

Barb Byers

BB: My name is Barbara Byers. I'm an executive vice president of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Q: What's your background?

BB: I use my background sometimes as an example to other people. Some people grow up in union families, grow up with union issues and social justice issues around their dinner table. My family and my father, to be kind, was anti-union although I don't remember us ever having a discussion about it. He just didn't like it when I got involved. My mother was a legal stenographer as it was called during the time and I would say she was a militant (unclear word). But I didn't have any union background. I became a social worker with the government of Saskatchewan and I didn't pay any attention to this thing called a union. About a year after I had my job as a social worker I got a raise, actually I got two raises, which was really great. I got a raise for having passed my probation after a year. Then a couple of months later I got this raise that what was then called the "association", apparently it was negotiated for me. I thought this was great, but I was still looking at it as if it was coming from the employer. So fast forward about eight years and I'm working in an institution, this is before the Young Offender's Act, so it's an institution for teenage street girls ages 12 to 16. A woman I worked with, called Shirley, who was a teacher therapist, came to me and said, "Barb, the tier two bargaining, which is occupational specific for social workers and corrections workers, has lost a bunch of people on the committee and I think you'd be really good, would you like to do it?" I remember saying to her, and I can hear myself, I said to her, "I don't know, Shirley. I don't know anything about unions and I'm not sure that I really like them." That's true, because my only memory of a union was when about four or five years before that I was supposed to be going to Ft. St. John BC for my niece's christening and there was a strike by the air traffic controllers. Of course I went out to the airport in a taxi to try and go to Ft. St. John and there was this group of people who weren't allowing the taxis through. It

wouldn't have done any good anyhow – they weren't working, there was no planes flying. But I was one of those members of the public that was horrified that somebody had interfered with my right to go out to my niece's christening. So I said, "I'm not sure about that." She said, "oh well just give it a try and if you don't like it you can always step back, it's not it's a lifelong commitment; you're not marrying it, it's not a job." So I agreed. Two things I learned from that is, although it's really important to get to members when they first come to the workplace, it's equally important not to forget the members who've been there for a long time who might still be active. The second thing I learned was to say to people who say they can't do it or don't want to do it, 'well just give it a try and if you don't like it you can always quit'. So 32 or 33 years later, here I am still active, still involved. I got involved in my union at a time of great excitement. We were preparing for a strike, which I knew nothing about. I had great mentors, people who were prepared to let me make mistakes, people who were prepared to say, "That's an interesting perspective but this is the way that we look at it in a collective way in the labour movement." People who were going to recognize and use the skills that I had and try to help me with the ones that I didn't have: I was really lucky in that respect. So that's my beginnings. That's a long beginning but I think it's important to hear where people come from. I was active in my union for about four years and became a vice president, which even in those times, was highly unusual. First of all, you usually had to be a man and secondly you had to work longer and harder. I became a vice president and then the next year I became the president of the union in an uncontested election. By the way, I wasn't looking to be president. I had people say, "You should do this," and I'd say, "Oh no, all these other guys want to do this." So here we go again, I became president of the union. I remember the headline when I was elected. One of the reporters in the Regina Leader Post, the headline was, "Woman Rockets to the Top", which I think is really funny because a friend of mine said to me, "I always knew you were a space cadet and now it's in black and white." So I was president of the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees Union for about four and a half years. Then again a group of people asked me if I would run for president of the Federation of Labour. The Federation had been a very badly split organization for all sorts of reasons, for all sorts of perspectives. You don't need all those details. But after a great deal of pressure, I agreed to do that. I had the most

wonderful time of my life being president of my union and president of the Federation of Labour, not because of the position, but because I got to take ideas that other people had and try to work them through. I had the position, if I can put it that way, to be able to say, “Okay you have a really great idea and let's see what we can do with this,” so working with people that way. Then in 2002 I was asked if I would run for the CLC executive council. The CLC is not noted for having a lot of controversial elections. There's usually discussion amongst the leadership prior to the CLC elections. But in 2002 it was controversial, it was hotly contested. I'm pleased to be where I am, although I very much miss being closer to the membership like with the Federation and with the presidency of my union. But I have opportunities like the AFL school, the CLC schools across the country, to make connections with members and hear what they've got to say and get ideas from them and say, “Okay I wonder if we can do something with this.”

Q: In what regard was it a controversial election?

BB: Oh just because it was contested. Oftentimes with CLC elections, there is an agreement usually amongst the national leaders about who they would support for positions. In this particular case that wasn't the case, so it was a contested election. Not to say that we don't have them; we do. But it was different that way.

Q: What were some of the challenges when you first joined?

BB: Challenges for workers or challenges for women in the labour movement?

Q: Both.

BB: Okay. I think the challenges for workers were very much the same things that people are facing now – the questions of the workload, which is becoming an increasing issue. We're finding that workers don't have the same ability to talk to each other across a coffee table at work. People don't take breaks, they're not taking lunch breaks. Everybody's so busy at work and so overloaded doing two, three and four jobs that they

don't have chances to make connections with each other and the people that you work with. I had a member tell me one time, I was walking a picket line in Saskatoon and she worked in the civilian service with the police. There was five units in the city of Saskatoon. We were walking the picket line and she wasn't a union activist before this but she was quite clearly getting a political education. She said to me, the political education is important but she said, "You know, actually walking the picket lines has been a great experience for me getting to know the people that I work with." I said, "oh really, that's interesting." She said, "You know, I always thought the people on third floor were a bunch of jerks." I think she might've said something a little stronger than that that had to do with your anatomy. But she said, "I always thought they were a bunch of jerks but I actually like them, they're nice people. I've gotten to know about their kids and their dogs and what their hobbies are, and I don't get to do that at work." So I think the problem that we were dealing with in the first fight was a reduced work week, to go from a 40 hour workweek to 36 for office staff and 37 and a third for what was known as field staff. It was about balancing work and family. It was about having a compressed workweek. It was about people having every second or third Friday off. It was about not just the economics but, as we would say, bread and roses, in the labour movement. I think that's still an issue and in fact it's an increasing issue because more people are doing more work for free. People are coming in, they're getting caught up on their paperwork, they're taking things home because they can do some of that stuff at home and it'll be less pressure when they go back to work. They come to work not feeling good or when they've got other pressures because they feel an obligation to their coworkers since their coworkers are stressed. They know that if they phone in sick that they won't be replaced and it will just get worse in the workplace. So I think that the questions of hours of work along with the financial issues are very much there. The issues around health and safety are still there, the issues around vacation leaves and all of those sorts of things are the same things we were fighting for, just a progression. The difficulty is that with the Harper government and then with a number of provincial governments, they've just wanted to not only stop us from advancing, they want to go back. I think there is some of those things. For women workers it's very much some of the same struggles. We tended to make some advances in the early '80s on the question of equal pay for equal value, then it

started to slide. We advanced and then suddenly we look at stats now and we say, “Gee, every occupation except for one – and I’ll tell you about that – but every occupation women make about 70.5 cents on the dollar to every dollar that a man makes.” That’s fulltime full year work. The only one where men make less money than women do on average in the occupation is as nannies. Nannies get paid horribly anyhow but I guess if you’re a male nanny you’re considered more desperate I guess, I don’t know. So there are those sorts of issues. We’ve still got a lot of those issues to work with in our workplace about equal pay for work of equal value, about employment equity issues and so on. Challenges in the labour movement, right? Again, I think it’s part of the progression. We’ve come a long way, we have. There were times that I would sadly say that labour schools were not considered to be serious schools, which were more about a good time and less about serious education. We’ve changed that around in terms of our approach to labour education as well. People get to have fun but it’s expected that they’re in class, that this is members’ money that’s being spent. But the factor for women who attended these schools, these were often not very safe places for women to be, and not very friendly for workers of color or aboriginal workers and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered workers, workers with disabilities. So we’ve made some advances. When I ran for president of the Federation of Labour I had a brother that came up to me at the banquet before the election, the night before the election. He’d had a few drinks, admittedly, which does not excuse his comments. But he said, “Well you know, you may be a good dancer or whatever or a good body, but I’m still not going to vote for you.” I remember thinking I thought that was so far in our past, but it wasn’t. I didn’t want him to vote for me for those reasons anyhow; that demeans the value of that vote. But I think that there’s still some of that there, there’s still certainly a certain amount of sexism that we see. There’s a difference in how a woman’s voice is heard and how a man’s voice is heard. I sit in union meetings, and not just with employers. Nancy Riche, who is one of my mentors, who sadly we lost late last year, who died very suddenly and we miss her every day, but she came out. The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour had a course called Men and Woman Talking. She came out to talk in that class and to give some of her stories and experiences. She said, have you ever been in a meeting where Lisa says something and makes her point and then Larry speaks next and he essentially says the same thing that

Lisa does but he never acknowledges that. He might just say it slightly differently but says the same thing. Then a person one or two or three later says, well I agree with Larry, and they don't acknowledge that Lisa actually was the one who started the conversation. Not that she has to own the idea, but she actually put it out. Ever since Nancy came and did that – and that has to be 20 years ago, 15 at any rate – I always keep that in mind. I go to union meetings and I watch our brothers do it. I go to union meetings and I see people who look like me do the same thing to workers of color or aboriginal workers who start the conversation and then their ideas aren't acknowledged. So I think we've come a long way but we've still got work to do. We can do it together but we should always remain vigilant about that. I guess one of the accomplishments, and people don't realize it when we're reading anti-harassment statements at union schools, is that those statements came about because of discussions that took place over many meetings with the CLC women's committee in the mid '80s. Women were coming to schools and conventions and conferences of the union movement saying, “I don't feel safe here, I don't like being harassed here.” The women's committee decided after much debate, much much debate, to ask the CLC executive council, the officers and the council, to ensure that a statement against harassment – and at that point it was sexual harassment and quickly got changed to all forms of harassment – but ask that a statement against harassment be read before every CLC convention, conference, school, meeting. There were women in that room who were in tears because they were afraid that their leadership would pull them off the women's committee because they had supported this. We listen to it now, sometimes people don't pay attention to it. But for some of us who were part of that small moment in history... And now it's done in every union. I can't think of a union or labour movement organization that doesn't have some sort of a statement or whatever against harassment as part of their regular business. But it was part of history. It may not seem like much now but it's made a difference about us naming it in our organizations and saying that we are as vigilant against harassment in our organizations as we are at the workplace with the boss.

Q: What's your most memorable achievement during your career?

BB: My most memorable achievements... Well the anti-harassment issue is a major issue. The decisions we came to about how men would be included in women's conferences or not. I can tell you about that if you want in some detail. I have to say that the starting of the summer camp for young people... Some people don't see the value in it. That's unfortunate because I've had the opportunity to see those kids that have come through that. Nancy Riche, who again was a great supporter of labour education but labour education from start to finish, both for the very young and for the very old, I remember phoning her up and saying, "Nancy... (I was a brand new Fed president), I got this idea that maybe we should have a school for, a summer camp for our kids." She was right there very supportive, helped financially, and in Saskatchewan where we'd just finished the 23<sup>rd</sup> year. I've been there every year. I've seen kids that have come through that, have got active in the union when they finally become union members, have sometimes gone out and looked for jobs specifically in a unionized workplace. Many have been more supportive of their parents who are union activists because they understand a bit about why they do it. Kids who have become teachers in all sorts of public schools and private schools and separate schools in Saskatchewan and some who have done great social action work about collective action and solidarity and the value of unions. So I think that's an accomplishment. Bringing together the Federation, and when I took over at the Fed it was a very split organization and my goal was to bring people together because that's the only way we could do a good job for all the workers in the province. I didn't do that single handedly. I had to work at it and model it, but ultimately it was the leadership that sat around the SFL executive council table that said, "We can do this together." So that was important. Starting the Prairie School for Union Women, being one of the founders of that is important to me and still is important. Again it was an idea where people got together and tried to build labour education. I think that if we don't give members the tools in labour education then we're not going to succeed at all. Those are some of them. There's probably a lot of others, but most of the accomplishments have been tied to what I've seen other people be able to do. Sometimes we win strikes, sometimes we lose them, or lockouts. Sometimes we win at bargaining tables, sometimes we don't do as well. Our judgment should be about how well we connect with our members, and that's been a key issue for me – how well we connect with members, how

well we explain our issues, how well we get them onside. Sometimes we're able to push our advantage and sometimes the other side pushes back. I always thought if I actually built the movement... I guess also young worker involvement and involvement by women, aboriginal workers, workers of color, workers with disabilities, LGBTQ workers, anybody that gets left out. We have to be full in our diversity or we can't move ahead.

Q: When you became union president, did you have any challenges with that?

BB: Oh ya! When I became my union's president, yes: First off, I was the first woman to be elected of a provincial government employees union as president. There was another sister who I want to give credit to in British Columbia that many years before filled out the term of a brother who left office, I don't know what reason. And I don't know the reason that she wasn't elected when the time came, whether it was that she didn't run or she ran and wasn't elected. So that was the first thing. I knew what I was taking on, it wasn't just history, but I was taking on people who tend to judge the person who comes to the door first and say, "Oh we had a woman once as president but that was enough of that." You want to say, "Well we've had a lot of guys too, you know." Or if a woman doesn't do particularly well then it's like, "Oh well, we tried that once." So I took that in. I took in the fact that I still really only had about four or five years of experience in the labour movement, so I was learning from everybody around me. I took in that I was having to become more aware of this thing called the Federation of Labour, because as the president I would be involved in the executive. My initial thing about sticking around before I was elected, was that even though as a government employee as a social worker, I'd had a relatively... I don't want to say easy time of it... but I hadn't had any big issues. I had one supervisor who we had not seen eye to eye. I think that I went in sort of ready to do battle with him whenever I had to meet with him, and he probably had his blood pressure go up every time he had to meet with me, so I think there was a little bit of both. But when I got active in the union I started to meet women who had worked for the government for a long time who couldn't use their seniority to bid on jobs because they were considered temporary, although they'd worked for eight years for the government. I had challenges with the organization when it was beginning to change, to really move

away from being an association. Oftentimes our history in the public service is to come from a civil service association, to setting its face as a union. Those of us who come from what some would say professional backgrounds, I think every worker is professional, no matter what job they do. But some of us who are social workers or nurses or teachers sometimes think that we don't have the same issues that a highway worker does. But we do, because we don't have much more control over our workplace than they do; in fact, sometimes I think they may have more. So there were all those sorts of challenges. Getting people active. I remember before I was elected president I was the education chair for my branch. I used to go around at noon hours and hold brown bag lunches and play union historical films or do educational things in workplaces, because I was trying to get people to see the union as more than just a strike or a lockout or more than just collective bargaining. It was so much more.

Q: Have you experienced any challenges now being the VP of the CLC, as a woman?

BB: I think so. I think that some of the same challenges are there, about whether our voices are heard or whether they're acknowledged. I don't expect somebody to automatically give me validity because of my position or to make exceptions because I'm a woman. But I do sometimes think that our voices aren't heard in the same way or given the same power or validation. So I think that some of that is there. It doesn't mean that we're not a great movement; we are. The fact that we've made the changes that we have, has really prompted a lot of things to happen. But I think that there's still some challenges to that. I think the politics of the labour movement between organizations is difficult. People believe very passionately in their own organization. They believe passionately in the people that represent them. Sometimes we act like we're, I don't want to say the high school cheerleaders on the football team, but sometimes we get very partisan about who we are. I think if we could figure out ways to build better bridges, that's part of the ongoing job.

Q: What do you hope people learn from labour history?

BB: First off, I would hope that they learn that *they're* making history. That they will learn about all sorts of names, some of which they knew and some of which they don't know, but that ultimately all of those people had, in order to be a historical person, you had to have other people around you. Many of which will never be acknowledged or even known about. So I would hope that our members that take labour history would know that they're making history. In the workplace they may have fought for some accommodation for someone that they never had to do before. It may not be a big issue, it may not be written up about somewhere, but it is historical and we need to keep track of those. They make history when they change things in their organization. We made history when we started offering childcare at labour education because it didn't used to be offered, it wasn't always here. The people who fought for that, it wasn't easy by the way, even though we were fighting for it in the workplace it wasn't easy in the union movement. So that they know they're making history. If you change the way you do things in your union, that's making history. If you figure out a way to bring in younger workers, that's making history. First off, that's what I hope – that everybody understands that history is them and that we all have some history. I told you some of my history about how I wasn't a union activist. Well that's my history. That also makes me say, get out and talk to people who don't know about the union movement. I would hope that they find that. I would hope that people generally, not just union members but people learning about labour history, would see how rich it is and how sometimes what looks like a defeat or a setback is actually just temporary, and you move forward. Some people look at the On to Ottawa trek and say, well it got stopped in Regina, people were dispersed, they were sent back and that was the end of it, they never got to Ottawa. A small delegation got to Ottawa but the trek never got all the way to Ottawa. But the reality is that all sorts of things started to come in after that. First off, the prime minister of the day ended up being defeated. But that wasn't just it, it was about the question of workers compensation laws, unemployment insurance laws, pension laws – those sorts of workplace issues as well that benefited union members and non-union members. So that was a huge benefit. I hope that people who take labour history will look at the history that we're still not telling. That's the history of women in the movement, history of equity seeking people in the movement that need to be told. There's a great video out of Manitoba done by Buffalo

Gals called "The Notorious Mrs. Armstrong". If you haven't seen it yet you should see it. Mrs. Armstrong has this wonderful history and she ends up being one of the big organizers for minimum wages, for the rights of women who work in the Woolworths and the Metropolitan stores of the day which were called at one point five and dime stores. "The Notorious Mrs. Armstrong" is a fabulous history of a women who was an activist and in the front and center in the Winnipeg 1919 strike. But I didn't know about her until a couple years ago. So it's rich, we have so much interesting history. I hope that people also start to do large and small things. If they find that there's a historical event that happened in a certain place, they should work with their local community to get a marker put in that says, on this spot in whatever day. Because you know what, it can be there forever and somebody who's passing through a month from now, six months from now, 60 years from now can say, "Look at that, the labour movement was smart enough to figure out to put something there for us, for history." So I hope that people do that. I'm not just saying this because it's a labour history group of course, but I hope everybody acknowledges the work that the Alberta Labour History Society has done, and how rich it is and how different it is. The fact that you started five years ago, I often say Alberta is the only place I can think of that didn't let their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary sneak up on them. It's not rocket science to know, okay it's our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it's our 60<sup>th</sup>, it's our 75<sup>th</sup>, it's our 100<sup>th</sup>. But I've seen way too many situations where in the labour movement we say, "Oh geez, you know, next year is our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, what are we going to do?" Well in Alberta you've been saying what you're going to do and then doing it for five years. Then you'll just keep on building on it until you get to the 125<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> and 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

BB: Let me just think on this for a moment. I think that when the labour movement is viewed, the easy stories are about conflict, about strikes, about lockouts. When we settle a contract and there's been no dispute and we put out the news release. I'm always disappointed that it gets buried somewhere way back in the paper if it gets printed at all. But that's not different than anything else. The news is about controversy, the news is about conflict. Good news stories, you don't get very many of those. What I would say is

we have to think of other ways to get our stories out. I don't think we should shy away from the fact that sometimes we're on the picket line and that there's nothing wrong with that. When workers decided that they're going to go out on the line, that's their decision. It usually takes them a long time to decide that, and every worker should be shoulder to shoulder with them. So I'm not shying away from the controversy and the militancy. But we are also militant in all sorts of other ways. We are militant in our support of United Way agencies, we are militant in our support of being an anti-racist, feminist, queer positive, youth inclusive, ability inclusive, anti-racist, worker centered organization. We should figure out ways to celebrate that. So that's sort of it, that we shouldn't shy away from telling our stories. We need to be proud of them and we need to be proud of the work that every person does, every person. Without the labour movement, we are the first and last line of defense for a lot of people. Not just our own members, but for a lot of other people. Without the labour movement there, defending our rights, pushing things forward, there's a lot of people inside and outside of the unionized workforce that would not have the rights that they do now, and they would be gone in a minute. If people think that the employers will say, "Gee you fought for this but you don't need the union anymore because we'll continue to give it to you", think again. It would be gone in a minute. So let's be militant, let's be proud of our militancy, and let's be proud of our social unionism which is connected into our communities.

Q: What ages does the youth summer camp cover and what do they do?

BB: Every one of the federations that runs a summer camp sets their own age limits. I believe in Alberta it's about 10 to 15 years and in Manitoba it's around the same age range. In Saskatchewan we've always been around 13 to 16, so we're in that heavy duty teenager hormones time. Every one of them sets their own agendas about what they cover. But the idea is not to bring kids in and sort of get the union message in, but we actually do things in a fun way. I'm going to use Saskatchewan as an example because that's the program I'm the most familiar with. We always do a session in the "isms" – the isms that divide us, the isms that bring us together. The isms like racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism – the isms that divide us. We think it's important that you

have a secure place for kids, that they can be themselves, and you can't be that if you feel like you're excluded. Then of course we talk about the isms that bring us together – trade unionism, feminism, socialism. So there's that. We bargain a collective agreement at that particular camp and I think the others do as well, in both Manitoba and Alberta I think they do. It's probably done slightly different at every place. But again, this is a place where the kids can set their own terms. They have to bargain them, they can't just set them. And similarly, management can't just come in with management rights. Usually the biggest issue is hours of wake. Instead of hours of work, it's hours of wake. The kids want longer hours of wake, in other words, not to have to go to their beds or go to the dorm early. The counselors usually want shorter hours of wake. So that's another piece of it. We do things on international solidarity. If you're a kid who's the same age range in India you might be working, instead of at summer camp you might be working making bricks or weaving. So we do stuff around child labour. We do things on health and safety in the workplace and the home, those sorts of things. Many of our federations as well have programs that they take into high schools. In Saskatchewan at any rate, the last day we always do a session called Organizing for Social Change. The reason is because oftentimes the kids get all fired up and they want to do something, then they go back to their home communities or their homes or their schools and they want to start something but they don't know how. Or there's an issue that they want to take on. Or they go back and somebody says, one of their buddies says, “Oh that's so gay.” They say, “Hey wait a minute now, that's not on, that's not cool to use the word gay in a derogatory way”, that sort of thing. Then their buddies of course give them the full blast of homophobia – oh so “What's wrong with you, what's happened to you,” and this sort of stuff. We knew after several years of working on this that our kids needed some tools to go home with so they could continue on with this. I think all of the camps do a lot of fun stuff as well. We go to the lake, we tube. I don't tube as much anymore because I threw my shoulder out, but they tube, they have a great time, they lay around. We have a rule in our camp in Saskatchewan that you have to engage in – and again this is a bargainable issue – you have to engage in one or two... The counselors usually start with you have to do three organized activities at camp. So we have a rule at camp that the counselors say you have to do three organized activities. The kids say, “No, we just want to do one.” So of course

you bargain and miraculously you might end up at two organized activities. The activities tend to be things that are cooperative games. Not to say that there's not a bit of competition, but it's not all-out. A lot of them are about people working together. It might be tie dying or it might be, we have fun time, sometimes we have a thing called body beautiful. We go to the beach and the kids that want to put on those masks, the ones that are supposed to clean out your pores. Boys, girls, whoever – they all do them and they have a great deal of fun putting that on. We do those sorts of things. We do activities at night, we do movies. Again, they don't all have to be the sort of, this is a union message. Kids come to their own conclusion just like adults do. So we do all those sorts of things. But the idea is to give young people an idea of not just what the union movement is about but how they can work collectively together. The idea of bargaining the collective agreement for camp is so that young people can say, “We've got these demands. First of all, how are we going to get there? That means we've got to hear each other. So we've got to all be onside with each other because you don't get it if you're not in solidarity. We've also got to have our arguments about why we deserve this besides we think we should have it.” The idea is that the camp really teaches and models that. What's astounding to me after 23 years at camp is the number of, in Saskatchewan we get about a 50 percent return rate, which people in the camping industry tell me is very high. It's not often that you get kids coming back for two, three, four, five years in a row. So that's one thing. But the other part of it is the number of kids that tell us that it's safe there, that it's safe to be themselves, that they can put out their opinions, that they can try new things, that the learning is fun and most of the time it doesn't feel like they're learning because it's not traditional in that respect. The number of kids that end up getting, well they all want to have union jobs, they all want to work for the union. We say, “Well it doesn't work quite that way.” But they want to get into a unionized workplace. We even have kids now, they're not kids anymore, they're quite clearly adults. We had a boy that went to our very first camp 23 years ago; he would've been 12 at that time. But he owns his own auto body shop in Saskatoon. I don't know how many, maybe 10 or 12 years ago, I'm still in Saskatchewan. The minister of labour under the NDP government said to me, “Do you know, and she gives me his name. She says, do you know this guy?” I said, “Oh ya I do, he's a camper from one of our very first camps.” She said, “You know, he owns an auto

body shop.” I said, “Oh really, that's really neat.” She said, “Ya, and he phones me up all the time telling me about the other auto body shops that aren't following labour standards or occupational health and safety legislation. He doesn't think that it's fair that if he's following it that we don't enforce it with other people, because the law is the law and workers fought for those rights.” So it's those funny moments that come back that are rich and wonderful and you say it was all worth it. Maybe the kid that you had who's 13 years old that drove you crazy for a week becomes a teacher or becomes a social worker or a nurse or a highways worker or a clerical worker or a worker who's maybe not in a unionized job but pays a little more attention to the labour movement or is prepared to also take on somebody when they say, “Oh well unions have had their day.” A lot of those kids will be able to take that on, and people who are organizing for social change in their organizations, in their communities and their homes. So it's a benefit.

[ END ]