

Blair Redlin Transcript

Ben Christensen: Okay, to get things started, Blair, could you start us off with giving us your name, and a little bit of your background in terms of how you became involved initially in anti-free trade activist work.

Blair Redlin: Okay, so my name is Blair Redlin. I live in Vancouver, but I'm originally from Alberta, and I was employed in the early to mid 80s as the Director of Research for the Official Opposition Caucus in Edmonton, Alberta. So, in the course of that work, I started to take note of how Peter Lougheed, the Premier of Alberta was particularly starting to push and advocate for the idea of a Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. So that got my attention and got me reading about it and thinking about it. Later I moved to British Columbia in 1987 and was hired by the Canadian Union of Public Employees as a researcher. My assignment in those days was all the CUPE locals in both British Columbia and Alberta, which was a big assignment. So I had already done some reading and thinking about free trade when the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement was proposed and negotiated and the Canadian Union of Public Employees was doing work on it. Actually, now that I think about it, when it actually came forward, I was working in Victoria before I worked for CUPE, I worked in Victoria as the Director of Research for the Official Opposition Caucus for about six months or so. I think that's when, in that time period anyway, that we started exchanging information with colleagues across the country and stuff about this agreement. So, I was aware of it and thinking about it, and outraged by what it proposed. I started to participate in the local Vancouver Coalition Against Free Trade and ended up as one of the co-chairs, along with Jean Swanson, who's currently a city councillor in Vancouver. We had three co-chairs for a period of time. The other one was Sue Vohanka, who worked for the Confederation of Canadian Unions at that time, which was a different union central than the Canadian Labour Congress. Sue was doing that for a time, but then she moved. For quite a period of time it was just Jean [Swanson] and I that were the only co-chairs. I'm a little fuzzy on the timeline, but I became active, and we were quite a good coalition and active coalition. We did a variety of activities, putting on public forums, putting on demonstrations, having signs educating people about the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. If I can just share with you, we were lobbying local politicians, and one of the lobbying meetings that stands out in my memory is that we met with John Turner, who was the leader of the Liberal Party and was the Member of Parliament for I think Vancouver Granville. Anyway, it was a meeting about the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, and I liked to think that we made some small contribution in his thinking prior to when the election eventually came along, as he took a very strong position against the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement during the election. It was useful to be able to inform him about it and send information afterwards. I don't want to make too much of that, it's just a memory I have. So, I learned a lot in that time period about

coalition work that I didn't understand before, because I had more of a background in the trade union movement, or the New Democratic Party and or government, where you use things like Robert's Rules of Order, and you have a defined agenda, and you have a chair. I came to understand that in a coalition where you're working with groups in the community there were people from various community and social organizations as well as union organizations. You have to try to try and achieve consensus rather than a majority vote in your decision making, because if you just rule by majority vote, as it were, then a lot of organizations will just leave the coalition. It's all entirely a voluntary thing - they will cease to be keen about it if they're outvoted. So yeah, it takes a lot more effort and energy to work to develop a collaborative consensus amongst all the participants in that kind of coalition environment. So that was useful. Very useful learning. We used to have our meetings down at First United Church, on East Hastings Street.

Ben Christensen: Why that location?

Blair Redlin: Well, Jean [Swanson] was able to arrange it and it was there where a number of groups that were based in the Downtown Eastside that were part of the group, part of the coalition. It was a community location, rather than a trade union location. There were a lot of memories in British Columbia that were fresh following the Solidarity Coalition in 1983, right, against the restraint program of the [Bill] Bennett government. So, there were a lot of people feeling bruised about the interactions between labour and community through that process and felt that there was the so-called “sellout” up in Kelowna. That's what a lot of people argued, but a deal was struck in Kelowna, that involved the unions mostly and kind of didn't involve the community partners that had been part of the Solidarity Coalition. So, people were feeling a little bruised about the whole interaction working together between the unions and community. I should maybe have said that I was given an okay from CUPE, to say that I was at the coalition on behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Ben Christensen: Did CUPE give you that green light because of some of the tension that had emerged during BC Solidarity?

Blair Redlin: No, I don't think so. I think it was that the National union was very strongly opposed to the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. So, I was working here for the national [office of CUPE] as a researcher, but I was based here locally in BC. I was basically saying I would like to volunteer to do this, and they said, “Cool, yes, we'd like somebody to participate.” It was more like that. I could go on, at length about different things. Maybe there's more to this part because I want to say that I sometimes in my memory, conflate the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement with the North American Free Trade Agreement. I have stories and memories about NAFTA as well as the Canada-US Free Trade Agreements. So, before I go on to that is there's probably questions you want to ask me.

Ben Christensen: It's my understanding that the coalitions that emerged around the free trade issue during the 1980s were a relatively new type of organization - the coalition building across unions and civic society, you hadn't seen that as much in the past. Does that speak to your experience?

Blair Redlin: I think that's true. I think that they were there with the Solidarity Coalition experience. There were tremendous gains that were made, and a lot of good memories that people had about Solidarity. I commend to you the work that the BC Labour Heritage Centre has done about the Solidarity Coalition, there's a lot of documentation that they've done on that and the agreement that was made at the end of frayed relations between the coalition and unions, so there's that, but I think, across the rest of the country, they didn't have that Solidarity Coalition experience. I think people were wanting to work together. Marjorie [Cohen] describes a lot of that in the article [<https://socialiststudies.com/index.php/sss/article/view/27315/20217>] that you shared with me - at the national level, people building networks together, and getting to know each other and getting to know how best to work together.

Ben Christensen: At the time, when you're working for CUPE, did CUPE view coalition-building as a positive strategy to fight against that issue?

Blair Redlin: Yes, they were very much involved in the Pro Canada Network, and providing concrete support to things like the public, the writing, and the publishing of that book, *The Facts on Free Trade*, the cartoon book and lots of things like that; CUPE was providing active concrete support.

Ben Christensen: So maybe you could tell me a little bit about the meetings, that you mentioned, when you met at the United Church down on Hastings Street. Can you describe a typical meeting? How often did you meet? Was there a sense of momentum throughout the course of these meetings?

Blair Redlin: I can't remember if we met every couple of weeks, or every month, because the meeting is one thing, but then you've got to do the work, the things that you've agreed to do in the meeting afterwards. We would tend to sit in a circle or around a table, and it would be people from various groups. I'd have to look up [who] the member organizations were but there were a lot of community organizations. Then those of us who were from unions would spend time in between meetings working with the local labour council, or there would be a labour council representative there. So, whether it was, we were going to print leaflets in the next two weeks or a month, or we were going to distribute them or we were going to have lobbying meetings, we would work out a strategy. I think there would be a certain amount of discussion about what people thought the Free Trade Agreement would mean to them, to their organizations, to the lives of their community. We put on public forums to try and educate people. So, I think the main thing at the actual regular meetings was for everybody to strive to hear each other and understand our different perspectives. There's lots that's been written

about that... Again, I don't want to make too much of this, but to answer the kind of question about the role of trade unions and the role of community groups because a lot of the community groups, most of them didn't have many financial resources to contribute to something like this. They would tend often to see unions and organizations that did have financial resources and would wonder sometimes why the unions were not putting more in or why it was difficult to get funding from the union participants. We would never like to be seen as a bag of money sitting on the chair and we tried to help people understand that there were definite complexities back in the union about the questions of financing. There's a whole approval process and they are democratic organizations where membership has a lot to say about things and prioritizing resources. So, there were those kinds of discussions. But I mean, everybody got along. I think the main thing was mostly for people to hear each other and understand their different perspectives.

Ben Christensen: You mentioned a little bit of the BC Solidarity Movement. I'm trying to contextualize your organizing work here in BC at that time. You mentioned that there was distrust of unions after what had happened there. Can you speak to anything else? Was there a kind of infrastructure that was established by the BC Solidarity Movement, that was able to be rolled into the free trade activism work you were involved in, or anything else?

Blair Redlin: I think it was not so much infrastructure, because that all kind of ended after Solidarity was finished. It was more like a personal connection. So, people knew each other, and there were individuals that took part- because there was a lot of community organizing that had been done together. So, people knew each other and were trying to direct that into the free trade work. Also, it's something quite different talking about a national and international agreement like that, rather than something that's localized in the BC government.

Ben Christensen: How would you connect your work locally, on the west coast to the national at that time?

Blair Redlin: Yeah so, at that time, there was the Pro Canada Network, which then subsequently evolved into the Action Canada Network. So, there would be national meetings, there'd be a meeting at the Pro Canada Network, and we would take part, by sending a representative or delegate. I don't think we did that very often, but the technology was not the same then as it is now if you wanted to meet. I mean, they had conference calls, but it wasn't really used, it was mostly like if you wanted to meet, you had to meet in person or talk on the telephone. So, I think what was happening at the Pro Canada Network level nationally was involving a lot of national leaders like, Bob White, or Maude Barlow, or Marjorie Cohen, or others, who led national organizations. We were more focused on trying to agitate and organize locally, mostly in the Lower Mainland. Again, my memories are fuzzy here, but there was another coalition in Victoria that involved the communities that were on the Island, but we would liaise with them. People nationally were trying to encourage local organising, and then there would be resources that

would come from the national level, from the central campaigns, like the Facts on Free Trade or the comic book or other kinds of resources like that.

Ben Christensen: Did you feel like you were part of a national movement, or did you work feel more local?

Blair Redlin: It was, it was very local, what we were doing, but we were tied in with them at the national level. I know that Jean [Swanson], for example, had a lot of connections with groups like the National Anti Poverty Organization. So, from time to time, she would go to meetings in Ottawa related to that. Or, I would ... on occasion go to meetings in Ottawa related to CUPE. So, we had to sort of connect with people that way.

Ben Christensen: Another question I have is when you would get together and meet what other types of activities did you participate in? Would you organize kind of public events?

Blair Redlin: Yeah. Public forums, demonstrations, lobbying. I think those are pretty much the standard things that we would do and that we tried to put energy into.

Ben Christensen: Could you share one example anecdotally of an event?

Blair Redlin: It's difficult because for me I did continue to be involved leading into the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Action Canada Network. So, there were different levels of activity at different times. For example, there was a demonstration here that had a lot of people when Brian Mulroney came to town at one point. But that was about the NAFTA.

Ben Christensen: Yeah.

Blair Redlin: So, I think we were trying to do a lot to educate our members, members of our own organizations, and then trying to motivate them to write to their Members of Parliament or to be active on it. Then there was the big national debate, televised debate about the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement with Maude Barlow, Bob White, and others... Peter Lougheed, there was a variety of them in that debate. I would say that, when you look back on it, I think Canada is poorer these days for not having that kind of thing. I think it'd be very rare for the TV networks to agree to put on a debate today that had some Premiers and some politicians with some community people included. Especially with regard to what the main issue the election was about. So, that was interesting. We were trying to support getting people together to watch the debate on TV or that kind of thing. I'm going to jump to the Action Canada Network, because for a bit I was assigned from CUPE in 1992 or 93 to Ottawa and I moved to Ottawa for a year. The job I had was National Campaigns Coordinator in the President's office in Ottawa when Judy Darcy was the President of CUPE. So, we were doing a national health care campaign as well as other campaigns, but we were certainly very involved with NAFTA and the work of the Action Canada Network. I participated in meetings

for the Action Canada Network in Ottawa as that role. I met a lot of people at the national level, it was a privilege to meet and work with them. I think one of the things that I remember that was really successful, and something that we organized, was a massive demonstration on Parliament Hill. It is still the largest demonstration that's ever been on Parliament Hill. We didn't bring any trucks with us, and we left after it was over, but there were 100,000 people. It did require a lot of organizing and I learned a lot about organizing in central Canada where the technique was to rent busses to bring people in bulk after people were booked off work for the day. We would bring them in by bus from Quebec, from Southern Ontario, and then there were buses coming from as far away as Windsor. That was a very powerful moment, it was a bit of a culmination of some of the organizing that had been going on for some period of time. Another powerful moment - and this speaks also to how times have changed as well as how Parliament has changed - but Mulroney was going to do a signing ceremony in the Railway Committee room at the House of Commons regarding the NAFTA and there were both Mexican representatives and American representatives there. We knew somebody that used to work as a parliamentary intern and knew the ways of getting in the back stairways of the House of Commons, and we went up into the signing ceremony and just took spaces in the room. So, when the ceremony proceeded, one of our leaders would stand up and start speaking against the NAFTA. Jean-Claude Parrot of the Canadian Postal Workers would stand up and speak against it. Then the security would ask him to leave and then the ceremony would proceed. Then Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians would stand up and say something and be asked to leave and Judy Darcy would stand up, and so on. We completely disrupted this event. In the course of it, I remember one of our colleagues went up and they had Canadian, US and Mexican flags. The colleague went up to hold the American flag and pulled it across behind Mulroney. So, there was a photo that went across newspapers around the country of Mulroney standing with an American flag behind him. That was a great moment. That tells you a lot about how different things were, the fact that we could even get in there and the fact that security was 100% a different concept in those days. So, the Action Canada Network headquarters was resourced with some staff; I think there were three regular permanent staff on all the time in those days, and they would have periodic assemblies or gatherings of people from across the country to talk about strategy. Also, there was a lot of work with community partners and union partners in Mexico and the United States, so, there was a lot of linkage. I went to meetings in Washington DC, other folks went to meetings in Mexico. There's still a lot of good linkage with the activists in Mexico that flowed from the work in those days. Those are some of the memories I have of some of that stuff. I would say that some of that led to what then became known as the anti-globalization movement. For myself, personally, I came back to BC and worked. I made quite a switch in my types of work; I became a provincial public servant. I became first an Assistant Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Employment Investment, and then Acting Deputy Minister there. Then I was Deputy Minister of Transportation and Highways and head of a Crown Corporation called The BC Transportation Financing Authority and did all kinds of things in the provincial public service. I

was not in the labour movement anymore. I was in the bureaucracy and did that until 2001. However, I remember thinking that when the protests happened against the World Trade Organization in Seattle that I was regretting being unable to go because I had to attend meetings in Victoria related to my job. In my previous life, I would have definitely been down in Seattle. If you think of the Seattle protest and what it accomplished in terms of pushing back the World Trade Organization as well as empowering and working with developing countries and helping them to have a coordinated international voice. A lot of that flowed from the experience that Canadians had on these globalization questions which is what the Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA were. Also for the pro free trade side, they like to call themselves “pro trade”, which is a false characterization used by the corporate side. They gained from their own experience with the Canada-US and NAFTA trade agreements as well, which was then an ideology that was carried on through the World Trade Organization. Maybe we should talk for a minute about what it is that was motivating everybody so much to be active in this. For some it was the idea of nationalism. And there had been a considerable Canadian nationalist movement going back to the days of something called the Committee for an Independent Canada and the (Mel) Watkins Report as well as other reports that were done that said basically by not having any limits on foreign investment that Canada was ceding its sovereignty. I always had a discomfort with this concept that it was nationalism per se, like waving the Canadian flag sort of idea. I thought it was more about a real deep concern about limiting the ability of government and democratically elected governments to act on behalf of their citizens in the best interest of their citizens. So, I always thought of it as a pro-democratic movement and saw the trade agreements as anti-democratic instruments to reduce and restrain the ability of citizens to make of their communities what they will and rather put international corporations in charge. That was where our understanding came from and why we became very focused on Chapter Eleven of the North American Free Trade Agreement which enabled corporations to sue democratically elected governments in front of unelected dispute settlement panels for actions that the government took which the corporations would argue limited their potential future profits. So, a lot of the work around NAFTA was in objection to that. Then a lot of work occurred after that and continues today. There's still an organization called the Trade Justice Network in Canada. I can refer you to any of those people and the work that they do about trade agreements. What they've done over the last few decades was focus on reducing and or mitigating this ability for investor state dispute settlement. Amazingly, the new NAFTA, the Canada US-Free Trade Agreement, the CUSMA [Canada-United States-Mexico] agreement, that was negotiated during the time of the Trump administration actually greatly weakened this, the Chapter Eleven's power. So, there's some legacy of the previous NAFTA that's still being carried on by, for example, the Kenney government. Alberta is suing the United States under those provisions, the previous NAFTA provisions regarding the cancellation of the Keystone pipeline and the money the Alberta government had invested in the Keystone pipeline. They're able to do that under what's called the legacy provisions of NAFTA. In other words, when their

investment happened, NAFTA was still in place with the previous NAFTA conditions, but now it is this new NAFTA, this CUSMA. In the Canada-US-Mexico Agreement, you do not have this investor state dispute settlement anymore. It's a state-to-state dispute settlement instead. That's a tremendous gain which has been achieved by people organizing all these decades. So yeah, I'm just saying that it wasn't sort of all about pond hockey and maple leaves, it was about the ability of democratically elected governments to act on behalf of their citizens.

Ben Christensen: Well, I wanted to ask you more about. What type of analysis was being used leading up to the 1988 election? Also, you've talked a little bit about your work leading up to the signing of NAFTA in 1995 and there seems to be a lot of things happening. You have the left nationalist movement that you've spoken to, but as you said yourself you never saw it through that lens, you saw it more as an issue of democracy, which is kind of in the broader context of globalization. Then what should Canada's participation be in that? What is fair and just? Can you speak to what the analysis leading up to the FTA looked like and did the analysis shift after 1988 federal election as it related to your work leading up to NAFTA?

Blair Redlin: Yeah, I think, like I said I connect it back to Watkins report and the Committee for an Independent Canada, that stuff. When I was a kid, I remember going to a Committee for an Independent Canada meeting in Calgary when I was quite young. That was around foreign investment. I think that was what people were really concerned about with foreign investors being able to dominate our economy. Then I think people began to get a better idea about nascent globalization in the context of the Canada-US free trade agreement. I don't want to dismiss too much the idea that people didn't want to be – people wanted Canada to be an independent country, they didn't want to become Americanized. I think that was a real element, but when people started to do the detailed analysis work, and it started to become clear what the point of that was, it changed. I've alluded a couple times to that document, the *Facts on Free Trade – Canada, Don't trade it away*. Do you have a copy of that? Have you seen that?

Ben Christensen: On free trade?

Blair Redlin: If you just wait a minute, I'll just get a get a copy and show you. Just hang on a minute. So, this publication here, when I look at the contributors we've got, I'm not going to list them all. We have the cartoonist Aislin, Margaret Atwood, John Calvert, Duncan Cameron, Shirley Carr, Tony Clarke, Steven Clarkson and Marjorie Cohen, Bob White, Ed Finn, John Dillon, and Dennis Howlett. A lot of these people are still very involved. Geoff Meggs, Jeff Rose, etc. So, there were articles doing analysis, one was called, as I just randomly opened, that says "Province's Hands Tied". They talk about how the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement would reduce provincial jurisdiction. There was a lot of data and charts so this this was really a key document. Actually, this was shipped out in mass quantities across countries. Again, it was pre-Internet. We actually had to use written documents, and this was a key piece to help people understand what

the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement was all about. I see one, “Why I Don’t Like this Trade Deal” by Duncan Cameron, who I think was the editor of Canadian Forum at that time. Here’s one here called “The Pro Canada Network” by Tony Clarke and it talks about the national coast-to-coast movement and what it was doing.

Ben Christensen: Was that published by the Pro Canada Network?

Blair Redlin: Well, no, it was formally published by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, but that's why it's called the “Facts on Free Trade” because CUPE had a regular publication in those days called *The Facts*. Although it was published by CUPE, it was really done for the Pro Canada Network. It was an important way of informing people about the issues. So, I thought it was a seminal piece of work.

Ben Christensen: Would you describe that as coming from a more a pro-democracy lens? In terms of how it’s framed?

Blair Redlin: Yes. I mean, as it says, Canada drove trade away, and there's maple leaves here. So, there's the nationalist part, but when you get into the details it's here. For example, gutting the Auto Pact and what it is going to mean for the auto industry? What's it going to mean for jobs? What’s that going to mean for social programs, right? I think there's a piece here by Margaret Atwood called “On Being Canadian” which asks if we do really want a country? I think that, since she's a writer, it's a little more emotive and entertaining, but it still asks if we do want to have a distinct country so we can pursue some of the objectives like Medicare and whatnot that adhere to Canadian values, and make us distinctive from, at that time, the United States. When we moved into the NAFTA it's a different problem because Mexico was not the overwhelming and dominating part of the international global economy that the United States is. In fact, often our linkages were with Mexican civil society organizations. There were American ones, but there was a particular interaction between us and these Mexican organizations. Both Mexico and Canada have a unique kind of relationship with the big elephant of the United States. So, we would develop a lot of links together that we had made common cause that way. Also, with but not against, US civil society organizations we made a lot of linkages and understanding, but people from the three countries would each have different things that they would prioritize and have different concerns about it. Then after the Seattle World Trade Organization meeting and the international anti-globalization movement there became much more interconnection and understanding with each other which made us work more closely together. I should say that I spent that time, just speaking about me personally, as a public servant in the BC government and then did some other things and eventually went back to working for CUPE and I ended up eventually doing quite a bit of work for CUPE on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union which was known as the CETA. It was interesting to come back to all these trade issues in a more modern time, after international activists had linked up well together as well as having more experience at that

time. So, I went over to Europe a few times to work with the civil society organizations that were opposing the CETA. They were concerned about - for one thing, it included this investor state dispute settlement mechanism, which they were very opposed to, and they also saw that Canada was a bit of a Trojan Horse for the United State's proposed agreement between the US and the European Union. People definitely did not want that. They understood that our economy in Canada is overwhelmingly US dominated, and U.S. owned and there is a great influence of US corporations. They were concerned about many things, but one of them was that US corporations could use their Canadian operations as a launching pad for investor state lawsuits to drive down European social standards and environmental standards. In the modern era, being concerned about environmental issues they were concerned about the role of the oil and gas industry in the Canadian economy, and whether the European environmental standards would be weakened as consequence of this. I was privileged to be part of that. In the course of that the Trade Justice Network developed in Canada nationally which still exists. I was co-chair of the Trade Justice Network for a few years around the Canada-EU Trade Agreement. The person that you could connect with, if you want to learn more about that is a man named Stuart Trew.

Ben Christensen: He used to be the editor of the CCPA's *The Monitor*.

Blair Redlin: That's right. He's a great guy. He recently switched to the Trade and Investment Research Project part of the CCPA. So, the Trade and Investment Research Project is something that CCPA put together and has been in place for quite a few years since. The person that was doing that work for many years was Scott Sinclair, who retired last year.

Ben Christensen: Okay.

Blair Redlin: Now I am remembering that we had created, when I worked at the Ministry of Employment and Investment in the BC government, we created a trade policy shop that included people like Scott [Sinclair] who worked for the BC government at that time. Jim Grieshaber-Otto, who's a farmer in Agassiz these days but he's another trade analyst that worked in that shop. Noel Schachter was the Director of it. Anyways, we had a core of people that were helping advise the BC government. One of the things that they did to great effect was thorough public hearings. There were so many trade agreements not just NAFTA. But the public hearings that the BC government put on were essential to help civil society groups mobilize around trade agreements. In those days, I guess I'm saying that in my own personal career and life, these trade agreements kept popping up to work on them, including the internal trade agreements between provinces and the federal government and the concerns about those agreements limiting the ability of provinces to act on behalf of their own citizens.

Ben Christensen: It seems to me that that's the arc from the 1980s to the present day. Activist work against free trade went from trying to stop these free trade agreements from being

signed to targeting more aspects of those trade agreements to make them more equitable and democratic. Would that be a good characterization?

Blair Redlin: Yes, absolutely, because we were fighting a rearguard action to make them less bad once they were already in place. I think I like that example of NAFTA and how it changed under the Trump administration and on other change political dynamics to remove the investor state because people had a lot of experience by that time with investor state dispute settlement as it was worldwide. I subscribe to something called an ISDS bulletin that comes every month or so. Worldwide, there's a whole industry of trade lawyers who work to limit the ability of governments to act on behalf of their citizens so as to allow for international corporations to do what they want, everywhere.

Ben Christensen: What is the ISDS bulletin?

Blair Redlin: It just keeps people up to date on the latest news such as what lawsuits are happening in South America, what lawsuits are happening in Africa and the context of those etc. For my work on the Canada-EU trade agreement, I have made acquaintance with and worked with a number of really outstanding colleagues in Europe. For example, Pia Eberhardt who is based in Cologne, as well as others who do really outstanding analysis on all these questions. They have written some compelling work.

Ben Christensen: Okay. I am concerned when I look at the current period and the kind of politics around free trade. I'd love to hear your thoughts on this. My sense is that social movements and coalition building that emerged in the 1980s have progressed like you've mentioned. Generally, in terms of kind of capturing the attention of Canadian public and motivating people to become involved in these issues. That seems to have just dissipated. My impression is that a lot of anti-free trade rhetoric, or criticism is coming from the right side of the political spectrum. I think about Donald Trump's and how he said, "I'm going to rip up NAFTA," it's a bad deal for American workers. You've maybe seen a little bit of that rhetoric in Canada, not as much but maybe things like Brexit. How would you characterize the politics and the anti-free trade politics today? Do you see a pivot that I've just described? Or would you describe it in another way?

Blair Redlin: I think that the backstory in the United States was that a lot of our predictions about what NAFTA would mean to the economy actually came to pass. When we were opposing NAFTA, we said it's going to make Canada a country that's much more resource dependent. We will be an exporter of raw resources, and our manufacturing industries will be decimated, and they were severely damaged. You know, when we went from a time of the Canada-US agreement, where we had the Auto Pact that ensured that cars which were manufactured in Canada were sold in Canada. I remember in the 1980s I lived in East Vancouver, there were many fish processing plants in the harbour here and now those are all gone because the processing of fish went to the [United] States. For Americans that

were opposed to NAFTA, it was a similar thing. What is this going to do to our manufacturing sector? A lot of those jobs went to Mexico. Then because the whole thing is all about always getting the cheapest labour that you can, a cheap labour policy, it also focuses on reducing strictures on corporations. A lot of those jobs then went to China. Then they went from China to Vietnam, then they go from Vietnam to Myanmar, Bangladesh. They're always moving to the lowest wage jurisdiction. That process did definitely decimate the so-called 'Rust Belt' in the United States. I think that people, working class people felt they weren't heard. There was nobody advocating for them about that, nobody speaking for them. I do recall that when Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were running in the primaries for who was going to be nominated as the Democratic candidate, they both said that they would renegotiate NAFTA as part of their campaign platforms.. However, when Obama became president, he did not renegotiate NAFTA. There are some that would say that [politicians] would make that kind promise in a primary election and then you don't carry it out. I think that a lot of manufacturing-based communities, working class communities felt betrayed by the Democratic Party in the United States. Then the ultimate opportunist and con man, Donald Trump, when he's able to spot something like that, he would take advantage of it. That's why he promised to renegotiate NAFTA. I mean it was a way of playing to the xenophobic Republican base about Mexico. Such as 'we've got to stop Mexico from mistreating the good old USA,' which is all BS. The upshot of it was that the thing was renegotiated and was slightly improved. Better to get rid of it altogether but it has been improved. To the shame of the Democratic Party, it was improved under a Republican administration. So, that's the long answer. What was your question?

Ben Christensen: I was just asking if you see the politics changing around any free trade? For example, shifting from the left to the right?

Blair Redlin: Yeah. I think that it depends on which part of the world you're in. In Canada the Trade Justice Network is mostly now a venue for nationally based organizations as well as Quebec organizations to get together, exchange information and do some organizing. For example, the main campaign that they're organizing in about the last year or so is to get this waiver, the so-called TRIPS Waiver. It's a trade related investor protections waiver under the WTO so that we can get Covid vaccines to the developing world without breaking them. It deals with the patent protection issues. A motion at the World Trade Organization was moved by South Africa and India to put a waiver in place around these TRIPS. That's what they campaign on, they're not campaigning necessarily on a particular trade agreement at the moment, but they're organizing on that. It's also a way for people to exchange information and knowledge, but it's not the same, you can't maintain the same level of organizing unless you've got an active target like the CETA that has now been signed. It still hasn't completely and formally passed in Europe yet, but it is more or less in effect. So, continuing to campaign against something that's already in effect is challenging, you need to find things to move to, to campaign on. At various times the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which Canada proposed

to change the name of it into the Comprehensive and Progressive Trade, blah, blah, Economic Agreement. Anyways, the one with the Asia-Pacific, there was a lot of campaigning against the TPP; I don't think it was xenophobic or right wing in any way. It was working in alliance with organizations in Asia and elsewhere that were also opposed to it, such as Latin America. I think that Brexit is a whole other kettle of fish, that's definitely right-wing nationalism within the UK. However, I would not argue that the current European Union, in the way that it operates, and particularly the European Commission, the management of the European Union, it's not exactly a bastion of progressive action and thought. The European Union is moving to implement on behalf of European corporations more ways of restricting the powers of democratically elected governments in Europe. I think the right-wing extremists in the UK were similar to the Trumpists, they were able to take advantage of that sentiment that we here in the UK should be able to vote for our own policies. I don't think that would have been as nearly a concern in the UK if the European Parliament, the European Commission, weren't so corporatist. They take measures to protect the European corporations, the multinational corporations based in Europe. That's what the European Commission does in large measure and promotes an agenda of deregulation in the course of it. So, I guess what I am trying to say is that I think it's a lesson for more progressive political parties, trade union movements, and progressive community organizations that if you let the right-wing extreme do what they want they will take advantage of that. It's not that these things are going to be any more progressive in the UK as a result, it's just that UK corporations will be better protected.

Ben Christensen: Okay, well—

Blair Redlin: There's also a lot of other infrastructure that's been built up over time with this anti-globalization movement. There's a lot of work that happens at the WTO globally, so one of the great legacies of the Seattle events was the amount of work people did subsequently to help people build connections and infrastructure. There's a whole process of lobbying, like the proposal that I was in. It's when I was at the Trade Justice Network, because that kind of work the Trade in Investment Services Agreement (or TISA) did, it is basically a services agreement under the WTO. People were very concerned that it would greatly empower the international technology companies and make it much more difficult for governments to control them. There's a lot of organizations around the world that were working on the TISA and working in Geneva and other places about it. Then Trump pulled the plug on TISA because he didn't want the US involved in any of these international things. That work kind of subsided because TISA wasn't going anywhere fast. The infrastructure of progressive people that work on questions at the WTO has ramped up again, around this TRIPS waiver that I'm talking about. So as a result, the relationships that we've built with each other, the experience we have has been invaluable. I should add to this list the Council of Canadians which was led for many years as an honorary chair by Maude Barlow. It's now led by others as she has retired and stepped back from that. The Council of Canadians

made a lot of important contributions to trying to organize people in local communities around Canada regarding these questions. They were also doing a lot of work internationally in particular Maude Barlow, and her work around water. Such as trying to ensure that water stays in public hands and is publicly administered and not privatized. It's been really valuable and, in result, has built a lot of linkages between people in the developing world with community activists there who care about water and people that care about water here. I think that the Council of Canadians kind of morphed and evolved from the Committee for an Independent Canada that I talked about. People like Mel Hurtig who helped to develop and create the Council of Canadians with Maude Barlow, and then it developed and still exists today. I think credit should be given to the Council [of Canadians] for building up an infrastructure across the country where they had offices, organizers, and people that do work on the ground around these questions. It's been an important one.

Ben Christensen: It sounds like you, going back to my earlier question about politics shifting, what you're saying is that those networks have globalized in terms of establishing connections with other people in different national jurisdictions. Then targeting more specific aspects of these free trade agreements once they've been signed. As a result, there is this kind of aggregate effect due to the fact that infrastructure continues to exist today, where there's all sorts of different types of work happening. I guess when I think about the 1980s, it's really to identify a social movement that emerges. It's focused on that one issue, whereas today, it's more, I don't know what the right word is, but it's different locations with a few more—

Blair Redlin: Diffuse?

Ben Christensen: Yes, Thank you.

Blair Redlin: Yeah, it's just not possible to maintain the same full-on level of activity all the time. You kind of choose your targets, your moments. The tactics that are on our side will never have the resources that the corporate side has, such as monetary resources and the lawyers. What we do have is the ability to mobilize actual people, for example, a tactic that we used at various times around the CETA and earlier was getting local governments to pass resolutions, such as at city councils to pass motions. Raising concerns about these issues, that's an example of something that has actually been quite successful on the CETA. This is because municipalities were concerned about when the CETA would reduce some of their roles and powers. At the local level you can, such as a local community group, can organize around something like that. Then you can raise attention in local media, with local politicians, and then hook that up right across the country, even internationally. In fact, the work we did in Canada was something that was picked up in Europe and was done there with a greater effect. They actually built up a whole network of European municipalities that were very concerned about the CETA.

Ben Christensen: Looking at it from below, rather than—

Blair Redlin: Coming at it from below, and given the resources that you have, you're always in a situation where the strength that our side has is people, and the strength that their side has is money and influence. I'm just remembering now that when I was talking, I had gapped a little earlier on when the BC government was holding public hearings, it was about the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). It was actually defeated internationally.

Ben Christensen: So that was a victory?

Blair Redlin: It was a victory, yeah.

Ben Christensen: On the the right-wing side of things, picking up some of these anti-free trade sentiments, is it in your view people experiencing the structural inequality that was created by these free trade agreements and more liberal parties not picking up that frustration. People like Donald Trump came along and saw that opportunity and used it to roll in his xenophobic threads if you will. It's becoming more of a populist orientated issue. Which is interesting to think about, because you still have this infrastructure on the other side that is also working actively against aspects of these free trade agreements. There seem to be two kinds of separate social movements if you want to call it that.

Blair Redlin: Yeah. The Trumpist movement is primarily xenophobic, and white nationalist. I don't know if they would care so much about trade agreements now that NAFTA has been renegotiated. On the other side, the Brexiteers have achieved their goal. So, now they will revert to the UK environment. They've got Boris Johnson as the Prime Minister so they're in their glory right now. I don't think that there's too much movement in that sense, but maybe they are. I just want to say that with regard to Mexico, I came to an understanding from some of these international meetings, that I haven't had before until recently, that NAFTA absolutely devastated the agricultural economy of Mexico. Mexico was flooded with subsidized corn from the United States. Corn is a staple of the Mexican diet. As a result of this cheap corn coming from the US, they were not in many communities able to continue growing local corn themselves economically. That was a major contributor to two things: one was the big push to emigrate to the United States, such as in a lot of these rural communities that had no economy after NAFTA. So, they try to get up into the US so that they can send remittances back to their family at home. So that tremendous pressure about immigration, it was NAFTA that had a huge amount to do with it. The other thing that it had a lot to do with was the so called 'drug war' in Mexico. This is because again if you're in a lot of these communities and your usual economy has been devastated you had kind of two choices and the other was getting involved in the drug economy. Then we saw the terrible toll that has taken in terms of lives in Mexico. I would never have known or thought about that without having been involved in these trade agreement issues. Of course, it doesn't get conveyed in the media. There's never

any connection between those two things, it is just seen as random... for some reason the Mexicans are flooding into the US. Also, for some reason they're shooting each other up in Mexico over drugs. There's usually an actual, concrete economic reason for these things.