

Susan Keeley

May 21, 2008

Q: You wanted to talk about women getting involved.

SK: When I first started going to my first union meetings, other than the daycare workers that came with me to that first meeting, there were two other women at the union meeting. That was sort of the trend after we dealt with the union dues, if you at that point, there was basically maybe four women that stayed after for probably the next three or four years. It wasn't something that women were really involved in. We found that most women had a double workload already, they worked full time with the city and then going to work back at home and taking care of the children and the household. Women didn't have a lot of time to attend meetings. That's still an issue today but more and more women are making it more of a priority. It wasn't necessarily encouraged that we attend those meetings. It was a bit of a novelty for the men to see us there. It was an inconvenience sometimes; they had to learn how to behave a little differently. Drinking at union meetings, before union meetings and after union meetings was a problem. For some of us younger folks that wasn't a problem but for some of the middle-aged women that became very problematic – having to deal with drunks at a union meeting wasn't something they were prepared to do. Our local certainly had our share. But throughout the years we started changing those procedures. For example, at executive meetings we stopped having alcohol at the executive meetings.

Q: How did it happen?

SK: It wasn't necessarily anything where anyone thought, well we're going to bring a motion and do that right away. It was something that sort of grew, that the members wouldn't appreciate spending union dollars on alcohol. It wasn't because it was uncomfortable for women, it was more that the members wanted us to spend the money more responsibly. But it had the impact of making it a little easier for women to come to

some of the meetings. They didn't have to worry about the drunks getting drunker during the meeting itself. It meant that some of the men would go and drink more prior to the meeting, but we tried to encourage more drinking after, so that we could have better discussions instead of yelling matches and things that would happen in those days.

Q: What year are we talking about?

SK: We're talking about the early to mid '70s. I went to my first union meeting in 1974. When I first got on the executive a couple of years later, we had alcohol at every executive meeting, and it was paid for by the union. That's something that I don't think would be acceptable today. But also certain behaviours and how people talked to each other was a factor. I personally could swear as good as any of them. I worked in daycare and the two-year-olds could probably outswear most of us. So swearing didn't bother me but it certainly bothered a lot of women. Gradually, issues of language came up, not necessarily at the meetings but in discussions prior to or after. And how the men treated the women was also an issue.

Q: At work as well?

SK: For me, not so much at work, because I worked in daycare at that time. But certainly at union events and functions, sexual harassment was something that women had to put up with if they wanted to be involved. There was no place to go to complain in the early days. It wasn't until close to the '90s that we actually got in harassment policies so that women could go and say, I don't like being treated like this, I don't deserve to be treated like this, and I refuse to be treated like this, so you have to stop it. Before that, women that were very active in the unions didn't want to go public and say, the big bad boys in the union are treating me this way. They didn't want to make it a public thing; they just wanted it to stop.

Q: How did you bring about a sexual harassment policy, and what did it look like?

SK: It took years and years. Throughout the different venues we had discussed resolutions about it. When CUPE developed theirs, they actually brought women from across the country, both staff and members, and we had a three-day forum near Kingston somewhere. We went down there, we sat down for about three days and talked about what should be in the harassment policy and what should be some of the ways that you could resolve the issues or the complaints. The first policies basically talked about respect, and that as we respect each other we don't treat each other in certain ways. Then they talked about definitions of sexual harassment. So the first policies came in strictly on sexual harassment but moved towards any kind of discriminatory behavior. Now, for example, CUPE's policy talks about we don't harass against our brothers and sisters. Originally it was brought in because of sexual harassment. We also started looking at ways of resolving those complaints by having ombudspersons trained and available at union functions. There, somewhere where you could go and say, I have a complaint and I need to have it resolved. Rather than it being made wide open public, they tried to bring the parties together to find a resolve.

Q: Why is it such a problem resolving sexual harassment issues?

SK: I think certainly at the beginning, it was behaviours that had been accepted for years and years.

Q: Like what?

SK: Oh just, I'm trying to think of specific examples. We had one president within CUPE that continually harassed women. He'd give them favours if they did what he wanted, and have them blackballed if they didn't. We actually started a campaign just amongst some of the women to try and stop it, but he got arrested just before we actually put those plans in motion. He was no longer around to have to worry about it. It was so bad that almost every woman that had been active within our organization had had an issue with him. If you would sit on his lap and play his little games, you got all sorts of treats and his support.

Q: ?

SK: That's something that I think even to this day women working in a lot of the union offices don't have pension plans. They work for organizations that have pension plans but they end up, if they have anything at all, they have RSPs that might buy you a tank full of gas these days, but it's not going to be anything you can live on. We had one sister in particular that worked for one of our locals for almost 40 years. She had to stay working that long because she had no pension. Initially they didn't even have RSPs. The members that she worked for all local 40's pension plan. I don't know that I should necessarily mention any names at this point.

. . . Quite often it was the same rationale that was around about women's wages, that women don't need to be paid as much because they've got somebody to take care of them, they're just there for pin money. They may want to buy a fancy dress once in a while; that's why women work. At least that was the perception, what some men thought, the ones that had any say about what their wages would be.

Q: Were you involved with any of the struggles on affirmative action?

SK: The affirmative action--I don't know that we've actually ever achieved that. Affirmative action was brought about initially to try and represent the number of people, women particularly, who were in the workforce but were not able to move upwards or get into certain jobs. There's basically women's work and men's work. In fact, I did an arbitration for a UFCW local; I was sitting as the union nominee. The employer was testifying and he talked about the men's wages and the wages for "the girls." There was quite a variance between the two for doing the same work. They actually had in their contract men's wages and, I don't think they said girls, I think they said ladies' wages. He thought there was nothing wrong with that. The arbitrator realized later that I almost went over the table ?? call caucus, because the man just didn't quite get it that there should be equity in what these people are being paid.

Q: In CUPE or the labour council, were you involved in any action of an affirmative nature?

SK: I've been involved in different committees throughout. We actually had a pay and employment equity committee coalition in the '90s up in Edmonton. We tried to get it off the ground to bring pressure to bring affirmative action into Alberta, or even some pay equity into Alberta. Pay equity basically says if you do the same work you get the same pay, or if you do work of the same value you get paid the same. That's a concept that's never been legislated in Alberta. There has been, for example, the federal government brought it in, and there's other people who talk about those struggles. I'm not even sure to this day if all the public sector employees at the federal level actually got the amendments, because that had been fought in the courts for years.

Q: Were you involved with the Alberta Federation of Labour?

SK: Ya. I've been in various committees at different levels. The Federation of Labor, through their women's committee, had been involved in the pay and employment equity coalition. We had various other groups – some of the immigrant women's organizations in Edmonton were involved. We had meetings and tried to develop some actions for two or three years. It sort of started getting bogged down with Ralph Klein. When you started getting the cutbacks, then the issue of pay equity sort of took a back seat. That's when the coalition sort of died out, because there were other issues. And that's one of the things we've had within the labour movement. We start fighting for a really important issue and then something even worse happens. So you drop the work on this and move on to fight this, to try to nip it in the bud. But then, just as you think you're getting somewhere else, something worse happens. We've been on this rollercoaster ride.

Q: Tell us about the Sisters From Hell.

SK: The Sisters From Hell were born April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1988. It was in the middle of the Alberta Federation of Labour convention in Edmonton. We had two strikes going on at that time

– the Zeidlers strike and the Steelworkers, Daam Galvanizing. What had happened is one day we had buses from the Fed that took some over to Zeidlers to the picket line and some went on another bus to the Daam Galvanizing strike. A bunch of us that had been at the Steelworkers' strike talked to some of the workers there and started a rapport. We went back after lunch to the convention. Just before closing of the convention that day some of the picketers came to talk to us and told us that after we'd left some of the scabs had been very threatening to them, saying, ya you're so brave when you've got all these friends around, just wait till shift change tomorrow morning. So we went, oops, we can't let them be alone tomorrow morning at shift change; so we have to be there for six o'clock in the morning. That was a really tough thing for some of us who don't do mornings. We figured, we've gotta go to bed early so we can get up in time to go to this, because we really can't let them face this alone. We went, okay, we'll just go to bed really early. We went, okay, we'll go to the Workers' Health Centre, it's having an auction that night, and the labour council had a function. We said, well we have to go to those. So we went to those. Then the Steelworkers said, well we've got a hospitality room, you have to come to that. Well the next thing you know it's four in the morning and we had to be at the picket line for 6. We said, there's no point going to bed now. So we all trundled into the buses and headed over there for six o'clock in the morning. Some of us were looking rather ragged. The real birth was when Darren Steinhoff from the Postal Workers were walking towards Cindy McCallum and myself and said, wow you sure look like the sisters from hell. We went, we like that. So when we got back to convention, Melva Forresburg is a woman that makes buttons for social causes, and she was at the convention. We asked if she could make four of these buttons, just hand make them right there, and she did. So the original four had these buttons. We just thought it was a joke at that point. But so many people wanted one that we had to order them from Melva. We figured, well if we're going to do this, there's a cost. Melva can't make them all for free, so she was going to charge us \$2. Then we decided, if we're going to charge people we may as well charge them \$5; \$2 will go to make the buttons and \$3 will raise money for donations. So the first \$300 that we raised from the button sales went to the Workers' Health Centre. Things sort of evolved with the Sisters from Hell. We made probably \$30-\$40,000 in donations over the years to various causes. We started in Alberta but then we

started selling buttons in Saskatchewan. So then Saskatchewan got to pick the cause that they wanted to support. We ended up going all the way across the country in donations, and got the activists from each province to say who they wanted to donate to. As it grew we had to develop different things about it. It was the Sisters from Hell, but recognizing that two of the founding members were men, how can they be sisters? So we came up with the idea that the brothers could be sisters but they'd have to have a sisternal name and it couldn't be the same as their own name; they had to be a little creative. But they could join. There's very little criteria about who we let join. The main criterion was you had to have a sense of humour. For those with limited senses of humour, we figured it would rub off on them. We've only denied one or two people entrance, and I'm not going to get into why. We did kick one out that was suspended because he wife ratted him out; he did something that he wasn't supposed to; so he got ratted out. The rationale really wouldn't make a lot of sense unless you knew a whole bunch more stuff. But we ended up with a pledge, an oath of office. I, Susan Keeley, hereby pledge to maintain my sense of humour, especially on the picket line or conventions or ... and we kept adding different events. And that I would abide by the rules and regulations of the Sisters From Hell, even though there aren't any yet; nor did we ever develop any. Then we had an official drink. The official drink became the flaming sambuca. We gave not rules about it, but just some cautions about how to drink a flaming sambuca. We talked about, after extensive research, particularly by the original four, that there should only be one sambuca per significant event, because otherwise you might not remember it. We had a secret greeting, which is the lowering of the toilet seat. I have people still today come up to me at various events and I hadn't seen them for a while, and that's the first thing they do. But we ended up having swearing-in ceremonies at all sorts of places – most conventions, week long schools, various places. I still have people saying, you've got to do a swearing in.

Q: Were there any official war chants or toasts?

SK: Oh yes. The official toast was "torch the suckers". I'd just about forgotten about that one.

Q: Why was the Sisters From Hell effective?

SK: It was effective because it combined being a trade union activist with having fun. We would go on picket lines or to various events and we would have fun, which would encourage more people to come and be active, and at the same time raise money for various causes that it was hard to raise money for. Some of them were for strikes that were significant. In Saskatchewan they had a women's shelter that they donated to. There were various causes. One particular cause that we championed was brother Bill Flookss, who became Sister Charity; he ran as a candidate in one of the elections and had to lay charges under the Elections Act for over 400 abuses or irregularities. There were at least 400 people that voted in the election that shouldn't have been allowed to vote, because they weren't eligible voters, but they were connected through the Tory campaign. They ended up going to court and we had to raise money for that. We developed a Sisters from Hell cookbook. Various members donated recipes and we put this thing together, certainly not in the days when we had the computer abilities that we have today. It was very manual-intensive to put this together. We sold them to help raise money for that as well.

Q: ?

SK: With the Sisters From Hell, the brothers became sisters with their names, but that doesn't really fit with your question. One of those types of struggles, an example would be 474 with their white ribbon campaign. I can talk a bit about that. That started right after one of the members had been assaulted in the schools, had been viciously and sexually assaulted in the school. Local 474, which was the Edmonton Public School Board, decided to take on the issue of violence against women, and started their white ribbon campaign, where they sold white ribbons to raise money for the shelters. But they used it more so for an awareness building of their members, that violence is not acceptable and that they were working towards eliminating violence against women. There's been lots of cases where the brothers have been very supportive. Sometimes only a few men at the start, but there's been a few of those cases and certainly we do have a lot of feminist men in the organization. That leads to the whole definition of feminism, and



that you don't have to be a woman to be a feminist. That's something that some people have a hard time getting around, that you can actually be a male and be a feminist too. The definition is really somebody who believes in equality of the sexes. If you believe in equality of the sexes then it's a tiny little step to believe that people of colour are equal too. Dealing with all the prejudices that we've had in our society, if you're a feminist you don't believe in the inequality of anyone, that we're all equal. That really does fit with the true beginning beliefs of the trade union movement, is that workers are equal. We're not slaves and we are in fact equal to the bosses.

... Like I mentioned earlier, my first union meeting was 1974. In 1975 Trudeau in wage and price controls.

Q: In the '80s there were a bunch of laws passed.

SK: I think that occurred right around the time I was leaving the executive, or I might've already left. It would be right after. I actually sat on the Federation executive for two separate blocks of terms. I used to joke that I only came on once every decade to try and straighten things out. But I haven't been in this decade.

Q: Tell us about the 1980s.

SK: Just to put it in context, the very early '80s was sort of the end of the boom in Alberta. We were just heading into the bust in '82. We had been negotiating double-digit wage increases in the late '70s and early '80s. In fact, in '82 I remember the City coming to us, because the bust had happened, and asked us if we would willingly roll back the next year's increase, which was 13%. We said, no, we have a signed collective agreement. They tried to threaten us, within our local anyway, that they would have to lay off people if we didn't give them the rollbacks. We said, well you're not going to lay off people that you need the work done, just to save a few dollars. So no, we're not prepared to roll back. We believe in the sanctity of the signed collective agreement; you can negotiate with us when the term is up. That started into the '80s. All of a sudden there were all sorts of different things happening – governments coming down and bad legislation that affected

various groups at different times. We had the War on 44 which is about Bill 44. We had the Change the Laws campaign that happened about a year after Gainers. There were other actions happening. We ended up having Solidarity Alberta in the '80s. There were lots of things happening where workers were getting together and protesting different things. We had some of our probably biggest demonstrations during that time. The change the law campaign, I believe that was the one where we marched to the Legislature. We had the Federation of Labor coming one way and the building trades coming another way and meeting to go on to the Legislature. It was fairly important, because the building trades and the Federation of Labor hadn't had a lot of joint activities, because the building trades had pulled out of the Congress in '81. To have a joint action with them was fairly significant and very important. I don't think that we followed up as much as we should've from those days. But there were thousands of people hitting the Legislature on protests in the '80s. Fairly important period of time. Unfortunately, it wasn't long after that that Ralph Klein got elected.

Q: Tell us about that one particular song from the Gainers strike.

SK: One of the benefit concerts that we had, somebody brought out Arlene Mantle, who was a singer/songwriter from Ontario. She wrote a song called Battle of 66<sup>th</sup> Street. She wrote that song and also performed a couple of benefit concerts to raise money for the strikers. It was something that I don't think we used enough of, having people actually put to song some of the struggles that we've had. I don't think we continue showing people that we have that history. For example, we have people like Woody Guthrie, who just about everybody knows songs of his. Most people know that some of those are actually union songs as well. Arlene did that song and I doubt if it gets played very often anywhere these days. It should be, because it's part of our history. It's important that we encourage musicians and artists to record our history and to write songs about what's happening now, not just what happened in the past.

Q: When Ralph Klein got elected, were you a union rep?

SK: Yes. I came on staff in 1990 with CUPE.

Q: In '93 he announced cutbacks of 20% across the board that came into effect in '94. Do you remember the laundry workers' strike of '95?

SK: When they brought in the cutbacks, that didn't necessarily relate in cutbacks of 20% to workers' wages, but in some categories it did. In fact, it was the laundry workers who in '93 took a 23% rollback on their wages, with the promise that they would not contract out their jobs.

Q: Laundry workers where?

SK: In Calgary. It was at the General Hospital, which is where a lot of the laundry was done, and the Foothills. Those two hospitals actually had the laundry facilities for all the Calgary hospitals at that time. In '93 the laundry workers said, ya, to save my job I'll take a 23% wage rollback. At this point you're talking about the lowest paid of any healthcare worker that there was. They took it in the chin. They took that cutback. That's what made it worse for them when, in 1995, the employer came to them and told them that they were contracting out their jobs and they would all be laid off. They didn't offer them any severance package, they didn't offer redeployment. In those days, what redeployment meant was that if you got laid off and there were other jobs open in your facility, then the employer could move you into another position instead of laying you off. But the theory behind that, that the employer had, is that you couldn't move up and get a promotion as a result of that. If you're the lowest paid at the very bottom, there is no place to redeploy you, because anything you would take would be a promotion. So they weren't allowed to be redeployed, they weren't given severance package. They were just going to be out in the streets with two weeks, not even paid notice, two weeks... They weren't going to be redeployed, they were just going to be out on the street after two weeks. And they expected them to work the full two weeks. They had had a meeting with us in the morning. I was their national rep and Len Fagnan at that time was the president of the local. We were at the meeting with the laundry workers when they were told they were

going to be laid off. After that meeting we asked the employer if we could stay and talk to the members. It's interesting, because this is one of the few times they actually shut down the operation to talk to the employees. They shut it down completely, had everybody there at the same time. We started talking to them and, understandably, everyone was very distraught. We ended up going to the employer and saying, we've told these people to go home sick. They're all stressed out, we don't want them working on these machines; it's too dangerous when they're this upset. We've told them to go home. The employer sort of blustered a little bit but then sort of understood that ya, it was pretty bad news. What we told the members is, go home for the rest of the day; we're going to arrange for a meeting that night. So at 7:30 we met at Bridgeland Community Association and we talked to the members about what did they want to do about this. We came up with some suggestions of what they could do. We told them we could file a grievance but, number one, grievances take a long time and two, there's no guarantee that that'll do anything. Then we talked about doing an information picket and at least letting the public know that this is not appropriate, not acceptable. But people said, well what's that gonna do? At the end of the day it's not going to keep our job. We said, well probably not. So they decided that they were actually going to go out on strike. They were not going to tolerate this and they were going on the picket line. The worst that they had to lose at that point was the last two weeks of their employment. They'd already been kicked in the shins because, if they'd known this was going to happen, they wouldn't have taken the 23% rollback and would've been able to go on unemployment insurance at that time at a higher rate than what they were going to end up with. So the workers talked it out and they made the decision. I think that's the important thing – it was the workers that decided. It was not something that was pushed by any big union boss. I think that's what scared the employer and I think that's what scared Ralph Klein. It wasn't by the leadership of the union, it was the members. They had decided. I left the meeting knowing that they would be walking out at five o'clock the next morning, which is the start of their shift. I phoned my supervisor at that point. Our regional director was Dave Werlin. I said, Dave, you want to come to Calgary in the morning? I think something's going to happen. He drove down in the middle of the night and got there for five o'clock in the morning as we started the picket line. It was a very interesting group of people that we worked with – mostly

immigrants, mostly women. Very nervous, that first morning. When we would stand in front of trucks the women would get really nervous because they were afraid they'd get run over. By the third day they were standing in front of them with their arms crossed, saying, I dare you to cross. It was a phenomenon that grew every day. The first morning I got arrested on the picket line because there was an over-zealous cop that thought we should just leave. He told us we had to leave or he was going to start arresting us. Then I questioned him about, well what are you going to charge us with? First off, it wasn't an illegal strike, it hadn't been declared so. We were there and there was no law that we were breaking at that point. He kept telling us to leave. I kept asking him, and the third time I asked him he grabbed me by the coat and pulled me over to the police car, and sat there for a while trying to figure out what to charge me with. That really freaked out some of the members at that point. But there was this one older woman who I believe was of Chinese descent. She just danced around the car, singing "We Shall Overcome". The poor cop is still sitting there trying to figure out what to charge me with and realizing that maybe he'd gotten in a little over his head. The result was I was charged with failing to walk on the sidewalk, even though there were no sidewalks there.

Q: This was at which facility?

SK: We were at the General Hospital laundry facility itself, basically walking past the driveway that the trucks would go in to drop their loads and pick up new loads. It wasn't K-Bro, it was still the health region at that time. K-bro was going to be taken over in two weeks. But because of this action, K-Bro didn't get in for another two years.

The first day, it was just the laundry workers at the General Hospital in Calgary. The second day, the laundry workers at the Foothills Hospital, who were members of AUPE, went out. What happened was every day there'd be an increase in action. There would be more support; we would eventually have most of the hospital workers out. The nurses decided not to go, but many of them came out on the picket lines outside of their shifts. It grew to the point that we had groups such as the Calgary Police Association, who had never really been labour-friendly at that point, donated \$500 to the strike. Maybe they were embarrassed that one of their members had arrested somebody from the picket line.

But it just continually grew. We had citizens driving by and dropping off doughnuts and coffee. I didn't think I'd ever want to have doughnuts after that strike. We had some of the nursing home workers. At that point they were called nursing homes. They came out, and the different hospitals went out. What started at the General Hospital went to the Foothills laundry and then went to workers at all the other hospitals, some of which are no longer around. It just continually grew. Because it grew, I think that's what scared the government – that it was growing and they saw the support growing each day. The general population in Calgary, which is not known to be a labour supportive city, were outraged at the fact that these workers, who already took it in the chin by taking these rollbacks, were going to be sent in the street with nothing. Even Calgarians knew how unfair that was, and didn't support that. So it developed as things progressed and we got more and more support. All of a sudden Ralph Klein, who said he wasn't going to blink in any of this, had to blink. He ended up phoning Terry Mutton, who was the president of CUPE Alberta division at that time, around three in the morning saying, we have to do something. As a result of that, there was a joint bargaining committee that went to meet with the health region. That included, for example, Carol Ann Dean, who was president of the Alberta Union of Public Employees; Reynold Morgan, who was president of the Foothills chapter; and I think there was one other person from AUPE – I'll have to look at the pictures to remember who that was. Then there were three people from CUPE. It ended up being Terry Mutton as well as Judy Darcy, our national president at the time. Actually we had four: we had Len Fagnan, who was the president of the local at that time; and John Moltos, who was the healthcare coordinator for CUPE in Alberta. They went in to the bargaining table. I was actually given a choice, though sort of not really. I basically told them, listen, I'm prepared to stay and be with the workers and not go to the bargaining table. Somebody had to be there because there were so many things happening. I'm not sure to this day if that was the right decision. I'm not sure if the end result would've been the same or not. The end result, I mean we do consider it a win, but we think it could've been a better win.

Q: What elements of it were a win?

SK: The elements were that the workers got their jobs back for two years. They were given opportunities to train for other positions within the healthcare region so that they could in fact get promotions and move up. Quite a few of the workers actually took advantage of that training. Others were offered positions with K-Bro when K-Bro did come in two years later. And they were all offered severance packages. So that was the last time workers were just given two weeks notice and left out in the street. There were actually severance packages. So those parts were wins. But what wasn't a win was that two years later they did contract out those jobs. I suppose people today could probably talk about the quality of that service and how different that is from doing it in-house.

Q: How will this affect people?

SK: I think initially, the best thing is our members were able to walk back into the job with their heads held high, for a period of time. Those people in particular realized that what they did by standing up for themselves did accomplish something. Further down the road, that something diminishes considerably, by no longer having a job there or whatever happened to some of them. We do know that some went on to other things. Some got redeployed within the healthcare system, because they were able to train and get promotions. Others stayed with K-Bro, and others just disappeared and went into other things. I think a lot of those people now would say that that was a turning point in their lives. But whether or not people will say today that it's a win... It was a moral victory, but a bread-and-butter victory where two years down the road ... they still accomplished the contracting out. We had been hopeful that, as this thing grew, the whole fight on contracting out would've been settled at that strike. We'd hoped that employers would say, it's better to do it in-house with your own employees than doing it outside. But I do know that the initial reaction of the members when they were told what the settlement was, it wasn't a happy settlement for them. We had members in tears, saying that it wasn't good enough. . . .

It was a subdued group when they heard what the results were.

Q: Why did it not continue to grow?

SK: I think there were a few things that happened. One, there's a fellow that does a talk show, named Dave Rutherford. Dave Rutherford was away on vacation when the laundry workers' strike started. His replacement was a much more progressive person than Dave Rutherford is. Dave has not been known to support any workers' cause by any means. So during those 10 days we had this other announcer that didn't argue with people that phoned in supporting us. Our members actually got into listening to that program during the strike. We'd have the car radio on and people would listen to it, because they'd feel really buoyed by all these people phoning in in support. About the second day before the end of the strike, Dave Rutherford actually came back to work. We ended up turning off his program, because he started getting very argumentative with anyone who supported us. I know how he works – he only takes the calls that support his issues. He ended up not accepting phone calls from people that were supporting us, and only took in calls that wouldn't. So that was a big change. One other major factor was the nurses decided not to go. We think that if the nurses had come out, then that would've been the real catalyst that it wasn't going to just end the way it ended. A lot of the nurses themselves were prepared to come out, but when they had their meeting to vote on it, it was...

Q: What would the outcome have been if the nurses had come out?

SK: I think that we could've gone further on the issue of contracting out, and getting turning that issue around so that there wasn't support for contracting out any work. It could've turned into a general strike, I don't know. I think it could've possibly grown into that. I think it would've ended up in a whole battle about contracting out in the public sector, which would've changed our history considerably. If we could've stopped contracting out in the public sector, then maybe they would've stopped contracting out, didn't even think about doing it in the private sector. It just boggles my mind why a private employer would want to contract out his own work. They didn't do that at that time, but they do it now. I think we could've maybe gained a lot more on the issue.

Q: It was an illegal strike – why didn't the law get more aggressive?



SK: The law did, to a certain extent. The employer took us to the labour board right away and the labour board declared – I think it was the second day of the strike – the labour board declared we were in an illegal strike. So we met with members and said, okay, the labour board says you have to go back to work. The workers said, well what will that get us? We said, well nothing. Well we're not going. So the workers said, no we're not going to listen to that. Then the labour board took it into the courts. The courts said it was an illegal strike, and ordered us back to work. Again we met with the members and again the members said, no we're not listening to that; this is our livelihood, what more can they do to us? We talked about what some of the things were that could happen. For example, we could get arrested. They said, well what do you think the chances of that are? I said, well because the public support is there for you, you're probably not going to get arrested. I said, perhaps the leadership may. But because the general public had already come onside with these workers, we didn't think that they were as much at risk. When they realized that the leadership was prepared to take that risk, they were certainly prepared. They actually took us to the courts twice, and twice the courts declared that we were an illegal strike. Still, the workers said, it doesn't mean anything to us, it doesn't give us our jobs back – we're not prepared to listen.

Q: The order was never enforced.

SK: No, they never did enforce those orders. But a few of the leadership were put in, sort of inaccessible for a little while. I stayed on the picket line because I figured if they arrest me it would be just the second time, that's all.

Q: ?

SK: We did talk about it. We ended up actually even having, which was quite different, we had joint meetings with the members from CUPE and AUPE. They talked about the options and they talked about sending people in. I don't know that there was, I actually don't recall any discussion about sending anyone specifically from the laundry.

Q: But the ratification meetings were separate?

SK: The ratification were separate; well we had the meetings jointly and then we went off and voted separately.

Q: What was their mandate?

SK: I don't know, Dave. I wasn't at the table. We knew that they were in there trying to negotiate a settlement. We were hoping that they were going to get the whole concept of contracting out off the table and that their jobs would be secure.

[technical difficulties]

[ END ]