May 3rd, 2022

Isabella Bakker Transcript

Interviewer: Record. There we go. So yeah, that's why I contacted you. And actually, maybe I'll just share my screen for a minute. I found this old article from you.

Bakker: Oh my God.

Interviewer: Here. Part of the reason why I contacted you is because I found this, "Free Trade: What's at risk?" [shows a screenshot of the article] I was going through all the Feminist Action bulletins. And so—

Bakker: Amazing, I don't even have that.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's on the Rise Up archives. Have you been there?

Bakker: I by accident went there because I was trying to remember about the National Leader's Debate.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bakker: And they had a little blurb on it and I saw a digital archive of feminist activism. So, I'll have to look at that.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, you should check it out. There's all of the old NAC [National Action Committee on the Status of Women] bulletins are on there. So, it's a great resource.

Bakker: Oh, yeah. Yeah, definitely. Yeah, so, as it says on that article: I was a member of the Employment Committee [of NAC]. And really, Marjorie Griffin Cohen was the person who was the catalyst, I think, for a lot of the action, organizing and coordination. And I worked very closely with her on doing things like leaflets, or speeches. In fact, I took some time to try and remember by looking at my CV, you know, where I gave presentations and so forth. I was really surprised by the diversity of requests. So, for example, I spoke to the City of Toronto and prepared a brief on behalf of NAC, for the Economic Development Committee. I spoke to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) on the Free Trade Agreement and privatization. There was the York Board of Education for their Professional Development Day. I don't know, you must have come across this; there was the Other Economic Summit of North America conference in Toronto in 1988 that ran parallel to the G7 conference that was held in Toronto.

Interviewer: Yeah. Marjorie talks all about it in her article.

Bakker: Okay, good. Then I ended up in Fort McMurray at the Alberta Business and Professional Women's Club talking about women in free trade. So, you know, there was a lot of interest and activism around it, and especially going into 1988 as it came closer to the agreement being implemented. That's what struck me was the coalitions that were formed, that NAC was part of, as well as the kind of public interest was really unique. I think, because it was really bringing economic policy down to earth and trying to speak to people in terms of their lives and their livelihoods and saying, "This is why it matters to you."

Interviewer: Yeah, well, that's one of the things that I'm interested in about this whole struggle is that, you know, free trade seems like it… I don't think it's intuitive that it would blow up to be such a big issue, right?

Bakker: Right.

Interviewer: It is so technical and economic. So, the fact that you guys were able to bring it down to earth like that, I find it was really interesting in kind of thinking about how it became such a big thing, right?

Bakker: Yeah. Well, I mean, I was fortunate because I trained in economics. I did my PhD in Economics at the New School [for Social Research] in New York, and actually defended in 1986. But the two years before then, I had been a trainee at the OECD in Paris, where I worked with a working group on the role of women in the economy. Through that group, I met Maureen O'Neill, who was the head of Status of Women Canada, and she was very much active in linking issues of the economy to women. She actually advocated for Status of Women, which wasn't really an official department in the federal government to have a seat at the cabinet table, which she got around that time. And I worked with her for about six months. To think really about gender, well women at that time, it was much more how we used it -- women and economic restructuring and sort of thinking about what kind of policies matter to different women from that perspective. So, trade, of course, was kind of a quite normal thing to come into that. I think there was also a lot of momentum at that time, initially around social policy and labour market issues, but increasingly there was recognition that sort of broader questions of the macro economy, public spending, taxation, trade shaped the conditions for social and labour policies. Those areas of macroeconomics were also relevant if we wanted to have gender sensitive policies. Then, of course, the activism supported increased interest and resources starting with the push for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in the 60s; then its formation and recommendations, which came out in 1971. Then the Abella Commission Report on employment equity, which I also worked on a little bit, which identified women as

Coalitions and activism in feminist movements

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) played a crucial role in linking macroeconomic issues to women's concerns, demonstrating the broad impact of free trade policies.

"NAC was part of a group of progressive academics, trade unionists, and others who took the agreement and went through it, piece by piece, to write about what were the implications of this for their particular sector or the groups that they were representing."

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Marjorie Griffin Cohen emerged as a significant figure in organizing feminist critiques of the Free Trade Agreement, collaborating with others to create accessible materials for activism. "Marjorie Griffin Cohen was the catalyst, I think, for a lot of the action, organizing, and coordination...we'd write pamphlets that would be there for distribution, or we'd write articles."

one of the groups that needed to be specifically focused on in terms of employment discrimination. Then, I think, NAC's victory to get this National Leader's Debate, which seems incomprehensible now that would have been some final debate for the Canadian federal election, and it was actually centered and focused on women's issues. So, there was a lot of sustained momentum.

Interviewer: So, when did free trade first come onto your radar screen? Was it before you were part of NAC?

Bakker: Um, I don't really remember as I think sort of academically, I thought about it and wrote about it a little bit in terms of restructuring and realized because Canada's position was very reliant on trade that this was going to be one of the big issues. But I think the political focus really was through NAC.

Interviewer: So, could you talk more about, maybe a little bit more of your biography. Like you were at the New School and then you were at the OECD? When did you move on from there?

Bakker: Yeah, as I said, I was in Ottawa in 84, early 85, working at Status of Women as an economist there. Then I moved back to Toronto to work on my dissertation. And I actually lived in the Annex, and I lived right around the corner from the NAC national office, which was really convenient, which meant I spent a lot of time at the office doing work there.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about the NAC Employment Committee as it sounds like with what you're saying about how, around that time, there was a focus on macroeconomic issues and growing interest in the impact of the economy on women's issues. Can you talk a little bit more about how that kind of manifested in the Employment Committee?

Bakker: I think that it really was a case of learning as you were doing. NAC was part of a group of progressive academics, trade unionists, and others who took the agreement and went through it, piece by piece, to write about what were the implications of this for their particular sector or the groups that they were representing. So, it was really trying to figure it out, academically. On this issue, it wasn't until the '90s really that we started to get academic networks as well as publications on gender and macroeconomics. I would say that my book, The Strategic Silence: Gender and Economic Policy, which came out '94 was probably, I think, the first book on this question. It was an edited book, so it brought in a lot of people who had experience on the ground. For example, one of the pieces was on trade in that book but that wasn't until 1994. But after that point, there was really a lot of momentum behind trying to, as we called it, engender macroeconomics.

There was also a lot of push in interest to develop expertise within the various levels of government in Canada around gender and economics. So, the idea that there should be not just an interest base and different political constituencies, but also that there should be capacity building within government to address these questions was really important.

Interviewer: So, can you talk a little bit about how the NAC Employment Committee got involved in issues of free trade? Were you around when they made the decision to really pursue free trade as a part of their research?

Bakker: Yes, as I said, mainly it was through working with Marjorie, and I can't remember where I met her, but she was the one who encouraged me to come and participate with her trying to develop

critical materials on or around questions of free trade and women. So, it was a case where, you know, they would often be like, "Do you have a couple of hours? Come to my house," and we'd write a pamphlet that would be there for distribution, or we'd write articles. We'd make connections with other people, whether they be in trade unions or other women's groups. Build this and create a better understanding of what was at stake in terms of the struggle around the Free Trade Agreement.

Interviewer: Do you remember who all was a part of the Employment Committee at that time?

Bakker: No, I don't, to tell you the truth. I just remember, Marjorie…

Interviewer: It would be interesting to hear a few more details about the committee in terms of how it was made up, how often it met, how many people were a part of it?

Bakker: Yeah, I'm really sketchy on all those questions. I can't really remember to be honest. I really remember not being part of very many meetings. As I said, I would either work at the central office or maybe go to her house to do work there.

Interviewer: Okay, and can you talk a little bit about the specific kinds of work that you did? So, you talked about putting together publications, you also mentioned before going in and doing presentations with different groups?

Mobilization strategies through grassroots efforts

The movement utilized grassroots, low-cost strategies to produce and disseminate materials quickly, ensuring their messages reached diverse audiences. "We really did, you know, we would churn things out in a couple of hours...It was all very spontaneous and immediate and we didn't rely on a great deal of central coordination within NAC."

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Bakker: Yes. So, I normally didn't have a lot of technology. You know, we had… what were those printers called? The ones with the carbon-based backing? That's how we did our leaflets.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Bakker: So, it was all very low cost, but very, very fast at the same time. We really did, you know, we would churn things out in a couple of hours. We were reacting as much as we were anticipating in what was required in terms of intervention in the political discourse. It was all very spontaneous and immediate and we didn't rely on a great deal of central coordination within NAC.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about how that the timeline of the struggle against free trade developed? My sense is a lot of stuff got started after the MacDonald report, right? Then it kind of built-up steam leading to 88. But are there any… you mentioned, like the Summit, as a key moment? Could you talk about how the campaign kind of progressed leading to the Summit?

Bakker: Yeah, I think the first thing was to try to establish that women's groups were a distinct political constituency, but that they could also really contribute something important to the debate. So, in a sense, it was trying to be kind of bilingual by saying, you know, we were in this as a social solidarity moment, but at the same time, we represent this constituency of different groups of women who will be particularly affected by free trade. I think that the biggest concern had to do with the impact that the Free Trade Agreement would have on cuts in social spending, because the fear really was that if you had heightened competition with corporations in the US then corporations would argue for a cut in taxes and that would lead to a squeeze on social spending. Social spending, of course, in particular, was identified as very important for women.

The other thing was there was also a talk of a new rule that if the government wanted to create a new program to replace private enterprise, it would have to compensate any cross- border firms that were going to lose from that. So, there was a fear, again, in the women's movement that if we wanted to establish a national daycare program, for example, which we're finally talking about now, that Canada would have to pay off US businesses that already sell the services in Canada.

So that was kind of the focus, it was trying to build bridges in terms of analysis and also in terms of social solidarity. But to reduce it to this understanding of ultimately, well what will happen to redistribution taxation? Summit is […] but it had our real questions. I remember there were a lot of groups, not just from Canada, but also from the United States there at the Summit. The question of global sustainability was really front and center at that Summit, where, for example, there was a session that was entitled something like the gross national waste product, and it was trying to define a quantitative assessment of waster in terms of GNP (gross national product) which is the universally accepted economic measure of wellbeing.

So that's the kind of thinking that was going on at the time, it was very creative and critical of resource depleting activities that were not reflected as an economic and social cost. Again, it was

Women's role in economic debates

Events like *The Other Economic Summit of North America* in 1988 and the *National Leader's Debate* highlighted women's distinct political constituency and their influence on public discourse. "NAC's victory to get this National Leader's Debate...actually centered and focused on women's issues...There was a lot of sustained momentum."

Womens' groups emphasized that free trade could lead to cuts in social spending, a critical concern given its importance to women and the fear of heightened competition driving tax cuts. *"...we represent this constituency of different groups of women who will be particularly affected by free trade. ...the biggest concern had to do with the impact that the Free Trade Agreement would have on cuts in social spending... Social spending, of course, in particular, was identified as very important for women." "...it was trying to build bridges in terms of analysis and also in terms of social solidarity...what will happen to redistribution taxation?"*

trying to present concepts and analyses in a way that would be understandable to the general public.

Interviewer: What were some of the main challenges, do you think, in making this information accessible to the general public?

Bakker: Well, I mean sources were always a challenge. So, you know, to go places, to speak to people, to produce materials, that was challenging, although NAC was getting some funding at the time. I think in a way it was less challenging maybe then than now because, in a way, what we have now is a kind of de-gendering of the political subject.

So, you know, this is something that happened shortly after free trade, what Janine Brodie and I refer to in our book *Where are the Women?* as the "*three Ds*" of de-gendering policy capacity (delegitimization, dismantling, disappearance), because you had a delegitimization of women's groups, beginning around the time of free trade and most equality seeking groups. You also had a dismantling of what I referred to previously as a large part of the gender policy capacity where the federal government and many of the provinces got rid of a lot of those units. You also had the disappearance of women from social policy debates, and you had them replaced by children as the focus of social policy. So, those three Ds really changed the ability to engage in discourse and debate a lot.

As I said in '84, it's striking that we had this National Leaders Debate and it was specifically around women's issues, so I think that there was a greater receptiveness, partly due to the kind of organizing and activism that not just NAC undertook, but many other groups across the country, to have these issues recognized as being central to Canadian public discourse as well as policy analysis.

From recognition to marginalization: women's issues in Canadian public discourse before and after Free Trade

In the 1980s, women's issues were central to Canadian discourse, but after free trade, neoliberal policies marginalized women's voices, dismantled gender-focused policies, and delegitimized advocacy groups like NAC. *"...what Janine Brodie and I refer to... as the 'three Ds' of de-gendering policy capacity: delegitimization, dismantling, disappearance. You had a delegitimization of women's groups... and a disappearance of women from social policy debates."*

"...with the election of Conservative governments, NAC became more and more delegitimized as an active player in the policy process, not just economic policies."

NAC itself faced challenges, including defunding, which weakened its influence. "*They started to get defunded and had to rely more and more on donations or grant writing... that really made things very difficult."*

Interviewer: Yeah, it's interesting to think about how central NAC was in making free trade an election issue. When you read Marjorie's account, it sounds like NAC was actually ahead of the unions in terms of leading the campaign on this stuff, and their stories about how NAC had offices for a while are one of the central meeting places for people organizing against free trade and stuff like that. […] So, I wanted to ask you a little bit about making macroeconomic issues feminist issues. I think when you're talking about delegitimization it kind of touches on that as well. It's

like I was wondering about if you've had any challenges inside NAC trying to convince members of NAC to pursue free trade as a campaign issue because my sense of NAC is that it was a very diverse organization. So, you mentioned presenting to know Fort McMurray, Alberta, Female Business Owners Association, or whatever. My sense is NAC had some quite conservative women's organizations as a part of it. So, was there any kind of pushback from people inside NAC in kind of moving towards free trade as an issue?

Bakker: Well, I think that there's always a tension probably, again, I really have not too many recollections. But I think that there were groups that saw certain things as the kind of the bread-and-butter issues of NAC and they had to do, you know, with childcare, with employment, and equal pay. It was more difficult to introduce questions of deficits and taxation policies, unless you could come up with direct examples. I guess that's what we tried to do, we tried to think about the Free Trade Agreement and how that would specifically play out in areas like taxation or deficit reduction. The whole way in which the macroenvironment was being constructed to become more privatized, more competitive, and was moving away from that sort of social collective model, in a sense.

Interviewer: My sense, from some of the other stuff that I've read, is that it was a bit of a struggle to connect women's issues to macroeconomic issues. There was, in part, a little bit of blowback in terms of delegitimizing NAC as an organization for women, because it was seen as moving towards too much this economic kind of side of things. So, I was just wondering if you also kind of shared that kind of experience, or would you interpret it that way?

Bakker: I can't say I share that experience, but I suppose it makes sense, that both internally and externally, that there might have been that kind of a push. In other words, you know, "don't go out of your lane," "you do this well," and "we've done this well, so let's just keep doing what we're doing." But, you know, at the same time, there was a recognition that the environment, the broader economic and political environment, was changing. We were starting to see the beginnings of a neoliberal kind

The struggle to integrate macroeconomic issues into feminist discourse

NAC had to overcome the challenge of framing macroeconomic issues like free trade, deficits, and taxation as feminist issues. The organization had to find concrete examples of how free trade would directly affect women, such as the impact on social spending and taxation. *"There were groups that saw certain things as the kind of the bread-and-butter issues of NAC... It was more difficult to introduce questions of deficits and taxation policies, unless you could come up with direct examples... We tried to think about the Free Trade Agreement and how that would specifically play out in areas like taxation or deficit reduction."*

Critics argued that NAC was moving too far into economic territory and should focus solely on social issues related to women. *" 'don't go out of your lane,' ..."we've done this well, so let's just keep doing what we're doing.' But at the same time, there was a recognition that the broader economic and political environment was changing. We were starting to see the beginnings of a neoliberal kind of policy agenda."*

of policy agenda. So, in a sense, I think NAC was, if there hadn't been some leadership that was looking at these questions, it was being pushed more and more into this. As I said, unfortunately, with the election of Conservative governments, NAC became more and more delegitimized as an active player in the policy process, not just economic policies. […] In a sense, when NAC came into being, and during this time around the free trade debates, I think there was still a faith that if one speaks to government, if one organizes democratically, and if one has the sharp analysis, critical policy analysis, then government would listen and would do something about it, I think. Of course, that's changed tremendously since then.

Interviewer: Yeah, and NAC had a lot of its funding pulled. What year would that have been? 90? 92? But my sense is that a lot of NAC's funding was pulled quite shortly after the 1988 elections. Is that correct?

Bakker: Yes, I think they started to get defunded and had to rely more and more on donations or grant writing, you know, to obtain grants, and that really made things very difficult. […] You know, that reflected when the Harper minority government came in 2006. The Minister for the Status of Women got up in Parliament and she announced, "we've achieved gender equality," and therefore they started to defund Status of Women and any organizations that were lobbying on behalf of women's interests.

Interviewer: Yeah, I remember that. I was wondering if you could talk more about the work that you did kind of making the case against free trade to these different groups that you talked to. You mentioned that you… I think you've mentioned the postal workers and Fort McMurray, women's organizations, how many groups did you make these kinds of presentations to? Were you on the road a lot?

Connecting Free Trade to everyday lives: Bakker's tailored presentations on its impacts

In her presentations, Bakker highlighted the shift towards privatization and its implications for public services, workers, and communities. *"I tried to target the audience, and it was on the Free Trade Agreement and privatization because that was one of the concerns that CUPW itself was raising." "They wanted to also see what some of the broader links were with other social groups."*

Bakker stressed that free trade agreements like the FTA, and later NAFTA, would significantly alter the economic and social landscape. *"This really was kind of a moment where a lot of people realized, 'Well, things are really going to change fundamentally from now on if we have this kind of agreement.'"*

NAC worked closely with its extensive network of over 700 women's groups, focusing on diverse member interests. *"we really did a lot of work with our own membership, because a lot of them had diverse interests and certainly represented diverse women"*

Bakker: Early presentations in around Toronto, as I see from my CV, in 88 I did a couple of talks in Alberta. Actually, I think I did one in Calgary, and it was at a conference, and Anne McGrath, who is now I think the NDP Federal Executive Director, she was one of the people who organized that conference. It was called *Women Looking Forward Conference*. I gave a talk there on women and free trade. So, I tried to target the audience, and it was on the Free Trade Agreement and privatization because that was one of the

concerns that CUPW itself was raising, but they wanted to also see what some of the broader links were or with other social groups.

Interviewer: Do you have any kind of memories of how people responded to your presentations? Or the people tended to kind of support your position? Did a lot of people show up to these meetings?

Bakker: Um, I don't remember that there was a great deal of kind of skepticism or pushback, if you like, I think people were just really first of all curious and then concerned about what the implications were because this really was kind of a moment where a lot of people realize, "Well, things are really going to change fundamentally from now on if we have this kind of agreement." Of course, then we had NAFTA, which again, changed the dimensions even further bringing in Mexico. But there were healthy audiences, as I recall for a lot of the talks and some of them were invitations to talk like at CUPW. So, it was kind of a self selection process.

Interviewer: Who did you remember as being some of the major players in kind of the campaign against free trade through that period?

Bakker: Well, I remember, you know, some of the public sector unions; they came on board fairly early. Then there were people who were critical political economists, some of them who had been, you know, in the Waffle in the early 70s, so people like Mel Watkins, Jim Laxer, Daniel Drache. Those were people that sort of quickly formed kind of a critical mass to try and work with both unions and other community groups. So, they became kind of a node if you like, for helping out in terms of trying to gather momentum against the agreement.

Interviewer: Which groups were NAC close with in working around these issues? I get a sense of the public sector unions, but were there other groups?

Bakker: I think it was because NAC itself was made up of so many different women's groups. You know, at its peak, it had over 700 groups that were members of NAC that we really did a lot of work with our own membership, because a lot of them had diverse interests and certainly represented diverse women. In that sense, we did a lot of work with them in particular, but I think CUPE, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, I remember them to some extent; the CLC, although they, again, I think came to this a little bit later because they represented a lot of different groups and there were different understandings. So, it was auto workers versus the steel workers, and they had different views on free trade.

Interviewer: What was the general mood of those that you were working with in opposing free trade? Were people hopeful? Were they fearful of what would happen?

Bakker: Probably all of those things, but what I do remember is everybody was really passionate about it. I don't know, there was just a lot of solidarity. There were a lot of people working really hard because they really believed in the cause of opposing this agreement and trying to get the message out as much as possible. There was lots of humor and just a lot of commitment, really sincere commitment.

Interviewer: In her article, Marjorie mentions the cultural side of it too, and that there were a lot of artists and performers that were concerned about this. There were cultural kind of reviews and cabarets and stuff, which sounds pretty interesting as well. Did you encounter any of that stuff in your own work?

Bakker: No, I didn't, no.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like, I mean, it was an exciting time in some ways in terms of galvanizing the left.

Bakker: I think there was, like I said, there was optimism that if people came together and really agitated then, you know, something would come out of it.

Interviewer: Could you talk a little bit about the connections with political parties during this time? Do you remember the connections maybe between NAC and different political parties? Do you remember, I think that one of the central things that came out of this was a free trade debate, right? That NAC helped to kind of organize around these kinds of issues. So, I was wondering if you could talk about that side of things?

Bakker: I don't think I really can. I don't really recall.

Interviewer: Okay, and in terms of the free trade campaign, I was wondering if you could talk about any of the successes of the movement of free trade? You know, obviously, the '88 election didn't go very well, but were there any kind of moments where you were able to achieve things that you thought were effective in pushing the debate forward?

Bakker: I'm not sure. I don't think I can answer that for you either.

Interviewer: Okay, well we can always return to that. Another kind of issue that comes up in the early free trade struggles is the role of nationalism. You know, there were a lot of people who were obviously kind of opposing free trade from a nationalist position. Then there were also other people that were more internationalists. I was wondering if you could speak to the role that nationalism played in motivating the work of organizations that you were involved in? Was there a strong nationalist kind of sentiment or people organizing through different kinds of imaginaries?

Bakker: No, I think at that time, at least my recollection is, that it was very nationalist. Part of that came out of that Waffle group that I just mentioned to you. There was very much a focus since that time, on the national question, of course in Quebec there was a focus on the national question simultaneously, in a much of a different way. So, I think that played a big role. It played a big role in people thinking that if there was more of an international, i.e., US influence, there would be an even greater influence on Canadian politics and public policy, then that would really tie future generations hands in terms of what they could bring to the table.

Interviewer: I was wondering also; you mentioned the summit as one of the kinds of key moments in the struggle. I was just wondering if you could speak a little bit more about that and what role it played in the struggle.

Bakker: I think it again, you know, I honestly don't remember that much about it. But what I thought was clever about it, was that it was done at the same time as the G7 Summit. It was dubbed as the alternative, *The Other Economic Summit of North America*. So, it was good at, I think, presenting to the public that there were alternative interpretations to the dominant political leadership of the G7. The fact that US activists came to it was important because it helped to build some solidarities with smaller groups in the US. So, in that sense, it took us a little bit out

of our nationalist lens and started to try and build links with groups in the US. That was not very successful with women's groups.

Interviewer: Hmm. That's really interesting. So, what American groups did you connect with?

Bakker: Oh, gosh, I could not tell you, honestly.

Interviewer: I think it's interesting how going from the 88 elections to NAFTA, I think that was 95, it seemed like the tenor of the movement kind of shifted from being more nationalist to more internationalist. There were more connections being made between activists in the United States and Mexico. So, it's an interesting area that we're interested in, you know, to what extent links were being made with American activists through this time and where.

Bakker: Well, from the women's movement perspective, I think that a lot of the American groups were not that interested in the Free Trade Agreement because, in a sense, they perceived the US, I guess, rightly as being in the driver's seat, whereas we, from a nationalist perspective, realize that it was us that we're going to – us as in Canada – that we're going to have a much bigger negative impact in terms of employment, in terms of service provision, in terms of choices about what kinds of national policies could be brought in.

So, I think I got the sense that the American feminists weren't that interested in it. It wasn't until NAFTA, when Mexico was brought into the picture, that they could start thinking about the employment impacts of such an agreement on things like the service sector in the US, where, of course, many, many women are employed.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what happened after the '88 elections? Did you continue? I mean, like, with your book and everything you were very active still around free trade issues. Did the NAC Employment Committee continue to focus on free trade after the 88 elections?

Bakker: Yeah, they focused on that, and they tried to, you know, broaden the economic focus. But as I recall, I probably, I think, stepped back from a lot of the NAC work at that time because I had just gotten a job at York, and it was hugely demanding. So, I ended up not having very much time for direct political activism, I still tried to continue to write critically and speak to different audiences but that's really when I started to develop my academic side and worked in gender and macroeconomics. That became my focus.

Interviewer: When did you get the York job?

Bakker: It was in 86, it was around the same time. But what happened was I was given more and more responsibilities at York, and I had to take on administrative things, so it became difficult whereas Marjorie was at a different stage in her career. She was at York at that time, and she was, you know, very well established, so had more flexibility whereas I was untenured and had to kind of jump through those academic hoops. So, that kind of diverted me from spending all my time doing work at NAC. So, the key years '86, '87, '88, I worked through NAC but after that my efforts there, they pretty much ended.

Interviewer: To think that the tenor of the free trade struggle shifted after the 88 elections. Could you speak a little bit about the 88 elections and their impact on the struggle?

Bakker: Well, I think that, obviously, it was disappointing to say the least. But I think that the focus on free trade dissipated somewhat as it became more of an issue-by-issue form of organizing. So, the different unions focused, women's groups would focus on issues they could see immediately relevant to them, so it kind of dissipated a national voice, I guess, in a way. Of course, NAC, with less and less funding, it became difficult for them to organize national conferences where we could meet and discuss with all the different groups.

Interviewer: Yeah, obviously, you know, as the government was cutting funding and everything seemed like it just made things that much harder.

Bakker: It did, as I said before, it really began to mark this kind of erasure of women's voices at that level, at the national level, and, as you say, the kind of underfunding began with the argument that it really wasn't necessary anymore; everything had been achieved or the governments were putting out gender neutral policies. So, instead of really focusing on if are they gender neutral, how do they affect different groups of women, different groups of men, it was just assumed that there was a kind of generic policy stamp to everything. That's why it took years for the federal government and the Department of Finance to actually be convinced to do a gender sensitive budget analysis, which they started to tentatively do and when the Liberals were first elected, in what was it? 2015? They're now pretty robust in terms of what they do, compared to most other Western countries at least.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Bakker: So that's all hard to get something like that established.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, absolutely. It's interesting also putting that into the timeline because it shows how it's part of these larger struggles, right?

Bakker: Yes. Of course, until the government was elected there was, again, there was not just on the part of governments but certainly also some of the Liberal governments. Just this notion that it wasn't relevant that for economics to deficit to taxation, so it was really just a consistent effort of different groups, different academics, to push this, waiting until there was some kind of political opening, which there was, and then there was really a lot of flurry of activity, which was, "how

Fragmentation of opposition after 1988 elections and the slow progress on gender analysis

The election loss led to a decline in unified national opposition to free trade, with activism fragmenting into issue-specific organizing by unions and women's groups. *"women's groups would focus on issues they could see immediately relevant to them, so it kind of dissipated a national voice... NAC, with less and less funding, it became difficult for them to organize national conferences where we could meet and discuss with all the different groups."*

It took years for the Canadian government and its institutions to adopt a gender-sensitive policy analysis, which would evaluate the distinct impacts on women and men. *"...when the Liberals were first elected, in what was it? 2015? They're now pretty robust in terms of what they do, compared to most other Western countries at least."*

do we do this?" That's partly what we learned, I think, from the free trade struggle was that nobody knew how to really do that very quick, critical analysis, but we just had to do it.

Interviewer: So, it sounds like there was a solid foundation of feminist political economists kind of going into the free trade struggle, but it also sounds like the free trade struggle itself provided an opportunity for people to congeal their analysis, right? So, it's interesting to see it.

Bakker: Yeah, no, you're right about that. I think that, you know, Canada was unique anyway. Well, I'll just speak for English Canada, that there was this critical tradition of political economy and from very early on, you had feminists who engaged with this tradition. The first article on domestic labour, I think, was actually written by Margaret Benston in 1969 in Monthly Review, a left US journal. She was a Canadian political economist. So, there was a tradition to build on from the 60s on. As I said, critical Canadian political economy, which very much did come out of the kind of nationalism and concern for having independence from the United States, became forged with elements of a women's movement. So very early on coming out of the English Canadian context, people like Marjorie, people like Meg Luxton, and many, many others dialogued and challenged the critical political economy tradition. They in turn, you know, taught the next generation.

> Pre-NAFTA, there was limited international solidarity between Canadian feminists and global feminist movements

Early efforts were mostly focused on the Canadian context, with limited connections to global movements. *"There wasn't that much international solidarity in that early stage... that became much more of a focus with NAFTA... as neoliberal globalization started to take hold, there were connections with women's groups and women academics in the Global South, places like South Africa, India, East Asia... those... that became more of the norm."*

Interviewer: I also appreciate how you mentioned the connections with the New School and the OECD because it sounds like there was pretty vibrant networks of feminist economists through the 80s. It's interesting to draw the international connections as well. Were there any feminist economists in other parts of the world that were opposing free trade?

Bakker: Um, I would say that there wasn't that much international solidarity in that early stage. I think that became much more of a focus in with NAFTA, for obvious reasons. Then again, as sort of neoliberal globalization started to take hold, there were connections with women's groups and women academics in the Global South, so places like South Africa, India, East Asia, those, you know, that became more of the norm, whereas before, I think it was a lot more isolated. We were really dealing with the Canadian context, the English Canadian context in particular.