

Laird Cronk May 9 2024 3.mp4

RM [00:00:05] Okay. Laird. Laird Cronk, former president of the BC Federation of Labour, a long time representative of the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers]. Away we go. Your early years Laird. I'm traditional. We'll go back there. You know, what was it like for you? I know your dad was very heavily involved also in the Building Trades [BC Building Trades].

LC [00:00:27] Yeah. I mean, I don't know how extensive you want to get into—

RM [00:00:30] Whatever you want. It's your story.

LC [00:00:32] I'll give you a thumbnail sketch. I can remember. It was terrible this morning. You know, you're getting old when you can't remember the name of the bill that got everybody all excited and under Vander Zalm, but I can remember my dad grabbing me by the ear when I was in junior high and saying, on a weekend, 'You're coming to Port Alberni.' (We lived in Nanaimo.) 'We're going to protest this bill.' He was an IBEW rep.

RM [00:00:55] Was it Bill 19?

LC [00:00:56] Yeah, solidarity movement, all that stuff. Up we went in the frigid morning air and stood with Shaw Cable folks up in Port Alberni. That was my first sort of indoctrination. You know, I was aware of all the union activities going on with my dad for years, you know, a thirty year business agent, but—and all the isms and I still—I drove people nuts at the BC Fed [BC Federation of Labour] with sayings from my dad all the time. But, you know, the thing is—

RM [00:01:24] Could you share a few of them?

LC [00:01:25] I will along the way.

RM [00:01:25] Okay.

LC [00:01:26] So, anyway, I remember that. Maybe that's where I got bit with this thing, this need to do what we can with the power of the group, you know. That was sort of—I wasn't too thrilled that Saturday morning, but—and it was cold and windy in Port Alberni. If you ever been there, boy, it can, and you can have some mornings. Fast forward, I ended up as an electrical apprentice working in the trades.

RM [00:01:52] That was your choice? You didn't feel pressured to do that or anything like that?

LC [00:01:56] I had—you know, here's an interesting little side story. Very quick one. I started at McDonald's in Nanaimo when I was 15 years old. I learned more in McDonald's in three years on systems and how to make things efficient and how to—the psychology of getting folks interested in doing the work that they do. They actually, you know—look, minimum wage employer, all of those types of things—but the structures and the systems and the way things operate was fascinating to me. I'd never stepped into anything like that in my life.

RM [00:02:28] Interesting.

LC [00:02:29] Fast forward, I ended up—I was a bit wild back in the day, and I somehow I ended up in Victoria working for a painting contractor that was kind of a bit sketchy. I got a call that I had an opportunity to go to work in Yarrow's Shipyard, which is the shipyard here in Victoria, the graving dock, the federal graving dock. Yarrow's have been around about 100 years. I started, I was 18, I had braces, I had a half-assed perm. (laughter) What was that all about? Had hair. (laughter) There's a picture somewhere. Thank goodness no internet back then. I used to pretend on Friday nights that I had other things to do because I didn't want to tell the guys—they were all guys in the yard—that I didn't want to go to the bar in case I got IDed. Not that I didn't go to the bar in Nanaimo all the time at 18. I mean, those were different days and got away with it. So, I would work in the shipyard all week and then go back to Nanaimo on the weekends.

RM [00:03:23] Yarrow's was unionized, right?

LC [00:03:24] It was unionized. I was an electrical apprentice. We got to—I was about three years into that. You get stints in the shipyard. We worked on the Navy ships that would come in. You get like six months off, six months on. It wasn't it the greatest for an 18 year old sitting with 50 and 60 year old guys figuring out what you're going to do with your life, and you felt a little out—I felt a little out of place. I liked the work, but I didn't, you know, it was just—it wasn't—I wasn't ready for it. I decided I was going to—L.A. Law was on TV. I don't know how I'm going down these roads, but L.A. Law was on TV. I decided I'd be a lawyer. You know, that seemed pretty cool, so I went to what was then Malaspina College in Nanaimo. My parents said, 'You can come and live in the basement, but it's on you. You find the tuition. How you get there, whatever, you can live downstairs.' So, I did that, and I made it, about a year through that. I had put my—sorry, when you stopped working in the IBEW, you could put your card into sort of abeyance, like honorary withdrawal, so that it was there if you ever wanted to go back and do electrical work again. Luckily, I hadn't been away a long enough. My apprenticeship was still there. I got a call in the summer after the first year of college. Do I want to go do, construction electrical, not shipyard, but construction up in Campbell River. I took my little Volkswagen Beetle and drove every day up to Campbell River and worked in the pulp mill.

RM [00:04:49] That's a long commute.

LC [00:04:49] Yeah. Back then, no—

RM [00:04:51] No Island Highway.

LC [00:04:52] That's right, the coast, so three hours each way. You know, you'd leave at four in the morning to get there, and you'd get home at 8:00 or 9:00 at night. I couldn't afford to stay up there, so I did that. My first paycheck with living out allowance, (so, this is about 1986, '87)—

RM [00:05:07] Oh yeah, the living out allowance.

LC [00:05:10] My living allowance is seven days a week, tax free. My first paycheck was over two grand for two weeks as a fourth term apprentice halfway through. I did the math, you know, like, trade math: six more years of school and articling and student loans or this. I said—now a switch flipped—I like this. I like the folks. I'm a little bit older. I understand a bit more. I'm interested in how the systems work. I'm going to be really good at this. Like I'm going to dedicate myself to this. And I really like the money.' So, law gone, and I never looked back. I went all the way through it. I won't bore you with the details, but I worked for

lots of contractors, which—the beauty of the union environment is you're indentured as an apprentice to the union apprenticeship system, not a particular contractor. So, when you're laid off, you go on the books, you get dispatched to another one. Your apprenticeship continues. Fantastic. I didn't even know at the time how fantastic that was compared to hoping another employer picks you up. If you weren't in the union environment, and you transferred your apprenticeship bullet. Fast forward through it. I worked for commercial, industrial, all of these things, and I got my ticket in 1989, as top of the class. I've got this pair of faux golden pliers hanging on my wall still for top of the class in B.C., and I was quite proud of that. I had dedicated myself to trade school. I wanted to really know it and learn it. If you're going to do it, do it. Then I started working in the pulp mills, not for the mills, but for a contractor called FMI, which sounded really fancy. It was Frank and Mike Installations. They were pretty big at the time, over 100 workers at one time in Crofton.

RM [00:06:53] It's all on Vancouver Island?

LC [00:06:54] This all on Vancouver Island. I was back living in Nanaimo, and I got married around then, married in '88, first marriage. I was working in the mills, making good money. Bought a house, in '89 or '90, when you could buy a house for \$110,000. Brand new. You know, this is a really important moment in my life. I went into the Royal Bank of what was then called Northbrook Mall with my wife, sat down and said, 'Before we go looking for a house, I'd like to know what I can afford for a mortgage. What you'll provide.' I'd always been at the Royal Bank, so I just carried on, and the woman loans officer said, 'What do you do for a living?' I said, 'I'm currently unemployed, but I work regularly, and I have T4s fours and my paychecks. I'm an electrician.' She said, 'Are you a journey person?' She said this. 'Are you a journey person?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'Do you have proof of that?' I said, 'Yeah, I've got my shiny new wallet card with my red inter-provincial red seal,' and I was very proud of that. I'm probably more proud than she expected I would be. She photocopied it, came out and said, 'You can have \$100,000.' I was gobsmacked.

RM [00:08:05] Wow.

LC [00:08:06] This is the late 80s, and I—gobsmacked to the point where I said, 'Why?' (laughter) Picking my chin up. She said, 'Because you're a tradesperson, and in this town we know that you can make a living.'

RM [00:08:17] Isn't that great?

LC [00:08:19] The power of being a tradesperson, the power of having a lifelong skill. So, that left a huge impression on me. We went out and bought a house. I worked electrical for a while, and then in 1992, the union journey began. I'd been—I wasn't a shop steward, but I'd been in safety meetings and things like that at the mill. I saw the politics of the workforce when you've got a hundred workers and safety issues and all of these things. I was always interested in that—somehow I just was. A position for an assistant business manager came up in our local, Local 230 of the IBEW. I had been on the executive board. I had run for the executive board because I was interested in those things. Actually, I think my memory is a little soft here, but I don't think I actually made it, and then somebody—because there was three at-large positions and somebody couldn't do it—so, I was like, yeah, the fourth one, so I was in. I'd been in for a while, and I applied, and lo and behold, they hired me. Jimmy McAvoy hired me just as he was retiring, and a guy by the name of Jack Zettler was taking over the local. He'd been a long term assistant. I learned my first lesson the first day. We represented all sorts of electrical folks up and down Vancouver Island in construction—utilities, Victoria Utility Group and Cablevision and [unclear], all that

stuff. The very first day the new business manager, Zettler, walked in and said, 'Okay, Cronk,' he says, 'Sign this paper,' and I said, 'What am I signing?' He said, 'Don't worry about it. I've done all the work. Just sign the paper,' and I did. About two hours later, this—what seemed like about 20 foot tall lineman and his buddy, who was only 18 feet tall—were standing in my office with their finger at my forehead saying, 'What the hell did you do, kid?' And lo and behold, I had signed what the new business manager, didn't want to sign, but knew that he sort of had to sign, which was—there was a possible strike with that group in Victoria. I didn't know any of this, and I just blindly signed the document. It was the—agreeing to the essential service levels if there was a strike of what work can be done. He knew it had to be done. He didn't want to sign it, so he got the new kid to sign it, and the lineman was all—so, I just did what came naturally. I said to the big fellow in front of me. I said, 'I signed it and didn't even look at it. First day. Didn't know what I was doing. My apologies. I wouldn't have signed it if I'd read it, and where do we go from here.' He kinda put his hand on me, this big hand, and said, 'It's going to be okay.' (laughter) The lesson I learned was I would never, ever in my life sign another document that I didn't know what it said. Ever. I would never do anything because somebody else wanted me to if I didn't know what I was doing.

RM [00:11:04] Did you hold that against Zettler?

LC [00:11:08] There was a few things that Jack and I didn't agree on. He was—he'd been around a long time. Big old lineman himself. Good trade unionist. We—probably, just such a difference in age, such a difference in sort of the job culture that, yeah, I'm this new fella in there, and he's been around a million years, and he had his ways, and I have my ways. You know, we went, I think two years. I was there almost three years. Then I got an offer from the BC Building Trades, where I'd been sitting in meetings, the Island Highway agreement—remember that?

RM [00:11:43] Yes, absolutely, Glen Clark.

LC [00:11:45] Had been negotiated with the unions. Zettler was on holidays, and I became the ipso facto rep from our local to go to the meetings. I found out a bunch of stuff was going on that I didn't know wasn't going on. I'm like, 'Oh my God, how am I going to deal with this?' I had to deliver some news to some of our members that didn't like it about that deal and stuff.

RM [00:12:05] I thought it was a really good deal.

LC [00:12:07] It was a really good deal, but at the time, it wasn't very popular with the union that had never backed up once, made any compromises in a million years.

RM [00:12:14] What was the compromise? Did you have "no strike?"

LC [00:12:16] The compromise was you didn't get the same rates and conditions, but you got all the highway work that you wouldn't normally get.

RM [00:12:20] Oh, because they lowered the rates so it would apply to everybody.

LC [00:12:23] Yeah, and honestly, Rod, great deal because you got work that had been going nonunion under the rigged labour code rules of the Socreds. Prairie Road Builders and others were coming into the province and doing all this work. There wasn't a lot of electrical, but the street lighting and the intersection, you know, all of the electronics for the

lights, all that. We'd never taken a concession in a collective agreement that anybody could remember, and all of a sudden you're doing this great deal, which helped other trades a lot more.

RM [00:12:51] Absolutely.

LC [00:12:52] The road building trades, like the teamster, the ops, labour, and our folks at the day, like the general consensus was, 'Why are we giving anything up?' I think, honestly, the mentality of the day was if they didn't do the work, that's fine, but they weren't going to do it any cheaper because they had work. I had to deliver some pretty tough news. Well, Zettler was on holidays, and I had found out, so I was delivering his bad news. What he had told folks at the meetings we had signed and what was on the paper, I dare say. Jack is no longer with us. You know, I love Jack, but not to tell ill of the dead, but, you know, I had to deliver a tough message to some folks and take the shit in the meetings, to tell you the truth. I wasn't too happy about that, and it's not the way I would have done business. So, we had a gulf between us on some of those issues. Not to take anything away from the good work that he did, but we just had a different way of doing business. And, lo and behold, those meetings, the Building Trades was a involved in, a guy by the name of Len Worden was the president. Len picked up the phone to me and said, 'We're going to have an opening at the Vancouver Island Building Trades. Are you interested?' You had to be the secretary-treasurer. It was a full time rep back then for the BC Building Trades, like the secretary-treasurers of the regional district building trades were. I was elected secretary-treasurer and became a rep of the BC Building Trades and left the local. Then all of a sudden within—a long answer to the first question, eh—and then all of a sudden, within about six months—

RM [00:14:27] I'm gonna stop you there before—we know what's coming. You took to union work, eh?

LC [00:14:33] I did.

RM [00:14:34] What attracted you to it?

LC [00:14:36] Well, let me be dead honest. Like I said, I started at McDonald's, and that wasn't union work. I liked it, and I liked the people, and I liked the systems. I took to union work because I had an offer to do it, and when I got there, I liked the money. I liked—

RM [00:14:49] I meant the bureauc— you know—

LC [00:14:51] I met people—oh, you mean the union representation?

RM [00:14:53] Yes. Well, no, that was a—you started to do a good answer. I mean you could do both.

LC [00:14:57] Yeah. Well, like most of the building trades folks, you had somebody in your family that was in the union, or you were really lucky to get in, otherwise, back in the day. It's different today. Here's what I'm going to say to you, and I mean this. There's not a lot of difference between a union and a nonunion worker other than the union card in your pocket when you start out there. Then you realize the good things, if you're paying attention, and you become, you know, dedicated to union work and improving the cause for union workers because, you see, it's life altering. The wages, the safety, the conditions. That's not to say I didn't enjoy the people and the structures in some of the nonunion, but

the pay was crap, and the safety wasn't the same. So, you know, it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure that part out. I was—I don't know where exactly this happened, but I've been enamored by the power of the group, not the individual. Like the individuals have to pull their weight. I'm a big proponent of that. That wasn't always popular in some of the rooms. Like we shouldn't be depending on the group to carry us, but the power of the group is incredibly powerful, and I saw that in the local union. I mean, that's what unions are. You're more powerful in a group, even if you're the best electrician in the world. If there's a thousand of you, and they can't do the work without all of you, you got better negotiating skills. I had—it wasn't hard to figure that out, and when I went to the Building Trades, I went, 'Holy crap.' Now all the unions have joined together and said, 'We're all working on this project, or else, with all of our workforce, look at that power.' Look at that power when they go to government and say, 'We need this change, or we need that change.' I started to figure that stuff out. I've always been enamored by the power of the group—full stop.

RM [00:16:42] Just like rowing, the eights.

LC [00:16:44] I suppose it is, and it's kind of funny because I was—I boxed on and off for 30 years.

RM [00:16:49] Oh, I was going to ask you about that.

LC [00:16:50] Amateur boxer—and that's not the power of the group. Not to say the trainer and all those folks that help you aren't really important, but you're on your own when you're in there. The union movement, the whole power is standing together, and if they can't separate you, you have considerable power. If you use your head and have a good strategy. That's what happened with the building trades. So, they had this thing back in the day, Rod, and we could spend a week on this, so I'll really distill this one down. But long before my time, the Building Trades have put a condition in all of the building trade collective agreements. So, all the craft unions in the building trades in B.C. in the Council all had the same provision in their collective agreement. They could refuse to send their members to that job if it wasn't 100 percent other union Building Trades workers on the job around them.

RM [00:17:39] The nonaffiliation clause.

LC [00:17:40] It was the nonaffiliation clause. What had happened was, and this is ironic because I had worked in Port Alberni in the pulp mill for multiple contractors, I had a sweet spot for Port Alberni. My folks grew up there. Here we are in this place where I made a lot of money and had some very good fortunes, and the mill had decided to bring—and they're doing the expansion to work on new, fancier paper and stuff like that, that they would produce—the whole new buildings, that they were going to bring in a nonunion glazier (glass company) to put in the office building structure, ironically, not the mill itself, that would look after this new area. The Building Trades went goofy, for good cause, like, they're going to try and break us, if you will. You need to know the backstory. The very brief back story is as government had changed in British Columbia, and rules had changed in British Columbia, and it was harder to organize, and some unions hadn't realized they had to keep organizing. They had smaller groups of workers than they once had. They—used to be this affiliation clause held in all of construction, wherever there's a Building Trades contractor, it was 100 percent union, or they weren't going to be there. This had been changing in the commercial and multi-residential industry because there wasn't enough general contractors that were union that would win the bid. The subcontractors,

the other trades were like, well, if we don't work for the nonunion general, we don't. And these were—

RM [00:19:06] The nonunion sector had really been making inroads.

LC [00:19:09] Right. So, if you ask the Carpenters who represented the union generals at the time, they'd say, 'The sub trade building trade unions are all cheating on us by working for the nonunion general contractor.' If you ask, the sub trade electrical, plumbing, etc., they'd say, 'Well, the carpenters got their head in the sand because their contractor's not winning the bid. So, we now have to walk away.' So, there was this weird, unfortunate— they didn't have the market share anymore. The rules had changed for a whole bunch of reasons that we can't distill all of those this morning. This affiliation clause had been chipped away at, but it was still 100 percent rock solid, never been chipped at in the industrial. Port Alberni is where it got chipped up. I'm the brand new Building Trades. I'm really interested in putting our cause forward, explaining to the public who we are and why we're important, and getting the solidarity of all the unions. Getting more unions in because they weren't all in. All this grandiose stuff that this young kid wants to do and along comes this dispute. I won't mention the name of the fellow. Not because I have any dislike for him. He's probably not around anymore (I don't know) but because it was a bit of a cheeky thing he did to me, so I'll just leave his name out. A rep up in Port Alberni for one of the affiliates called me up and said, 'We're walking off the job on the affiliation clause because they brought in a nonunion glazier. You're the Building Trades rep for the island. We need you up here.' I said, 'Damn straight. I'll be up there. I believe in solidarity.' So, up I go. I understood the clause because I'd come through the system. I'd been a rep. I have negotiated agreements. I'd, you know, I'd done grievances and arbitration. That was nice to have that base. I go up, we walk on the job, and he pushes me forward and said, 'This guy is here to talk to you all.' (laughter)

RM [00:20:47] Right.

LC [00:20:48] And I go, oh yeah okay. He is an older fella. He didn't want the hassle, I guess. I explained it to everybody, and we walked off the job. The glazier nonunion workers walked off the job that day, and one of them said to me, 'We understand it. Like, we got no choice. I got to go to work. We know what you're doing. Like we get what you're trying to hold on to here.' Off we went, and we ended up in a seven month labour dispute that I ended up, ipso facto, (I had no idea that was coming) running it because I was an agent of the BC Building Trades and elected secretary-treasurer of the Vancouver Island Building Trades. There I was making speeches and trying to so—

RM [00:21:24] It was a wild time.

LC [00:21:26] It was a wild time. There was over 100 arrested. It's still the largest labour dispute, if you boil it right down in B.C.'s history. I did it the way I thought—

RM [00:21:36] How did it become so large?

LC [00:21:37] Well, I think because we—at the time, we were like we were on the CBC national just about every night. It was it was wild. I think because, like, in all honesty, we were pretty flamboyant in our stance. Again, I had this philosophy, if we're going to do it— we had this meeting in Nanaimo in the Carpenters, the basement of the Carpenters Hall. Basically, I said, 'What do you guys want to do? All guys again. They said, 'Well, we don't want to give up the affiliation clause in industrial. That's the thin edge of the wedge.' One

of the guys said, I'd rather go out in a blaze of glory' than, you know, just the fire goes out in the night. I said, 'Well, if we're going to do it, let's do it.' So, me—like old school stuff. No internet. I think phones were those big gray things with the black rubber. (laughter) It could be a, you know, anyway—and nobody really had them. A couple of reps maybe. I saw another buddy of mine, and we got MacMillan Bloedel, Unfair to Labour signs printed like a thousand of them. We tied strings on them all night long watching Hoffa, (the movie had just come out) to get revved up in my living room in Nanaimo. We drove up that morning, and we looked for anything we could do to block the construction gate, because for those that don't know, in pulp mills, there had been a long standing labour board provision. If the mill set up a separate entrance just for construction, than the main entrance for their employees, and if they didn't what they called dirty those entrances, if they didn't let either side use it, if they kept them clean, then if there was a labour dispute at one or the other, you couldn't shut down the other one. It was an illegal labour dispute. So, there's this construction gate. We found more people showed up than I thought. I didn't really know what to expect. I just knew that we were going to go big or go home. I wasn't gonna lose this on my first watch. Wasn't really what I wanted to do, but if I was going to do it, man, I was going all in. We showed up. We found an old telephone pole in the woods because it was kind of wooded around the area. We found an old pickup truck, like an old, rounded roof Chevy (for the C bodies). We found a bunch of stuff, and we put it all in front of that gate, like hundreds and hundreds of us. We picked up the pole. We dragged an entire truck and put it there. Some friends of ours in the labour movement showed up with a dump truck and put about 90 yards of soil in front of it. (laughter) Next thing you know—

RM [00:23:59] This is old school.

LC [00:24:00] Next thing you know. Yeah, we're standing there, and the cops come down, and they just left, and we all cheered. Then more people showed up because we were winning. All of a sudden we have 1,500 people on that corner every day. We had a—fast forward a couple months, we had a cooking camp. We'd feed hundreds of people every day. We, unions in the day, (and I won't name folks, but I'm sure they're safe from it now) but unions of all stripes came and helped us. I never saw that coming. I'd never been part of anything like that. Back in the BC Tel [B.C. Telephone Company] days and that was unionized. They showed up, and I probably shouldn't say this, but I'll say it anyway. They cut the telephone line to the inside for the mill management to be able to make calls so that—make it tough for them. We had a nonunion baker showed up and gave us bread and said, 'I gotta live in this town and you folks have been good to me.' We had—

RM [00:24:51] That's right—a union town.

LC [00:24:52] Unbelievable. I got summoned to the Chamber of Commerce, and I was happy about that because I thought union people should be in these rooms. I just felt that way anyway. I went in and explained why it would be a good deal for the mill. Instead of breaking—like we'd built it, we'd maintained it. We'd, you know, how about you sign a multi-year deal with us to maintain it, and we can talk about terms and conditions rather than trying this stuff. I don't know if the Chamber of Commerce really thought that was— they didn't care what I thought, but they brought me in to talk, and I had a plan, and so it was really interesting. We ended up with the leader of the Communist Party from Cuba dropping by. (laughter)

RM [00:25:33] Not Fidel Castro.

LC [00:25:35] No. It was part of their political group. We had all sorts of dignitaries. I'm just like, 'What!' We had MLAs. We had—[Ken] Georgetti came over as the [BC] Fed president and spoke. I'm like, 'Wow, this is turning into something, and it built, and it built, and it built. Eventually, they cleared it all out. Then our folks would start to get arrested. No violence. Just sit there. We had to keep this thing going. I made a deal. I had—I've always believed in having strong relationships with folks across all manner of—they might not be in the same camp as you but get to know them. I got to know the representatives of the two locals in the mill. Really good relationship with them.

RM [00:26:20] That was the CPU [Canadian Paperworkers' Union] mill or —

LC [00:26:21] CEP [Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union].

RM [00:26:23] Yeah.

LC [00:26:24] They agreed—how about this? They had provincial bargaining that—the Labour Board had played with them too, so that they couldn't all bargain together, and they went local by local by local. They were further down the list. Their bargaining was coming up and they made a deal. We made a deal through our friendship and support that this mill would go first in their provincial bargaining while we were out here on this dispute, getting arrested every day. They argued in bargaining that it could only be Building Trades that could do construction in the mill. So, they fought for us. I made a handshake deal with big Dougie Lesire (he was a giant guy, like six, seven or something) that whatever they got, we would honour. This is important because we're now into the wintertime. We start in the summer, and we're into the winter. We're almost seven months in, and they got to the end of bargaining, and he was prepared—I'm going to tell tales out of school here, but so what, it's the truth—he was prepared to do whatever they had to do because the rest of the locals in the CEP backed the local that was on strike with funding and strike pay help. They were on strike. They were striking, and they had a myriad of their own issues, but they wanted to put this clause in so that it was all Building Trades because they understood that if we're gone, they're next. Right. Anyway, Big Dougie, said to me one day at their union hall where I would show up just about every morning after I'd visit the police station to try and make sure we didn't have any problems with them, RCMP station. He had tears in his eyes. You never see a mountain with a man like that with tears in his eyes. Why would he ever be crying about like be afraid of? And he said, 'I've got to sign the deal.' I said, 'What do you mean, Doug?' He said, 'Your issue is the last issue.' I said, 'I know we've talked about that many times, and I can't tell you how much we appreciate it, and it's good for you, too.' He said, 'They're going to pull our funding.' He said, 'I can't control this.' The other part of the CEP—

RM [00:28:16] The CEP was going to pull their funding and not back them?

LC [00:28:21] That's right. They said we got to sign the deal for us at our sort of higher powers in the province.

RM [00:28:27] Boy.

LC [00:28:27] And he was crying.

RM [00:28:28] Yeah. That's tough.

LC [00:28:31] I said, 'You got to do what you got to do man for your people—like you got to do it.' So, he did it. This is an interesting moment in my life because I had made a deal with Doug. Now, I'd been preaching we will never lose in this tent and on these rallies. I'd been—I was up there every freaking day of the—for seven months. Every day. Seven days a week. I mean, it was my baby now, and I was going to deliver because we needed to hold this line. I went down and explained that the CEP had signed a deal. They put a clause in that said anybody can work in the mill, but they have to be paid the Building Trades rates and a few other sundry pieces, and they had to be affiliated to something or other. It wasn't what we necessarily wanted, and nobody felt worse than Doug. I said, 'We're going back to work.' I got a call from my boss, Len Worden, saying, 'We're holding the line.' I said, 'You want to hold the bleeping line. You come tell the folks because I made a promise to a trade unionist that fought for us and went on strike for us.' There was a flurry of behind the scenes activity with Building Trades heads of unions. This is really interesting. I don't think I've ever said this out loud before, so hello labour world. A little bird—because I had a lot of information and people that I had relationships with, they tell me everything that was going on in that town—came to me and said, 'You need to go down to the quay.' I said, 'What do you mean, the key? The quay, like a parking lot. Like a quay—Q-U-A-Y. Quay along the waterfront, not far from there. I said, 'Okay. Why?' He said, 'Because the IWA [International Woodworkers of America] has got a crew ready to go to work if you don't.

RM [00:30:21] Wow.

LC [00:30:21] They'd supported us, but they never overtly said, 'We're with you.' They were there on the rallies. Don't get me wrong, I got tons of time for the IWA folks that were there, but at a leadership level, somebody apparently made a decision that they would. There was kind of a long rivalry before my time about who should be doing that work, anyway.

RM [00:30:39] That goes way back.

LC [00:30:40] Sawmills, and all that kinda—

RM [00:30:42] Absolutely.

LC [00:30:42] We had the pulp mills. They had the sawmills. So long, long story short, I couldn't make it down there because there was all sorts of other things going on. I bypassed some other things where they brought security in and on purpose and pushed into our crowd, and our guys fought back. Then there was an injunction to move us down the road; there's all this stuff went on. Some guy threw transmission oil and bags all over the place. Looked like blood. On TV, I thought we killed somebody. I went down and smelled the transmission fluid and went aww Jesus, we've been set up. Anyway, that's all before this. I sent one of my sort of lieutenants down because I had other things going on, pretty important things that day. He said, 'Yeah, there's a whole crew down there with their tools. So, I relayed that to other Building Trades heads of unions, and we ended up honouring our deal and going back to work.

RM [00:31:33] I'm confused.

LC [00:31:34] Yeah, sure.

RM [00:31:35] So, this all started over the glaziers doing, you know, a nonunion glazier's crew.

LC [00:31:40] That's right.

RM [00:31:41] How did the IWA get involved?

LC [00:31:42] So, basically the Coles Notes is we pulled our troops out of there; we pulled all the trades out because of that.

RM [00:31:51] Right.

LC [00:31:51] The mill went, and this was a setup from MacBlo. Really. The mill said (they set us up to do that because they knew we would) they said okay, now we cancel all your contracts, and retender everything, and they brought in a company called TNL to do the whole works.

RM [00:32:03] So, the nonunion glaziers are still going into work?

LC [00:32:05] Yeah. What I truly believe—well, nobody went into work for a while because we blocked that gate.

RM [00:32:09] Of course, but eventually.

LC [00:32:09] Retendered everything and TNL got all of the work. I truly believe that was a setup with MacBlo and TNL to drive that wedge to get them in. They couldn't get the rest of us out without canceling the contracts. We sort of cut our own throat legally. They kicked us out. They brought TNL in, and the war was on. We were blocking the gate. They were bringing them in and school busses, all hiding under the windows. Our guys were yelling and screaming. I was trying to keep the peace.

RM [00:32:33] These are all nonunion people?

LC [00:32:34] Yeah. Basically, at the end of it, we got a great support from the in-house union. We got a pretty good clause, but not what we wanted. Then there was this internal battle that people didn't even know about between me and the head of the Building Trades on, hey they wouldn't have gone there without our partnership. We have to honour our partnership. At the end of the day, I guess, however that worked, I don't know, I was runnin' Port Alberni. Enough conversations were had that folks went back to work and finished. They set up the work that our folks ended up doing. Like they set aside a bunch of work for us, some that TNL was still doing.

RM [00:33:14] So, MacBlo did let you guys, when you called it off, they let you in to do some work—

LC [00:33:18] Some of the work.

RM [00:33:19] But the nonaffiliation clause was dead.

LC [00:33:21] And they had to pay the rates of the Building Trades to any of those other workers and all that stuff for time immemorial.

RM [00:33:25] The IWA, what would work were they going to do? How did they get involved?

LC [00:33:29] Well, if we wouldn't go back, they were apparently going to go in. This was my information at the time.

RM [00:33:34] Who was there? Was it Haggard then?

LC [00:33:35] Haggard.

RM [00:33:35] Yeah. Haggard.

LC [00:33:39] So, we went back in. Fast forward to the end of this saga. The next Building Trades convention was coming up, and I had several of the heads of the Building Trade unions come to see me, and say, "We want you to run for the presidency of the Building Trades." Now, looking back, Rod, too early, too soon. Didn't know enough. Wanted to change the world. Figured I could, didn't think there was any doubt about that. Put my name. I thought about it, talked to my wife, talked to my family. Talked to my dad, talked to McAvoy, who are all retired now. They said, 'Do it kid'. So, I went for it. Worden fired me the day I told him that I was going to run, which was interesting. We got to the convention at the old Ops Hall— still there. Back then there was more blood and smoke on the walls than there is today. They have a proportional vote in the Building Trades. We made our speeches. We did all our stuff.

RM [00:34:36] Worden was running again?

LC [00:34:37] Worden was running again, and I was running against him. We knew it would be a tight thing. Everybody would have these sort of little parties the night before and invite people to try and sway—all that stuff that goes on in politics and union politics. We got to the floor, and again, the Coles Notes is: proportional voting, so when you voted, you voted your membership size. We lost by one tenth of one percent of the membership of the Building Trades.

RM [00:35:04] Wow.

LC [00:35:05] Best thing that ever happened to me because if I had gone in thinking that I could—there was big rifts and some trades were out, and I was gonna—you know, we built solidarity through Port Alberni, and I think they saw me as the uniter because of the circumstance. I just figured I could figure it all out. I don't think I could of looking back. I don't think I had that ability, and I think all those structural problems would have weighed on me, like they weighed on Worden. I may have done things differently than him. Maybe it would have been good, but looking back man, I was greener than Kermit the Frog.

RM [00:35:41] What year was this?

LC [00:35:43] I think it was '97. A few months later, they had a big coming together of the executive, the Building Trades, and said—you know, part of my thing was there's a big split between the trades and a bunch are out. We've got to change leadership. Some people wouldn't show up because of who was at the front of the room, you know. Time for change, bring it together. Solidarity, power of the group—all that stuff that I had learned to love and believe in. I didn't win. He did. Fair and square—as fair and square as it can be, and, several months later, they revamped the entire structure. Their entire constitution.

Made the president not a full time officer and hired an executive director, and they paid him out and off he went. Out of all of that mayhem came what is still today the new version of the Building Trades, which then enabled folks to come back because they won't polarize over a president that half of them said, 'You're only looking after those trades or these trades.' The executive director worked for the executive and could be hired and fired and did what (if we ever talk about the Fed here) what I believed in my whole career and still do, which is put a circle around the things in these umbrella organizations that you agree on—not the stuff you want to fight about—and use your power of the group to get it done. That's what that new structure allowed them to do. Set the politics aside. Executive Director now, Brynn Bourke, does the work that they all agree needs to be done, not the stuff they don't like each other about, which every organization has, and that solved that problem. So, I probably wouldn't have lasted long, even if I was doing a great job. (laughter) That's, you know, the longest answer to a first question ever, but that's how I that's how I really got into the labour movement.

RM [00:37:39] I was doing my book *On the Line*, I mean, I wasn't even going to have that in the book because I didn't know about it. Right? Finally, I started reading about it, I said, 'Holy shit, this is unbelievable.'

LC [00:37:50] It's still the biggest labour dispute in B.C.'s history, I believe.

RM [00:37:53] Well, I had talked to [Bill] Zander about it and he got arrested, you know. It was it was funny, you know. He was—had to wear the ankle bracelet, but they'd run out of ankle bracelets. Right. So, he went on his own word. He said, 'Okay, I'll stay home for 14 days or whatever, 30 days. He said, 'Yeah, I got a lot of gardening done.'

LC [00:38:12] You did. A lot of people got that. There was one—so, one quick story. There was a guy who had a very high pitched voice, and his nickname was Squeaky. He was a very quiet guy. He was with the UA, [United Association of Journeymen & Apprentices of the Plumbing & Pipefitting Industry of the US & Canada] the pipefitters. He got arrested. When he got arrested, and he went before the judge—some people got—if you've been arrested a couple of times, they would give you the bracelet, or some people went into Brannen Lake [correctional centre] for a week or two weeks instead of the bracelet, in Nanaimo. Svend Robinson came out and stood with our folks when they went to jail that day. I had a lot of respect for him for that. In the pouring rain. No cameras, no media. Just 'I believe in what you guys did.' Always have a lot of respect for him for that. He was an MP then. A little side story.

LC [00:38:59] Anyway, Squeaky got arrested, and they were at court in Nanaimo. They did a lot in Port Alberni; They did some in Nanaimo because there were so many that were arrested. He refused to sign the waiver that everybody had to sign to say, 'I will never do this again. I'll never go back.' Whatever. He—I don't remember, Rod, how long, but it became such an issue. They kept him in jail because he wouldn't sign it. This quiet guy, and he did it quietly, but it spoke huge volume. 'I'm not signing it.' They kept him in jail. It was over a month, and now hundreds of people are showing up at the courthouse. 'Yay, Squeaky' and 'MacBlo is unfair to labour.' Eventually they, to my knowledge, they let him out without signing it because it was causing too much problem. (laughter) There you go. The things that happen.

RM [00:39:44] And you didn't get arrested?

LC [00:39:45] I did not, because—.

RM [00:39:46] Was that on purpose?

LC [00:39:47] Because our lawyer said to me, 'If you get arrested, the Building Trades is going to pay a lot of money if they're sued. So you cannot get arrested.' So I didn't get arrested. I kind of wish I did. I really do actually wish I did because I felt bad that here's folks voluntarily, as they would say to you, 'I have made an individual voluntary decision to get arrested,' and I couldn't do it. I felt bad about that, but that was my job, and I was going to do my job and do it well.

LC [00:40:13] Our lawyer at one point in time said—now you got to go back into the flavour of the day. These were all men primarily, and it was a different chauvinistic time, even not that long ago, but it was. Remember, we packed the CEP hall, and the lawyers came up from—we had one for the Building Trades, and then some of the trades hired their own lawyer. So our lawyer—he was kind of a really good lawyer, but he wasn't like big speech guy and that—there was big speeches from other lawyers that were really keen on getting jobs be—representing because they can make great speeches. Somebody in the crowd asked our lawyer, what—should I put my house in my wife's name because I'm worried if I get arrested, there is this thing called criminal contempt, the second time you get arrested (which isn't criminal code, by the way, it's still less than federal but it sounds like it is and it scared people.) So, I remember our lawyer a very dry way, stood up and said, 'I am prevented on counseling people how to avoid penalty for breaking the law. However, in my view, the odds of losing your house to your wife are far greater than losing it to TNL.' (laughter) I looked to the crowd. It was pretty wired up and they just went 'Oh all right. Yeah, that makes sense.' (laughter). And that diffused everything.

RM [00:41:36] But if we look back on it, it was a defeat, right?

LC [00:41:39] It was—I don't ever look at it that way, and I'll never look at it that way. Did we not get the clause that we wanted? Did the mill manage to get, sort of nonunion or anti-union represented workforces in? Yeah, they drove a wedge. Did we end up at the Building Trades—I think was a two million dollar fine at the end of the day on a civil suit. True. But I firmly believe and I believe this to my core, that if we hadn't done that (and we did get a clause in there) that if we hadn't done that, we would have been trounced out of all of the industrial in the province. We caused such a problem. We were—we didn't go away lightly. Even if we had, we made it clear that we have to do this there and there and there. We'll do it even if we don't have any money left. We're going to fight you every single time. A hundred more arrested. I do believe, like if you look at the history, we continue to do the lion's share of and still do the industrial work in the province. I believe that's because they believed we would continue to cause them economic harm.

RM [00:42:43] So, this wasn't this watershed moment that, therefore, it was all over for you guys?

LC [00:42:47] No way.

RM [00:42:48] You basically held your own and you would think—.

LC [00:42:50] That legacy lives to this day. Yeah.

RM [00:42:51] That it's because of the stand you took.

LC [00:42:53] We served notice that we're not going quietly into the night.

RM [00:42:59] And there's mild mannered you leading this ferocious, illegal strike.

LC [00:43:00] True.

RM [00:43:03] You never saw that coming.

LC [00:43:04] I didn't see it coming, but I was fully prepared to do to the best of my like—look. Like in every walk of life, there were some folks that would throw nails on the ground. There were some folks that wanted to put sugar in gas tanks and ruin equipment. There's some stories that I won't tell you. Things that I heard that folks were prepared to do, and I did everything I could when I found out about those things to root them out. I had folks with armbands that were like our security that would pick up the nails. It would—you can't control everything in those difficult situations. My way of looking at it was, we've got a moment in time here. If they're doing this, it seemed to me, for their principle of breaking us, we're going to do everything we can to hang on as long as we can to not ever give up. The challenge for me was bringing people together, not breaking all the rules and the laws wantonly, but actually do our best to put the best face forward. You know, there's lots of folks that will say we lost. There's still lots of folks out there that understand that we didn't lose.

RM [00:44:09] You must look back on that—I mean, there was a real solidarity, esprit de corps. You see some of these people. Run into them again. You're all still nostalgic about it.

LC [00:44:17] There's a fellow that's been waiting for me to get through cancer treatments so that way I can go up to Nanaimo with two of the old timers and still meet with them and talk about it. Like lifelong friends. If I wasn't infected with the bug of the power of the group before that, like, cut me in half now, and you'll see power of the group written inside there.

RM [00:44:38] Sort of like old veterans getting together. Went through the war, eh?

LC [00:44:41] Kinda. Yeah. Nobody had ever been in—the Building Trades folks have been all through a lot of stuff, but we never been through anything like that. Not many of them left, probably.

RM [00:44:50] You know, I'm going to ask you because we touched on this before the interview started because I found it kind of interesting. It used to be controversial in the labour movement. There was this liaison program with the RCMP, and some people would say we don't want anything to do with the RCMP. Others thought it was good to liaise with the RCMP. You know, because the RCMP, we all know their record in past labour disputes.

LC [00:45:11] That's true.

RM [00:45:12] You know, why are you talking to the enemy? But you believed in the liaison program. You want to talk about that and the role that happened in Port Alberni.

LC [00:45:19] I was aware of the liaison program when I was, I—actually that would have been my first experience. Later I worked for the IBEW national office, and I had—I continued that relationship with them. I was approached by, and I didn't even know it

existed at the time. I was approached by an RCMP labour liaison officer who said, 'Look, you're running this thing, and I can provide you advice on how to stay out of trouble, what you can do, what you can't do, and tell you sort of how to negotiate your way through a relationship with the local RCMP detachment, if you're interested.' I said, 'Yeah, I'm interested. I'm searching for all the information.' Like honestly, Rod, I had reached out for more people and places and groups when you're running something that's that prominent. My view was, whoever you are, listen to you, and then make a decision whether you want to move forward. For example, side track here, I had a reach out from a very prominent person from the environmental movement, who had just finished up the Clayquot stuff that said, 'We will stand with you on that corner.' I had a long, long conversation and a lot of strategy discussions and thoughts and talks with our folks and said, 'We kindly decline your offer,' which may have been a very powerful thing to do, by the way, because at the end of the day, we don't want to be in a fight with you over shuttin' the mill down versus, you know. We were afraid of who we were getting tangled up with. That's the kind of thing it attracts when you have something of that magnitude. I thought the RCMP thing was a good idea, and literally, we were having people arrested every day. In the beginning RCMP showed up, I didn't know when or how. I didn't know if they were going to use force or not. They were probably worried about who our folks were, you know, all that stuff. What they might have on them, for weapons. Anything, right. All the old stereotypes. Turns out a few probably did, but not very many, you know. Fast forward with that knowledge from the liaison, I actually built a relationship with the RCMP detachment at Port Alberni, where most mornings I would go into the detachment. Everybody agreed: no phones, no cameras, no—it was electronically a different age anyway. I wouldn't say we're going to have ten arrested, so you better have enough people down there to do it. I would say, 'Well, it sounds like a nice day for a walk. (laughter) I might have a few guys walk by the gate today. I might have a few more than typical. I don't know. Could be.' The deal was, we didn't surprise them. They didn't use force on us.

RM [00:47:52] Yeah. No, surprises. Yeah.

LC [00:47:53] Honestly, they would arrest our folks passively, if you will. No violence. Take them, process them, and drive them back, and drop them off a block away. It worked for months until there was a kind of a set up of violence by some nefarious folks that you—

RM [00:48:12] You think they were agents provocateurs?

LC [00:48:15] Yeah, well there was security hired by the mill, and they walked in with paper, like they were in military dress. They're big, huge dudes. They walked in when I wasn't down at the line. I had a call to go up to the hall. I can't prove that they did that on purpose somehow, but—and they marched into a thousand people pushing and shoving. You know what happens.

RM [00:48:35] Yeah. People shove back.

LC [00:48:36] They'd been waiting for five months to get some pressure off of themselves for how tough this is. They pushed back, and some people were punched out. Now, I believe it was a set up, and they got what they wanted. We had an injunction to move us 1,500 metres down the road.

RM [00:48:50] So, that's exactly what happens.

LC [00:48:51] I'd already, by the way, negotiated a camp down the road just in case that happened. So, we moved down the road.

RM [00:48:57] But that was a tough one. You couldn't be out the gates.

LC [00:49:01] I was there when they—the day we had to move, make the decision. I already had a camp up the road that sort of the masses didn't know about, but the leadership did. We negotiated a piece of property across the intersection. You could see it from there. Nobody knew what our decision would be because the RCMP were coming down that day to move us. I was standing there on the line that morning having thought about this a lot. This is probably the takeaway moment from Port Alberni in terms of personal development. I've got 1,500 or so of my folks here, and they're itching for a fight. They want—they're still in the blaze of glory. We're six, five, six months in, and we've controlled that. We are the toast of the town in a way, in that we are fighting for the good wages and conditions, and we haven't gone over the line— pun intended. The RCMP are coming down that day, and we got to make a decision to move, and they'd been hyped by the media and hyped by everybody. Here's the moment. I had a lot of people, Rod, that were sayin', 'Today we fight.' And they wanted to, and I tell you, honest to God, if I had turned around and said, 'let's go,' they would have run over those cops, and people would have died. Both sides. I believe that. Police came out—and the only time in my life and I don't ever want to feel this again—came in the bus, and came out in the full riot gear, beatin' that mantra on their—

RM [00:50:26] I've seen it.

LC [00:50:26] That does something to you where you go 'oh oh.' That's an organized, weaponized into formation, beat in the force.

RM [00:50:35] Intimidation.

LC [00:50:36] Yeah. Now, they didn't come to the line. They stood off to the side, and then they came down, and police officer served the notice, and I— I had this all—once I made my decision, I had this all ready to go. I turned to our folks and said something to the effect of: we'll never surrender. We'll never fight. There's no point fighting the legal system here today. We've got a site where we have this still in our view. We ain't going anywhere. Let's march boys. And up the street we went cheering and yelling, and we'll never leave.

RM [00:51:09] Bet that was tough.

LC [00:51:10] I saved their lives.

RM [00:51:12] Yeah.

LC [00:51:12] My view, I was saving our folks lives. I don't—I intellectually believe that we might have had a grand old day. We might have felt real good about ourselves. We probably would have killed a couple of cops. We probably would've lost 5 or 6 of our own. I would be answering to their families, all of them. I didn't believe it would further our cause. I didn't believe it would further our cause.

RM [00:51:35] Was that the biggest decision you've ever had to make, do you think?

LC [00:51:37] It certainly was at the time. I've had to make equally big in terms of policy and outcomes for people, but not in terms of lives.

RM [00:51:36] Yeah, no. I hear you. Boy.

LC [00:51:48] I was 27.

RM [00:51:50] Yeah. I was going to ask how—I mean, how do you do that at 27?

LC [00:51:53] I had hair.

RM [00:51:54] It's like Amber [Hockin]. She was 27 when she went to work for the CLC. How does it—and people respected you.

LC [00:52:01] Yeah.

RM [00:52:02] I mean, the old timers didn't say, you know, this young whippersnapper, we want to fight.

LC [00:52:08] I think the veteran labour folks understood that, but I think the emotions of the day when you're there, you gotta be real careful of that because you unleash that, you can't go back in time.

RM [00:52:20] No. That's true. Absolutely. All right. Boy, that was great.

LC [00:52:21] That was an hour.

RM [00:52:25] We don't care about all the other stuff that happened to you. That was the big one.

LC [00:52:28] (laughter) Yeah, that was the big one.

RM [00:52:29] Kidding. (laughter) Okay, you ended up working for the IBEW again?

LC [00:52:34] What happened was Port Alberni ended. I did a short stint back with my local.

RM [00:52:39] You ran against Worden.

LC [00:52:40] I ran against Worden and lost. My local hired me to be an organizer for a while, so I did that. I loved that—talking to workers. I actually went—I don't know—just tell the story, right. I would actually go to the homes of the guys. Follow them home and try and talk to their partner because their partners are like, yeah, you do need to get the union collective agreement, [unclear] right? All sorts of interesting things we did back in the day. Anyway, I worked for the local for a bit, and then I went back on the tools, and I worked on the tools. Union contractors were always leery of me at that point, and I could feel that although nobody ever said anything and I didn't get laid off quicker than anybody else. I started my own contracting company.

RM [00:53:20] Wow.

LC [00:53:21] I had Cronk Electric for a few years in Nanaimo. Signed to the local. I only ever had one employee. One member that worked for me, and I did the most of it myself.

RM [00:53:31] What was that like?

LC [00:53:33] It was awesome. Really hard to make money, but yeah, really awesome. What happened was—I did this for a couple of years, and then I decided that I was going to move from sort of small commercial and multi-residential wiring to do something where you didn't have to worry about whether they pay you at the end of the day. I would do—I was going to bid on a government job so that the money would flow. I came down to Victoria. I was in Nanaimo—Cronk Electric. Drove to Victoria to look at a new building, alterations they were going to do at UVic. I went to the local union hall now as a owner-operator of a company saying, 'Hey, Mike,' (the business manager) 'You need to give me a break on this on the agreement. Give me a break on that so I can bid this—out bid the nonunion, and then I can put a bunch of our folks to work.' You know what a contractor does, right? Argue your side of it. He said, 'I'm not going to talk to you about that.' He slid a piece of paper across the desk. I said, 'What the hell is that?' He said, 'You're going to read that, and you're going to do that.' I said, 'I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know what it is. I need to know within two days whether I'm going to bid on this job.' He said, 'You read that. You phone me tomorrow, then we'll talk. That's the deal.'

LC [00:54:42] I took it home. I read it, and it was a job opportunity in the government in the Ministry of Labour, Employment Standards because the government, the NDP government that had now come in, had introduced this. It wasn't an act yet. It was a policy called the Skills Development Fair Wage Policy that basically said X number of provincial dollars on any provincial construction projects (schools, hospitals, stuff like that, government office buildings) if it reaches a certain funding threshold, then this policy (which then became an act), applies, and it has to be folks from the Building Trades that get called to do the work. Nonunion contractors can work, but they have to hire from the Building Trades' hiring halls. There was a set wage for all of them, and every worker that did trades work had to have the appropriate trade ticket or be an apprentice. There was penalties. If you were caught twice cheating in a year, you were banned from bidding for two years in government jobs. They needed an officer in Nanaimo because they originally started with employment standards officers. Great human beings, excellent at their job, didn't know a damn thing about construction and they couldn't do the jurisdictional piece. I read it. I remember sitting with my wife at the time and looking, and she goes, 'Well, that's your life description, never mind job description. You need to apply.' I phoned Mike Kirby, the business manager, next day. I said, 'You son of a bitch. You gave me something I can't refuse.' I applied, and they hired me, and that was my next phase. I spent two years, and I became the policy adviser to the director of employment standards for the provincial team because I understood collective agreements. I understood jurisdiction. I understood pretty quickly the employment standard.

RM [00:56:22] You would have been a great hire.

LC [00:56:23] It was awesome. Then, a guy from the ICBA [Independent Contractors and Business Association] complained to a reporter who wrote a piece—it wasn't on the front of The Province, but on the second or third section—that said kind of basically 'Last Bastion of Communism: Glen Clark hires old buddy who ran the nonunion out of town to punish contractors for government funded construction.' I was pissed off.

RM [00:56:45] Was that Mike Smith.

LC [00:56:47] No, it was a woman whose name I don't remember. There's this whole exchange, if you—nobody ever will, nor should they—but if you Google in Hansard, you've got folks calling me Jimmy Hoffa. Dale Lovick, who was the labour minister, because they called for my firing, said he was hired on purpose. It was proven that they did the proper hiring procedures. There had never been a complaint about me. Lovick said, 'No, he's not Jimmy Hoffa, but this is McCarthyism.' That's all in Hansard. I was terrified, Rod, that I had brought shame and disgrace to the employment standards people who very quietly do a great job making sure workers have minimum standards because you're in that group. I actually drove down, and Patti Stockton was the Employment Standards director, and I met with her and said, 'I'll resign,' because the program was more important than me. She said, 'The last thing you'll do is resign because you're doing a really good job. And if you resign, you're saying you did something wrong and you didn't do something wrong. And that's a problem for us too.' So, I carried on—

RM [00:57:47] That's great.

LC [00:57:47] And I went up to the Employment Standards branch that day to pick up something over corner, McKenzie and Quadra. I got a standing ovation from about 50 people.

RM [00:57:56] Wow. Isn't that great.

LC [00:57:57] Broke my heart. Like, if I could cry—I don't cry very often—the tears were welling up. They felt that somebody was doing something for workers and was unjustly targeted by the media. Then a bunch of things were said in the legislature. So, I had a—you can't fight that because, like slander, because it's protected inside the house. Nobody would say that stuff outside the house. I had an offer from a lawyer to pro bono fight slander for the article, and I turned it down because I didn't want to bring any more attention to that.

RM [00:58:33] That's reprehensible. But, you carried on.

LC [00:58:37] Yeah. They dredged up Port Alberni. 'There was blood in the streets.' 'This guy had always hated, you know, nonunion companies.' 'Glen Clark's hired him to punish them.' It was bullshit, but it's politics.

RM [00:58:48] Well, you had hated nonunion companies.

LC [00:58:50] I actually don't hate the companies. What I despise is the companies that play games to try and make sure workers have lesser conditions.

RM [00:58:59] Undercut.

LC [00:58:59] Yeah.

RM [00:59:00] Yeah, exactly right. Okay, so you did that. You really enjoyed it. Were you effective, I guess obviously.

LC [00:59:05] I think so, yeah. I did that for several years, and I liked the employment standard side of it too. I understood, started to understand the government side of it and how all that worked. Then I got a call from the national IBEW office that said, 'Hey, young

man, the national rep in British Columbia is retiring, and we'd like you to be our national rep.' Which was unprecedented at my age. I was still pretty young. Sorry, I was 27 then, so I would have been 25 or 26 when I was in Port Alberni. Lo-and-behold they hired me to be the national rep, and I spent 18.5 years as the national rep. So now, joy of joys, my job is to look over all the locals in British Columbia, one in Alberta, and hold them to the constitution of the IBEW. Make sure they're living to all the rules, because they can do their own things in their local, subject to the overarching constitutional provisions, but to work with them. You're sort of part police officer, but you do it in a respectful way—form a relationship with the business manager and help them to succeed. You become an expert on all things for them to guide them. Whether it's lobbying, whether it's if they need help, if it's a small local with bargaining, which I'd done, or arbitrations, which I'd done. You also, if there were charges of officers inside the union with others, you oversaw the trials of that. It was the greatest job in the world because you could make it whatever you wanted it to be, and it was the power of the group again.

RM [01:00:32] Were you the heavy, though?

LC [01:00:35] What I did is fostered a relationship with the business managers to do everything I could. They understood they had to live to the rules overarching, and that I would be watching that.

RM [01:00:45] Because national reps in the past with the IBEW have not had a great, a savoury reputation.

LC [01:00:49] The running joke was, I'm here to help, and everybody goes 'aaah'. (laughter) In fact, I'll tell you a quick thing that describes how I looked at it in a second. I formed these relationships. I basically said to each business manager, I am here to work with you day and night. I will help you with lobbying. I'll help you with bargaining. I'll help you with solidarity between the locals. I'll do all these things, but you got to live to these rules. I will be like your best friend and colleague, but if you don't live to those rules, I'll be your worst enemy, and you won't even see me coming. That was the relationship I formed with them, and I had a couple of times (and I won't go into details) where some constitutional pieces weren't working properly. I had to say to business managers like, I'll change the locks on the door and trusteeship your local before you even know, like you're not going to get a courtesy call.

RM [01:01:35] So, you were prepared to do that?

LC [01:01:37] Fix that, and tomorrow we can work on all these other things holding hands.

RM [01:01:40] So, you were prepared to be the heavy?

LC [01:01:42] Yeah, but didn't want to.

RM [01:01:43] Right.

LC [01:01:44] But I was honest with them that I would be, and I never had a problem.

RM [01:01:47] You never put anyone under trusteeship?

LC [01:01:50] Nope.

RM [01:01:50] And you really liked that job?

LC [01:01:51] I loved that job. Right near the end, the last seven or eight years—with most unions in the B.C. Federation of Labour, the head of the union sits as an officer. Like the 14 largest unions of B.C., the heads of those unions sit at the officer table of the B.C. Fed. The IBEW and some of the other Building Trades, you've got multiple locals. You don't have like a B.C. division. They would just pick a business manager, rotate them as a Fed officer for different terms. The difficulty was they're so bloody busy in their own jobs, they never shared anything with the other business managers as much as they would have liked to because it just didn't work that way. They came to me, I don't know, five or six years before I became the Fed president and said, 'We'd like you to sit at the Fed for us because we believe that you will provide us what's going on, and you have the time and the ability to do that. We sit at regular meetings with you, and we believe you'll represent us there.' I begrudgingly, Rod, because I like I got other things going on. I don't need to be at this, whatever this is. I never really played around with that. I begrudgingly went there, and then I fell in love with it. It was the ultimate power of the group. I mean, the local is the power of the group for the workers. The group of locals is the power of work for the locals. The Building Trades is the affiliates together. Oh my God. Now we've got the entire labour movement heads bringing all their power to the Federation. This is the ultimate group power, if you can harness that. If you can get that solidarity, and if you can come up with a tangible plan on any given issue, you can change things. I was in love with it.

RM [01:03:29] Boy, I never heard the Fed described that way before.

LC [01:03:33] Oh my God. You know what the key to the Fed is in my view? One of the serious principles that you have to have to be an effective Fed president: you need to know you don't have one member. In my view, you don't have one member. It's the affiliates that sign up to want to join under your leadership together for the things—again, my lifelong belief in this is the things you can put a circle around that you agree on, not the things you don't. Go get them with your group power. Sometimes, going back in time, I saw Fed presidents—and I've seen this in other organizations in the labour movement—like Fed presidents that believe that the member of the Labourers [Labourers International Union] or the HEU [Hospital Employees' Union] or the BCGEU BC General Employees' Union] was their member somehow and they were—and they forgot that they're there to bring value to the affiliate. That's how I live my life as the Fed president.

RM [01:04:27] Well, because that's why they say the Fed president is powerless and he's only—any power he has is by persuasion.

LC [01:04:34] If you do it right, and you respect the affiliate, and you don't play in the politics of what they don't agree on—I mean, let's be honest, you've got to deal with some of those things with the group sometimes, but you have trust with those folks, and you bring them together. You got all sorts of power. Voluntary power.

RM [01:04:54] Did you see division at the Fed? Of course, you saw the division because there was division.

LC [01:04:57] Absolutely.

RM [01:04:58] So, how did you react to that?

LC [01:05:00] I was going do it different. I ran—

RM [01:05:03] You were there six years before you ran, right?

LC [01:05:04] Yeah.

RM [01:05:05] Do you want to just talk about what the Fed—

LC [01:05:07] Well, sure. I mean, I was an officer representing the IBEW, for five or six years before. Look, the Fed officers, you can appreciate it's the heads of the 14 largest unions. They have different constituencies of workers, and they have different views on lots of things. The most important things they have great solidarity on, but other things got in the way and would drive wedges. It's really critical that leadership of the Federation doesn't dabble in that witchcraft. You don't—I've got something I want to pass today, so if I play this side off against this side for their divisions, I can get the—it's short term fool's money.

RM [01:05:49] Was that what was going on?

LC [01:05:51] I had seen it years before, and I didn't like it—that kind of thing. My view was, if I was going to be the Fed president, I was going to respect whether you were the smallest of the 14 or the largest, you got equal voice and respect at that table. I would never, ever do the phone officers the night before to try and get what I wanted passed, passed.

RM [01:06:14] Was that what was happening?

LC [01:06:16] It felt like it. I don't know.

RM [01:06:17] Was the Fed dysfunctional?

LC [01:06:18] I was never the one that got the phone call. I assume, by the way the meetings went that some of those games have been played.

LC [01:06:25] I don't want to say any individuals because I don't have—honestly—I don't have any proof of any of that. All I know is, and I have great respect for all of those presidents, it's a tough frickin job. They all did a fabulous job as far as I'm concerned, in the way they do it. My point was, when I sat there as an officer it looked to me like calls had been made. It looked to me like people had predetermined outcomes. It looked to me—now, maybe it wasn't the Fed president. Maybe it was somebody from a union. All I knew is if I ever sat in that chair, I was going to bust my ass to make sure that I never did that. It didn't matter to me what our outcome was that day. If they had enough respect for me in the way I did the job, they were going to listen to my input. They were going to discuss with each other, hear what each other had to say, and come to an outcome, and I would carry that outcome out. Now I would give them a very strategic thought, view, my impression, my experience, my whatever. Then they would do with it, as they will. If they ever got to a point (and they never did, never even came close) where they came to something that I wasn't prepared to do, I would've stepped down. I wouldn't do something I couldn't do. We never got there. My thing was, don't play any politics of division. Find the things we have in common. For me, Rod, the day I walked in the door— employment standards, labour code. All that stuff.

RM [01:07:39] I'm going to stop you. all. I just want to go back just a bit before we get to you as Fed president. Did you support Amber in her bid for president?

LC [01:07:46] Oh yeah.

RM [01:07:46] You thought there needed to be a change?

LC [01:07:48] I was in the counting room. I was her scrutineer.

RM [01:07:51] Yeah, and it was very close.

LC [01:07:53] It was the worst half an hour in my life when I knew the answer before she did, and I had to walk onto the floor with the crew, and it was damn close. It was a handful. It's the only time in my life I couldn't look at love in my life in the eyes. I just—and she said the second I walked in that room, she knew.

RM [01:08:14] But that showed the division in the Fed. I mean, that was a divided federation.

LC [01:08:17] That was a unique time, too, because Jim had done a good job. He'd been there a long time. He had openly campaigned for Irene as secretary-treasurer, who had tenure and exposure, and a lot of respect from folks to be the next president. Amber—so you got to go back to Michelle Laurie before that. Look, I don't have bad things to say about Jim Sinclair, but I was on a political camp that said we want the Fed to be different. You've been here long enough, and I backed Michelle Laurie. I was the national IBEW rep then.

RM [01:08:51] Oh, I forgot about that.

LC [01:08:53] To run. Because I thought she—

RM [01:08:53] Amber ran against Irene.

LC [01:08:58] And I'll talk about why in a second, but that bring a different way of doing business, and she didn't make it. Then Jim decided that he was going to retire, whether he felt like it was going to be too big a battle or whether he just wanted to retire. I have no idea; those aren't discussions I ever had with him. He's got a right to make that decision, whatever it was. He was promoting Irene. We the collective, that same sort of group, we're searching for the next candidate, and it was Amber. She'd been the CLC [Canadian Labour Congress] regional director, well-respected as well. So, you have these two—it'll be the first woman. Two women—titans, if you will, in their own industry. Irene, coming out of being the Teachers' president. Amber, a long history that you talked to her yesterday, right? And all that stuff. They had at it, and they did their campaigns. I think, and I said this to Amber, 'it's amazing to me, monumentally amazing how close you came because you weren't the secretary-treasurer set up to be the president. You didn't get to sit with the officers in an elected officer position. You know, to get as close as you got is extraordinary.' Irene won by a handful, kind of like my Building Trades loss. She won by about the same percent. You know what? You'd have to ask Amber this question, but I think looking back, she would probably say what I said about the Building Trades. Maybe one of the better things that happened to her. Not that she wouldn't have done a fabulous job. Irene did her job, and then she decided to retire, and I decided to step into that void.

RM [01:10:31] Okay. And did—you weren't opposed were you? Did you get unanimous?

LC [01:10:36] Yeah.

RM [01:10:37] Why did you want to be president of the Fed?

LC [01:10:39] Well, Irene had made it public that she wasn't going to run after her second term. She had said to the Fed officers, 'I'm not going to run.'

RM [01:10:48] She was tired of the divisions.

LC [01:10:50] Could be. You'd have to ask her that, but it's a tough job, too. It takes a lot out of you. She'd been doing a long time because she was sec-treas. That's a long traveling world. I was used to traveling world. I travel all over North America for the IBEW, so I wasn't afraid of that by any stretch. I, honestly, until a couple of months before because she let it be known several months before, I was part of a group that was like, who do we get? Who do we get, who do we get? Then one day, driving in my union truck, I pulled over on the side of the road and said, 'That was a crazy idea you got Laird,' talking to myself. (laughter) 'Why don't you bring all the experience that you have because there just didn't seem to be anybody. Like nobody was putting a name forward. Step in. I sat there, and I thought about it, and then I phoned Amber and said, 'Here's what I'm thinking.' We talked about it a bit, and then I thought about it some more, and she was fully supportive. I pulled over in my truck another day or so later, and I said, 'If I'm going to do this, I'm going to phone every officer of the Federation today and tell them that I'm going to do it, and why I think I can do it.' If I don't have like, overwhelming support, then I won't do it because I'm not looking for a fight. I'm not looking for my name in lights or any of that bullshit. Right. I phoned and I got a hold of, I don't know, like 12 out of 14, and I had like ten 'hell yas' and four 'We got to go through the process of our organization, but you got my support. It was unanimous.

RM [01:12:21] That's got to be a pretty good feeling.

LC [01:12:24] I think so. It was. I understood the magnitude of what I was stepping into. It wasn't a time to go, 'Oh yeah!' (laughter) It was a time to go, I now have the opportunity to bring to bear what I hopefully can bring to bear, to have the greatest in British Columbia, group power for workers. How do you turn that down!

RM [01:12:48] What did you see as your goals?

LC [01:12:50] Okay, so I walked in the door. A Fed is a lot different animal—has to be a lot different animal depending on what you have for a government provincially.

RM [01:12:58] Yes.

LC [01:12:59] When it's a Socred government or a Liberal government or—and I lived through that stuff, from the Port Alberni, with my dad talking my ear to the being in the union movement during a bunch of the Liberal years. You're a different animal. Like you're not ever invited into anything. You don't have anybody on any provincial committees. You have to be a different animal. You have to fight in a different way. What we had was a brand new NDP government, just barely a year old. I looked at that and my view was that the Fed had to be a different animal. Part of the reason I ran was I. I wracked my brain to think of somebody who would agree to do it in the first place. They didn't already have a

job. That's the problem. The people are, I think, skilled to do it usually had a job. It had to be somebody that was prepared to say it's harder in a weird way when it's an NDP government than when it's a Liberal or a Socred government because you don't just march. It's not that simple, but you don't just march and yell at empty buildings and swear that they're doing everything wrong. You have to compromise. You have to find the deal. You have to bring the labour movement together and say, these are the things that we can achieve.

RM [01:14:09] Because they're not giving you a blank check.

LC [01:14:11] That's right. You need to bring your folks together because they all want something different, and they've been waiting 20 years. To me, that's like a crossword puzzle. That's the greatest crossword in history, and I had the opportunity to shepherd that process. I had a good relationship with government because part of what I did was political advocacy for the IBEW. I knew the premier. I knew most of the ministers before they were ever in government, and I had a strong relationship with them from the IBEW perspective. I wanted to bring to bear what I could bring to bear. I wanted to bring the folks together and cut out any bullshit and have them bring their solidarity together. Because if I could walk in the room with a minister or the premier, whether I had one other officer from the Fed with me or not, if they instinctively knew that I had them all with me, well, we can make change. You have to have hard meetings and say this is what we reasonably in our, you know, with the doors closed, we reasonably think we can achieve. We're going to shoot for this, and if we get this, that's pretty good. We had to have those discussions, and I thought I had the ability to do that. I've been working with local unions and the IBEW and all of national [unclear], and I thought I could bring some of that and bring credibility and bring like—my word is my bond. No one has ever said that I'm not trustworthy. I thought I could bring that. That was my goal. One really important thing. Bless the Fed staff. Amazing folks. Probably weren't too enamored with me because I walked in, and I'm going to dare to say (and I wasn't there before, so I don't know exactly) I was a different cat. I walked in and said, "I'm going to be overseeing all policy. I'm going to be overseeing and deciding what our policy initiatives and public persona is. If it's WCB stuff, I'm going to learn it, and you're going to help me learn it, and I'm going to have the final say on what we do. You know that letter I signed way back when? Never again. (laughter) The staff, as awesome as they were and all the things they already had going on, had to revamp and say to me, here's all the things we're doing. Then I dig in with them and say, but we're not going to do that anymore. We're going to do this and we're gonna do that. I remembered, and I said this to them, we're not serving the membership. We're not serving the Fed on what we want to do or serving the affiliates. I am going to be an officer-oriented president, and I'm going to bring them together, and we're going to decide what we do. We're going to have all of your input, and then we're going to make a decision, and then you're going to follow that up—and that's how this works. I probably pissed a lot of them off because they were used to doing their own really good policy work. Here comes this guy that they know but all of a sudden he wants to be hands on, on everything. When I was on a radio interview, I knew everything about it. I didn't go on the radio interviews just like give me the notes.

RM [01:17:00] Blathering away.

LC [01:17:01] Yeah. No bloody way. So, the Federation of Labour is this. We all know the structure, like it's all of the affiliates in that power. Then there's more affiliates. They don't sit at the officers. There's a broader meeting of the Executive Council with all of the other smaller affiliates and everything. They do all of this advocacy work on behalf of those affiliates, if we're paying attention. There's always been a cut and thrust, and I'm going to

go back to the elections. There's been a cut and thrust between—I'm going to hasty generalize here Rod, and somebody will be unhappy with me, but so what. We're tired. There's the social agenda, and there's the hardcore, what I would call meat and potatoes agenda of old, which is collective bargaining, employment standards, labour code, WCB, right?—the structural pieces. I come out of being a service rep and a national rep that dealt largely with those structural pieces. I knew collective bargaining, I knew arbitration, I knew labour code, I knew employment standards, I knew WCB. What I said to our folks and some somebody will watch this and say, 'That's an asshole thing to say.' Okay. (If I'm swearing too much, let me know.) I said—and somebody will take this out of context and maybe it's not good context, I don't know—but I said you need social license for social justice. That was my mantra behind the door. I said, we need social license for social justice inside our house. We should and need to, and it's super important. I need to learn more about the social justice causes because it wasn't my forte. I'm all over it, but if we're not doing the meat and potatoes first, I know what's going to happen. We're going to be back in those rooms. We won't be. The affiliates will be in those rooms where I used to be, saying we need to put somebody else in charge at the Fed because we need more meat and potatoes. If I'm being honest, that was the view for decades, on and off on any particular president I'm talking about, but too much social justice, not enough meat and potatoes issues. There's that cut and thrust. The Fed president has to balance that. They have to walk that tightrope. I walked in and said, I'm going to be hands on. I'm going to hear you. We're going to work together with the staff. We are going to concentrate on a plan of employment standards, labour code, WCB. We're going to build organizing strength for our—

RM [01:19:19] Minimum wage.

LC [01:19:20] Minimum wage, which is employment standards. We're going to want the labour code changes so that you can organize with card check. We're going to get WCB so that your—these blood charts of how long, you know, back in the day you're off before they say you go back to work whether you're healthy or not. Like we're taking all that on. When the affiliates and I'm going to talk to the officers, and we had a strategic meeting, and I laid out this problem. I said, 'You go, yeah, man.' They were all over it. Then I said, at the same time, we can do all the social justice issues that we're already doing, and maybe even some more because they're behind us. Because they—depending on what affiliate you are, without naming names of the affiliates, they need to be able to say to their members, we send X number, hundreds of thousands of dollars a year over here, what is it that we get out of that? I used to say to our folks, what's our value for money coefficient today with our affiliates? What are we bringing to the table? What's our value? What do they say to their members about when they have a constitutional convention, and somebody says, 'Why do we pay this per capita to the Fed? What do they ever do for us?' Do we have an answer for them? They're not our members. So, that's how—that was my whole philosophy of the Fed. I'm proud of what I think we accomplished, which is we have an NDP government. We're not going to get everything we want. Right? My view, but we're going to bust our ass. We're going to reintroduce more policy than we had before. We're going to make the public space for changes to employment standards, labour code, WCB. We're going to make the public space. We're going to educate all the MLAs. Used to circulate to all of them, and the ones that sat on Treasury Board, everybody knew what our issues were. We're going to meet with the relevant ministers. We're going to push like hell. We're not going to damage this government, but we're going to hold them to account for what we want. That was my philosophy on that. There was never a question, a niggler, a back room. I mean, I had—you been around long enough, you get input from everywhere. Nobody said we're not doing enough. Why are we doing all the social justice issues if what

they wanted was meat and potatoes, and we were doing the damn meat and potatoes. One of the hardest parts about it is that staff at the Fed is incredibly good and good at what they do. I'll give you, five sick days. That's a whole story in of itself. I could write a book just about that. At the end of the day, I knew as the Fed president we weren't going to get ten days, which we were arguing.

RM [01:21:36] Well, five days was unprecedented.

LC [01:21:38] Five days—

RM [01:21:39] People didn't realize that.

LC [01:21:40] So, what happens with—this is the perfect issue to describe this, but there's issues like this all the time. You create the public space; you create the policy. I was all over the policy so that I could really be the spokesperson and know it because I helped build it.

RM [01:21:57] Just so people know, this is arising out of COVID.

LC [01:22:01] That's right. Everything in this particular one had sort of—the stars had lined up. We had—remember the meat packing plants where people were going in sick. The premier had had displayed disgust, but that was the situation that was going on. People shouldn't have to go to work sick. We coined the phrase—if you go back in time before anybody else in North America, you shouldn't have to wake up in the morning—this is on purpose. You shouldn't have to wake up in the morning and decide between going to work sick and paying the bills. You know, what we coined that phrase from? Tales out of school. There was one day, partway through COVID where Amber had a scratchy throat. She said, 'I don't know, should I go to work?' I said, 'That's the phrase we need, because you're a real person and a real hard work, and you're making that decision.' We got to put that out there, and it caught fire. You had COVID. You had—the public health folks were saying that's a good idea. All of a sudden I got texts from, I won't name the MLAS saying, in the floor of the House, there's the opposition party grilling the government with your quotes. (laughter) I'm like, they said, this is the twilight zone instead of the duct. So, we had this beautiful time. In the meantime, we had—I and a combination of our folks had figured out after the first couple of years, you have to do a multifaceted thing to change legislation. You have to educate because as much as these MLAs, a lot of them came out of the labour movement or have social, progressive backgrounds, they don't know your particular issue. You have to do briefing notes. You have to have solid policy because they've got to fight for it on the floor in front of the public. Then you've got to make the public space, and we spent money and ran campaigns on that. Those relationships, the public space, you got to have all those things lined up to make something happen. We had that. Jonathan Sas and a researcher at the time (I hired a researcher because we needed policy research) we put together a ten page document on paid sick leave that did international, peer reviewed stuff. I remember a particular high up in government policy style person saying, this is like the go to manual on this in the world. They handed it out to people. You need to be that, you need to be that good, and our team was awesome, and we built this. We had the stars lined up. We had this perfect thing. We had our relationships with government. We've educated them. We had the public on side largely—and because when you really think about it, and I had to come around to this as a construction worker where it's a mark of strength to go to work sick, right? Because I poured concrete today, I had to be convinced in the beginning if I'm telling the truth. Then I was all in that it never

made sense to go to work sick and make everybody else sick. Like that's— you only do it because—

RM [01:24:43] Especially COVID.

LC [01:24:44] You need the money. COVID helped us make that argument.

RM [01:24:48] Yes.

LC [01:24:48] Acutely, and then more broadly. We brought all of that to bear, but the whole point I was making was the staff wanted and created. They do this on multiple issues, but this is the perfect one to exemplify it. They are deeply invested in the ten days now. I mean, deeply. I mean, they live and breathe it. When we got five they're pissed. They're depressed. They're angry. They want to tear the house down. The job of the Fed president is to know that's going to happen, to try and inoculate them that we're probably not going to get ten. Then, what do you say to them the next day? What I said to them was essentially you guys did the best job I've ever seen a labour group do ever in history, and I've been around since dirt was invented. We put the report together, we did the relationship, and the public space. We got five days of paid sick leave for every worker in this province. We've made a difference. It'll last forever or as long as it does, and it's in legislation. Hold your head high. Did we get that when Tommy Douglas was the opposition to the prime minister nationally and was making change? Did we get that under Glen Clark? Did we get that under Mike Harcourt? Did we get that under any other time? It's never happened in the history of the province of British Columbia, and you achieved it. Lift your damn head up.

RM [01:26:12] And it's never happened anywhere in Canada.

RM [01:26:13] Because, as my dad used to say, and they'd have to listen to these things. Here's the first one. Celebrate. Your victories are few and far between, but not for too long. Get back to work. (laughter) Put your toolbelt back on. We got more to do. People are depending on us. We're the only ones that are representing workers out there like this. S, get back to work. We don't have time to be pissed off and tear the house down. We just did a monumental thing, and we'll build on it. I used to tell them this story in the Building Trades. We used to invent a fund with the employer in bargaining, some kind of a training fund. We'd say, 'wawa'. They'd say, 'We don't need that fund.' We'd say, 'Put a penny in per hour.' (When there was pennies.) Or a nickel. They wouldn't balk at it because it was nothing. Then you'd build it to a dime in the next round; then you'd build it to a quarter. Next thing you know, you got \$200 million in a training fund. This is our beachhead here. That'll stand like—I got emotional. I got a text from one of my sons months later saying I was able to say today, like, he doesn't delve in the world I was in. He lives on the mainland. He's a tradesperson. 'I was able to stay home today and not make my crew sick and not make my partner sick because I got really sick and isolate, and I didn't lose any wages. Thank you.' I went, 'Oh shit.' Making a difference, right? It can—literally in COVID it saves lives, but after COVID it never did make sense for the employer. Lots of employers lined up too.

RM [01:27:36] Yeah that's true.

RM [01:27:37] There's all of these things you juggle as the Fed president, and they're difficult to do. If you do it right, if you don't play games, if you don't choose sides of— if you see them as your group family, and you put a circle around the things that they agree on (I

know people get tired of me saying that) and put the other stuff aside because you could argue and split apart on that (and I'd seen that in the Building Trades years earlier and never use your group power) if you can harness that power and then you've got the strategy, you can make change. And we did.

RM [01:28:09] So, Doug, I want to touch, you know—

LC [01:28:09] Laird. Doug's gone.

RM [01:28:13] Sorry. (laughter) Laird.

LC [01:28:14] Died in 2001. (laughter)

RM [01:28:19] One of the things I read about you as you—took these courses on, or workshops on women in the trades or women in the workforce and the harassment and so on that they face, and it really had a powerful impact on you. Do you want to just talk about that?

LC [01:28:36] Yeah. Early on as the Fed president, Sussanne Skidmore, now president, who was secretary-treasurer, the—

RM [01:28:42] Bystander intervention course.

LC [01:28:44] Yeah. More than a bystander.

RM [01:28:45] More than a bystander.

RM [01:28:46] Sussanne walked into my office, and Nina Hansen was also a director of the Fed at the time. The two of them walked in my Fed office, closed the door and said we have this new program that's been invented, through women in the trades, called the More than a Bystander program. What it is, is it's going to—it's a really cool course. It's been set up to train men in the construction industry—whether they own the company, whether they work on the tools, whether they're leadership on the job—about their responsibility to not be just a bystander when bad things are happening to women in the trades. You see, it's easy to attract women into the trades with high wages and glossy posters. But when they show up and it's a crap show, when they're chauvinism, when there's even violence and there's like bad, it should never be. You wonder why that they could never get higher rates of women in the trades because every one of those stories goes back legitimately to other women. If you really want to do it right, do it right. Somebody had invented this; I had no I had no part in that. They walked in, closed the door and said, 'You're going to be in the first cohort of the training.' I said to them (I'm being honest here), 'I got a lot of stuff going on, and we got a short time to do this.' I've told—I think I even said this. I think I said this, and it wouldn't surprise me because I said it in many rooms for many reasons at many times. I've said to the officers, 'I'll do two terms if they have me. That's it. We got a lot of work to do.' They said, 'No, you're going to do this. (laughter) You need to do this. It's very important that they see a man, a white man from the Building Trades in this course, from the Fed president that they believe in it.' I said, 'Fine.' It's not that I didn't want to do it or see value in it. I just—like I couldn't clone myself when I was trying to do a lot of stuff. I went, and it was at the IBEW hall out in Coquitlam, and the BC Lions players, Jamie Taras, and others were there. He's a big, old dude who was on the Gray Cup winning teams. You know, giant of a man. There were several of them. They were fantastic. Angus Reid and they—

RM [01:30:58] A great guy.

LC [01:30:59] And they put the course on for us, about 40 of us. I won't go into the things that, you know, when you close those doors some of it's sacred. They laid out how we've been preprogramed since we were little kids. I'll give you one example. Just one. We sat in a room, and they wrote up on the board. They said, tell us all the most denigrating things you've ever heard anybody be called on a construction site. People started off a little quiet, but, you know, they got around to it, and they put like 40 things on a whiteboard. Then they said, 'You notice anything in there?' We looked. (I'm going to screw this up because not quite exactly what they did, but you'll get the gist.) What? It was Jamie Taras, big Jamie Terrace. He circled almost all but one or two of the 40 things saying, 'What do they all have in common?' For me, the light bulb went on. They're all like, feminine descriptors. When we denigrate men, we call them things that could be positive about women in a negative way. Doing it my whole life. When you're in construction, you use these terms. That's what we did in the 80s and 90s, and it's still going on today. This is one facet of a life-altering two days where they deconstruct all the crap. The big takeaway for me was you didn't have to have been a perfect person. You could have done some—sort of the group things that we all did. Laugh at dirty jokes, or tell them yourself to be popular or whatever, doesn't mean today you are off the hook for saying, 'Thinking about it, I never should have done that. I don't agree with that today, and we need to eradicate that. That's a powerful thing because otherwise you excuse yourself from the room saying, 'Oh, I don't want to be a hypocrite,' and you don't do the hard work. That was a big takeaway for me. What this course does, and it's so bloody powerful, is it trains men that it's their responsibility to not be a bystander. Rod, what's super important is I'm—as you might have noticed—I'm an A type personality. On a jobsite, I would have been a bystander years gone by. There weren't women in the job sites where I was very often, but because A type personalities like me, I didn't want to be confrontational, so I'd just watch it. I knew if I got confrontational, I was going to be in a punch up, and I was probably going to win it, but that didn't do any good. I really didn't want to have to—like, I only had one speed, right? I've had enough now—so we let a lot of stuff go. It not only exposed to us all of these things that we've been programed on, which perfect logic when you look at it, it showed us tools to de-escalate without having to go to Def-Con 4. Sometimes, it's just standing in the room; sometimes it's just whatever it is. I have to tell you this (and I know we're probably way over time), but I have to tell you this. I got this shirt at the end of it. Like, it's life changing, right?

RM [01:34:04] Yup.

LC [01:34:04] And I, you know, a letter to the editor on it. I've promoted it everywhere I've been. It was the last thing I said at the Fed when I retired. Don't forget about this program. Of all the things I had the opportunity to say, like it means that much to me. They gave me this shirt that said, on the back of it, 'I'm more than a bystander, are you?' So, I'm going to tell you, I was up at Harrison when it came back to life from COVID, the Harrison Winter school, you know, all of the different, affiliates. There's usually around 1,200 people there a week. I was in a meeting of not—sorry an after evening sort of social event—and there was a group of fellows, all fellows standing in a circle, as happens, drinking some wobbly pops and telling some lies about life, comparing all of their toys (laughter) You know, all that stuff. One of them told an inappropriate joke and I'm like, 'Oh my God, I'm trained on this. I have a responsibility. I'm preaching it.' You know what I did? I won't stand up here. I was wearing that shirt. It's a group in a circle, so I turned around, and put that 'I'm a more in my center. Are you?' This is a de-escalation tool that I improvised. I said, 'Look at the

shirt.' Then they want to talk about something else. A couple minutes later, another same person started another joke, and I turned around again and said, 'I could do this all night.' And 'aw ha', you know, went to something else. Then I went to more constructive conversations, and then, you know, the group filtered away. I thought, 'Oh my God, the de-escalation works'. You stop the chain. That's what we need to do on the job sites. Super powerful. Smart people did this. It's my job when I find out about it to take the power of the group and apply it to it.

RM [01:35:53] Is it changing in the Building Trades?

LC [01:35:55] They tell me it is. I mean, I'm not out there, but they tell me it is, and they've put through I don't know how many hundreds of these folks. I went and put it on for lots of groups after that because they train you to put it on for others. I put it on for what was then the ITA [Industry Training Authority] leadership, the apprenticeship commission. I put it on for all of the executive council of the officers of the Fed. It was really cool.

RM [01:36:18] You know this—I made a note of a quote from you that says, 'As a progressive man, a husband and co-parent of three young women, I was confident I understood what women face daily. But the training I received help me recognize more what women have to think about daily in a society entrenched with male privilege.'

LC [01:36:38] That's true.

RM [01:36:39] That's pretty powerful.

LC [01:36:40] When I was in that first cohort, they asked us to describe things—when we'd been through some of this now and our eyes are opening—that we observe in our family, with our loved ones, women in our lives. People told the stories that broke my heart. Well, one guy said, 'You know, it's things that you would just not even really think about. So, my wife goes out with the girls to have a couple of drinks once in a while. She always wears her runners in case she has to run to the car or in there's something bad outside.' Another one said, 'My wife always walks with the keys to her knuckles just in case.' I went home and told Amber this and she said, 'Like, duh Dude.' (laughter)

LC [01:37:19] One of the things Amber had said to me when I first became president was she said—I think she'd be comfortable with me relating this. She said look, women in the labour movement know instinctively and over a period of time about men that they should stay away from in the labour movement, and you're going to be in all sorts of social settings. She said, 'This isn't your old IBEW group' now you're with—she said, 'You're known as a trustworthy man.' She said, 'But I'm going to give you some advice,' (and I had heard this from another, a fella, actually, once upon a time.) She said, 'If you're in an elevator in a hotel and there's a woman from the conference in the elevator, and she hits seven, hit five and get off, because it doesn't matter who you are, if it's 10:00 o'clock at night, she's going to wonder if you're going to follow her to her room. Don't put her in that position.'

RM [01:38:13] You know—

LC [01:38:14] I never even thought about that stuff. She goes, 'You should.' (laughter)

RM [01:38:18] You know, it's interesting. Similarly, I would get off a bus late at night, and there was a woman there, and I happened to be behind her, so I would cross the street just so that she would know—

LC [01:38:32] Good on you.

RM [01:38:33] I mean, no big deal, but yet the consciousness now is different. Like ten years ago, I wouldn't have done that.

LC [01:38:39] I know.

RM [01:38:39] Because I'm trustworthy. I mean, so what's the problem here, but she doesn't know that.

LC [01:38:43] Well, this is what I said to Amber. I think if I remember accurately, I said, 'I'm never to do anything.' She said, 'It's not about you.'

RM [01:38:49] Exactly.

LC [01:38:50] (laughter) You know, I'm like, 'Oh yeah. Good point.'

RM [01:38:52] God, Laird, you're such a good talker. There's stuff I haven't even got into, but—

LC [01:38:56] Well, Fed presidents are politicians too. (laughter)

RM [01:38:58] I want to ask you one last question. When you look back at your— because we could have gone on and on about the Fed—what are you most proud of? You know, during your four years at the Fed, is it any particular legacy, or is there just an overall sense that you did a good job? How would you assess that?

LC [01:39:14] Well, I'm a firm believer that legacy isn't something that the person you ask about legacy should be talking about.

RM [01:39:21] Well, when you look back, though, what do you take some pride in?

LC [01:39:27] I think, I would say I'm proud that I could bring to bear a strategy that honestly brought the family together. Again, I know you've heard me say it, focus on the things that you have in common that you want to achieve, and bring your group power together, and then put a strategy in place to get that done, and then trust. Oh, if Sussanne Skidmore was here, my good friend, she'd say, 'Oh, how many times has he said this,' (laughter) trust the process. What I'm really proud of is we added to the Fed; we built to the Fed. We had people want to join the Fed because they could see that we were together. I met once with a very high profile powerful person in the provincial government. I went into that room when they expected I would have every officer with me on a very heated issue, and I was alone, and they said, 'You're alone.' I said, 'If you don't know that they're with me, I shouldn't be in the room.' They said, 'We know they're with you. We actually changed that issue that we were there to change that day because you have integrity and trust, and you see everybody equally power. Then when you join them together, you have the power of the group. That's all I wanted. Listen, Rod, you can't stop me that quickly. (laughter) We're all caretakers. None of us own this. The Fed doesn't have members. We serve at the pleasure of the affiliate unions. I'm there for a short period of time to do everything I can to

move it on. It's like provincial campsites. You leave it a little bit cleaner than you get it. You make it better than when you started if you can. Right? That's what I believe in. I think we did that. I really, honestly believe—now granted, we had a provincial government [unclear]—

RM [01:41:13] I was thinking that of course it wasn't your fault.

LC [01:41:15] The danger is you implode into, 'I want this. No, I want this.'

RM [01:41:18] Which has been the case with the Fed before.

LC [01:41:20] And I said, 'Enough.' How about we do this, this, this and this, and you all have input on what those look like. That's—legacy's not the right word. We achieved great things together because we stood together and recognized the power we had, if we focused on what we were supposed to do. One last thing, even though you didn't ask (laughter). They probably have a recording tape. There's another thing that's really important for a Fed president. Often you get invited all the time to go to conferences or conventions of affiliate unions and speak. Obviously, they want to give an update on the Fed. Many times, if I'm being honest, they want you to be able to take away their obligation to explain why they're part of the Fed. They want you to make their members understand why. I really thought a lot about that because you can go and make speeches, and you can be what I call the scripture preacher and everybody clapping and cheering, and you can call the opposition names. You can get all the easy stuff. My view is this. If you look at all of the remarks I brought in the last two years, (because it took me a while to figure this out), they were all about like, they're not my members, they're the affiliates members, but they're part of—I used to say, I want to tell you a story about the book we're writing together. Here's the things that we, you know, when we got together [unclear] this government and all this stuff we're doing. Because you belong to a union, that union exists—because you fund it with your dues, it exists, and then it joins with other unions, and that makes us. What we're doing is because you're there in the first place. Let me tell you all the stuff you've achieved. Let me tell you, when you're at a barbecue on your block, what you can say you were part of doing. Look at the stuff that we did. I did a big list of the Liberals and all the things they broke down in the 2000s, and all the stuff we'd achieved together with the government since we were here. I had an old longshoreman come up—he just looked like, and I'm generalizing. (laughter) He just looked like a cynical old guy, and he's like, 'Oh my God, I never thought about it like that. That's part of the role too. You need to plug people into the greater movement—the power of the group—because you're powerless without them, right?

LC [01:43:35] All right. Wow. That's great.