

Interview: Jackie Ainsworth (JA)

Interviewer: Janet Nicol (JN)

Date: August 23, 2017

Location: Vancouver B.C.

Transcription: Jane Player

JN [00:00:02] Okay. Jackie Ainsworth, tell us a little bit about your background growing up in Ontario and how this influenced your life.

JA [00:00:15] Well, you sent me the questions earlier, so I've been thinking about it a bit. You know, my parents were working people and my dad went on strike a few times when I was growing up, but I never thought of my dad as a trade unionist. My mum was a homemaker 'til we went to school and she went to work in the drugstore in town. You know, I think of ourselves as working class, but certainly not trade unionists or feminists. Not me. Fifties, anyways. I was trying to think of what my first sort of activism was. I remembered I was working at the hospital in the kitchen part time during high school, and so I was like 14. Ontario announced that they were doing away with the minimum wage for students. There'd been a minimum wage and you could, if you hired students, it was a lower wage. I remember hearing on the news that they were doing away with that and I was so excited. I thought, oh good.

JA [00:01:38] I remember it was 75 cents to a dollar, and I was really excited about that. Then when I got my next paycheque, it was still 75 cents. I remember calling the Department of Labour and making sure I had it right. I remember talking to my friend Lee, who was also 14, because we were in grade nine, and she worked at the hospital. We decided that probably what had happened is that the hospital administrator didn't realise that there had been an increase in the minimum wage and that we would go talk to her. Lee's mum drove us there and we had an appointment. It seems odd, but it was a small town, small hospital. I guess the administrator had agreed to the appointment. Anyways, we told her that it had been raised and she said she wasn't going to raise ours. I told her that if she didn't do that, that she could be fined \$500 a person. She got very, very angry and kind of threw us out of her office, literally just screamed us out of her office. Then, on the next paycheque, we had our increase and a little back wage. I thought, like, where did we get the idea that we could walk in on a hospital administrator and tell her that she had to raise our wages? I don't know. The next time—should I just keep telling these stories? Okay. Because the next time, I was 16 and I found I was waitressing, again, after school and on the weekends, and then we found out from another waitress's mother, who was the bookkeeper at the restaurant, that they had a big banquet section as well as the restaurant, and that when we worked the banquet, nobody liked working the banquets because you didn't get tips. Then we found out that the owner was actually charging a gratuity, a percentage on the banquet costs, but we didn't see any of it. I called the Department of Labour again and they said that that was illegal and that if he was specifically charging a client for gratuities, then it had to be used for gratuities. I went to the boss and told him that we had found out that he was charging. Again, he was really angry, but I didn't get fired. Then we all got gratuities after that when you worked banquet. I don't know. I think it's kind of sometimes just a personality thing, maybe. Also, when I think back on it, my mum was pretty, you know, strong. I do remember during that period, the birth control pill was coming into being. My mum used to have women over for coffee every day from the neighbourhood. I do remember one time there was a whole group of them and I was wondering what the heck was going on in our living room. It turned out my mum had

agreed to call the pharmacist, who she knew as a friend in town, while all the other women were sitting there to find out about this thing, the pill. I guess I get a bit of it from her. My dad, as I said, used to go on strike—went on strike, a couple of times, some pretty long, nasty ones. We had that experience; I don't know, but I think I—apparently, I started off quite young. (laughter)

JN [00:05:32] [unclear] and what compelled you to come to B.C.?

JA [00:05:32] You know, I went to university in Ottawa. Most of my classmates, most of my friends went to U of T [University of Toronto]. I really wanted to get away from a small town, and so Ottawa it was. There, I got involved with the anti-war movement. Ottawa—University of Carleton was a big centre for draft dodgers coming in. We always had guys, you know, crashing in our lounge or in our cafeteria. We would watch with them when the lotteries were on TV, see if their draft numbers came up. It was really active. After a year, I just felt really compelled to leave university because I thought that the most important thing in the world was to stop that war. I wanted to work full time against the war. You know, that's when the whole "question authority" was one of our sort of mantras during the sixties.

JA [00:06:42] The whole university scene was—I didn't like it at all. I kind of had enough of school and I wanted to be really involved in stopping the war. Vancouver was one of the main centres in Canada that had a really active antiwar movement. In the summer, I hitchhiked to Vancouver with a girlfriend of mine.

JN [00:07:09] You were you working in a restaurant there?

JA [00:07:09] Yeah. I started working in restaurants because I had after school and it was good money in terms of tips, but I was only able to get a job in Smitty's Pancake House. Again, we were just so mad about everything. The war was going on so we were angry about that. Then, at work, we weren't making enough money. I wasn't making enough money to make my rent. You know, we were treated so badly at work. I talked to some of the women at Smitty's. We decided that we should go in and talk to our manager about how we needed more money to live on. There were five of us. We went into his office; it was really crowded, it was a very small office. We told him that we needed to make more money. He said, 'Oh, that was easy.' There was two things we could do. We're like, okay. We should take off our wedding rings and we should shorten our uniform skirts. We left there, five of us, and we were just really, really angry and everybody kind of dispersed and went home. I remember I was walking by a pay phone booth at the corner of Broadway and Fir. I was so mad and I got the yellow pages and I looked up the unions and found the hotel and restaurant. I thought, okay, well that must be the one. I called them and said that, you know, explained the situation and they said, 'Well, come on down tomorrow and we'll give you some union cards.' That's what I did. We signed up a majority of the employees at Smitty's, and we applied for union certification. The other woman who signed up the employees, Liz, her and I were both fired and so we launched an unfair labour practise. That was the start of my trade union activity.

JN [00:09:38] [unclear]

JA [00:09:38] Well, yeah, it was really interesting because that was—and I know this just because we're working on this project—that was in September of '93, or sorry, 1973, September of '73. Then a month later in October, I was going out to UBC [University of British Columbia] with a bunch of friends—I'm going to tell this story anyways. I was going

out to UBC with a bunch of friends, and we were quite drunk, and we were going out to watch the movie *Burn!* with Marlon Brando. I actually took a bottle of Southern Comfort with me into the movie theatre and I was passing it to this woman behind us. There were three of us. I kept passing it to this woman behind us and she passed out. She was really—and so we took her home with us. The next morning, she got up and we, you know, we were all pretty hung over and we were making coffee. She looked at her watch and she's like, 'Oh, my God, oh, my God, Jean's going to be so mad at me. I'm late, I'm supposed to be going to the founding convention of the Working Women's Association.' I was like, 'What's that?' She started explaining that they were going to be forming a women's union and why we needed a women's union. I was like, 'Oh, that's really interesting because I just got fired from my job for union organising.' She was like—. [

JN [00:11:10] [unclear]

JA [00:11:13] Yes. She said, 'You need to'—that was D.J. O'Donnell [Doreen-Jean O'Donnell]. She said, 'You've got to talk to my friend Jean Rands.' I was like, 'Oh, okay.' Off she went to the Working Women's Association Founding Convention, and then she called me and gave me Jean's number. Then I met Jean on her lunch hour. I think she was working at Guardian Insurance, and I met her downtown for lunch on the Monday.

JN [00:11:42] That was the beginning of a powerful partnership [unclear] Can we finish about the poor women in the Pancake House (laughter) [unclear] Did that not [unclear] there was no follow through—it just kind of collapsed?

JA [00:11:51] They signed a union contract and it was for probably—I forget now—but it was for like, I don't know, 10,15 cents more than the minimum wage. The conditions were virtually no different than any.

JN [00:12:06] When you and the other woman were fired that was it for the union [unclear]

JA [00:12:08] We took it to the labour—well, then I met Jean Rands and she said, 'Oh, you've been fired. You should take it to the Labour Relations Board.' The union didn't help me. They said that I wouldn't get my job back and there was no sense in trying. Jean helped me and introduced me to Tommy McGrath, who was with the seamen's union and who became a lifelong dear friend. He helped me. We went to the Labour Relations Board, and they said that I was not fired for union activity, that I was fired because—I think it had to do with the reduction in my hours. Yes, that's how they fired me, basically, because I was one of the ones—I wasn't a part-time worker. I was working in order to pay my rent. They put me down to 10 hours a week or something that I couldn't possibly afford to stay there. They said that was a business decision and not an anti-union decision.

JN [00:13:12] How about the other woman?

JA [00:13:12] You know, I think Liz did not go before the Labour Relations Board. I think she just went to work somewhere else.

JN [00:13:22] [unclear] so that union wasn't really helping?

JA [00:13:26] No, I think. As it turned out, I just remember this one quote from Tommy McGrath. I've used it in speeches before so I think it's okay. You know, when he said, 'Well, what union did you join?' I said, 'Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union.' He said, 'Oh, well, you might have a chance at the Labour Relations Board because they're really

corrupt and they're in the pockets of the Labour Relations Board. So, you know, they might make a deal for you.'

JN [00:13:56] You learned about unions, but also about bad unions.

JA [00:13:58] Yes, exactly. Had a not good experience with HRU.

JN [00:14:07] That leads into, can you describe your early working life and activism when you came to B.C. [unclear] in that meeting with Jean and then did that lead to UBC?

JA [00:14:18] Well then, I got—I think actually maybe I was already working. I went and got a job at Denny's Restaurant on Broadway there. This time I was going to be way more strategic in terms of signing people up to a union. You know, as soon as I met Jean, I mean, I just glommed onto everything she said. I went—she asked me to come—if it's okay, I'll just back up one meeting. After I met her, she said at that lunch that day, she said, 'Oh, the first meeting of this new Working Women's Association is Wednesday at the library. Why don't you come to that?' I was like, Hmm, hmm, a meeting, I don't know about that,' but I went and I thought, 'Oh, I'll just go and sit in the back and see what they're up to.' I walked into the room and there was like about six or seven or seven or eight women sitting around a table and Jean said, 'Oh, great, you're next on the agenda.' I met all those women that night and I told them the story of Smitty's, and they were just so wonderful and so supportive and interested. I don't know, I just never looked back after I met Jean and those women. When I was working at Denny's, you know, I was really trying to figure out what union we should join 'cuz Working Women's Association kept talking about a union. Then, you know, I just I wasn't sure what to do, and I think I might have got a date or two wrong there, because now that I think of it, SORWUC [Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada] had just been formed.

JN [00:16:12] They were formed in '72, weren't they?

JA [00:16:15] Right. They had been formed. Yeah, when I was working at Denny's. No, I'm not sure, we might have had one certification. I'm not sure if we had a contract. Anyways, it was up in the air what to do at Denny's. I was collecting phone numbers, getting to know the women. I hadn't worked there for very long. I came to work and the day shift—I worked the swing shift—and the day shift had walked off the job and was picketing it. I was like, 'What's going on?' They said that they were sick and tired of being mauled by the day manager. You know, it's interesting, Jean and I were talking about this a couple of days ago. We didn't have the word sexual harassment then, so we used words like unwanted advances and being touched. Apparently, the day manager was a really disgusting and abusive guy. They walked off the job and their various boyfriends or husbands had come and helped them picket. They had these sort of ambiguous signs that said something about, you know—it's pretty obvious that there was something not good going on at that shift. Again, we didn't have the words then. Anyways, they said, 'Are you going to cross our picket line or are you going to join us?'

JA [00:17:57] It's like, 'Okay, I'm going to join you. Have you thought of joining a union?' 'No, we don't like unions.' I had the phone numbers of all of the swing shift and night shift people. We called them and they all came down, and yeah, that was the really big turning point for Working Women's Association and SORWUC, both of which still existed because, you know, we shut that place down for three months. They kept trying to have that big Denny's grand opening up the new Burrard store. Every time they announced it, we had a mass picket. Working Women's Association members and other women's liberation, other

women, and all our trade union friends that we'd been making would come and we'd shut that down.

JN [00:18:51] Were unions involved or on the fly picketing or [unclear]

JA [00:18:58] Nope. (laughter) I kept trying to get people to join a union. I think some people might have signed SORWUC cards. I don't really remember. Yeah, I do remember, one time we decided—we heard that a new Denny's was being built—part of the construction of the new Coquitlam Mall. We decided we'd picket the construction site. We went out to Coquitlam and we explained to the—with our picket signs, Denny's waitresses on strike—and we explained to the construction workers what was going on. They all respected the picket line so we shut down the construction site. The superintendent, they were really angry. I mean, they were screaming at those construction workers to get to work and they just all stood around. I think they were a little amused, but I think they just weren't going to cross the picket line. Then the union rep came down. It took about an hour for him to get there. He was yelling at them to get back to work—that this was illegal, they weren't in a union, but they wouldn't cross the picket line. Then it took about another hour. Denny's had been to court to get an injunction against us because it was an illegal picket line, no union involved. They had gotten injunctions against us so then they brought injunctions down and they were giving them out to us on the picket line. We were talking about this the other day—we were ripping them up. The construction workers were just kind of like, 'Wow, they are really gutsy'. Anyways, I think we shut it down for three days, but then they went to court and got contempt of court charges against us. A couple of us who they identified and specifically got contempt of court charges against us, we were told by a lawyer, by Harry Rankin, who agreed to see us, that we should get out of town because as soon as we were served, we would go to jail. Myself and another woman left town so we wouldn't get served. Then the strike went on for about three months. Then they offered us all a bunch of money to go away. Some took it and some of us wouldn't.

JN [00:21:52] [unclear] Was that your segue to other work?

JA [00:21:53] Yeah, that's when I saying I was tired of waitressing and I thought I might try working at UBC.

JN [00:22:06] [unclear] solidarity

JA [00:22:06] Yeah, it was wonderful.

JN [00:22:08] [unclear] solidarity

JA [00:22:08] Yes. I mean, an illegal strike, spur of the moment, and we shut down, you know, opening of a new store, and we picketed that, you know, the original store for three months and the construction site. Yeah. It was a real lesson in what our potential was.

JN [00:22:30] You saw that potential realized at UBC.

JA [00:22:33] Right, so then at UBC—gosh, that took, well the story's there—so I'm not clear what we want to talk about it there. I think for us it was a real concrete example of, you know, how to win.

JN [00:22:50] Did you and Jean strategize as what sort of, maybe get jobs and see what [unclear] UBC and see what spontaneous [unclear]

JA [00:22:59] Well, you know, the women at UBC had been—they'd had a couple failed union drives, OTEU (Office and Technical Employees' Union]. They had tried with them and failed. They had a first AUCE (Association of University and College Employees) drive and it failed. Laurie Whitehead, who was at UBC and one of the main organisers out there in those drives, she was also a member of Working Women's Association. I mean, she came to work in Women's Association from being at UBC. You know, it sounded really exciting. They were talking about a second drive, another try, and lots of the original organisers had been through two failed drives already and were pretty discouraged. I think Jean and I thought, you know, let's go out to UBC and work, you know, with the women out there and bring some sort of new blood and try one more time.

JN [00:24:00] What sort of job did you get?

JA [00:24:01] I got a job as an L.A.1, a library assistant 1, in the Woodward Biomedical Library. I stacked books and checked them out, and did some sort of—when folks wanted a specific book helped them find it. That kind of thing. Jean worked in typesetting. She was a typesetter in the Publications Office.

JN [00:24:32] Were any other women from Working Women working there [unclear]

JA [00:24:37] They weren't working there, but I remember there were a couple. Melody Rudd, for sure. We got an office in the student union building, which we just paid for out of our pockets and from our membership dues, which were a dollar. Yeah. Working Women's Association helped us staff the office and they also did a lot of leafleting with us. They were definitely involved in support work.

JN [00:25:09] When you were out there, did you have to pass your probation before you [unclear] or did you start right away?

JA [00:25:18] Yeah, I don't—yeah, because the probation. I remember that because it was six months and we applied for union certification after I'd been there about three months. Maybe four.

JN [00:25:32] [unclear]

JN [00:25:33] Yeah. We started right when the semester started in September and we applied for certification in December, end of December.

JN [00:25:45] What made this third drive successful? [unclear]

JA [00:25:50] Yeah, that's a good question. Yeah, I think we just kept getting together a larger, larger group. I don't think they had the extensive support in terms of all the leafleting. Yeah. I think Jean and I brought quite a bit of experience to—you know, we had the connections with Press Gang, and with the women's movement in terms of leafleting and experience, sort of arguing with women about, you know, good unions and bad unions and why our union was different, and being able to write that up and get it in leaflet form and get it out to women. You know, they'd been trying for a long time, so the network was definitely there. There was about 30 activists involved in that drive, which is, you know, a really healthy number. This is one of the things I need to note in that speech that I gave, that I did. It's interesting when I read it all because it doesn't mention men. Of course, you know, it's the library and clerical workers. There were men that were very active in that

union, in fact, critical organizers in the library. I noticed all the way through that speech, I say women this and women that. There were obviously—and that was sort of interesting to us trying to sort of talk about that because we wanted to talk about it as a feminist union. Obviously, you know, men were going to be involved—that was different from the Working Women's Association that was women only, which is one of the reasons we tried to have both the Working Women's Association and SORWUC as entities in existence at the same time. We really did want an organisation of women only to support a lot of the trade union work. Unfortunately, we just didn't have the resources and Working Women's Association kind of petered out. It was interesting that whole question of organisations that were that were going to have men in them and how that would work.

JN [00:28:11] [unclear] average maybe 20 percent male?

JA [00:28:12] Oh gosh, I don't know that number, but wild guess I'd say 20 percent.

JN [00:28:17] It was predominantly female labour.

JA [00:28:19] Oh, yes, yeah, 80, 85—that's right. About 80 percent women worked at UBC in our bargaining unit. I do remember one time a reporter asked our president, 'What about the men in your union? You keep talking about a feminist union.' She said, 'Well, you know, our union, unlike other unions, is not going to discriminate against the minority. And in fact, we have very democratic processes in place that will ensure that that doesn't happen.' I thought that was a really lovely response and she was a really lovely person—is a really lovely person.

JN [00:29:04] What stands out about that first contract, of course, was that it was so precedent setting [unclear] is to organize to get such a good contract. Can you talk about how were you able to do that to get women's language [unclear] Were there any other precedents you were building on? What do you credit to that success?

JA [00:29:28] You know, we had done a lot of research in the Working Women's Association and in Vancouver Women's Caucus and in between Vancouver Women's Caucus and Working Women's Association, there was the Working Women's Workshop. All of that time we were talking about sort of what women workers needed. You know, maybe this is a good time—and in the course of this history project we've talked a lot about, we don't want to underestimate how important the Canadian, the independent Canadian trade union movement, was at the time. They were called breakaways. The breakaway union movement was at the time, especially here in Vancouver, they were doing grassroots organising, talking about what was wrong with the existing unions, and winning. You know, we were very good friends with some of the activists from CAIMAW [Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers] and from PPWC [Pulp, Paper, and Woodworkers of Canada, now Public and Private Workers of Canada] in particular. You know, they met with us a lot. They gave us a lot of advice about union contracts and union constitutions and safeguards against entrenched bureaucracy, how to write that up in our constitution and bylaws. You know, not to underestimate how important that movement was; it was quite inspiring to us to think that, okay, independent unions can win. They were obviously really inspiring in terms of our contract. We knew we were going to be fighting for things that had never been fought for before and it was just a matter of being able to write them up in contract language. One of the things we were very adamant about was that it wasn't going—you know, we would have as little legalese as possible. We wanted to have a contract that all workers could read and understand. Yeah, it's just a matter of sitting down and writing it up.

JN [00:31:49] In terms of the economic impact, that really impacted women's lives, the fact that the hourly wage went up, so high. How did you calculate that parameter [unclear] how were you able to argue that at the table and get it?

JN [00:32:07] It wasn't just that it was a significant wage increase. One of the things about wages that we talked about a lot and really resonated with women, was that—well, two things, equal pay. There was already, you know, there were workers on campus, men, who—janitors, no experience, you know, entry level—that were making three times what experienced private, personal secretaries to deans at the college were making. People knew that; so, there's the whole issue of equal pay. We also really argued, and it was one of the main tenants of our organising drive, that any wage increase should be across-the-board because men were concentrated in the top job classifications. Any wage increase that was a percentage benefited men more. An across-the-board increase was a real sort of high-profile demand of ours—reducing the wage gap. The other one was that we wanted to reduce the number of—well, at the time merit level, which we wanted to convert to seniority level. We wanted to compact all of those. It was a real drive for more equal wages, not just by gender. That really resonated with women, that issue of equality for all, I think.

JN [00:34:00] When you argued it, what was the reaction at the bargaining table?

JN [00:34:06] Well, the reaction at the bargaining table was—I mean, I don't think they ever reconciled themselves to having to deal with 13 women. Oh, sorry, it wasn't 13 women. See there, I do it again. There was a couple of men on the bargaining team. There were 13 of us on the bargaining team. I don't think they ever really—I mean, they signed those wage increases because they knew we were going to go on strike.

JN [00:34:35] They knew you had a high percentage organised?

JN [00:34:41] We had a 90 percent strike vote. We had had a strike committee going for several weeks. All the posters had been printed. They knew all this, you know, and the libraries to be shut down, the data centre that was out there, I mean, they finally got it. By then we were so angry at how we'd been treated and we were really feeling our solidarity and power within the union. I remember when we were really close to signing a final agreement, I remember as Jean and I went out the door (I was staying at her place then) I remember Al, her partner, saying, 'Don't give in because you're tired. Tell them you need to take a break and you'll come back tomorrow. You've got so much leverage now. Don't let them wear you down.' It was because we were really exhausted and we really wanted it to be over. It was good advice, and boy, we just hung in there—and lots of support.

JN [00:35:56] [unclear] Lots of support.

JA [00:35:57] Yeah. Lots of support. He was great.

JN [00:36:01] So that you had the first contract, a big success, and did you stay after, did you enjoy some of that [unclear].

JA [00:36:10] Not really, because one of the things we did right away was we elected a full-time union officer to work in our union office, and I ran for that position and was elected.

JN [00:36:26] In SORWUC?

JA [00:36:27] Sorry to AUCE. I worked full time after the contract was signed in the AUCE union office. Thinking about it now, it was probably unrealistic, but we were so determined that no one in the office would get too comfy in the union office, that we had a six-month term and then you had to go back to work. Probably could have been a year, but we were just getting settled into it. Anyways, at the end of six months, we really thought that there was just, you know, UBC was solid and SFU [Simon Fraser University] had joined, and Notre Dame University, Capilano College, New Caledonia, and we were just like, 'What's next?'

JN [00:37:22] Jackie, were they joining after they saw the contract or were they joining as you were organizing?

JA [00:37:24] Some of them joined us as we were organising. Notre Dame University, in fact, they were the first AUCE local certified. They were certified before UBC. Yeah. I think ours was the first contract. SFU, I forget when they organising got started, whether it was during our organising or once we applied for certification, but definitely a lot of parallels for those first three. Capilano, New Caledonia, and the teaching assistants at SFU, they all came after.

JN [00:38:00] So, of course they saw the contract [unclear] good union [unclear]

JA [00:38:06] Yeah. We thought now, we should try downtown. We were ready to take on sort of a private sector employer. Now that was a strategic discussion for me to get a job in the banks, and then Jean got a job in the banks, and Melody and, you know, several of Working Women.

JA [00:38:35] Was Melody a worker at UBC or just part of Working Women?

JA [00:38:39] She was at UBC, she was just part of the Working Women's Association, but then she was a library worker at SFU, so she was really involved in the organising there.

JN [00:38:51] I didn't realize that she went that far back even before SORWUC?

JA [00:38:56] Oh yeah, In fact, that day I met, the first time I met Jean Rands, a lunch hour at Guardian Insurance, she told me, 'Oh, you need to talk to a woman, Melody Rudd, because she's organising into HREU at Pizza Patio'. Melody was involved right at the beginning. Yeah. In fact, I think she was a member of Vancouver Women's Caucus when she was a student at UBC.

JN [00:39:23] When you moved downtown, was SORWUC in the Dominion Building at that time?

JA [00:39:27] Oh, good question. I don't think so. I think we moved into the Dominion building—yeah, I think we were on Kingsway and then we moved into the Dominion Building downtown.

JN [00:39:46] [unclear] downtown [unclear]. Are you okay?

JA [00:39:51] Yeah, I'm good. Thanks.

JN [00:39:54] And they had an opening at Victory Square?

JA [00:39:58] Yeah, I think I might have looked up in the classifieds, and I went to training for a couple of days at the head office, and then they placed me at Victory Square Branch. Yeah.

JN [00:40:12] And where did Jean work? [unclear]

JA [00:40:13] Jean took some time off after UBC, and then she got a job in what was then the Bank of BC, which I think became Hong Kong, Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corp.

JN [00:40:23] [unclear]

JA [00:40:24] She was at Bank of B.C. And Melody was at Bank of Montreal. Yeah. I got a job as a ledger keeper at the Victory Square branch, in the personal checking account section. You know, I'd been there for a while and I was just getting used to the job and quite enjoying it. Then someone came up to me and said—I think I'd been there, you know, three or four weeks. Someone came up to me and said that they were really upset. What had happened—I'm not sure what had happened—but something had happened. I mean, I wasn't really involved a lot; I'd only been there three or four weeks. I think they might have been nervous to approach me because I was new, but they did and said that everybody was going to book off sick the next day. I forget what it was that they were so angry about. I said that I thought that there were better ways of protesting whatever it was that they were planning to do and why didn't we all get together and have a beer after work and talk about it. Everybody agreed to do that, so we went to the Railway Club. (laughter) It was just up from Victory Square branch, so it was kind of good.

JA [00:41:55] Again, I forget what the specific grievance was, but we talked about whether or not we should all book off work the next day. It was decided we shouldn't do that because the training office was, head office was just, you know, at Hastings at Granville, and they would just get on—fire us and get all new people in, so that was kind of hopeless. We talked about writing—I remember we talked about some kind of petition, or writing a letter about what we were angry about. Then we decided, no, that wasn't a good idea because they would just note our names and throw it in the garbage. Then, of course, I raised that I thought we should join a union. Everybody said, 'Oh, yes, that's probably a good idea, but that's impossible. That's just ridiculous in terms of, you know, how big CIBC is and how big the banking industry is. And that was just a fantasy.' I got home and called up Jean and Melody. We met later that night and we did up a leaflet saying why bank workers should be in a union, and they leafleted my branch the next morning. Just so it wouldn't look super conspicuous, they leafleted several branches on West Hastings there that morning. A couple of women in my branch really got interested in the idea and so they started coming to SORWUC meetings. The head teller and another teller and myself started meeting outside the branch.

JN [00:43:45] [unclear]

JA [00:43:45] Oh, Jan, that's a really good one. That might have been what they were really upset about that night because unpaid overtime was a really big issue. The other one was the arbitrariness of who the supervisor liked and real favouritism on the job. That came up a lot in our organising drive over the next couple of years. You know, young men, supervisors—what did they call them—management trainees and a lot of young women tellers. There was just a lot of favouritism. That might have been it, too, because—but

you're right, unpaid overtime was a big issue. The banks, because they were federal workplaces, came under a law, which I think was originally meant to apply mostly primarily to the trucking industry, where you could average out long workdays over a several week period so as long as it averaged out to eight hours a day. The banks just used this, of course, because at month end, or quarter end, or pay days, we worked long hours and then of course, we'd work eight-hour days the rest of the time it wasn't like we—and they had everyone convinced that they didn't have to pay overtime.

JN [00:45:22] [unclear] So a couple women started coming to the SORWUC meetings.

JA [00:45:25] Again, we talked about the whole thing about, you know, did SORWUC have the resources to take on the banking industry? Should we should we be joining even some one of the unions, maybe in the new independent Canadian—Confederation of Canadian Unions? Is that what it was, the CCU? Yeah, so there was discussion about that. You know, we were convinced that in order to organise an industry the size of the banking industry, that we needed to have new organising strategies. We needed to be able to respond in a concrete way to people's criticisms of the existing unions that were in the women's industries, the business unionism that was, you know, was our sort of option to join. We also had to respond to the issues that we were facing at work, which just—you know, we talked to so many union reps, whether it was in Office and Technical Employees, or in Hotel and Restaurant, or in Retail Clerks and they just didn't understand our issues. We just felt that it needed to be a whole new kind of union and a whole new kind of union organising. Very similar, and we raised this often, very similar to when the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] did their organising, you know, in the auto industry in particular and took on the existing craft unions.

JA [00:47:14] In the end, myself and the two tellers, determined that we know through our employee list at the bank, and we determined who we thought we should approach to join the union. We didn't think we could get a majority. We weren't sure. We also had to be careful that we got in our application before anybody—before management found out. It was kind of tricky to decide whether or not we should approach people that might give us the majority, or if they might just turn around and walk into management. At the time, a Canada Labour Code, you could apply with a 45 percent—I'm sorry, it could've been 35 or 45—but bottom line, you could apply with less than an outright majority and then they would hold a vote, so we thought that's what we would do. We'd apply; we would only go to the people that we were sure about. We knew we could have the percentage that would force the vote and so that's what we did on August 16, 1976. Oh, we were also nervous that there might be a period there where if we put our application in the mail, or we took it to the Labour Board, that there might be a period where management knew about it, but could publicly deny that they knew about it, and fire us in the meantime. What we decided to do was hand-deliver the application that day to the Labour Relations Board, take a copy of it, which we did, and Melody and Jean came into Victory Square branch and made an appointment to see the manager, and told him that, you know, right now someone was handing this same application to the Canada Labour Relations Board. There was a lot of press outside our branch by noon. It's pretty exciting.

JN [00:49:38] [unclear] branch under the United Bank Workers [unclear] part of SORWUC.

JA [00:49:39] Right, the Union of Bank Workers, UBW, Local 2 of SORWUC.

JN [00:49:45] [unclear] organizing drive started in SORWUC.

JA [00:49:47] Yeah, that's right, there's been previous organising, a Kitimat branch about 25 years earlier and there had been—but it had failed. It was with OTEU, and it had failed, and not really gone much further. Yeah, this was the next wave.

JN [00:50:16] [unclear]

JA [00:50:19] Quebec might have—no, I think that came after us, but I'm not sure there were some credit unions maybe. It was sort of the first launch. We held a press conference that afternoon saying this was going to be the first of many, and that we were launching a major organising drive in the Canadian banking industry, and etcetera. It was fun. It was well-covered and especially because I think we were all bank workers that were holding the press conference. I think we took advantage of being sort of media darlings. (laughter)

JN [00:50:56] And it was very bold coming [unclear]

JA [00:51:00] Yeah, it was on the national news that night. (laughter) I do remember, I'd been really nervous about filling out my job application at CIBC because, you know, there was a lot of union—I mean I couldn't very well put my last three jobs at UBC, Dennis and Smitty. I'd kind of like made up a job resume. My reference was my mum who was working in an office, my grandpa's office in Ontario, and they had called her for a reference. Anyways, she called me later that day when we applied and said, 'What's going on out there?' I was like, 'Why, Mum?' 'Because I've been getting calls from CIBC confirming your dates of employment here.' Yeah, they were on to us pretty quick.

JN [00:52:03] How soon did other banks start signing up after that big announcement?

JA [00:52:10] Immediately. We used to get a big—every morning we would get a big batch of checks from the data centre that we used to have to go through and check for things stale-dated or post-dated, or [unclear] etcetera. There were notes in there from the data centre people the next morning saying, 'Call us.' It was pretty quick. You know, Jan, now that I think of it, I think the union office might have been already in the Dominion Building because it rang off the hook. We were right away meeting with other branches, I mean, that week.

JN [00:52:52] Mostly in bigger cities?

JA [00:52:52] Almost exclusively in Vancouver.

JN [00:52:58] Vancouver, but then it spread to the Sunshine Coast?

JA [00:52:59] Yeah. Then we got some calls from the Sunshine Coast, from Vancouver Island, and from Northern B.C.

JN [00:53:05] [unclear] Saskatchewan?

JN [00:53:08] Then, yes, the Saskatchewan folks got in touch with us. That might have been—they had a Saskatchewan working woman's group there. I'm not sure which happened first, whether they got in contact with us and used our leaflets, or whether the bank workers got in contact with us and we put them in contact with the working women's group. I'm not sure. Yeah, they were involved.

JN [00:53:35] You had when you started to negotiate with the banks you had 18 [unclear].

JA [00:53:39] Is that what it was? You know, honestly, Jan, I was so—I don't remember. There's a lot of blur there.

JN [00:53:50] They are all well-documented in Account to Settle. It's all there.

JA [00:53:51] It's all down. It's in writing. In fact, that was one of the things we did as sort of catharsis when we knew we had been really defeated the first time around. We took the following year to write it all down, in a book. I think that was a really good thing to do.

JN [00:54:16] Did you ever get to the bargaining table with any of the banks?

JN [00:54:17] We did. We got to the bargaining table. Of course, it was so interesting when we were writing the book because we realised how strategic the banks were. Bank of Commerce would tell us that they—we wanted to—I forget how many branches we had at the Bank of Commerce, but obviously we wanted to—we had the same contract we were presenting to all of them. We wanted to bargain collectively with the other branches, but they said, 'Absolutely not. The Labour Relations Board decision one bargaining unit at a time.' That was Bank of Commerce's strategy. Of course, it took forever to set up one meeting with one branch. That's how they stalled and stalled and stalled. Bank of Montreal were like, 'Oh, sure, we'll meet with all of you.' But they filed every single possible legal block you could think of. That was clearly their duty. Then the Bank of Nova Scotia—and I mean, it was just sort of interesting how many fronts we were fighting on. We did get to the bargaining table. Nothing ever got signed, of course, because over the course of the two years really there were a lot of unfair labour practises. We were doing those. Initially, the first year, we were arguing the whole issue of the bargaining unit, and trying to raise money, trying to find people that could go, you know, we'd get a phone call to go out to Tahsis on Vancouver Island, or Port Hardy, on Vancouver Island. We were all working full time, so no, we were stretched pretty thin. AUCE helped a lot. AUCE helped financially a lot, but our finances, you know, I do remember using my vacation to go up to the IWA [International Woodworkers of America] meeting in Kamloops. I just tell you this as a kind of a really classic example of what we were up against. I had the opportunity to speak at their union meeting in Kamloops, at the IWA meeting and told them our story and how desperate we were for funds. Here's one of the richest unions in the province. At the time we had a leaflet out and it was called the monthly budget and we were leafleting. It was what we had used—Vancouver real estate board statistics. We'd gone through and we figured out what the budget would have to be to live with one woman with one child in Vancouver. It came to 1,100 dollars. This was the current leaflet we were distributing. I told this to the meeting. I remember the first speaker stood up and said, 'No wife of mine, it's going to make 1,100 dollars.' The rest of the guys in the room, some of them booed and some of them laughed. Mostly they laughed. They voted to send—I forget it was a chunk of change for us at the time, \$500, something like that. The executive were furious that they had voted to do that and they just never sent us the money. They never wrote the check. It was tough, it was really tough.

JN [00:58:01] [unclear].

JA [00:58:03] Yeah.

JN [00:58:10] What about the legal decision, it was a victory even though it was a long process. You went all the way to the Supreme Court? It was decided—

JA [00:58:19] Nope, at the Canada Labour Relations Board. It was decided that—so, what the banks argued was, in terms of the bargaining unit and the fact that we had to have a majority, that the CIBC bargaining unit should be all CIBC in place, across the country. What we argued was that if the board ruled that, they were, it was tantamount to saying that we didn't have the right to unionise and that under the Labour Code we did have the right to unionise, organize. We argued that it had to be a branch, or a data centre or, you know, one physical workplace and the board agreed with us. What they said was that with the banks' argument, it would basically deprive us of our right to unionise. They accepted that argument. As it turned out, you know, it was sort of— and we actually knew by the time we got the decision that it was going to be a Pyrrhic victory because the branches were too small and it was too easy for them to pick us off, and it was too difficult to maintain solidarity. Even by the time we got the decision, we were already talking about how we had to either have a major workplace like one of the large data centres or a region, a city, a town. We weren't sure, but we knew, we did know that the branch by branch was not going to enable us to win this time round.

JN [01:00:12] It was still an historic decision.

JA [01:00:12] It was a historic decision because, you know, previous to that, bank workers didn't think they had the right to unionise. I mean, we were told by management, we didn't have the right to unionise because of how important the banking industry is so that unions and strikes just couldn't be part of the industry. We were told we couldn't unionise; in that way, it was a really important decision. There were a couple other important decisions that came out of our drive. The definition of the bargaining unit in terms of who should be in and who should be out. Again, that was kind of a Pyrrhic victory because we ended up with loans officers being included in a bargaining unit with tellers. Even by the time we got those decisions, we were already thinking, you know, loan officers for sure if they're unionised, but probably their own local in our union. It was interesting how we were, and I think that's how we saw it after our defeat is that, you know, an industry that size is never organised the first time around. We had made some really important—establish some important legal decisions and learnt a lot from what the next drive should look like. Unfortunately, that was 40 years ago.

JN [01:01:49] [unclear].

JA [01:01:50] No, it's a bitter pill.

JN [01:01:55] [unclear].

JA [01:01:56] Yes, but, you know, there was such a backlash in the eighties. I think, you know, there's a lot of reasons why there wasn't a second drive. I think unions were spending a lot of time just trying to hang on to their own members when they probably should have been out there just organising. There's a lot of reasons, I think, why a second drive didn't happen.

JN [01:02:59] [unclear]

JA [01:03:01] All of those women that were involved in, you know, SORWUC and AUCE, are still really active in their communities, and in their unions, and in raising our kids. Our girls, our little boys.

JN [01:03:19] [unclear]

JA [01:03:20] Dramatically.

JN [01:03:26] So when the book came [unclear].

JA [01:03:34] Well, actually, they did finally. They waited until it was defeated and then they waited for a few more—I think I was there for about 15 years and people swear that it was because they finally thought it was time they could get rid of me. They shut the branch down (laughter) and everyone else got a new job except for me. They argued that they just couldn't find a place for me.

JA [01:04:20] I applied for a job over in—I saw a job opening with the CIBC over in North Van and applied for that, but of course I didn't get it. I launched a—well two things—I launched a labour practise and also, I was very ill at the time. Not surprising I guess, after the bank drive, and, of course, we continued to try to do things after the bank drive failed. We were still active in credit unions and trust companies. I'd gotten quite ill so I'd taken some short term disability. We also applied under the Human Rights Code for discrimination for sick leave. In the end, like I said, I was ill, I was exhausted, and I'd met someone, and had decided to move to Seattle. I accepted a settlement with CIBC.

JN [01:05:29] [unclear].

JA [01:05:29] Right, rather than, you know, go to the Labour Board or to the Human Rights Commission, I accepted a settlement.

JN [01:05:39] It is amazing, Jackie, you did stay on [unclear]

JA [01:05:51] Yeah. I liked the women I work with. I really liked my job. I liked working in banking, and I had to work, so, yeah, it worked.

JN [01:06:09] Were many people fired? Do you remember?

JA [01:06:13] People were fired. There was a really high-profile firing on the Sunshine Coast in Gibsons. They fired the main union organiser there and we picketed that branch. We never—you know, I was going to say we didn't apply for certification, but I'd have to check that. We never got her rehired but it was a very—you know, the newspapers picked it up in Gibsons and with lots of trade unionists in Gibsons, we picketed that branch every Saturday for quite a while. Yeah. There were other firings for sure.

JN [01:06:50] That you fought [unclear]

JA [01:06:51] Fought back, never won them.

JN [01:07:01] You went down to Seattle, what did you do there?

JA [01:07:03] Yeah, sort of interesting. At CIBC, I ended up getting, you know, some fairly good job performance reviews after everything had settled down. When I moved to Seattle, I applied for a job in a bank and they looked over my resume and just loved it. I mean, I'd worked in the industry for 15 years and worked in a lot of positions and got several promotions. They said, 'Gosh, this is all just looks great. You're certainly qualified for the position. All we have to do is check your references.' I was like, 'Oh, that's so sad.' (laughter) What I did was, I said, 'You know, rather than check with CIBC's personnel

office or human resources division,' (as they were called by then), 'Why don't you call my manager at my branch and talk to him directly? Because, you know, he's the one that really knows my work.' They were like, 'Oh, that would be fantastic.' I literally raced home and I called my manager at my branch and I said, 'Look, I'm living in Seattle. I'm going to be here a long time. I really need a job. I really need a reference from you. They're going to call you.' He said, 'Do you promise to never apply at CIBC again?' I said, 'Of course, no, I just need a job here.' He said, 'I'd be delighted to Jackie.' He gave me a really good reference and I got the job at the bank in Seattle. I was there for 23 years at that branch. Yes, I retired from there.

JN [01:09:00] [unclear]

JA [01:09:10] It was really difficult. There was a period of time when I was fired from CIBC, before I moved to Seattle, when I needed a job. I went to Vancity. Again, they looked at my resume and said, 'You're hired.' I said, 'Fantastic.' Then they called me. There was a position at the branch at First and Commercial, so I was going to be going there. I had the interview at the head office. They had said, 'Great,' they had called the branch, and it was all set up. Then they called me a day later and said it turned out that position wasn't available and they put couldn't hire me. I went into the branch and I asked to speak to the operations manager and I said, 'You know, I had a position here, and then I didn't have a position here. And is the position still open?' She was really upset and she said, 'I don't want to get involved in this.' I said, 'Get involved in what?' She said, 'I'm just not going to talk to you.'

JN [01:10:28] You were blacklisted?

JA [01:10:29] Yeah. Vancity had decided not to hire me.

JN [01:10:32] [unclear]

JA [01:10:33] I couldn't. No, I got a job at Bank of B.C., and they called me and said, 'No,' they withdrew that. Thankfully, there was a position open at CCEC [Community Congress for Economic Change] credit union and I worked there for about—it took about a year transitioning between CIBC and when I moved to Seattle. I worked there.

JN [01:10:57] [unclear]

JA [01:10:58] In fact, they were in the middle of a union drive when I was hired. Yeah, so I got to be involved in some negotiations there. That was good.

JN [01:11:08] I know we already talked [unclear] because you spent so long in the industry at all levels can you comment on the future [unclear] on bank workers, on unions in B.C., Canada, United States, that type of thing.

JA [01:11:33] Well, you know, what are we all going to do right now? I mean, I think we're—what's that saying? May we live in interesting times. I think we all have to organise and do whatever we can and resist in whatever ways we can but—

JN [01:12:07] [unclear]

JA [01:12:09] Well, it should mean shorter workweeks. It should mean more time for leisure and cultural development and time with our families. It should mean all those things.

JN [01:12:24] [unclear]

JA [01:12:25] Exactly. You know, one of the things that I'm a little bit worried about, and I think it's true in Canada, too, but obviously exaggerated in the United States, is that the coalitions that we're going to have to build. One of the groups that must be worked with is working people and especially marginalised working people. Maybe they voted for Trump and maybe they voted for Harper, but they're winnable. They're really angry. People have been unemployed for so long, or working in marginal jobs and, you know, seeing their kids' futures being burdened by debt. There's a lot of things happening with climate change. There's a lot of things happening, but there's nothing happening about working people and organising working people.

JN [01:13:46] [unclear]

JA [01:13:47] Yes. So—.

JN [01:13:48] [unclear].

JA [01:13:52] That's important and that's working people doing it themselves. Right? I guess I'm just worried that there's sort of a marginalisation of those workers. Then, of course, I was mostly (laughter) one of them (laughter) so I'm a bit concerned with them the most. (laughter)

JN [01:14:14] [unclear] I like to believe that.

JA [01:14:19] Yeah. It makes it even harder. I don't know what kind of—I'm retired—and so I'm not in the throes of what kind of organising it is going to take, but it's obviously going to be, again, a new kind of organising. A different kind. A new kind of organisation. A different kind.

JN [01:14:47] [unclear] example that started [unclear] ideas that were radical and new [unclear]

JA [01:14:48] Yeah. You know, I think that's one of the things that this story does say is that when we decided that what we needed was an independent feminist union for library and clerical workers at UBC, and that we should just found our own organisation and do it. We said to the guys from the PPWC, 'How many should we have, how many people should we have at a founding convention?' They were like, 'Well, a founding convention for a union,' they were like 'Hmm, 30, 40.' We were like, 'Oh no.' They said, 'Well, a minimum of ten.' We're like, 'Okay, ten, ten.' It was really hard to get ten people to that meeting to found a union. It was a year and a half later, we signed one of the largest pay increases, as you know, in Canada that year. It happens fast, but that's the other one I would say that was really exciting. You know, that it can start with—I'll quote Margaret Mead here—but it can start with a few people, but it also happened so fast. Women who it was so difficult to get them to, you know, think that they should join a union and get them to sign their union card. Ten months later, they were legally walking off the job. I don't know. It happens fast.

JN [01:16:29] We talked about how we don't really have another independent feminist union. [unclear] there was no model.

JA [01:16:42] I think that's true. Somebody asked me that recently, and you're right, there was no model.

JN [01:16:49] Which [unclear] has to be. I mean [unclear]

JA [01:16:52] Yeah, I think it was just a very organic thing. We work in these jobs and what do we need to realise our power, which we did understand.

JN [01:17:10] [unclear] traditional union setting up a new set of rules.

JA [01:17:14] Well, and again, not to underestimate the role that the breakaway unions played here in Vancouver.

JN [01:17:20] On the wave of feminism.

JA [01:17:23] And the wave of feminism. I mean, the message of the women's movement was, we're going to do it ourselves—and we can do it ourselves—that we have the skills, the ability and the dedication and the commitment, and we can do it ourselves. I mean, that was the message of the women's movement. Definitely that played, well, a primary role.

JN [01:17:50] [unclear] It was in the air.

JA [01:17:53] Yeah. Resistance and fightback was in the air. Yeah.

JN [01:17:59] Last question. Can you comment on the value of labour history, especially women's labour history. When you think of this project we're doing, the legacy to pass on like the bank book, An Account to Settle.

JA [01:18:17] I guess, you know, we don't want to make the same mistakes again. It's really important to learn what worked and what didn't work in terms of our union drives. Again, I think we're concrete examples of a lesson that women today that we can do it ourselves. I think, you know, documenting that and making it personal, which I think we are doing in our in our project, that we're working on, making it clear to women that we were waitresses at Smitty's Pancake House, or we were office workers at Guardian Insurance, that we can do it.

JN [01:19:25] Last question, is there any other comment or question you would like to include?

JA [01:19:31] I don't think so. Thanks, guys.