

Alice de Wolff Transcript

Chris: Okay, maybe I'll just introduce things by saying welcome. We're talking to Alice de Wolff, a free trade activist, for the free trade activism history project, and it is March 7, 2022. As I mentioned, we're going to get started by talking about biographical stuff. I was wondering, first of all, if you could just give me a little bit of your biography in terms of where you came from, and how you got involved in, in free trade activism.

Alice: I got involved in— well, first of all, I was involved in the women's movement early on, consciousness raising groups and the kind of feminism that was developing at universities. I was at Simon Fraser [University] in 1967 and in the Vancouver area until 74. So, in that period we were not heavily activists, we were doing a sort of academic thinking. I was, at that point, connected with a group that were at UBC, who were beginning to connect with Dorothy Smith, who was teaching there. So, that happened, but I got employed by Canada World Youth when I was in my sort of mid-20s. That took me into a whole international... interested in international politics, international development, and a kind of popular education, which coalesced. I worked on the Prairies. So, I took teams to Africa, but I became, then, the Regional Coordinator for Canada World Youth on the Prairies. There was a very strong development, education kind of movement on the Prairies. That group -- that sort of synthesis -- was paying a lot of attention to what was developing as a real country critique of trade agreements that was coming from the South and prepared me for when I went to OISE [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education]. When I was in my mid- or early-30s, I went back to school and while I was at OISE -- it was the kind of feminist, my feminist kind of roots that took me there -- I followed Dorothy Smith across the country; there's several of us who did that. But I was employed for a good part of that time, at the Development Education Centre (DEC) in Toronto. That was a real hub of information about [all] kinds of things but the real concern about what was happening was in free trade zones in different parts of the world. We had films about the maquiladoras and what was beginning to happen there. It was a real hub for looking at the connections between Canada and other countries, as well as what our international relationships were about, right. I didn't at that point necessarily have a strong piece, it wasn't necessarily completely focused on that. But it was a real background for an important place for me. I was at OISE, I guess there was a very strong feminist group of us who were there at that point. We were, of course, studying with a number of people -- but I was particularly... with Dorothy Smith as my thesis advisor -- and were very interested in how our social relationships are organized in relation to state policy—so, kind of women in the state. We held a big conference, but people were beginning to kind of pull out about the relationship between women in the state, you know, the kind of the bureaucratic processes of ruling. For me that took me into looking at the constraints that are on registered charities that are trying to do international development work, how that related to gender relations, both in Canada and overseas. So, that was my piece.

Chris: Around what years were you at OISE?

Alice: I was at OISE from 83 to 88. Somewhere in there. I mean, the other thing was that I'd also done some work with the Canadian Council for International Cooperation. They wanted to do some

assessment of Canada's funding and its impact on women's programs in a number of places [around] the world, but they actually sent me to Botswana, into Zimbabwe, to take a look at that question. There's a whole series of things that... the whole sort of history made me very cautious and critical of our international development relationships. Like so many people, women who were interested in international relationships who got drawn into the Women and Development (WAD) kind of framework. I was pretty predisposed to be critical of it. So NAC happened kind of in and around all of this -- the National Action Committee on the Status Women (NAC). I was involved with the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee in Alberta, in the late 70s, in Haiti in 1980. I think what happened was that a number of my good friends from Alberta were on the board of NAC and they came and stayed with me. I would get for board meetings chapters and verses about what was happening with that. That was going on through from 84, 85, and 86. NAC decided it wanted to have a foreign policy committee because it was having committees on all kinds of things. So I said, "Well, I'd be very happy to be on the Foreign Policy Committee," and took that group into whole discussions about our sort of economic relationships with other countries. So, I carried that kind of discomfort about the Women and Development framework into that discussion and really wanted to broaden what we were looking at to include trade agreements and whatever else we could. So that was my entry; I began to do that. I was working on that foreign policy committee with Doris Anderson, which was a big treat. I just really liked Doris. At the same time as Marjorie [Griffin Cohen] and Laurel Ritchie and other people were working and explicitly looking at the trade agreement in relation to the next general policy. They had started from a visit to a place of looking at women's employment. Again I had a committee on women's employment. I think that's what started them. So, I was drawing on their stuff in this other direction. When I was just completing my degree, NAC needed a coordinator. I applied and they hired me. So then for four years, I was the Executive Director of NAC.

Chris: That was like, 1988?

Alice: Yeah, that's right. Until 1992.

Chris: Okay.

Alice: Yeah. Which was an extraordinarily interesting time to be there. Of course, it was never [not] an interesting place to be, but there's was a whole organizational mess happening. I don't know whether you know this, but there was a real shift happening in the emphasis of the politics of the organization. The kind of simpler version of it was that there were many more women and women's groups who were not interested in doing a lot of face-to-face lobbying with the government. They were much more interested in doing, kind of, grassroots organizing such as the focus on policy, but thinking that there were other ways and then actually sitting down to lobby with the government would actually make them change, and or would affect change. That created a split in the organization at that point. There was a new executive elected and the staff quit. I had just been hired as the Executive Coordinator and the entire staff quit. There was this really big kerfuffle in a whole new board. A whole bunch of people who had never been part of the organization before -- very competent, great people, but anyway.

Chris: That was in 88?

Alice: That was 88. Yeah.

Chris: Wow. Yeah. Tough time to come into a new position.

Alice: Oh, man.

Chris: [...] So, when was the first time that free trade appeared on your radar screen then? Is it like something that you needed to organize around?

Alice: Well, personally it was beginning to show up... in retrospect, Marjorie's piece about the MacDonald Commission, that she was working on was released in 85. It was likely in the next year that I began to work with it. That was mostly in relation to this sort of foreign policy committee that I was working on with ACC, and the other students at OISE. We were quite surprised at ourselves. I remember the several of us ... sort of sitting around and going "oh my god, we're talking about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT]." Who knew that the GATT was like, "why are we? Why do we? How is this?" That had come about a lot because of both the political work [and] the actual work of interpreting what was coming out of the MacDonald Commission. I think people are beginning to take a take a look at the draft of the trade agreement and realizing that manufacturing was going to get nailed. Canadian manufacturing was going to get nailed and that there was a lot of focus on the auto industry, but also the [International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU)].

Chris: Yeah.

Alice: They were really sounding an alarm. So, a number of us were sort of talking about that, trying to figure out how we could work in solidarity with mostly Montreal and immigrant workers who were involved in the textile industry.

Chris: That's interesting. I read a student thesis where they did an oral history of the textile workers in Montreal and they were quite militant for in the 80s. So, they maybe crossed over there.

Alice: Oh, completely. They did. Were they members? They were NAC members. I'm pretty sure. They were very influenced by what was happening there. I know that happened. NAC adopted, I think its first formal off the floor policy, resolution on the floor, and it was approved by all member groups – policy on free trade. I think it was in 86 or 87. So those debates... I don't know whether you know the way that NAC functioned?

Chris: I think I know a little bit. I think it would be good to go into that a little bit.

Alice: Well, it was actually quite remarkable. There were 500 member groups. They all contributed to a policy development process that happened at the annual general meetings. There was one of those a year, a big annual general meeting that happened in Ottawa. There would be 400 or 500 women groups at those meetings. They weren't small by any means. The meeting would be a weekend of placing policy recommendations on the floor and voting -- discussing them and voting about them. That part of it happened in both languages. So, we were translating. Part of the contention was about how we even made a decision. There was some of this very deeply democratic and kind of feminist discussion about how we do this if we don't have full

agreement? How do we reach enough agreement that it's going to be okay with everybody to adopt a position? What do we do if there's remnants of really serious opposition to that position?

Chris: In principle, you were moving for consensus?

Alice: In principle, but that's really difficult to do in a weekend with 500 people. I began to use something that we call Roberta's Rules of Order. There's a very big contention about how you actually make it come to an end. Do you have to bring it to a vote? What do you do with it? Anyway, that was very interesting and caused a very lively meeting. They were included, I think, until probably 1990. We [organized a] lobby session, which was an hour or an hour and a half with as many members of the government as we could get into the room, where we would pose questions to them. The last one that I remember was the Prime Minister and the leaders of the opposition. All of the party leaders were there, all of them, like the ministers who were in charge of areas that we were wanting to ask questions. There were 15 of them who sat in front of us. They were prepared to take our questions. They stopped after that one because they decided they didn't have to actually go through this. But that was a big part of that. There were 25 board members who met every two months, who actually came to Toronto. There was always a midterm meeting, somewhere in the country, every year. When I look back on that I'm kind of astonished that it all worked, and there was commitment from people across the country that came together every couple of months. The other thing was, and this is going to relate to your question about whether there's materials. I think we issued eight issues a year of the newsletter, *Feminist ACTION*. They were good; there were 10 pages in English 10 and pages in French. It was released every couple of months about sort of what was happening, what we were thinking was going on. I've gone back and taken a look at the articles and they're very good. I think they completely continue to stand and a number of them were about free trade.

Chris: So, you have access to the newsletter still?

Alice: They are on the Rise Up! archive.

Chris: Oh, great. Yeah, I'll check it out. It would be great to get copies of that.

Alice: Oh, yeah. For me, it's a very big rabbit hole because I think, "oh my gosh, I was there. Oh, that's right, I remember that."

Chris: Yeah, I bet.

Alice: So, again, when I think about the ways that we're communicating now, it feels like it's from another lifetime. I remember that we maybe organized two or three conference calls with people across the country, kind of towards the end of the time that I was there, in the early 90s. We did very little of that, most of it was in person, by written newsletters and or stuff that we sent out in the mail. By that rate and from these very regular meetings we got our first fax machine. I was amazed at what we could do with a fax machine. We would have a document, and somebody could edit it or translate it the next day and then we would have it back very quickly. The fax machine was wonderful. Sue Callie, I don't know whether you know her, but she pushed and pushed us to switch to online, likely with a couple of other people. I remember Sue doing this so we could try to begin to figure out how to use computers to talk to each other. We actually

purchased an email program for the board members to begin to try to figure out how to talk to each other, but then we also had to purchase computers for some of them because they didn't have them.

Chris: What year would that be?

Alice: Well 89, 90.

Chris: Okay.

Alice: I actually remember as a girl, the first morning that it began to work. I went to the computer that was hosting this program and picked up the first email from somebody in Saskatchewan. Wherever it was I just said, "oh my god, here we go. This is different." Anyway, most of our communication was in the mail. So, there have been documents that were captured in *Feminist ACTION*, in the newsletter, so we can go look at that.

Chris: Yeah, that'd be great. Could you just take us back to 1986 and 1987? You mentioned that the policy opposing free trade was kind of introduced at that meeting. So, do you remember how the meeting went? Were people in favor of pursuing this campaign or was anybody ambivalent? What was the mood like at that meeting?

Alice: I don't actually have a strong memory of that moment. I know that the Conservative Party's women's committee, that was a member of the of NAC, wasn't happy. I don't really remember. Like, I remember them. I remember a number of them leaving the big room, the big AGM room.

Chris: So, you had member organizations for every political party?

Alice: We did.

Chris: Oh, wow.

Alice: Yeah, at that point. I think they stayed members for quite a long time, but they stopped coming to the meetings. At least if they did keep coming they stopped putting resolutions forward. But that began around when we moved on from the MacDonald Commission that challenged our economic policy. When we moved [from] issues around violence, abortion, childcare, and began to kind of go deeper into what might be behind a bunch of those problems, the sort of economic inequalities. That's when the split began to happen, when a vocal opposition to NAC began to happen from other women's organizations and the formation of REAL Women [of Canada] who very explicitly got set up... they were kind of Reform Party activists. They got set up to say, "these people don't represent us." Okay, so back to your question about like, what was it like? It's very interesting. I don't have the strongest memories about what it was like. I'm sure that Marjorie [Griffin Cohen], Laurel Ritchie maybe would have a better memory of this stuff because they were the ones carrying this stuff. They were the carriers of it and would likely have a much stronger sense of just how the opposition played out. I think as much as anything there was concern from women that were not comfortable talking about economic policy about whether they could talk and then carry it; also, whether they knew enough about it to actually be able to speak to it. In many ways, I think that's what we felt with NAC. I know that was what I felt. I was involved with quite a lot after that. I was trying to give the membership enough

material, enough information to be able to walk into their MP's office, stand outside on the street with a banner, and or have information meetings with their membership; made sure they had enough information to be able to do that. Because it seemed for many different women's organizations, it wasn't a familiar territory. This issue took them into the territory that they weren't necessarily resistant to. It was just like, "how do we do this?"

Chris: It's interesting, because I think for some people when they hear about free trade and how early NAC got involved in kind of fomenting opposition to free trade. I think there are some questions about why NAC and free trade was problematized from the beginning as a woman's issue. Right? So, I'm wondering if maybe you could speak a bit to that? I mean, for starters was NAC one of the first organizations that that took a position against free trade? Were there other organizations that were coming out against it?

Alice: Well, there was a coalition kind of developing. I think in 86, there were a number of conferences that the Council of Canadians held. They called it the Maple Leaf Summit. I will have to check the date of that-- either 86 or 87.

Chris: It's in Marjorie's article, I think.

Alice: Yeah, yeah, we can find it.

Chris: But before NAC took a position, the Council of Canadians would have formed, and they would be kind of speaking out against it?

Alice: Yeah, and Maude Barlow was part of NAC's network. She was never necessarily on the board but she was interested. I went back and kind of looked at some of the Alberta Status of Women materials and she was speaking about a number of different things through the NAC networks sort of in the late 70s, early 80s. So, I think she sort of took a path and focussed on her interest of economic policy as it related to women. It was pretty early in the 80s, maybe earlier than that. She may be one of the people you want to talk to... she should be one of the people you want to interview [on] what happened. I think at that point -- I was thinking about this the other day -- that women's studies had got themselves lodged in the universities in the late 70s, early 80s. By sort of 80 to 83. In there were a number of women, Marjorie being one of them, Barb Cameron, and what's her name? Cheffcin? A bunch of people ... were sort of around at that point. There are a number of people who were beginning to do that sort of work academically, who were also activists and had a direct connection into the activist community, because I think that work wasn't completely solidified as academic only; it was still quite tightly connected to the activists. So when they did the kind of writing that they were doing, I think, more happened with it; I don't want to overstate this, but in some ways more than happens now. They would be working on one of these issues and it would be taken straight to or it came from the questions within one of the labour movements, the unions, childcare stuff or NAC general policy. I think that it wasn't just NAC that was doing this, I think it was a part of the maturing of the women's movement here. People kind of, I think this happened to me too, worked away at a set of issues long enough that you want to dig deeper. You kind of went, "Okay, this isn't moving the way that it should." You

make an argument that somehow this should go away. There's obviously a bunch of stuff underpinning it that's keeping it there. So, I think there is a whole bunch of different ways activists and academics were digging away at a bunch of those questions. So, um—

Chris: Maybe we could get more into that?

Alice: Yeah. It's an interesting question about why it was like that at NAC. There are, I think, a number of people who've tried to examine that in a certain amount of depth. So, one of your questions is about what some of the early organizing was like, and what I know about that was that there were groups that got together in what became the Action Canada Network. It had different names before that, but from some real interest in trying to figure out how we would make connections with activist groups across the country with groups that were doing the same kind of thing. NAC was absolutely there, very close to the beginning of it. One of the reasons for that, I think, was because we had a strong membership in Québec. Both the Québec unions and the FFQ, the Federation des Femmes du Québec were ready to take a look at constitutional questions and sort of economic policy, I think before groups in the rest of the country; they were kind of further ahead by just a little bit on their alliances with the labour movement. They were stronger than ours in the connections with the labour movement in that they were very strong in the late 80s and early 90s. It had taken quite a long time for that to develop. I think there was a sort of symbiotic development where the women's caucuses in different labour unions were people who had to either be connected through NAC and or one of its member groups, realized they needed to do work in the union, and then, vice versa, the women's caucus established in the various unions and then joined NAC and pushed around different kinds of policy. So, it was a kind of symbiotic development, a really strong connection. I think that was happening just a bit sooner in Québec. Québec was much more aware... the people in Québec were way more attuned to paying attention to what might be happening around large policy issues and constitutional issues. They were on it because they were very concerned about how almost everything impacted Québec. So, the FFQ was, I think, very influential in taking NAC into those early coalitions. It was a place that I know we learned a lot from; we learned a bunch. I remember myself having to kind of change my language around talking about how we spoke about Canada as a nation because our colleagues in Québec were opposed to that language and that we needed to figure out how to talk about the rest of Canada-- Québec and the rest of Canada, kind of whatever language was working at that moment. Yeah.

Chris: That's interesting, because the national question is one that's interesting in terms of how it changes and evolves through the whole anti-globalization movement. It seems like questions of economic sovereignty were really framed around national identity in the early years of the struggle against free trade. But then, you were kind of mentioning it, it's already kind of being problematized even in the early conversations by like Québec activists. So, can you speak a little bit about how national identity kind of was negotiated in these kinds of struggles? Do you think there was like a strong economic nationalism at the beginning, framing the struggle against free trade?

Alice: I remember it as being a strong cultural movement. I think that's because the voices that I heard really early on were fairly mild, like Margaret Atwood, before I began to kind of really engage

with and try to kind of work with this stuff—I've gone all over and been all over the place on this question.

Chris: To get you kind of grounded again, we will get back into the campaign against free trade, because so far, we're up to 1986-87: NAC adopts a policy opposing free trade. Right? So, I was interested in what the organizing work looked like in terms of the fact that you've adopted this policy and your moving towards the federal elections in 88. So, what kinds of stuff do you get involved in at that time? How do you start getting involved in the organizing against free trade? How does NAC get involved in that? What kinds of stuff are they doing?

Alice: Well, it kind of fell right smack in my lap when I became the coordinator in 88. Kind of looking back at the newsletters and the stuff, we were definitely talking about it, definitely raising it. I'm sure it came up at the annual meetings. I'm sure that was the stuff that we that we discussed. In 88, there was a federal election and we produced... that was what my job was that summer, it was to produce... On election day, free trade was definitely part of it. It was one of several campaign platforms issues that we took up. I think there were five: childcare, etc. Free trade was one of them. We produced a fairly substantial election guide that went to everybody across the country. I remember there being stacks of them in the office. That was us getting them out. I'm pretty sure that the federal guide is on our archive Rise Up! I'm pretty sure there's a copy of it there. So that was something I did in terms of producing that and getting it out was a very big piece of what NAC was doing from my perspective. We were also trying to follow up and get another women's debate with leaders. That didn't work. It was in part, I believe, because the argument that the political parties were using was that, like, "All you want to talk about is free trade. How are your interests different than... Like we'll talk to you about abortion, but everybody in the country is interested in free trade. Why should we have a special debate with you about that?" It was mostly because they didn't want to, and we came up against a very firm... like, you know, we went back and forth. The Liberals were prepared to participate and then the Conservatives said "Well, maybe we'll participate," then they dropped out and it disintegrated. So, there was a woman's debate in the 84 election, which there must be a copy of it somewhere; it'd be interesting to kind of take a look at. Somebody should do this and see what the differences are, what the issues were that we have talked about in that debate, come and compare it to the ones that we thought we were the primary issues that we wanted to focus on in 88. The other thing was that we did a public service radio announcement, which NAC had done a number of times, sort of announcing that these are women's issues; these are included free trade. We had trouble getting it aired on all of the stations that we wanted it to be aired on. I can't now do chapter-and-verse about who gave us trouble. ... And because NAC had done this before in the previous election, fairly successfully apparently, we thought it was going to go relatively easily and it didn't. It aired on some radio stations, but not on all. I found a survey that Marjorie had sent out to the member groups to the across the country with questions -- I'd love to know the results of this, I don't have any idea where it went -- she was asking whether they had managed to talk about free trade stuff in their meetings. "Have you had meetings with MPs? Have you had rallies about it? Have you written letters to the editor?" She was asking very explicitly about what the actions were. Those had all been things that we had suggested might be possible for groups to do. We were speaking about it. When I say that, at least the board

members were speaking about it in whatever they managed to get public, some kind of a public gathering or platform or something. So, I certainly know that was happening. Because the people that were able to do the most intensive kind of education and sort of mobilizing work were the board members, because they met with each other every couple of months. That was 25 women across the country.

Chris: So, you were able to get those women mobilized for free trade and kind of take it up in different parts of the country?

Alice: Yeah.

Chris: Okay, so I've just been making a bunch of lists in response to your answers and our discussion. First of all, in terms of the stuff that you're doing, it sounds like publications were really important and creating a communication network, or you already had a communication network through which you could produce and circulate this kind of information on radio and print, write this kind of thing in meetings. I also think you've talked about it in your talk. Marjorie mentioned it. I thought it was interesting that NAC was like the physical space that the meeting took place for a while for the Coalition, right? I'm not sure if it was Action Canada or another group, but I think you mentioned that the physical space was being used by people organizing against free trade for a while. I was wondering if you could talk about that.

Alice: It's interesting, I don't remember that particularly. It may have been that it had been happening before I actually inhabited the space. I'm not entirely sure. I mean the NAC offices—

Chris: Are they in Ottawa?

Alice: No, they were in — why am I not sure about this? — no they were in Toronto.

Chris: Okay.

Alice: They were not huge but it's entirely possible that was happening there. It wasn't like we had a big... well, it could have, anyway. That may have happened but it was before I was actually, familiar with the space and how the space was used.

Chris: It connects to the relationships you had with other groups and the list I was making: it's just the organizations that we're getting involved in this stuff. So, we already mentioned a few like Action Canada and the Council of Canadians, which seemed to get their start right around that time, around 85 to 86. I guess NAC was a part of the Action Canada network.

Alice: Yep.

Chris: Also, Maude Barlow was connected with NAC and then that connected to the Council of Canadians. You mentioned the female textile workers in Montreal also in terms of the union connection. So, I'm wondering about like who were the other actors that were engaging in this struggle? Who are some of the important players opposing free trade at this time?

Alice: Well, the auto workers and then Bob White and the... I just had her name and it's gone; the woman who... oh, Peggy Nash. I'm not sure what her immediate connection was, the organizational connection was with Bob White but she was active both with NAC and right

smack in the middle of this with the auto workers, right? Because she traveled with him and she may have even been his speechwriter, I'm not sure. She was very active with NAC, I actually think that I may be making this up, but she may have actually had been a chair in some of our meetings, the big meeting, the AGMs, because she's very skilled. It was kind of just a very strong connection there. Again, I can't necessarily tell the story of who came first, but I know that certainly by the mid 80s, they were very strongly interlinked. I mean, Peggy's interest was in childcare; what she took into the Union was a whole bunch of initiatives around childcare: what the union might be able to do in individual plant locations, as well as its general agreement, its big agreements with the automakers, and my guess is that she, early on, was involved with that because of childcare. The whole trade agreements brought her into this sort of trade agreement piece. Again, she would have been certainly connected with that. When there was any kind of coordinating that we needed to do or wanted to do, any statements that we wanted to release on, we would check with the auto workers through her. I don't think there was an easy peace early on between the NAC and the labour movement because, just generally speaking, I think at that point, the labour movement wasn't completely easy with its women's caucuses and its women's committees. The labour movement wasn't sure about the women's movement. There was an uneasy kind of interesting alliance that happened. I suspect it was likely a bit rocky, in the very beginning. I wasn't personally part of those kinds of meetings that happened in the 86 to 87 period, but my guess is that that's a big piece of what was going on. Not just a guess... I mean, I know that it was not. I don't know the extent to which the labour movement resisted some of the next involvement. They may have, I don't know that for sure, but it wasn't a completely straightforward relationship in the beginning.

Chris: How did the labour movement respond to free trade? Do you think there was like overwhelming opposition to free trade? Or was it more of a mixed kind of response?

Alice: I don't think I assumed by the time that I got heavily involved in it. I assumed that it was full on opposition. There is more that I learned over that number of years, but the labour movement after that I suspect was a full on opposition at the level of the leadership, not necessarily at the membership level.

Chris: So, okay, so we have the labour movement and the Action Canada Network. Were you ever directly involved in Action Canada or some of these other coalition's that formed?

Alice: Well, NAC was. Yeah. I made sure that there was NAC, somebody from NAC was attending. Some of my job as a staff person was to just make sure that they were there. So, from 88 on I think those meetings happened in Ottawa and were in Toronto. I wasn't actually at the meetings.

Chris: I guess, Marjorie would have done a lot of that.

Alice: Yeah, I've certainly understood that that Marjorie did a lot of the convening on a bunch of that stuff.

Chris: Yeah, and within NAC I'm getting a sense that the real early centres for opposing free trade would have come from the employment group that you mentioned before, as well as the foreign

affairs committee and the Québec activists, right? So were there any other groups within NAC that were really kind of gung-ho about kind of pursuing a struggle against free trade?

Alice: Well, my thinking about Peggy is just maybe... Certainly women in the labour movement, but they didn't specifically organize in a group necessarily... well, in the employment group; the NAC employment group were made up of people who were strongly connected to the labour movement. I mean, there's a very strong connection there. I just don't know exactly where the sort of initiative was, or where the bigger push was. I'm not sure I can say. I'm thinking about the Ontario Federation of Labour and certainly they took very strong positions around trade agreements. However, at what point, that merging of womens' concerns in this, the strong women in the labour movement, who were connected with the NAC employment stuff. I'm just not entirely sure when and how that happened. It had happened in 1985 or 86.

Chris: I mean, one thing that comes out in your story is like, it's not about just organizations, and it's easier to talk about networks of people involved in different things at the same time versus talking about organizations.

Alice: Yeah, that's right.

Chris: Yeah. It's striking how connected the women's movement was with the labour movement at that time, right?

Alice: So, that was one of the very big changes that happened with DACA was in part the shift that happened that I inherited when I started my job.

Chris: Yeah. So, we've talked about organizations and some of the stuff that you did. I was wondering if you could... If you had to kind of create a timeline of the key events leading up to this kind struggle around free trade, leading up to the 88 election, what would be some kind of key moments or the most memorable kind of moments of that struggle?

Alice: So, here my memory is a little... my memory of that period is, as someone who was not right smack in the middle of NAC... and it's influenced to some extent by my later connection with the Council of Canadians, and my friendship with Maude, right? So I'm merging things here a little bit. I know that the MacDonald report and Marjorie's taking that piece and looking at it from the viewpoint of women was very important because that started a whole discussion. It made it possible for us to see that you could do this right and what the issues were. I know that the beginnings of the Maple Leaf Summit, what had become the Council of Canadians or I think it was the Council of Canadians at that point, but I'm not I'm just not sure. I know that the first meeting was really important. There was a debate when Maude and Bob White took on... Thomas D'Aquino? That was really important that there was a kind of galvanizing moment for NAC. I think the strength of the Employment Committee and its formal resolution happened in in 87 for opposing free trade. That was really important because it just meant that we could talk about this now-- like, there was no trying to convince people across the country that this was important, we had done that. Now we had to provide people with what they needed in order to do that effectively. So, that certainly, for the organization, was very important. It's very interesting. I don't remember a lot of the events, the events that happened during the 88 election; the sort of

public... except that we didn't get a women's debate; so that our issues that we wanted to have inserted into the federal election didn't happen and we were not pleased about that. That represented a different relationship between us and the government because we were beginning to get pretty serious pushback. It was the beginning of the loss of funding for women's organizations like NAC so it signaled a very big change in the relationship.

Chris: So, would you say free trade was part of the element that kind of transformed that relationship? The fact that you took the stance led NAC to move away from more of this lobbying kind of arrangement and to have more of a kind of social movement, grassroots organizing arrangement?

Alice: Yep.

Chris: Okay, that's really interesting in terms of how it changes. NAC's orientation too.

Alice: Absolutely. They noticed that we were doing something different, and they didn't like it.

Chris: I imagine just getting hired in 1988, it must have been really challenging for you to get a grip on all of this stuff. All of these changes taking place, right at that moment, it sounds like things were kind of reaching a peak at that time.

Alice: The learning curve was rather steep. Yes, absolutely. Things were at a real crescendo and the organization was very important. Engaged in ways that were very significant. Yeah, it was changing in front of our eyes.

Chris: What were some of the biggest challenges coming into 1988? I wonder what were some of the biggest challenges related to the free trade struggle that you encountered at that moment? You mentioned that you didn't get the woman's debate; that sounds like that was a big issue. Were there other challenges at that moment in terms of negotiating NAC's relationship with these struggles?

Alice: I definitely think there were moments when the message to us was quite firm that, "you're going a bit off script here." As soon as you begin to talk about economic policy you're in other territory. If you're talking about sort of the more legal liberal notions of women's equality, the issues of how many women are doing this and the other stuff, then, okay, we can talk about that. However, as soon as you begin to kind of go deeper than that you're no longer talking about women's issues. I'm trying to remember because I know there was a meeting, maybe more than one, with ministry people in Ottawa where they pretty much said this to us, "We'll talk to you about these things, but not about these other things." It was at the same time, so it was a broader moment. Maybe because it was a moment when the Reform Party was very active and really shifting the policy. The policy sort of framework in the country and their position on women and women's issues was that they aren't any different than anybody else's. Why should you in any way respond to women's concerns because they're just like everybody else. Which was a big umbrella for keeping a whole bunch of policy positions. It was about one's position really being in the home, you know, very conservative policy positions, kind of under wraps they were the ones that didn't necessarily want to talk about it publicly. Their primary kind of frontline position was that women weren't any different than anybody else, so we shouldn't be given any privileged access to policymakers, shouldn't be given any special funding, no special sort of compensation.

They're deadily opposed to affirmative action. That seeped into government policy at the same time as we were broadening our understanding of what the problems were with government policy and it opened the door that hadn't been there before that led to the government saying, "Well, maybe we shouldn't be funding these women's organizations." There wasn't a lot of questions about the kind of funding that we received from the government for the first couple of years, then there was and they began to remove funding for women's organizations.

Chris: When did they start removing funding? Was that after the 88 Elections?

Alice: Yeah.

Chris: Okay. That makes sense.

Alice: Not exactly in the first year but by the early 90s, women's groups, women's centres, women's transition places, a whole bunch of women's organizations across the country began to really feel the feel the policy, the funding crunch. They went after NAC's funding, but they didn't completely drop it, they cut it in half, which was significant because before we were able to fly people across the country and bring them together to have conversations. We had strategy sessions every couple of months that had a substantial capacity. By the time of 90-91-92 that had been cut way back, being able to do that.

Chris: So, the 1988 elections happens and how do you experience those elections? Is that like a turning point? Do you have any hope around organizing after the 88 elections? Or is it just experienced as kind of a retrenchment of the state and roll back on your abilities?

Alice: Yeah. You were worried about it.

Chris: Were you hopeful that the 88 election, the free trade issue would be defeated? Kind of leading up to the elections... Or were you more—

Alice: Yeah, we thought there was a sort of an outside chance. We were very hopeful that there would be enough people across the country that would have become aware of it. So, if not this time, the next time, when it becomes again a really serious election issue. I think we were having successes in other places. We had success around the abortion issue and had some other successes around affirmative action. We were having successes in other places. We were, I think, still feeling as if we were strong enough and powerful enough that a public education campaign would actually provide enough support for significant policy changes in that area. So, I think that the 88 election didn't put a hole in that totally. Well, we were we were concerned that we missed a chance to really implement a childcare policy. And I knew that the trade agreement would likely make that very difficult, and it did. It still is.

Chris: Can you just say how the Free Trade Agreement makes childcare policy difficult.

Alice: Just the general... We had a sense that what the agreements were about clearing the economic grounds for services, for the deregulation and taking services out of the realm of government, out the public service. The trade agreement was looking like attacks or potential attacks on government's capacity to create public programs and very specifically with childcare. What were the specifics about that?

Chris: We can look at some of the documents. I think reading Marjorie's reports might be helpful.

Alice: I'd appreciate that because I used to be able to do this. In general, we definitely got that part. We went, "Oh, my God, they're going to treat our all of our protections, the tariffs and quotas, even our healthcare"— I remember sitting there getting this—"even our healthcare programs as subsidies to industry." That becomes a trade practice as opposed to like a public program. It can be challenged and can be scrutinized as part of the trade agreement. In that understanding, we all understood that our healthcare, our education systems, any potential new programs are all threatened by this movement, the trade agreements movement. I don't think we were wrong about them.

Chris: It's interesting because I don't think it's necessarily intuitive for certain people that free trade would be a childcare issue. But it's really, I think, notable that NAC was able to make it a childcare issue, beyond just being like a labour issue, or an issue of outsourcing, or that kind of thing, right? Connecting it to services and things like that, seems like a central contribution of NAC and it was widening the scope in terms of all of this stuff. So that is at least for me... I'm not sure if I'm reading that correctly.

Alice: Maybe. I know we made the argument that women are going to be impacted in and around the squeezing of public services -- who relies on them and whose lives have been changed most dramatically by a number of public services are women. That argument is used... If you go and take a look at some of the articles that are in *Feminist ACTION*, you'll find that argument there.

Chris: Yeah, it'll be great to look at some of that stuff.

Alice: Oh, what is this other group? Women Working with Immigrant Women? Was that right? Women work at— WWIW. They were very honest about this, about the trade agreements and they were a group of women who were both active in the labour movement but were also developing pretty substantial economic critique at an international capacity to kind of think more than nationally about what was happening.

Chris: Yeah, the connection with immigrant woman too, is very notable.

Alice: Yeah.

Chris: So, we've been talking for a long time. I'm aware of our time.

Alice: Okay.

Chris: Just kind of wrapping up, I was wondering if we can kind of talk about the legacy of this struggle against free trade in the early years. I'm also curious, post 88 was NAC still very active in organizing against free trade? Because in some ways, it's a turning point, but then we see when I got involved kind of coming into the 90s the anti-globalization movement, which was kind of building up steam right through to the 90s... it's kind of an interesting moment because it seems like the federal election is lost, then this movement continues and I'm wondering where NAC was situated in all of this.

Alice: So, NAC carried that, it didn't ever lose that capacity. But the organization as a whole really weakened throughout the 90s. So, one of the things that happened in the early 90s was that we got involved in the constitution debates, you know Meech Lake. And I know that many of the same people carried a similar analysis with them into the critique of the constitution accords... a lot of that thought was very much informed by our connections in Québec, our membership in Québec. We also had a strong Indigenous women's representation. So, we were paying attention to both of those very strongly in terms of the positions that we were taking. Now, the extent to which NAC stayed active in the trade agreements? I don't think I can speak to that easily. I don't think I should try to go there. It's a little foggy for me. I think that it provided a lot of individuals with real interest in their ability to understand what was going on with the World Trade Organization, and the protests and stuff that happened around the World Trade Organization. I think it created a bunch of the background for a number of women to be involved in that. I don't know how many women's groups actually took that up.

Chris: I guess you would have also been involved with the Council of Canadians at that time, too, right?

Alice: No, I wasn't involved. I started to be involved with the Council after I moved here in the last 10 years.

Chris: Okay. Well, I think that was all my questions. I'm wondering if you have anything to add, anything I missed? Anything that's important to the story that I might not have gotten to?

Alice: Well, just a little note that one of the reasons I got back involved with the trade agreements was that I was looking for a place to be active from here, and the council chapter here was very active. And they sort of said to me, "here is a list of things that you might want to be active around," and free trade was one of them. So, I stuck my hand up a little bit there. Not long after that, somebody asked the Council if there was somebody who could speak to an annual meeting of trade union women that happens along the west coast here from California up to Alaska. They gather at least once a year for a week and meet. So, somebody from that organization had asked, or from the regional office, if somebody could come and do a workshop on free trade agreements. So, that was in 2013, or 14? So, you know what that tells me is that it stayed a very alive question both in the labour movement as well as in people who are concerned about women's issues. So, it felt very familiar to do it. It felt very much like coming home to do that session, and it was interesting that that it still was very much alive. It was a topic that a bunch of people of younger labour movement women were wanting to know about.

Chris: Yeah, well, I think that's why it's so important to kind of preserve this collective memory.

Alice: Yeah.

Chris: Because it's easy for people to forget about all these early struggles. I think it's so important to understand how we got to where we are now, right? So, that's why I appreciate that you took the time to talk with us.