

Interview: Hans Brown (HB)

Interviewer: Johanna den Hertog (JDH) and Ron Johnson (RJ)

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Transcription: Brenda Wagg and Donna Sacuta

JDH [00:00:04] Okay. We're going to start now. Hans, this is the second time that we've interviewed you and we're finishing the interview, and I want to ask you about the 1972 election campaign. You were campaign manager, and you told us last time about how you got a paper envelope and that affected how you directed organizers. Can you tell us the story about what happened and how you managed to redirect those organizers?

HB [00:00:35] Well, our campaign did receive some help from—

JDH [00:00:53] That's okay. You got a brown paper envelope and you wanted to redirect organizers, and how did you do that? Where were they coming from?

HB [00:01:06] I don't know where the brown envelope came from, but it was put under the door of the NDP headquarters on East Hastings, and when I came into the office, there it was. When I reviewed the information in the envelope it turned out that it was all polling information, and it was conducted by a Detroit polling firm that was doing research work for the Republican Party in the States and also doing polling research work for the Conservative campaign in B.C. So anyway, it was a very professional set of research data and on reading it, it became clear to me that if the data was accurate, we would win the election. But there was a problem with the data, and that was that it did come to me very late in the day for making adjustments to our campaign to reflect the data. But I decided that what I would have to do is I'd have to do something extraordinary because we had organizers driving across the country from Ontario to help in the campaign and they'd all been put in the Lower Mainland. Well, on the basis of reviewing the information in the poll, we were safe in the Lower Mainland. All the seats we had, we would retain and other seats we had a potential of winning. So I tried to get hold of Dave Barrett to go over this with him, but he was busy and so I talked to Bob Williams about it and showed him the data and how we could make best use of it by shifting organizers instead of sending them from their drive across the country and sending them to the Lower Mainland, I should send them up to northwestern B.C., to Prince Rupert and Smithers and Terrace and Prince George and in the interior. There were seats like well, Harry Lali's seat. So Bob Williams, he immediately recognized the advantages and the challenges here. And so he said, 'Yeah, we should shift our resources.' And so I had no way of getting in touch with these people to tell them that we were shifting them and that they should turn north and go to Prince Rupert instead of coming down to the Lower Mainland. So my great idea was to phone the RCMP in Kamloops and ask them to look out for two cars of organizers as they came through Kamloops because I found out from their parents in Ontario that that's where they would be, somewhere in the Revelstoke-Kamloops area. So I phoned the RCMP and they were most cooperative and said, 'Well, if we see the car that you're after, then we'll stop it and we'll get them to phone you.' So that's what they did. And I just caught them at the last moment before they switched north into the Cariboo.

JDH [00:05:07] That's an amazing story and really means a lot in terms of the developments of the 1972 election.

RJ [00:05:15] Now, I presume that you didn't tell the RCMP that they were NDP organizers and you were calling to reassign them. You needed to—

HB [00:05:23] I didn't mention the NDP and they didn't push it. I mean, I sort of implied that when I told them that I had been in touch with the family, trying to find out where they could be reached, that it was a family matter, not a political matter.

JDH [00:05:46] Great story. Okay. We are now moving on to another part of your career Hans, and after the 1991 election, you worked for the B.C. Labour Relations Board. I understand you were appointed in, I think, 1992 or 1993. Can you tell us what your role was at the B.C. Labour Relations Board? A little bit about that function.

HB [00:06:25] Well, the Chairman of the Labour Relations Board was Mike Harcourt's choice, and he chose Stan Lanyon, an old friend and a real policy wonk, a policy maker. And then a number of other members of the board were appointed and I came as a labour appointment. Now I was there, I did the work of the Vice Chairman of the board. I did hearings, did interpreting labour relations, Labour Code. But I wasn't a policy leader, and there was some fear in the Labour Relations community— particularly on the employers' side—that that's what I would be. I would be a stick, not a carrot.

JDH [00:07:44] So you were someone who had represented unions many times when you worked for the HEU (Hospital Employees Union). How did it feel to now be in a neutral role?

HB [00:08:01] Well, I had to work hard because in maintaining a neutral role and acting on that basis.

JDH [00:08:18] Was it valuable to have had a labour background in that role?

HB [00:08:34] Well, yes it was because my role in the labour relations community was—

JDH [00:08:56] Was it your role in classifications or evaluations that was significant?

HB [00:09:19] Oh, move on—

JDH [00:09:21] Okay. All right. Well, do you think there were any issues or cases while you were a Vice Chair of the LRB that stand out for you, that you remember as being interesting or significant at the time.

HB [00:09:45] Well, I did quite a few cases where groups of workers tried to form a union and after we determined whether they had the numbers and whether they met the criteria. I handled a lot of it. And particularly one that I always remember because it went on so long. It was Richmond Cabs and they really wanted to form a union so that they could negotiate with their employer. And the employer was really opposed to it. Now, ultimately, I ruled in favour of the people who wanted the union.

JDH [00:10:44] So when you say that took a long time was that like, a lot of days of hearings or was that a long hearing?

HB [00:10:55] Yeah.

JDH [00:10:56] Okay.

RJ [00:10:59] Did you do.

RJ [00:11:00] Hans, did you have to deal with the law changing? I cannot remember anymore when the NDP was elected in 1991 and then—was there new labour law? Were you setting precedents and interpreting a revised labour law, or was the labour law essentially stable at that time, unchanged?

HB [00:11:22] Well, it was relatively stable at that time. I mean, the Labour Relations Board had tremendous leadership. Paul Weiler was the first Chairman of the board and people just didn't argue with Paul Weiler because you open an argument and you were immediately clobbered. He always got his way because he had a vision of labour relations that he brought not only to the B.C. entire community, but he went and taught at Harvard, and he was a real mentor to everybody on the Board and people recognized him as such. So Stan Lanyon—well there were a couple of other people that Paul Weiler brought in, such as John Baigent and—

RJ [00:12:24] And how was the level of cooperation between the management appointees and the labour appointees? Was it a collegial kind of working, everybody is just working to ensure the law was properly applied? Or did you really know, 'Well those are the management appointees and we're the labour guys and it's kind of separate and—.' What was the atmosphere like there?

HB [00:12:52] Well, it was a very cooperative atmosphere because of the leadership provided by the Chairman. Because people like John Baigent had real clout in the Party on labour relations issues.

JDH [00:13:29] Were you ever involved in mediation?

HB [00:13:33] No.

JDH [00:13:35] Okay. And do you have any—

HB [00:13:42] My biggest experience in arbitration was before I went to the Labour Relations Board, when I was working for HEU for about six years, I was the union, HEU union nominee on the Classification Arbitration Board. And that was at the time the longest arbitration in B.C. history. And it went something like 80 days of hearings. And then the Board went into the backroom and spent another 40 days sorting out just how, what was the appropriate classifications for all the clerical and maintenance employees in the industry throughout the province.

JDH [00:14:42] And you were responsible for the labour-side of that?

HB [00:14:44] I was responsible for the labour-side of that. And ultimately the award—I think (unclear) was the Chairman and we won about 70-80 percent of— So I take a lot of satisfaction from that because a) I was tremendously successful and b) the members realized that I had scored an unexpected arbitration win for them and the Health Labour Relations Association, the Employer, went out of its way to kill off that arbitration board because they didn't want to bring any more of their classification cases before me.

JDH [00:15:38] And what kind of impact did that have on members, the success of all of that 78 percent? What did that mean for members?

HB [00:15:46] It meant a significant wage increase and it meant a classification ladder. But as you as your duties changed, you had an opportunity to bring that to the attention of the employer with—if you feel such with a proposal that you be reclassified. And of course, it was really there to always be reclassified up. But if you can get the criterion right, then people do proceed up the ladder.

JDH [00:16:26] That was a huge impact for the HEU.

HB [00:16:28] Yeah

JDH [00:16:31] And in any of the time at the LRB, did you, were there other, did your experience with classifications and evaluations help with any other cases in general? Or was it mostly organizing applications that you heard?

HB [00:17:09] Well, I did get a disproportionate number of classification arbitrations. What always happened here was that on occasion, I would just get the law wrong. Then invariably the matter was referred to Stan Lanyon. And that was for all Vice Chairs, not just me. If any of us got the law wrong, in Stan Lanyon's mind, then he brought you into his office and he told me why he thought it was wrong and that, 'Hans you should think about this. I want you to go out and consider what I've said, but you've got to make the decision.'

RJ [00:18:01] Was that at a draft stage or—

HB [00:18:04] Yeah

RJ [00:18:04] Right. So the Chair is overseeing kind of to make sure that the decisions that actually eventually get handed down are what he or she would think would be the correct decisions.

HB [00:18:18] Yeah, they're consistent with the long-term application of the Labour Code vision as seen by Paul Weiler and it's concurred with by Stan Lanyon.

JDH [00:18:31] So what was your favourite part of working at the LRB? What did you like about it?

HB [00:18:47] I liked about it. I liked the Vice Chairs there. They were a very collegial group. We talked with each other a lot. I mean, the reason that Stan Lanyon would know that it's a problem with a decision by one of the Vice Chairs is that we had Vice Chair meetings and people would raise what they thought might be a problem and get the views of the other Vice Chairs and the Chairman. So I liked that. I liked writing decisions and I'm a good writer and that was recognized by Lanyon and the Board. That's why he wanted me to think about my decisions and as a good writer, I wanted to write a good decision.

JDH [00:19:49] Okay, great. Maybe then we move back. You then became in 1996, we had another election.

RJ [00:20:01] Just before you do that. Hans, when you look over this way, I don't get it as much, but there's a slight glare on your glasses. Are you able to shift in your chair? I wouldn't bother about the glasses. Are you able just to shift a bit more towards. Yeah that will do it. That's, that's perfect. Yeah. And I'll just adjust the camera just ever so slightly.

Yeah. That gets rid of that glare. Johanna I'd like to move that lamp, though, just a bit out of the frame. Can you, can you slide that?

JDH [00:20:37] No. No.

RJ [00:20:39] It's okay.

JDH [00:20:41] You're.

RJ [00:20:42] Okay. Perfect. That's good. That's all I need.

RJ [00:20:45] Great.

RJ [00:20:50] Okay. Sorry about that. Technical details here.

JDH [00:20:53] Okay. Let's move on briefly to the B.C. NDP campaign of 1996. This was the Glen Clark became leader of the NDP and I think you came back to help with that election.

HB [00:21:10] Yeah, I was Vice Chairman of the Labour Relations Board.

JDH [00:21:13] And then you came back to help with the election campaign.

HB [00:21:16] Right, Glen phoned me up and asked me to run the campaign. He said, 'You're my lucky horseshoe and I want you to run my campaign.' So I thought about it and I told him that I would become campaign manager, but I want to make sure that my campaign team is who I think it should be. And I wanted Chris Chilton to be assistant campaign manager. I remember I wanted you to be a communications person or the other people I specified. But the point was that Bill Tieleman came in—oh, no, yeah—Bill Tieleman came and tried to persuade me to take on the campaign manager job. I said, "I will take it on, but I've got to have my team." And well, no, that wasn't acceptable at the time. So next, Maureen Headley came to see me and she was Glen's campaign chairperson on his campaign committee. And she really put the blocks to me to become campaign manager. And I said I said, "No, we keep going around this, you've got to realize that I'm firm on who I want on my team." But anyway, it was interesting in the campaign. Who was Glen Clark's friend in the economics department at Simon Fraser?

RJ [00:23:24] Oh, Tom Gunton.

HB [00:23:25] Tom Gunton. Yeah, well, Tom Gunton was he was a friend of Glen Clark. Glen put a lot of value in his opinions. And he was he was a very smart guy. I only had really one or two disagreements with him. The first disagreement was that he didn't want to have a party platform. And I felt that that would be a mistake. You know, we don't we don't have to put our heart and soul into drafting a platform because we don't have the time, but we've got to have something. And I asked Soren who is the great writer, 'Soren, could you churn out a party platform that we could give to the media?' And because they were going after us as not having a party platform. So then Tom Gunton had a friend, an economist friend who we knew from the economics academic community in B.C. and was then working in London, Ontario. And he had this economic model of the B.C. economy, and he was really excited about this economic model. And he came in to see me in the campaign headquarters, and he wanted this model printed immediately and a press conference organized around it. So he said, 'Glen wants this to happen. So that's why I'm telling you.'

So I had looked at this proposal, how the NDP's economic proposals could turn the economy around. Anyway, oh yeah. So I told Gunton that in my opinion, this professor's proposal didn't mean that they'd drag the B.C. economy into the new era of prosperity, that in fact it may do exactly the opposite. And I just picked out a couple of facts that that he'd addressed in this paper. And they didn't—just isolating those facts—they didn't prove Gunton's point at all. Anyway Gunton was really ticked off that I wouldn't take it to the printers and I said, 'No, I'm not going to do it. It doesn't prove your case and I don't think that the NDP should hang its economic arguments on this academic paper because the media won't buy it and our critics won't buy it, and we leave ourselves vulnerable.' Yeah. So Gunton—

JDH [00:27:15] Was that during the election campaign?

HB [00:27:17] Yes, it was. Gunton kept pushing it. So I finally I said to them, I said, 'Look, you may be right and I may be right. I'll tell you what we'll do to find out if you're right, because I'm not interested in pursuing this argument. Tell you what I'll do. We'll call a meeting of the provincial executive, and they can review this rather startling proposal. And if the party thinks you're right, then fine.' Well, Gunton didn't want to do that. So I said, 'Well, how about if I called a meeting of the provincial council?' This is two weeks to go. Well, Gunton knew that that was impossible. We couldn't organize it. I should have suggested, 'Well, how about a convention? Let's call it a policy convention.' So he realized he wasn't getting anywhere and so he dropped it. But you know, when he had an idea, he was pretty stubborn. But I thought he was wrong on these two points and he didn't push them unnecessarily.

RJ [00:28:39] Now that election campaign. There wasn't a lot of expectation necessarily that the NDP would win in 1996 because Harcourt had been sort of hounded out of office. There was internal unhappiness about how all of that went down.

HB [00:28:58] Just a minute. Oh, darn. Sorry.

RJ [00:29:08] Okay. Well I'm sure it will come back. So I was just going to ask you, when you started, when you took on that job, did you think that the NDP could win? I mean, Glen Clark was the new leader. The NDP is in tight in a very difficult situation. So what was the strategy to win?

HB [00:29:25] I thought we could win because our vote was distributed so efficiently and our polling results were consistent with the Liberal Party results and their polling results showed that they would win. And when I looked at our polling results, if you just looked at the efficiency of the vote spread, that they could win and we could also not lose. And throughout the entire campaign, we never fell behind the Liberals. Now we slowly declined, but we didn't decline fast enough to lose it. And my campaign was—and all the researching and the overnight polling just showed that they were piling up big majorities in their core seats, but we were maintaining majorities slightly reduced in our seats, too. And as it turned out, we just squeezed in.

RJ [00:30:31] Just talk to us about the strategy, because it was 1991 was A Time for a Change campaign. 1996, the campaign was very tough on Gordon Campbell. Whose side is he on anyway? It was a very much an us-and-them working-class versus Gordon Campbell's corporate friends campaign. How much of that was part of the success?

HB [00:31:01] Oh I think that was a big part. I mean, I remember those early, those pre-election ads where we really went after Gordon Campbell. We had not only a very efficient vote distribution, but we also had a case to be made—a negative case to be made—on Gordon Campbell. And we made that case.

RJ [00:31:31] What would you say to the public or to maybe labour people who are watching this in the future who say, 'Yeah, but I don't like negative campaigning, you know, we should just, you know, run on what we're going to do and not run the other side down?'

HB [00:31:52] Well, there has been a shift in attitudes that didn't do us any good in—

RJ [00:32:10] In 2013.

HB [00:32:11] Yeah. But it did ultimately. Ultimately that sort of opposition research is—well, not necessarily opposition research it's just Trumpism. Just suggests a whole new method of communicating and just spreading false fake facts, fake news, fake allegations of impropriety by your opponents.

RJ [00:33:00] So when you look back on the 1996 campaign and thinking about how tough the NDP campaign was in the ads on Gordon Campbell and so on, now honestly saying from, we're sitting here now looking back on that, was the criticism of Gordon Campbell fair or was it mud?

HB [00:33:21] It was fair. I didn't feel there was any mud. I mean, what was mud? Was Gordon Campbell playing a guitar mud? No, but it suggested a dimension of his character.

RJ [00:33:48] Or wearing the plaid shirt.

HB [00:33:51] Yeah, fake. Fake style.

JDH [00:33:58] So that was a tough campaign and you were very insistent on having your own team. Was Glen Clark happy with the results?

HB [00:34:10] Yes, he was. He sent me a very nice card thanking me for my work, and 'I couldn't have done it without you, Hans.' So I was quite pleased with that.

JDH [00:34:23] And what happened after that election campaign? Did you stay working for the Party or did you start working for the labour movement again?

HB [00:34:32] I started working for the labour movement again.

JDH [00:34:36] And was that a relief to get out of election campaigns or were you always sad when the election campaign would be over?

HB [00:34:53] No, I have a pretty long track record covering quite a timespan in the NDP, so I was glad to ease up a bit. And I was particularly glad to ease up on fundraising. In fact, to get out of fundraising.

JDH [00:35:20] Maybe we should move now to the time you spent later at the Health Sciences Association at the HSA. You started work there I think in 2002. How was it that you came to work at the HSA?

HB [00:35:40] Well, when I left the Labour Relations Board, I just took a leave of absence. I didn't look for a job, I was semi-retired. And then after I had not worked for about a year, then I decided I just had another year to go. I decided I'd better start looking for a job. But it's not easy when you're in politics and suddenly the party loses, the campaign is lost. It's not always easy. And I applied to the BCGEU, HSA, BCNU, HEU. Most of my problem was that I didn't have the seniority. I would be applying to all of these organizations that I'd only bring limited seniority to the table. In fact, brought no seniority to the table because invariably when these jobs came up, internal candidates were given preference and the staff unions insisted upon that. But Cindy Stewart, who was the president—she wanted me to hired. And so she sort of put the arm on the HSA executive and I was hired.

JDH [00:37:33] And what was your role? What did you do for the HSA?

HB [00:37:37] Well, what they wanted me to do was to work on classification. That was something that I brought to the table, classification experience and rather vast experience. And that's what I brought to the table. And it held me ultimately in good stead, because the internal applicants and other applicants, they didn't have the classification experience and HSA had a tremendous classification problem.

JDH [00:38:10] Tell me about that. What was it like at the time?

HB [00:38:15] It was a problem of getting their classification disputes before an arbitration board and just having them dealt with through arbitration because there was no other way that they could be dealt with.

JDH [00:38:37] So what did you do to make things better?

HB [00:38:43] I went through their hundreds and hundreds of files and I dumped half of them and just looked at them. And, people file grievances, and there is no grievance. So where there was no classification grievance, I scrapped it. So I had two piles, a pile that we would ultimately go ahead with, and the pile that we were not going to go ahead with. And so the I got Cindy Stewart and the HSA executive to buy that approach. And right off the bat they were able to report we've moved, you know, 600 arbitrations off our books, and so the HSA executive was very happy about that because they could go and report to their units that we're making progress on HSA classification. Then I sort of picked a sampling of grievances and got them before an arbitration board. And in most cases, we won. But it was moving too slowly when I left. That's the stage that we were in.

JDH [00:40:12] Were you in—did something happen in the HSA to move it to some kind of expedited arbitration process for the first time? Were you involved in helping to make that happen?

HB [00:40:27] No, I think that that was, that would—

JDH [00:40:34] Or did your work help to move the union in that direction?

HB [00:40:43] Well, my help certainly helped move in that direction because— To move to an expedited model was what I was trying to do when I was moving out sample arbitrations, just to see what type of arbitrations might get some traction with the employer.

JDH [00:41:04] Right. Right.

HB [00:41:06] And then when I left, that's the only approach that was there on the table to pick up. So they did.

JDH [00:41:16] Right. Good. Are there any other highlights or special memories from your time of the HSA?

RJ [00:41:24] Just I just want to add, because we're talking about the HSA for future people who may listen to this tape. The HSA is the Health Sciences Association of B.C.

JDH [00:41:33] Right.

RJ [00:41:34] So any special memories from that time?

HB [00:41:46] Well, I think my memory was of the people that I worked with, and they did some remarkable work. Miriam Sobrino she's a—what an organizer, what a worker. Now I know she has Bruce Ralston to look after keep moving ahead, too. But she was able to handle that and her family and her Director's job at HSA. It's really quite amazing. Rachel Notley worked at HSA for two, three years. And so quite a number of the HSA staff here in Vancouver went out to Alberta for a couple of weeks to work for Rachel Notley.

JDH [00:42:40] Was Rachel Notley there when you were there?

HB [00:42:42] No. No, she had left. She wanted to go back to Alberta. And she really hit it big in Alberta.

JDH [00:42:55] From HSA to Premier.

HB [00:42:56] Yeah.

JDH [00:42:59] Okay. I'm going to ask you a few just general questions, Hans. Anything that we might have missed? Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience in the labour movement or in politics that we may not have touched on?

HB [00:43:21] Well, in terms of campaign strategies, one thing I've missed, which I shouldn't have, and that is how we won seven by-elections in our big lead-up to winning—.

RJ [00:43:40] In 1991.

HB [00:43:42] Yeah. Well, that was remarkable. I just remember those fondly. Well, this is another Bob Williams recommendations. I got our polling results on whether or not Bill Barlee could win in Boundary-Similkameen, and our poll showed that he could. And Bob Williams came through the office one day when the poll results somehow just got a place on my desk face up. Naturally, Bob Williams saw it and took a look at it and he said, 'Well, we can win this. Let's go for it.' And so I said, 'Well, Bob, I think you're right. I think we will go for it.' And we did. And Bill Barlee won. David Zirnheld. Elizabeth Cull. Tom Perry. And just an amazing number of candidates and such highly-qualified candidates, that was what I liked about it. We guessed right on the quality of the candidates who got the nomination that were encouraged to run.

JDH [00:45:09] And how did that matter going into the 1991 election?

HB [00:45:17] Because we had a strategy and no one could argue that there was anything wrong with the strategy, that the strategy had weaknesses, because we kept winning with it. That's all you had to say is, 'Well, we won. You have any more criticisms? Oh, well, that's interesting. But we won. We didn't need that.'

JDH [00:45:38] Okay. Anything about some of the greatest challenges, if you look back on either NDP politics or the labour movement that you had, that you remember, what are the greatest challenges?

HB [00:46:07] Oh. The greatest challenges—

RJ [00:46:25] I'm sorry, I'm looking here because this is flashing at me that it's going to run out of battery and it shouldn't be because it's plugged in—

JDH [00:46:41] Okay. Hans, what about anything further about what you're most proud of?

RJ [00:46:54] Sorry. I'm being distracting here.

JDH [00:46:58] Was it going?

JDH [00:47:00] No. Well, it's not, actually. It's saying it. Saying it's going. We can keep talking. It's saying it's going to run out of battery, but I don't see why it should, because I've got it plugged in. So sorry Hans, carry on. What things are you most proud of?

HB [00:47:16] Well, I'm most proud of are the three provincial elections that I won. Now, I didn't win them singlehandedly. I won them because I had a team that worked very well with me and I worked well with them. And I was very proud when Ron quit the NDP and I got him to not take another job, but just to hang steady doing a party platform.

RJ [00:47:48] I remember that.

HB [00:47:52] And yeah, then you came back into the fold, and— No, I tell you, in between Ron and Soren Bech, you just couldn't have better writers. They were brilliant and the stuff that they produced was brilliant. And it made me look brilliant, to be able to show this stuff off. Alan Gregg, he was a Conservative—

RJ [00:48:27] Yeah. Pollster guru?

HB [00:48:31] Yeah. Were you involved in the Yes campaign?

RJ [00:48:36] Yes, I was, actually. You brought us in to try and do B.C. advertising for the Yes campaign.

HB [00:48:43] Right. Because the reason I ask is Alan Gregg used to talk to Dave Gotthilf quite a bit during the campaign and he told me that one time he was talking to Alan Gregg, they mentioned, they got talking about you and Soren and Gotthilf and said that you three were the best and most competent team in the country.

RJ [00:49:26] That's very nice to hear.

HB [00:49:28] Yeah, it is.

RJ [00:49:29] Well, I remember, maybe you want to comment on this. When I was working with you in 1990—probably about 1990—and we went with Cate Jones and Dave Gotthilf to San Francisco to a Campaigns and Elections School.

HB [00:49:48] Oh yes.

RJ [00:49:49] What do you think the impact of that visit was with the four of us going to that school.

HB [00:49:59] I don't get—

RJ [00:50:01] Did it change the way we were doing politics? Did we learn useful things in that? I mean, I guess I would say I think one of the things that we did and your willingness to go to that school was that it changed our approach on how tight we were on message and managing debates, and we huge number of things from that.

HB [00:50:29] Did that lead us to Karl Struble?

RJ [00:50:31] It did indeed.

HB [00:50:33] Yeah.

RJ [00:50:34] And Michael Sheehan as—

HB [00:50:36] Oh and Michael Sheehan. That's right, yeah.

RJ [00:50:38] Clinton's debate coach, Lloyd Bentsen's debate coach, who we then brought in to coach Mike Harcourt.

HB [00:50:44] Yes.

RJ [00:50:45] And the caucus.

HB [00:50:46] Yes. This is another case where Bob Williams comes into the picture, because he was quite skeptical about Michael Sheehan. But Michael Sheehan, we brought him up to Kamloops for the caucus training session and one of the training exercises was to be given three facts and those facts and you're supposed to turn those into a positive message for your side. And Bob Williams laughed and smiled when he heard that that was the exercise, because he says, 'Our people could never do that.' Well, Michael Sheehan could. He was given three things about the Peace River Dam policy—

RJ [00:51:47] Coal—was it northeast coal, I think?

HB [00:51:49] Or northeast coal. Anyway, it was one of these northeast resource development plans. And Michael Sheehan, he's from the southern United States and Washington, he knows nothing about the Peace River project, but he spun it in such a way that Bob Williams was absolutely nonplussed. He just said, 'That's amazing. It's all right. He doesn't have any knowledge of this policy at all.'

JDH [00:52:19] Wow. Significant.

RJ [00:52:22] I believe that that experience and in particular that caucus meeting started the NDP—which we then used all across the country—this idea that if you have the right frame, the right message, you can talk about any issue and bring it to your—

HB [00:52:39] Right.

RJ [00:52:40] frame, and Michael Sheehan taught us that.

HB [00:52:42] Right? Yeah, because I remember. He did those sessions with Tom Perry, Elizabeth Cull. There were a number of people who were receptive to this framing and moving messages.

JDH [00:53:02] Okay. I'm going to bring it a bit to conclude this interview to—.

RJ [00:53:07] I have one last—

RJ [00:53:10] Sorry. Well, I've one last. I have a question. Do you want to do yours first? Hans, you were campaign manager for three times, and I just think we should get on record here, actually— although that was a tremendous plus for the party and a boost for you in terms of the accomplishment of it—actually being the NDP campaign manager had its downsides in terms of actually then coming out of it and being employable because you were highly partisan in some people's minds. Do you want to make any comment on that experience and just how people need to sort of be aware, both if they're doing that job or if they're hiring people from that job. It's actually hard to be labelled as much of a campaign Party operative as you were labelled sometimes. Is that correct, do you think?

HB [00:54:18] Well, I don't know. Well, back in the 1990, 1992, '93, after the election, I wanted to— The job of Provincial Secretary, campaign manager was really getting me down. So I talked to Ernie Hall and Dennis Cocke about moving over to the government-side and being a Ministerial Assistant or whatever those positions were at the time. And Dennis Cocke said, 'No, love to have you, but we can't have you because you draw attention to political maneuvering by the Party.' So that's when I went out and talked to HEU and got HEU. Anyway I've only talked about this once actually and it was—I forget who I was talking to—but they came to talk to me because they didn't believe it, that I would be turned down by the government. And so I said, 'Well, if you don't believe me, go ask them.' And so the person who I was talking to did go to ask Dennis Cocke, and Cocke said, 'Yes, I did that. I regret it, but that's why I did it.'

JDH [00:56:11] Yeah, it has an impact.

HB [00:56:12] Yeah.

RJ [00:56:14] So there's a price to pay for doing this kind of work that—in that case— certainly you paid it. But the Party's the better for it.

HB [00:56:27] Yeah.

JDH [00:56:29] So this is part of the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre's work on oral history about trade unionism and politics. Hans, what would you say to young people today about why unions are important? Are unions still important today?

HB [00:56:48] Yes, they are.

JDH [00:56:55] Why are they still important? In your view?

HB [00:57:02] They're important because when you bring large numbers of people together in acts of cooperation and solidarity, you strengthen yourself. You strengthen your case. And if you've got your case properly framed, you create a base of activism that has some enduring power to make change. Yeah, I mean, it is Solidarity forever the union makes us strong.

JDH [00:57:45] And you also are someone who combined work in the trade union movement and a lot of political work. There are some people who say, you know, the two should stay separate and maybe, some people don't see that political activism is necessarily important if they're part of the trade union. What are your views about that and what do you think, given your whole life of activity in both fields, what do you think the relationship between unions and labour and politics should be?

HB [00:58:23] Well, we we're going to have some practical lessons and experiences with George Heyman, who is really well connected to both sides of the argument. You're putting the green side and the brown side.

JDH [00:58:43] So was politics important for the trade union movement?

HB [00:58:47] Yes.

JDH [00:58:49] Would we have won, would the NDP have won if the trade union movement hadn't been as active, do you think?

HB [00:59:01] Do you mean the provincial NDP?

JDH [00:59:03] Yes.

HB [00:59:12] Well, I think the trade union movement plays a necessary role. It puts people who are organized out into the community to join with others, to make changes that others can identify with and therefore work behind and work for. I mean, the alternative is that you get held down by the Donald Trumps of the world.

JDH [01:00:00] And finally, what about labour history? Do you think labour history is important?

HB [01:00:08] Yes, it is. There have been actually quite a lot of books on the history of the trade union movement, Des Morton and other people that have pulled all this together. Now, I mean, it's been quite a while since I've read a book on labour history.

JDH [01:00:47] You have labour history, so you are labour history as well as books. So I think maybe if there's nothing else that we haven't touched on Hans, I want to say thank you very much for this interview and thank you for all your memories that you've shared of the many campaigns—the successful campaigns—and your work in the trade union movement. Thank you.

HB [01:01:11] Why, thank you.