

Carol Anne Dean (part 2)

CD: It was about that time where I was giving serious thought to whether or not I really wanted to continue being actively involved in AUPE to the point where I would seek positions that would involve me in the bigger part of the union. Having said that and finding my way to my first AFL executive council meeting, I found myself, being very young at that time and somewhat naïve still, sitting around a very important table with some very active long-time trade unionists, who welcomed me around that table and was glad at the very least to see that there was representation at that table by AUPE. I suppose it was around that time that I started to vocalize out loud to those people I got to know around that table that I seriously didn't feel that I would perhaps continue being involved in AUPE. I'm happy to say it was people like Dave Werlin from CUPE; Phil Oak, who belonged at that time with the Steelworkers; Ian Thorne, the union he represented at that time was the McMurray Independent Oil Workers that is now also CEP; Norm McLennan, who at that time was with the Paperworkers Union that we now also know as CEP; who basically took me under their wing, counselled me, gave me wonderful advice, but more importantly encouraged me not to quit. I really thank those individuals today because had it not been for them I truly believe that I very well may have folded up my tent and gone home. Having said that, I then became an executive member of the Federation of Labour for almost ten years. I sat in that seat all the four years that I served as a vice-president of AUPE. I continued on following the positions that I held in AUPE thereafter as well. Just going back to some of my time as a vice-president of AUPE, there were a lot of things going on in our union at the time, some of them most disheartening. I suppose the one thing that sticks out in my mind the most is the fact that within our constitution did give the authority for the executive committee to merge, amalgamate and define locals and chapters within our union. It was pretty obvious that there were pre-meetings going on with at least the majority of AUPE's executive minus at least two vice-presidents; I was one; my sister, Loraine Ellis, was another. The formal part of our executive meetings I think were just simply to put into law the kinds of decisions that they wanted to make. I certainly recall on one occasion being called into an executive committee meeting where the motion was put to the floor where they were going to merge and

amalgamate certain of our locals, and in the process of doing so, would result in the number of provincial executive members around the table being reduced. But you didn't have to do much research to see where their rationale didn't wash very clearly with most of us. As an example, the Alberta Hospital Edmonton was a local unto its own. It was to be merged and amalgamated with Ponoka, which was at that time a local unto its own and had its own provincial executive member. So just in that instance alone there you had two provincial executive members; now you're reduced to one. Albeit the rationale was we were getting too big and these were just small locals, it didn't prevent of course the provincial executive members still holding their seat from the Royal Alec Hospital, again a small facility, no larger or smaller than that of Ponoka or Alberta Hospital Edmonton. But, of course, as I said, it became very clear to many of us that the amalgamations were done to ensure that John Booth could regain a majority vote on the provincial executive so that he could continue his agenda. What that was totally I don't think all of us were ever really very clear on. That created a hailstorm in our union that I believe still is fresh in the minds of many longstanding active AUPE members to this day. There was huge dissension amongst the ranks. It was constant around the provincial executive tables, at local meetings, and of course followed its way to the doorstep of our AUPE conventions as well. In one particular convention a resolution had been put that in fact would rescind the decisions made by the executive committee. Not that there hadn't already been several attempts made around the PE table. I remember occasions where John Booth just simply didn't agree with the membership and would get up and walk out of the room. In one particular case, all of the provincial executive members basically got up and followed after him to his office and had a bit of a sit-in, encouraging him to come back to the table so that we could deal with these matters around the PE table. At the same time, a resolution was put to our convention to rescind that decision and many different attempts were made that day on the floor. For example, as always, AUPE would conduct its vote and members would raise a card, their voting card, making their decision whether they were for or against a resolution. In the process of doing so, it was determined that our resolution had passed. However, someone got to a mike and insisted that there be a roll call vote. Well, at that time, albeit our conventions are probably twice as large today, there was about 350 people on that floor. That passed, meaning that the secretary of our

convention had to stand up and call out each name of each delegate and ask each individual to stand up and declare their intentions on that resolution. That resolution still passed, albeit by a slim majority. We took a lunch break, a recess from convention. There was a number of us sitting in one of the hotel rooms at the time waiting for convention to end when someone came to the door to inform us that they had listened to the news and in doing so had overheard John Booth indicating that in fact he was coming back to the floor of convention basically to rule that particular resolution out of order. His rationale for that was because we did not count abstentions. Well it didn't take long for all of us to pull out the constitution which dictated our rules of order. More importantly, when it's silent, the Bourinot Rules of Order came into play, to study up as quickly as we could in preparation of convention reconvening. Sure enough we went back to that convention floor and he basically ruled that resolution out of order. If we didn't think we had a mess and there was chaos in our union before, then let it be said that we were really in a lot of trouble amongst ourselves at that point. That probably gave rise to a lot of different tumultuous situations and incidents over the course of a few years. I did run again as a vice-president, albeit at that time many of us would meet in advance. There were some pretty sad shenanigans that took place where many of us it was suggested might want to go home and sit with our partners and talk to them about the politics of the union, that in fact there was no holds barred. Some of my brothers and sisters were receiving phone calls; they were being threatened. At the same time some of their partners were being called, being suggested that perhaps if they weren't home and when they're out at union meetings maybe they're up to other kinds of things – anything that could be done I think to cause trouble and issues at home for active members who believed strongly and were in opposition with John Booth at that time. It did in fact cause a great deal of problems for a lot of my brothers and sisters and their situations at home. But regardless of that, people just became more entrenched. We were more firm in our resolve that we were going to stand together; we were going to increase our ranks. Those ranks were healthcare workers, people from the education sector, those working directly for government service. Every occupational grouping and every local was involved to some degree, individuals from those locals. It was a long time coming. However, we were able to bring resolutions to the floor of the convention. We were able to gain majority on that convention

floor and it really did force the administration at that time to put on a little kinder, gentler face and be far more democratic than we had known our union to be in the previous years.

Following that, as I said, I ran for vice-president again. Needless to say, any opportunity there was to challenge myself or anyone like me that was running for a position, but that just made for very interesting times. Quite frankly, I think those of us who won positions during those days earned them, earned them not because of our strong resolve but because we had to stand front, centre, and forthright on behalf of the members. Many of us did enjoy not only holding those positions but did enjoy a great deal of support by the memberships as a result of that.

Well, as time goes on and those people who maybe know you better than you might think you know yourself, it was not long before we would be reconsidering those who would be running for our AUPE executive again when I was advised again by people who I know very well and have a great deal of respect for that I really didn't have any choice, but I was going to have to put my name forward for secretary-treasurer of AUPE, which I did. In the fall of 1989 I was elected executive secretary- treasurer of AUPE, actually the first woman elected treasurer of AUPE as secretary-treasurer. Those too were very interesting times. As a union and for some time, things were not good financially with our union. It didn't surprise me that when I became executive secretary- treasurer to find that we didn't necessarily have the most healthy of finances. At that point a lot of different changes and really as a union it really forced us to be rather innovative in making our decisions on the kinds of programs we were going to offer, the representation of our members, and more particularly how we were going to fight back, not just for the name of our own members but for the labour movement as a whole in Alberta, of which we belonged. My time as secretary-treasurer albeit was more focused on the finances of AUPE but there were a number of memorable experiences. I can recall May 1st 1990 when the social workers in our union, Local 6, went out on what they know being the 22 days in May. They went out on strike at that time and the issue back in 1990 is no different than it is today for social workers, and of course it's caseloads and their ability to properly care for the children and those in need in this province. That was a wonderful time, albeit it was somewhat frightening, because when your members are out on strike, they expect strike pay. Across the province about a week later was a very exciting time, an opportunity again for a real show of force by

AUPE members on behalf of quality public services in this province and a really wonderful time to be involved in AUPE, albeit our finances not being all that healthy. The other event that took place four years after my taking the position of secretary-treasurer was again the same individuals and certain others who indicated to me that it was also my time to seriously consider whether I would take on the role of president of AUPE.

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