

Duncan Cameron Transcript

Interviewer: Okay, usually I start by asking how did you become involved in the free trade struggle against free trade. But what I was hoping you could do instead was begin, rather with explaining when the idea of free trade was first introduced in Canada, because, during our phone conversation, you said, our timeline doesn't start early enough. And I was hoping you could maybe just go back a little bit before the early 80s and explain what was happening that led to what happened in the 1980s.

Cameron: Okay, well, so it's Duncan Cameron. Free trade was a historical issue and known as such to many Canadians. People had learned in school about the Laurier Reciprocity Agreement with the U.S., and the subsequent 1911 election that saw the Laurier Government defeated. Free trade was therefore a dangerous topic for politicians.

The Conservative Party had defeated Laurier by talking about the importance of protecting Canada. Fast forward to the Conservative leadership race won by Brian Mulroney. The issue was raised by John Crosbie of Newfoundland: Brian Mulroney was against it, saying, the boys in Chicago can bump up their factories runs, and close their Canadian operations. The Canadian branch plant economy would suffer huge job losses. This analysis was at it turned out accurate.

The contemporary analysis for the free trade discussions, which led to Crosbie raising it politically, was a 1975 paper that was published by the Economic Council of Canada. André Raynaud was the Chair of the Council and a prominent economist from the University of Montreal. He was a champion of the idea, which in the abstract was supported by economists going back to David Ricardo

The Council backed to the idea of a Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and Richard Harris and David Cox of Queen's University produced a General Equilibrium Trade (or GET) model that used econometric analysis showing modest, but positive benefits that would be gained by Canada from tariff reductions.

It is not well understood, but trade "liberalization" is mainly about using tariffs to replace government regulations that restrict competition from abroad, not about reducing tariffs. You liberalize trade by evaluating your regulations and estimating their tariff equivalent. For example, if you've got a government purchasing agreement limiting procurement of office equipment to nationally based producers—you do an analysis that concludes, that adds 15% to national costs, because goods can be purchased for 15% less elsewhere. So, instead of the national procurement restriction, trade is liberalized by slapping a 15% tariff on office equipment imports. The idea behind the procurement restriction was to help build a domestic office equipment industry. The tariff tells a foreign provider what it costs to win

a share of the Canadian market. If somebody does conclude a sale, the purchaser had to pay a 15% tariff, which can lead to purchasers favouring domestic producers.

In the post-Second World War period, the original General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (or GATT agreement), was negotiated in London. These negotiations took place because the International Trade Organization, a world trade body with extensive powers, that was approved by a wide international agreement was nonetheless kiboshed by the US Senate. So instead, the GATT was set up with minimal powers, as a small administrative body. GATT was principally a tariff agreement with a trade dispute mechanism as well. Interestingly the average industrial tariff in the postwar period was 50%. It was through a succession of seven different negotiations—including several after the 1975 Economic Council report—that tariffs had come down to less than 10%. These tariff reductions were so serious that by 1988 there was only a 1% overall tariff on all Canadian exports to the United States, and 85% of our exports were tariff free!

In 1975, the idea that trade agreements were about reducing tariffs was very much what was behind the Economic Council report. What actually happened—what the Economic Council didn't account for—was that the tariffs they wanted removed were already coming down. However as this happened regulations and trade restrictions were slipped back into legislation. This was the case particularly in the United States, which invented all kinds of different protectionist measures to keep out goods and services from other countries. And so, when Canada—when Mulroney—came up with the idea of the free trade, based on what some of the people in this party wanted, and what the Macdonald Commission was recommending, the impetus for all this came from the Canadian business community who said publicly that Canada needed to be free of American protectionism. It was claimed this could be negotiated head-to-head with the US. What wasn't said was that US President Reagan had called for free trade “from the Yukon to the Yucatan” and that US business had an agenda to use their bilateral power to bear on their major trading partner in order to get concessions they couldn't get in the GATT, but which would serve as precedent for other negotiations to follow, in NAFTA and at the creation of the WTO which replaced GATT.

Interviewer: Like the BCNI? [Business Council on National Issues, later called the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE)], and that today calls itself the Business Council of Canada.

Cameron: Yes, from the Canadian side it was the BCNI that pushed for a trade deal. Of course, some Canadian exporters were faced with regulations that the Americans were putting in place. So, they said, “You know, we need an agreement so we can get rid of those so-called trade remedy laws. Those regulations which they keep hitting us with and anytime we make an entrance into the US market, they come back with these trade measures to stop us. So, we need to get rid of American protectionism.” So it was not about tariffs, though André Raynaud's Economic Council study was about tariffs.

The Liberals had watched this big business sentiment develop [while] they were in power. And so, they said, “Well, let's do this sector by sector. We don't want any kind of comprehensive agreement. But let's talk about agriculture. Or let's not talk about agriculture, or about cars. We have the example of the 1965 Auto Pact, which was an

agreement between the Government of Canada and the automakers, not with the United States, it was with the automakers. And the automakers had agreed that they would get tariff free movement of goods, parts across the border, so long as they assembled one car in Canada for each car that they sold. So, it was a managed trade agreement. This was a realistic approach on the surface because the economy is sectoral. That's how it works. That's the reality. So, if you go sector by industrial sector, and you look at each industry, electronics, or heavy equipment or whatever, and you figure out what you can do to get rid of those barriers. That was the Liberal approach. And it was sort of not going anywhere, but it was there when the Conservatives got elected.

The Conservatives pulled this idea of a deal to get rid of American protectionism out of a hat so to speak. And the reality was that with first-past-the-post electoral system, if you have 60% of the population who are against free trade, and only 40% who are in favour, if the 40% vote for one party the Conservatives — they win the election. Why ? because the 60% divide their vote between the NDP and the Liberals ... which is what happened. So, the Conservatives knew going into negotiations that any sort of a deal could be politically a winner.

I don't want to get ahead of myself, but when Tony Clarke and the Pro-Canada Network people who put together the political program to oppose free trade, instead of calling for an election on free trade, they should have called for a referendum. If we'd had a referendum, it would never have passed. Obviously getting the government to call a referendum they would lose was not something to bet the house on. So, an election was the likely outcome. And the Liberals thought they could win a free trade election and I agreed with them. However, the NDP was a problem.

Interviewer: And John Crosbie, he was a Newfoundlander—

Cameron: That's right.

Interviewer: And where did his interests come?

Cameron: Well, he was, you know, in the time of [Newfoundland's] referendum to join Canada... he was opposed to that. His family were famously opposed. So, the trade union people and others voted for to join Canada, because they knew they would get Unemployment Insurance, and old age pensions, they would get the kind of things that they needed, to allow people to continue to stay in Newfoundland. Otherwise, they'd have to leave. Anyway, Crosbie for whatever reason, was never a particularly strong Canadian. So, the idea of, you know, the US and Canada, coming closer together, integrating the two economies he didn't see the dangers, Newfoundland had a strong culture, I don't imagine he thought it was under threat.

There was a sort of bravado among the free trade proponents. Canada was strong and could stand up to the US. This covered up a very pro-American view many businesspeople had about the world. Concern that there was a distinction between the two countries that required Canadian governments to act to preserve it was absent. After he left politics,

disgraced by single digit approval ratings I might add, Mulroney joined a bunch of American company boards, and he moved to the US basically. So, there's a lot of that sort of, you know, who cares about which country you live in sort of situation. That was part of what Crosbie was a part of, but not all Conservatives of course.

Interviewer: Oh really, there is a faction within the Conservative Party...

Cameron: That's right because the Conservatives had traditionally been the nationalists in Canada. There was the Joe Clark, Flora MacDonald, David MacDonald, David Crombie nationalist group. The so-called Red Tories. They were the Conservatives, really. And then there were the big business Conservatives (who could also be big business Liberals if the situation demanded it).

Interviewer: Yeah. So, it's really pressure from this faction and the business community?

Cameron: The business community have always supported both Liberals and Conservatives. The Liberal Party had social liberal and business liberals. Indeed, most of the serious ideological debates in Canada take place inside political parties, not across political parties. After the 1963-67 Pearson era, the Liberal social wing was primarily Quebec based, Monique Bégin and Marc Lalonde, Pierre Trudeau, a bunch of very strong Quebecers, came into the party. The social liberals had dominated after the war, and it seemed they would always be there. Then Jean Chrétien came in, and big business went back to the Liberals, and the social wing became pretty weak. It ended up with Lloyd Axworthy and Sheila Copps, and that was about it in the parliamentary party.

Interviewer: Right.

Cameron: And so that was a Tweedledee and Tweedledum system, where one party gets in the other. And you had the Red Tories, and the big business Conservatives; and the social Liberals, and the big business Liberals. There was a lot of commingling. The business community in Canada, though it has been incredibly weak economically being dominated by American companies, it has been incredibly strong politically. And they really have organized, you know, they have all these American groups in the house with them. And they're very, very strong politically.

Interviewer: And that was through the BCNI?

Cameron: Yes. The BCNI were the main instrument outside government by which free trade happened. In fact, they negotiated basically a Free Trade Agreement with their counterparts at the Business Roundtable in the US prior to the negotiations between Canada [and] the United States. They'd already made arrangements with their American colleagues to be sure that they could line up, you know, to ensure they wouldn't get any opposition from within American business to a formal agreement.

Interviewer: Okay—maybe we'll move on to more questions about your career after this—but you're talking about the 70s under the Liberals, they were looking at trade more by sector, whereas the 80s, you know, free trade became a blanket deal, essentially. How is that viewed as a benefit, rather than how business was previously done?

Cameron: Well, initially, the idea was that free trade meant that you can pay less for everything. So as Canadians, you'd say yes to this free trade idea because goods are going to come into Canada with no tariffs to pay, and cost less. And people, many Canadians, have been going across the border and hiding their purchase, small scale smuggling if you wish. From the first time they crossed the border people have been trying to avoid paying duty on what they are bringing home. Under the free trade deal tariffs were going to be reduced over 10 years.

The gradual tariff reduction didn't mean that the customs process was going to disappear. Officials were going to be on the alert for real smuggling of items such as hard drugs and firearms .

What was even worse... what made the whole lower cost goods a complete fallacy was that the Conservatives were introducing a Goods and Services Tax, which meant that there were going to be a GST paid on all imports, plus on all domestic produced goods, whatever people saw in the store. So, Canadians, instead of getting you know, things duty free, all sudden we were paying — as everybody quickly learned — a seven percent tax across the board on goods and services (not food of course) and this was for the rest of their lives though Stephen Harper reduced it to five percent later.

The GST replaced the manufacturers sales tax of 17% on domestic production. The same tax was levied on imports (Canadian manufactured exports were exempted from tax). So, it was domestic and foreign manufacturing companies that got a tax break while Canadian voters paid the 7% on consumption. Taxing consumption was ideological more than anything. Progressive income taxes reduced inequality, consumption taxes increased it. But taxing consumption at a uniform rate was supposed to be neutral and allow the market to efficiently allocate resources between say services and manufactured goods. What it did was weaken government funding of services.

Instead of free trade being a visible benefit for Canadians, the 7% more to be paid at the cash register because of the GST drove people crazy. The tax was widely unpopular. That's why Mulroney ended up with an 8% approval level prior to the 1993 federal election, and it is why he resigned rather than face the electorate. The Progress Conservatives under new leader Kim Campbell ended up with two seats and disappeared as a party to be replaced by the Reform Party in the West and the Bloc Québécois .

People were voting against Mulroney, and against the GST. I have never seen a hatred like that for a politician. The Globe and Mail and the BCNI tried to protect him, or said, "Well, you know, Canadians didn't like Pierre Trudeau."

When Pierre Trudeau subsequently died, it was the biggest news story in the history of Canada since the end of the Second World War. It went for a month, daily all the time, constant. It was huge. I mean, there never be another story like it. His presence was just so large in the public imagination, you know, and that was that came from the realization that he had brought something special to public life. Not only had he repatriated the constitution and introduced a charter of rights and freedoms, he had talked a language that

resonated, the language of a just society with a place for everyone. Public feelings were not artificially orchestrated by the media. It came from people recognizing an exceptional leader. Demands came from across the country to name a school, a playground, a park, a street, a building, or a funding programme after him. It was amazing. I couldn't believe it. And the journalists that I worked with couldn't believe it either. Ultimately with a one-time contribution of \$125 million the Chrétien government created the Pierre Elliott Trudeau foundation to fund scholarships for doctoral studies, and reward mid-career academics with research allotments. As his son Alexandre put it, the idea was to honour his father for the way he lived. PET had been an outstanding student, an academic and was always attuned to the intellectual world. The Intellectual perspective is not always the best way to view politics, but it worked for him.

Interviewer: Okay, so why don't you tell me how you first got involved with free trade issues.

Cameron: Well, after graduation from the University of Alberta in 1966, I joined the Department of Finance in Ottawa. The issues that interested me were monetary issues, international monetary issues. And so, I had a background working on the international economy. I was the Executive Assistant to the Canadian Director of the World Bank for example . And I followed IMF issues.

In 1968, the gold market collapsed, and there was a major international financial crisis. So, when I left to do my PhD, I worked on international financial issues, which are totally separate from trade issues. I did my thesis in Paris on the reform of the international monetary system.

When I joined the Political Science Department at the University of Ottawa, I was asked to do Canadian politics. In 1984 I co-authored with Gregory Baum a book entitled *Ethics and Economics*. And that was about the Catholic Bishops statement of the unemployment crisis, and what that revealed about the Canadian economy. At the CPSA [Canadian Political Science Association] meetings I met Daniel Drache. He said, "Listen, I'm coming to Ottawa. Can we have lunch?" And so, we did. He had this project to do, what became the Other Macdonald Report, he said "Why don't we do it together?" So, I said, "Sure."

I researched all the different briefs that were presented to the Macdonald Commission. I went through them and selected the ones I thought were interesting. And we went through the whole thing together. When that book came out, it was quite successful. It was the Macdonald Commission commissioned by the Trudeau government and headed by a Liberal that reported to the Mulroney government. It prominently called for free trade with the U.S. In the book we pointed out that free trade was really economic integration with the US.

This book [pointing to a copy of *Ethics and Economics: Canada's Catholic Bishops on the Economic Crisis* co-authored with Gregory Baum in 1984] sold over 10,000 copies; while this one *The Other Macdonald Report* sold six, six or 7,000 copies. This is unheard of today; no left public policy books sell 1,000 copies or anything much above. So, the books did well.

Interviewer: 10,000 copies! Why do you think this one did so well?

Cameron: Well, the point of departure for the book was a statement by Canada's Catholic Bishops that unemployment revealed a moral disorder in the Canadian economy. The statement was in the book along with some previous statements that led up to it. Because it was a commentary on public affairs and Catholic social thought; the Catholic community caught on to it. It became important within the Church community. I had a friend at the tennis club, who worked at the Bank of Canada, and who as a Protestant, attended church regularly; he was happy to tell me the minister cited you in church! So, the book had become important in the world of the social gospel.

With two successful books to my credit Jim Lorimer our publisher asked me to do *The Free Trade Papers* [published in 1986]. He phoned me up and said, “[Why don’t] you do this book?” I said, “it’s not something I know a lot about, this isn’t my field, trade.” However, I knew it was going to be the issue, so I said I think I should learn about it, so I’ll do it.

Interviewer: Because you're a monetary guy. And this is free trade.

Cameron: Yes. This was trade, two different subject matters. But the reality is, of course, capitalism is about capital flows. And capital flows are often linked to trade, so then I learned how the two mingled... was able to introduce elements, I think, into the debate that were missing, like, the exchange rate. And, you know, if you if your exchange rate goes up by 10%, all of a sudden, it's like, you've taken a 10% tariff off your imports. But you put a 10% tariff on your exports, because your goods are priced in US dollars. So, the actual agreement Canada should have signed with the US was an exchange rate agreement, not a trade agreement, just get a stable exchange rate, one that everybody believed would remain the same would have been good for trade, and investment.

Anyway, I was asked to do the book [*The Free Trade Papers*]. And I did the book. And it did quite well. And it was timely to say the least because a free trade deal was concluded. And so, then I started to getting asked about the issue and to speak on it and, and as I started being invited to meet with groups who were ... against free trade and wanted to, you know, have a deeper discussion of what it was really about. For instance, I was invited to speak in Quebec initially, and subsequently did a number of presentations in that province.

Interestingly, probably the first group in Canada that was opposed to free trade was the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA), the Quebec farm group. In my first public event I was on a panel with Jacques Proux who was the head of the UPA—actually it was the Liberal Party who invited me—I think it was the Quebec wing of the Federal Liberal Party who got me to come and be on a panel and discuss the free trade issue.

Interviewer: Why were they [Union des producteurs agricoles] one of the first [to come out against free trade]?

Cameron: Well, because I think they just understood that the dairy industry and, and all the supply management stuff would eventually be on the table if we went into an agreement with the

US. This of course happened when the Justin Trudeau government ill-advisably renegotiated NAFTA with the Trump administration. The Americans had agricultural support policies. And they had all kinds of huge surpluses, eggs and milk and everything else. They just wanted to get rid of it and it could wipe out our industry. So, the UPA realized how vulnerable farmers were to American dumped surpluses, particularly in Quebec, where there is a lot of milk produced, a lot of eggs and poultry and things. They were very sensitive to the need to have an income support for the farm industry if we wanted to have control over our food supply.

Maxime Bernier would have been easily elected leader of the federal Conservatives if he hadn't opposed supply management. Conservatives in Quebec organized to oppose him, the local son, by supporting Andrew Scheer from Saskatchewan, because Scheer would support supply management. So, Bernier lost the Quebec support he needed to win. The race was so close it was crazy. I turned out Bernier was cheated out of a few votes by the Conservative party organizers who didn't want him to win.

By then, I was in regular contact with the Catholic Bishops secretariat through my earlier book, and *The Free Trade Papers* was of interest to their network, and to the interfaith coalition of churches. When it looked like the ongoing negotiations were moving towards a deal, and the anti-free trade forces were mobilizing, that's when I was asked to set up a research and analysis team to examine the deal if ever to be agreed to. I had asked Tony Clarke from the Bishops who was instrumental with others in putting together the ProCanada Network "What do you do if there's an agreement?" Late he got back to me suggesting I form a team to make sense of any agreement that was reached.

Interviewer: So, can you explain to me, how did Catholics become so involved in this debate against free trade? Because it seems, by today's standards, unusual.

Cameron: One of my favorite economists is the American Robert Heilbroner, who wrote *The Worldly Philosophers*, and is a specialist in economic history. And he came up to Montreal invited by the Polanyi Institute, which I was active in as well. At the end of his talk, he said, "You're having a public controversy I understand you're having a national debate. Why are you so opposed to free trade here." And so, people went, "Duncan, do you want to answer?" And I said, "Free trade, that means more free market." "Oh, I get it now," he said.

So, this is what the Catholic Bishops understood the free trade debate was about: market regulation, writ large, that that it overshadowed discussion of public issues, limited democratic decision making. Governments were going to give up the space to business and business, were going to implant their own rules and call it "free trade". And so, it was ... going to be a shift of power. And the Catholic left, the social Catholics, Catholic left activists, were very strong, similar to the social gospel activists [that] helped create the CCF [Cooperative Commonwealth Federation] ... in Western Canada, the Farmer-Labour party. So, the Catholic preferential option for the poor was gone under free trade. And their principle of the priority of the needs of labour over the wants of capital conflicted totally with the thinking behind the agreement, which was to put capital first, you know, and let everything else fall into place.

Interviewer: So, they identified free trade as really ideal for capital rather than—

Cameron: —as a weakening of the social fabric of the country. They'd already put out this statement, that unemployment revealed a moral disorder in Canada. The fact that we weren't taking unemployment seriously or... poverty seriously was a terrible statement about our society. And this free trade agreement would just make it worse, which of course it did.

Interviewer: Yeah. You mentioned that the Catholics were good organizers but not activists?

Cameron: Well, Catholics were good at communicating. So, they're used to sharing information. The churches communicate all the time, you know; they talk to their flock. They actually mobilize people through informing them. The only [other] mobilizers were the women's movement. And then the women's movement had a very, very good and early analysis of free trade thanks to Marjorie Cohen and probably a couple of other people—

Interviewer: —like Laurell Ritchie?

Cameron: Yes. Laurell Ritchie was an important organizer, a huge presence in the anti-free trade group in Toronto. What Marjorie brought was an analysis of the impact of free trade on women's work. She was one of the first to do any analysis of the likely impact of free trade. And she understood that the Canadian economy was primarily a services economy. And that nobody had any idea of how this thing was going to [impact] services. We learned from her work that the manufacturing sector — where we were the most vulnerable — was where most women were employed. And so, it was her book, *Free Trade, and the Future of Women's Work*, which CCPA published, actually, that was a great organizing tool.

In general, the women's movement could get people out to a meeting to handout material or to organize an event. And the Farmers Union were good, too.

Interviewer: What did the Farmers Union do?

Cameron: The English language farm community is divided into the Canadian Agricultural Federation, which is organized by sector, a conservative group. And the National Farmers Union, which is the much smaller, radical left-wing group that was based in Saskatchewan. Roy Atkinson was the legendary leader, as smart a man as you will ever meet. By the time of the free trade fight, the leader was from Prince Edward Island, Wayne Easter, and he was very strong on the free trade issue and made a political career out of his opposition to it as a Liberal actually. So, they were just very good at alerting their members to what difficulties lay ahead. Small group, but effective organizers in Ontario, and in the West. So, in Saskatchewan, I think ended up with two thirds of the population being strongly opposed to free trade. And that would be farm groups who were leading then, and labor groups as well.

Interviewer: And I guess farmers, the union in Quebec [Union des producteurs agricoles] felt threatened by basically being put out of business by the Americans?

Cameron: Exactly.

Interviewer: Okay. So where did your critique of free trade... What was it influenced by?

Cameron: Well, the Canadian political economy approach to public policy where I was coming from. When I returned from France with my PhD completed on the international monetary system, my colleague, John Trent gave me Daniel Drache's paper on retrieving Canadian political economy, that was about [Harold] Innis and [W. A.] Macintosh and the origins of, and the revival of Canadian political economy. I read that... I thought, well, I can do this. This is my field of study; I can do work using this analytical framework. And in fact, I was in the Canadian politics section of our department. And I said, well, our dominant should be political economy.

Interviewer: What year was this?

Cameron: 1975. So that department all agreed with this. And of course, in Quebec, the Association d'Économie Politique had just been created. So I was at the initial meetings, and I spent... most of my intellectual contacts were in Quebec. And the most important political economist in Canada was Gilles Dostaler from the University of Quebec in Montreal. He was really the leading figure, the most advanced theoretically, the first to introduce Kalecki into the discussion. And, you know, he wrote a book on [John Maynard] Keynes; it was just really, really good. And so, he had an influence on my own research agenda. Michel Pelletier was the Secretary Treasurer.

Other people became a source of inspiration. Stephen Clarkson, Daniel Drache, Abe Rotstein, and Mell Watkins, Toronto academics. Working together I gradually got to know them, we became incredibly close friends. Mel Watkins and I did the Canada Under Free Trade book together. And I was instrumental in having Mel brought back from England where he was on sabbatical to help directly in the public debate. I told Nancy Riche of the CLC they needed someone with his stature and ability to be able to fight free trade effectively when she lamented their lack of resources for the fight. So, Mel came back from London at their invitation. He was hired for a year as a Special Advisor. I had become quite close to Drache through doing the Other Macdonald Commission book. Because of my teaching a course on Canadian American Relations I had reached out to Stephen Clarkson the leading expert in the field. So, it was what in your article you call the "left nationalist group" [referring to the peer-review article by Hurl and Christensen, "Building the New Canadian Political Economy" (2015)] that was big influence on my thinking.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Cameron: But the interesting thing, was that the—

Interviewer: Sorry to interrupt, is that how you identified, as a left nationalist?

Cameron: Well, I identified first as a Canadian political economist. My acquaintance with left political economy began when I went to France to study in 1971. The first two books I was given to read by a fellow student were [Nicos] Poulantzas, *Pouvoir, Politique, et Classes Sociales* [1975] and [Ralph] Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* [1962]. So that was where things were in France in the 70s. People were debating and discussing state theory. And you know, we would come out of an impoverished social sciences background in

North America, where the role of American sociology was dominant. So, the only places that didn't understand that societies set up in classes were in the US and those Canadian universities that mistakenly featured American sociology often taught by American sociologists. But by being in France, I began to understand the importance of neo-Marxist analysis and had begun to understand the role of social classes in history and its development from one stage to another. And the interesting thing about the free trade thing was it was aimed at giving the capitalist class the upper hand, it was class debate. The crux of it was about breaking the power of the working class to organize, negotiate increases in salaries, and get more control over their workplace. It was designed — as David Dodge put it to me in a private conversation—I thought he was exaggerating at the time—but you know, he was a senior official in Department of Finance before coming Deputy Minister and then government Bank of Canada Governor, so he knew what was going on, and I should have taken him more seriously. And he had said to me, “This free trade agreement is being put forward, so we can't have an industrial policy.” Well, you know, the trade unions at the time of “Six-and-Five,” the wage restraint program, the union said, “Listen, we would support this if the businesses who are going to benefit will agree to investment targets; that they will invest the savings in new jobs.” Business wouldn't agree. So, the government went ahead with wage and price controls anyway. And of course, then the trade unions couldn't support it. But they would have agreed to wage and price controls and would today if the counterpart was to be planned investment.

In a broad sense my take on free trade came from my understanding of Canada through the study of economic history. It was helped along considerably by reading Kari Levitt, *Silent Surrender* that my same friend Ken Curtis had passed on to me upon his return from a trip to Toronto.

I was studying in France at the *École de hautes études en sciences sociales* as it's called today. In my day it was called *École pratique des hautes études*. And the founding figure was Fernand Braudel, the economic historian and his work was like that of Innis and Macintosh. You know, he was studying the way a society evolved—the material formation of a society through its economic activity. His best-known case, which made him famous in France was of the Mediterranean. He also did a three-volume history of capitalism, which was incredibly important. So, it was his presence, and that of all the people he had brought to the *École pratique* that influenced my thinking as I was doing my thesis.

Interviewer: Okay. And so that's a huge influence.

Cameron: I came back from France with the sort of a good grounding in economic history as the basis of social science not just of neo-Marxism. And the Canadian political economy approach seemed to me to fit, you know, very nicely. And the interesting thing was that—you discuss this in your paper—there was an anti-nationalist group who tried to pretend that that there was no link between social classes and nation, which to me was absurd. Karl Polanyi served in the First World. As a Hungarian he was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. And he said, “Of course the working class have signed up, all they have is their national culture.” You know, it was astounding, workers fighting workers because it was such a treason really of the ideals of the International Socialist, of international socialism.

The socialists got together and said, you know, “We're all brothers, and we'll never fight each other.” And then the war breaks out and they all go out and fight each other. Why? Because of their identity as human beings with their natural culture.

In Canada, people are crazy patriots. Totally patriotic. And the working class gets, you know, taken to the cleaners when somebody starts waving the flag, the way that Mulroney did over free trade. That was one of his great arguments. Canada's strong enough to take on the United States ! Please save me from this chauvinism. I don't even like flags. I don't want anything to do with flags. We're doing fine. But it doesn't mean that you don't pay attention to you know, the national institutions. I mean, they're our democratic institutions. How could you not? How could you think this was wrong. If it's not our democratic institutions, it's somebody else's.

The whole point of Kari Levitts book was that foreign ownership of the means of production matters, it makes democratic politics so much more difficult when the economic power is centred abroad.

Interviewer: Do you see this debate, as you frame it, in your mind more as a kind of a national issue or a democratic issue, or a combination of both?

Cameron: It's a combination of both. But it's definitely democratic because what you were doing was you were limiting the power of the national legislature, and particularly the provincial legislatures. The role of the federal government [was] to ensure that the provincial governments abided by the Free Trade Agreement. Stephen Clarkson called it an external [...] constitution, an externally imposed constitution. I called it in my article for This Magazine, called "The Dealer's" – which was written immediately after the free trade deal was signed – a charter of rights for big business. Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms overrides the Canadian Constitution, which is interpreted with reference to the Charter. The trade deal was about giving powers to businesses, so they could do what they wanted using the deal, knowing legislatures would be limited in their action by an international agreement that took precedent over domestic law—even the Canadian constitution! With their new rights under the agreement, you couldn't touch them even when they were polluting.

When the environmentalists realized the extent of limits on legislative power, they became engaged. In fact, the longest chapter in The Free Trade Deal book is on the environment. When the environmentalist found out about this charter of rights for capital, they were aghast. To protect the environment, you must be able to control the rate of [exploitation] of natural resources. So, under the Free Trade Agreement, we agreed we couldn't tax the export of raw materials. So, we couldn't control the rate of exploitation of natural resources. And the Conservative sponsors of the deal pointed out there's not a word in the agreement about the environment, which is true. But the whole thing was about the environment, you know?

Free trade was a national issue—whose nationalism? The Conservatives were running on nationalism. So were the Liberals. The NDP were asleep, somewhat oblivious to the

dangers to the Canadian economy. And in fact, they had another concern, they were trying to replace the Liberal Party in that election. Ed Broadbent started off doing quite well in the polls, and he thought he could replace the Liberals. And they did not oppose free trade because they thought opposition to it would favour the Liberals. So, they didn't mention that in their opening statement, as Ross Howard of the Globe who was sitting next to me at the NDP press conference pointed out to me immediately. Broadbent didn't mention it in his post campaign statement on the campaign either. In a follow up piece for This Magazine, I wrote about the election, pointing out how the failure of the NDP was instrumental in the Conservative victory.

Interviewer: What do you think? I mean, where did that come from? A lot of folks we've spoken [with] have spoken about how the NDP were really weak on this issue. I mean, the NDP did participate in but public debates on national television, basically siding with the Liberals being opposed against and then there's John Crosbie, who's for it. But it seems that Ed Broadbent was either wanting to make the election about a bunch of issues beyond free trade, or was, I guess suspicious of those who are against free trade as being more associated with the Liberal Party? Can you speak to why the NDP was asleep on this issue?

Cameron: Well, I mean, they had lost touch with their constituency. The NDP was the successor to the farmer-labour party, the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation], launched on the prairies in 1932. When the CCF got wiped out by Diefenbaker [in] a populist sweep, they reconstituted it, they brought in Labour, the CLC as a founding partner in the New Party, as it was first called. Broadbent represented Oshawa, which was, you know, the capital of General Motors in Canada, it was a CAW town, full of autoworkers. Ed was also very close to the steelworkers who were historically big players in the NDP. And he just abandoned them, despite their opposition to free trade and tried to focus the public on other issues . I mean, he cut the links with these trade union activists who were fighting mad about being abandoned despite union financial support given to the party expressly to fight the deal. The leadership of the CAW eventually cut their links with the Ontario NDP. The relationship never recovered from the 1988 election; the union never renewed their engagement with the party.

My interesting anecdote concerns John Godfrey, who was the editor of the Financial Post (in fact, as editor, he fired me as a columnist) wrote a piece in which he said the only way to deal with this free trade issue is for the Liberals and the NDP to cooperate electorally, and the Liberals should stand down in 20 NDP ridings where the NDP have a chance to win, ... and the NDP should stand down in 20 Liberal ridings. So, I took this to two Pro-Canada leaders, Mel Hurtig and Tony Clarke, and said, "What do you think?" And they said, let's see what we can do. And so, Mel tried to speak to the Liberal Party, and I tried to speak to Bob White. And Bob wouldn't hear a word of it; they were all in with the NDP. And the CLC had had a bunch of money budget for the anti-free trade fight; instead of giving it to the anti-free trade fighters, they gave it to the NDP, who never used it. So, there was a great round of recriminations after the election,

Bob White was the in charge of the Political Action Committee of the CLC. And so, he

invited the NDP, to a conference in Ottawa. And he invited me to speak, and he said, “I want you to come to my hotel room for breakfast at eight o'clock.” So, I show up there, and all of these NDP MPs, and advisors and so on are all there. So, he walks across to greet me, and he invites me to sit down at a table set for two, like we're sitting here comfortably, and they, the rest of the people, are milling around, eating standing up, while we talked. He just cut them dead. And then we walked over. And I'd seen on you know, the schedule, it says Duncan Cameron 15 minutes. I said [to Bob White], “How much time do I get?” [Bob White says] “As much as you want.” So, for two hours, we just hammered the NDP, all of them in the room.

Interviewer: Really?

Cameron: It was his way... he was just livid. Buzz Hargrove never recovered from that election. I mean his views of the NDP just came to change completely. So, they, the NDP spoiled their relations with the auto workers in that election. Because, for the auto workers, this was life and death. They were taking out full page ads on their own in the Globe and Mail, double ads attacking, and they had a very good analysis; they had Sam Gindin as their main resource on the issue, a foremost economist in the country, a source of great wisdom on a host of economic subjects.

Interviewer: So, Broadbent thought he could replace the liberals. And that's one—

Cameron: That's right. He thought this free trade was a Liberal issue. If you're against free trade, people are going to vote Liberal. So yeah, he thought it could he could get around it; whereas he should have been doing what Jagmeet [Singh] is doing which, you know, 40 years too late, which is figure out how you can keep the Conservatives out of power and from ruining the country. Like the way that [Jason] Kenney is ruining Alberta and [Doug] Ford is ruining Ontario. And [François] Legault is ruining Quebec for that matter.

Interviewer: Okay. You came to this issue as a political economist. And a lot of your work during this time was as an academic publishing this pile of books on the table right here. You mentioned that you were involved with Canadian Forum, columnist for the Financial Post, president of the CCPA [Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives]. And so, were you involved in any coalition work during this time?

Cameron: Well, yes very much so, in a specific role. The research and analysis team that I put together and headed up was a part of the Pro-Canada Network. So, I went to all PCN events, every meeting, and every general assembly, and made a presentation generally. I was on every conference phone call. And I made a presentation on every phone call. So, I was very much involved in coalitions, yeah...

Interviewer: Okay, so the Pro-Canada Network—I'm just trying to establish what this organization looked like—was it really like as a small group of staff and volunteers, kind of across the board?

Cameron: It was a large group of organizations who had signed on, including individually: the trade unions, the farm groups, women's groups, and churches. The key players were the women, the churches, and the trade unions, but there were also peace groups. You know, you name

it, there was students, seniors' groups, all kinds of people involved. I can't remember how, how we tithed people, but you know, people were expected to make contributions. And so, we initially hired Peter Bleyer, who [you] should be talking to. And then Randy Robinson, so there were two staffers. And then I think we had Mandy Rocks as well join. And Marcella Munro. So, there were two women, two guys, a small staff. And Mike McBain, who was work[ing] for the bishops... also spent a lot of time on this. I had office space downtown where I had the CCPA office, I had the Canadian Forum in here, and I brought the Pro-Canada, re-named as the Action Canada Network, there as well. So, the three organizations were all in my office. And we had a great big table which I went and bought with Diane Touchette who was the administrator for CCPA from a dealer in used government material. So, we had a table which we used for the CCPA board meetings, but they were used all the time by Action Canada [Network] people, and the Canadian Forum editorial group meet there.

Interviewer: Okay, so it's a real hub?

Cameron: Yeah totally. It was, you know, I mean, I'd be sitting in my office and people would be coming in and out for various activities and we would discuss doing articles for Canadian Forum, talk to them about the CCPA research agenda. And next thing, you know—it was a lot of stuff that's going on turned into articles and reports. Charlotte Gray actually wrote an article about it in Saturday Night. She called it “Designer Socialism”.

Interviewer: The Pro Canada Network? Can you describe the origins of this group?

Cameron: Well, I think the origin of it was the press conference for the Other Macdonald Report. So, we did a press conference in the Press Theater in the National Press Building on Wellington Street in Ottawa, and we had the representatives in the book who were all there, including Wayne Easter from the Farmer's Union. And Mary Simon, now the Governor General who was from Makivik Corporation. So, there was all kinds of people there. Not the CLC because they weren't in the Other Macdonald Report. They were really mad about it, actually.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Cameron: The steel workers were there, CUPE, and the auto workers. And so, when [Wayne] Easter stood up and made a great speech, the is the first time for me meeting with so many allies, we have got to keep meeting. We have to keep this solidarity going. And in Ottawa, Tony Clarke, Gil Levine, Peter Findlay (my predecessor as president of CCPA) and I had been meeting and talking about getting some kind of people's issues national council together, before the Council of Canadians was formed by Mel Hurtig, which in a sense, played that role. But there was still a need to have an organization that, you know, had a left focus and, brought people who were distinctly on the left together. And that was what the Pro-Canada later Action Canada Network was about. Tony Clarke at the Bishops was a key figure, and Marjorie Cohen at the National Action Committee on the Status of Women—women's organizations had been working with Catholic Bishops, despite, you know, total disagreement on issues of primary importance to both of them. Despite irreconcilable difference over the question of abortion, they worked together effectively. On the Catholic

side you had Bishop Remi De Roo, who was a main author of the landmark 1982 New Years Day statement Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis. He was the Archbishop of Victoria. His work was such that he was honoured at a dinner of the political economy network of the Canadian Political Science Association.

There was a core of trade unionists who were interested in coalition work with civil society organizations. Nancy Riche, Vice-President, and later Secretary-Treasurer of the CLC wanted to reach out, wanted the CLC to have NGOs as partners. In Quebec, the trade unions have long been divided into three central bodies: the CSN [Confédération des syndicats nationaux], the Quebec Federation of Labor, and the Teachers Federation, but they've learned to work together in coalitions. So, they were there as a coalition of labour, but they weren't as good at working with the community groups. There was still a lot of hostility. So, we didn't have as much grassroots Quebec support as I think we could have had if the unions had been more open to bringing people like that into their coalition. But we had the church and then we had a lot a lot of organizations which had Quebec representation. So, it wasn't as if Quebec was absent from this, if anything, Quebec was the most vigorous centre of opposition to free trade in Canada. The problem was that Mulroney was also pushing the Meech Lake Accord and making it central to his campaign in Quebec. And so, there were, you know, people who were ready to support the Conservatives in spite of free trade, because they wanted the Meech Lake Accord adopted.

Interviewer: At the time in the separatist movement in Quebec, was this the policy of “beau risqué” where [Quebec separatists] put their support behind Mulroney and the ‘88 election?

Cameron: Yes, that phrase came from Premier René Lévesque who had lost his referendum on a mandate to negotiate a sovereignty-association agreement with Canada outside Quebec and was ready to participate in talks Mulroney was leading with the provinces. John Turner was leading the Liberal Party—no longer Trudeau—and Mulroney had put himself forward as a Quebecer who wanted to bring Quebec on as a signatory to a constitutional accord so as to erase the memory of Quebec not signing the 1981 Constitution Act. Despite being an obvious Anglophone to people who knew him, Mulroney also had spoke a fluent, colloquial French and was a graduate of Laval University. So, it's not as if he didn't have authentic Quebec roots ... as much as that was hard for a lot of people to see that, he had a Quebec background, and he was very experienced in negotiating on behalf of business with labour unions, and a very skillful politician, who, you know, eventually lied himself into infamy.

Interviewer: Okay, so going back to the Pro-Canada Network, where did funding for this organization come from?

Cameron: There was very little funding, but the bishops provided some, I think, the Council of Canadians gave initial seed money, they were much involved in its creation, and the CLC and the major unions like CUPE, Auto, and Steel provided some money, and different groups provided in kind services. I helped. The CCPA housed them. It was my fax machine used; you know; my telephone lines were used. So, you know, a lot of work was staff time donated. Most of the energy and the efforts came from volunteers, you know. But the staff

were important. But you could ask Peter Bleyer, he wrote his thesis about this. There were two doctoral dissertations that were written at that time. The other is by Jeffrey Ayers, who's an American political scientist. He did his postdoc with me, actually. I think it was a postdoc or maybe it was just doctoral research. I didn't have to spend much time with him. His research meant he had to go around to see a bunch of other people. I helped him to identify them. After six months he said to me, "Well, I've talked to everybody except for you". I haven't been in touch with him recently. But I used to see him all the time. He is still very active on Canadian-American questions from his University position in Vermont.

Interviewer: I've read his book. Marjorie Cohen said there's really not much on this topic besides Jeffery Ayer's book. But I didn't see Peter Bleyer's PhD thesis.

Cameron: Peter's got his stuff. Tony Clarke has got dementia. But Mike McBain, you might be able to get in touch with.

Interviewer: Mike McBain?

Cameron: Mike was a key staffer at the Canadian Catholic Bishops Conference that issued the 1983 Ethical Reflections statement. He seconded Tony Clarke and played an important role in the anti-free trade fight and other subsequent battles over the deficit, and social spending cuts. The CCPA gave him an award for social justice. I spoke at the award ceremony that was maybe five years ago, maybe longer. I can't remember now. And he retired at that point. He was running the Canada Health Coalition at that point.

Interviewer: So, what was the aftermath of the '88 federal election for you and the people you're working with on this issue?

Cameron: Well, in my case, it was acting as president of the CCPA. And to use the kind of collective work of organic intellectuals – to develop that through building a cadre of CCPA research associates. Canadian political economy was an intellectual resource, a methodological tool for the CCPA to use to analyze federal spending and taxation a budget time, and to be on top of public policy formulation that was occurring under free trade. Basic

macroeconomic, and trade policy, and Bank of Canada monetary policy as well since they need to be looked at together. In the nineties monetary and fiscal policies worked at cross purposes and we pointed that out. The Bank was shutting down the economy, causing unemployment when it dipped below 7.5% the so-called non-inflationary rate of unemployment. Meanwhile Finance was cutting UI so that the unemployed would cease choosing leisure over work ! Incredibly destructive and stupid. I wrote the Governor of the Bank, he never replied.

At CCPA, we hired Bruce Campbell, who had been the assistant to the NDP trade critic, Steven Langdon, and Steven Langdon was actually a serious political economist. And so, Bruce was deeply engaged in trade policy, and had studied economic development. And he had been hired by the CLC, to do an analysis of job loss. And I tried to get the Ontario NDP government to fund a study of job loss, because I said, "Listen, the Ontario economy's gonna go in the toilet as a result of free trade. You're in power. You're going to

wear [it] if you don't point to somebody else". So yeah, they didn't understand the need to do it, which was just too bad.

So post free trade I was pre-occupied with how public policy was being generated. As the Canadian economy slumped after the deal was implemented, and puzzlingly interest rates were raised by the Bank of Canada at the same time, we moved pretty quickly into an era of federal deficits. The Business Council on National Issues had developed what I called a "three reason approach" to reducing government. So, there's the war on inflation. And that means limiting wage increases through raising Bank of Canada interest rates. And, of course, the first thing that should go up in inflation is wages. Right. Okay. Then, after the war on inflation approach to reducing government spending, there was the international competitiveness argument. Free trade fell under that, you know, we have to be internationally competitive, so we reduce the ability of government to legislate on behalf of citizens. And so, we have this trade agreement, which takes away the measures we needed in order to compete in world markets. And then the third one was, when those two have out used their usefulness, it's the federal deficit, the terrible deficit; we have to fight the deficit.

So, in all three cases, your policies are aimed at reducing government spending. That's the common [thread]. So, I had to move from one issue to another, but it was always the same group of opponents. The arguments were a bit different, but it was the same fundamental political economy stuff we were dealing with the struggle, working class against big business, the owners of capital bent on maximizing investment returns. The CCPA wanted to raise issues for discussion in our national framework, the media, our national parties, and our democratic institutions, we were trying to develop a higher level of political debate. What I found after 10 years of running CCPA – and having established an office in Manitoba and one in Nova Scotia and one in BC, and to have personally been part of the group that established the Parkland Institute in Alberta—what I found was that we produced all this material but couldn't get the kind of media attraction it deserved. It was as if there was a censorship of the left by the CBC, CTV, the Conrad Black papers that became PostMedia, and the Globe.

Interestingly it was in Quebec that we got covered regularly by everybody. I hired Paul Browne a perfectly bilingual Francophone to be a researcher to help us respond to queries in French. Both Bruce Campbell and I could communicate in French. In fact, still today in 2023 I have a regular spot on the morning show here in Vancouver on Radio-Canada.

It was only in BC that we really got an immediate audience for CCPA material once we opened an office here. I came out here, the NDP government had brought in a set of legislation on apprenticeships. And the Carpenter's Union were furious because businesses would hire carpenters as apprentices, and then fire them after a year, and hire another apprentice, so they were misusing the whole legislation. And they talked to Marjorie Cohen about this. So, Marjorie said, "Well, why not get the CCPA to study this?" Ed Finn, who worked with me at CCPA, a long-time trade unionist, understood exactly what this was practice about. He wrote a report on it. And so, I said, "Well, let's release it the BC". So, I came out here, on my own, paid my own ticket. And we organized a press conference. I can't remember how we did it. But anyway, we had a press conference and I walked in. It's

45 people there. We've got, you know, three or four different Chinese language reporters. Plus, we've got you know, the Sikhs and Hindus. Everybody's there and BCTV, the Vancouver Sun, the Province—what is going on? So anyway, I talked up our report, and we got big play. And I'm thinking, wow, this is quite special, and unusual for us to get so much media coverage. It happened that Ken Novakowski was holding a meeting of WISER, the Western Institute for Social and Economic Research the same day. And Marjorie Cohen said, "Well, I think you should come to this meeting." I didn't really want to go to a meeting. But she convinced me to attend, and as we sat around the room—I can see there's 30 researchers present, an impressive turnout. And Novakowski is announcing that because the BC Federation of Labour don't support this project it wasn't going to go ahead. And instead, there was going to be a conference on new conservatism. \$30,000 from the Teachers Federation had been set aside to fund this conference. In the meantime, CUPE had \$30,000 reserved for WISER. And somebody else had \$30,000.

So, I got on the airplane to go home, and I had Seth Klein's M.A. thesis in my briefcase. He'd come and interviewed me in Ottawa on the deficit issue, his thesis topic. And I said, "Do you want to have lunch?" and he said, "Well, I'm going to the Bank of Canada." And I said, "Well, afterwards, if you want to have coffee." He said, "Well, I'm going to the Department of Finance." And I've got, you know, 45 MA students. I've never had one of them who went to the Department of Finance, Bank of Canada on their own. So, I was impressed with him. And so, I read the thesis on the way home and I thought, well, you know, he's done a pretty good job here. I mean, it was a subject I knew pretty well. And so, I phoned up Marjorie and I said, "Why don't we restart the BC CCPA?" Because there had been a BC office in CCPA, which was a victim of the fallout over the general strike at the time of the 1981 Solidarity Movement. So, I talked to Marjorie, I said, "What if we re-opened the CCPA office in BC and hired Sett to set it up?" And she said, "Let's do it." And so, I asked her to talk to Ken Novakowski. When she phoned me back, she said, "You're gonna have to talk to Ken." So, Ken was reluctant, but after a good conversation, he agreed to go along with the project. In fact, Ken has written up the history of how the CCPA in BC got started. Vancity were very important. They provided a big chunk of money to get us started through their community development arm. I had lunch with the Chair of the Board at the time. She was quite willing to champion our case. We had the previous chair Coro Strandberg in our corner.

Seth Klein did a remarkable job; the BC Federation of Labour became a supporter. An active research programme was established, staff hired, and research associates appointed. It is what I most proud of in my period as president, opening the BC office.

So, I, at that point, I had been at the CCPA for ten years. I've been editor of Canadian Forum for ten years. Ten years in these things, you've given what you can, it's time to let other people have a kick at them. Unfortunately, the Canadian Forum team that took over, fumbled the opportunity, and it quit appearing, which was a real tragedy for me.

I was back at Ottawa giving my full attention to my own research when my accountant explained that an early retirement package was available. It meant that if I continued to work ... it would be for nothing. So, leading up to retirement in 2004, I started wiring a weekly column with rabble.ca. Judy Rebick had started rabble.ca, and CCPA had sponsored it. CCPA accepted the grant from an Arts organization in Ontario, which required the recipient be an organization with charitable status, had an income tax number, which was the case with the CCPA. And so, I was in the picture when it started, I met with Judy, became a founder myself and I gave her a personal check. A few years later she hired Sharon Fraser to be the new editor. And so, I said to Sharon, "Well, maybe I could start writing a column for you." She said, "What a great idea." So, I started writing a regular column for rabble.ca and the next thing I knew I was involved in rabble.ca on the business side.

It was in some ways a natural next step. Why? Because in the mainstream media, the ability to have a public discussion was so limited, because media would just censor everything from the left. I mean, they've never interviewed, done a full-scale interview with Charles Taylor, the most eminent political scientist in the world. You know, number one, easily recognizable in the profession worldwide. Never been interviewed in English Canada, nobody ever talked to him. The media don't pay attention to thinkers, you could say they're anti intellectual. But they do talk to Americans of course. And, most importantly they're anti-left. They don't read the left. They talk about the left all the time. They don't have a clue what it means. Never read anything that we produce. Nothing.

Interviewer: It's funny because people think the media is left leaning in this country.

Cameron: It's a joke, because, you know, people like Andrew Coyne is going to read one book on how market prices can adjust and solve all our economic problems and be the solution to everything. And he's written from the same perspective for 30 years and been on national TV speaking from a right-wing position on everything except maybe proportional representation. For a time, I was a token lefty writing in the Financial Post. My column was dropped is after I published a list of companies that weren't paying income tax. And that was the list that Bob Rae used to help get elected on.

So, I... you know, I wanted to be more involved in getting ideas into the public, and looked like the Internet was one way to do that, to bypass the existing media, which was shutting us out. Not in French. I've had a career with Radio-Canada as an invited commentator. I was on the radio, from the first year I was at the University of Ottawa. On a regular basis. I'm talking 30 to 40 times a year, if not more on their major public affairs program on radio at noon. And every time there's a budget, I'm right there in the lockup, and right there on, you know, in Parliament, sitting in a table with my headset on while all the MPs are billing around. We're discussing what they think they were elected to discuss on the radio you and seeing me there all the time irritated some of the NDP MPs. At CCPA I tried to ensure that our study authors got the attention. I did not want to have too high a profile.

Interviewer: Really, why?

Cameron: Well, you're taking their place in society, speaking on issues of the day at the invitation of the Francophone press, a role M.P.s like to have for themselves. They've been elected; they have legitimacy because of that to speak on behalf of their constituents.

Sensing this displeasure, I decided I didn't want to have too big of public role. Because I didn't want resentment to build against the organization because of my presence. So, we tried to ensure that it was the authors of the different works that caught the attention. Sandra Sorensen was Executive Director of CCPA, following Jim Davidson who had recruited me to become president after we had worked together at the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton, he as the staff person, and me as the organizer of a conference on Full Employment. Sandra understood how to move research into the public domain. She had a hand in getting Harold Chorney on The Journal, the CBC flagship public affairs programme hosted by Barbara Frum that followed the national television news nightly, to give his take on the deficit issue (that it was caused by high interest rates not government spending). So, she was good at the specialist practice of public relations, something the NGO world needed to learn more about in order to get their important work into the public domain. At CCPA we could have spent more time on cultivating ties in the media, as opposed to on coalition work.

Interviewer: Lastly, towards the end of interviews, I like to just ask participants about the terrain of politics of free trade today. Just as a point of comparison, because when I originally got us into this project, we're looking at what Donald Trump was saying about free trade and, and, you know, wondering, well, where is the social movement that seemed to be so present in the 80s whereas today, it seems to be kind of non-existent and that's kind of what got hooked into this topic. And so, what do you see as the legacy of the signing of the free trade deal for the Canadian economy today? And do you see the politics around free trade as having shifted? Because in the 80s, there really seem to be such a strong social movement against it, but it does seem so radically different now. In terms of those who are opposing it, it seems to be kind of more piecemeal of, you know, a couple of groups across the country working on different aspects of different free trade deals, that kind of thing. Do you have any comment on that?

Cameron: I think it's the terrain for engagement that has changed. The results of free trade are much wider and greater inequalities in Canada and in the US. The Canadian economy moved from being a manufacturing economy centred in Ontario, to an oil and gas economy, with Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, being added to existing activity in Saskatchewan, and especially Alberta with its tar sands production. Jim Stanford's done numbers on the state of corporate investment in Canada. An incredible 90% of it was in oil and gas over a period of 10 years. As the free trade logic of closing down Canadian plants worked itself out, Ontario, which was the leading province in Canada became a have-not province receiving regional equalization payments! So, there's been a real shift in the Canadian economy, and a surge in the impoverishment of Canadians. The YMCA did a study probably a decade ago now. In the Hamilton-Toronto urban area fully 50% of the population were having difficulty making ends meet. That's half and it's today more like 60%, and it's across the country. So, you've got the newly impoverished, you've got the restructuring of the

Canadian economy with the branch plants gone. And of course, the American economy has been restructured following the major move of manufacturing capacity to Asia, principally China. And now that's all changing with the election of Biden. It started with Obama when the Americans have instigated their famous pivot to China and supposedly away from the Middle East. It is important to recognize that the new cold war with China started with Hillary Clinton and Obama, prior to Trump. So, there's a whole geopolitical shift. With Biden there is a new American protectionism designed to recoup manufacturing production under the cover of building a green economy, environmentally motivated so exempted under trade agreements that allow for action on the environment. The American left are fully supportive of this, Bernie Sanders is on board; economists such as Fred Block and Robert Kuttner are in favour. The proxy war against Russia over the invasion of the Ukraine does not seem to deter left support for Biden.

The activity that is creating the grassroots organizing and activity here and elsewhere is on the climate issue. The BC CCPA did a lot of studies of climate change, and successfully I thought, framed it as climate justice. I think they got sidetracked for awhile before finding a way forward. Marjorie Cohen, a senior academic and founder of the BC office tried to explain that it was not, you know, a market mechanism, a carbon tax, or putting a price on carbon, which was going to, you know shut down Green House Gas emissions. Other inhouse economists were quite keen on the carbon tax as the answer to climate change which it clearly is not. Direct regulation is what is needed.

The climate issue is the one issue that that takes in every aspect of social life, because ultimately, the climate issue is about how we produce goods and services and extract resources. And so, we have to get a democratic control over our economy, if we ever expect to control climate change. And so that's where the political debate needs to be focused now, that's the issue now, democratic control of the economy. And that, of course, means the abandonment of the free trade model. So, it's, it's just coming at trade from another direction. But it's still a national issue. It's still a democratic issue, and it's still there, free trade, behind which is the free market, so-called which is in fact dominated by corporate monopolies . Our zone of political action is Canada. Maybe the main GHG emitters are India, China, and the US, but we still need to ask ourselves what we can do in Canada?

One of the issues that really for me, was essential for my opposing free trade was the loss of the possibility of having an independent foreign policy. I mean, on this Russia-Ukraine issue, it's very clear that Canada's role should be to ensure that there be negotiations and should be some kind of peace process put in place. Instead, we're trying to be the happiest pro-Ukrainian group in the world, making fools of ourselves by adopting a locker room rah, rah approach to war, not taking stopping death and destruction seriously. I mean, the American policy is to weaken Russia and fight to the last Ukrainian. That's crazy. And this President Zelensky is not a hero in my mind, he's an actor playing a role he played on television, literally. He's going out around the world calling for support to fight the Russians. Like he's getting himself in a position where he can't now negotiate or make the major compromises that will eventually have to be made. I mean, it's tragic what's going

on. And Canada is nowhere on this issue. I mean, we're... we are somewhere but it's the completely wrong place.

I got personally quite upset to see how Canada dealt with the United States at the UN when I was on the UN delegation in 1967. The Americans wanted to push us around all the time and officials at the Department of External Affairs were prepared to accommodate them. And I discovered that the vaunted, you know, independent foreign policy that Pearson was supposed to be pursuing was not that at all. Pearson was acting as an American agent in dealing with the British, with and the French is what he was doing. And so, it wasn't an independent action of his for peace, it was an action on the part of the Americans. So, to discover that we've gone from that which was already very questionable, to outright subservience to US foreign policy aims, and no capacity at all to carve out an independent position, is very disturbing. The Liberal government seems not to know there are all kinds of people in Canada that have been part of the peace movement, wanted to see international development, and wanted to reform world trade; wanted to reform the International Monetary System, wanted to have action on climate, international climate agreements. The idea of international action by Canada independent of the U.S.— which is the main obstacle to action on all these issues—has just disappeared. We're sending people abroad still, but you know our Foreign Minister goes off, and does photo ops, that's it. The Defense Minister does photo ops, with Trudeau, Canada only does photo ops abroad. That's it. They don't contribute anything. So, it's... that's a consequence, the worsening of that situation which existed prior to free trade.

Interviewer: So really losing our democracy?

Cameron: Well not totally, we can still vote, but in reality, our choices are severely constrained. And our capacity to act nationally through our national institutions has diminished. We've become subservient to, you know, as part of the integrated North American economy. Canada is like a neo-colony, third world style.

Interviewer: And so, this is basically a victory of capital?

Cameron: Over labour. And it's, it's, you know, the private sector trade unions in Canada that have been incredibly weakened as a result. The steel workers used to be a real force with a large, well-organized membership. You know, now their growth sectors are lower paid security guards. They are making efforts to organize Starbucks, which is all in good, but it is not like bringing in a steel plant in one move. The auto workers no longer exist as such; it was a leading social union with money and organizing power. It came together with paper workers and communications workers, failing industries all unfortunately, to build Unifor which is having some success against big odds in bringing the electric car business to Canada. And I remember the paper workers as an incredibly strong union, Don Holder was the head of it. And you've had the communications workers and they oil and gas workers. And now all these people are all together in Unifor. And there's been one thriving sector and that's oil and gas. The telecom sector, to some extent is still standing, though. I don't know what the employment situation is there.

Interviewer: So really, you see it as free trade is kind of breaking the back of the Canadian labor movement to a large extent?

Cameron: Well, it's certainly weakened the private sector component substantially because it's weakened the Canadian economy that affects the capacity to organize and win good contracts. So now we're organizing Starbucks. Well, I'm all in favour of that, Amazon too. But still, it's not what it was — industrial unionism. At the grass roots there is rejection of low wage labour. I mean, that's Canadian economic strategy. It's cheap labour. I mean, if you did a study of the OECD countries, prior to the enlargement of the OECD, but the basic Western European, Canada and North America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, you look at the distribution of salaried income, you would discover that Canada and the US have these huge amounts of low-income workers. Much more so than in France or any other country. And that's just continued to expand. And now it's at the point where people don't want to work for the airlines in poor jobs, those that worked in hospitality don't want to work in poor conditions for peanuts.

Interviewer: Okay. I do want to ask you about the role of the labour movement and the political dynamics, so it's going to take us back to the 80s a little bit, and then maybe we can wrap things up. I'm starting to set up a better understanding of some of the dynamics between CLC and the CCU that was led by Laurell Ritchie—

Cameron: Oh, yes. Now on the difficult relationships with internationally based unions, I know what you mean. The independent Canadian labor group, the Confederation of Canadian Unions was not popular with the CLC leadership.

Interviewer: Did you have any observations from that time—were the CLC a productive force for this social movement struggling against free trade or—

Cameron: Or defending their organizational interests ? Yes, there were individual trade union leaders, and thousands of activists who were 100% focused on defeating free trade. But for instance, in BC the mandate of the representative to the BC Federation of Labour was to ensure the CCU were, you know, sort of not in the picture. They spent a lot of energy working against the CCU. In that period, I was invited by Karen Cooling to speak at the CCU annual convention. You know, that was for me, that was my political home. These are the people that I identified with; they had objective for an independent trade union movement that I supported.

Yet I did a lot of work with the CLC. And I had a relationship of trust with Shirley Carr when she was the president (the first woman) and she sat in her office and told me how she forced Dennis McDermott out, and how she won the race to replace him. And, you know, she, she let me know, she was someone who was able, and capable of getting things done on behalf of her membership. Our relationship, and those I had developed with the other executive members Dick Martin, and Nancy Riche helped me pull the CCPA out of the financial difficulties it was in when I became president. The CLC gave us a loan of \$100,000 interest free to pay off the debts that we'd accumulated. And I negotiated an agreement whereby they would pay down that debt we owed at \$1,000 a month. And then

the \$1,000 would become their financial contribution. Yeah, it's still there. So that's how the CCPA was rescued and became a force, it was through CLC money. The Secretary/Treasurer at the time was Richard Mercier. I didn't know him, but we met, and we spoke together in French. It turned out he was from the lower Saint Lawrence region where I had just been on vacation, so we were able to connect pretty easily. He offered the loan; I suggested the repayment scheme — we had no money to repay the loan— and he agreed to take the proposal to the Executive where I had supporters.

So, it wasn't as if you couldn't talk to the CLC or deal with them. The individual unions were, and are their strength, and the provincial Federations of Labour are very important. Some of them are good, and some of them are not so strong. So you go to Alberta, they've got a strong president in Gil McGowan. And, you know, I think they've been able to put up a fairly good fight against Jason Kenney. And, you know, they helped Rachel Notley get elected. So that in itself was a minor miracle. The Ontario Federation of Labour has been weak recently, they just haven't been able to come together though Sid Ryan did his best as president. I mean, the auto workers were not in the Ontario house of labour. They split over all kinds of issues.

In Canada public sector unions are the backbone of the movement now if only because of numbers. The two major social unions were the CAW and CUPE. So, I don't know— Unifor with Lana Payne as elected president, you know, I think Unifor will be a real progressive political force in Canada. Bob White who took the autoworkers out of the international union the UAW, created the CAW was a once in a generation leader of great quality. In his own field, as good as Pierre Trudeau was in his. So, a lot depends on the individual leadership figures and kind of role they want to play with. But White came out of a union that was organized and could mobilize and could do stuff. Some of these unions... it's very difficult, because they're not really in touch with their members. So, if collective bargaining is what they do, and the case the auto workers that sit down every three, four years, and White would bring home, the, you know, the goods, and people would get their 30 years service and out to good pensions, and would get substantial,

substantive wage increases. And yeah, and after he left, the auto workers were signing agreements with differential wages for new entrants, and, and they were defined contribution pension plans not defined benefits. They were trying to negotiate with the Japanese companies and accepting all kinds of stuff that was, you know, looked unacceptable. So very hard. I mean, the interesting thing about the unions for me was that when I first started paying attention it was the days of the UAW and if you read Sam Gindins book on the creation CAW he explains how the American government went to Chrysler and told them you know, for the national interest, we have to get you to accommodate Chryslers needs for healthy profits, and so reduce your wage demands, do concession bargaining with them, otherwise, they're gonna go bankrupt. So, they said this to Bob White who said, "No, we're not doing concession bargaining. Management had created problems they need to fix them. Why would we do concession bargaining to help the American government ! We don't partner with the United States." And so, they ended up having their convention creating the Canadian Auto Workers. And all their pension

money was in Detroit. Anyway, Bob [White] wrote a book about this and he said, “You know, the guys on the shop floor would say to me, so what about our pension money? It's not a problem he would respond. Then he would go home and say to his wife, ‘geez, I don't know how we're going to deal with this pension plan’” [laughter]. Yeah, but he was a leader. He had to tell it that way, he had to exhibit confidence, otherwise he would have lost their support. So, I mean, they did the creation of a national institution in order to fight on behalf of their membership, what they couldn't do it in an internationally integrated organization. And that's why they understood what the free trade deal was about.

Well, you know, for the public sector unions, it's pretty obvious that the national institutions are their employers. And they don't have that same kind of integrative thing. So, they've been the backbone of the trade union movement as the industrial unions have declined. And I mean, White would put alliances in place; he took in the fishermen, the United Fisherman and Allied Workers union headed by Richard Cashin who was a fabulous trade unionist. And but he needed support, Cashin needed support, and White was quite happy to provide it. That union is still part of UNIFOR. So, trade unions needed a strong central body, yet they don't want to give up power to have it. It's hard for the central body to act when their main role ends up mediating between different members fighting over jurisdiction. Even White was totally involved in fighting it out with Cliff Evans at the UFCW.

Interviewer: Okay.

Cameron: Evans brought his union into the CCPA as a sponsor, but before it happened, he had me speak about the economy to his members. And I had to go to New Orleans before a pensions convention of 12,000 people and debate John Crispo on free trade. He made me go to two more of his union conventions, and then UFCW gave us a yearly contribution of \$10,000. CCPA needed to have visibility with his membership before he would take a proposal to fund us to his board.

Interviewer: When would have that been?

Cameron: It would have been 1990-91 or something. But, I mean, he knew that I would do that kind of stuff in order to get his support. So, he took advantage of my willingness to do what was necessary to build the CCPA more than any other labour leader else did. But it is you know, the dynamics of the coalitions that were formed UFCW and CAW had their differences but they both supported CCPA, and I had good relations with Cliff Evans, despite being very close to Bob White. Differences emerged between unions, and within unions were worked out, and reborn over various issues.

To me, a key issue that emerged after free trade was the poverty issue. And Mel Hurtig wrote a book about it, and I did some work on it. And we'd started talking about living wages and minimum wage increases and so on. And then finally, you know, what happened here was the BC government asked Marjorie Cohen to head up a minimum wage commission in BC. A nice minimum wage package was adopted; she would have liked it to be extend[ed] to farmworkers, and it wasn't. And, moving quickly was resisted. But it was a major achievement. There was no public opposition to it, no debate offered by business

groups. It's quite amazing. Think of it. If you tried to do that ten years ago, you'd have everybody up in arms. Her commission had the research, its conclusions were clear, raising the minimum wage had to be done. You know when you want to effect change, research is very important. I liked to say social movements feed off of good research. If you don't have the research, if you haven't studied the question, and come up with irrefutable arguments, you're not going to mobilize people. And the climate people are a good example, they've got irrefutable arguments, and they've got scientific studies, so that they're able to mobilize people. And so, research to me was the key to building, and sustaining over time the anti-free trade movement. We had really good stuff showing, you know, what the agreement was—a charter of rights for business—and what it wasn't—an opportunity for more good jobs and higher wages. We showed what was wrong with the deal in detail. When Rick Salutin did his cartoon booklet for the Pro-Canada Network, you'd read it, and it was based on my edited book *The Free Trade Deal*, that's where he got his stuff, it was how it was supposed to work, research leading to easy to communicate ideas, in easy-to-understand language. Rick is an expert writer, as good as you will find. We don't always have someone that good to popularize academic research. This idea was raised in your article about the organic intellectual being able to do more than do a book like *The Socialist Register*, something that Leo [Panitch] and Greg Also were doing. Which is, you know, very useful for all kinds of people. But you've got to go beyond that. You got to be able to write for newspapers and be able to reach all kinds of people who don't consider themselves socialists. And that's, I think that's going to happen on the climate issue. I think it's just beginning. It is interesting that the public are way ahead of the governments. And people are acting. In Vancouver, it seems everybody has a bicycle. The new City Council wants to shut down the bike lanes on Beach Ave but that is not going to stop people riding a bike instead of driving.

Thanks for your invitation. I'm so pleased to come and connect with you.

Interviewer: Well, we really wanted to speak with you. And thank you for agreeing and giving us your time.