

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Cohen, Larry (with Rechenbach, Jeff)

Interviewer: Debbie Goldman

Date of Interview: January 3, 2024

Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.

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Debbie [00:00:00] This is January 3rd, 2024. We're in Washington, DC in Larry Cohen's apartment. We are blessed to be sitting here with Larry Cohen and with Jeff Rechenbach. Hannah Goldman is also here as producer. This will be both an interview of Larry and a dialog between Larry and Jeff. They were elected in 2005 -- Larry as president of CWA and Jeff as secretary-treasurer -- and have been brothers together in building CWA during a period of many challenges.

Larry [00:00:37] And for 40 years.

Debbie [00:00:38] And for 40 years. I want to start, Larry, just very briefly -- since I know you don't like to talk about yourself -- tell us when you were born, where you were born, what community you were born in.

Larry [00:00:53] North Philadelphia, which does make a difference, in 1949, and grew up in a house owned by my great-grandmother, who was an Irish immigrant, Mary Francis. My mother, who was -- I'm not going into all these stories -- adopted, and my father and my grandmother and my mother's stepbrother. So five adults and me with one bathroom. I would call it middle-class. It was a rowhouse. Middle income, because they all worked. My great-grandmother had been a radical. She would call herself an anarchist. She was not exactly an Emma Goldman type. She was about 75 when I was born. She died when I was about six, but it was her house. Then it became my parents' house because her daughter died before she did. It's an unusual story because its five adults and one kid [in the household]. Eventually, we're not doing this story, my mother's stepbrother and his wife had two kids. They both died and the kids were adopted by my parents. But I was the only biological kid. So, there's a neighborhood where everybody's jammed in these row houses, but that's where your friends were, played all kinds of sports. I lived for that. Jeff is and was a much better athlete. I played everything. I was great at nothing. He [Jeff] was great at baseball and decent at other things. But that's what my kid life was about -- being outside and playing ball of some sort, depending on the season, and a lot of friends.

Debbie [00:03:16] What were the demographics? I know you've talked a lot about --

Larry [00:03:19] Well, they changed a lot.

Debbie [00:03:20] -- growing up in North Philadelphia in a rowhouse had a big impact on you.

Larry [00:03:26] Philadelphia had a big impact on me, good and bad. And again, to breeze through this part -- the beginning was, you're a kid and you're fine. The demographics were initially white working and lower middle class, but eventually, more black than white. My organizing life as a teenager began with police brutality. [Shows emotion] Even now, it's emotional to me. Fighting [Frank] Rizzo, who was the police commissioner and organizing against that as a white kid. Enough about that.

Debbie [00:04:16] No, actually, I know it's emotional, but this is new to me. Is it new to you, Jeff?

Larry [00:04:22] No.

Jeff [00:04:22] No.

Debbie [00:04:24] Could one of you just briefly tell us about this?

Larry [00:04:29] By the time I'm in high school, there's a movement, the civil rights movement, that even in high school -- and again, we're just going to hit the highlights, but -- after graduating high school, still being involved in that stuff, there's a demonstration that fall. This is the highlight of [what] Rizzo was like. He's the police commissioner. Most importantly, ends up leading the Democratic Party. The mayor, [James] Tate [mayor of Philadelphia, 1962-1972] -- and this had been a reform party in the [19]40s -- loved Rizzo. And so Rizzo built a political career out of being a racist cop. He was named police commissioner. Then in 1972 -- I'm jumping ahead -- gets elected mayor for two terms. He shaped my political consciousness in a negative way. There's positives, obviously, but in a negative way. In 1968, after I graduated high school, at a demonstration at the Board of Education with 3,000 kids -- more black than white -- he gets out of his car. He heard about the demonstration. It was totally peaceful. He brings 100 rookie cops on two busses. As they get out of the bus, he says, "Get their black asses." [Shows emotion] And beat the shit out of us. And killed a girl. [Pause] That's where we start.

Debbie [00:06:06] So your political consciousness came more from [fighting racism and police brutality] than from the anti-war movement of that period?

Larry [00:06:13] Yeah. We brought them together. By the way, the end of the story is good. In 1980 -- he's [Rizzo] been mayor eight years -- he tries to change the city charter so he can keep running. This is a violent electoral referendum situation. I lived in a different neighborhood in north Philadelphia with my two kids and wife who worked at the library down the street. The same racism -- and it was a mostly white working class neighborhood -- again, another rowhouse. People were afraid to vote. We won though. In my neighborhood -- I spent a whole day at the voting place because people were afraid to vote. [Shows emotion] It was violent, the voting. That's enough about all that.

Larry [00:07:09] But the war -- it wasn't just there, but in a lot of cities, there was a confluence of fighting racism and the war. For me -- I was arrested many times, by the way, in this period in my life, too many times to count, but never for anything except what I would call doing the right thing. That's not the way police saw it, but it bled into things like organizing against the draft because I saw it as racist and kids who went to college got a deferment. My father -- we briefly can talk about him for a minute -- seven years in the army in World War II. [He] went with me to the draft board and said, "I fought in World War II. I'd never fight in this war." I turned in my draft card at eighteen risking years in prison. We shut the draft board down eventually, all the members resigned -- that's mobilization. We did tactics. The [draft board] members were all volunteers -- they all resigned. Now, that was obviously symbolic because the draft didn't go away and the induction center was still there.

Debbie [00:08:28] Just to clarify, when you said five years in prison, did you --

Larry [00:08:40] The Supreme Court, in a bunch of cases, which I didn't even know about till recently. I didn't pay attention to any of this at the time. The Supreme Court, in a bunch of cases, said that the draft boards were operating as basically prosecutors and judge and jury and threw out a whole series of prosecutions. You probably remember the Vietnam Moratorium Committee.

Debbie [00:09:20] Yes.

Larry [00:09:21] At age -- probably twenty by that time -- I was a co-leader of that in Philadelphia with John Braxton. We'd organize high school students to turn out and the [draft] board members won't get in the door. I never got arrested there. So every time the draft board met, once a month, we had 100 kids and they couldn't get in. Even then [we had] the notion of conversion from the draft to counseling. We set up a table and we said, "We need a drug center in this building. "We need a drug center here, not a draft board. That's what this community needs." So that notion of conversion was there. But anyway, racism and Vietnam came together. I have a poster, I didn't bring [it] out. May 8th, 1970, which was a Friday. By then I'm twenty, [I] was the main leader of a demonstration where we shut every high school down. Students marched, five lines of march, to Independence Hall. At 12 noon we had 100,000 people there.

Debbie [00:10:52] This is in 1970.

Larry [00:10:53] May 8th.

Debbie [00:10:54] And you were twenty --

Larry [00:10:55] That was on racism, fighting Rizzo. Again an anecdote. The head of the Civil Disobedience squad, George Fencil, who knew me well -- he spied on me constantly -- came to me that day and said, "Larry, I want you to know." You have to imagine, kids -- nineteen, twenty -- running this stuff. He comes to me and says, "The boss [Rizzo] wanted me to line those five lines of march with cops with billy clubs."

Debbie [00:11:51] We're now talking about [19]69 or [19]70?

Larry [00:11:53] I went back to [19]68. But back to [19]70 -- May 8th, a Friday at 12 noon, 100,000 people at Independence Hall, more than half high school kids. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the next day 10% attendance [in Philadelphia high schools].

Debbie [00:12:10] So this was --

Larry [00:12:11] You talk about mass activity and strikes. We said ahead [of time], "No elected officials." They all wanted to speak when they saw 100,000 people show up. Remember that the referendum in 1980, where we won, despite the kind of violence [I mentioned] in my neighborhood. So the fight against Rizzo had a happy ending in that he couldn't change the charter. And the final ending is, two years ago, his gigantic statue in front of City Hall was removed.

Debbie [00:13:11] Just to clarify a couple of things --

Larry [00:13:13] So that's my roots. Then I went to work in the public sector for six years and that's what led to the on-the-job organizing.

Debbie [00:13:20] We'll get to that in just a second. In 1970, May 8th, when you did that march in Philadelphia, that's when the big national demonstration was here in Washington, DC?

Larry [00:13:31] No. That was not the same time.

Debbie [00:13:32] But you called it the moratorium in Philly?

Larry [00:13:35] Yes. First there was the moratorium, nationally, but city-based and the next year was the Vietnam mobilization. That's different. [Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam was in 1969.]

Debbie [00:13:40] And that's what you did. You were telling us about the --

Larry [00:13:43] The moratorium is where Braxton and I were the co-chairs at age like, nineteen.

Debbie [00:13:47] Here in --

Larry [00:13:48] Philadelphia.

Debbie [00:13:49] In Philadelphia.

Larry [00:13:50] Only in Philadelphia, coordinated with cities across the country.

Debbie [00:13:51] Okay.

Larry [00:14:03] Because to this day -- I don't want to get into the details of this -- I had this sense that you build a popular movement and you fill it up with the people that are in the movement. You don't have it filled up ahead of time. And so even NAM [New American Movement] which, you know, your mother-in-law was a leader of, which --

Debbie [00:14:21] And my ex-husband.

Larry [00:14:22] What's that?

Debbie [00:14:23] My ex-husband.

Larry [00:14:25] Well, but also your ex-mother-in-law -- [Dorothy] Healey was a leader of NAM, right?

Debbie [00:14:28] Yeah, but Richard Healey was a key leader of NAM.

Larry [00:14:33] Okay, but I was always fascinated by her.

Debbie [00:14:36] Yes.

Larry [00:14:36] You know, we're not getting into her history. You could do that without me.

Debbie [00:14:39] Right.

Larry [00:14:40] To me, she had a fascinating history. I didn't know her, except minimally. But her relationship with you, I thought was amazing.

Debbie [00:14:48] Yes.

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Larry [00:14:49] And helping build the house and living there and all that.

Debbie [00:14:52] But what happened in 1970 that led to the mass protests then?

Larry [00:14:56] [19]70 was the National Guard killing students at Kent State [and Jackson State].

Jeff [00:15:00] For context, the day before four students at Kent State were murdered by the Ohio National Guard.

Larry [00:15:06] It was a couple days before -- was it [May] 4th?

Jeff [00:15:08] The day before. [The Kent State killings were on May 4, 1970.]

Larry [00:15:09] Then our demonstration at Independence Hall and the student strike was May 8th, not May 5th.

Jeff [00:15:13] I had been there that weekend, demonstrating at Kent State. I was in high school. We went up there for the weekend, just camped out, held demonstrations. They burned down the National Guard barracks, or the ROTC barracks rather, on campus, which we, to this day, believe the ROTC did it because it was a shitty barracks and gave them an excuse to get a new barracks. But they blamed it all on us, on the demonstrators.

Larry [00:15:47] There we go. That's a link we didn't know we had. But anyway, that triggered -- and we had built this massive organization. Obviously, you don't strike every high school in Philadelphia because of Kent State or Jackson State. Jackson State was nearly all black. They literally shot out the windows in the dormitories and killed kids. [Two students were killed at Jackson State by police on May 15, 1970.] So we were prepared for that kind of strike activity.

Debbie [00:16:14] Okay. That clarified this. Thank you.

Larry [00:16:16] No other city had that kind of 100,000 people at 12 noon and shut down the high schools.

Debbie [00:16:21] I just wanted to clarify for this. That was Jeff Rechenbach who was jumping in. So now we know his voice.

Larry [00:16:29] Yes. Our lives are linked, but now we have another link.

Jeff [00:16:30] Right.

Larry [00:16:31] But to me, the racism came first. Again, building popular, grassroots, broad, not sectarian, meaning not deep, but broad. That's a key thing to me. For my whole life -- and in the last ten years, my friends in Argentina -- which you're not going to want to get into -- but I learned from them. They had decades of fighting fascism and using those strategies. The book *On Populist Reason* which was written by Ernesto Laclau, an academic in Argentina. I only read it five years ago, [but it's a good summary of this strategy for popular movement building from the bottom up.] They've just lost to fascism again.

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Debbie [00:17:40] Okay, let's go back. Just a couple more questions about your family. What did your father do?

Larry [00:17:47] He did many things -- started out as a baker, seven years in the army. He stayed in after the war. Ended up an officer. And then, eventually, accounting and financial planning.

Debbie [00:17:59] Okay.

Larry [00:18:00] My mother worked -- in some ways, more relevant, she was adopted and then as an adult committed herself to kids who had no families. She worked in a childcare agency, eventually leading what she called networking, building a whole network around kids who had no families, similar to what Boys Clubs might do.

Debbie [00:18:27] What elementary school and high school did you go to?

Larry [00:18:33] How is that relevant?

Debbie [00:18:34] It might be.

Larry [00:18:37] It's not relevant.

Debbie [00:18:37] Okay.

Larry [00:18:38] I mean, I could go into all that stuff.

Debbie [00:18:39] I just want the names. You don't have to give any more detail.

Larry [00:18:43] K-8 school in that neighborhood in Philadelphia. And then, my family moved eventually -- Cheltenham High School.

Debbie [00:18:54] After you graduated from high school did you stay in the Philly area?

Larry [00:18:59] Yes, but I had a global perspective in part from working on two freighters in the engine room, Norwegian freighters, after high school, and came back and forth. It was two different ships. But, that was a year in which Europe was on fire. I was in a number of those cities when students and workers -- like in the port of Marseilles, the port was shut down, mostly by workers in that case. Our ship was not unloaded. I could go on and on about that, but we'll skip it.

Debbie [00:19:38] But I do remember that you played some kind of musical instrument.

Larry [00:19:42] On the ship, I was depressed, initially -- I was telling Jeff earlier -- seasick for a week. That was a period where I'm at the bottom of the barrel, literally, working in the engine room as an oiler, which some of it was a Jack London fantasy thing of adventure. The ship started out in -- it was not in Philly. I had to go to New York to get on the ship. It was a Mediterranean line with Norwegian officers. But I was sick and depressed. I worked in the engine room. It's not like, oh, you're seasick -- you don't have to work. No. The engine room was really, in a different way, a violent place. The chief engineer was literally an ex-Nazi officer. The ship was old. I wasn't clinically depressed, but that's how I learned to play the harmonica. I brought a harmonica with me,

and I would sleep on the top deck. The sleeping quarters that I had were impossible to me. Other people got used to it. So I would sleep on the top deck and I figured out how to bend notes and that's all you really need to learn. Later there were times where I would -- not a lie -- basically be busking with the harmonica somewhere in the world and getting donations. Playing the blues, because if you can bend notes and if you have the right kind of mentality, you can play the blues and even be white.

Debbie [00:21:39] Sounds fun. Okay. So after the freighter, you came back to Philly.

Larry [00:21:45] I never left Philly.

Debbie [00:21:48] Right. And you never went to college?

Larry [00:21:52] No, I did go to college, in fits and starts. Eventually graduated college and got a master's degree from Rutgers while I worked full-time.

Debbie [00:22:00] Okay.

Larry [00:22:00] And even got a master's degree.

Debbie [00:22:03] Do you want to tell us about that?

Larry [00:22:06] No.

Debbie [00:22:06] Okay.

Larry [00:22:07] There's nothing --

Debbie [00:22:07] I want to ask --

Larry [00:22:09] I worked full-time the whole time, basically, initially shit jobs and then not so shit. But that's what got me to the state hospital, the Fort Dix stockade, which was a state program. That's the roots of the State Workers Organizing Committee for me.

Debbie [00:22:25] We're just about to jump into that. One last question. Larry, do you consider yourself Jewish?

Larry [00:22:31] Yes in many ways. For my father being Jewish and helping others from that framework was important.

Debbie [00:22:37] What does that mean to you and what kind of Jewish background?

Larry [00:22:40] I don't want to go into all that. What good is that going to be here?

Debbie [00:22:43] I think it says something about values. Or it may not.

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Larry [00:22:48] Well, for you and me, it might. And a few other people. Not in general. You know, for me, later in life, adopting the prophetic tradition kind of notion, not necessarily a theological position. But it means a fair amount to me -- not in an organized way.

Debbie [00:23:25] Jeff, do you have any other questions before we jump into --

Jeff [00:23:28] No. Let's get into the New Jersey state workers.

Debbie [00:23:34] Maybe you can start asking questions. Or you want me to keep asking?

Jeff [00:23:36] Go ahead. You're doing great.

Debbie [00:23:41] Start talking about the New Jersey State Workers campaign.

Larry [00:23:44] Yeah. So it wasn't CWA for years. I had six years working in the public sector. I got fired a few times. But again, we can skip that.

Debbie [00:23:58] Public sector means New Jersey state --

Larry [00:24:00] New Jersey and Philadelphia. I was back and forth because the part of Philadelphia that I lived in then -- now we're in the mid-[19]70s -- it was around the Delaware River. One side of the bridge is Philadelphia. The other side is New Jersey. I lived in Philadelphia, but worked in New Jersey.

Debbie [00:24:21] For the state.

Larry [00:24:23] It was a bunch of public sector jobs. Yeah, ultimately the state, but it was mental health and corrections, although the corrections stuff I did was in the stockade at Fort Dix. They didn't call -- we did call it that. It was a military prison, but the state had a program in there.

Debbie [00:24:44] And did you take the --

Larry [00:24:45] But that was part of the roots of the State Workers Organizing Committee. I believed at that point, in that period, that public workers -- and not just manufacturing workers -- needed to organize. I got \$2 an hour at the state hospital, which was shit pay even then. And it was a semi-violent job also, because I was in the adolescent unit. Some of the kids were violent. I was only a few years older than them and they looked at it that way. I always believed in union organizing. My family believed in that -- not necessarily organizing, but supportive. So for me and many others -- so the State Workers Organizing Committee, [was a broad based effort to build a union and change our economic situation and our lives at work.]

Larry [00:26:28] A lot of people I knew did join NAM [New American Movement]. But [when I mention opposing sectarian organizations,] I'm talking about a wide variety of organizations, like Weatherman, LaRouche, and many others.

Larry [00:27:27] Because that was going on all over the country then in 1970, [and years after].

Jeff [00:27:32] [19]70. Yes.

Larry [00:27:32] Yeah. So I'm just saying, I was against what I call sectarianism.

Debbie [00:27:38] And just to clarify again --

Larry [00:27:40] The State Workers Organizing Committee -- let's come back to that.

Debbie [00:27:43] -- you went into public jobs because you believed --

Larry [00:27:46] Because I needed a job and I liked the jobs. That was the only reason. Secondarily, I believed everybody should organize a union.

Debbie [00:27:54] Where did your union values come from?

Larry [00:27:57] Oh, those neighborhoods were filled with union people.

Debbie [00:28:16] Okay. So continue with --

Larry A lot of the roots of SWOC, which we called it deliberately. In the [19]30s you had Steelworkers Organizing Committee, so deliberately we called it the State Workers Organizing Committee. Trenton was connected to one of the biggest steel plants in the country, US Steel Fairless Works. Trenton was a manufacturing city. On the railroad you see the sign on the neighboring bridge: "Trenton Makes, The World Takes." Well, it's all shut down, thanks to NAFTA [North America Free Trade Agreement, 1994] and trade policy before that. A lot of the work was hard and the pay was awful. But to me, I loved that work.

Debbie [00:29:20] What did you love about the work?

Larry [00:29:23] Well, because I believed that change was possible. Even in the state hospital adolescent unit, a lot of the reasons those kids were in there -- and that was like being in prison, literally -- was because of the environment in the United States, broadly speaking. We organized patients and their families to shut down involuntary shock treatment. I got fired for that. We refused to work demanding management eliminate involuntary shock treatment. That failed. But then we started demonstrating -- this goes back to the draft board tactic -- at the psychiatrists' homes.

Debbie [00:30:10] Larry, I think this says a lot about you. So I'm just going to press.

Larry [00:30:14] Yeah.

Debbie [00:30:17] Your answer to why you loved it was because you thought --

Larry [00:30:21] The kids. And that we could change mental health in America.

Debbie [00:30:25] It was more the big picture and not --

Larry [00:30:29] No. They're not any different.

Debbie [00:30:30] And the individuals as well, helping the kids?

Larry [00:30:34] No. It starts from the kids. I had to work with them every day. I knew them well and spent a lot of time with them, besides work, and their parents. And you know, I'm only a few years older. Remember, some are seventeen, eighteen year-olds. I'm like, twenty, twenty-one. They treated me that way, including the first day trying to beat the shit out of me. Two of them jumped me. They were totally rebellious. But, in that environment -- and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* had [already been published]. We were all well aware that we weren't the only ones fighting involuntary shock treatment, but the mobilization tactics -- number one, we started a newspaper called *The Low Lifes* written by the patients, and distributed it and organized many of the parents. In the draft board story, we went to every one of their houses and where they worked, depending on where they worked, demonstrating against what they were doing -- not so much against them, the draft board members. One guy worked for the Post Office, another owned a motel, another worked in a hardware store.

Debbie [00:31:44] Is this where you developed and continued your organizing tactics?

Larry [00:31:51] Yeah. Well, I was learning them, and also reading about other people doing similar things. But the idea is that you figure out creative resistance. At one point, in CWA we called it creative persistent resistance, CPR. Back to the State Hospital. To us, psychiatrists were the root of the problem. It wasn't just them, but this notion of involuntary shock treatment, which meant that without any permission, including from the parents, kids would be shocked till they passed out and put on Thorazine to control them. They cared about controlling their behavior. One kid who I worked with, faced with that kind of situation, jumped out the window and killed himself. He had a lot of problems but he was not violent. A lot of them were, but he was not violent. And that helped spark this. But we went to the psychiatrists' houses and demonstrated and eventually I got fired. But eventually, after I was gone, the involuntary shock treatment was dropped. In the stockade at Fort Dix, which was this state program there -- it was called an education program -- we organized the inmates. The guards had no idea what we were doing. There were riots. Eventually, I lost my job. But the State Workers Organizing Committee grew out of a lot of people doing things like that, but then linking it to the shit pay and very high inflation. We had slogans like "5% won't pay the rent." You had 14% inflation and 5% pay increases.

Debbie [00:33:30] How did you build the State Workers Organizing Committee? And then the decision to connect with CWA. Jeff, join in as you want.

Larry [00:33:44] I'll try to make this brief.

Debbie [00:33:46] We're now in the 1980s?

Larry [00:33:48] Yeah, the early [19]80s now in terms of the organized SWOC. No, not the [19]80s. This is the [19]70s, sorry. This is the early [19]70s.

Debbie [00:33:57] And is this before --

Larry [00:34:01] 1981, we win elections with two other unions on the ballot, the state [was] neutral. Just to go to the end of this. AFSCME [American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees] and AFT [American Federation of Teachers] -- SEIU was not involved -- were affiliating two associations, and us building from the bottom, and winning giant representation

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elections for 40,000 people -- and by then, affiliated with CWA for a bunch of reasons, and some resources -- not compared to the other two -- from CWA -- and we won all four [units] for about 38,000 people. We still called it SWOC. After we win, in the CWA world, eight local unions are formed and that's when I end up on the staff, etc. Probably a mistake. I should have stayed in one of the locals.

Debbie [00:34:54] No, it wasn't a mistake. New Jersey passed --

Larry [00:35:00] But that took ten years.

Debbie [00:35:00] Okay.

Larry [00:35:00] It was about ten years of organizing including bargaining the first contracts. [00:35:08 [0.0s] All the good organizing that I did -- I shouldn't say all the good, but most of it -- it's never quick. Even in the *Organizing Basics* [CWA publication]-- my favorite page -- I wrote a lot of this. I could dig out the exact words. "How long? As long as it takes. How long? As long as the committee -- well, this is stage two, the committee -- as long as the committee will be organizing inside, we'll be supporting them outside. No time limits." That came out of not just my own experience but my belief that as long as people on the inside -- this is inside-outside -- will organize and carry on the organizing activity, the least we could do is stick with them.

Debbie [00:35:56] We, meaning the union.

Larry [00:35:58] Yeah. By that time, the union. But, in any case, the people on the organizing will stick with it -- those organized and support on the outside -- it's not a hardship.

Debbie [00:36:10] So talk about the Committee of the -- I forget the number.

Larry [00:36:13] So we build it to a Thousand. Did you find the pin?

Jeff [00:36:16] Yes.

Larry [00:36:17] Where is it?

Jeff [00:36:19] Covered it up.

Larry [00:36:20] Yeah. [Takes a pin] This one. This didn't exist till CWA but this notion of Committee of a Thousand, we were very serious about.

Debbie [00:36:34] Can you read the pin out loud?

Larry [00:36:37] Yeah, if I can see it. "Every worker a member, Committee of a Thousand, CWA." This is [19]86. This was already a formal thing by [19]81. But that's a nice-looking pin, which as you can tell, part of my thing in CWA was nice-looking pins. There's whole series of them here.

Debbie [00:36:57] Why?

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Larry [00:36:59] Because pins like this, people would wear all the time. And pins like this [holds up another pint] -- They're sort of ugly, and they're not going to wear them for long. But there's a whole bunch of pins in this box. This was a Quebec local that left CWA eventually. But this is their pin, which I love. And this is the movement pointing to the individual. So it looks like a human. But actually the arrow is key. We have other pins with arrows. Anyway, I have a whole box of these kinds of pins. [leafing through his box of pins]

Debbie [00:37:33] Okay. I think you've explained why you like pins.

Larry [00:37:36] But I like enamel pins. This is one near the end of my time, CWA mobilization pin. There's a lot of those. And even now, Claude gave me this pin when I met with him in the summer at --

Debbie [00:37:53] Claude Cummings, the new CWA president.

Larry [00:37:56] This is not your typical kind of union pin. So if you get this pin, you might wear it day after day. But that notion of design a pin with people that they like and that they'll wear. So the Sprint Employees Network, which you probably were supportive of -- meaning your work every day -- that pin is beautiful. That's in here. I'd have to find it. And that's a beautiful pin. At least one person replaced their earring with the pin.

Debbie [00:38:22] Okay, we get it. It's a way to build solidarity.

Larry [00:38:26] But beauty.

Debbie [00:38:27] And beauty.

Larry [00:38:28] Yeah. Another theme for me, which we probably won't get into, is the relationship -- you can see it around this apartment -- of art and also music and even these pins and design and things like this -- long before we had memes -- that would sort of bring people together and tell a story. Obviously that's an old thing. But that was something that I embraced.

Debbie [00:39:00] Okay. I think we were on the Committee of a Thousand.

Larry [00:39:04] SWOC took ten years. But at our best, what we learned -- not initially -- is charting. In the early days of CWA organizing when I became [national] director of organization, we had these giant wall charts. There was no effective organizing committee, whether it was twenty people or US Airways' 10,000, unless every workplace was charted out with every name.

Debbie [00:39:26] Can you describe charting, and when we're off mic --

Larry [00:39:30] I didn't keep one of those charts, sadly.

Debbie [00:39:31] Well, I will tell you then. I went through Danny Fetonte's [CWA Texas State Employees' Union and then District 6 organizing director] room to prepare it to give to the University of Texas at Arlington's archives. I think that he had saved at least a hundred charts.

Larry [00:39:55] Oh, there you go. So you'll have a picture of that.

Debbie [00:39:57] The question was, from his wife, Barbara, "How many of these will they want?" I said, "Enough so that people understand that this is the essence of an organizer."

Larry [00:40:09] Yeah. He's somebody who did it at the national level and was a district organizing coordinator.

Debbie [00:40:15] Danny Fetonte.

Larry [00:40:16] Yeah. But it's a funny story for him because by the mid [19]80s, early [19]80s, we had these clunky computers and very early -- what do we call that type of software? Not membership. Database software, but clunky. These things were not laptops. They were clunky. And I was big on every full-time organizer in CWA is going to use one of these. He was anti-tech and we would have huge fights over it. [Debbie laughs] And for him it was the wall chart. I was a proselytizer and designed the initial wall chart. So it's not like I hated wall charts. But they're not efficient. You're not going to just drag -- especially in larger things we did like the AT&T wireless organizing -- you're not going to chart out tens of thousands of people.

Debbie [00:41:08] Can you explain charting?

Larry [00:41:09] But to go back to New Jersey -- so charting and lists. I'm a fanatic about lists with every person. Eventually we're talking about 30,000 people and within a six-month period we had to collect and file something like 12,000 [cards], more than 30% of 38,000. So we had a cushion -- not a big cushion in that case, but you only had six months or they were timed out. And New Jersey had no effective bargaining law initially when I was working there. By this time they have a bargaining law and that's what led to these elections all over the country, in the states that had public sector [collective bargaining] laws. Before that, in New Jersey there were two associations. And as I said, part of the story of the other unions was the affiliation instead of the grassroots bottom up. If I was ideological about anything personally, it was bottom up, not top down. Now, at some point, I began to believe in both. But I probably had teenage kids by then. I hated top down, absolutely believed in bottom up. And leaders would develop, shop stewards developing from organizing committee members, Committee of a Thousand. They weren't all stewards, but they were organizers and mobilizers. So the key to being Committee of a Thousand or CWA Organizing Committee -- and that's the *Organizing Basics*, the second CWA organizing manual, is the committee, and the key to being on a committee is that you will keep track of ten to twenty workers. Why? Because you're not going to be able to really interface with more than twenty. Together, our number one activity in stage one, which is contacts, is mapping. Mapping leads to charting, and charting is where we have these big charts, and you could look at the number that's on there because I don't remember, but let's assume fifty names on a chart going down and then smaller columns going across. Then you would label each column what it was, what you were charting -- did they do X, did they do Y -- a whole series of activities. You would rate them and we only used 1 to 3 deliberately. All the unions, to the extent that they did anything, it was 1 to 5. To me that was bullshit because 1 to 3 was solely behavior.

Debbie [00:43:45] What is one? What is two? What is three?

Larry [00:43:48] One means they actively supported the union. You could see it in their behavior. I was a behaviorist. I learned to be a behaviorist working, very young, in a state hospital. I didn't

know what behaviorism was. I learned what B.F. Skinner was. Again, the ideological left thought Skinnerism was bullshit, right? Because it came from a different place. But to me? Teach people positive reinforcement and give it to them. Get rid of shock treatment, get rid of Thorazine -- not totally get rid of all drugs necessarily, but -- positive reinforcement, that's how Hailey is so great.

Debbie [00:44:28] Hailey is your dog.

Larry [00:44:28] Yeah. I would argue that's why my kids are great. There was some negative, but virtually none.

Debbie [00:44:37] So what was 1? What was 2? What was 3?

Larry [00:44:41] Depending on the campaign, but on the chart, [we tracked] their behavior. Let's say at the minimum, they were public about supporting the union, not just signing -- we're talking now private sector, you know, not a neutral employer.

Debbie [00:44:59] So 1 was support.

Larry [00:45:01] But active. You could see their behavior.

Debbie [00:45:02] You wore a pin --

Larry [00:45:04] My great-grandmother said, "I'll watch your feet, not your mouth." To this day, that's what I believe in. I don't give a shit what people say. It's what they do. Especially -- I say this to electeds all the time, including Obama the last time I saw him, when he was still president, on the TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement]. It's what you do! And all of you believe -- particularly [David] Axelrod [Obama political advisor] and the people around him -- it's the exact opposite. It's only what you say.

Debbie [00:45:29] Okay, so that's 1.

Larry [00:45:31] They get rated a 1 if they engage in the behavior that we're doing. Number 3 was the people who are against and number 2 is everybody else. So the point of that -- versus a 1 to 5 -- was that anyone could do that rating. Right. Anyone. That became ritualized in some way in my world and CWA, starting in the mid [19]80s. Enforcing this kind of approach -- but it's a very bottom up approach, even though it's a ritual of its own in some ways. But the 1 to 3, when every other union did 1 to 5 -- "Oh, this one's leaning this way and this one's leaning that way." "Yeah? Well, how do you know?" "Oh, by what they say." "Really? You care about what they say? I don't give a flying fuck what they say." And that goes back to literally her [my great-grandmother] and being raised on what she said. This is what I told Obama -- I literally quoted her, "Everybody in this house can talk. Five adults and me." So she's talking to me as a five-year old. "Everybody in this house -- I'll watch your feet, what you're doing. I don't care what you say." I said that to Obama the last time I saw him, one on one, in his office. I'm no longer president of the union. I'm helping to lead the fight against the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He gives me a thirty-minute lecture about Vietnam and China and why we need the TPP. I had to just sit and listen. You know what I'm like. I don't like doing that. [Debbie laughs] At the end, I said, "I just want to quote my great-grandmother. And I still love you a lot." As you know, we split the union. [Barbara] Easterling [CWA secretary-treasurer, 1992-2008] supported Clinton and I supported Obama. The union was split in [20]07, and

it started at the CWA legislative conference, where we bring them both to speak. We're supposed to be neutral. She introduces Hillary [Clinton] and announces for her. And so then I introduced Obama and more than paid her back.

Debbie [00:47:21] Who is "she?"

Larry [00:47:22] Barbara Easterling, secretary-treasurer at the time. My first secretary-treasurer. When I ran for president in [20]05, it was with her. She was the incumbent, for God knows how long. And when did she get elected? Do you remember?

Jeff [00:47:49] Oh, gosh. No. I mean, she'd been around awhile already at that point.

Larry [00:47:55] Yeah. She had been EVP [executive vice-president, 1985-1992]. Anyway, we made an agreement. The two of us and the board will stay neutral. The members can go the way they want. In the introduction [she] announces for Clinton. So, I'm a pretty fast thinker. I decided, well, I won't just introduce him. I'm going to say to the people, "Well, you heard that. We weren't going to be talking about our opinions, but now that Barbara did -- and that's fine." Because I wasn't there to pick a fight with her. "I support Barack. I'm pleased to introduce him." I gave a funny introduction about him and we had a big hug because he had no idea that I was going to do that. There were other unions that did endorse -- [Dog barks] Hailey [the dog], you don't need to go out.

Debbie [00:48:50] Barbara became secretary-treasurer in 1992. We just checked.

Larry [00:48:57] Okay, so this is thirteen years later. She didn't hate me personally but she didn't like my leadership. And he [Jeff] can elaborate on that a lot better than me. She didn't want me in any of these positions. Anyway, we made our own peace and I liked her. You know, she's still alive. I could tell great stories about her but this was not one of them.

Debbie [00:49:19] Okay, let's go back. I think we're almost at the end of the State Workers --

Larry [00:49:26] So the SWOC thing --

Debbie [00:49:27] What I want to ask -- why did you go with CWA?

Larry [00:49:57] I actually have a copy of it somewhere. We had a flyer and it had a caricature. Jerry [Jerome] Wurf was the president of AFSCME [1964-1981] and his brother, Al -- talk about nepotism -- was the quote, leader in New Jersey. We don't need to get into how did he get to be that, and everything else. Let's just say it's not about democracy. Jerry would be viewed, even in that NAM circle, New American Movement, as progressive. Not to me as a worker and not to my colleagues, brothers and sisters, as we would have said then, siblings, but we didn't say that then. AFSCME did organize one unit of state workers before -- we were not involved. SWOC existed -- but anyway, it was uncontested. Al Wurf played tennis with the Democratic governor of New Jersey, who we hated. So again, my political orientation [is to fight to change the party] -- Frank Rizzo, thanks to the Honorable James Tate as he called himself even after he was mayor [1962-1972] -- Rizzo became the leader of the Democratic Party. I gave this lecture, literally, to the full DNC [Democratic National Committee] over and over again when we fought to get superdelegates out in the party reform stuff. This is after I left as president of the union. They would have to listen, including Mayor [Michael] Nutter -- who's black and who was the mayor in recent

years of Philadelphia [2008-2016]-- about why any old blue just won't do. 500 people are in the room. And I say, "Mayor Nutter, you know this story full well, that Mayor Tate literally anointed Rizzo as police commissioner who was beating the shit out of people, mostly black, and then paved the way for him to take over leadership of the Democratic Party with this demonstration in his past, 'Get their black asses,' and beat the shit out of us." [Any old blue, just won't do.]

Debbie [00:51:56] Let's go back to why you didn't want AFSCME.

Larry [00:51:59] Now we're in New Jersey and the leader of AFSCME, Al Wurf, whose brother is the president [of AFSCME] and viewed as a liberal, would have supported McGovern in [19]72 -- so did CWA, but virtually no unions did. They supported Nixon or nobody. Wurf was the darling of the left. This is why I don't like the left, per se. Because it's all symbolic, top down. It's bullshit. Al Wurf literally played tennis with the governor. We're getting shit pay and living through the day-to-day work experiences that the activists, at least, lived through. And the shit pay for everybody. We organized. So the idea that AFSCME was going to come in top down, figure out in their own way, in a very different organizing style, how to file these petitions. So we were the ones who filed first. They did intervene, you only need 10%. You need 30% to trigger.

Debbie [00:53:02] So what was the positive about CWA?

Larry [00:53:05] The positive about CWA was that the CWA leadership in the district was willing to accept this style. Morty Bahr and Jan Pierce -- Morty was the elected district VP and a wonderful supporter. But a lot of this was not their world either. New Jersey's small at that point. New York is the dominant thing [in CWA District 1]. On the telephone side, New Jersey only has the operators. They were amazing. It could bring tears to my eyes, the individual operators who supported us. [CWA also had the service representatives at New Jersey Bell.]

Debbie [00:53:49] But there was AT&T in New Jersey.

Larry [00:53:52] The New Jersey Bell. Yeah. Nobody called it AT&T.

Debbie [00:53:55] No, I mean the [AT&T] Long Lines were in New Jersey, the headquarters. [Correction, at that time AT&T headquarters were in New York City.]

Larry [00:54:01] But that was small. But that's where Clara Allen, who was the Jersey director -- she's a whole other story and her connection to this.

Debbie [00:54:08] Okay. And back to Jan Pierce. He was the assistant to Morty Bahr, who eventually became vice-president of District 1. So Marty was supportive, you're saying?

Larry [00:54:21] Yeah, mostly not involved. And we were raucous. I mean, it wouldn't have been easy for them. They were totally supportive that we were totally independent -- and even [Glenn] Watts [CWA president, 1974-1985] was definitely an ally of what we were doing. There was a whole thing going on in New Jersey -- what if we win? We're going to have 38,000 of these people. We were organized a lot more by then. So while we built SWOC -- and then when we were organizing not state workers, other people --

Debbie [00:54:53] Meaning county and municipal --

Larry [00:54:55] Yeah. County and some private sector people in their own independent ways.

Debbie [00:54:59] And Glenn Watts was the president of the national union at that point?

Larry [00:55:02] Right. Yeah. Barely new president, initially. By the time we affiliated, he was president for five years by then. When I say "affiliated" -- it was informal.

Debbie [00:55:16] There was no affiliation agreement?

Larry [00:55:18] No, because we were an organizing committee. We didn't represent anyone. We had a lot of supporters organized in a structured way, but we didn't represent anyone. That wasn't even our framework initially. It was more of, in its own weird way -- anyway, I don't want to get into that. I'll get off the track here. But, the main reason we came to CWA -- there's two reasons, the positive and the negative. The negative -- it was AFSCME. We actually had a caricature of Wurf. I don't remember the picture, but I know the headlines. "They have one lobbyist. We have thousands." The picture was probably us in front of the State House demonstrating. That was top down unionism and we totally rejected it. Now, after we win, there's tension in CWA about that model, even in District 1. Watts was amazing, is all I could say. Because even in that conflict -- and I'm not getting into it -- but the conflict that we had politically with Jan and Morty -- something that was probably Watts's own, the Jimmy Carter stuff. District 1 supported Kennedy in 1980. This is now 1981. Glenn Watts and the union supported Carter. You could only imagine that. I mean, it was overt. Morty had events at his house. The choice between those two, for sure -- personally, I would have been totally sympathetic to it, but I'm just saying that was in the background. Then we have this conflict about bottom up. We're bargaining this contract. We had 100 people in the first bargaining committee. By that time, I'm on the staff and I chair the committee. But the notion that you're going to have 100 people, elected people, 100 people bargaining these contracts? They were in the room together because even though there were separate bargaining units, we forced the state [to agree] that we're going to be in one room or else you're going to have a circus here. But that was not the way of CWA. Were you involved in bargaining by then?

Jeff [00:57:23] Oh, sure.

Larry [00:57:24] 1981?

Jeff [00:57:26] Yes. My first bargaining committee was [19]74.

Debbie [00:57:31] For Ohio Bell?

Jeff [00:57:32] For Ohio Bell.

Larry [00:57:33] Yeah. So you know what I'm talking about. Plus, you had Marty Hughes [vice-president of District 4] -- talk about top down.

Jeff [00:57:37] [Laughs] Right. Exactly.

Larry [00:57:38] And I like Marty Hughes. Don't get me wrong. So we're not getting into that this minute. But in the scheme of American labor, at that time, I would have put him way up there

despite what eventually took him out. But put that aside. But this idea that we're going to have 100 people, elected people, and we had arguments over it

Debbie [00:58:10] Why was Watts wonderful?

Larry [00:58:12] He was very supportive of [us] -- and I think it was mostly genuine. Did you know him?

Jeff [00:58:17] Oh, sure.

Larry [00:58:18] Yeah. So he was -- even though -- I wasn't looking to be anything. Right. It was always -- I get my joy, and this is true -- I like leading in a certain kind of way, but I always got my joy from large numbers of people, going back to that -- even in the Rizzo thing where we went in jail together. May 8th -- now I know the right date thanks to Jeff -- of 1970. You can't describe the joy of seeing 100,000 people there and no violence and Rizzo doesn't get the police to attack. So the joy comes from the friends --

Debbie [00:59:01] So finish the statement. Watts was wonderful because he supported --

Larry [00:59:08] Well, I don't want to get into his own head but he consistently supported me personally --

Debbie [00:59:14] Okay.

Larry [00:59:15] -- even when I had some conflict because of our notion of political action particularly, but also the bargaining. Our bargaining went on forever.

Debbie [00:59:25] Okay, let's finish one thing. You said the reason you chose CWA -- you've given a lot of the negatives. What was the positive?

Larry [00:59:35] Positive was, fine, you can organize in that way. I don't remember -- it wasn't huge, but financial support. And traditional labor would have thought we should be eliminated. That's [CWA Local] 4340. CWA convention wanted to eliminate -- you were a staffer in that.

Jeff [00:59:52] 4309.

Larry [00:59:53] Yeah. 4309. 4340 was the plant [local in Cleveland]. Sorry. I just committed a cardinal sin.

Debbie [00:59:55] 4309 was the Cleveland --

Jeff [00:59:58] It was the Cleveland commercial, clerical, just a mishmash of predominantly female jobs.

Larry [01:00:09] And Jeff, at age nineteen?

Jeff [01:00:12] Yes, at age nineteen, I was elected president.

Larry Cohen Interview (with Jeff Rechenbach) – January 3, 2024

Larry [01:00:15] Yes, that's unheard of in any union, let alone CWA. One of the things the two of us share is -- way over our heads at a young age.

Jeff [01:00:25] For sure. Yes, I was definitely over my head.

Larry [01:00:28] Yeah. But we shared that and we learned from that. We didn't know each other at all.

Jeff [01:00:32] But there's a certain positive about naivete. You don't know what you can't do yet. And so when you're trying to do things that other people would look at as being, well, that's just the way it is; you can't change that -- and so you tackle those tasks with that innocence of not knowing that or not understanding that that's the way it's supposed to be.

Larry [01:00:56] Yeah. I like to think that we kept some version of that the whole time we were in the union.

Jeff [01:01:02] Yes.

Larry [01:01:04] It got mediated, right. Because if you have certain positional power, I call it, you get certain responsibilities whether you like it or not. You're manager. But that notion of, in my case, I'm sure he already has [spoken] for himself. Literally inventing, constantly, with other people, though, and trying out -- that's something I'm proud of. And still, Our Revolution [political activist organization coming out of the 2016 Bernie Sanders for president campaign, Larry Cohen as chair], coming out -- I had an argument with Bernie [Sanders] before I agreed to work with him at all, where I said, "Bernie --" this was two days after my term [as CWA president] ended.

Debbie [01:01:43] Bernie Sanders.

Larry [01:01:43] Yeah. Two days after my term ended, one on one, in his shitty office next to the liquor store over on Massachusetts Avenue [in Washington DC]. Schneider's, I think it was called [the liquor store]. The worst office you could imagine for somebody who ends up [a] serious candidate for president of the United States. Just the two of us. I said to him, Bernie, "I'll volunteer." He said, "No, no, Larry, I want to pay you. You'll be an amazing top leader of this campaign." I said, "Bernie, I love you dearly. I'll never work for you. But I'll volunteer ten hours a week." Because I had a whole bunch of things I wanted to do. And the volunteer idea, I got totally from Jeff [Rechenbach]. Jeff left four years earlier and told me at the time, "Listen, I'm not taking another job, but I am going to do a bunch of things, and I'll always be here for you." That kind of thing. He was amazing. And I relied on him a lot. Our successors didn't really do that at all. And by the way, not relying on me is one thing. Jeff's sense of CWA is -- I couldn't even describe it. I don't know why. I know why, because he was so active at the youngest possible age. But [he] was the best of anybody I ever worked with. The sense of CWA, the whole of CWA.

Debbie [01:02:54] What does that mean to you, Jeff? I'm going to stop --

Larry [01:02:58] Let me go back just to say this, to wrap that part up. The CWA was the mix of not AFSCME; knowing that we would be taking on -- so Watts didn't care and Bahr -- and I met Watts. I had to come through formal meetings in that period, a little bit. Not a lot. More so with Bahr and Clara Allen. Morty and Clara Allen basically didn't speak. She was the New Jersey area director and

he's the elected vice president [of District 1]. [Clara Allen began work as a telephone operator in 1936, served as an officer in Local 1150, appointed to CWA staff in 1951, then NJ area director in 1967 and administrative assistant from 1978 until her death in 1997.] New Jersey at that time probably had 10,000 people, and New York, mostly New York City -- New England had almost nobody. So the district [was] New Jersey, New York, and New England. New York probably had 40,000. I'm making up the numbers. It doesn't matter in this interview. But politically, Clara ran for national office several times and lost, while she was at the administrative level in the union and a woman. She and I got along great -- not perfectly, but great. And she didn't speak to the vice-president. I mean, she would if she was sitting in a chair next to him and he spoke -- but not voluntarily. This was a rocky kind of situation, but that's what labor is, frankly, at its best, I would say. I didn't know that then, because I was basically a bottom up organizer and a worker. But I learned that, eventually -- a few years after going on staff by this point. I learned that, whatever amount of time I was going to put into doing this work -- and typically for me, it was 60 or more [hours]. I'm not bragging about this -- [it was a] mistake in many ways, but 60 or more hours a week. Half of it was internal, building unity, working inside. This goes all the way through the mobilization ideas, the behavioral part of it. But working inside is a constant process -- whether in a local, whether in a shop or an office. It's a constant process. I use this song. We use the movie, whatever you call it, the video. It was before we used the term video. From the ILG [International Ladies Garment Workers Union]. I don't remember the title of the film that they made, but the song was "Freedom." "Freedom doesn't come like a bird on the wing / It doesn't come like a summer rain / You have to fight for it, work for it, day and night for it / And every generation has to do it again." And the song is fine, but the key to me is, Unity doesn't fall from the sky. That notion of traditional unionism, whether it's right-wing business unionism that was rampant in the building trades. They were Rizzo's allies in Philadelphia. They were his allies. They were his core. And my whole political life was fighting him and that kind of notion and racism -- but not just racism, that kind of iron-fisted fascism.

Larry [01:06:22] They ran the unions like that, top down. The notion that we did all this work, and that we're going to end up in AFSCME, run by Al Wurf, playing tennis with the governor and a kind of cronyism, politically, that was typical of unions at that time, across the country. That's opposed to, "No, we'll make our own decisions." The NJ gubernatorial election in 1981 -- District 1 leadership decided that the union would endorse Jim Florio for governor but our state worker leadership group, including me said publicly "It's fine for District 1 to do that, but in New Jersey -- it'll be up to the members what they do."

Debbie [01:07:33] And did you end up endorsing Florio?

Larry [01:07:36] Well, in our own way, but not District 1, the structure of CWA.

Debbie [01:07:41] But New Jersey workers --

Larry [01:07:43] No. We didn't endorse anybody.

Debbie [01:07:44] Okay. I wanted to clarify that.

Larry [01:07:47] But District 1, in our structure, could speak for New Jersey, too. But our membership -- in the general election, yes. But in the primaries, our membership supported

different people, particularly Joe Merlino who was speaker of the assembly, who was running against Florio.

Debbie [01:08:15] Larry, I think we're about at the point where we're going to move on to your dialog. But before we do, there was one other question. There were many CWA leaders of your generation who were part of SWOC and I'd love to get some names.

Larry [01:08:35] Yeah. Well, first of all, a benefit of CWA -- To the credit of Watts and Bahr, when we won, we had 38,000 potential members and no dues. This was a tension point, since bargaining was slow. That first agreement was two years, by the way, 17% pay increases over two years. Nobody in the country was doing that. It was because of the mobilization model, the roots of -- we didn't call it that then, the Committee of 1000, which we did have in how we confronted the state on the job. It was job action without strikes.

Debbie [01:09:20] Who were some of the leaders who emerged?

Larry [01:09:22] But they said to me, "You can pick --" I don't remember the number, but seven or eight people -- this is out of this feisty milieu that we were in -- to be CWA reps, because it's the only job title they had at the time. You've got to imagine the lifestyle difference. At a certain point, I became what they call "blue voucher." Blue voucher for several years, in my case. Before we won the election, I'm now a CWA rep and basically just doing organizing all over New Jersey. We organized a lot of people, in the public sector mostly -- although we didn't limit it to that -- and had representation elections before the state elections. But a lot of the people, who became those initial seven: Carol Gay and she'd been an activist in Camden. She went on to be New Jersey area director. Kathy King, who was a staffer for a long time in New Jersey. I'd have to think through all seven, but my best ally and best friend was Jim Gallagher. [He] became the president of Local 1039. So that was the other thing. We created these locals, more or less. I say more or less -- CWA would have had 50 locals. You know that model.

Jeff [01:11:08] Yes.

Larry [01:11:09] Right. And we would have had fewer. But one of the ways we organized was by department because it wasn't just the pay. One of the initial bargaining demands was \$5,000 minimum pay for full-time work. \$5000. This is 1981. You could figure out the arithmetic of how low that pay was. We won that demand. By the time I left, it was \$18,000 minimum pay for any full-time job.

Debbie [01:11:37] Any other names that you want to mention?

Larry [01:11:39] Yeah. All the initial local presidents were key leaders. And these are big locals. CWA -- 60% of the dues are in the local union. 40% are in the national. The national has a lot of the heavy lifting, all the bargaining costs, all the arbitration costs. So the locals have huge resources. Gallagher didn't want to go to staff and I had my own misgivings of all that. But that was water under the bridge by the time we won the election. He was totally amazing. My best friend. He was probably Jeff's height, but 400 pounds. One day he died of a heart attack, dropped dead while he was local president, probably under 40.

Debbie [01:12:34] Jeff, how tall are you?

Jeff [01:12:35] 6'6".

Debbie [01:12:36] Okay.

Larry [01:12:37] Yeah. So he could have been 6'4". I don't want to diminish Jeff, but 400 pounds. An incredible organizer. So, anyway, that's a few names. I don't want to. I can think about that and send you a list if you really care about that later.

Debbie [01:12:59] Did Hetty –

Larry [01:13:00] It goes on and on, that list. Brooks Sunkett, treasury department leader and became the first president of local 1033. Mike Hopkins from Hudson County and first president of 1037. Paul Alexander, president of local 1038 in south Jersey. Carolyn Wade and Norm Leavens, leaders of 1040, the institutions local. I can list names of people who are no longer active that were key leaders. Marianne Rieger was the first president of Local 1034. She was incredible. She dropped out of a nunnery, literally. And her uncle was Speaker of the Assembly Joe Merlino. One of the reasons we had a rebellion about Florio -- Merlino ran in the primary. You could think about the top-down notion. "Well, we don't care that -- we need Merlino. He's the Speaker of the Assembly. He's running, and his niece is one of our top ten leaders, Marianne Rieger. So ratchet ahead to 2016, when we have a referendum vote in the [national] union to endorse [Bernie] Sanders. That's how Sanders was endorsed in CWA. A referendum vote. Clinton was the insiders' choice at that point.

Debbie [01:14:09] Okay.

Larry [01:14:10] So we'll stop there. But there are a lot of names.

Debbie [01:14:12] Okay.

Larry [01:14:13] And they're black and white. Brooks Sunkett was a critical leader. Treasury Department. He was an auditor. He was not there at the beginning of SWOC, but he was there by [19]79 or [19]80. We win in [19]81. He was the first president of that local. Norm Leavens and Carolyn Wade. Carolyn was not the president, but anyway, they have a whole complicated history of [local] 1040. [Local] 1031, which was Higher Ed support staff, state colleges -- Abby Demel, she was amazing. [Local] 1032 was Pete Cerrenzo, that was the highway department. In the organizing drive, they were Department of Transportation Organizing Committee and they called themselves DOTOC. They were engineers. They weren't just engineers but led by engineers. These people had a degree in engineering. This is not what American labor was about and they were incredible. For them, it was about fighting privatization of their work, not losing their jobs. A lot of what we did, whether it was mental health or engineering, was about the work. That's why we organized the locals by the work and a bit geographically, because north Jersey believed they were another world -- that's the New York world -- but mostly organized around the work, meaning department by department. That's how we charted to go back to that -- department by department.

Debbie [01:15:53] Did you want to ask anything more about that?

Jeff [01:15:57] No, I think we're ready to move on --

Larry [01:15:59] The leaders were amazing. They were almost all in their 20s and 30s -- Cerrenzo was the only older one I remember and Mike Hopkins, quite an individual leader. I loved them dearly. He was [the] first president of the north local and he was older and he drove a Checker. I still remember him showing up in his Checker. At that time, you have to imagine -- it's the 1970s -- and a crew cut with the hair sticking up. He was like that. He wore a suit. I didn't have a suit. Nobody wore a suit. Nobody thought of wearing a suit. But he was as committed as anybody but older.

Debbie [01:16:41] Wonderful.

Larry [01:16:41] Cerrenzo, the engineer -- much older. Leavens much older. But most of us, Committee of 1000 -- 30, 35 years old, or even younger -- black, white, men, women -- split. You know, it was quite a group.

Debbie [01:17:00] There's a whole lot more we could ask, but I think probably we should take a break and then move on. Thanks for the conversation thus far, which brings us up to an important time in the union, which is the seismic change that came with divestiture in 1984. Your bringing in New Jersey state workers -- just before that or around that time -- was part of big shifts in the union. What I want to have this dialog focus on then, is the components of the new strategy, I guess -- well, not new strategy, because it was a Joe Beirne strategy from the early time -- but how building mobilization, building organizing, building political action and bargaining, in your locals, districts, national over the period of time. And I just want to get a timeline for each of you, just timeline, and then we'll get the stories. Larry, you got on staff as you were organizing SWOC. You were a staff rep. Then you became New Jersey area director?

Larry [01:18:25] Yeah, not immediately.

Debbie [01:18:27] That was the next step.

Larry [01:18:30] I was New Jersey area director and leading the organizing in District 1.

Debbie [01:18:36] Okay, so you were titled organizing director?

Larry [01:18:41] Those were the two things I was doing.

Debbie [01:18:42] Okay. And then the --

Larry [01:18:44] And then I was the assistant after Morty [Bahr] got elected [national union] president. Jan was vice president [of District 1]. For a bunch of reasons, District 1 got two assistants which we then got rid of.

Debbie [01:18:54] So you were assistant to Morty Bahr when he was --

Larry [01:18:57] No. I was assistant to Jan Pierce.

Debbie [01:18:59] Okay. And then --

Larry [01:19:01] Along with Larry Mancino. We were very different.

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Debbie [01:19:04] Yes. You are. And then --

Larry [01:19:07] I loved Larry, just for the record.

Debbie [01:19:09] And then you came to headquarters as organizing director under Morty?

Larry [01:19:15] No. Assistant to the president in charge of organizing and mobilization, which is the word I use.

Debbie [01:19:21] Okay. And that was what year? Do you remember?

Larry [01:19:27] 1986.

Debbie [01:19:28] Okay.

Larry [01:19:28] But I was still leading New Jersey and living there so I was doing multiple things.

Debbie [01:19:34] Okay.

Larry [01:19:35] I didn't live here then.

Debbie [01:19:36] Okay. And then the next was what year, when you were elected --

Larry [01:19:46] [19]98.

Debbie [01:19:46] -- executive vice president. And then --

Larry [01:19:50] 2005.

Debbie [01:19:51] -- elected president and --

Larry [01:19:53] Jeff's elected EVP executive vice-president].

Debbie [01:19:54] And you retired --

Larry [01:19:55] And Jeff, before that, is elected secretary-treasurer. He can speak for himself.

Jeff [01:19:57] Yes.

Debbie [01:19:58] And you resigned and retired in ?-

Larry [01:20:03] I didn't resign. The term ended.

Debbie [01:20:05] The term ended in what year?

Larry [01:20:06] I didn't run again.

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Debbie [01:20:07] Okay. What year?

Larry [01:20:11] [20]15.

Debbie [01:20:10] 2015. Okay.

Larry [01:20:13] Two days later, [I became] senior advisor to Bernie Sanders. So there was no break. Stupid on my part.

Debbie [01:20:18] Okay. And Jeff, why don't you give us just your --

Jeff [01:20:24] Yes. So I'm not as good with dates as Larry is. [Laughs] He has an incredible capacity for every kind of number you can imagine.

Larry [01:20:34] Yeah, but some of them are wrong as you learned over the years.

Jeff [01:20:36] Yes. By fractions. You're always in the right ballpark, whereas mine is a lot of guesswork. Let me go backwards. It might be easier for me. I retired in 2011. I chose not to run for reelection. Actually, at the time we were trying to do some belt tightening within the union. We were trying to make some accommodations to cut our expenses. I suggested it would be a good time to eliminate the position of executive vice-president. I was secretary-treasurer at that point and Annie Hill was the executive vice-president and Larry was the president. I announced that I was not going to run. Then Annie announced she was going to run for secretary-treasurer at that point. So 2011, I retire from CWA. 2005 I was first elected executive vice-president with Larry. 2008, I would have been elected secretary-treasurer, upon Barbara's retirement. Barbara Easterling. And so going back then, from 2005 I was the, district vice-president for the Midwest region [CWA district 4], which was Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. I was elected vice-president of that region -- oh, gosh. I'm going to guess probably a dozen years earlier, maybe 1993, something like that, somewhere in that range. Bob Johnson had been the vice president at that point. I had been an administrative assistant to Bob Johnson during that period of time. Bob succeeded Marty Hughes, whose name has come up a couple of times during this conversation this morning already. Marty Hughes was the district vice-president. He asked me to join the CWA staff in 1981, I think -- yes, January of [19]81 I came on the CWA staff. I worked for Marty for -- oh, gosh -- probably five years, somewhere around there -- mid to late [19]80s is when Marty finally resigned and Bob Johnson took over. It's a remarkable string of lucky circumstances that got me to where I was, beginning with -- as Larry mentioned earlier -- getting elected president in my local at age nineteen.

Debbie [01:23:31] That was what year?

Jeff [01:23:32] That was -- would have been at nineteen -- well, I should be able to do the math on that. 1972.

Debbie [01:23:40] And that was which local?

Jeff [01:23:42] Local 4309.

Debbie [01:23:44] In Cleveland.

Jeff [01:23:45] In Cleveland, which, as I mentioned earlier, is a predominantly clerical local -- service representatives, data processing, yellow pages -- although not the sales reps in yellow pages, but all the administrative work behind the yellow pages and white pages -- payphones, which was where I hired in at, something completely obsolete.

Debbie [01:24:07] What year did you begin working for Ohio Bell?

Jeff [01:24:09] I hired in at Ohio Bell at age seventeen in 1971. Well, first of all, it was a lucky circumstance, again. I was hired in to be a lineman which would have been a different local. They had us go out and meet our foreman, or who was going to be our foreman, before we would go to training. And the foreman starts swearing at me, "I've got no use for you. Go back down to the employment office. I don't know why they sent you out here." I'm thinking to myself, "Great, I'm going to go home and tell my parents I got fired before I even worked a day on the job." I could hear my dad saying, "I told you should have got a haircut before you went down there." Anyway, it turns out because I was 17 I couldn't drive a company vehicle. So I was no use to him because I couldn't drive a truck. So they sent me to the pay phone department which was a completely different local and just a happy circumstance that I wound up there. I didn't have to drive a truck. I was responsible for all of the keys for each individual pay phone in the city of Cleveland. There's a separate key for every pay phone. We had to put them together every day for phones to be collected. Anyway, I get there and the local president approaches me, asks me to join the union. We didn't have agency shop at the time. I signed a card right away. I grew up in a blue collar neighborhood. In fact, there was a Chevy plant not a quarter of a mile from my home. So a lot of UAW [United Auto Workers] members, steelworkers in the neighborhood. I joined the union right away. He says, "Well, your group doesn't have a steward. Would you like to be the steward?"

Jeff [01:26:05] On day one?

Jeff [01:26:06] On day one. I have no clue what a steward is but I say, "Sure." He says, "Well, we're going to need some help in this group. We don't have anybody here. And there's a good chance we're going on strike in a month." "Okay. That sounds good to me." In fact, I literally graduated from high school on my first day of work at the phone company. I had to rush home. Our graduation was 6:00 that night and so I had to rush home, change my clothes, and go graduate from high school. I saw this as a great opportunity, on a personal level, because my high school girlfriend had moved to St. Louis after graduation. Her parents had transferred to St. Louis midway through her senior year, our senior year of high school. I thought, well, this is great. If we're going to go on strike, I can go visit my girlfriend. I asked the local president, "Look, how about if I do double picket duty the first week?" He's putting together the picket schedules. Then I could take a couple of days off that first weekend of the strike and go to St. Louis. He said, "Sure, that'd be great. In fact, we've got a couple of 24-hour offices downtown and it's almost all women that work in those buildings. I'm going to have you go from 4:00 in the afternoon until 8:00 the next morning."

Larry [01:27:30] Oh, wow.

Jeff [01:27:31] Well, for a seventeen year-old kid -- no problem. I said, "Yes, I can do that." So I did that for a week. That Saturday morning, I get up. I'm going to go on an airplane for the first time in my life. I go to see my girlfriend. She's waiting at the airport with her father. Her father's got the biggest smile I've ever seen on a guy's face in my life. They had settled the strike while I was in the air. They take me to lunch, put me back on a plane, fly back to Cleveland.

Larry [01:27:59] That was it?

Jeff [01:28:00] Never saw or heard from her again. [Laughs] You know, in the days where you had to pay for long-distance [phone calls] and we exchanged letters. I got a couple of letters after that. But that was the end of that romance. Yes. But in the meantime, everybody thinks, What a great union guy this guy is! He was there from when we left at the end of the day and when we got there in the morning and boy, this guy is dedicated. I don't want to diminish my affection for the union, which, really sort of crystallized a little later on when, as Larry mentioned, CWA was the only union that endorsed McGovern.

Larry [01:28:39] One of five.

Jeff [01:28:40] Yes. Well, I mean, in my world, that was it. The AFL-CIO didn't. We did. That's all I needed. And I had been really active in a bunch of antiwar issues around the Cleveland area. And that was -- wow, these two progressive ideas come together for me. So anyway, that's where my genesis of my activity --

Larry [01:29:10] I'm interested in the girlfriend. Too bad we're recording -- we'll come back to it later. That was the last time you talked to her?

Jeff [01:29:15] Yes. Absolutely.

Larry [01:29:17] Later, I want to catch up on that.

Jeff [01:29:19] Yes. Okay.

Debbie [01:29:21] Your interview with John McKerley -- it went up to this point, correct?

Jeff [01:29:25] Yes.

Debbie [01:29:31] Okay. But we have more to do, which maybe we'll capture in this conversation.

Jeff [01:29:33] Yes. And I think with McKerley, I already talked about a good part of my time as a local officer. And it in some ways, just to piggyback on Larry's experience -- it really came from this ground up push on things. In my instance -- Larry's comes from a very intellectual place. Mine came from --

Larry [01:30:00] Well, it's a mix.

Jeff [01:30:00] Yes. This is what makes sense. We had a number of issues that I confronted early on as a local president that had been long established practices but I was too naive to recognize that this was the way things had to be. And so [I] rallied people together, built this -- without calling it mobilization -- this network of people that were ready to stand up and fight back against some things that we didn't think were right. One was, when you came to work on a Monday morning as a service rep[resentative], you started at 8:00. Your break was at 8:10 in the morning. So ten minutes after you arrived at work, you went on break.

Debbie [01:30:47] Some people, not everybody.

Jeff [01:30:50] Everybody! Because the phones would light up at 8:30 in the morning when the office opened. Monday was the busiest day and so you had to take your break at 8:10. And so we mobilized around this issue -- "8:10 never again." And built this big rally and we walked off the job.

Larry [01:31:07] It's exactly the same.

Jeff [01:31:09] Yes. We walked off the job and we crushed that so that they had to now schedule regular breaks. What kind of break is it -- ten minutes after you've just barely hung your coat up and you're going on break? It was that kind of thing. There were a couple of other issues just like that. We had an advantage in Ohio with the Ohio Bell contract in that we didn't have arbitration. We also didn't have a no-strike clause. So we could strike over grievances. I employed grievance strikes as a regular weapon and got people mobilized ahead of that, getting people geared up and recognizing that this is something we can have an impact on.

Debbie [01:31:55] Did you inherit a steward structure or did you have to build one? It sounds like you didn't inherit it, at least --

Jeff [01:32:04] Yes. It was shabby. As I said, we didn't have agency shop at the time. So a local that had a potential membership of 2,000 -- we would normally hover around 13 to 1400 members and 6 or 700 non-dues payers. You literally, on a monthly basis, had to sign up 100 people just to stay even. People were getting in and out and so it just made sense to try and build this network from the ground up to get people to begin to connect and understand what it was about, that it wasn't just some insurance premium that they were paying. I won't spend a lot of time with that because I did spend a lot of time talking with John McKerley about that.

Larry [01:32:50] CWA had a button exactly the opposite of that. "It doesn't cost. It pays. Join CWA."

Jeff [01:32:57] Right.

Larry [01:32:58] Exactly the opposite of what you just heard.

Jeff [01:32:59] That's right. I refused to use those [buttons] because we had those at the time. "Here, pass these out." Well, wait a minute. People think that's all they have to do. And that isn't all they have to do. You've got to have them engaged. They've got to understand what the union's about. In some ways, I think, we were stronger at the time because you had to go out and talk about the union and what it meant to be a union member and sell people on the notion of being part of something bigger -- beyond just signing the card to pay your dues -- you had to connect a reason with them to do it. Once we got agency shop, in many instances, we got lazy about getting people engaged.

Debbie [01:33:47] When was that?

Jeff [01:33:47] Agency shop, I think, came in the phone industry in the [19]75 contract, maybe. That sounds about right.

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Debbie [01:33:53] So that was national.

Jeff [01:33:53] Yes, that was national. Yes.

Larry [01:33:56] But AT&T would have been national.

Jeff [01:33:57] Yes. Right. Yes. But all the Bells --

Larry [01:34:01] That's what I mean. They're all owned by AT&T at that time.

Jeff [01:34:04] That's right. So I think [19]75 was when we got agency shop. In that first period where I was local president, you literally had to sign people up on a regular basis. You had to have an organizing committee. You had to really work at it. The previous local leadership hadn't really done any of that. They had really gotten pretty lax about it.

Debbie [01:34:31] So you wanted to --

Larry [01:34:32] I just want to highlight the grievance strike. He skips over that, like lots of people were doing it. This was a major reason, my opinion -- not knowing him or [Local] 4309 at all -- that they had a whole series -- it wasn't just the grievance strike -- This was the other place besides New Jersey. When I came in [19]86, [19]87, because I was still doing New Jersey, to focus more on the country. The stories -- and he's gone by then. He's on the staff. But since [19]81, right?

Jeff [01:35:07] Yes, Yes.

Larry [01:35:08] But the roots that made it key for us -- because some people said, "Oh, well, that's a huge group, public sector." But the roots of mobilization that we used and wrote about, as I said in the first [Mobilization] manual was [local] 4309. They had a whole series of activities, especially by then, because then you had Ryan and Rosen coming after you.

Debbie [01:35:33] John Ryan and Seth Rosen.

Larry [01:35:35] Right. And they kept that going. At that time, it was ironic, because you're on the staff and they're getting labeled, like we were in New Jersey, as way too radical -- I don't remember if it was before or after. It wasn't necessarily radical, but, "Their behavior -- we don't like it."

Jeff [01:35:54] Right.

Larry [01:35:55] Right?

Jeff [01:35:55] Yes.

Larry [01:35:57] This local was almost notorious.

Jeff [01:36:00] Oh, sure. Yes. Yes. When I left, my vice president was an African-American woman, Lily Belvy Holt. She became president. The next election after I left, John Ryan ran for local president against Lily and beat her. It was close. I mean, it was a close election. And Lily then took part of the local -- and this was absolutely at [vice president of District 4] Marty Hughes's

direction -- and split off the portion of the local that was predominantly African-American into this [local] 4306.

Larry [01:36:45] I forgot about that.

Jeff [01:36:46] Yes. And left the 4309 part, which was the service reps, which were really the core of our activists. They were really the ones that drove all the activity we had. Split the local apart. That became a huge fight. John [Ryan] and Greg Reamer, who was a vice-president of the local at the time, and George Smilnak came to me and asked me to run against Marty [Hughes] at the time. I had just been appointed to staff and I said, "I can't do that. I empathize with where you guys are and I'll do what I can to help, behind the scenes here, but --"

Larry [01:37:26] You're like, thirty years old, too.

Jeff [01:37:28] Yes. Not even, I think --

Larry [01:37:32] Anyway. Roughly.

Jeff [01:37:33] Yes. Yes. Late twenties.

Larry [01:37:36] [Unclear] 4306?

Jeff [01:37:36] Lily Belvy Holt.

Debbie [01:37:38] And what work were --

Jeff [01:37:41] That was the data processing folks, the yellow pages, all the clerical yellow pages -- a lot of different clerical groups around the city of Cleveland that we had organized were all in 4306. The service reps and a couple of other groups were then in 4309.

Debbie [01:38:00] Payphone people.

Jeff [01:38:02] No, the payphone people went to 4306, I think. Yes. No, I think you're right. I think the payphone stayed with 4309.

Debbie [01:38:10] And the reason Marty Hughes did this was 4306 was more black people and --?

Jeff [01:38:16] No. He used that as a reason to do it.

Larry [01:38:23] Positive reasons.

Jeff [01:38:24] But his was a concern over this activist mindset that had been created in this local. When you were doing that, now you've got agency shop, so now you've got a local of over 2,000 members, but the driving force behind it comes out of the service representative group, which is Seth Rosen, Jeremy Genovese. There's a whole crew of folks that built up off this grievance strike process that's what we've been through over the years. And so it was --

Larry [01:38:57] That's only in Ohio and primarily in one local.

Jeff [01:38:59] Yes.

Larry [01:39:00] It's a major, major thing. People think now -- a lot of these tactics that we use, but particularly now, in this case 4309 -- like those are new ideas. They're not new ideas.

Jeff [01:39:11] Yes.

Jeff [01:39:12] And some of them go back to the [19]30s and sit-down strikes.

Jeff [01:39:14] Right.

Larry [01:39:15] And again, a lot of the tactics that I fell into and used totally -- we didn't know each other -- but we did these en masse in that period. And we'll get eventually to this 2004 strike of four days. Nobody in the country did that. We invented that, Jeff and I. And Morty went with it. The four-day strike of 100,000 people at AT&T -- in advance, telling management, it's four days and we're coming back, to disarm the anti-unionism of the company. We advertised it in advance -- we'll be out four days; we're coming back. But we showed them that 100,000 people were ready to walk out. The creativity that Jeff helped create in the union -- and the people he's mentioning, perpetuated [it] after he went on the staff -- a lot of it is rooted in the local right-to-strike that didn't exist anywhere else in CWA. And yeah, some of the Mine Workers' locals had it. And eventually -- when did that end, the local right to strike?

Debbie [01:40:22] [To strike] between contracts.

Larry [01:40:23] Yeah. To strike at any time on a grievance. The grievance strike.

Jeff [01:40:27] Yes. So that ended -- well, it was after divestiture. I think it probably was when SBC took over Ameritech, merged with Ameritech [SBC/Ameritech merger in 1999], and they already had --

Larry [01:40:45] Well, they never had the right to strike for unions.

Jeff [01:40:48] Right, right. And they [SBC] had Connecticut too, didn't they?

Larry [01:40:52] Yes.

Jeff [01:40:52] Connecticut was in that group as well. [SBC bought Southern New England Telephone Company in Connecticut in 1998.] So it was at that point and the quid pro quo, I guess, for that -- but the other part of the problem was within Ameritech itself.

Larry [01:41:06] Right.

Jeff [01:41:07] Ohio was the only one that had the right to strike. The other four contracts within Ameritech -- Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin all had arbitration as a result of grievances.

Larry [01:41:18] Right.

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Jeff [01:41:18] And did not have the right to strike.

Larry [01:41:21] Well, that is the quid pro quo though -- you do get arbitration.

Jeff [01:41:23] Right.

Larry [01:41:23] And it's not like you could strike on every discipline or every firing even.

Jeff[01:41:27] That's right. Yes. At the time, there was also getting card check recognition from SBC.

Larry [01:41:36] Well, [19]86, I was involved in that. Negotiating the first card check with AT&T. That was [19]86 and that was [executive vice-president] John Carroll. Carroll, who was wonderful to me, he was one of the three EVPs [executive vice-presidents] then, and he was in charge of AT&T. He literally brought me [in] to bargain that piece and getting that one paragraph that we didn't have anywhere else in CWA. "AT&T will neither help nor hinder when workers organize." If a majority support the union, then it laid out the procedure to have an arbitrator verify that in fact, there was a majority. For me, that's a major [achievement] -- going into that, bargaining with AT&T, convincing Morty that that's worth fighting for. John Carroll didn't need any convincing. I'm not saying Morty needed convincing, but Carroll was also amazing.

Debbie [01:42:37] Okay, this is now after divestiture, so when we're talking about AT&T in 1986, we're talking about the long-distance company. Still 100,000 CWA-represented folks. Yes, it's the long-distance company at that point. Why was negotiating card check --

Larry [01:43:01] Yes. Again, mostly -- that's right.

Debbie [01:43:04] Neutrality.

Larry [01:43:05] It was card check and neutrality. Majority sign-up -- I never called it card check. Majority sign-up and neutrality. In that negotiation it included manufacturing -- and that's huge in terms of what was going on in America and the horrible trade policy of Democrats as much as Republicans. And every single manufacturing plant, the biggest consumer, meaning on the corporate level in the world of telecom equipment, the leading industry in the world, the economy at that point. And we lose not only in divestiture the separation from AT&T, the customer, but plant by plant the work all leaves America, encouraged by our trade policy. But in the meantime, we did a ton of organizing. When I came, there was no organizing department. It had been for a couple of years. But anyway, basically, the national union didn't do organizing, and Morty was committed to doing it. But Lucent [AT&T spun off the Western Electric manufacturing subsidiary and Bell Labs to form Lucent Technologies in 1996] organizing and that majority sign-up paved the way later for SBC and AT&T wireless organizing. In that initial period, we organized all over Lucent and had a truce with the IBEW. Before that, they fought over every campaign, and they would wine and dine. It was horrible organizing. But in the Lucent world, it included engineers, engineer assistants, every single plant, and amazing workers and amazing union members.

Debbie [01:44:53] Lucent was the spin-off of the Western Electric manufacturing plants --

Larry [01:44:56] Exactly.

Debbie [01:44:59] -- which I think was around 2000. [Correction, 1996} That was after you were president, correct?

Larry [01:45:06] No. What was that -- after I'm President? I'm sorry.

Larry [01:45:07] The spin-off of Lucent.

Larry [01:45:10] You're talking about as an IPO? I don't know the year for that.

Debbie [01:45:13] Okay. We can look it up. [The Lucent IPO (spin-off from AT&T) was in 1996. In 2000, Lucent spun-off its enterprise network business in an IPO to form a new company, Avaya,]

Debbie [01:45:17] Yeah. It doesn't matter right at this minute.

Debbie [01:45:21] Can you finish -- you were talking about --

Larry [01:45:22] I just went on this dialog.

Jeff [01:45:24] Right. But I would also add in there [District 6 vice-president] Vic Crawley's role down --

Larry [01:45:28] That's later.[1992-1997]

Jeff [01:45:28] -- with SBC. Right. And getting the card check down there.

Debbie [01:45:34] I wanted to ask one thing about the militance of 4309. Was [it] a majority female local?

Jeff [01:45:42] Yes. The local was majority female. It was probably 85:15 female to male.

Debbie [01:45:51] And what about black/white? Once they split.

Jeff [01:45:55] Well, once they split it was probably 85:15 white to black. But if you had the amalgamated [locals] -- they came back together, so the merger was undone. That took a vote at the convention. It was a whole mishigas. But 4309 if you did it demographically by race was probably, oh, gosh, 60:40 almost white to African-American.

Debbie [01:46:29] Early [19]80s.

Jeff [01:46:29] Yes. Early '80s. Yes.

Debbie [01:46:34] Because it was majority women, how did that impact, if it did, the militance?

Jeff [01:46:42] My experience in the union all along is women have been far more militant and better leaders of actions than a lot of the men have been. Part of it, I think, stemmed from the fact that there was clearly a hierarchy between the male-dominated jobs and the female-dominated jobs within that industry. Here you've got what they would call a craftsman working outside, getting paid

almost twice what somebody with a similar set of skills, intellectual skills, is doing work inside. It's simply because those were the male jobs and these were the female jobs. And it was only until, ironically, the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunities Commission] stepped in and signed a consent decree with AT&T[1973] that eliminated a lot of practices that literally led to this path of only men in these jobs. For example, the job that I got hired into had the exact same pay schedule as a craftsman except it cut off at the two-year point. So the [craft technicians'] schedule was five years. Mine went up to two years. The notion was then that if you wanted a craft job, you got a leg up by having worked in this inside job. It was all guys working in there. There was a clerical section but they didn't get a leg up into a craft job by working in pay phones. But I did because I was working in this pay phone job. Now, I never left the pay phone department, so I didn't avail [myself] of that. I was already pretty active in the union.

Larry [01:48:26] The local president was full-time or not?

Jeff [01:48:27] No, no, no. Gosh, no.

Larry [01:48:29] Even with 2,000 --

Jeff [01:48:30] Even with 2,000 --

Larry [01:48:31] There was no agency shop, but even with 1,200 members --

Jeff [01:48:33] Yes, there was no agency shop. Even with 1,200 members, we were all part-time [union officers]. It was almost a 50/50, my time on the job and my time working for the union. Part of that included time where the company was paying for my time, joint conference time where we're actually meeting with the company because they paid for that time. That grew as I got more active with this notion of -- again, I'm calling it mobilization now, but we didn't have that word for it. As I got more active with that, probably to the point where I was maybe a day, day and a half working on the job, and they at that point had to accommodate and put somebody else in there. So whenever I was in there, I was just like a bonus. In fact, most of the time then I would just do union stuff working on the job. It was a different environment, too. They sort of acknowledged that was part of the way things went. They didn't really give us any grief about doing union work on the job. They gave me a phone in fact. And that became --

Larry [01:49:47] They gave you a wireline phone?

Larry [01:49:47] Yeah, that sort of de facto became --

Larry [01:49:49] Is that right?

Jeff [01:49:51] Yes, the local office.

Larry [01:49:52] That's amazing. Yeah, yeah.

Larry [01:49:56] I just want to stress that that group, which we used in [19]86, [19]87 as part of my function with CWA mobilization, which we did call it in [19]87, was to use those examples and those leaders, more so than the ones in New Jersey because they matched, you know, 70% -- in a certain way, not exactly, but -- industry basis was similar to what was still 70% of the union.

Jeff [01:50:33] Unlike New Jersey we inherited a union. You guys created one.

Larry [01:50:36] Yeah. But you inherited a union that had activism at its core because of --

Jeff [01:50:40] But there was a certain amount of stagnancy within the union at that point as well. We were pretty content. It was a heavily regulated industry. The employer got cost plus from the rate makers every year. And so if their costs went up in negotiations, they were able to get that back the following year out of the regulators.

Debbie [01:51:05] And it was a monopoly until [19]84.

Jeff [01:51:06] Right.

Debbie [01:51:08] And in the local, probably a monopoly until the early- to mid-1990s. It was AT&T [the post-divestiture long-distance company] where the challenges were greatest.

Jeff [01:51:18] Right.

Debbie [01:51:19] How did you build the mobilization or promote the mobilization culture and strategy?

Larry [01:51:33] Some of that was getting district VPs -- you couldn't get access in CWA for somebody like me. I'm mid-thirties. How do you get -- at that point, because of the New Jersey experience with such a gigantic, diverse group of people -- at least half women, black and white together, consciously.

Debbie [01:52:06] I'll get to that. But we haven't talked about that, how there were significant black [workers] in New Jersey.

Larry [01:52:17] Yeah.

Debbie [01:52:18] Majority?

Larry [01:52:19] No, no, no. For a lot of us, whether we were black or white or men or women, we knew that we needed -- first of all, that's what we wanted. The notion of the activists being from, and appearance as well, not appearance, but being a cross-section. In the [CWA publication] *Organizing Basics*, the organizing committee must be a cross-section of the workplace. Then that's defined. It's defined in terms of black, white, and brown; men and women; and all the job titles you just heard about in detail from Jeff. You can imagine the number of job titles [in the New Jersey state workers' units] was at least 5,000. So you have 38,000 people and probably 5,000 or more job titles. So it's not just the job title, but as we talked about, it was the department. But the notion coming out of [a] country trying to fight racism, not the whole country, but millions of people -- we weren't about to reproduce it in a brand new organization. So it was consciously, at every level, including in CWA organizing. The organizing committee-- the leadership has got to reflect the workplace.

Debbie [01:53:36] Was this a challenge throughout your tenures, of fighting racism within the union?

Jeff [01:53:46] At some level, it was, at least -- I can speak for the phone piece of it. It was institutionalized from the phone company. You had this existing construct already from the phone company where African-Americans were typically on the lowest jobs, the lowest paid jobs. And so, you had to build your way out of that culture. I consciously continued to have an executive board. I always ran with -- my vice president was African-American. My treasurer was African-American. My secretary was a white woman. But you were aware of this. This was still coming off, early on, the [19]60s and the civil rights movement, and Cleveland, in particular, was a very polarized city. There's a river that goes down in the middle of Cleveland, and the east side is where most of the African-Americans live and the west side is almost exclusively white. It's changed now. It's different now. But there were all these institutional constructs that were in place. And so you had to consciously reach out and get African-American -- particularly women, in my case, with the local -- engaged and working on union activities. The reality was they were fantastic. They wouldn't take shit from anybody. It was a great way to help build that union, build the local. So yes. That continued. To Glenn Watts's credit, he was aware of this as well and consciously was making sure the districts and sectors were appointing African-Americans as staff and to the dismay of some of the district vice-presidents who just didn't think that that was the way that they needed to go. I can think of Marty Hughes, when he was told, "Your next appointment of a staff has got to be an African-American." He would pick the most obscure African-American you could find versus a leader who was outspoken and helping to build things. He would go and pick somebody who was fairly docile in terms of their view of organizing in the union in general and then put her on a shelf and then say, "See, look. I did that, but that's what I got."

Debbie [01:56:42] Did you have organizing by African-Americans for more power, as opposed to the leaders picking --

Jeff [01:56:52] Yes.

Larry [01:56:56] Minority caucus started.

Jeff [01:56:58] Yes. Minority caucus probably had its roots right around that time. It's so many years ago, so it's hard to get where the yin and the yang was, but there was clearly a push within the union that got built and began to create a pressure on the national executive board. If you look at the national executive board when I came on staff -- I'm trying to think now, if there was a [woman] --

Larry [01:57:24] Dina Beaumont.

Jeff [01:57:25] Yes. Dina would have been it. And she came --

Larry [01:57:27] And that was an affiliation.

Jeff [01:57:28] Right, through a merger affiliation. Otherwise, it was all white men up there and [CWA was] trailing behind, I think, a large part of the rest of society, but probably in step with most of corporate America still at that point.

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Debbie [01:57:48] Let's go back to mobilizing. So how did you build -- you were the director of organizing and mobilization.

Larry [01:58:00] Director of Organization was the title. "Organization," not "organizing."

Debbie [01:58:06] At any rate, how did you try and build a culture of mobilization? And as I recall, 1982, there was a -- it was not Committee of the Future. It was --

Larry [01:58:23] Yeah. Some version of that.

Jeff [01:58:25] Committee on the Future.

Debbie [01:58:26] Committee on the Future?

Jeff [01:58:28] I think so.

Larry [01:58:28] I wasn't involved in that, though.

Debbie [01:58:29] Okay.

Larry [01:58:32] So you have to dig that out somewhere else. Were you involved in it?

Jeff [01:58:34] No.

Debbie [01:58:36] Talk about mobilizing.

Larry [01:58:41] It was clear to me that the way to do that -- first of all, it was clear, if we talk about Jobs with Justice -- I won't do it now. We don't need to.

Debbie [01:58:50] Please include that.

Larry [01:58:50] It was clear that the United States in the world -- and partly because of the days on the freighters, in Europe, and what was going on, I always had some sense of the world, not just of the United States, not in any detail, didn't speak other languages. But I knew full well -- and we started Jobs with Justice [in] 1987 -- that we were at the bottom in collective bargaining coverage of every democracy in the world, the very bottom. And that American labor, including our beloved union -- our union changed, but -- didn't even acknowledge it, because if you went to a global union meeting, the richest unions in the world -- I'm talking about money now -- were all in the United States. And you still had the notion that the AFL-CIO itself at that time, put aside efforts like Working America, counting those numbers, which is what they do now. [Working America was founded in 2003 as the community affiliate of the AFL-CIO for individuals who did not have a union in their workplace.] But now, there's 8 or 9 million members who are in unions that have bargaining rights. They nearly double it by using everybody who ever got signed up in Working America.

Debbie [02:00:02] 7 million in the private sector?

Larry [02:00:04] No, no, this includes AFSCME, AFT -- paying dues. Let's call it 8 million -- because Jeff's right, I get in the right ballpark. I actually have that data, but I don't want to go get it. No, there's about 8 million, almost half of which is public sector -- remember, NEA [National Education Association] isn't in the AFL-CIO, but -- who their unions pay, quote, dues to -- it's now 55 cents a month to the AFL-CIO. And then there's the NEA, SEIU and the Teamsters [who are not in the AFL-CIO at the time of the interview.]. I'm not saying it's the whole -- but that's the AFL we're talking about. Almost half of it is public sector --

Debbie [02:00:44] Go back to the founding of Jobs with Justice.

Larry [02:00:46] Among the union presidents, Morty Bahr led Jobs with Justice. Of course, I worked with great staffers like George [Kohl, special projects director at that time, later research director and assistant to the president] and Eduardo Diaz [CWA international affairs director who died in 2000 at age 41], and great staff leaders from other unions and organizations.

Debbie [02:01:12] George Kohl.

Larry [02:01:13] Yeah. And Eduardo Diaz. But this is on the staff level. It was staff intensive. But the consciousness that U.S. collective bargaining was already a disaster. When I was born back in north Philadelphia, Jeff in Cleveland. We didn't know the numbers, but it was 35% bargaining coverage in the private sector. Today it's 6 [%]. That crisis was already there in 1987 and I was well aware of it. When I had discussions about leaving New Jersey and all the rest of it, a lot of it for me was framed in terms of this is a disaster. There's no organizing rights and bargaining is being destroyed in this country -- striker replacement, that whole notion -- let alone the contrast with the rest of the world. For me, having been through, I almost call it the torture of bargaining in New Jersey for all the new groups we organized, but particularly holding 37, 38,000 people together and using mobilization, because that's all we knew. That's all we could do. Strike was illegal. You went to jail. We did have work stoppages. It was in my head that to do that job of organizing in the way I defined it, it had to include collective bargaining. CWA was the last CIO union to form. The CIO in Cleveland -- Jeff can speak on it, he grew up in it. Cleveland had the benefit of being a city with some version of equality of blacks -- it didn't have Frank Rizzo. I'm not saying it was great either. But it didn't have Frank Rizzo.

Debbie [02:03:10] It had Dennis Kucinich [Cleveland mayor 1977-1979].

Jeff [02:03:11] Before that, we had Carl Stokes, the first African-American mayor of a major city [1967-1971].

Jeff [02:03:16] And it's not a coincidence.

Jeff [02:03:17] Yes.

Larry [02:03:18] It was a cornerstone, as much as Detroit, of the CIO. So was Akron. So was Lorain, with the Steelworkers. But where Jeff grew up, the CIO was an organizing-focused organization that had been basically destroyed except for its remnants. But CWA was the last CIO union, which meant the national union had a huge role in bargaining. And resource-wise, we didn't have a great strike fund, but we had a defense fund. There was a notion that if there's a strike, if there's a tough bargaining, we're all in. Even the history of the president of the union's role in those

situations and the executive board on the strike. It was part of my give-and-take with Morty Bahr and Jan Pierce on whether I would try to take this position on. It had to include contract mobilization. We couldn't bargain the way we were bargaining. That had to be, in part, because we were in a crisis. Even then, it [collective bargaining coverage] was at the most, 20% of the private sector. It had dropped from 35 [percent]. It's now plateaued at six and a half per cent.

Debbie [02:04:47] Describe what you mean by contract mobilization and how that was different --

Larry [02:04:52] The slogan some didn't like that I used to say even in large audiences in CWA, "We all focus on what goes on at the table. We could have five Einsteins or five monkeys, and the outcome is going to be mostly the same."

Debbie [02:05:04] Keep going.

Larry [02:05:05] That was part of how I would introduce: Why does mobilization matter? Then we did the first version of that.

Larry [02:05:15] And again, Ohio -- 4309 in particular, but I would say broader -- lots of the leadership and definitely a Bob Johnson -- and when did Marty [Hughes] -- you said this before.

Jeff [02:05:31] Mid to late 19]80s.

Jeff [02:05:33] Yes. It's the same time frame. Bob Johnson was amazing. Jeff was his partner in leading that work. District 4 was incredible for me, personally. Marty Hughes absolutely believed in organizing. He was very excited about New Jersey. I might have been the only one but I came out there when he started to try to organize state workers, which Jeff was involved in Ohio.

Debbie [02:05:58] Describe contract mobilization.

Larry [02:06:00] It's the notion that the issues that you are going to focus on in bargaining come from, and are processed with, the members, including relatively obvious things like surveying. If you think about mobilization -- involve as many people as possible, as broad as possible. Deep. So call deep, a strike -- or even more impressive, a grievance strike, because that takes more discipline -- or an intermittent strike. If it's contract mobilization -- there's other types, political mobilization -- you start six months before expiration, particularly in a larger group. There are mobilizers, not just stewards. So it's structure, mobilizers -- one for twenty at the most -- members, it's education. We start way in advance. We figure out together -- it's two way -- what is the contract going to be about? All members participate at least surveying. They're not all mobilizers. Ideally, 10% are mobilizers. Action, the third component -- it's another triangle -- structure, education (two way), and then action. Action starts with wear red shirts on Thursday. We started that before, not long before, but the year before [Gerry] Horgan was run over and killed in Verizon [1989 NYNEX strike when a scab worker ran into and killed Horgan on a picket line in Westchester NY]. That local [Local 1103] then took it up as religion. But "wear red on Thursday" came from the first big year of CWA mobilization, which was [19]87. It starts with wear red on Thursday. We got to that -- we did a joint training with the Boilermakers. The Boilermakers had started "inside out," and they had a whole program around the contracts and we did joint training. I organized with a leader of the Boilermakers. I wasn't elected. I was the Director of Organization. We met in Kansas City where they were based, ironically, the Boilermakers, because they were doing a version of this throughout

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the union. We brought people from every district [for] three or four days. And a lot of them came away with, "Yeah, that's the way we want to bargain." Morty was somewhere in between. He was great at negotiations, but he supported this idea. And so it started then --

Debbie [02:08:35] "Then" meaning the first --

Larry [02:08:36] [19]87. It wasn't just about that --

Debbie [02:08:37] But the first [post-divestiture] contracts were [19]86 --

Larry [02:08:40] Yeah. [19]86 there was no CWA mobilization.

Debbie [02:08:44] Okay.

Larry [02:08:44] CWA mobilization was not linked to telecom bargaining. It was linked to a strategy for the union, no matter where you work. The biggest example was the New Jersey state workers. But again, 4309 was an example, in some ways, in a deeper way with grievance strikes. The whole notion was to redefine bargaining and the linkage of the mobilizers, one for ten, to the actual elected people at the table, not two worlds. We're not just there to support them. We're there together to figure out if we're going to do meaningful bargaining and to figure out where we end up. A lot of people hated that, because it meant the bargaining process would go on much longer. If you believed in this model -- some of it was belief -- you didn't care about that. We didn't care when the contract expired but we began way in advance of that. The strike was a tactic. This is very confused today. Shawn Fain, UAW president, in the Big Three auto bargaining [in 2023] focused on months of mobilization but the expanding limited strike is what was noticed.

Larry [02:09:59] The strike is a tactic. It's an action. We have a whole series of actions. That's the way these [CWA Mobilization] booklets are broken down. It starts with wear red on Thursday. The strike is not necessarily the penultimate. Most private sector workers in the United States practically have no right to strike. They'll be replaced or some other version. They don't have the power to strike. It won't make any difference. The employer will say, "Good! See you later." But that doesn't mean they don't have a way to build power through mobilization. As you see in this booklet, *Mobilizing to Build Power*, from day one. That's what it was about. Every member could relate to that in some way.

Debbie [02:10:50] How important was education to mobilization?

Larry [02:10:53] Most of the activity. Back to my great-grandmother. If you measured most of what people did, it was the education, defined as two-way discussion. It's not one way, we'll teach you a new language. It was, let's figure it out together. This is in the ideal. Let's figure it out together. It's a different kind of unionism. And to link them -- those mobilizers, I knew, we knew, were the best organizers for new units, not just the AT&T wireless kind of organizing where we had the advantage of, We're AT&T, you're blah, blah, blah. We do the same jobs, except for retail. Customer service, technician -- retail is different. But all kinds of organizing. CWA organizing was based on, you'll organize where you live. This notion of Norma Rae, the organizers flying around the country -- we virtually eliminated it. District based, not DC. Never was DC based. District based in a national team. The tradeoff was there's district organizing coordinators -- Seth Rosen was a great example. [District 4 organizing coordinator; vice president District 4, 2005-2012 when he died

in a tragic drowning accident]. District organizing coordinator was his initial job when he left the local [4309]. He had done organizing before part-time because we had the advantage of -- like Jeff was talking about in his own thing as a local officer -- you could go off the clock and you'd still have health care, but the union would pick up your pay, reimburse your lost time. So from day one, for me as the organizing director -- again, there was a lot of receptivity to that concept. Lost time organizing had real roots in CWA. Before I became national director, for five years I had travelled all over District 1 with organizing drives that helped build a different culture there with Morty and Jan. They embraced that -- the idea that we had to grow the union or we're going to die. And that was [when unions represented] 20% of the private sector. Again, we're now at 6 [percent]. But in CWA, even when it was at 20 [percent], more so than almost any other national union in the private sector, and we were private and public both at that point. When I came to Washington from New Jersey, we had public and private sector organizing experience. That's why CWA was the principal founder of Jobs with Justice. We embraced the notion that we're on a labor death march in the U.S. All you had to do was look at the chart. The percentage organized was not going to stop dropping at 20 [percent].

Larry Cohen Interview. Part 2

Debbie [00:00:04] Mobilization.

Larry [00:00:04] They start at the same time. CWA mobilization, Jobs with Justice.

Debbie [00:00:08] My understanding of the origins of Jobs with Justice is that [the] first post-divestiture organizing of a long-distance competitor was at MCI -- I believe it was customer service, maybe operator center -- in Michigan.

Larry [00:00:26] Not operators, just customer service. Southfield, Michigan. Again, it's District 4. Bob [Johnson] and Jeff [Rechenbach] and total support for the campaign and Jobs with Justice. It's not a fluke. He could talk about why that happened. I don't know.

Jeff [00:00:43] It was a target and it made sense. We had some great structure in place already. So you had a perfect set up with Larry now taking on this organizing notion and Bob, who was just --

Larry [00:01:01] Amazing.

Jeff [00:01:01] -- a great leader. Talk about somebody who's just loyal to the union. When the union was going in this direction, that's exactly the direction Bob was going with all of his heart and soul. And so he climbed right on board, even though that, in some ways, was not the model that he necessarily had grown up with. He, like I, had grown up under the Marty Hughes top-down model.

Larry [00:01:28] Yeah, but you had your own history, I would say.

Jeff [00:01:30] Yes. And so did Bob. Bob had his down in Portsmouth [00:01:32][Ohio]. [1.2s]

Larry [00:01:34] That's right. Bob was a firebrand.

Jeff [00:01:35] Yes, yes.

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Debbie [00:01:37] Bob Johnson.

Jeff [00:01:38] Bob Johnson. Yes, yes. He had some wonderful stories about organizing activity down in southwestern Ohio.

Larry [00:01:44] Yeah. You talk about action.

Jeff [00:01:47] Southwestern Ohio, Portsmouth area. He proudly would bring out a copy of *Look* magazine from back in the [19]50s somewhere, about the strike in Portsmouth that had gone on for I think seven months or something. Some of the stories that Bob talked about out of that strike. They had one guy who wouldn't join the union and they found him up a pole one day, and they brought out some gas cans and doused the base of the pole and said, "Are you ready to join yet?" [Laughs] And he joined.

Debbie [00:02:30] Who was the employer?

Jeff [00:02:32] It was General Telephone of Ohio.

Larry [00:02:35] Yeah. That's important. You asked a great question without knowing the answer. I was going to interject that. The fact that Johnson came from General [Telephone] -- it's very different than the bureaucratic union that, for the most part -- not Ohio Bell -- existed in the Bell System. As you well know, the history of that was bureaucratic. It wasn't CIO. In [19]48, it merged with TWOC, the Telephone Workers Organizing Committee, which had a very different history. But General was never part of that. You had to fight like hell to survive --

Jeff [00:03:05] Yes.

Larry [00:03:06] -- for the union. And remember, Portsmouth, Ohio is on the river. It's basically a southern town that's in southern Ohio. The other side of the river is the South. And Johnson was amazing. That's the kind of people in my whole life that mentored me. Right now, chokes me up. He was an incredible leader. That's because he was also a soldier. He followed Marty Hughes everywhere to the very end and did what Marty asked. But he understood what it meant to organize, how you should bargain, how you build a union as much as anybody that's ever lived.

Debbie [00:03:50] How did he mentor you, Larry?

Larry [00:03:51] Well, Jeff, you started that, how he mentored you.

Debbie [00:03:54] No, I asked you. [Jeff laughs]

Larry [00:03:55] Well, alright. I'll come after. He mentored Jeff a lot more than me. That's how I got to know Jeff.

Jeff [00:04:01] Yes, he mentored me, obviously, in that role. He was my supervisor and it was by example. I literally shadowed Bob for three or four years. He deliberately, without me knowing it at the time, was grooming me to eventually become the vice-president. He just made a point of engaging me in every single discussion about any kind of policy, anything that was happening in the union.

Debbie [00:04:34] What were the lessons?

Jeff [00:04:37] The lesson that I got from Bob, more than anything, was just this intense loyalty to the union. There were times when Marty would say, "We're going to do something," and Bob --

Debbie [00:04:49] Marty Hughes.

Jeff [00:04:49] Marty Hughes. And Bob Johnson would be absolutely polar opposite on it. But when those were the marching orders, we marched. And that was this the sense of, we're going to stick with the union no matter what. He gave me that plus also this sense of engaging others. He did it with me, and then I tried to do it with basically the rest of the staff. I told the staff early on when I became vice-president, "Look, I want you to be able to think and act independently. If we screw up, we'll screw up together and we'll take ownership of it. But I will defend you to the end no matter what decision we make." That gave them more of a sense of being able to do things and accomplish things rather than, here's the marching orders, go ahead and march. It emboldened their creativity to do different things. That's where you come up with the Seth Rosens of the world, the John Ryans, these creative thinkers that can really take up a problem and attack it head on. I attribute that to Bob who was comfortable enough in his own skin and his own level of knowledge to engage others that maybe knew more than he did and be willing to take their advice.

Debbie [00:06:18] I want to shift in this question. We've been talking a lot about militance, about creativity. I'd like to hear you both talk a little bit about strategy. We're building power. At the same time, in order to be effective with militant and creative strategies and tactics, one has to have an analysis of how much power you have.

Larry [00:07:25] Yeah.

Debbie [00:07:26] So I like to listen --

Larry [00:07:28] Yeah. Number one, we used that terminology in every bargaining. But also in the country as a whole. It wasn't that way for labor, but political action should solely be about, I want to be happier. And what does that mean? So if I'm running for dog -- you don't run for dog catcher, but -- city council, board of education. It should be about happiness, not about winning an election. Now that's totally fucked up in this country, but to this day, that's what I preach, teach, do. Because of the Bob Johnsons -- he totally got that -- the Vic Crawleys, that's District 6. And tens of thousands in District 1 -- that's a lot. The leadership of [Districts] 4 and 6 and eventually when Harry Ibsen was in [District] 9 [1983-1992]. Harry had the same kind of political culture as Jeff did -- a little bit different than Bob in terms of where he came from. With Morty leading but me organizing -- and in my own world, the Jobs with Justice organizing, helping new people organize in new units, contract mobilization. It was Bob and Jeff, it was Crawley, it was Harry Ibsen. The others were fine. They weren't excited about it. Eventually, Noah Savant in [District] 3 [2005-2009] but that didn't last that long.

Debbie [00:09:02] So having the district vice-president supportive was critical to --

Larry [00:09:07] And then, how you work with the executive board. I'm basically an organizer since I was fighting Rizzo and chose to do that. That was a choice. I didn't have to do that. So

organizing can be summarized in two words: broader and deeper. Broader means more people, deeper means more activity. It's not just quantitative, but it's strategy, power analysis and building deeper. I looked at the CWA board, I didn't know any of them, except Morty and Jan, when I became assistant to the president and director of organization. I knew my world. I was very much embedded in New Jersey, politically and in every way. I moved from Philadelphia, eventually, to just on the other side of the river. I lived on the river on the New Jersey side. I was also emotionally totally Philadelphia, not New York. I looked at the CWA board, and it gave me a lot of pause about taking that job on for a million reasons. But I was -- you could call it scared or horrified or both. It's not just that board. You're the organizing director when organizing is getting increasingly impossible. Here's one example about Jobs with Justice and the AFL-CIO. I didn't know any of that, but I sure got a taste of it in a hurry when we started Jobs with Justice. The [CWA executive] board -- it became clear to me that, in their own way, overwhelmingly, they were very, very decent, but we had to build up alliances. For me, in that period, to make that move, I had to figure out our Board, about 15 members at the time.

Jeff [00:11:58] Yes.

Larry [00:11:59] But then we brought in the sectors and then the diversity [board seats beginning in 2007], which I'm very proud of, Jeff and I winning that vote and getting that done. But I knew I had to organize inside -- you know, that half of my time was with that board, the national staff and local leaders. Not around them. A lot of people would just work around them. I didn't like that. And [District] 4 was like a godsend for me. And then [District] 6. Crawley wasn't there initially. I don't remember the years. I could make it up. Jeff would be happy if I made it up. [Crawley District 6 vice-president 1992-1996].

Jeff [00:12:34] [Laughs] And believe it.

Larry [00:12:35] I'd go to St. Louis and stay in his house with him and his wife and his daughter and son who was active in CWA -- and the other daughter had moved out. But they were everything to me. And together we built the transformation, particularly the fight to organize wireless -- which was huge because [in] the contract language from [19]86, the company management said -- just like they're saying now with the [AT&T wireless] agents -- neutrality and majority sign up do not apply to wireless.

Debbie [00:13:56] Anyway, you were going to the wireless organizing story, which --

Larry [00:14:03] Yeah, well I was tying it into -- also, right now, to me, the big membership crisis, which, you know, we got to get -- it's not my job to get people's head around that, so I have to work with Claude [Cummings, CWA president at the time of the interview] to do that. Tom Smith [CWA organizing director at the time of the interview]. Derrick Osobase [District 6 vice-president at the time of the interview]. There's a crisis in terms of, do they [AT&T wireless franchise stores] own stores like Starbucks or are they all franchised like McDonald's? Because of the change [in the NLRB rules] brought about by Jennifer [Abruzzo, National Labor Relations Board general counsel at the time of the interview] literally -- majority signup and joint employer, much better joint employer than we had with the Obama [National Labor Relations] Board. [Larry is referring to the 2023 NLRB *Cemex* decision which requires that an employer that commits an unfair labor practice in the run-up to a union election must immediately recognize and bargain with the union.] It's very clear -- and [using] the 1986 [contract] language [with AT&T] -- that we have a golden opportunity

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to use the 25,000 members at AT&T retail, with the more than 25,000 now who work in the [franchised] agents' [stores]. But that notion -- it's the same notion that we developed and we had coming out of New Jersey, with Morty's support, which was essential. But you had to win over in a deeper way [the] vice presidents.

Larry [00:15:34] But winning over District 4 and District 6 was key.

Debbie [00:15:47] District 6 represented workers at SBC.

Larry [00:15:49] I know. But then it merged with AT&T. I don't know the year for that either. It was the first merger. So AT&T -- however you want to describe it -- you describe it as long-distance. It's complicated what it was. But AT&T bought and merged with SBC. [SBC bought AT&T in 2005, changed its name to AT&T. Prior to this, SBC had already acquired Pacific Telesis, SNET, and Ameritech. Later, the new merged AT&T bought BellSouth.] But initially, yes, SBC, which had the same contractual paragraph about majority signup and neutrality. The origins of organizing at wireless were in District 6. It could have been somewhere else but it was in District 6. And it was because of Vic Crawley, who for decades before I knew him was totally committed to this kind of organizing. And, eventually, he is elected District [6] vice-president. In [19]86, [the] vice-president was very different, but when he[Crawley] became vice-president, we created the [executive] board organizing committee. Again, this is a version of organizing inside. Board organizing committee -- Crawley is the chair. Jeff was on it but was probably before you.

Jeff [00:16:57] Yes.

Larry [00:16:58] So getting people on that committee who had this view -- it wasn't just me. It wasn't Morty. It was that we had a team.

Debbie [00:17:08] Would you consider the wireless organizing of -- actually, it went from SBC, which bought Pacific Telesis -- and a condition of support for that merger from CWA was winning the neutrality and card check language in both companies in the merged --

Larry [00:17:34] Well, you're talking about for wireless because we had that language but it was narrowly defined.

Debbie [00:17:38] And it was only in the Long Lines contract. It was not in the SBC contract, and it was not in the Pacific Bell contract.

Larry [00:17:47] I don't think that's right.

Debbie [00:17:49] I know it's right.

Larry [00:17:50] Well, we'd have to check it because I would argue that it was not for -- there was an argument internally about it, particularly about wireless. But anyway, keep going. We don't have the contracts here. It's not going to matter.

Jeff [00:18:04] Well, SBC merged with Ameritech.

Debbie [00:18:09] After it had bought Pacific Telesis. That was the first merger.

Jeff [00:18:13] Pacific Telesis was the first. Okay.

Larry [00:18:14] That's before they merged with AT&T?

Jeff [00:18:16] Yes. And then SBC actually acquired AT&T, not the other way around. AT&T didn't acquire SBC.

Larry [00:18:24] Yeah. It was more of a merger, but okay.

Jeff [00:18:26] Yes. I mean, and basically [Edward] Whitacre [CEO of SBC 1988-2007] was acquiring the name more than anything. It was still --.

Larry [00:18:32] Okay.

Jeff [00:18:32] Yes. And as part of the condition at Pacific Telesis, and then later at Ameritech, they had to agree to give us card check recognition in exchange for our support at the various utility commissions around the regions that had to have approval. But that again, the genesis of that is down in District 6 and the work that Crawley and Cohen did to make it happen.

Debbie [00:19:01] Yes. Five Years to Card Check. Where I was going with this was: would you consider the process that went on to gain recognition at wireless -- what eventually became AT&T wireless, but was not originally -- one of the biggest organizing successes after the state worker campaign?

Larry [00:19:25] I would say there's a number of those that, in their own way, were key -- including Lucent wall-to-wall manufacturing; including, in a gigantic way, the US Airways [customer service unit] later acquired by American, which is 22,000 people today. That took years. But even things like *The Wall Street Journal* -- it was [organized] not through the [Newspaper] Guild, but that was our own effort -- and getting majority sign-up in all their companies. So they've got Market Watch and we get majority sign-up, and the Guild merging with CWA and adopting that strategy. And then, New Jersey, we actually got majority sign up after I left and assumed the national position, but by law, majority sign-up for public workers. Then in New Mexico, we were involved in all these things. It wasn't just CWA. And then, the origins of the Employee Free Choice Act with majority sign up. The irony, of course, that from 1949-69, [majority sign-up] was [National Labor Relations] Board law, as it is again now. Of course, this is something I still work on -- it's driving me nuts that unions are almost ignoring the *Cemex* decision to bring back Joy Silk [In 2023, the NLRB ruled in the *Cemex* decision that majority sign-up of workers could lead to union recognition, restoring elements of the 1949 *Joy Silk* majority sign-up doctrine.]

Debbie [00:20:51] Could you explain Joy Silk.

Larry [00:20:53] The NLRB in *Joy Silk* [1949] directed that "If the union has a majority, and the employer does not recognize the union and bargain, the Board can order bargaining if the employer commits unfair labor practices." That was key in sustaining organizing momentum, like the sit-down strikes in the 1930s or White House policy in World War II. They work together; these things are not in isolation -- but that was a key and [is an] untold part of why there was this continuing surge of organizing into the 1960s in the private sector. There's a whole parallel story about the

public sector organizing. But in [19]69, the NLRB, before the Supreme Court, reversed its own policy on majority sign-up in oral argument. [President John F.] Kennedy had appointed people like [Byron] White [Supreme Court justice 1962-1983], who was horrible. The decision -- *Gissel* [*NLRB v Gissel Packing*] was the name of that case and SCOTUS [Supreme Court of the United States] reversed *Joy Silk* with the NLRB collaborating. One of the amazing things about [current NLRB General Counsel] Jennifer Abruzzo is she knows the details and frames it historically.

Debbie [00:22:29] Jennifer Abruzzo.

Larry [00:22:29] Yes. A core reason that she wanted to be general counsel -- she had been deputy and she worked there 23 years and got fired by Trump -- was to bring back *Joy Silk*. And within a week of being confirmed -- which was a split vote [51-50]; she got one more vote than she needed or exactly what she needed; I don't remember -- she put out a memo: "We're bringing back *Joy Silk*." When I say she put out a memo -- except for the small number of employees who work for the Board members, all the regional directors and all the lawyers work for her. She put this memo out in August of 2021. But the point being that the consciousness, even today, of how important that decision is and of what we lost and now regained is not well understood.

Larry [00:24:06] USMCA, the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, has better rights for Mexican workers organizing -- with an advisory board from the US -- than what we have here. That drives me nuts. It's not reciprocal. There's no Board looking over what goes on here. But the point being that this notion of, your bargaining will turn to shit if the majority of workers in the country have no real right to organize. Not a titular right. Not a ceremonial right. And at 6% [collective bargaining coverage in the private sector] it's shit everywhere. CWA, despite the bargaining power that the union as a whole had, and that the [executive] board knew they had, particularly at AT&T, but even to some extent in general, and to some extent in New Jersey -- we had organized a lot of people. But CWA embraced this idea -- and that's the core of Jobs with Justice -- that there's no democracy when there's no ability to organize and bargain. Jobs with Justice mobilized around 3 points— organizing and bargaining rights, our standard of living, and secure jobs.

Larry: Every morning she [Jennifer Abruzzo] wakes up with only that in her head.

Debbie [00:25:53] Who are you --

Larry [00:25:54] Jennifer Abruzzo. There's nobody -- there's not a single union president that wakes up in the same way with that in their head. And yet every bargaining -- whether it was the UAW or the CWA bargaining coming up this year in AT&T or Warrior Met [Coal] where the workers were on strike for over a year [2021-2023] [and] had to go back without any agreement -- that's the Mine Workers. That's still the most militant union in -- it's shrunk, but they know what solidarity is.

Debbie [00:26:26] My understanding is Jobs with Justice -- beyond what you said the core understanding is -- is also about labor community --

Larry [00:26:34] Oh, yeah. The idea is we have so few union members that we have to build organization. This was true until recently there. It's functioning in a different kind of way. Fine. But the core was, you sign this pledge card, "I'll be there" -- whether a union member or not -- I'll be there five times a year for somebody else's fight as well as my own. That's the way we can start

winning. [It] was based on -- at that time in 1987, 20% [of private sector workers] are organized -- it was probably 18 [percent]. The only way we win is that people can join something and build something that they have equal ownership in, whether they're in the union or not. And we will have an organizing committee in the cities where we build this, that will have -- That picture [he points to the original Jobs with Justice poster] is meant to represent flight attendants, miners, farmers, community organizations. It's black, Latino, white, men, and women, and that was all very conscious in [19]87. As I said, we added the fourth -- I like triangles, but we added the woman on the right because we needed equality. [All laugh]

Debbie [00:27:52] And my understanding is this specific event was back to the closing of the MCI customer service center and --

Larry [00:28:02] Yeah.

Debbie [00:28:03] -- trying to build a labor/community coalition to fight that and saying, "Oh my god, we have to recreate these things every single time we have a fight. Let's have an organization."

Larry [00:28:16] That's right. But also, let's teach people that they can build and join things that can not only build power but make them happier because we can win. Winning was key.

Debbie [00:28:27] Winning is important, isn't it?

Larry [00:28:29] Yeah.

Debbie [00:28:31] There's so many topics. I don't want to stop before you've talked about the fight over the Employee Free Choice Act.

Larry [00:28:40] Well, if you don't mind me saying this, the AT&T strike of 2004, which my brother [Jeff Rechenbach] here was more key than I was, even though I was EVP [executive vice president], because he was still the vice-president of District 4. That was his last year.

Debbie [00:29:03] Talk about that.

Larry [00:29:04] Our collaboration on that, your [referring to Rechenbach] leadership of that with me supporting --

Jeff [00:29:10] Yes. Again, it was this notion of trying to build something but retain some kind of control over the action. In a typical strike, you go out and strike -- you're handing the keys off to the employer as to what happens next. Well, what we talked about and we then engaged [District 6 vice-president] Andy Milburn down in Texas and -- and now I'm remembering our contracts were on a different time frame than the Pacific Telesis. [In 2004, these were all separate contracts with the different AT&T subsidiaries] The Ameritech contract and the SBC contract had a common expiration and the Pacific Telesis one didn't, for whatever reason, I don't remember what that was. We were trying to recall this earlier today, why there wasn't somebody from District 9 there [District 9 bargained the Pacific Telesis contract].

Larry [00:29:57] Talk about where we met for coffee or breakfast or lunch. Jeff was saying, "Well, there are only three of us there. And I'm thinking, well, what happened to California?"

Jeff [00:30:07] Yes, right.

Debbie [00:30:09] And this is before Bell South [was purchased by AT&T in 2007].

Jeff [00:30:11] Yes. Before Bell South was in the mix. We came up with this notion of, let's do a specifically timed strike. It'll build solidarity within the bargaining unit. People will be engaged. They'll be wanting to take place in this and at the end of that, it'll send a clear message to the company that these people really do care about what's happening at the bargaining table -- and at the same time, not leave it to the company to determine when the strike was over, by doing whatever they're going to do at the bargaining table. So we would retain control to treat it as more of a tactic than an overall strategy. This is a way for us to attack the employer but maintain control over that attack. And so the two of us had talked about it and we thought, well, we've got to get Andy Milburn, who was the vice-president of District 6 at the time, engaged. And we brought him along and he was all on board with it, if I recall.

Larry [00:31:20] It may have taken some --

Jeff [00:31:21] Yes, it took a little while, because he was more of the notion of, we're going to go on strike and we'll stay out until the contract is resolved. That just didn't make sense in the context of where we were today. It just completely disengaged us from where the path was going to go. We wanted to retain it. And he bought in with it and then we gave Larry the job of taking this tactic to Morty. [Laughs] He called us in the office then, Morty did.

Larry [00:32:03] Yeah, the three of us.

Jeff [00:32:04] Yes. He'd been having conversations with the company, trying to get things resolved, trying to move things along, and wasn't entirely thrilled with it because it was going to subvert some of the relationship that he had built up with the CEO at the time, Ed Whitacre. But he went along with it, begrudgingly. I think it turned out to be a great strategy. People felt good about the contract. I think we ratified the contract with higher numbers than we had in the past because they felt some ownership of it. They felt like they'd done something to make this happen. And in fact, they had. They were able to use a tactic that -- they'd [been] taught that a strike was some never-ending thing or potentially never-ending thing, to alright, it's a finite piece of action that we can take. We talked about the legal ramifications of it. We can't do intermittent strikes but you can strike once.

Larry [00:33:10] It's not protected activity, an intermittent strike.

Jeff [00:33:12] Right, right.

Larry [00:33:12] You can do it, but you'll get --

Jeff [00:33:14] It'll be a risk.

Larry [00:33:14] Yeah.

Jeff [00:33:15] Yes. But, you could go out once and bring them back and that was still a protected activity.

Debbie [00:33:21] Why did that increase the leverage to get a good contract, a four-day strike?

Jeff [00:33:32] My dilemma up in District 4 was, we've got a pretty solid group up there, in terms of being able to engage and activate people. But it was a little different down in District 6. You've got a little bit of a mixed bag. That's where you got right-to-work down there. So, it's always a little daunting wondering anywhere through the South what a strike is going to look like in terms of who goes out and who doesn't go out. But this was a way to get people engaged where there wasn't this sense of uncertainty for them. They were willing to sacrifice four days of pay in order to send a message. Would they also be willing to sacrifice a month's pay? Two months' pay? Three months' pay?

Jeff [00:34:22] So that got everybody engaged in a way that they otherwise wouldn't have been. Then the message to the company was, wow, these people really are paying attention to this contract fight in a way that wouldn't have happened had we called a regular strike. And so that translated to leverage at the bargaining table that you could feel. You could feel when you went back -- they were angry. The company was angry. They were not prepared for this tactic. They didn't think we were going to go on strike. And we upset the apple cart for that four-day period that we were out. But at the end of it, they recognized that this potentially could lead to something more drastic. And we got a decent agreement as a result of that.

Larry [00:35:10] That was unprecedented in this country at that time. And it was 100,000 people.

Jeff [00:35:15] Yes.

Larry [00:35:15] Earlier today, Jeff looked up *The New York Times* article on it. And again, what I would chime in would be that bargaining needs to be about being happier. It's the same as political work. For the most part, strikes by then had become you didn't necessarily gain leverage because you had to worry about, the one day longer -- that was our slogan. "One day longer, each day stronger." But that's not necessarily reality, even with -- by then we had, I don't know if it was \$300 a week strike benefit. So that definitely was a cushion for people but the burden goes to every single family on strike. And that leads to a settlement. And again, my own background -- and Jeff helped lead this much more than I did, but I played a role -- and Whitacre refused to talk to Morty. I ended up the one, in addition to dealing with this, dealing with Whitacre.

Debbie [00:36:24] The CEO of SBC.

Larry [00:36:26] Right. And, a year later, I was the president of our union and [Randall] Stephenson replaced Whitacre as CEO. So this all, in a certain way, worked out. But the more important part was that the members knew what they were committing to and were happy to do it. And in my opinion, a better bargaining strategy than a strike, because we would have had the burden of -- which the company totally understood -- well, it's not necessarily "one day stronger" because, at a certain point -- and Morty often used this language, not to a fault, by the way -- we have to measure continuing this against what we're going to gain. I don't think we'll gain anything more than this. Meanwhile, the company's thinking, well, they're going to cave; they're going to

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agree to what they have at some point. You take that off the table with this tactic. And as you saw in *The New York Times* article, Jeff saw it, national public attention on this tactic. And 100,000 people.

Debbie [00:37:32] Right. So now that I'm getting my head wrapped around it --

Larry [00:37:35] Employee Free Choice Act came after that, by the way. Next year.

Debbie [00:37:39] This was a strike -- SBC, by this point, had bought Pacific Telesis and Ameritech, [but] had not yet bought Bell South.

Jeff [00:37:48] Right.

Debbie [00:37:49] That's why they weren't involved.

Jeff [00:37:50] Right. Right.

Debbie [00:37:51] And the long-distance AT&T had not yet been bought.

Jeff [00:37:56] That's right.

Debbie [00:37:57] So you were two districts --

Jeff [00:38:00] Right.

Debbie [00:38:00] -- you don't remember why California wasn't involved -- going on strike, and you had different contracts.

Jeff [00:38:08] Right.

Larry [00:38:08] Jeff's saying California had a different expiration date.

Jeff [00:38:11] Yes.

Larry [00:38:12] That's why they weren't involved in the strike. That's what Jeff said. I don't know the dates.

Debbie [00:38:16] I can't remember.

Jeff [00:38:17] Yes, I don't remember either.

Debbie [00:38:20] I can't remember the years in which, unfortunately, the agreements were made [to have different expiration dates].

Jeff [00:38:24] Yes.

Debbie [00:38:25] Some districts stayed out. Others didn't.

Larry [00:38:30] Well, some added a year to get something, things like that.

Debbie [00:38:33] Yeah, and it broke up [common contract expiration dates]. Something we'll never get back, unfortunately.

Jeff [00:38:37] Right, right, right. But it really was the notion of asking people to sign a check for their four days of pay that they were going to contribute to the cause versus asking them to sign a blank check. And so, you got much deeper buy in. It was a party out on the picket line. These people were out there celebrating. They were having a great time. I think it was the summertime. And it was great. It was good weather.

Larry [00:39:07] Good weather. Yeah.

Jeff [00:39:08] And again, the big thing for me was at the end of the day, they felt real ownership of the contract. They didn't feel like, oh, at the end of the strike, we just gave in to whatever was on the table. We didn't really win what we wanted to win. It really enabled us to help build the union after that.

Debbie [00:39:30] And the company moved as a result of --

Jeff [00:39:33] Yes, the company moved. If I recall, there were some retiree healthcare issues.

Larry [00:39:40] Health care period, yeah.

Jeff [00:39:41] Yes. Healthcare was a big -- in fact, in *The New York Times* article, one of the analysts talks about how much more it was going to cost the company in healthcare costs as a result of this contract, because at that time they wanted us to pay for a fair portion of our healthcare. I forget what the number was at that moment, but they backed off of that and it was a big deal. It's one of these things where it's taking red shirts to another level.

Larry [00:40:15] Absolutely. Highest level.

Jeff [00:40:17] Yes.

Debbie [00:40:19] I don't know about you guys, but I want to try and keep the conversation somewhat [focused]. We need to talk about the Employee Free Choice Act and your ten years of presidency. I'm not sure what other topic. You did some major efforts at restructuring the union during that period. Any other major topics?

Larry [00:40:57] No, we can go with that.

Larry [00:41:02] In my realm -- and Jeff is there at the beginning of it -- the fight to change the Senate rules, expanding the booklet [he references a CWA booklet], training 50,000 people about democracy and how that directly affects -- I don't remember if it was 6% [private sector workers' collective bargaining coverage] by then, but close to it -- our political power. Working class political power was directly tied to collective bargaining and to the lives and well-being of our families and communities. The democracy part of that, not just who do you elect -- as I say, "The rules, not just the rulers" -- came from that. We built the Democracy Initiative, another pamphlet there out of that.

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Debbie [00:41:52] Who were the main folks in the Democracy Initiative?

Larry [00:41:56] Greenpeace, Sierra Club, NAACP, and CWA.

Debbie [00:42:00] So what led you to --

Larry [00:42:02] Anyway, that's not till 2012.

Debbie [00:42:06] Here it says December 2014.

Larry [00:42:07] Yeah. Well, that's the pamphlet. 2012.

Debbie [00:42:10] Let's talk about Employee Free Choice Act.

Larry [00:42:12] Right. The simple thing is, take the lessons from CWA, the crisis in the country, put them together. By that time, eighteen years of Jobs with Justice, that had limits. How do people in the largest and the wealthiest democracy in the world with the worst bargaining rights -- how do you reverse it? The core of the Employee Free Choice Act was majority sign-up and first contract arbitration. [Majority sign-up means that a union gains recognition when the majority of employees in the unit sign cards indicating their desire for a union, upon certification by a neutral third party. Majority sign-up is also referred to as "card check" recognition.] It was simple, much simpler than the PRO Act [Protecting the Right to Organize Act, first introduced in the House of Representatives in 2023]. And the PRO Act -- sadly, I would say -- eliminated majority sign-up. It's not in the PRO Act, deliberately -- thinking that majority sign-up is somewhat anti-democratic and why it didn't pass. There's absolutely no basis for that. But anyway.

Debbie [00:43:10] Neutrality is not in it --

Larry [00:43:12] You can't legislate neutrality in the United States because of so-called First Amendment rights for employers. So you're immediately up against the Supreme Court. What you can do, which [NLRB General Counsel Jennifer] Abruzzo -- so we're now in a moment where Abruzzo and the [National Labor Relations] Board, because of her leadership, are ahead of the PRO Act, and few in union leadership have much understanding of that. So joint employer, majority sign-up. There's other things that are fine in the PRO Act, by the way. [Permitting] Secondary boycotts [which were banned in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act]. But they're not the core of what the problem is here. I would absolutely support eliminating [the ban on] secondary boycotts. But in any case, it does not have neutrality because of judicial decisions on employer speech rights.

Debbie [00:44:00] Okay.

Larry [00:44:00] When I was elected president, I immediately was asked by President Sweeney to chair the organizing committee of the AFL-CIO.

Debbie [00:44:11] John Sweeney, president of AFL-CIO [1995-2009].

Larry [00:44:14] Yeah. And I did that the whole ten years I was president. We needed to confront, more than anything, as a Federation -- we don't agree on all kinds of things, political and otherwise, but agree that the sole thing we should wake up with every morning is the chart that you see in

almost everything we wrote. So even in this pamphlet on building democracy [picks up pamphlet] -- very first page, this is training 50,000 CWA shop stewards. It's all rooted in that. Jobs with Justice was all rooted in that chart.

Debbie [00:44:57] This is the chart on page one that shows the rise and fall of private sector collective bargaining coverage from 13% in 1930 to 36% in the early [19]50s, down to 6.6%. This chart ends at 2012.

Larry [00:45:15] And it's now 6.5 [percent]. So it did level off -- hard not to level off when you're that low. There's another chart, it shows the other countries of the world. Is that right there?

Debbie [00:45:31] Yeah, page three.

Larry [00:45:32] It's collective bargaining coverage. Part of the problem in the US -- it's too often called union density. It's called union membership because we're focused on, what is our membership? Too often, that's about dues as well, as opposed to what's our power? And the power -- France is the big example -- is collective bargaining coverage. They don't focus on union membership.

Debbie [00:45:53] So you were chair of the organizing committee.

Debbie [00:45:57] And got people to agree -- not just the committee, but obviously Sweeney -- that we should rise and fall over the collapse of US labor law in terms of bargaining and organizing rights, that we should just take that on, rise or fall. That was 2006 or [200]7, the origins of it. And, I think that's what I'm trying to --

Debbie [00:46:23] Larry, how would you sum up, for an outsider why US labor law is so weak? And the way employers are allowed to function under the law?

Larry [00:46:43] It's the combination of -- no other country, except for the UK [United Kingdom] and some provinces in Canada, have the notion of a win-lose representation election where the employer campaigns on your right to bargain. In every other democracy, it's presupposed you have a right to bargain, but if people don't join, there's not going to be any outcome. In virtually every other democracy, they have sectoral bargaining, which is, again, for me, a whole other level of this. We don't have to get into that today. This is what's going on in Sweden right now with [Elon] Musk. They have sectoral bargaining. There's a contract for that sector, their mechanics -- I don't know exactly how broad the sector is, but in any case, they're covered. And led by [Elon] Musk himself -- he's a micromanager -- [Tesla in Sweden] refused to acknowledge that they're covered by a collective agreement. That strike -- there's 150 mechanics in Sweden, but they repair the Tesla vehicles. And now, at this point today, all through Scandinavia, there's work actions involved -- including in Sweden, the post office won't deliver license plates for Tesla. So they [Tesla] made a colossal blunder. There's a lot of ways Tesla, even from their framework, could have dealt with it. They've totally screwed up. It's now public that they're trying to hire somebody to deal with Nordic labor relations and they don't produce there. It's only the peripherals, mostly, in this case, repair.

But aside from China, their [Tesla's] facility in Germany is probably their second biggest facility in the world. Germany has sectoral bargaining and Germany has IG Metall, a union we worked with. Ver.di is the one we mainly worked with on T-Mobile. But we also worked with IG Metall on a

number of projects. And it's already now come to the point where IG Metall is on a major membership drive because they have the same exact issue. They have sectoral bargaining for the metal sector. That's their sector. They're the dominant (almost) the only union -- metal is broader than steel or car. They have divisions, like car. It doesn't apply in the suburban Berlin factory of Tesla. There's probably -- I'm making up the number -- 6,000 people there as opposed to 160. So now, he's got a giant problem.

And of course, particularly given the UAW settlements at the [Big] Three [auto companies in 2023] and the fact that he [Musk's Tesla company] has the Fremont plant -- by the way, \$495 million from Obama [auto recovery plan, 2009]. And we could not get -- I worked with [Ron] Gettelfinger, the president of UAW [2002-2010] to get the people who worked there-- General Motors -- it was called the NUMMI plant with Toyota, a joint venture -- they made the Toyota Corolla and the Chevy Prism -- and the Obama government, in that car crisis where they bailed out in bankruptcy Chrysler and General Motors -- Ford didn't go into bankruptcy -- they gave \$495 million to Musk. He hadn't made a car. We met with Biden, the three of us, Biden, Ron, me. I was chair of the organizing committee and very close to Obama and knew Biden. Two meetings. The first one was automatic rehire, successorship, and Biden comes back. "No. Can't do anything." They wouldn't say to Musk, "You're not getting the \$500 million." The story's worse and worse. If I went into the details of the car czar who worked there, where they are now -- it's a horrible story about the lack of depth in the Obama White House and Administration for workers' rights.

Debbie [00:51:02] I just wonder -- this was a NUMMI plant that became a Tesla plant?

Debbie [00:51:07] Yeah, it was a union plant.

Debbie [00:51:07] Okay, okay.

Larry [00:51:10] But anyway, we're back in the context of this.

Debbie [00:51:12] Right. And Employee Free Choice Act.

Larry [00:51:15] It was very clear in 2005 -- probably right away we started on this, but I don't remember the first year bills were filed. I know that in the House, the first year the bill was filed, we didn't have Senate majority then. But it passed by 65% [in the House of Representatives], including sixteen Republicans. So that had to be 2009, I would guess. No, it couldn't be, because in 2009 we also had, depending on how you count, 60 or 59 Democrats in the Senate. Anyhow, so it was the year before that. [correction: It was in 2007 the House of Representatives passed the Employee Free Choice Act by a vote of 241 to 85.] In 2006 -- must have been [when] the [Nancy] Pelosi speakership began, and we had one-on-ones. [Pelosi elected speaker in 2006, took office 2007-2011 and again 2019-2023] She embraced it. [Chair of the House Education and Labor Committee Representative] George Miller led it. He was my brother and friend and totally amazing guy. He embraced it immediately. Jody Calemine, who had worked at CWA as a young lawyer, was then working for George and worked for George until George left, probably 2012, [20]13 [actually in 2015]. It had to be 2007 or [200]8 -- passes by 65% in the House, with sixteen Republicans, [with] states like Michigan and Ohio, Republicans voting for it. We couldn't get it on the floor of the Senate in 2009. So 2009, we have a Senate landslide, biggest since the [Franklin D.] Roosevelt years. 60 senators. That counts [Senator Edward] Kennedy, who had a major seizure. It's the main reason we never got it through. On Inauguration Day at the lunch, Kennedy had a seizure and never

came back. Came back for one hour, for one vote, but didn't resign. I didn't ask him to resign, obviously. We never got his seat replaced till he died [in August 2009]. Soon after, a group of union presidents, including Sweeney, met with President Obama in the Roosevelt Room right next to the Oval Office. Obama says to me -- after I give the pitch. And he says, in front of everybody, "Larry, I hear you well, but our priority is healthcare." And he probably made up a story that after healthcare -- well, he never got to healthcare. We end up in early 2009 with the Affordable Care Act. Barely better than nothing. We did support it. And then [Republican] Scott Brown wins.

Debbie [00:54:00] In Massachusetts.

Larry [00:54:01] Yeah.

Larry [00:54:02] And so we're nowhere near -- we still have a supermajority, but at that point we're probably at 58, 57 [senators in favor of the Employee Free Choice Act]. We don't have Blanche Lincoln for this.

Debbie [00:54:11] From Arkansas, right?

Larry [00:54:13] Yeah.

Debbie [00:54:14] No, Nebraska.

Larry [00:54:17] No, she's Arkansas.

Larry [00:54:18] Yeah. Corporate lobbyist, as soon as she left, like so many of them, [Thomas A.] Daschle [D-SD 1987-2005] and others. In any case, the good news would be -- and a nice pin here in my box, metal pin of Employee Free Choice Act, I think you saw -- but the good news would be that you could -- not just me -- you could go to almost any union meeting in America and people knew what the Employee Free Choice Act was. That's one. Two, out of that campaign came Fix the Senate Now, and the Democracy Initiative. It's the same players. Out of that campaign with [Senate Majority Leader] Harry Reid [D-NV] as the leader at the time, all we could get was, "We'll change the rules so that we can put a nomination on the floor." The key is to put it on the floor because even a bill -- if the bill is on the floor and discussed, you can pass it with a majority, but you can't put it on the floor without a cloture vote, they call it. And you need 60 [votes] under the current rules for cloture. There's a couple of exceptions. Out of this giant campaign that came from the Employee Free Choice Act for us -- and then CWA put huge resources, including a huge chunk of my time, into Fix the Senate Now -- we got the rules changed on nominations. People were saying, "Well, when Republicans have a majority. What will they do?" And I would say, "They're going to do whatever they're going to do." That's backward thinking. Groups that I mostly like, NARAL [National Abortion Rights Action League], Planned Parenthood [said,] "We'll lose abortion rights." And I'd say to them, "We don't have abortion rights. We have a court decision. We should be passing a law now for abortion rights, not resting on Roe." And who am I to say that? But I said it just like this because they opposed Fix the Senate Now, totally opposed it. But through the needle we accomplished a few things. At the time we had no functioning NLRB, because they didn't have three members. We had no labor secretary. The newly Elizabeth Warren Consumer Financial Protection Board, with no director. We had no EPA administrator. And more importantly -- that's important enough -- 300 judges were backed up. So it took two years to get that. We could not get what we wanted, which was a version of talking filibuster, which right now we still don't have. But

the important thing would be that the CWA executive board and our members did this big education project, like we would do on contract bargaining, on Employee Free Choice Act. Same thing. With thousands of stewards off the job. Embraced this.

Debbie [00:57:12] That executive board, meaning CWA?

Larry [00:57:14] Yeah, yeah. And eventually the AFL-CIO -- again, I was willing to argue for total support from other unions. When you're that right, it's not that hard to argue. And the same with the Trans-Pacific Partnership fight they took on. It's not in their DNA to do those kind of campaigns.

Debbie [00:57:31] And that was a victory.

Larry [00:57:33] That was a victory, in part because of the Bernie [Sanders presidential] campaign and [Hillary] Clinton moving somewhat. Then most ironically, as Jeff knows better than I do, [Donald J.] Trump embraced this, "Stop the TPP."

Larry [00:57:51] So we're still there with majority signup, first contract. Abruzzo can't really fix first contract. She's helping, very focused on it, but can't do arbitration for first contracts by fiat. Can't dictate the agreement, but has done a lot on bad faith bargaining, including Starbucks.

Larry [00:58:20] And the PRO Act does not have majority signup. It does have first contract arbitration.

Debbie [00:58:31] Let's move to the topic of restructuring the union -- a lot happened -- and the finances.

Larry [00:58:42] Well, also the diversity --

Debbie [00:58:45] Yeah.

Larry [00:58:46] I would say [it's] as important as anything.

Debbie [00:58:47] Okay. Talk about that.

Larry [00:58:48] Four elected leaders from the union -- they didn't have to be local presidents but they all have been -- in diversity seats [on the CWA executive board] because it was too slow to change the makeup of the board. Worked together on that. Annie [Hill, executive vice president 2008-2011, secretary-treasurer 2011-2015] worked on it. Do you want to talk about that?

Jeff [00:59:07] Yes. That's it in a nutshell. Things weren't moving quickly. We've definitely made inroads. The Board looks different, even without the diversity seats than it did when we first came into the union.

Larry [00:59:23] That [the diversity seats] helped break that open --

Jeff [00:59:24] Right. Yes.

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Larry [00:59:25] Several of the diversity Board members moved from that to district vice-president.

Jeff [00:59:27] That's right.

Jeff [00:59:27] Frank Arce [elected to diversity seat on the board and then District 9 vice president in 2019].

Jeff [00:59:28] Right. So, it really created not just a path, but a notion that this is something to be alert to and heads up to and pay attention to making our union --

Debbie [00:59:42] Jeff, describe what the "it" is.

Jeff [00:59:43] Just diversity on the board.

Debbie [00:59:47] No, but pretend it's not the three of us who know what it is. What was the constitutional amendment.

Jeff [00:59:55] Right. We took the union and broke it into, what, four different regions?

Larry [01:00:00] Yeah.

Jeff [01:00:00] Combining some districts. And said that in each one of those districts, those combined districts would elect a diversity representative to sit on the executive board and have all the same power and votes as an elected regional vice-president or sector president or anybody else that sat on that Board.

Debbie [01:00:25] Without the bargaining responsibility.

Jeff [01:00:28] Without the bargaining responsibility. Their responsibility was basically to bring a diverse view to the to the board deliberations. And clearly, that's what they've done.

Debbie [01:00:37] When was this passed? And what qualified as diversity?

Jeff [01:00:42] I'm going to defer to my numbers wizard here.

Larry [01:00:44] Yeah, but I'm not great on [unclear] the year. [It was in 2007.]

Jeff [01:00:47] Yes.

Debbie [01:00:49] Okay. What qualified as diversity?

Larry [01:00:53] You couldn't legislate that so anyone could run for it. But we created a culture where a white male would have been totally embarrassed. I don't know that one ever ran. And so it mostly meant people of color, particularly African-American, in terms of the reality. But you couldn't legislate that because of the Labor Management Reporting -- and what's the D stand for? LMRDA -- I forgot what the D is. [Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act] You couldn't

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restrict who ran but you could describe the purpose. The result was fine because no white male ever ran for it.

Jeff [01:01:35] Right.

Larry [01:01:35] For any of them.

Debbie [01:01:38] 2007.

Larry [01:01:40] Okay, so Barbara [Easterling, CWA secretary-treasurer, 1992-2008] was still there. That's good.

Jeff [01:01:44] Yes.

Debbie [01:01:44] My memory is she chaired the committee that came up with the proposal.

Larry [01:01:49] That came from -- I don't want it to be about me. It didn't come from there.

Jeff [01:01:53] Yes. No. Yes, it came from the president's office. There's no question about where it came from.

Debbie [01:01:59] And I know Yvette was very involved. Yvette Herrera.

Jeff [01:02:01] Yes.

Debbie [01:02:02] You were driving it.

Larry [01:02:03] The minority caucus -- I used to go to those meetings. It goes back to the Rizzo stuff. The minority caucus helped drive it. And the board was great. The board drove it. And Barbara supported it.

Jeff [01:02:19] Yes.

Larry [01:02:19] But it had huge grassroots support from amazing leaders across the union.

Jeff [01:02:25] And it just made sense. I mean, it really did try and bring us into the 21st century.

Larry [01:02:31] Yeah.

Jeff [01:02:34] It created a board that's much more reflective of who the union is. Something that had been missing since its inception. Since day one of the union. I feel very good about the progress we've made in changing that dynamic.

Larry [01:02:53] Yeah. Initially, the minority caucus said to me, "We want a representative." I thought about that for a while and said, "That's not going to change anything, we're going to do four."

Debbie [01:03:07] And they wanted it to come from them, as opposed --

Larry [01:03:09] No, they didn't care about that. They would have been happy with electing --

Jeff [01:03:12] Yes. Yes. It did more than just change the diversity. I think it also changed the perspective. I mean, these were local leaders.

Larry [01:03:22] And that was deliberate, too.

Jeff [01:03:22] Yes, these are local leaders now on this board that brought a different mindset and a different set of concerns to board discussions in a way that you couldn't have accomplished with any other process. It was really a twofer although it was advertised as just diversity.

Larry [01:03:43] Yes. For us it was, secondarily, that it'll change the way the board behaves at meetings.

Jeff [01:03:52] Right.

Jeff [01:03:53] Because they were likely going to be huge local leaders, not like token local -- they had to get elected in these combined districts. So Carolyn Wade [president local 1040 in New Jersey], Claude Cummings [then president local 6222 in Houston, then District 6 vice president, then CWA president beginning in 2023], Madelyn Elder [local 7901]. She was the West Coast. She was a leader of Pride at Work as well as being president of [the] Portland [Oregon] local. Who was the fourth one we that had initially -- I forget. [The fourth was Nestor Soto, local 33225 in Puerto Rico.] But anyhow, those were three of the four -- I'd have to think through. What region are we missing?

Debbie [01:04:40] So talk a little bit about --

Larry [01:04:42] But that was huge to get that done and the enthusiasm around doing it, ultimately -- before the convention and at the convention and then that initial election and the embrace of those four and the equality they had with board members who had a huge staff and bargaining responsibility. They had full equality. They had the same power to change the union as anyone else, including the president of the union and the secretary- treasurer.

Larry [01:05:19] And there were other things. What was our thing called when we got elected president [and] EVP? And Barbara was there for this. She was very good at contributing, but also going along.

Jeff [01:05:31] Yes.

Larry [01:05:31] She loved Jeff personally -- not necessarily politically, but personally. And that was deliberate, too. That was not why I was interested in Jeff. We put out a booklet with ten changes. What was that called? I would have that in a box in there, but I don't remember --

Jeff [01:05:52] Yes, it's in my attic.

Larry [01:05:53] You were there. You don't remember either?

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Larry [01:05:55] One of them was this diversity.

Jeff [01:05:57] Yes.

Debbie [01:05:57] I'm thinking of Committee of the Future.

Larry [01:05:59] No, we didn't call it that.

Jeff [01:06:00] No, no, no, this was way past that.

Debbie [01:06:02] It was after that?

Larry [01:06:04] No, this is when we ran.

Jeff [01:06:04] This is when the two of us got elected together. This was 2005.

Larry [01:06:09] This is far after Committee of the Future. This is when we ran for office.

Larry [01:06:12] Yeah.

Larry [01:06:12] It was about, Here's ten changes. I think it could have been eleven because I like that number, too. But it was ten or eleven changes.

Debbie [01:06:22] [Reading] "Ready for the future."

Larry [01:06:22] There you go.

Jeff [01:06:24] Yes. Thank you.

Debbie [01:06:25] "CWA's strategic plan with eleven" -- this says eleven --

Jeff [01:06:26] There you go.

Larry [01:06:27] I like eleven.

Debbie [01:06:31] 2006. "Bold new Strategic Industry Fund."

Larry [01:06:36] Yeah, we got that adopted.

Jeff [01:06:36] We got that done.

Debbie [01:06:37] "A national telecom office."

Jeff [01:06:37] We got that done.

Debbie [01:06:41] And then, mandated that you bring to the 2007 convention "specific proposals to increase board diversity."

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Larry [01:06:50] It also had things about eliminating meetings we didn't need. I would say that's reverted. Now the good news about zoom is now that has cut the number of meetings. Zoom. Because they do zoom meetings for a lot of them. But in some ways that's reverted.

Debbie [01:07:07] But the reorganization of the board and the Strategic Industry Fund funding issues -- talk a little bit about that.

Jeff [01:07:18] Go ahead.

Larry [01:07:18] No, you go ahead.

Jeff [01:07:19] No, no, no.

Larry [01:07:21] You did as much of that as anybody. I'd rather hear you do it first. Do you mind?

Jeff [01:07:25] This is your time. [Laughs] They've got plenty of time with me anytime they want. Let's let you go through that.

Larry [01:07:33] Yeah. So what's the exact question? So I don't ramble around.

Jeff [01:07:36] The Strategic Industry Funds and --

Larry [01:07:38] Yeah. And then the Growth Fund.

Jeff [01:07:41] Right.

Larry [01:07:41] That might not have been in that proposal, but the notion was that we need resources to build power by industry, even though we're not really set up by industry. And that we'll allocate the funds that way, and that we have this incredibly growing strike fund. Because of the 6% [collective bargaining coverage of workers] and other things, the practical consequences of a strike are not what they were and not sufficient. They're important but not sufficient. So this notion, again, of mobilization and building our power -- not just where we work, but a lot of it is -- we used to talk about, say, with T-Mobile or Sprint -- it's like all their employees are sitting with the management, the management that we're bargaining with, but they're sitting there on that side of the table, too. Because the company has to operate in a market economy. If we don't have sectoral bargaining -- and this I actually worked on more after I left CWA than before -- but if we don't have sectoral bargaining and don't have a sense of our industry and how we build power in the industry, along with the organizing challenges -- the first contract problem becomes hopeless, not hard. I used to say, "It's hard, but not hopeless." I said it a lot. Now, I'm not so sure. But I never really will act as if it's hopeless. And nobody else should either. But it's certainly gotten more hopeless. That was the basis of the Strategic Industry Fund, and that we set a floor -- you were the secretary-treasurer by then, or Barbara was, I don't remember.

Jeff [01:09:31] Barbara was.

Larry [01:09:31] Jeff was key on all this, even though he wants me to talk about it. It was all administrative procedures so that the strike fund would never be in jeopardy. It was only the income from it, and it was only part of the income from it. It was clear that here's the risk-reward. The

reward is a lot greater than the risk. If we don't do this, much broader sense of building power in our industries, including organizing in the industry only, and the people in the industry would make the decision. We broadened the scope of the Defense Fund Oversight Committee, that they would be able to review what we did with the funds.

Debbie [01:10:09] And what was happening to dues income during this period?

Jeff [01:10:15] Well, it -- reflective of the membership -- had been a fairly steady decline. In the telecom industry, the highest paid titles were declining at a much more rapid pace than anything else. The growth that we had was in --

Larry [01:10:32] Things like retail stores.

Jeff [01:10:33] Yes, where the rates weren't as high. The wages weren't as high. So we were seeing a steady decline there. We were also juggling issues with the pension plan. And there was a whole host of financial pressures to try and deal with things. It just didn't make sense for us to be sitting on this huge amount of money that just continued to compound, and use it for a [strike] tactic that -- while not obsolete -- had really become -- it just wasn't --

Larry [01:11:09] Well, for most of our members it wasn't effective.

Jeff [01:11:10] Right. Right. The majority of the members would never see a dollar from that fund. So wouldn't it make more sense to take a portion of that and invest that in building the union? That was the notion of it. It took a little convincing. We had to do a roadshow and go across the country to try and convince people that this was the way it ought to go because their notion was, "Well, we got to have this in case we go on strike. It's got to be here for us because our members have put the money in and they deserve that." Well, they deserve a union that is growing and building power. That's what they deserve. It's not about just making sure that somebody gets a \$300 check in the third week of a strike. It's about making sure that there's power behind that strike or that action or that tactic, whatever it happens to be. And so trying to diversify the use of that fund was a big deal. It was a big sell. We had to work it. Like you said, we had to roll the Defense Fund Oversight Committee into it so this notion that it wasn't just the executive board trying to grab the money, so that there was some rank and file oversight over it. We made a number of different tweaks along the way to make sure that it was palatable for everybody and got a majority at the convention. At the end of the day, it did. Fundamentally, [it] was, I think, a big turning point in trying to resolve the finances of the union and get it so that we could function going forward. I'm long gone now, but some of the things that you did after I left and that even Chris and others have done since then using those dollars are much more creative than we were able to do in the past, where we were sort of hamstrung by our general dues income.

Debbie [01:13:05] Chris Shelton, the president, who came --

Jeff [01:13:06] Chris Shelton, the president. Right. Came after Larry, right.

Larry [01:13:13] And a lot of these campaigns that we talked about, we funded by getting the leadership of that fund, that SIF fund, to support -- like the Employee Free Choice Act. We easily spent \$2 million on that. We spent over \$1 million on Fix the Senate Now. No other union was willing to commit resources like that, and neither was the AFL. I argued quite passionately for these

resources. [I] deeply believed that's part and parcel about our own happiness and about the future of our jobs and our kids.

Debbie [01:13:47] You know what? There's one more that we didn't talk about. International. And I think talking about T-Mobile, and/or the way in which you worked with the Mexican union around the complaint against Sprint -- [those] are examples of your approach to international work. So why don't you, very briefly --

Larry [01:14:11] Yeah. La Conexion Familiar. It was important to me that people in our country, not just in our union, see that the U.S. was at the bottom, in terms of many things -- you could list the things, but one of those things, obviously for a union, [was] collective bargaining and organizing rights. I would always call it "bargaining and organizing rights" because it's the same thing. Too often it's "organizing," and even worse is "union density." I hate that term. Why is that important?

Why is that a public good, union density? But bargaining and organizing rights are a public good. Like voting rights they are necessary for a functioning democracy.

Going back to the organizing effort, particularly because of states like Texas and Arizona and California sharing this huge border with Mexico and realizing even then that we're linked. And in my head -- this turned out to be true, but I didn't know it would be true -- that a reform movement in Mexico was much more likely to succeed than a reform movement in the United States.

So I preached this all over the world; Paul Revere, the American -- I'm ringing the bell. "We're going down the fucking drain. You should learn that. Not just that we may have the best movies and music in the world. You also need to know that in the U.S., the rights of working class people are being destroyed. And copy us at your peril. And be on guard about American corporations." Canada is ahead of the U.S., right? In that period. Not much. But Mexico looks much harder on the surface. Morty [Bahr] was very supportive of this approach; Lou Moore, the international staffer, was not. But we first ended cold war foreign policy by informally agreeing, "No more convention resolutions on foreign policy." None. This started in the late [19]80s, because the resolutions were all like propping up the State Department. We'll leave it at that. We don't have to say CIA. They meant nothing to the average member.

We did have a convention resolution opposing, before it started, the war in Iraq. We were the only union to do it. So that was done because we have good and welfare at the end of a convention and delegates raised it and organized support. It didn't come from the executive board. But basically 25 years of no resolutions on foreign policy.

But starting in the mid-[19]80s, we did what we called cross-border, reciprocal, cross-border organizing training en español. And we had Eduardo Diaz and Virginia Rodriguez to run that. I went to a lot of it, tried to improve my Spanish and failed at that. But, it's a solidarity thing, too. And it was only in Spanish. Recognizing that in those states, particularly, but also other states we have CWAers that are great organizers speaking Spanish. So we should be running organizing training -- back in the [19]80s in Spanish. We started to do that with the Telefonistas, as I called them. The STRM [Sindicato de Telefonistas de la Republica Mexico]. Long acronym. And, [we] built bonds, particularly Eduardo [Diaz] - but also me with Francisco Hernandez Suarez, the president of that union -- but particularly Eduardo [who] was loved. And he had been an organizer

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-- I knew him from New Jersey, but then [he] moved to work for the Texas State Employees Union as an organizer and then when I got elected EVP came onto the national staff working with me. And we had this -- whatever we want to call it. He wasn't there for international. He was there for organizing. But nonetheless, contradiction with Lou Moore.

Debbie [01:18:25] And how did this come out in the Sprint campaign?

Larry [01:18:30] Virginia Rodriguez. La Conexion Familiar. Virginia was the district organizing coordinator in California. We had a national campaign at Sprint. Sprint had a subsidiary [called La Conexion Familiar with employees telemarketing Sprint to Spanish-speaking people in the US]. We formed the Sprint Employees Network. Rick Braswell led it as part of the national organizing effort. So we had Sprint organizing, and you could join Sprint Employee Network without representation rights. This is something that went back to my time at SWOC as well as the Texas State Employees Union. We had a number of examples where we built an organization without bargaining rights, and we didn't call it minority -- it was just membership organizing. You'll be as strong as you can be, just like SWOC was without CWA. So Sprint Employee Network was that.

Well, one of the places where that really took hold was La Conexion Familiar, which was about -- at that time, if you lived in the U.S. and had family in Mexico or friends and you called Mexico-- that was a big revenue source. Basically, it was a Sprint subsidiary with service reps who helped in those transactions in the same way that the service rep in [local] 4309 in Ohio Bell would've worked. Same work. Sprint fired everybody [and closed the center rather than hold a union election, 1994]. I went with Francisco and Maria Xelhuantzi, who's still very active in Mexico, to the Mexican labor commissioner. We convinced him -- they loved it even though that was not a progressive government -- to file charges against the U.S. under NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement labor agreement]. First time that was ever done. I'm not sure if it was done again. They were horrified here, the Clinton administration. But the AFL wouldn't pick it up in the way they should have. It got buried in reports. Nothing ever got done. It was an outrage.

Debbie [01:20:40] And talk very briefly about TU.

Larry [01:20:44] So it's the same idea.

Debbie [01:20:45] I mean, the --

Larry [01:20:47] TU is what you wanted.

Debbie [01:20:49] -- the relationship with Ver.di .

Larry [01:20:50] Yeah, but that's TU.

Debbie [01:20:53] TU is T-Mobile United. Right?

Larry [01:20:57] We just called it TU. It was a member organization that T-Mobile workers in the U.S. could join. It wasn't really an acronym. It's a whole history that had to do with being sued by management for using their brand. So we never used their name, meaning T-Mobile. I had a number of those, the most famous was "Can you hear me now?" Contempt of court with Verizon for using their slogan, and winning that contempt of court. I still remember Mary O'Melveney [CWA chief

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counsel at that time] saying, "Larry, you'll go nowhere near the courthouse where this is being adjudicated" which happened to be in Trenton.

Larry [01:21:49] [Samuel] Alito was a federal judge, had the jurisdiction for this case in Trenton. And Alito agreed with CWA – [it] was not contempt of court. Anyhow, TU -- forgetting about the name. That's where the name came from.

Debbie [01:22:07] In relationship with ver.di.

Debbie [01:22:07] Yeah. It was created jointly with Frank Bsirske, the leader of ver.di. Ver.di and IG Metall were the two largest unions in Germany. Germany has a long tradition of sectoral bargaining. You know, membership is more complicated there. Ver.di is two million members -- the whole services sector, including much of the public sector services. And Deutsche Telekom was a significant part of ver.di. Ver.di is an acronym that stands for United Services Union in German. Don't ask me to say what it stood for, meaning the German. It was long. And the initial chairman, they called it, of overall ver.di was Frank Bsirske, who had, ironically, come from the Green Party, which is different in Germany. They have huge elected membership in parliament, [and there's a] different system there that allows for that. And they recruited him from the Green Party to come and lead ver.di. Ver.di was a merger of a bunch of services unions in the early 2000s. I had a series of meetings with him at global meetings and he was very decent and we became friends. I convinced him and Lothar Schroeder and others who were leading the Deutsche Telekom part of ver.di to work together to organize T-Mobile U.S. I chaired the Global Union for Telecom -- before I was president of CWA and built that around joint work at multinationals. Jeff was involved in that, so we could go to him. So Ameritech was New Zealand, Belgium --

Jeff [01:24:13] Hungary.

Larry [01:24:14] Hungary. Is that it?

Jeff [01:24:15] Yes.

Larry [01:24:16] They were the dominant telecom in those countries. U.S. capital strategy at that time was that companies needed to go global. Jeff was either vice-president by then or -- anyway, he was in charge of that. What did we call the Ameritech Group? It had some name.

Jeff [01:24:37] Yes.

Larry [01:24:38] Anyway.

Jeff [01:24:41] I'll think of it after we're done recording.

Jeff [01:24:43] We were doing that kind of work. Vodafone, which was a major player in the U.S. with the British unions -- they were a renegade, but there was no collective bargaining there in the UK. They were gobbling up wireless all over the world. We had a Vodafone group. We had an Ameritech group. So I go to Bsirske and say, "Okay, Deutsche Telekom is using the same brand -- not a different brand -- T-Mobile in the U.S.. They're totally organized [in Germany], as you know." I went to a lot of work sites pitching this, with their blessing, obviously, with their leaders in Germany and was shocked by what I saw, even for me. The difference -- you could go to a call

center anywhere. I went to only a few. The union members ran the call center. There might have been a manager there who wasn't in the union, but they had nothing to do with how it was run. What we pushed -- what I pushed, in particular -- was, I don't want this to be meet, greet, and eat global unionism. That's still what it mostly is -- meet, greet, and eat. You get a plane ticket, you get a hotel and you get a lot of food and don't accomplish much. We didn't want this to be the bureaucrats in our unions. We wanted it to be call center workers with call center workers. I said, "They'll join an organization and we should decide jointly how it's run." That was the TU. At some point -- I wasn't involved but -- CWA dropped their support after I left as president. Do you know when? You were still there.

Debbie [01:26:44] I was definitely still there.

Larry [01:26:46] It's totally your responsibility that that happened.

Larry [01:26:50] [Debbie and Jeff laugh] Absolutely.

Larry [01:26:50] Absolutely not. Debbie would have kept anything progressive going.

Debbie [01:26:53] We were this close -- and my fingers are very close together -- to getting some kind of neutrality and organizing rights agreement as T-Mobile was buying Sprint and was being sued, not by the Trump administration, but by the states led by New York and California. Letitia James, who has proved to be an amazing [New York] attorney general, said to CWA, "What is it you need?" And we told her. She was adamant that she would not sign off on pulling back the suit until we got what we wanted. She was amazing. Unfortunately, [then Attorney General Javier] Becerra out in California, who was the AG, did not have the same kind of --

Debbie [01:28:00] -- anyway, we were this close --

Larry [01:28:06] I didn't know about Becerra [was involved]. That's amazing.

Debbie [01:28:07] Well, we didn't have much political power in California, either. It was a very different union relationship and structure. Ultimately, the CEO of T-Mobile, John Legere, was calling Chris [Shelton] - Chris was president -- at least once a day. They would reach an agreement and then T-Mobile's lawyers would negotiate with [CWA chief of staff] Jody Calemine. What the lawyers were permitting was, you can have organizing rights in one call center for one year -- something so ridiculous -- and we'd reject it. The upshot was that the judge in the case decided he couldn't second-guess T-Mobile and Sprint's statements that this would be good for consumers, and he let it go through. That was pretty much the end of the possibility of us having the kind of leverage to move that company [in the year 2020]. So that was the end of that campaign. And I'm sure Sandy Rusher would give more detail.

Larry [01:29:25] Yeah, I'm sure I heard from her then. I don't remember it all. And even from Chris at different points of that, but this California part, I didn't know about.

Debbie [01:29:42] I think we've covered a lot of ground. I want to give each of you a chance to talk about anything that you feel hasn't been covered, or you want to -- any questions from you, Hannah? No. So here's what I would say. This will be archived and available and hopefully the next generation is going to be listening in a way that we make it available. At any rate, what would be a

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sum up that you would give to people who care about workers' rights in America from each of your vantage points?

Larry [01:30:30] Go ahead.

Jeff [01:30:31] No, go ahead.

Larry [01:30:31] Oh, come on.

Jeff [01:30:32] You're the champion of this more than anybody else in this nation.

Larry [01:30:37] I don't know about that.

Jeff [01:30:37] Oh, well. Name someone who has done more.

Larry [01:30:43] Say the question again. I always go along with what he wants at the end of the day.

Jeff [01:30:46] [Laughs] Yes.

Larry [01:30:48] That's a true statement, by the way.

Debbie [01:30:50] It's a sum up that you would give as to what one has to focus on if you're concerned about workers' rights and democracy in this country.

Larry [01:31:01] Well, I would say that, the sum up would be -- it's the last version, at least as far as I know -- of the CWA triangle -- with movement building, representation, and organizing; and how they're all connected. And keeping that, as if we were making a movie, and that written down on a -- in the old days, a three by five card -- and you're looking at it the entire time you're making the movie -- that's what we all need to be doing.

Jeff [01:31:32] Like I said, he nails it. It really is about trying to generate from the grassroots up. It's one individual at a time, one worker at a time. I won't even say "members," just one worker at a time, trying to get them to understand that we do have power if we can pull ourselves together.