

Interview: Larry Kuehn (LK)

Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN) and Al Cornes (AC)

Assisted by: Lesley Harrington

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Note: This is Part 2, continuing directly from Part 1, recorded on a separate day. No exact date is on record.

[00:00:10] KN: Good afternoon. And we're here today to continue our interview with Larry Kuehn, who was the President of the BCTF from 1981 to 1984; the interview is being conducted by me,

[00:00:25] KN: Ken Novakowski, and Al Cornes; and Lesley Harrington is helping us with the technical assistance for this interview. I do want to say, this is the Part Two of the interview that we are doing with Larry, the first part delved into some of the early years and had largely to do with his activism leading-up to his presidency and his early years as President. So, today we will be dealing with some questions that go back to those early years; and then we will be talking about the post-presidency years on staff and things that happened since then. So, Larry, what we'd like to start with, how was Larry Kuehn as a student? I wonder whether you can remember your most vivid experiences while you were a student in school.

[00:01:19] LK: Probably the most significant thing that I learned a lot from, in terms of my own teaching, was a Grade 9 Social Studies course, where we chose a particular topic, and then went off and did a lot of research on it. And the topic I chose—this would have been in late 1950s—was about Quemoy and Matsu, which are the two islands that are between Taiwan and the Mainland of China, and there was a conflict going on at that stage between them, and it was part of a long-standing situation in China. And, what I learned from it was that it made me learn something specific and get into enough depth in it, that I still remember that particular assignment. And it's insignificant in many ways, but it really led me to think about that, compared to all of my other experiences, as formative; and why I think that the kind of project-teaching that the new curriculum is proposing, is a significant; and appropriate direction. This certainly influenced the way that I taught both, Social Studies and English. And the teacher, who gave us that assignment, was, actually, taking a course himself in teacher education, and got an A for my project in his class.

[00:03:17] LK: But, for me, it was, as I say, a really formative experience. The other one, was watching my mother teach. She was a Grade 4 teacher for many years, and long before the idea of the open classrooms, she didn't have her students in rows where their desks were, facing, so they were in, sort of, tables and a very much of a non-traditional type of teaching, certainly, in

the 1950s. So, between those experiences, probably more than anything I did in the Teacher Ed program, influenced these pedagogical practices that I used in my own teaching.

[00:04:02] KN: So, Larry, you referred to the Teacher Ed program—can you tell us a bit about your university years? Were you an activist on campus, were you involved in politics then?

[00:04:12] LK: Yeah, I went to Reed College in Portland, which has a reputation of both, being very highly academic institution, but also, a social activist institution, and I was engaged in sorts of things like protests and so on, in the 1960s. After I went—once I graduated from Reed—I went into a Domestic Peace Corp, called Vista, and I thought I wanted to be a lawyer. So I indicated that I wanted to do social justice law. So, I got assigned to the public defender's office in Miami. We went into the jails every day to interview people, who hadn't been able to put a bail over a three-day-period to see whether they could be released under the Order of Cognisance. And, during the course of that, I decided, along with one of the other people working there in that office to set-up an evening education program, because we saw that there were all those people in prison for up to two years, and the Dade County Jail, that had absolutely no programs of any kind for the prisoners.

[00:05:42] LK: They just sat in their cells all the time, so we had started this program helping people prepare for taking their GED, the alternative to graduation. And I saw one particular couple of people, a father and a son, both of whom were virtually illiterate. They were African American; and they were just really, gentle people, and it struck me there, the insanity of imprisoning people who really, were totally marginalized, and education was a better place than the law to deal with issues of equity and the rights to be full participants in the society. So, I then, went back to Reed College for a Master of Arts and Teaching Programme, and I was able to qualify for a teaching certificate.

[00:06:47] KN: So, this experience actually inspired you to become a teacher.

[00:06:50] LK: That's right, yes. I guess, my younger brother is a teacher, as well. And my mother was a teacher, and, I think, both my brother and I were influenced a lot by our mother to become teachers.

[00:07:09] KN: Larry, can you tell us a bit perhaps about, once you graduated, why you chose to come to Canada from the United States?

[00:07:20] LK: I wanted and expected to be able to teach in the US. However, I wasn't able to get any teaching interviews, and so I actually, went back and looked to see what there was in my records, that was blocking me, and I found a letter from the principal of a school. The Master of Arts and Teaching Programme is an internship program, where you're teaching half-time of your own students, you're not a student-teacher in the same way. And I looked at what the principal had said about me and the letters that were sent out to anybody, who's considering interviewing me; and the essence of the message was that "he will work well with Negroes or Indians, but will not fit into the American public schools".

[00:08:21] KN: Wow.

[00:08:22] LK: So, the only job interview that I got was with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And that's what lead me to think, I'd better find out just what it is, that's an issue here. So, some friends of mine had come to Canada because of the draft, and said that there were lots of jobs up here. One of my friends sent me a copy of The Sun, and I went through it and applied for a couple of jobs, and a week later I was offered a position in Kitimat. It's something, I feel like, I should thank the principal who wrote that, because I am much more satisfied as a Canadian and teaching in Canadian public schools than I would have been, had I actually got a job teaching in the US.

[00:09:25] KN: Larry, last time we met, you did talk about some of your earlier teaching experiences and particularly, what it was that caused you to become active in teacher causes. Is there anything else about teaching that you remember that you really, particularly, enjoyed? What was really rewarding about teaching?

[00:09:47] LK: Well, the approach that I took, the pedagogical approach, was one that probably would be characterized as personalization in another context. I was developing a relationship with students, so that, particularly, as an English teacher you're able to provide support to students, particularly in writing and developing their own style and find out to some degree who they are in the course of the kind of work that they were doing in the classes. And that's always been a rewarding aspect of it. And I've had a number of experiences that sort of showed me or gave me the kind of feedback about the value of teaching; in particular, one (instance) where one of my ex-students became the editor of the newspaper in Kamloops. And I saw an editorial she's written, and I thought it was very good, so I wrote to her. One thing she said was that the only journalism training she's ever had was in my Grade 12 English Journalism class. And, as President I was interviewed by a couple of other students from that class, who had gotten jobs in the media. And, so often you don't see the direct connections between your own teaching and what happens to the students afterwards.

[00:11:45] LK: One of the difficulties of evaluating what we do as teachers is that the long-term really is what you have to understand. And we very seldom get a chance to do that, and so, for me, it was very rewarding to get that kind of a response.

[00:12:07] KN: Thank you, Larry—that's pretty much where we started talking about your experiences, last time we've interviewed you when you were a teacher. So, we're going to move now to the period that came after your presidency, because, I think, we've covered all that in the previous interview, but I thought, to wrap up the rest of that discussion, we'd ask you if you look back onto your three years as the President of the BCTF, what do you see as your most satisfying accomplishment, or accomplishments?

[00:12:47] LK: Well, we certainly moved in that period from being a union without the kinds of possibilities that a union has in terms of influencing the conditions for members; and we, between 1982 and 1983 we've moved from the vote from members of 60/40 (percent) against a

right to strike, to 60/40 (percent) in being prepared to go on strike. And that represented a significant transition, I think, in how teachers saw the nature of their work and their relationship of their role to the employers, to the authorities in education; and that obviously has to be one of the things that was important to me among the changes over that period of time. I was able to spend a lot less time in the curricular aspects, and the professional organizational aspects, than I would have liked to, because the combination of the political kinds of challenges that we faced in that period, really, meant that I had to spend a significant amount of my attention on those issues, rather than some of the broader kinds of issues. I actually found that being a vice-president was more satisfactory way of dealing with the other kinds of issues. Because the president gets very little control over his or her work.

[00:14:47] LK: It is defined very largely by the context that you're in. But the vice-presidents have more scope to do other things, to identify areas to work on, and so, I was able to do more in that position, than as president—some of the things that I really value about the Federation and the kind of work we do.

[00:15:12] KN: So, Larry can you tell us a bit about what you did in the gap year that you finished your term as President?

[00:15:20] LK: BC FED and the Solidarity Coalition set up an on-going organization; and I was seconded to work in that, with the Operation Solidarity and Solidarity Coalition. And I did that for about a year and a half after being President, and we were following-up on many of the kinds of issues that Solidarity had raised. But, obviously, there was much less focus at that stage, because of the media crisis being over, and now you're back to competing with a whole lot of different agendas and requirements, that the groups had.

[00:16:13] KN: So, when did you join the BCTF staff and what were you doing when you first came to staff?

[00:16:20] LK: Yeah, there were basically 3 or 4 different jobs that I did. One, was that the Federation created a research project, called In the Wake of Restraint. I was hired along with one other person, to carry out the project. And what we were doing is looking at the impact of what had happened with the loss of teaching positions, the impact of the actions of a government at the time of Solidarity in the kind of austerity that was there. So, that was one period of time working on that specific project. I then filled-in when the editor of the Teacher was on maternity leave, and was editor for a few issues of the Teacher. And then I worked at CUSO for a few months and, eventually, came back to the BCTF as Director of Organization Support Division.

[00:17:38] KN: And, how long were you in that position?

[00:17:42] LK: A couple of years, before the Federation created, with the initiative of Ken Novakowski, the Research Department, which pulled the research resources from the bargaining and PD divisions; and brought them into a single area, where we had some independence to

design research and carry out research, that wasn't just focused on whatever the day-to-day concern of those other divisions was. And that also brought the technology responsibility into the research and technology area, when that was set up.

[00:18:29] KN: And you became the director?

[00:18:31] LK: Yes.

[00:18:33] KN: And that division had been since...

[00:18:35] LK: Since 1991, I guess. I think that's when we set it up.

[00:18:49] KN: So, you did mention, of course that we did add technology to the division, and that was because many of us thought you were extremely well-suited to take on that portfolio because for a long time you were one of those people in the Federation, who kept introducing us to new technologies. And this was a point in time, when changes were beginning to happen in the way we communicated and the way we did our work. And you always seemed to be on the cutting edge of what was happening or was available. So, how did you happen to take such an interest in that in your career of work?

[00:19:30] LK: I have a kind of an ambivalent relationship with digital technology. Certainly, as a teacher I used technology, had students doing things like a TV news cast, where they would take the news item, understand the formatting (of it), to write and deliver as news people. Various kinds. We made Super 8 films, and I just saw the potential for the technology, and in fact, the direction where things were going. And then I was introduced to the kind of networking that was going on—really, just starting—before the Internet and saw a demonstration of what some people were doing and trying to build networks, and so, I really pushed for us to get into this, because it seemed to me that the communication was in essence, the business of what we were in. And, that we have a very diverse and wide-spread population, and we adopted the Envoy 100 system, which was a very early networking technology. And, one study of the use of technology by unions indicates that we were the first union to have a network,

[00:21:16] LK: and this was in 1981, that we started it really. And by 1983 during the Solidarity strike we had people in every local in the province, and they were able to send messages, virtually, from their picket lines and share and develop a sense of community, in Solidarity. So that on the picket lines people in Burnaby would have the story of what was happening in Fort St. John; and the kinds of things that teachers were facing there. So, I really thought it was the communications aspect of technology that I thought were important. But that's not what most of the people in technology were doing. They were looking at it in terms of business applications, a lot of which we use now, but for me it didn't make sense to make those the most important aspects of technology for a union, because we weren't a business, we were in communications.. I don't know what to call it, a communication entity, I guess, and so, it was important for the technology to be utilized in those ways.

[00:22:55] LK: We spent in 1983 around \$200,000 just in communication charges for things that now cost us pennies.

[00:23:07] LK: That's

[00:23:16] LK: an indication of how much things have changed. And the level of commitment that we made in the early 1980s that we were prepared to pay the price for being able to communicate more effectively.

[00:23:25] KN: Larry, one of the significant parts of your job has been the responsibility for the BCTF's International Program. I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind taking a few minutes to talk about that program, and its place in the BCTF. And, also how you've seen it change in virtually 25 years or so that you've been in charge of the program.

[00:23:56] LK: The international work of the BCTF goes back to its very early days, in 1923 I think, it was when there was an international organization set up, which Charlesworth was a part of, as the General Secretary of the time. And that was the theme in many respects that was the subject of the dissertation that I wrote for my doctorate at UBC, which is online if anyone's interested. But during the 1930s there was a lot of focus on the League of Nations, and on peace, and then, anti-fascism, when that became an issue. You can trace it through the whole history of the organization. In the 1970s we tended to have some motions every year, people were committed to internationalism who were active in the Federation throughout that period of time, and before even I was active in it. And every year, at the Annual Meeting there would be, generally, a recommendation for something in relationship to the international work. In 1980, I guess, the BCTF Annual Meeting added \$50,000 to the Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua, which was where the Sandinistas had just won power.

[00:25:46] LK: And they wanted to follow the Cuban approach—this is a country that has large-scale illiteracy and they wanted to make the country literate in a short period of time. Our \$50,000 was matched tree-to-one by the National government, and so, it was \$200,000 which was the largest single funding for Nicaragua's Literacy Crusade at that stage. What we did was, in 1981 we thought we, instead of making this an ad-hoc kind of thing, we should really think about a larger kind of process that was ongoing. And so, I believe it was 1981 that we had a motion to create a fund with the allocation of a percentage of dues, that were represented when we did the Nicaragua Literacy Crusade, which was 1.86% of the fee revenue for the BCTF in a general operating fund. And what that did, was it gave us a set amount of money that allowed us to think long-term of what you could do in terms of setting up things that were not just ad-hoc, one-off kinds of relationships. And so, we sort of struggled with that for a number of years, and finally, in 1986, a group of activists, who have been involved particularly in our Nicaragua initiatives for peace, set up Co-Development Canada as an NGO to be the partner with the BCTF and working with unions in Latin America.

[00:27:57] LK: And it's grown over that period of time, it is partner with lots of more groups now, although we're still the major partner; and it was a way of having bi-lingual people, which

is essential in doing direct work with colleagues in Latin America; and this allowed us to do longer-term thinking. So, there are three-year to five-year plans; in fact, in some of them we've been doing the same kinds of projects for thirty years, that reflect particular kinds of directions, that are consistent with the values of the BCTF: things like gender roles, and participation of women in the union, and in society and in schools; and those programs in Peru and in Central America in particular, have been for a very long period of time. During the late 1980s as well was the period of a great deal of change taking place in Southern Africa, as the Apartheid regime became more and more beleaguered in challenges both to Apartheid within South Africa, but particularly to the international movement against Apartheid, which was probably as important an international project or campaign, since the abolition of slavery and the abolitionist global activities at that stage.

[00:29:46] LK: So, we were a part of the new union that came out of the end of Apartheid, and the release of Mandela from jail, and the formation of a non-racial teacher union, which really had no resources at all to try to organize an alternative, that brought together teachers from all over unions and racial groups in South Africa. We were, again, able to provide a significant amount of funding—\$50,000 a year in 1990s terms; to support the union in their organization. And the current High Commissioner to Canada from South Africa was the first President of SADTU. And he's talked, every time he has come out here, about the role the BCTF played in both, getting the union established, but also in saving his home and car, because when he became the President of SADTU, they cut off his salary. And the money that we contributed was essentially, what allowed him to support his family over those crucial first months and years of formation of this new union. So, we've had an extensive program, one that is focused consciously around particular kinds of values, and particular kind of relationship: it's a union-to-union relationship, aimed at strengthening the unions, as well as at social justice in Latin America and Southern Africa.

[00:31:48] KN: In that regard, can you tell us a bit about the kind of training programs the BCTF taught in South Africa and the other developing countries as well?

[00:32:01] LK: In South Africa and Namibia we essentially helped set-up the equivalent to staff rep. training programs that we do, that are our shop-steward programs. That really grew out of the period where Tulas, who was to become the general secretary of SADTU in 1994 came and spent three months with us, essentially looking at how to organize a union within a larger area and the kind of organizational aspects. He had been one of the very prominent activists in the anti-Apartheid work, but his experience was in organizing, basically, resistance and not in organizing a large and growing organization in terms of just the organizational aspects of how you do that. And, out of his time here he identified, as well as one of the people from NANTU, Namibia, who were here for the extended time with us; he identified our staff rep. training programs being, what would be most useful to them in building the union strength at the school and the larger kinds of units of the organization. And so, most of our work over that period of time was in training and in developing the training programs.

[00:33:45] LK: In the case of Namibia, it's continued up until as recently as last year, of doing various kinds of support and training for NANTU officers and activists. In Latin America the focus has been more on training women, specifically, to improve their capacity, and to make demands of the right to participate in leadership of their unions in Latin America. So, there is this very chauvinist history, and it's not something that will just disappear—cultural patterns don't change overnight, and so, it's an on-going aspect of the work that we do there. The group of women who are involved in some of the programs that we supported, developed their own program called the Non-sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy, and have developed the Central American Network. They are holding workshops, they are developing teaching materials. In the case of El Salvador, it's been adopted as a part of the Ministry's program of training for teachers. So, it's been very rewarding from our perspective, and we hope, from the perspective of the teachers and the union activists in Central America and other parts of Latin America. We've also been involved in a variety of issues around the neo-liberal policies and particular, trade agreements, and the inclusion of education as a tradable commodity in these trade agreements. And the problems, that that presents to a public education system, that is aimed at preparing people for citizenship, not just for being tools, as employees in a capitalist system.

[00:36:05] LK: And so, since 1999 a lot of our work has been with the Free Trade of the Americas, which was defeated; and the General Agreement of Trades and Services was created, which did come into effect. Those are ongoing kinds of things that are relevant today with the communications and the Trans-Pacific Partnership that our government has signed initially, along with 11 other countries. And we're in the process today of hearings in Vancouver getting the opportunity for people to have input on of whether we should ratify the TPP or not. So, these are all issues that we started with, a long time ago, but continue to be central to our international work we do.

[00:37:04] KN: So, in that regard I have two very brief questions, can you comment on those? You talk about the BCTF's role in getting SADTU off the ground. Do we still hold a special relationship today with SADTU?

[00:37:21] LK: Not particularly. We recently received a proposal from them for some more training kinds of things, but things had changed in South Africa a lot, and the kind of relationship we had doesn't exist in the current time. Still does in Namibia; NANTU is one of our longest partners in Africa, but, really, it is the only country where we have projects now.

[00:37:56] KN: And have you talked about our relationship with Central and South American teacher groups? Can you talk a bit about Tri-National and the BCTF's role in that?

[00:38:10] LK: One of the aspects related to trade agreements was the development of the North American Free Trade agreement, and in 1993 a labour studies teacher in the USA organized a conference, that brought together about 300 people from Mexico, Canada and the US, to talk about the impact of trade agreements, of NAFTA in particular on the impacts of public education. And out of that grew this organization, called Tri-national Coalition In Defence

of Education, which has had conferences every second year since then, and we're about to host the 12th Tri-national conference, and it is an opportunity to bring together teacher union activists from each country, to develop more of an understanding of each other's contexts, and also, the impact that neo-liberal policies and this trade agreement, in particular, had had in North America. And NAFTA is the model, under which all of these trade agreements have been developed, and with the kind of negative impact on all kinds of things. For most people it's very little understood how education fits into this, and overnight it didn't change, but if you look over a 20-year-period, there is a variety of things that have been taking place, could really be tied to both, trade agreements, and the kind of power relations that exist within those trade agreements.

[00:40:10] LK: So, it's been a very productive opportunity for us to work with activists from the three countries. Until recently, very few from the US participated, but with the Chicago strikes and the organization of the Chicago Teachers' Union, which has become a model for caucuses and unions in the thirty of the larger American cities, and it can be traced back to the Tri-national. One of the key organizers for the Chicago's teachers union was at the Tri-national, when we had it in Los Angeles, in 2010. And out of that he had learned what we were doing at the BCTF, and went down and brought Jinny Sims down there to talk to a caucus. And they formed a caucus that won the control of the union in elections, and who had become the outstanding set of teachers, who are challenging the neo-liberal kinds of things that are happening in education in the US. There's an article that he's written recently talking about using the BCTF as a model for what they were trying to build in Chicago, so one never knows what kind of impact there may be from the

[00:41:58] LK: kind of work that you do, but this is one where there is some concrete feedback to us about the value of what we've done in that regard.

[00:42:10] KN: Wonderful. So, Larry, in your role as the director of research, you also played a role in enhancing and facilitating teachers' and the Federations' understanding of what the education curriculum changes is in this province. And I'm wondering if you could take a few minutes, again, to comment on how you've seen the curriculum, the educational role of teachers change over, say, the last 25 years of you being in that position, right up to the current situation, as I understand we're getting a new curriculum and it's problems.

[00:42:58] LK: Yeah, there's an interesting, and, to some degree unfortunate kind of cycle of what's happened in curriculum. In 1968 the Federation had its own commission on education, which produced a report called involvement. And if you read through it you'd see that many of the things were identified there, because they've become just the conventional activities that were carried out in education. It was a period, where up until that point, the curriculum was heavily centralized and quite traditional, and the pedagogical practice at a large degree was lecturing. The involvement report called for different kinds of pedagogy and to think of it as more progressive, I think. The school I taught at in Midway was an open-area secondary school;

one of the few that existed, and it had been developed according to a philosophy of education that was very open, alternative pedagogical practices, etc.

[00:44:28] LK: Then,

[00:44:29] LK: 2 or 3 years after the school had opened and I was no longer there, the school district had put up walls within this open-area secondary because the open kind of practices had been too rooted in both, the teachers' experience in teaching, and the parents experience in being students. And, I saw a similar kind of pattern happen with the Year 2000, which was built on the kind of progressive, open pedagogical proposals, and had a large impact in terms of the new Primary Program, which had pretty much persisted... But, again, by the time it got close to touching the secondary schools, the pressure was such that, the NDP government by then, which hadn't initiated this, but had to carry it on, carried on with it, but then suddenly announced that it was going to end, and there was a new approach that was going to be taken, which was basically, the outcomes-based education, which is one of the competing kinds of frameworks for curriculum. And now, we've again, gone to proposals for a change in curriculum, and there are a lot of contradictory aspects of it.

[00:46:23] LK: This round of the curriculum change really started with the premier's council on technology. And it was based on neo-liberal perspectives of technology and using the quite directed approaches to change; but at the same time talking about creative thinking, and critical thinking, and the like. Now, a lot of the impetus coming out of that, which resulted in a lot of curriculum work being done around the world right now. What's come out of this is something different from that approach—the language is still the same, but what has been attractive, I think, for teachers is that (there) is giving up a lot of the intended outcomes, and having more of the big ideas and having more opportunities for teachers to go into depth, because they don't have to cover as many different areas; all of which had been positive aspects from the perspective of a lot of teachers. On the other hand, nobody in the government really has a philosophy of education. They would have trouble identifying and justifying the curriculum approaches that are being taken. And they're not prepared to put any resources into it.

[00:48:20] LK: And therefore, consequently, the dangers of this not succeeding are two-fold: one of them is that the resources and the capacity of teachers has reached a breaking point in terms of the expectations on them, as in the number of teachers has been reduced, the number of support positions, etc. So, that's one (concern) that it will simply go under the weight of what else is demanded of teachers. The other one though, I think, is, as well, what happened with my experience in Midway, what happened with the Year 2000, and the Harcourt's decision in the mid-1990s, and that is, as you get to the secondary school, that there are expectation that had been built over generations that are very difficult to get people to change. And the more open approaches, the kinds of assessments that are not as specific as the grade levels, but looking at broader kinds of ways of both, communicating to students and to their families, you know, what it is they're learning and how they're learning it; a backlash from that perspective is another possibility.

[00:50:03] LK: So it's hard to say what will happen, but if both of those issues aren't addressed—that of resources and building a constituency that understands the differences in way which we're assessing; then we'll likely end up again, with a promise, which isn't ever fulfilled.

[00:50:35] KN: Thank you. One of the other issues that you played a key role in, was the formation of the Federation's Aboriginal Education Program. Can you tell us a bit about it, and the issues that came rise to the Federation moving in this direction and perhaps, about how you've seen that program function since it's been established.

[00:51:06] LK: I forget which year, I think it was 1997, at the meeting there was a motion passed that called for some policy related to the aboriginal students and I was given the task of pulling together some people to talk about that particular motion. And one of the people that I had asked to come to our discussion was one of the staff people in the Vancouver school district. And, she said at the very beginning: "This isn't my organization". And she meant, I think, that it simply wasn't serving the needs that she had, or her identity as an aboriginal person. So, then, it became, for me, an objective to making sure that this was an organization of aboriginal teachers. And a task-force was set up, again, there was a beginning of some changes taking place, with various organizations coming together to talk about the fact our aboriginal students are not doing well, that their graduation rates are very low, that there are all sorts of issues;

[00:52:49] LK: and that created then the basis for creating a task-force on First Nations Education. And we had on it all teachers who were aboriginal, except for one; and one was Metis and the others were either formally members of bands, or non-status; or living off the reserve. And, for almost two years we talked about what the issues were, we went around and had a few hearings, in essence, in different parts of the province, to hear not just what teachers had to say, but what the aboriginal communities had to say. And out of that we developed a report that went out to the annual meeting, which proposed, among other things, the creation of aboriginal education staff-person and an ongoing Aboriginal Education Committee. And part of it was also pushing districts to—or locals—to identify aboriginal education positions on their executives and to try to build a network—not of just the provincial committee, but of the network that reached into all of our locals. Much of the model that the Status of Women program developed came out of a task-force. And I think, that there has been a lot of success in that, and the success that is happening in the schools

[00:54:53] LK: is nowhere near where we should be, but we've moved a long ways. Certainly, the curriculum aspect that is supposed to include aboriginal ways of knowing and contributing to all curricular areas (will be beneficial). And we have a lot of activist aboriginal teachers in the province, that when you go to Annual Meeting, there are quite a few aboriginal teachers, who were active enough in their locals, that they're also active in the Federation at that level. And to me, it's always been an objective to go back to be able to say to Lorna Williams, that I think, that we are the organization that a lot of aboriginal teachers do feel like they belong to now.

[00:55:48] KN: So, Larry, we will now move onto Al's portion of the interview.

[00:55:54] AC: Wonder if you could tell us a bit about your Freedom of Information Request to the Archives Canada?

[00:56:00] LK: A number of unions had put in applications for the files of the RCMP Security Squad, which had operated until 1984, when it was abolished and CCIS was created because of some of the things that the Security Service had done over the years, the dirty tricks, etc. So, I put in a request to archives, the National Archives, where there records were, for any records on the BCTF. And, it turns out there was a file called "The Communist Influence in the BCTF"; that was opened in 1959 and only closed in 1984, when the Security Service was abolished. And most of what was in it was there from and covered 1959 to the early 1970s. Then there were the odd things after that, including about Solidarity in 1983. They sent us the 1,800 records, or information about 1,800 separate records that existed in that particular file. Half of them were redacted completely. Most of what we got was the news clippings, AGM minutes. A pretty good archive of news clippings over that period of time that could be useful for us in understanding the history of Federation, and to get access to some things that we wouldn't have had otherwise.

[00:57:57] LK: But the redacted items would have been, of course, more interesting to get. I did out an appeal for that—as you can do under the Freedom of Information legislation—to say that, I think, too much has been redacted here, to go and look again. And it has taken a year—a year from the request to get the first bunch—another year to get the response to the appeal with one additional document. But that document was really telling, because the structure of it was that it was type-written mostly in a wide column, and a narrower column beside it. And there were at least 40 initials of at least 40 people on that document, who would have read this document from within the RCMP, which gave me a sense of how extensive it must have been. And it was also interesting, because it was a report on our AGM, I think, in 1961 or 1962; and the things they chose to report on was one was a motion to invite a speaker on peace. And peace was, in the Cold War days was a communist plot,

[00:59:25] LK: and the meeting had actually rejected having the speaker on peace. It also had the motion calling for the creation of a strike fund, which obviously, somebody there thought it was very subversive idea; and a couple of other motions of that sort, that were really, simply, a trade union kinds of activities, that were being promoted at the AGM with some motions. And I'd love to see the rest of the things. Jim McFarlan long contended and I think, that these documents certainly suggest that there was somebody that the RCMP had in the BCTF who was writing these reports on the regular basis. At least 900 of these reports of some kind were fully redacted, because they would have indicated who it was who was involved in that process.

[01:00:35] LK: There is

[01:00:38] LK: an interesting other aspect related to the Cold War—that after World War II and the split of the world into the communist and capitalist there were competing teacher organizations set-up. One of them was the WCOTP—the World Confederation of the

Organizations of the Teaching Profession; and in 1967 when a whole lot of CIA's activities became known from the US—I forgot how it happened—once this was discovered, that 80% of the funds spent by WCOTP came from the CIA through a Front Foundation. And interestingly enough, the CIA through that foundation, also supported a competing teacher organization—the WCOTP was affiliated with the NEA in the US; and the AFT was affiliated with a different international organization. And the CIA was funding these two competing ones, that finally, they came together in the early 1990s; 1993, I think it was when Education International was created. But it shows the degree to which both, the security services, records and the relationship to these international organizations demonstrates how significant the Cold War was in relationship to unions.

[01:02:38] KN: So, given that and your comments on the various programs on the issues of Federation, wondering if there is anything else you'd like to say about your experience at the BCTF? If you look at the time-span, it is over 35 years altogether, so there must be other things you'd like to comment on?

[01:03:00] LK: You know, I've been thinking about that, as some people might wonder why I still am around after all of those years of engagement. But there are so many important things that were important to me that the Federation has done, and I have been able to have a role in—affiliation with labour, as a staff person I worked with a task-force on that. Or on the other kinds of things that we've discussed, that reflect on the kind of social justice commitment that I have personally, that had brought me into teaching in the first place and into the union as well, that I can't imagine any other place I could have been, where I could have been more involved in really significant social justice, and education, and labour positive kinds of things, and that's what keeps me going still.

[01:04:09] KN: OK—and what are your thoughts of the current state of affairs in the sector of public education in British Columbia? Would

[01:04:18] KN: you like to comment on that?

[01:05:05] LK: We basically have a walking disaster that is only held off by the incredible degree under which teachers are prepared to work harder and harder, and harder, to a point where it is just not going to be possible anymore, I think. The nature of education has changed, nature of the students that we have has changed, the expectations are greater—all the things that we should be doing we can't do. All of those are serious problems that simply need to be addressed. They aren't unique to us. One of the impacts of the neo-liberal domination, or of the neo-liberal policies, is that everywhere, the collective work that people do to create a valuable and fair society are under attack, because it's entirely focused on the "me", where I can gain as a consumer rather than a citizen. And, essentially we continue to struggle against those, and to maintain the kind of values that public education represents.

[01:05:52] KN: So, to wrap this up, Larry, we have one last question. Given what you've just said, do you have any comments or a message for young teachers that are just starting out in their profession?

[01:06:08] LK: You know, Susan Robertson says that the neo-liberal system creates neo-liberal people. And I think, the danger is, that the teachers not having the broad sense that we came out of the 1960s with the social value of public education and what we can do as teachers. And I think, that that is the most important thing for us to engage young teachers in, and the people beginning in the profession, that this is not just about technique and technical achieving of some kind of standardized result, but to also be seen as a social process. And that means that you have to participate and social organizations including the local unions, if we're going to not let the liberal ideas and power win out.

[01:06:52] KN: Thank you, Larry,

[01:07:36] KN: thank you very much.

[01:07:38] LK: Thank you.