DC: And he's pissed with us. Anyway, Stewart and I, immediately, have to go to Bowman. So, Bowman arrives for bargaining that morning, and we go in on that wooden porch at the STA office and we stick the piece of paper in front of him, and he says, what is

[01:02:12] DC: it;

[01:02:13] DC: and one of us jokes, it's \$2.1M; and Bowman has always been this... with paper all over the place, he was disorganized in a very organized way. He says, what are you talking about, and we told him, you signed this thing by accident. And he went white. He just went white. And he wasn't a slick guy, Bob Bowman, he was a bit of a steady

[01:02:40] DC: kind of guy. He says, what were you going to do? And Stewart said to him, we are giving it back to you—and you could see him relax—but remember, Bob, you owe us one. And at the end of that round there was something... I can't remember what it was... some Pro-D thing, I can't remember. Last thing on the table—and Bowman was resisting it—and Stewart said to him, Bob, remember. And he signed it off, and that was that.

[01:03:27] DC: So...

[01:03:29] KN: Nice work.

[01:03:31] KN: So, then, David, at what point did you run for the BCTF Executive, to be on the BCTF Executive?

[01:03:42] DC: Uh, maybe immediately after... Well, I ran a lot of times before I won (everybody laughs); I always used to say—and it's not quite true anymore, but I used to say—I'm still undefeated in elections where nobody runs against me. And in the ones where people do run against me, I am about 50/50. I am a bit better than that now, but I think I ran three times, in the late 1980s maybe, early 1990s and was defeated all three times. Came close; I came close.

[01:04:24] DC: And then, eventually I was elected Member At Large, I think, a couple of times. And then one year I was elected Second Vice-President for one year—and it has to be said—I was iced right out of that. I had no responsibilities, because

[01:04:50] DC: Ray was the President and Alice was the First Vice, I think, and we were on the different sides of the great divide in the Federation. And they gave me nothing to do, basically.

And then I ran for President against Alice the year that Ray stopped being President. Alice ran for President after him, right? Am I right?

[01:05:14] KN: Yeah.

[01:05:15] DC: And I was the Teacher Viewpoint candidate for President that year; and, of course, didn't win that year, and came back on the Executive as a Member At Large for a couple of years. So, I was on the Executive I think, for four or five years during the 1990s; the early 1990s. Jeez, I don't know the numbers. At least four or five years, maybe more. I was on the Executive in your time, at least for one year;

[01:06:10] DC: and then Ray came after;

[01:06:12] DC: so,

[01:06:13] DC: for both years Ray's time; and for both years of Alice's time; and then for both years when Kit was President. So, how many is that? Six or seven years. And, you know, I was a little better in getting along with the other side than some of the people on my team; but I worked with some wonderful people. I will speak to my side of the divide. I was on the Executive with Susan Crowley;

[01:07:05] DC: tremendous, principled, sharp as a tack, great speaker, always committed to progressive issues, especially around social issues; gender issues, anti-racism, international stuff. She was great to work with on the Executive. I worked with Maureen McPherson, who a lot of people forget, she was a tremendously nice woman; very practical, very pragmatic, very principled. Another person I worked with, Peter McCue; who was a wonderful politician; wonderful people politician. And, it must be said of Peter, that it was a very big decision for him, which side of the fence to be on. You probably remember that one, when the Teachers for a United Federation was launched, and I think, you had a lot to do with that, Peter was on that list, initial list, that came out in the Summer Conference that year. And I went to him, and we had a little heart-to-heart; and he was very confused. As you know, Peter isn't an ideological guy, particularly. He eventually came back to the Viewpoint side; but, great guy to work with. I worked with Tom

[01:08:41] DC: Westwater.

[01:08:42] DC: The story about Tom Westwater is that he ran for the Executive Committee at the BCTF one year, made a speech, and then was ill and stayed in his room the whole rest of the AGM. And was elected, and we realized that was his greatest gift, Tom, was that he could make a speech. And if you had kept him away from the AGM the rest of the time...

[01:09:09] KN: OK,

[01:09:36] KN: David, let's move now to your successful bid to be elected President, and some background to that.

[01:09:52] DC: I think, the background has to start with the formation of Coalition for Change. So, as you know, and I am sure, as others have said, the BCTF has traditionally—not so much now, but traditionally had—a kind of party system of activism. At least since Teacher Viewpoint was put together before I showed up.

[01:10:27] DC: And that,

[01:10:32] DC: I think, increasingly in the 1990s, people became more and more disillusioned, not so much with the party system, but the way it was functioning. There were people—and still are people, actually, who remembered historic injustices—or justices—depending on where you sit; from decades ago.

[01:11:01] DC: Anger and bitterness that had to do with things that happened as far back as, certainly, 1987. Right? From the time that Teachers for a United Federation was formed, there was a very bitter and, not a very comfortable relationship between the two political organizations that dominated the Federation. Certainly, for the next ten years, after 1987 it was Teachers for United Federation that dominated the Federation politically. But, you know, philosophical and ideological contention can be a very healthy thing. But it was getting less and less healthy as time went on, I found. And it was incredibly counter-productive. And I and Peter Ellis, in fact, began to talk, I think, in about 1997–98 about how do you get past this. There's got to be a way to get past this. And I should say that in my view, in my judgement, the counter-productive politics came from both sides. My team had some negative ways of doing politics, and I think, that the other team—your team (points towards KN) made some mistakes.

[01:12:45] DC: But none of that, in the big scheme of things mattered so much to me, as the fact that it became very hard to do the business of the Federation. There was stuff that was going on, that was just tension and conflict, and it wasn't productive. Peter and I had a couple of discussions about "is there a way to get past this? And then, at a Rep Assembly, and I was trying to remember which one it was. I would guess, it was the Spring Representative Assembly of 1998, is my guess. Jerry Horton from Comox—I think he's from Comox, or... Campbell River? Campbell River—came to me at the Rep Assembly, and as I said before, I tend to get along with people, even if they were on some other side of the debate. Jerry Horton came to me in a flap, at the Rep Assembly and said: "I've had it! I'm never coming back to this place again!" I said, what do you mean? He said, you can't have a debate here. Every time you try to have a debate, it is not about what's on the floor, it is about something else from 10 years ago, or 20 years ago and people are fighting about that;

[01:14:06] DC: and you can't do the business here and I've had it! And at that same Rep Assembly I had a discussion with Dave Harper, also from Campbell River, I think, and he said the same thing. Not in such a demonstrative way, but... that reinforced for me the discussion I've had with Peter Ellis. And, what had happened politically, just straight politics-wise, is that the default position of people—a whole bunch of people on Island locals, a whole bunch of people in the Kootenays, some in Metro, some on the Valley, sort of the North part of the Valley, like,

Maple Ridge and Mission—the default position of many of those people through the decade of Teachers for United Federation, was Teachers for United Federation. They weren't particularly View-pointers or TUF people, they were just sort of going with the flow. They went with the winning team. And they were people, you know, the John Chisamores of the world, the Jim Ikers of the world and the whole... we could name dozens and dozens of those people. And those people were increasingly uncomfortable with what was happening, and I will get into two or three things, actual events, that triggered it.

[01:15:37] DC: So we called a bunch of people, and we said, let's figure something outside and we eventually called it the Coalition for Change.

[01:15:49] DC: And it

[01:15:56] DC: launched, or came out of the closet at the Fall RA in 1998, probably. Because it was the Winter RA where they decide the candidates—so it was the Fall RA of 1998. And we started to chat with people and people were very open. Much more open, than I had expected—

[01:16:17] DC: to something new. Not so much a lot of View-pointers; there were View-pointers, who we had worked with and you wouldn't be surprised with the names, but they're not important at this point, who said, this is a sell-out, and you're going to be like these people, etc. There was a whole reaction, although the majority of the View-point people said, yeah; we have to do something different. And the notion was, let's agree on what we can agree on, and if we can't agree on other stuff, that's OK. We're not going to beat each other up about it. And it was a kind of more Coalition type notion in politics, that we could find ways to work with these people, who, after all, are very progressive people, and so were many, many of those in that other camp, too. But that's a whole other story. And in the Federation, three things happened that year, that were kind of historical acts—but, maybe not. There was a relationship between them. The first thing that happened, was that there was a set of negotiations, the provincial negotiations, with then-NDP government, which resulted in some OK stuff. Some better-than-OK stuff, but the process for which was just terrible. Just terrible,

[01:17:52] DC: and the activist-members around the Federation were really angry. There were months going by, when nobody told them what was going on.

[01:18:01] DC: Nor

[01:18:28] DC: did the people know what was happening. That was a year before that set of negotiations happened, and you remember, there were questions at the AGM. Heather Fraser asked Ray something about the negotiations, and his response was, I can't tell you. And people were really upset. It was a very much a contributing factor to people souring on the TUF crew. The second thing that happened, was the strike, the UTFE strike.

[01:18:56] DC: The support staff union at the Federation went on strike. And, I think it is fair to say, that the labour relations, the personnel relations, the human resources situation as regards to the support staff union, in the years leading up to their strike was increasingly problematic at the Federation. And there are other people, who can better analyze that, I have my own notions of it, but it was terrible. And the support staff went on strike, and that was incredibly divisive in the Federation. People were embarrassed; people were mortified, that our own staff would be on strike. And then there was, of course, the admin staff strike many years later that had a similar impact. And attached to that, it has to be said, that (and this isn't the third point and I will come to the third point in a minute; this is still the second point) and there was an increasing criticism of the administrative leadership of the Federation. I think, it's a fair thing to say, that Elsie McMurphy and Jim MacFarlan were increasingly criticized by the activist-members of the Federation. I think it was probably also true among the staff, but we knew nothing about that.

[01:20:45] DC: And I don't want to say too much about that, you know I have a fair bit of admiration for Elsie, I think that she was a tremendous leader of the Federation in the period of 1987, during the unionization period. I think she, and there are my comrades, who would criticize me for ever saying anything positive about Elsie, but I do. I think, she did a fantastic job in 1987. I also think that she made enormous errors in the immediate after-math of the unionization drive; but I think she did a great job. But it's clear to me, that there was an increasing unhappiness and discomfort with her leadership of the admin side of the Federation; and Jim too. And there are great things to say about Jim, for his period at the Federation. He was a great leader on many levels, but, has to be said, that there was increasing criticism of Jim. The third thing that happened that year, or grew in that year, was the government had been in power for 10 years! And in 10 years you piss people off, one way or another. People get tired.

[01:22:14] DC: And so, by the time the AGM came in 1999, there existed a Coalition for Change, and all this other stuff that happened in the Federation, that caused a change, caused a move. The centre wouldn't hold. And I recall, I went into the AGM kind of... yeah, a little optimistic. I loved the AGM, it's fun; it's fun even when you lose, but I was a bit optimistic about running. And then I started talking to people, and I thought, holy mackerel! By the last night I remember very specifically, talking to a guy from

[01:23:10] DC: Howe Sound.

[01:23:59] DC: I can't remember his name—a British guy, with grey hair... I remember late that night, before the election, talking to him. And he said, yeah, maybe we need a change. And I thought, holy mackerel, this is going to happen! I didn't say it to anybody, because it would have been embarrassing had I been dead wrong; but—you remember, it was wonderful for me, it was wonderful! Everybody has got an ego, and it's lovely to be told that people like you, but more importantly for the Federation, it was a change. It was a sea-change and all of those folks, who had as a default position voted for—not all of them, but many people, who didn't really like the party system, and didn't really know what they thought about one or the other, but they had

been loyal to TUF, more or less, in those 10 years—a whole bunch of them came over to us. But, maybe they were surprised enough by the result, that when it came to electing the First Vice-President and the Second Vice-President, they went back the other way and they elected the incumbents, Grace Wilson and Linda Watson.

[01:24:49] DC: And so, I had to work in the first year with Grace and Linda. A couple of things happened, even in the spring before I took over. First of all, I had a couple of frank discussions with some people on staff, who let me know, what I hadn't known, which was that the situation inside, on staff, had also become very, very tense, and very, very difficult with respect to the leadership. We didn't know that from the outside, maybe somebody did, but I didn't. I didn't know that. And it has to be said, that people were very unhappy with Elsie's leadership then. So, that was one thing that happened. The second thing that happened was, Elsie left. And I can't remember whether it was late in the spring? It was late in the spring, yeah. Elsie resigned or retired, I do not know what the details of that were—I actually do not remember what the detail of that was. Did she resign? Did she retire? I don't remember. But what I do remember is, we needed an Executive Director.

[01:26:22] DC: And remember, we, on the politics of this, sort of caucus politics of this, there were 5 of us—and next time we meet I want to talk about some of the other people in my caucus, whom I didn't get a chance to before we broke—there were 5 of us on the Viewpoint side and 6 TUF people on the Executive. So I was the President of a minority, you know. Obama and the Congress! Bad analogy. And I worked with those people. So, we needed an Executive Director and we began to talk in our caucus about who that might be. And it was obvious that we needed somebody right now. Right away,

[01:27:06] DC: to take over. And the discussion in our caucus was not concrete. Somebody mentioned Wes's name in the course of it. But we weren't real organized in that discussion. I got a call from Kit. So, it may have been right after July 1st, because I think I was the President by then, by the time it happened. I got a call from Kit, who said, we need an Executive Director, what about Wes, temporarily? And I said, sounds pretty good to me, but I want to talk to some people, which is what you did in those days, and the people thought that was an OK idea. So, I phoned Kit back and said, yes, let's do this; and I want to move it and I want you to second it at the Executive. And he said, sure. He was still the Past President. And that's what happened. We hired Wes and he did fine job, and he was able to bridge the political gap between the two groups.

[01:28:30] DC: I should talk about Grace and Linda a little bit. I enjoyed working with Grace and Linda, although I disagreed with them, and I was happy when they were defeated the next year. They both brought excellent strengths to their positions. Linda was a kind of "anal", you know, she read every piece of paper that was ever printed anywhere in the world, and she knew what it said. And Linda is a pretty progressive woman in lots of ways. Grace, a bit more conservative, comes from a more conservative place; but very courageous. I told you the story, which I'll tell again about her... One of the first priorities for me, when I came to work in the fall, was

resolving—I think, at the time there were about 125 UTFE members and about 130 live grievances. Remember, up in the lunch room there was a board up on the wall of all the grievances listed. And, one of my priorities was to resolve as many of those grievances as we could. And I talked with Grace about that, because at the time—and maybe it is still the case, I don't know, the First Vice-President was... part of their responsibility was, you know, to be on the bargaining teams and all of that stuff.

[01:30:13] DC: And

[01:30:14] DC: to be the political person involved in personnel. And I talked with Grace Wilson about it and I said, we have to resolve these. You can't have 130 outstanding grievances. I don't care whose fault there were at—and I had a sensed whose fault it was a lot of times, but I don't care whose fault it was, we can't have 130 outstanding grievances.

[01:30:39] DC: She said,

[01:30:40] DC: to my surprise: "Yes, I agree". I don't know what I expected from her, but she had been part of the government, that was in power when those grievances came up, and I thought she was going to be defensive when I said that. But she wasn't at all. So, I said, now it's your job to deal with this. I said, we've got to talk with Jim MacFarlan, who was the Assistant Executive Director and was responsible for labour relations at the time. She said, yeah we have to talk to Jim. I said, it is not going to be an easy conversation, I'll do it if you want. If you prefer, I'll have that conversation with him. And she said, no it's my job, I'll have the conversation. I was amazed and had tremendous admiration for her, for saying that. She didn't have to do that—I was the one who had got elected by talking about what a lousy job the Executive had done with the staff. She wasn't! It was my responsibility to, really, have that discussion. But she, to her great credit, and I tell this story often, said, she'd have the discussion.

[01:32:08] DC: So, she did... I was out somewhere that afternoon, and I came back the Executive offices. And as soon as I walked in, I could tell, whoa, something is going on here. There was a kind of... something in the air. So I went to Donna Coulombe,

[01:32:27] DC: who...

[01:32:42] DC: somebody needs to talk about Donna Coulombe at length; who was the person, who actually, ran the BCTF in lots of ways; for years, and years, and years, and did such a marvelous job; brilliant woman, just a totally brilliant woman, very progressive woman. I went to Donna, and I said, what's going on here? And she said, well, I don't know. Grace went into Jim's office and there was a lot of shouting coming from in there, and then, Jim walked out and he slammed the door. And, I don't think, Jim's ever been back to this building. Maybe he was, for your interview.

[01:32:58] KN: Last week!

[01:33:13] DC: I don't think, I could be wrong, but I don't think he ever came back.

[01:33:29] KN: Last week, it was the first time.

[01:33:44] DC: It was the first time... And we went to work, Grace went to work. I don't know who the staff-person was, who worked with her on that; maybe she did it mainly on her own; but we resolved many, many, many of those grievances, and began a much better relationship with the staff. So, that's one thing that happened that first year. Another thing that happened that first year, was we began the process for bargaining the ill-fated collective agreement.

[01:34:00] DC: No, that can't be true.

[01:34:03] KN: That was in 1999–2000.

[01:34:06] KN: One of the things you might want to talk about is the CUPE strike in the spring of 2000.

[01:34:12] DC: Thank you! When I look back on that, I kind of chuckle to myself - I didn't realize at the time, really. So, there was CUPE strike, a provincial CUPE strike that happened at the time. And my attitude was, so when CUPE is on strike—I told you before, my parents said, never cross a picket-line. My attitude was, that if CUPE was going to be on strike, then we weren't going to go into work. And part of that came from our past experience in the previous CUPE strike, which must have been in the early 1980s, I don't remember the year. I don't remember the year, but there was a previous provincial strike in CUPE, in the early 1980s, where we made a kind of agreement,

[01:35:04] DC: with CUPE that we wouldn't do their work. Remember that? And I had been a teacher in a school at that time, and I had to cross the picket-line. And I remember us in Surrey; we were hard-liners, saying, never again. We were never doing that again. You know? I mean, there was a deal, we were loyal members of the Federation, and it was probably the right thing to do at the time. But, we were very unhappy with that. So, at the time—you know, I can't remember the details, they were only on strike for a couple of days, weren't they?

[01:35:26] KN: It was

[01:35:48] KN: a little longer than that, and

[01:35:52] KN: it was not a total provincial strike, but it was a large number of locals that were bargaining together.

[01:35:57] DC: Right.

[01:36:00] KN: And we honoured the picket-line.

[01:36:01] DC: We honoured their picket-lines; but not only that. I developed a relationship with Barry O'Neil at that time. For instance, I went to the Labour Board, they were arguing essential services, I think. And they got a terrible essential service designation—yeah, they were forced back to work, by the NDP government. Sorry! First, I went to the Labour Board—it was a long

time ago, you know? First, I went to the Labour Board and sat with them in the foyer there, as they were arguing essential services, and I remember... So, for me, that was, just what you do.

[01:36:49] DC: That was just what you do—you go there with your fellow workers and if they're involved in the struggle, you just go, but there was some surprise there. It wasn't that we didn't have progressive presidents of the Federation before me, but the situation hadn't come up. And so, I think, that Barry in particular, and a number of other local leaders, saw it as an act of solidarity, just by showing up at the Labour Board. They saw that as an act of solidarity that surprised them a little bit, and made them feel really good. And I think what happened, that we were at the Labour Board when the announcement came from the provincial government, that the NDP provincial government was legislating them back to work. And, there was a million media there. And Barry was questioned, and then they turned to me, and I said, what I thought, which was, this is a terrible day for British Columbia. I said something like that—a terrible day for labour relations in British Columbia—which is what I thought, which is what I believed. But I don't think that there'd ever really been—again, the situation wasn't such—that a BCTF President was questioned on a CUPE strike in that kind of way, when we had honoured the picket-lines.

[01:38:26] DC: And I think, that it's fair to say, that the relationship between the Federation and CUPE changed to some extent as a result of that experience. And I'm very proud to have been part of that, it's an important moment. And it's a testament to what had changed in the BCTF. It was, what year? 2000?

[01:38:52] KN: 2000, yes.

[01:38:54] DC: In 2000, thousands of BCTF members honoured somebody else's picket-line at schools. A few years back, if you'd asked those thousands and thousands of the BCTF members, would you go on strike and put a picket-line in front of the school, thousands of them would have said: "No". They didn't believe in strikes, they wanted not to be in a union. And yet, when push came to shove, the membership was very, very solid and understood that they couldn't do that. And why? Well, they themselves had been on a bunch of strikes of teachers, in the years leading up to that. And they, in their collective bargaining days—when we had the real collective bargaining—the people understood, they'd been on strike themselves and CUPE had honoured their picket-lines. Certainly, the membership in general, even if they hadn't been on strike, they knew that CUPE had honoured our picket-lines, so we had become unionists. You know, through the experiences in 1983; through the one-day general strike in 1987; to the years of actual collective bargaining; there had been a sea-change in the attitude and self-concept of the members of the Federation. And that was a clear indication of it.

[01:40:33] KN: So, we'll be going onto your second year, which would have been 2000-2001. First of all the Executive changed, as you indicated earlier, so you had a majority support on the Executive. And that was also the year—and can you talk a bit about that year?—when you were

getting ready for the next round of provincial bargaining. And also the provincial election, that happened that year.

[01:40:59] DC: Well I should say, that politically—first let's talk about the politics—I think that, it turns out that in the first year, I guess, I didn't wreck the place, I wasn't the kind of wild and crazy guy that some people said I was going to be, or thought I was going to be. And the politics changed and Neil Worboys was elected the First Vice-President; and Jinny Sims was elected Second Vice-President; and we were able to have a majority on the Executive. It should be said, that that majority in itself, just like every other political organization was a coalition. People had different perspectives; there was a... I have to check, but I'm pretty sure, a couple of people, who were elected, that year were Coalition people, but not View-point people. I think, John Chisamore was elected, and, maybe Iker—or maybe the next year that Jim Iker was elected.

[01:42:09] DC: And I think, Harper was on the Executive one year, I can't remember. Anyways... OK, so we had to prepare for negotiations. And it was provincial bargaining, which is a very complicated business in the Federation. People didn't like provincial bargaining, they were mad at the NDP for bringing on the provincial bargaining. And we had, on the salary side, fallen behind substantially, over the few years that came before that. And there was a kind of push to redress that stuff. Jeez, how much do I remember, not a huge amount, but what I do remember is that there was debate at the Executive Committee as to what would our salary demand be? And it was a crazy debate. Over three years we wanted to catch up what we lost, and get a raise. And I think that we've lost something over, not the three years, but over some period, somebody calculated that we'd lost 20 or 21% over some period. And so, we thought, well, we'll do 20 or 21% and then we'll get a raise, for three years of 3% or something each year.

[01:43:54] DC: Anyways, we get to the Executive and this gets debated, and somebody says, 34%! It should be 34%. It shouldn't be 29 or 30 or something. And I remember very well, saying, you can't do that. We can't be coming out and saying, we want 34% raise. And they said correctly, well, we're not really asking for a 34% raise; we're asking for a catch-up and then we're asking over three years for this amount—it's really, pretty reasonable. Well, it was on some level, pretty reasonable, but it was preposterous. So I said at the Executive, the NDP government has just given a bunch of deputy-ministers a raise of 32%. Or, senior bureaucrats a raise of 32%. I said, make it 32. At least, we can argue—they give it to those guys, we deserve it too. No. There was a coalition of the TUF people left on the Executive, who—I don't know why they were for it, at least one of them was for it, to embarrass us—and a couple of our people, who thought, you know? Let's go! And we wanted improvements, obviously, to class-size and composition, which for me was always the centre of what we were looking for.

[01:45:34] DC: But the decision was made that it was going to be 34%.

[01:45:39] DC: And we had two co-chief negotiators. Alan Crawford and Irene Lanzinger were the chief negotiators, and Irene was the public face of those negotiations. So, we held a press conference just before the negotiations were to open—or maybe it was after they opened, I

don't remember, but we had a press conference to lay out our position on negotiations. And it was at that hotel up at the corner of 12th and Cambie. A dark, dingy room. And we had it all worked out, that we are going to focus on the class-size and composition and all the other stuff that is good for kids.

[01:46:30] DC: And

[01:47:10] DC: when we said 34%, I mean, we presented it in pieces, you know, we tried to put the best gloss on it, and that was all anybody wanted to talk about. That was all that the press wanted to talk about, and it was all over the media, and we took a big hit on that. A big hit on that. And then we began negotiations. It was a good bargaining team, there were some very fine people, Jim Iker was on that team, Brian Porter, Irene Lanzinger, Crawford, of course. Somebody else just popped into my mind—that woman from Kamloops, or Kelowna, or somewhere in the Okanagan; was a tough person; she was very good. Kelly Shields was on that team! Anyway, the negotiations went nowhere. Absolutely nowhere. So, that's 2000, and it just went on and on, and on, and they just went nowhere, and then they stopped because a provincial election was coming. So, think about how things were in 2000–2001. The people of the province had

[01:47:51] DC: soured on the NDP government and Glen Clark; there was the fast ferries and there was the so-called terrible deficit that the government had got. Some of it was a fair criticism. Some of it was the deck on the back of his house. Some of it was fair criticism, some of it wasn't

[01:48:16] DC: t.

[01:48:17] DC: The people were tired, clearly tired of the NDP. Two things to do with the election that should go down in history: one was that we met with the liberal caucus, do you remember that?

[01:48:39] DC: There was a meeting, I think they had asked for it, actually. They were getting ready to be government, and everybody in the world knew that. And they figured they had to talk to various constituencies. And we held a meeting at one of those hotels up on Broadway—or, not, it was in a restaurant! And it was a pretty high-powered crew that they sent; De Jong was there, Rennie Massey was there, Gordie Hogg was there, those were the three that I remember the most, of course. Of course, Hogg and Massey said the most; they were former teachers, and they kind of knew some of us. But I remember being very struck by Mike De Jong at that meeting. You know, Rennie Massey is not going to do too much work in preparation for meeting. And Gordie Hogg is a very nice man, and a friendly guy, you'd want him on your curling team, but he's not going to prepare for that meeting. They were hail-fellow-well-met kind of guys at the meeting.

[01:50:12] DC: But De Jong had done his homework. He knew a lot. And there was the woman from North Van, who was a teacher, who used to teach in Burnaby. De Jong had done his homework, he knew our issues, he asked penetrating questions—he was outrageous—but he

asked real questions. I left that meeting with a lot of... respect isn't quite the right word, but, admiration for De Jong. So, that's one thing that happened, and, of course, they listened to us, and they (went) "a-ha, a-ha, a-ha"; and then they went off, and they could say, they met with the BCTF. The second thing that happened was, that the NDP asked for a meeting. And, it was here (points to the inside of the building). And Mo Sihota and, I'm pretty sure, Paul Ramsey too, and maybe somebody else, but Mo did most of the talking. They came, and it was probably in the winter before the election, and kind of begged us to endorse them, which, of course, was impossible. The policies of the Federation prevented that, but more to the point, it wouldn't have flown, because teachers are British Columbians too, and I don't know how many of them voted for the NDP in the 2001 election, but, what the NDP got was some 21% of the vote in the 2001 election. So maybe 20% of teachers voted for them or 35%;

[01:51:53] DC: but... you know, teachers weren't happy with them either, for, sometimes, good reasons, sometimes, for not; but they weren't. So, it was both the structural problem and a political problem. So, we couldn't say "Yes" and we didn't

[01:52:10] DC: t. The other thing that happened before the election, was... and I can't remember the sequence exactly, it may have been right before this Sihota thing (meeting), or after. Clark resigns, and there's a leadership thing... And I got sent to Harrison, where they held something, to lobby the candidates. So, one of them was Ujjal Dosanjh, who got elected, the other one was...

[01:53:03] KN: Gordon Wilson.

[01:53:04] KN: Former education minister.

[01:53:05] DC: Right! But he was never leader. One of them was Gordon Wilson, and the other one was, from Kootenays, Corky Evans. And I remember, there wasn't an opportunity, it wasn't set up in a way that I could actually talk to these people. So, there I am, wondering around and I had to kind of button-hole each of them in a crowd. And I can't remember what the instructions were, you know, free collective bargaining and class-size and composition. And I did talk to all of them, but only for 30 seconds; it was, kind of, a wasted moment. Didn't matter, anyways. And the last thing that happened in the anticipation of the election, of course, is we interviewed the two candidates for Premier. And I interviewed Ujjal Dosanjh and Gordon Campbell. And Ujjal was pretty beaten-down by then; you know. Everybody in the world knew what was going to happen; I guess, most people didn't think it was going to be that overwhelming... But Campbell was Campbell, you know, he was serious, he was polite and he promised there would be no attack on free collective bargaining, and that they weren't going to take away our right to negotiate class-size and composition.

[01:54:47] DC: It's all in the Teacher Magazine, and Peter Owens was there with me, at those interviews. And, as we know, it didn't turn out that way.

[01:55:02] KN: So, given that the Liberals did get elected quite overwhelmingly in that subsequent election that spring, one of the first things they did was to introduce essential services legislation, which limited our right to strike. That was during the summer session of legislature. Would you care to comment on that?

[01:55:28] DC: Yeah. A couple things to say about that. One thing is that I had to make the argument of the public—I mean, it's important that we look back on this period: its 77:2 in the legislature. And there's not a friend to be seen for the BCTF anywhere, in the civil society, even. We got pummeled in the press; and in media—and in the public. I think, it's fair to say, in the public. And in that context I want to say a word about Carole James.

[01:56:09] DC: I, as the President of the Federation attended the BCSTA convention at some point in all of that. And, literally, we didn't have a friend to be seen anywhere, or so it felt. And I was on a million call-in shows and in the media. And the truth is, I think, I began to enjoy it, because I think I was fairly effective in the context. But I went to that convention, and Carole was gracious and welcoming, and kind in a way that I, or the Federation, through me, was not received from anybody else, anywhere. And I want her to be remembered for having done that, when she could have just been bureaucratic. And I came, and she could have said hi, and gone onto the next thing. But she didn't, she was very fine. OK, so back to essential service. So, we find out that they are going to bring in—they bring in an Essential Service Legislation. And we had a discussion in this room, I'm pretty sure, with the lawyers for the Federation: Yorke, Diane MacDonald had started not too long before that; but she was there; and

[01:57:35] DC: maybe Randy was there, I don't remember. And we're having a discussion about what's our position was going to be at the essential service hearings. And we come in, and somebody, probably David, says, well the way it works in other industries is that you make a compromise—you find some stuff that doesn't really need to be done for the industry to continue. And he gave the example that was used, was healthcare, and, you know; and you accept that those people are entitled to carry on the strike, and the others, who are essential, have to go work, and that's what we should do. And, you know, there are gym teachers, and music teachers, and industrial arts people, and he gave a bunch of examples. And I looked at Neil and Jinny, and we all shook our heads... I don't think they were in the first meeting, I think it was me; and I said to David, we can't do that. He says, what do you mean, we can't do that? I said, we can't do that. We cannot be taking a public position that some of our members are essential, and some of our members aren't essential.

[01:59:13] DC: We can't do that! We always argue a teacher is a teacher, is a teacher; we also say that music is important, and physical education is important. You can't tell the teachers in a school (that they're not important)—we'll just divide, and we'll wreck the Federation! We'll divide the Federation. Well, they were pretty chocked by that. And then there was another meeting, and I've talked to Neil and Jinny about it, and they were totally on-side as well. And there was a second meeting, where we had discussed that as well. And David and Randy, and Diane at the beginning, were—I mean they were very respectful of us, we were the political

leadership of the Federation, but they were pretty insistent that we had to do this. And we said, no, no, no, no. And, finally, Diane—to her credit, Diane—who said, at the second or third time we got together, she was the first one who said, OK, it's going to be harder for us, it is going to be harder for you, it is going to be difficult at the Labour Board, but you're the boss and we'll do what you say.

[02:00:39] DC: And so, our argument at the Labour Relations Board—isn't our essential services hearing still live? I don't think it was ever resolved. I think that there is still an outstanding essential services... what is it?—15 years later... thing at the Labour Board. We changed the argument and the lawyers did a great job. They started putting forward a different argument, which is that argument about time: how long is it before what teachers do in classrooms is essential? Is it essential the first day? No, kids get sick all the time. Is it after a week? Well, parents take the kids out of school all the time, to go on holidays, and many, many, many more coherent arguments about (that). And what about the strikes that did happen for three weeks or four weeks in Fort St. John or somewhere there, the long ones, way up there. Did the kids survive? Didn't seem to be essential... There was another kind of argument that's been made. It was very important. Very important change that took place. So we went to the Labour

[02:02:06] DC: Board to argue that, and it was endless. Went on, and on, and on, and on. I testified, and Diane was the lead lawyer on that, she did a fantastic job, marvelous job—and she was young; and relatively inexperienced. And I have to say that a trade-unionist from another union said to me early on in that hearing: “You sent the wrong lawyer to the Labour Board. She is not experienced enough; she's not senior enough to be making that argument, it is too important”. And I said, well, that's who's there and we all know what's happened with Diane. She was then, and she became central to what we were doing at the Federation. So, throughout there was more than one thing happening at once. That Labour Board hearing went on, and on, and on, and on, and the hearing was still happening January of 2002. It was because we went back, and back, and back.

[02:02:48] KN: Through part

[02:03:31] KN: of that we took a strike vote.

[02:03:34] KN: The first provincial strike vote.

[02:03:36] DC: Yeah, and we were nervous, man! We took the first provincial strike vote, and the members were amazing. So, we were here, and how do you take a strike vote? This is the BCTF, you talk to every single teacher. You bring people in and you train them, and you send the Executive out in locals around the province. And, remember, what was the connection with September 11th?

[02:03:56] KN: I think,

[02:04:16] KN: September 11th was the staff planning day.

[02:04:19] DC: I think the strike vote took place shortly after... when did that strike took place?

[02:04:28] KN: It took place in September—late September.

[02:04:31] DC: I remember speaking at a gigantic Surrey teachers' meeting, in Cloverdale at the Fairgrounds. And it's Cloverdale, you know; so it's just before a strike vote, and there's thousands of people in the audience. And I spoke at the meeting, as I did at numerous other local meetings, and I remember a woman-teacher getting up after my speech and saying, how can we vote to strike right after this terrible thing has happened in New York? So, there was that going on at the time, and people felt like we were being somehow selfish, which we weren't but... So there was that strike vote and it was another 91% vote, wasn't it? Incredible. Incredible. Think it through: the government is in power, they've got 77 seats, to 2 in the legislature; the media are all over us; there's nobody anywhere being sympathetic publicly; just a few little, timid, the teachers are not all wrong kind of things. And the teachers vote 91% to go on strike! That was extraordinary. That was extraordinary... So I want to talk a little bit, if it's OK with you, about the negotiations—not so much the negotiations,

[02:06:12] DC: not what's happening at the table. We go to the table, but nothing is happening and nothing is happening; and then the rumours start: they're going to take away your right to strike, they're going to take away free collective bargaining, and they're going to take away the right to negotiate learning and working conditions. We're hearing it from everywhere. And a second thing starts to happen.

[02:06:37] DC: They're

[02:06:40] DC: starting to be phone-calls from Lee Doney, at the government, saying... Oh no, before that, we met with the Minister of Education, Christy Clark—this is a year before. I should talk about that for a minute. Is that OK, Ken?

[02:07:04] KN: Yeah.

[02:07:06] DC: We tried desperately to get a meeting with the Minister of Education, after the new government was elected. And she just kept putting us off, and putting us off—you were at that meeting, weren't you?

[02:07:17] KN: [laughs] Yeah.

[02:07:18] DC: Putting us off; it was at least a year, that she couldn't find a way to meet with us, and finally, we met with her in Victoria. We brought gifts for her son, her then infant son, Hamish; brought some kids books. And we spoke with her about our concerns. And the thing that I remember the most about that meeting was her threats. I mean, she is a very charming woman, and very smiley; but she was threatening us in that meeting. I recall that she said at one point: "There are people in my caucus, who I have to hold back. I don't agree with this, but they say, that your compulsory membership should be taken away". And I can't remember her words, but she said: "You'd better behave. You'd better behave, or else, the hard-liners, who I

don't agree with in my caucus, are going to win the day". And I remember saying it, this was one of my favourite moments of my time as President of the Federation, I remember saying to her: "Minister, you can do that. You can take away our compulsory membership, as others have done. That would mean, that we'd have to spend enormous amounts of time, and energy, and money dealing with that. And your government will have to spend enormous amounts of time, and energy, and money dealing with us.

[02:09:05] DC: And at the end of it all, we'll clean your clock". And it's one of my favourite moments of my time as President of the Federation (laughs). So, Doney was phoning, and we were having sort of off-the-record conversations. He was the deputy-minister of labour, and he was saying, you know, the government's going to move, there's going to be legislation. And we were

[02:09:44] DC: threatening to strike; and I would say to him, well, what are we going to do? And I remember the last conversation very well, I think, that we can find some more money. Not a lot, but some more money for your members—if you'll agree to take class-size and composition out of the agreement. So I said... "Nothing doing", I can't even remember the words I used. But I was so gobsmacked, that he would even ask us that. But there was a mediator involved in the discussions, and had been for a number of weeks, if not months. Steve Kelleher was mediating the actual dispute, while this other stuff was going on. So, I phoned him up, and I said, look I just had this conversation with Doney, and this is what I think he said... But this is real important, I have to know for sure, that that's in fact what he said. Because it's all coming down. They passed a legislation on the Thursday night, and this was early that week, I think. So I asked Kelleher to do—he wasn't really involved in the thing with me and Doney—

[02:11:22] DC: he was involved in the negotiations. So, I said, well, you phone him up, and check it out. He said, sure! I got a call from him a couple of hours later, and he said, yes, that's what he said to you. They'll find some more money—a little bit—if you agree to take the class-size and composition out of the agreement. And I said to Kelleher, well, we can't do that. And he said, no you can't. And that was that. A couple of days later, the legislation came down.

[02:12:09] KN: Do you want to talk about the legislation then; and what it meant for teachers and also how the Federation responded?

[02:12:21] DC: Well, what it meant was, that a collective agreement was imposed—a new collective agreement was imposed; which didn't have in it the class-size and composition, and a number of other working conditions items. It had a little tiny raise, and, in addition, it was made illegal for teachers to negotiate those working and learning conditions provisions, that would make things better for kids. That was made illegal. And it's what we expected, but it was devastating. Well, so we met and we decided we had to respond. And we decided that we needed to take a day off on Monday the 28th of January. And the government immediately said, this is illegal. And somebody, I think, it was Christy Clark, or maybe it was Campbell, talked about fines and jail. But there was nowhere else to go. The membership were outraged, and we

had to make a statement. Originally we had said, if such legislation came in, we said we would stop work while the legislation was in the legislature. That was passed in

[02:14:46] DC: the Fall RA: it

[02:14:47] DC: said, if such a legislation was to come in, we will go on strike while it is in the legislature. While it's before the legislature. So, Thursday night, through the night, they passed the legislation. And we decided, well, we're trying to take out 30,000–35,000 people out on strike. How do you take them out on strike at night on Thursday, or even on Friday. You have to talk to them! So, we decided that we were going to do it on the 28th. And I got a lot of grief—or some grief from some hard-lined members about that, that we took a few days to talk to the members whom we were asking to come out on strike. But we did. So, the essential service legislation is still going on.

[02:15:50] DC: Or maybe, an essential service hearing—or maybe there was another hearing. Anyways, we were at the Labour Board on Sunday night, talking about—and now it became concrete, not just abstract—they were talking about Monday. We were going to go out on strike on Monday. And it was late at night on that Sunday night, and where I left, it appeared to me, as I left and it was still going on—the lawyers were still there, they told me to go home—it appeared to me, that there was going to be a designation, that the Monday strike; non-strike, the Monday action was an illegal strike. Which would have made a difference for members... Later on, a few years later, they were more mature, but at the time, we were frightened. And I remember coming home, and... weeping. It all jumped into me, all at once; these months of pressure, and everybody was against us, and the government can do whatever they want; the Labour Board is going to make it illegal, and it's just was too much for me; and I... Anyway. I recovered (laughs). And the next morning, it snowed.

[02:17:33] DC: It snowed through that night. And it's Vancouver, so there was 3–4" of snow. And

[02:17:43] DC: somehow the lawyers got it stalled, or postponed, or something—there never was a designation at the Labour Board, that that Monday, the 28th of January, strike was illegal. But we woke up that morning, and it was snowing, and it was scary as hell, because who knew what was going to happen around the province. And, Ruth and I, and our son drove down to the PNE, because we were having rally for Vancouver in the Coliseum. And we drove down there, and there was a steady stream of people walking through the snow, and it was a sunny, beautiful day walking through the snow to the Coliseum. Got inside the Coliseum, and that steady stream of people filled-up nothing in the Coliseum. Nothing was filled. And, I don't remember what time it was called for; was it called for 9:30 or 10, or whatever; and it was half an hour, or there were 20 minutes before the thing, and there was hardly anybody there. And, I remember saying to a number of people—what if you call a party and nobody comes? But then somebody came rushing-in. Maybe Geoff Peters, I can't remember, and said, there is a gigantic traffic jam out there so you have to slow it down.

[02:19:14] DC: So, we did, and as you know, it was spectacular. We filled the Coliseum; they said 12,000 people were there, and that's no exaggeration. The members were incredibly strong and incredibly courageous. At one point I was standing on the floor, looking up at this, and a reporter came up to me, and said, aren't you afraid? You know, the premier or somebody there is saying you could go to jail. And I looked up and I said, do these people look afraid? None of them looked afraid, and they were angry as can be, and they were solid and they were courageous; and it was a fabulous rally; you know, in the midst of horror (laughs). It was a great rally. And that was the day of my comment, which I

[02:20:17] DC: stole from John Chisamore, which he claims he stole from Dave Pidgeon—when I said, in the middle of the speech: "Mr. Campbell thinks this is a one-day protest. He's wrong. It's Day 1 of the protest". And it turned out to be true. We're still involved on some level in the Day 17,000 of that protest, and it's never stopped. So, the membership were terrific, and we began to turn it from there. I'll talk more about the P-plan, or whatever it was called later; but it began to turn. Because in the history of British Columbia, I think, is that every time the public are put into a position, where they have to either back the teachers or the government, eventually, they back the teachers! And I think that, that day—and it wasn't just in Vancouver. We flew to Victoria later that morning; and there was 7,000 on the lawn of the legislature; and there were 20 or 25 other rallies—most of our membership

[02:21:40] DC: was out that day at rallies. Everybody was out of their schools, most of the membership was out at rallies, although it was freezing cold in most of the province. But I think that that was the beginning, that day was the beginning of the success—it wasn't successful—but the beginning of the success of the fight-back. That people began to see; the people in neighbourhoods and towns and cities across the province see the whole of the teaching profession, saying, no, no, no—even if you say what I am doing is illegal. We saw it in the other strikes, right? Even if the courts say, what we're doing is illegal, most of the people in the province say, well, it's the teachers, you know? And they're doing this—there must be something to it. There is a residual respect for us in what we do, and what we say, and that we're sincere, and that we are fighting for something fair. And I think, that that day was the beginning... Looking back you can see it. At the time you couldn't see it. At the time we were... It was a wonderful day for teachers, but we were alone.

[02:22:57] DC: It felt like we were alone. And the rest of the trade-union movement, it has to be said; the presidents of the trade unions were up on stage there with us at the Coliseum, and they were wonderfully supportive; but we felt very much alone. But looking back on it, I think it was the beginning of the fight-back.