

Interview: Frank Everitt (FE)

Interviewer: George Davison (GD), Natasha Fairweather (NF)

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Transcription: Pete Smith

GD [00:00:05] Okay. We're here on the unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh to interview Frank Everitt, long-time labour leader. I'm George Davison. I'm the secretary-treasurer of the Labour Heritage Center now. And I've got a series of questions that I want to ask you this morning.

FE [00:00:23] Hopefully I'll be able to answer some of them.

GD [00:00:25] Good. Good. So we'll start off with some simple biographical questions like what's your full name?

FE [00:00:32] Well, my mother called me Franklin, but I go by Frank. Last name is Everitt.

GD [00:00:38] And where were you born?

FE [00:00:40] Born in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan.

GD [00:00:42] Where is Spiritwood?

FE [00:00:44] It's about 80, 90 clicks away from Prince Albert or North Battleford.

GD [00:00:50] North of both of those?

FE [00:00:53] Both of those. Yes.

GD [00:00:54] Northern Saskatchewan. So you were raised there?

FE [00:00:57] Yeah. I left home when I was 17 years old. And arrived in Quesnel when I turned 18.

GD [00:01:05] How did you get from Spiritwood to Quesnel?

FE [00:01:09] I hitched a ride with one of the neighbours to Edmonton and then took a bus from Edmonton to Quesnel.

GD [00:01:13] Why Quesnel?

FE [00:01:14] I had a brother that was out there. Somebody I knew. So I thought I would take my venture over there and work for a little while and then go to Europe. That was it.

GD [00:01:25] So what year was that?

FE [00:01:26] That'd be '71.

GD [00:01:28] Okay. What kind of issues were in the air in the early 70s?

FE [00:01:38] Well, I went to work in the forest industry, and if you wanted a job, you could get a job pretty easy in the forest industry. So that's where I ended up. And there was a lot of immigration at that particular time. Where Indo-Canadians were coming to work. Have a number of good East Indian friends that I met through work and continue to this day.

GD [00:02:01] So this is quite different from Spiritwood. Was there any labour in your family?

FE [00:02:07] Most mostly was farming. And they didn't call it labour, but it was co-op farms. So my cousins had a co-op farm and if you talked about unions in that vein, they weren't interested in that sort of stuff.

GD [00:02:21] Was there grain farming that far north?

FE [00:02:23] Grain farming and cattle.

GD [00:02:25] Cool. What did your parents do for a living?

FE [00:02:29] They were farmers. Actually just sold our farm. We were seven years short of 100 years of being in the farm. My dad used to come out to Giscome and Eagle Lake around here to do logging with his uncle.

GD [00:02:46] So winter work?

FE [00:02:47] Yeah, winter work and had to go back and farm during the summer.

GD [00:02:50] There were lots of sawmills between here and Spiritwood?

FE [00:02:53] Penny? Yes, there were tons along the River Road here.

GD [00:02:56] So what was your first experience with work? You worked in a sawmill, a planer mill?

FE [00:03:04] Planer mill in Quesnel. For Weldwood of Canada at that time. I got a whole week of work, and then they laid me off. So I left there and went up to Mackenzie, to my uncle's for Christmas. Come back and he said, "Where you been?" And I said, "Well, you laid me off so I left town." he said, "Well, you start tomorrow again." so I went back to work, and that was the last time I had any layoff from them.

GD [00:03:28] So the last of the biographical questions. Do you have a family of your own?

FE [00:03:33] Yes, I have four boys, five grandsons and one granddaughter.

GD [00:03:39] And your wife is still with us?

FE [00:03:41] Yes, she is. And she was a Steelworker as well.

GD [00:03:44] Cool. So the working-life set of questions. How you got the first job. You went to Quesnel, your brother got you a job?

FE [00:03:55] No, I went to the operation myself with the—ask about an application. They hired me on the spot.

GD [00:04:02] And that lasted a week.

FE [00:04:04] That lasted a whole week. And then I got laid off.

GD [00:04:06] And when you went back after your Christmas visit, you got hired again?

FE [00:04:11] Yeah. Yeah, they brought me back.

GD [00:04:12] So what was your responsibility?

FE [00:04:15] I was piling lumber in boxcars and cleaning up spill loads whenever somebody knocked one over. That would be the job of the new guy to go pile them back up.

GD [00:04:25] So that was an average day work for you?

FE [00:04:27] Yes.

GD [00:04:27] How long did that last?

FE [00:04:29] I work for Weldwood of Canada for about eight years.

GD [00:04:32] Okay.

FE [00:04:33] And then I took a job working for the old IWA. In 1979.

GD [00:04:39] Okay.

FE [00:04:40] And I was a rep for four years, and then I became the President in '83.

GD [00:04:45] So in those early years, the first eight years, were you involved in the union at all?

FE [00:04:50] Probably '74, '75 I started to be a shop steward and got on the executive for the local.

GD [00:04:58] Okay. So you've talked about piling logs. Did you run equipment?

FE [00:05:08] Yes. Later I ran forklift, loader.

GD [00:05:13] So this was manual labor, though?

FE [00:05:15] Yes. And the old green chain never had nothing but rollers for you to roll the wood off. There was nothing automatic at that time.

GD [00:05:25] So what was the Quesnel forest industry like in the '70s? Was it booming?

FE [00:05:32] Yes, it was doing fairly well. Everything was outside. There wasn't a lot of inside booth jobs in the planer mill. We had a green chain that was probably 100 feet long or so and didn't wear hard hats when we first started. Didn't have any heaters above. And gradually we got rollers and heaters and hard hats.

GD [00:05:56] Now you see truckloads of logs going, you know, up and down the highway and all over the place. Is that how the mill was supplied then?

FE [00:06:04] It was all trucked in. Some in Weldwood for instance, came into their plywood plant by a log run. And they used to have booms of log come down the river.

GD [00:06:16] The Quesnel River?

FE [00:06:18] Yes.

GD [00:06:18] Oh cool. They don't do that anymore

GD [00:06:22] No, they don't do that. They closed all that down a number of years ago.

GD [00:06:25] So did safety regulations change while you were working?

GD [00:06:30] Well, like I said, we got hard hats. And that was the first major shift in there because everybody was used to wearing their hats and doing whatever they wanted to cover their head, but nothing as far as a hard hat. Then we got to ear muffs as well to take away the noise from the equipment. And safety we'd have regular safety meetings with a committee to see what fix-it items needed to be done within the operation.

GD [00:06:59] So when you got more involved in the IWA, what was your role there?

GD [00:07:06] I think I was a shop steward first and then became a Vice Chair on the Plant Committee and then finally Chair of the Plant Committee.

GD [00:07:13] So how many would have worked at the plant?

GD [00:07:15] Probably 50 people.

GD [00:07:16] Okay.

GD [00:07:17] Small operation in the scheme of things at that time.

GD [00:07:21] Right. So when did you come to Prince George?

GD [00:07:26] 1979 I started working out of the office here in Prince George.

GD [00:07:31] So what did that entail?

GD [00:07:34] Then you were responsible for all the mills. My area was south to Quesnel. And so we had mills, a number of mills in Quesnel, Hixon and Strathnaver area.

GD [00:07:47] Okay. Yeah.

GD [00:07:48] Well, there were mills along the road up to Prince George. So I would do a weekly run, pretty much, to Prince George, connect with the office either Monday or Friday. Worked out of my home mostly.

GD [00:08:01] Yeah. Tell me about the structure of the IWA.

GD [00:08:06] We had staff and they were basically set up in lines, if you will. We had people looking after the West Line, North Line and the North Line would go from here to Fort Nelson, out to McBride for east and south to Marguerite just south of Quesnel, and then out to Smithers.

FE [00:08:30] That's a big territory.

FE [00:08:32] Really big territory. When you talk to people that don't know the territory and so you've got to drive ten hours to get up to Fort Nelson. For a day.

GD [00:08:39] And on days like this.

FE [00:08:41] Yes, you certainly know that you need to be equipped and you're going to be looking after yourself if you get in trouble.

GD [00:08:49] So when you were working in Prince George with servicing that South Line, what were you doing?

FE [00:08:55] Well, I'd go to the different mills wherever there were some issues with the workers and hopefully settle those issues with the employer as a rep. We had some interesting people in the industry in those days.

GD [00:09:10] Employers or workers?

FE [00:09:12] Both. Got to be right on with that. In the early days, we had a company called Ernst Forest Products. And they were organized, but they did not like the union very much. And Weyer sawmill was another one that was a bit jaundiced about the union. So you'd come to get a pass to go into the operation and they'd let you sit there 'till lunch hour was pretty much over and then a few minutes before time was up they'd give you your pass so you could go in but then you'd have to have supervision when you went into the mill. They'd follow you wherever you were going or take you so you didn't get hurt, was their story.

GD [00:09:50] So presumably you were there because there had been a problem that needed to be resolved between the worker and the employer?

GD [00:09:57] Yes.

GD [00:09:58] How did that happen if you're not allowed to get in?

GD [00:10:01] Well, they just didn't let it be that access. You'd have to make sure that you've got access to the employee after hours when he was off shift or she was off shift and talked to them about the issue. And then you could go to the, with the committee to settle it with the employer.

GD [00:10:16] So would there be like a written agreement at the end of that?

GD [00:10:19] There would be a written of the collective agreement breach that we filed. And then subsequently, the employer, some of them would sign off or send you a letter saying this is a resolve to it or the reasonable result. And then you'd have to decide whether you were going to proceed to arbitration process for them.

GD [00:10:37] So tell me a bit about the collective agreement.

GD [00:10:40] Well, it's certainly expanded over the years. First collective agreements, the biggest clause for the employer was management's rights, and it covered basically everything that you didn't cover in another direction to give the union some power to assist the workers. And we had a job evaluation program within that collective agreement.

GD [00:11:02] So where people would be placed?

GD [00:11:04] Where they were placed, and then what value we would put on a particular piece of equipment that you were working on and that would generate you to a different grouping, maybe above base rate for the industry. Base rate when I first started was about \$3.50 an hour, and we're now up to about \$32 or \$33 an hour.

GD [00:11:23] Hours of work?

GD [00:11:25] Eight hours a day, a ten-minute coffee break and half-hour lunch.

GD [00:11:32] Holidays, pensions, anything like that?

GD [00:11:34] Holidays, yes. Pension came in in the early '70s. There used to be separate pension plans within the province for the IWA and subsequently they came together in the early '70s under one umbrella.

GD [00:11:49] So in the mid '80s, you became the president of the local. So was that a contested election?

GD [00:11:58] Yes, it was. Yes. In '81 I ran for first vice president and I lost by 100 votes. And then in '83, I ran against Larry Dockendorf, who was the president at the time, and was successful. I held that position till '95 and decided that maybe I needed to take a break from that.

GD [00:12:23] So. Okay. Let's talk about your role as president. Now you're responsible for everything that goes on in this huge region. How many staff were there?

FE [00:12:35] Well, I think we had about 8 or 9 staff at that particular time. Four support staff in the office.

GD [00:12:43] So this is also the '80s.

FE [00:12:46] Big strike.

GD [00:12:47] Big strike. When was that?

GD [00:12:49] That was in 1986.

GD [00:12:52] So let's go back a bit. Like '83 was Operation Solidarity. I know Jack Munro was involved in the end of that. What was happening here?

GD [00:13:06] We were not as active in this particular area as they were in other parts of the province. We were upset with the government. There's no doubt about that. We had a

few rallies, if you will, in support of that but it became a position where someone who could take the backlash, if you will, and settle it. And that's where Jack Munro came in. Well-spoken across the province and went to make a deal because others couldn't do that. And we ended up with a settlement with the dear premier at that time and saved us from catastrophe, in my humble opinion.

GD [00:13:49] Right. But like a provincial-wide strike.

FE [00:13:53] All those good things that come from masses of people thinkin' they know where we should go, brings all people that have an issue may not be your issue, but they have an issue, so the glob on to what's happening.

GD [00:14:07] So how did the local here fit into the provincial IWA?

FE [00:14:13] As a President, I would be a Board Member on the Executive for British Columbia. Originally we were tied to Western Canada. There was a regional district in Western Canada and one in Eastern Canada.

GD [00:14:28] Okay.

GD [00:14:29] And then over time the amalgamated into one region across Canada and became IWA-Canada.

GD [00:14:35] So in terms of bargaining, though, was there a—

FE [00:14:38] Provincial structure.

GD [00:14:39] Provincial structure, but were agreements for the north separate or tied together?

FE [00:14:46] Sorry, Yes. We had a provincial structure for the union but individual employers joined associations or we had independents. So the independents in the north were Canfor and West Fraser and the association was done by CONIFIR and that would cover McKenzie, Fort Nelson, Quesnel, some of Prince George like Carrier Lumber and Lakelands.

GD [00:15:20] So what was the strike in '86 about.

FE [00:15:22] Contracting out of jobs. We wanted to nail down what was continuing to be worker's work going forward. And we had a three day strike with the CONIFIR operations and myself and Harvey Arcand in William Lake put together wording that we thought would be acceptable with one of the employers. And we took it back to the provincial committee and got agreement for that. So the CONIFIR member companies went back to work right away and then in January of the next year, we put down the current practices saying this is what actually happens in the operation and nailed that down. Weldwood of Canada didn't settle for seven weeks and finally we got that written around and Weldwood went with us to each individual site and we did the current practices for there. West Fraser and Canfor were still on strike. That lasted four months.

FE [00:16:25] Wow.

FE [00:16:26] Toughest time for our membership.

GD [00:16:29] So summer, into fall, into winter.

GD [00:16:32] Yes. I think the decision was around December tenth or ninth that we made the deal for the other operations, and that subsequently went on to deal with the southern interior and the coast.

GD [00:16:49] Oh so those, the terms that you had agreed to here went province-wide.

FE [00:16:52] Yes.

GD [00:16:53] So that was a successful strike in one way, but it cost a lot.

FE [00:16:59] Yes.

GD [00:17:01] How many workers were we talking about?

GD [00:17:03] We had probably 5500 members from within the local. A significant number.

GD [00:17:11] So what was strike support like?

GD [00:17:13] I think it was around a hundred bucks a week. And then if you had children, there was a seven dollar top up for each child that you had.

GD [00:17:21] Did the local have a strike fund?

FE [00:17:24] No. They came from our office out of Vancouver.

GD [00:17:29] So the strike's over '86, what happened next?

FE [00:17:33] Well, in some cases, it was a lot harder to build back relationships with the West Frasers and Canfor. But over time, we were able to do that. And like I say, there was a lot of nervousness when we were going back in the following year to do the current practices with the CONIFER operations, whether we would maintain our position or whether or not the employer would be able to do that. And it worked out quite amicable at that particular time. And I think that was a building of a stronger relationship with the CONIFER member companies.

GD [00:18:10] So the next set of questions is about politics at work. And I think you've talked about the relationship between workers, employers and unions. In some cases it was okay. In some cases it was a challenge. The strike certainly a huge challenge. Are there other than the strike itself, are there any stories you could share about negotiations? Was there another strike after that?

FE [00:18:40] No, that was the last strike that we had.

GD [00:18:43] So negotiation went.

FE [00:18:44] Better from there going forward.

GD [00:18:46] Okay. What kind of other than contracting out, were there other issues that were in play? Money, obviously.

FE [00:18:55] Obviously you have money. I mean, our biggest increase that we ever got was in '81 after a short strike with some operations.

FE [00:19:03] That's when the inflation was in like high teens, right?

FE [00:19:06] 13. We had 12 and 14 on the table. And they said that wasn't enough. And we got 13 and 15 in those years and it wasn't but a year into it that the employers were back at the table asking us for a rollback on it. It didn't happen, but they still asked for it.

GD [00:19:26] So there were money settlements, obviously, in each of these rounds of negotiations. The NDP came in in '91. Was there any. What was the change from the Socred era of forest management to the NDP?

FE [00:19:46] Well, I think there was a lot of talk about revitalizing the industry and making sure that we were using the best use of all of the material that we got out of the bush. So value added stuff was a big deal, pushed by the NDP for us to get back into it.

GD [00:20:05] There'd also been huge rationalization in the industry, had there not?

FE [00:20:08] Yeah.

GD [00:20:09] Talking 'bout all those mills, you know.

FE [00:20:11] Mergers were the thing going on as well. And so people weren't sure. The joke in Mackenzie was the guy who's got the sign business has got the best business going forward.

GD [00:20:24] Right. So you said you took a break in '95.

FE [00:20:31] Yeah, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. So I thought about for a while, took a little time off and went in to be the financial secretary for eight years.

GD [00:20:45] And so that's an office job?

FE [00:20:48] Yes, full-time.

GD [00:20:50] Okay.

FE [00:20:50] And the process was a bit unique. We were having our National Convention here in Prince George at that particular year. And we had an executive board meeting, and the president and myself resigned. The second-vice resigned. And the third-vice, Fred Carol, moved up to president and then reappointed folks for the position. So we had a short meeting and then walked over to the convention thereafter and gave them a new line-up of the officers for the local union. So I did that for, 'till 2003, I believe. And it became some of them politics that you were talking about internally. And a good friend of mine said, if you're running challenge, there's no sense challenging and sitting back in the position you are, financial secretary. If the president doesn't want you to be there, you're just going to put yourself back in the same spot. You might as well run against the president. That's what I did.

GD [00:21:56] And you won.

GD [00:21:57] And I won. Yes. So from 2003 to 2017, I was the president. And during that time, we continued bargaining in different times. And out of that 2003, we got the longest collective agreement that we'd ever had from 2003 to 2009. So was a six year agreement. And I came into it mid-term sort of thing while bargaining was going on. Members, really didn't like six years, but—

GD [00:22:30] It's a long time.

FE [00:22:32] Yeah. You can't foresee that kind of stuff.

GD [00:22:34] No.

FE [00:22:35] So we ended up thereafter shooting for shorter agreements than that.

GD [00:22:40] Three years?

FE [00:22:41] Yes, three and four years. And prior to my retirement in 2017, we talked about a merger with the Williams Lake area, which had up until 1977 been a part of Local 424. So we voted, both memberships in Williams Lake area and here, and the vast majority supported the re-merger together. So we amalgamated the two locals together in '17. And I retired after the annual meeting in June.

GD [00:23:19] So, the Brink interview that you did, you talked about a major change from the union involved in workplace issues and bargaining to more policy-oriented work with the changes in the forest sector in general. Can you talk a bit about that?

FE [00:23:45] Well, in the times with the IWA our office had an economist on staff. So did FIR, Forest Industrial Relations, out of Vancouver. So the two of them would look at markets and you could have a lot more knowledge rather than just brawn and the threat of a strike. You could have knowledge that could make the arguments for progressive agreements based on information that you chatted back and forth with different folks who are economists. And the two of them would give their forecasts as well, with their own basic plan to where the world was going to go. But it gave us better knowledge to bargain with and were, I think, more successful as a result of that. As time went on, the IWA was starting to shrink. And in the 2004, I believe it was, we merged with the Steelworkers. And each local union kept their autonomy, which was—and our pension plan as well. Because stories were out that Steelworkers just wanted our pension. It wasn't true because we'd already signed off that we could stick with the pension plan that we had.

GD [00:25:01] So how does the Steelworkers structure differ from the IWA?

FE [00:25:07] Well, because we maintained our own bylaws, we're able to continue to operate similar to what we did within the IWA. It's a bigger organization, so it's got more ability to take on policy things across Canada or the States, wherever they may be. So I think there are some advantages now with the bigger organization. It brings us back to where we would have liked to have stayed with the IWA when we had economists and people that can tell you how the world looks from the bigger picture.

GD [00:25:39] So I used to work with Steve Hunt. Around the United Way in the Lower Mainland, which is now United Way British Columbia. But he was the head of District 3, I think it was. You were part of that?

FE [00:25:53] Yes. District three would go from here to Manitoba. Then you had District 5 in Ontario and Quebec.

GD [00:26:03] So there was a series of questions about labour issues, which you've talked a lot about getting started in the labor movement, organizing workers. You've talked about memorable strikes. What was your proudest moment for your time in the labour movement?

FE [00:26:24] I think just helping people out. I mean, in some of the time we got into helping people with addiction issues. And whenever you can help someone deal with that, get them back to a productive part of their life that they're destroying. That's pretty rewarding. I think. You bring a family back together, you bring a person back to their job so they can be gainfully employed rather than going through self-destruction.

GD [00:26:54] What was probably the most challenging time you had?

FE [00:27:00] Oh '86, the strike. With half of the members working and half of them not. That just causes chaos.

GD [00:27:05] So I'm trying to think of when it was, the mill explosions at Burns Lake and then Lakeland.

FE [00:27:15] January was—

GD [00:27:18] '16? '17?

FE [00:27:21] No, earlier. '12, I think.

GD [00:27:23] Okay. Right.

FE [00:27:25] We had the first one at Babine. I'm not going to remember the dates. And then shortly, a month later, we had the one at Lakelands.

GD [00:27:36] And so I know Steve Hunt was after public inquiries and all that kind of stuff. What was the role of the local?

FE [00:27:46] Well, the safety director, the present president right now and I went to the hospitals and visited with the individuals there. He visited with some of them in Vancouver. We were out at the mill site in Burns Lake talking to folks, trying to assist in any way we could. We had the good fortune to have the Lake Babine hall there from the Nation and they provided food for days and days at that. And here in Prince George, we had good cooperation from the city. Happened to be on council that particular time, too. And the community came around Lakelands and supported them in any way we could to deal with the injured. And our first vice president at the time, Brian Croy, went into the mill with Emmert Turner and we were doing some educations for the crew. When the mill blew up. He's never been able to work since. Very dramatic. And you try and analyze—I mean, to this day, I'm not sure the exact cause. I mean, there's all kinds of rumors of what the cause was.

GD [00:29:08] The spontaneous combustion of the sawdust was the official story, I guess.

FE [00:29:13] But whether it was a gearbox that went dry and lit that or what, we will never really know. And millions of dollars were spent to try and make the place safer. I hope we did the right thing and got it safe so people could—

GD [00:29:27] There was never a public enquiry about that though, was there?

FE [00:29:30] No.

GD [00:29:31] WorkSafe did a number of investigations.

FE [00:29:35] Yeah, and wrote reports and subsequently all kinds of dust abatement stuff was put in place in the sawmills to make them hopefully free of that problem again.

GD [00:29:47] My son was called in, living in Quesnel at the time, on a cleanup crew on the weekend to clear [unclear]. So how do you think the labour movement in B.C. has changed over time?

FE [00:30:07] We're pretty passive nowadays. I think people have earned good wages and they spend good money. And they believe that's what their role in life is, to go to work, make money and spend it. Trying to gel people together is a hard job nowadays, I think. Harder anyway, in my view. The folks who are busy with their life and that's what they want to continue to do. And I envy people that have that ability to communicate and bring the issues to light that people need to focus on instead of waiting 'till it's too late to focus on them.

GD [00:30:56] How many members does the local have now? Has it declined over the years?

FE [00:31:03] For sure, yeah. With all the mill closures that we've had, I think they may be at 3500. And with the amalgamation.

GD [00:31:11] Sort of about a third?

FE [00:31:12] Yeah. I mean if you put them back together in the 70s, it was probably 7000, 7500. That's huge.

GD [00:31:22] So you have—going to divert a bit because you got into municipal politics.

FE [00:31:29] Yes.

FE [00:31:30] How did that happen?

FE [00:31:32] Well, I had always been pushed to get into provincial politics. And I thought that's what I would do. I would work for the labour movement for about ten years and then get into provincial politics and then having a greater view of what that entails, the hours that were there and where you would be and where you would not be, but that provincial politics could go away. And I resisted the urge for people telling me to do municipal. Finally said okay, let's go to give it a try. So in 2011, I put my hand up and had a wonderful crew behind me to push through. And I was elected. And then I continued there for 11 years.

GD [00:32:17] So 3 terms?

FE [00:32:18] Yes.

GD [00:32:19] So were you bringing a labour voice to the city council? You were elected by everybody.

FE [00:32:29] I would say that I was bringing a common-sense approach to it. Labour being my background, certainly didn't hurt me at all. It certainly helped me to get to where I got to on City Council and I like to be aware of what was going on in the city and hopefully give some guidance around how that would best suit constituents. We didn't always hit the mark, though.

GD [00:32:55] No.

FE [00:32:55] There was times when City Council was in disapproval by far from the citizens and particular when we had some overruns with the parkade that everybody will remember well and was publicized.

GD [00:33:14] I pointed it out to Natasha on the way in last night.

FE [00:33:17] What we happened to do is end up with having to build a bladder underneath a parkade.

GD [00:33:24] It's right on an aquifer.

FE [00:33:24] Yeah. And it would flood every time. And if you didn't have the bladder in there, it would just run in there and flood all the cars out. And then you would be paying that way, too. But a couple of projects got lumped into it at the same time. So then there was another \$7 million that got added to the total or \$9 million, what sounded worse than it really was, but it was a significant overrun that we as Council weren't able to contain or didn't contain at the time. Got into deep doo-doo.

GD [00:33:52] I see the second condo starting to—

FE [00:33:56] Rise.

FE [00:33:56] To rise, yeah. So it's starting. So in the end, it's going to be a good project and bring people downtown.

FE [00:34:02] Yeah, it certainly is. It'll be helpful. I think the thing that we were able to do on council that was really good, was to amplify Prince George as a center for Vanderhoof, Mackenzie and the outlying areas and bring that together. I don't know that that's been kept up now. It seems we've lost that issue of bringing everybody together for our own mutual benefit. But who knows what will happen in the next couple of years or next term. Hopefully that comes back.

GD [00:34:35] Right. So what do you think the most important issue is facing workers today?

GD [00:34:43] Continuity of employment. We have many, many part-time workers. With not the benefits that full-time workers allow you to do. And for the forest industry, you need folks that are invested in the forest industry that don't work on a quarterly report or a yearly report. They're in it for the long haul and deal with it in that vein rather than just simply 'It's

a quarterly thing, I didn't make enough money let's get out of that.' I mean for Canfor to have one mill in Prince George (a sawmill) and half of a pulp mill in both areas, it's a sad state for the forest industry. And I don't know that it's so much about policy as about willingness to find different ways of doing stuff.

GD [00:35:45] So, I mean, the modernization of the industry going from manual labor, chainsaws and piling wood to the kind of equipment that's in the woods now and the mills that are state of the art. That's been a huge change, which has, you know, led to a lot of the job loss.

FE [00:36:04] Certainly has but the I think the balance that was talked about at that particular time is either you embrace technology in some fashion or you become antiquated and they just shut it down for that reason because it can't produce what the neighbors can. You lose one way, or if you can gradually deal with it, you get a longer life out of the working.

GD [00:36:28] So why is it important that we commemorate workers in the past?

FE [00:36:35] I think that helps the younger generation understand that all those things weren't just given to them from their employers. And there is a necessary thing that people have to understand that sometimes you have to stand up for what you believe in so that you can do things for other folks that maybe not in the position that you're in. And that helps move our economy forward because everything else is rising so your wages need to rise in order to be able to pay for all that stuff. Other than that you can't afford to do nothing and where we are now in politics we are going to find out what the cost of living is really at. And it's scary. Where they talk about food sources and and doing some of your own stuff that your grandparents may have done. Not your parents, but your grandparents may have done. It's a look back at at the future.

GD [00:37:35] So, second last question, why does labor history matter to you?

FE [00:37:40] Well, I'm damn proud of it because it's done very well for so many people and their families. It's provided university degrees for their children by the wages that they were able to make working for organized labour. And organized labour sets the standards for non-organized. It's never, never going to change. Someone has to set the bar so other people want to compete for it.

GD [00:38:10] So that's something young workers need to understand.

FE [00:38:13] Absolutely.

GD [00:38:17] So those are my questions.

NF [00:38:19] Are you involved at all in the memorial for injured and killed workers here in Prince George?

FE [00:38:26] We used to do that on the 28th of May every year. Yes.

NF [00:38:31] And the sculpture?

FE [00:38:33] When the first one was done, Steve Hunt came up and spoke to the group. Yeah. It's symbolic to recognize the four people that were killed in each of the operations

and the ones that were injured. I don't know how we can commemorate them in the same fashion because for their life, some of them, it's totally over as well. One thing I forgot, George. We had the idea one time to—this big event, organized the truckers in Prince George.

GD [00:39:19] Okay.

FE [00:39:20] 2005. We, February I think it was, we shut down trucking in Prince George and we didn't get a permit for that. We just pulled a trailer out in front of Ms. Bond's office and we probably had trucks, 500 in town, just going around, just a massive show of things. And it was a plan to do selective shut downs. But once people got the bit in their mouth, they just went off and done it. And then when we finally got a deal with Canfor, Wade Fisher and myself, Wade Fisher was out of Williams Lake and it was had retired from the IWA so he come up and assisted with us and Wade's a good talker and got an agreement from Canfor. So when I went to the crew to tell them we got a deal, the folks who weren't part Canfor didn't want to go back to work. That was pretty dramatic. In any event, Canfor withdrew their offer, and I convinced the crew to go back to work anyway. Lot of hype, but we didn't measure up as well at the end of the scenario.

GD [00:40:47] I wonder if anyone got the idea for the Ottawa convoy from shutting down the city from here.

FE [00:40:51] I knew next time we wanted to have something, we needed to get a permit anyway. I had more undercover RCMP walking the hallways in the Ramada than I care to remember for a long time.

GD [00:41:07] The one thing I've always wanted to ask you about was you were on the College Board.

FE [00:41:11] Yes.

GD [00:41:11] When we had the strike in '95.

FE [00:41:14] That was a bit unnerving, too.

GD [00:41:15] I was a local president. It was over contracting out, which you were very familiar with. I think fortunately, we had a friendly government at the time, and I have a suspicion that Paul Ramsey was pulling some strings and ended the strike and sent it all off to interest arbitration. But before the strike, Terry Weninger (the president) came over to the union office. We negotiated the contracting-out process, and then I was waiting for him to give me the thumbs up. That it's okay. You know, we would, we'd live happily ever after. And he couldn't deliver. So we did a vote to take a strike vote. And then we took a strike vote. And then the college put a final offer on the table. And we rejected that even higher than the vote to go on strike. And then three and a half weeks from mid-February to mid-March in '95, we were out in the cold. And that was a tough time. I remember in the middle of it there was a board meeting at the church or something like that downtown, which was very uncomfortable. We were trying to say, Hey, we had a deal. Where did it go? And of course we got it in arbitration later on.

FE [00:42:32] Terry was an interesting fellow to deal with.

GD [00:42:34] Yeah. When they did the 50th anniversary at the college. I had, I think I had just come back. It was 2019 and Terry came back. There was a huge crowd in the atrium and they pulled out a time capsule that they put together in '94 for the 25th anniversary to be opened up on the 50th anniversary and Cy Fortin who was one of the welders, and Terry was there. The new president was almost nowhere to be seen. He's just been there for a few weeks. And so Terry was emceeding this event and he pulled out a whole bunch of stuff, but one of which was a College Board package that had the financial statements in it. And he hauls it out and he says, "Where's George? Where's George?" I'm kind of at the back of the room standing up I'm over here. He said, "We never had two sets of books." OK Terry.

FE [00:43:41] Yeah. The college has a—well under the same issue. You can't run a deficit.

GD [00:43:47] No.

FE [00:43:48] And the health board is no different than that.

GD [00:43:50] Well, yeah. And now with the decline, I mean the college is completely different from when I was there. Half the students were international a couple of years ago. You know, it's I don't know what it does to serve of the, you know, the central interior these days. And then with Covid, most of the stuff went online, right. So I picked a good time to retire. But they're going to face layoffs again and program cuts that we faced in that 2002 to 2009 period all over again.

FE [00:44:27] Well, simply, I mean, there's a lot of money that comes in to universities, colleges with International students.

GD [00:44:33] Yeah. Its their bread and butter.

FE [00:44:36] 50 percent?

GD [00:44:37] Yeah. Well, because government funding for post-secondary has declined so much over the years. Remember when the NDP were in, they put a freeze on tuition because it was rising so quickly in the '90s. And but they didn't compensate the institutions for that. So when the Liberals came in in 2001 and said, you know, we're going to change the funding system, we're going to make more, more people pay. They took the freeze off. And I think in the first year, tuition went up 35 or 40 percent. Year or two, it went up 40 percent. So it almost doubled in two years. And and then it made it unaffordable for a lot of people around here. And so no, more international students was the solution, right? Offset that loss of domestic with international.

FE [00:45:29] Well, that's something you can play with. And they'd either come and pay that price where if you went to the government said we need more money, the answer would be no. So you just—

GD [00:45:38] Yeah. And, you know, when I started in the '90s, there were two sections of ESL (English as a Second Language). Hazel Ramsey was one of the the instructors with me out in Smithers E on the front, on the front lawn of the college. At one point we had over we had 10 or 11 ESL instructors. And I joke that they wouldn't put a class on until the plane landed out at YXS.

NF [00:46:10] So are there any other, anything else that you can—

FE [00:46:12] So you can be able to put this all back together in some fashion. I've rambled all over the damn place.

NF [00:46:18] That's great. Yeah, well, that's good. Any memorable conventions you went to, or conferences?

FE [00:46:27] First convention I went to, I was a staff rep and usually an officer went but I wasn't at that particular— I think it was '79. We went to Minneapolis St. Paul for a convention. I had 20 delegates from the locals. So we're a big crew and we were flying to Winnipeg and I think that's where we cleared customs and one guy had a DUI, which made him inadmissible, so he had to go home. One guy fell off the wagon while he was there or maybe before we even got on the plane. We never seen him hide nor hair for the week. So then we quit paying per diem till after you come back so we could correct those little errors if they happen. But I remember our Trustee saying to me while we were down there and he said, "if he isn't here when we're ready to leave, he's on his own". But we got on a paddle-wheeler went down the Mississippi River for a little tour for the group and it was quite nice. When I leave here, I'll think of a whole bunch of things that I should have talked about.

GD [00:47:52] So that's great.

FE [00:47:53] I think the best part about it is that my kids have been able to, three out of the four of them, still live in town and—

GD [00:48:06] Are they working in the forest sector?

FE [00:48:07] One is working at Interfor. And the other one's a heavy-duty mechanic at an Inland Kenworth at the top of the hill. The other one's a welder. So they do spend a fair amount of—connected to the forest industry for sure. And the other one he's fortunate enough that he gets to play at home. He's got a CNC machine in his garage, and he makes knickknacks and emblems for bikes.

GD [00:48:37] Cool. So, small business.

FE [00:48:38] Yeah.