

Carol-Anne Dean

CD: Where I was born? I was originally born in a place called Hertfordshire, England. My parents immigrated to Canada when I was about three years old. I live in the City of Edmonton and still do to this day.

Q: Okay, we're rolling. Can you tell me where you're from and what your earliest influences were?

CD: Oh I'd be happy to tell you that. I was born in Hertfordshire, England, and I immigrated to Canada when I was about three years old. Raised in the city of Edmonton. My father, who was a very staunch socialist and at the same time the president of his local with the PSAC, was a very strong influence on my-- not just as his daughter growing up but certainly when I decided to become involved in the labour movement.

Q: What were the living conditions of the community where you grew up?

CD: I come from a middle-class family, lower-middle-class family. My father was the breadwinner for many years while we were small children. My mother didn't actually go back to work until my youngest sister was in grade school. I have a sister who is a year and 11 months younger than myself who is mentally challenged, a brother who's four years younger, and a sister who's about 10 years younger. The community I lived in was the west end of Edmonton, and as a matter of fact I still live in the west Edmonton area today.

Q: Were there any influential people in your life?

CD: That is a really open question because I have had great privilege to be involved with and connected to many influential people all along during the course of my life in the labour movement. I think I would first have to start with those at my workplace. It all started there

when I first worked at the University of Alberta Hospital. At that time it was the first job I had where in fact I became a union member. At that time we were known as Branch 54 and had a business agent as opposed to a union rep, and was the local that at that point was one of the last branches within the structure of AUPE before it changed. I was approached by the business agent, who quite frankly was a very good friend of my manager in the department that I worked in. It was my manager who suggested that perhaps I might be interested in getting involved and attending some of the courses that that business agent was attempting to release employees from and to attend. So I have to say one of the first influences, believe it or not, was my manager who, for the years that I in fact worked with her, became a great personal friend of mine and allowed me the opportunity for the time off that is required to really give heart and soul to the labour movement. The very first union activity that I attended was the Alberta Federation of Labour School. I had originally chose Effective Communications, and I did that because I believed that if I didn't continue to be involved in the labour movement that a course such as that was going to be very beneficial to me in whatever I might aspire to in later years. When I came actually to Jasper for the Labour School and introduced myself as being someone from Local 54, there were a lot of people that were very surprised firstly to know that I came from that local and a lot of people, and mainly again long-time activists of the union, that were surprised because it was like the same people continued to go to the same courses year after year. I remember one particular day where individuals, one from each of the classes, was to be chosen as the student representative. We were to meet for lunch one day and advise and make announcements back to our individual classrooms. It was decided in my absence that the last person that was going to join the group was going to have to be the emcee for the entire evening of one of the evening events. Unfortunately, my Health and Safety class, because I wasn't accepted into Effective Communications because it was full, and got bumped to my second choice, was chosen as the master of ceremonies. So that was also my very first experience at actual public speaking. Over the course of what's going on now, very near 30 years of experience and involvement in the labour movement and positions that I have held, I have a number of influences that were in AUPE but I also have to say that there was a period of time in my life that I was going to leave it all behind. A tremendous amount of frustration,

annoyance, and at that time frankly I was a vice-president of AUPE. Sadly, the president, John Booth at the time, did not, as one should as the president, take his rightful place in the seat for AUPE around the Federation of Labour executive table, and as that appointed me to do that on behalf of AUPE. I have to say that at that time I was probably one of two or three women only that sat around that executive table. But having said that, there were great influences there, people who came from any of the public or private sector unions. At that point in time I shared with them my frustrations, and it was those individuals who encouraged and supported me to continue in the labour movement and to persevere. I'm so very glad for those particular influences because I went on and became very involved in AUPE and I would like to think played a very important role in putting a much kinder face to our union and influencing our union to become far more democratic than it was when I originally became involved.

Q: Besides Vice-President, what other positions have you held in AUPE?

CD: Well, going right back to the very beginning, I held the chair of Local 54, which at that time was simply the University of Alberta Hospital. Following that and being on the provincial executive, I think I did three terms as well on the negotiating team. I did become a vice-president of AUPE and did two terms. Following that I was the first woman executive secretary-treasurer for AUPE, and following that, I was the second woman elected in AUPE and served two terms as the president.

Q: What difficulties did you experience as secretary-treasurer?

CD: At that time and for some time our union was in financial crisis to the extent where we waited desperately each month for the union dues to come in from the employers so that we could clear ourselves out of a first line or operating line of credit. Of course it was a bounce back and forth, and as a result of that we did have to make some significant changes through the PE and convention in how we dealt with our finances. Certainly when I became secretary-treasurer we were not flush as a union by any means. I should add that at that time and the latter point in

time that I was the executive secretary-treasurer, Ralph Klein and once again the Progressive Conservatives were elected leaders of the province, and the cuts began. Included in that and given the financial crisis we had, we also as a union had groups of members who stood up during the course of negotiations. The two that come immediately to mind to me is Local 6, what soon became known as a 22 days in May, went out on strike. I think probably after the first week or so, Local 3, the Solicitor-General correctional officers, probation officers, went out on strike as well. That in itself put great financial pressures on the union as well.

Q: What changes did you make as secretary-treasurer?

CD: Well, I think at that time for example, I'm just trying to think, for example we had reduced the number of committee members that were on our standing committees, which was a hard thing to do because as one well knows the more people you can get involved in the union and the more activists you have, the stronger you are. We did have a group of three psychologists on staff, and unfortunately we could no longer provide that service to our members. Also, along with that, certain other changes were made, and I guess one starts counting pencils and pens and printing, and unfortunately even looking at reducing the amount of money that went into the bank accounts of our individual locals so that they too could continue being active with their members.

Q: What major accomplishments have you had in your life?

CD: Major accomplishments? Well just summing it up as one thing, because I'd like to think I did many things, I would like to think that I put a kind and more gentle face to our union. By that I don't necessarily mean out in the public or with other unions, but I think in the nature in which we treated each other. I'd like to think that I made our union more democratic and welcoming to new members.

Q: Did you do any community work outside the union?

CD: Well, I volunteered, yes, but I couldn't say that I volunteered working for any particular charities or those kinds of things. I continued to volunteer in the labour movement. So I was very involved in a lot of the activities of the Federation of Labour, the National Union of Provincial and Government Employees, and also a lot of other social justice groups within the province of Alberta and to some degree outside of Alberta.

Q: Do you have any artifacts?

CD: Yes, I do. I have a very small shoebox because as you can well imagine with almost 30 years in the labour movement, if one kept every memento... But I have managed over the years to reduce it down to one small shoebox. When you talk about artifacts, some of them might be buttons, not my own necessarily, but might be buttons of people who were very important to me and still are to this day, that I struggled and worked with in the labour movement; it would be their buttons that they may have worn when they ran for an election. I have cards that were sent to me by members saying very nice things about working with me in certain struggles. That became a lot more prevalent of course when I became the president and our union was really in a full-fledged crisis with Ralph Klein and the Progressive Conservatives privatizing and thousands of our members losing jobs.

Q: What year were you the president?

CD: I was the president from the fall of 1993 to the fall of 1997.

Q: During that time the union experienced some difficult times?

CD: It probably was the four hardest years, probably the year leading up to that and certainly following that as well. I was elected president six months after Ralph Klein, albeit we were already seeing prior to his election some changes, some layoffs occurring and some forms of

privatization or contracting out being introduced. It was full-fledged war on public sector unions, public sector workers, and quality public services. No holds barred, there was no corner or section of either the education, healthcare, or government services that weren't under full frontal attack. At that point I watched thousands of AUPE members lose their jobs either through privatization or simple layoffs.

Q: What are you doing now?

CD: Where I am today, I am most fortunate. When I left AUPE I worked part-time; I was successful in a job competition through the Federation of Labour. They had managed to get some money out of the Workers Compensation Board basically to hire someone who could organize, coordinate, and write a response to each of the recommended policy changes and work at ensuring that the labour movement had full voice in the consultation process of the review of the WCB policies. I added to that by running in my community, first trying to take on the then Nancy Betkowski, later Nancy MacBeth, on behalf of New Democrats. I was unsuccessful. However, following that, four months later, I ran as a public school trustee and I was successful and spent three years doing that until one day my phone rang and it was the then president of AUPE, Dan MacLennan, asking me if I would be interested in involving myself at my old workplace, as that workplace was being raided by another union. With that I came back to AUPE as an employee on a temporary basis. Then, following that, I took over for the individual responsible for labour relations at the University Hospital. Following that, a position opened up, a competition was held, I applied for the position and I have now spent about the last eight, I think January is either my eighth or ninth year, as a membership services officer, once again representing the members of AUPE.

Q: Can you describe the process of making the transition from a rank-and-file member right through to becoming a president of AUPE, and what factors drove you towards this?

CD: Well that probably could be a very long story. Let me just say that I got involved, as I said, being approached by the business manager at that time asking me if I would be interested in going to convention. I indicated I was interested. I went to a membership meeting, I was elected. Following that there was a meeting of all convention delegates, and at that time they sat down with the resolution book and said, okay now we're going to resolution 2-1, mark yes. Then we're going to resolution 3-2, mark no. Well, at one point I spoke up and said, well hang on a minute, I haven't even had a chance to read them. They said, it doesn't matter, just mark yes or no because that's how you're gonna vote when we get there. Now ordinarily in our union there are caucus meetings or maybe membership meetings where a resolution that was going to convention is debated by the regular members, and they indicate to their representative that they're in favour or opposed; that is in fact the way a member will go and vote on that particular resolution. I, on the other hand, went home that evening to my parents and was having a conversation with my father, who very emphatically indicated that if you've been elected by your members to attend convention, you're there as their representative and that you're there to support their position. When they have voted and indicated how they want you to vote on a particular resolution, it's incumbent on you to do that. But as I began to explain to him that's not what was happening, that in fact we didn't have a membership meeting, in fact we were basically being told by the business agent how we were to vote, my father very clearly said to me, well if that's the case, you go to the convention, you listen hard, sort out what you believe is in the best interest of your members, and do what the hell you like. I was also told when I got to the convention that there were certain delegates coming from my local that I should deliberately stay away from; they were just troublemakers. They indicated one particular individual. Her name was Carol Arnold. I never saw her for about the first day and a half of the convention; she didn't sit with our table. However, one of the reasons why we were told, and maybe a little later I can get into it, because politics being what they were at one time in our union it was very difficult indeed – you need to stay away from her because she's a commie. When all of a sudden out of the blue late one afternoon at convention she just sort of sat down and people started to whisper, there she is. I actually approached her at the end of the convention indicating that I had been told I should stay away from her, and would she be

interested in going for a drink so she could tell me why? There actually began a 25-year friendship. But at the same time, speaking to her and certain others from our local, it became very clear that we weren't a very democratic local, that there were people that were not being properly represented; the voices weren't being heard. From that a group of us rose from the ashes and quite frankly did become quite a militant group within our local to try and make the changes that needed to be done. Going on from there I can say that did I ever aspire to be a leader or ever imagine in my life that I would've had the good fortune to hold the positions I did? Never. I think it was what people saw in me and felt that it had to be me and that I was worthy of support. Had I not had the kind of support and hard work from others, I don't think I ever would've been very successful. So having said that, we realized that one of the things we had to do as a local was we needed to invoke change. In doing that, we set to request that there be general membership meetings and these are the issues that we wanted on the agenda and this is the information we wanted. They wouldn't call meetings. So we would put our own notices together and we would slide them through the glass on the bulletin board just outside the cafeteria, and when we'd go back at lunch somebody would've removed it and we would stick it back in again. Ultimately – and I know that this is probably a dirty word for a lot of folks in the locals, because it's not a good place to be – we deliberately put ourselves into trusteeship. Now having said that, the motion was very clear to indicate that we were only going into trusteeship for a very brief period of time. Then you've gotta call elections and using that opportunity to perhaps inject new blood. I have to tell you at that time I still never intended to run for any of the positions. It wasn't until our physical plant, the trades department within the University Hospital, had put together a slate and they were all physical plant people that many of us realized, well that's not democratic either. So we needed to try and find individuals from all of the occupational groupings, including the physical plant, to make up the executive. It was really at that time it was decided, you have to run and we're saying you have to run, you're the one who has to run for the chair of the local. So that's certainly how I became the chair of the local. I think, following that, being impassioned by values and principles of the trade union movement, wanting desperately to be very involved but yet always being encouraged along the way to climb up the ladder and take on all of the positions that I have



held over the many years. But let me just add here that one of my happiest moments and what I was happiest doing was being on the shop floor representing members. But each position I took within AUPE and each rung of the ladder that I climbed, I realized that even though I had made a mark and reached the point of being president, that in fact I had now removed myself from the very place that really I was the happiest and felt most worthy in representing AUPE members.

Q: Did you have family support?

CD: I had great family support, from my father in particular, who was a tremendous encouragement. I have to say that my mother was always a bit concerned that I would be putting my job on the line, but my father was very quick to tell my mother to leave the girl alone. So I had a great deal of support from my family. I dedicated my life to the labour movement and remained single throughout many years, all of the years, quite frankly, that I was involved in the labour movement. However, having said that, I did have my sister, who again was a great support for me because it allowed me at least to own a home. Although I didn't spend much time in it, it was well kept and it was safe. My family was there and always ready to cancel a birthday or family gathering for another weekend or further down the road to accommodate my schedule travelling the province or being involved in other things.

Q: Can you talk about travelling as a union rep and going around to various areas of the province?

CD: Absolutely. Of course once you are the president, well I should say once you have a position on the executive, one of your roles is to go and meet with the members, to discuss with them, find out their issues, and more importantly, impart what the union is doing and working on on their behalf. Of course, as a vice-president, secretary-treasurer, and, of course, a president, there are many, if not all, locals and chapters that I visited from one end of the province to the other. I will say that in doing that, more often than not I did travel alone. I did travel alone to

many of these places, and I found that sometimes that was a great comfort to me because I found I was often surrounded by people and it was a great opportunity when driving alone to gather one's thoughts. But I enjoyed very much travelling, not so much travelling as the experience that I had first of all in visiting areas of our province that I would probably not have been afforded the opportunity to do – small rural communities, to see and learn, being a city girl, just how well and how cohesive and reliant small communities are on each other. That was certainly one thing that I learnt. But I think travelling and visiting the chapters and locals, in particular the different sectors, and understanding not just the nature of the work, but more importantly, learning about the types of public services that Albertans were being offered was also a tremendous learning experience for me.

[ END ]