

**Tacoma Community History Project
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Interview with Patty Rose

RM: I am Ruan Murphy, interviewing Patty Rose. May 5, 2011, at 10 AM. Patty, can you tell me when and where were you were born, about your family and growing up?

PR: I was actually born in Tacoma, Washington. I was born here at the old St. Joe's Hospital in Tacoma. One of my brothers was born there as well. The other brother was born at Tacoma General. So, all three of us kids were born right here. And I actually live on the property that I lived on when I was growing up. After my parents died, I moved back onto the property. So, I am literally where I started.

RM: Does your family come from a labor background?

PR: Yes and no. My father worked several occupations where he was part of a union. He worked at Martinec Ship Building. Martinec is Union. They are Union today. He also worked at Saint Regis, which was a pulp and paper plant here in Tacoma. It is Simpson Tacoma Kraft now, but he worked at Saint Regis in the bag plant and they were represented by the Pulp and Paper Worker's Union. I know my grandfather was a painter. I don't know if he was part of the Painter's Union. My dad at various times in his life did work where he belonged to a labor union. My mom was a stay-at-home mom for much of the time and then worked in the restaurant industry. I don't believe she ever worked at a place that was unionized. She is originally from Canada and married my dad who was originally from Minnesota, and then moved out here.

RM: Have you always had an interest in labor and unions? And when did you first become involved?

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PR: I actually— I didn't know a lot about labor unions because unfortunately our school system now doesn't really give you much history on labor organizations and labor. Usually there is a paragraph or two about Samuel Gompers and that is about it. So, I didn't have— other than my father being involved off and on in occupations covered by unions. I did have a neighbor who was the secretary at the Meat Cutters Local. And when an opening came up in the labor temple, where she worked, in the office next door— she let me know that there was a clerical position for the Service Employee's Union and I might be interested in that and apply, which I did, and was hired in 1974. And I literally went there for what I thought was an interview and went in and they told me that I could put my coat and purse there, and there was my desk and someone would show me what to do.

So, I literally walked in and started working. And that is about how it has been for thirty-seven years. So, I worked there for twenty-seven and a half years. I was in a clerical position for the first twenty years. I was the office manager and the bookkeeper so I ran the local union office and then we merged with the Seattle office, so a lot of what I was doing was being done already in Seattle, so they gave me the opportunity to transition to a union rep position, which I did. And I worked seven and a half years in that capacity before— so twenty-seven and a half years with SEIU Local 123, which became Local 6, and then the vacancy came up here and I decided to run for this position.

RM: When did you start working for the Pierce County Labor Council?

PR: So, I actually looked it up— I became a delegate in 1981. So this year I will have my thirtieth anniversary as a delegate. But actually coming on staff here, that

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was July 1, 2002. So, it will be nine years this July. I did serve on the executive board for a couple of years before I ran for the secretary treasurer position, which is the fulltime, paid staff position of the Labor Council. So a delegate for thirty years, an executive board member for a couple of years and then the day-to-day officer for not quite nine years.

RM: Why did you take that job?

PR: Well, at first I— our secretary treasurer before me left office before the end of his term, so there was a vacancy created. He went back to— he came from the Operating Engineers Union, and they had had a couple of deaths, and he returned to work as a business rep for the Operating Engineers, and he still had seven months left on his term here.

And so, many of the board members— there are twelve of us on the executive board— approached me about running for the position. And at the time, initially, I said why would I do that? I worked at SEIU for twenty-seven and a half years and I don't think so. And I was asked again and I actually took a pay cut to come to this position at the time. And I was like, why would I leave my job that I can retire from in two and a half years to take a job that I would take a pay cut— no. I don't think I will do it. And then the president, Vance Lely, said to me, well, you can be the first woman to ever hold that position. I was thinking, oh, I wish you wouldn't have said that.

In the end, I actually looked at it and because I had had such a varied background— I ran the office, I was the bookkeeper, I worked as a field rep, I worked as a union organizer— I really had a very— I had all the pieces to come to the Labor Council and

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be the day-to-day officer for a very diverse group of affiliates and union members. So, in the end I decided yes I would run for the position. There were four of us who were nominated— two men, and two women, actually— and campaigned, and won, and started the job July 1, 2002. And then I had to run again because it was only the unfulfilled term. So I had to run again in seven months, but since my initial election, I haven't had opposition. I have been nominated without opposition and I run every two years— every odd February.

RM: What did you hope to accomplish?

PR: Well, I wanted the Labor Council to be a very visible and positive force in our community. And I obviously wanted to— for us to have a bigger political presence in our community, and also we have a labor agency, a non-profit 501(c)(3) that we help union members during times of unexpected financial emergency and wanted to make sure that people knew that that resource was available. Also, connecting the education system for a long time— and it is changing somewhat— but believed if you didn't go on to a four-year university, you were not taking the right path. And in reality, there are a lot of skilled jobs that you can get without a two-year or four-year degree if you pursue vocational technical training and probably more— most importantly is the union apprenticeship programs that are available— particularly for the building and construction trade jobs.

RM: Since you are the first woman to hold your position, how has that affected you or the unions?

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PR: I actually don't really think the gender has ever been an issue. And probably when I ran nine years ago— like I said, I had been a delegate representing my union for twenty-one years before I even ran for this position. I served on the executive board, I served on various committees through the Labor Council— so, I think that— and this might sound kind of corny— that folks knew I had paid my dues literally and figuratively, right? I am a union member and I pay my dues, but I had been engaged in the Labor Council for over twenty years prior to seeking the elected position here. Probably I brought a perspective that maybe my male predecessors didn't.

Clyde came from the Electrical Worker's Union— so building trades— John Thompson before me— immediately before me— was with the Stationary Engineers. And I came from Service Employees, which represented health care workers. So I had a bit of a different background, but I think it actually helped to just bring another perspective to the local. And when I need to get up to speed on building trades issues, we have the Building and Construction Trades Council just down the hall. So, they are part of our council, the individual locals of the building trades are part of our council, but I have a ready resource right down the hall, so it doesn't matter that I didn't come from a male-dominated industry or— and if you look at statistics now, the sector of the work force that is growing and organizing are women. So, it just all worked out very nicely.

RM: Clyde Hupp was an active participant in the labor movement. How has he impacted the unions or the movement?

PR: Clyde had a very interesting period here. He was the secretary treasurer from 1977 to 1993. And during that time— and I read a little bit about this in the book—

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that it was real important for labor organizations to own a building and have a newspaper. Did you read that in there that the only thing that they were missing is they didn't have a building and they didn't have a newspaper. Well, when Clyde came into office we did have a building— it was the labor temple— and we did have a newspaper— the Labor Advocate. So he had to do things that I have never had to do— run a building corporation, have tenants— all of that piece. Run the newspaper while editor and publisher and all that were hired, it was still part of what he did as part of what he did as the secretary treasurer.

And today, we don't have any of that. Now what you need is a website and an activist blast list so you can get the word out to folks. Clyde and I actually talked about that. He said that things moved much slower when he was the secretary treasurer. And if you think about it, if you wanted to talk to someone or give them something in writing, you would type the letter, you would mail it, and it would take two-three days— or new technology, you would fax it. Well, now, we have instant messaging. We have the ability to send email with documents and so it is far— he said things are moving much faster now than they did in the time that he was here. I also said to him— and you— it is both a blessing and a curse that when you come to work you have got thirty, forty, or fifty emails already waiting for you. He didn't have any of that. If you wanted to talk to him, you called on the phone or vice versa. So things just move so incredibly fast now that it is—

RM: Efficient?

PR: Yeah.

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RM: Technology. Are unions growing in number or declining?

PR: Well, nationwide we know that the statistics are down— that less than 13% of the work force is organized. But in Washington State we have actually increased in union density over the last eight or ten years. We are now number four in union density out of the states. About twenty percent of our workforce in Washington States is unionized. That is probably dipping a little bit just because of our state employees, public employees— because of budgetary reasons they have had layoffs and rifts and prison closures and so on. So, we might have dipped a little bit, but we are fourth in the nation. That is very interesting because in Tacoma Pierce County, we actually have a union density of about twenty-six percent or twenty-eight percent, which is twice the national average. So, we are a very union town in Tacoma, Pierce County.

RM: What major changes have occurred in labor in Pierce County since Clyde's retirement?

PR: I know that right now we are facing a lot of locals that are merging— particularly our firefighter locals where they are combining fire districts and where they used to have the Lakewood Firefighters and the University Place Firefighters— they are merging. So a lot of that is going on. We also have the incredible threat that Clyde probably didn't have— of outsourcing, and work fairly easily being shipped over seas— call centers and even manufacturing. So I don't think during Clyde's period here that that was quite the threat that it is today. And I would say that is probably the biggest— the global economy and the outsourcing of jobs.

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RM: Otilie Markholdt wrote in the Labor Educator, 1997, that organizing the unorganized was a top priority. Can you give examples of that actually happening?

PR: And I agree with Otilie— Otilie was a great woman. When I started as a secretary, Otilie was part of the Office and Professional Employee's Union, Local 23. And I went to my first union member meeting when I first became a member— I had never been to a union meeting before— and I happened to go into the hall and sit down by this woman— Otilie Markholdt— and she was a fabulous woman and lived and breathed labor every moment of the day. And sitting with her, before I knew it, I was volunteering to be on the education committee— she truly did not believe anybody should just sit idly on the sidelines. She wanted everybody engaged in the process.

And labor organizations were the way to combat the power of employers and for workers to have a say in their day-to-day lives and working lives. Otilie was a wonderful person. Organizing the unorganized is still a top priority. I mentioned that there are twenty percent organized— that means there are eighty percent that are unorganized in our state. And probably during my lifetime in labor one of the biggest examples of organizing was when the homecare workers— an initiative was passed that allowed them to organize and I bring that one up because I actually worked at SEIU during that time and helped gather the initiative signatures to get it on the ballot that allowed the workers to organize.

And home healthcare workers— there are over twenty thousand of them that are now employees of the state that are members of SEIU 775. So that was a huge organizing campaign. The legislature ruled in 2002 that state employees would have

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full scope collective bargaining and that allowed them a bigger voice in their contract negotiations with the state and obviously there are forty thousand state employees that that impacted. So, while that was not exactly organizing, it did give more workers a voice and the ability for full scope collective bargaining. So those are the two that I would just name off the top of my head.

RM: I read a letter dated May 28, 2002, urging union members to support you for secretary-treasurer. The letter stated that PCCLC did not have the political power to help elect former members of PCCLC or members of unions to legislative positions. The letter called for an independent political operation and support to help elect union members and union supporters to office. What has the Labor Council done on the political front?

PR: **We, every year, have a process and we call it our COPE interview process. COPE stands for Committee on Political Education— and we are actually just in the beginning of that now. What we do is we determine all of the political races that are up for election or re-election and then have a very deliberate process where we have them— so let's just say for instance the Tacoma City Council. There are positions open where incumbents are seeking re-election. And there is also a position where the council member's term limited out so he can't run again. So, that will create a vacant position. We ask candidates to complete an interview or a questionnaire and have a face-to-face interview with our COPE committee. The questionnaire is about 10 questions and we ask them many things including questions about their ideology and if they believe that workers have the right to organize and collectively bargain, and some very other specific questions.**

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We have several questionnaires tailored to the office— so we have one for City Council, we have one for Port Commissioner, we have one for School Board, we have one for Parks Commissioner, and so on. So we have them all complete the question, sign off on it, and then we have a face-to-face interview with the candidate. We do this every year. We do local candidates obviously, but we also do federal and state. We interview the state representative candidates in our jurisdiction in Pierce County. We have interviewed Patty Murray, we have interviewed Chris Gregoire, we interview the congress people for the three districts that Pierce County encompasses— Adam Smith, Norm Dicks, and Dave Reichert— so we have a very deliberate process where we ask them questions.

The committee is made up mostly of our executive board, but all affiliates of our council can send a member and meet face-to-face with their representative or school board member or whatever, and ask them very specific questions. We keep that questionnaire on file so if we ever need to look back at it and say you said you were going to agree that workers would have the right to organize and now there is an opportunity for you to help us organize— anyway— we keep that on record to hold them accountable. And then we interview them— even someone that we have— even— we interview Norm Dicks. And how many times has Norm Dicks been re-elected here? Certainly longer— since 1976. And yet, he still comes and if he can't be face-to-face he has a call in, but he has his staffers in the room and we don't give them a pass. We interview every one. We want their answers to the questions, we want their signed questionnaire— and like I said— having labor's endorsement is something and candidates seek us out. When I told you that about 26% of the work force is organized, we also have the ability to turn those voters out. We have contact

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with them, we educate them, we do labor-to-neighbor doorbelling, which means we go in targeted districts and go house to house to union members' house and say this is our process, this is who we have endorsed, here is the information and we urge you to vote for candidate for X, Y or Z. And we actually do that. So, we have a pretty good machine here that we can— it is important for candidates— we also make campaign contributions, so there is financial piece to it, but mostly it is boots on the ground. It is volunteers going out doorbelling, phone banking other— and I think our political program has increased since I've been here.

RM: In your experience, how is economic justice achieved in the workplace?

PR: Well, I think that— the simple answer is by workers organizing so they have a collective voice. If you just think about the scenario that I am a worker, I don't belong to a union, I think I deserve a raise, I go to the boss and say I think I deserve a raise, I have been a good, productive employee, and the boss might say— you know, that is true, but I don't have the money to give you a raise, so that is just too bad. Or they might say, you know, what? You are a good worker, but my daughter's son needs a job, so I am going to have to lay you off so I can hire my nephew— well, if worker's have a collective voice where they can say, as a group, we think we should have a raise and here is why— or we think we should have a labor-management committee so we can talk about common problems and how to make the company better collectively— that is the way to do it. Forming a union on the job is the best way for workers to have a voice.

RM: What are the most significant events or changes in the labor movement that stand out for you during the time you have been active?

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PR: I think I talked a little bit about the globalization and the outsourcing probably being the biggest change— you know, trade agreements, opening markets, employers being able to shift work offshore— that has definitely impacted our labor movement. And you can see it more in what they call the Rust Belt— the Midwest part of our country that used to be the manufacturing hub— a lot of those jobs— making washing machines used to be done— now they are being done in Mexico. And automobiles— a lot more competition because the work— part of the car— the engine might be made in Mexico or overseas. I think that is probably the biggest. If we want to talk about significant events or changes, I think what has been happening in Wisconsin and other places— but certainly Wisconsin was the first— where there has been an anti-union sentiment and law makers trying to pass laws to deny workers their collective bargaining rights has certainly mobilized the labor movement once again. We only have the look at the big rallies that were held— certainly on the ground in Wisconsin with the public employees there— and the 14 senators who left the state so as to not have a quorum to bring that to a vote. Which, we know ended up happening anyway, but the courts will decide how legal that was.

But even here in our own community, we had a big rally on April 4, the day of solidarity— the day that the AFL-CIO asked labor organizations to have some kind of event. And there were more than fifteen hundred around the nation on that day. And we had one— ironically, it was down at the University of Washington- Tacoma Campus. And we had three different sets of workers there talking about how their rights to organize and bargain collectively had been threatened by various things. Then, there was the big rally down in Olympia on April 8 where close to ten thousand workers showed up— union members and others— who said it is our right to

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collectively bargain. And so, I think that has really mobilized the labor movement. And the conversation is now, how do we keep that momentum going? Because we have got people— we have got people who are riled up. Folks only take so much for so long before they stand up and say that is enough. And I think we are at that point.

RM: In an interview with the Tacoma News Tribune in 2007, you mentioned that the issues facing unions were health care, jobs being outsourced, and loss of pension benefits. Can you tell us more about those issues and what other issues do the unions face today?

PR: I think that is ironic that probably those three are probably still right up there. Healthcare is certainly an issue. If you are a union member, you are more likely to have healthcare that is provided, but there are a lot of people in our community who have no health insurance. So, we have been working for a long time to create some kind of healthcare system that— a piece of it was passed, but there is still a whole lot more to do. Healthcare is also very expensive. And we see at the bargaining table, workers are in negotiations, and they are asking for their health benefits to continue, their pension, a modest wage increase, and the employer saying, you know, what? Your healthcare plan premium cost went up twenty percent. I can either continue to pay your healthcare or I can give you a wage increase. And that is a very realistic scenario that with the healthcare costs escalating, it is difficult to maintain them and also give pay increases. So, healthcare is certainly still it.

Jobs being outsourced— and just the loss of jobs with the downturn of the economy, our unemployment rate is close to ten percent. That is the official rate. It is probably a lot more than that because there are people who have run out of unemployment or are no longer seeking work because they have given up. So the

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creation of jobs is still very important. Jobs being outsourced is still important. Although you just have to look at the Boeing Company who outsourced much of the 787 Dreamliner only to come up with problems because several different countries were doing a piece of the plane and then when they were all shipped back for the manufacturing of it in Everett, pieces were not fitting. And it slowed down. We know that the Dreamliner is way past the date that it was supposed to be out and flying, and part of that was because of the shoddy work.

I have talked to SPIA members— engineers and technical people who are members of SPIA, the engineering union, and they are saying that their work has been outsourced to India and other places and then when the finished product comes back, they end up having to redo it because there are problems with it. So, it is not really the big savings that some of these companies envisioned happening.

The global economy is a reality, but we really need to make things in America again. I know that— I think ABC News has been running a feature on building things in America again— putting people to work here. And our labor council goes a step further than that. We certainly have a buy-American attitude, but we also have a buy-Union attitude. Which is— you can see that I have got thirty-eight jars of peanut butter sitting on my desk. That is all Jif peanut butter, which is union made. So people are bringing me donations and we are going to donate it to our local food bank. They could have bought Skippy, they could have bought something else, but we are buying the union product to support the workers. And our union label committee meets every month— they are meeting later today as a matter of fact— so that we can help get the word out to people that buy American, and when you have the opportunity,

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buy union. Because it is going to create jobs here in our community— it is going to create jobs in our country.

And then the other pension benefits—defined benefit pension plans are kind of a dinosaur. Although if you are a union member, you are more likely to have a defined benefit plan, and that is a plan that guarantees you a pension of a set amount when you retire, as opposed to a defined contribution, which only sets what the contribution rate will be, not what the end result will be. It is dependent on the stock market and other things. Pension benefits are— we want people to be able to retire and live in dignity with an income that supports them and with healthcare benefits, whether that is Medicare or whatever— pension benefits are an important part of a worker's benefit package.

RM: In the same interview, the PCCLC and unions were asking politicians to sign the (federal) Employee Free Choice Act that would reform labor laws to make it easier for workers to organize and join unions. Do workers continue to encounter opposition to organizing? How would you compare the situation now to union organizing in the earlier years?

PR: I don't know if you noticed when you walked in here, but there is a poster out there that says every twenty-three minutes a worker is fired for trying to form a union. And that is really the truth. Workers today who are seeking a voice at work go through tremendous pressure once the employer— not all employers, but about two-thirds of the employers— when they find out there is an organizing campaign going on at the workplace. And what the employer typically does is hire a consultant— usually a high-priced lawyer— who specifically works in this field to bust unions. And

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it is called union avoidance. And employers will do that to keep a union out. They threaten workers saying that if you vote to go union I am going to have to close the plant because I won't be able to afford the wages. Or if you vote to go union, I can just move this operation to India. Or if you— so on and so on threatening them about what will happen if they— this is illegal by the way, but our laws are so weak in enforcement, what usually happens is— so say an organizing campaign starts, the employer will do all of these things— captive audience meetings, where they will call the employees in, sometimes one on one, and tell them all of this— scare the worker. So that by the time the election actually happens several months down the road, they change their mind and do not vote. The penalty for this is a ruling— the union can file an unfair labor practice charge— a ULP with the National Labor Relations Board— but quite often the penalty is nothing. You have to post a piece of paper on the wall for 30 days that says I shouldn't have done that, I won't do it again; or pay a fine. Well, the employer will do that. What is a \$2,000 fine for a multi-million dollar company?

So, it is very— it is difficult now days to organize— particularly in the private sector. And I think it is harder. Also the culture. Years ago folks used to go to work at General Electric and they would work there their whole career. And maybe their father worked there, or their mother, and they would go and there was already a union there, and they joined the union and it wasn't too difficult. Now days, most people have not gone through an organizing campaign. I haven't either. I haven't had a whole lot of jobs because I went to work when I was twenty-one for a labor organization— but when I walked in the door and started working there was already a union there. I already got the benefits of the labor contract. I didn't go through the organizing campaign where all of that happened. And many workers today don't. And

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the work force is much more transient. People don't go to work and work somewhere for twenty-thirty years. They may have six, eight, or ten jobs throughout their career. So that makes it a little more difficult to organize, too.

And certainly the— we had hoped that the Employee Free Choice Act would pass and that would reform our current labor laws to make it easier for workers to organize. And one of the provisions of the Employee Free Choice Act was that if a majority of workers sign a card saying I want to be part of the union, that that would suffice for the election— so, if a majority of them signed a card, it was verified by a disinterested third party— that was it. No prolonged campaign, no election that happens 4-6 months down the road— usually what the employer does is fire the organizer— the person that is kind of behind— to scare the other employees— the Employee Free Choice Act would have done away with that. If the workers decided they wanted to do that, then that is how they could form a union. That is how they do it in Canada today and it works very well. Unfortunately, we just couldn't get to the number— we could in the House of Representatives, but not in the Senate— to get that legislation passed. I do have a pledge form in that other room there where we did ask the politicians who signed it— who showed up at our Labor Day picnic that year— to sign the pledge that they would support the Employee Free Choice Act and the right of workers to form a union if they wanted to. And we still have that, but it is legislation that is not currently being considered.

RM: How does the Council strengthen and give voice to workers in bargaining with employees?

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PR: This is probably one of the things the Council does best. Our labor council is the umbrella organization for the unions in Pierce County, and we have about ninety affiliates— ninety different local unions who are a part of our council. And those ninety represent probably 56,000 or 57,000 union members in Pierce County. So if someone is bargaining and not getting anywhere in bargaining— we will just call them— we will just say UFCW local— United Food and Commercial Workers Union— who represent about ninety percent of the grocery workers here in our county— so say they are trying to negotiate with one of their employers, and they are not getting very far— what they can do is call our council and we can immediately get that information out to our affiliates who can then get it out to their members. So we can get a message out to 56,000 union members living and working in Pierce County that says we want to have a picket. We want to have an informational picket in front of the Safeway store. Would you turn out some members?

And like I said, we have email and activist blast lists. So we have those workers email this. We can send out information. We can say join us at this picket or rally. I can go to the mayor with them and say do you realize what will happen if we shut down company A or B or if we hold pickets or whatever— so it is a way that we can quickly mobilize our labor community. And it works well here in Pierce County, because we have such high union density. Now, if we were in Atlanta— in Georgia or Mississippi and we were having this conversation, where union density is very slight— they probably don't have the clout that we do. But we can say there will be trouble. There will be trouble and it gets a little attention. I am often asked to sign on to letters. There were negotiations for a contract at Tacoma General Hospital and their union asked me to sign onto a letter to the CEO encouraging her to bargain in

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good faith and come up with an agreement that was mutually acceptable. And they had had some informational pickets and so on there, and in the end they were successful in getting a fair contract that the hospital approved and the workers voted probably ninety-seven to ninety-eight percent in favor of. So, at the end of the day, there was a good agreement reached and our labor council helped in distributing that information and— like I said, as the umbrella organization, we have a way to get a message out that their local union wouldn't have.

RM: In our labor history we learned that ethnic minority workers are concentrated in some of the worst paying jobs with little advancement. Many of them don't have jobs at all, and lack skills to get jobs. What is the situation in Pierce County for various groups of workers of color? What can the labor movement do to help them?

PR: This is true. It is also— it was also true for women at one time. I know that I have a copy of a contract in my desk from the '40s when the aerospace machinists first organized workers with the Boeing Company. And their contract rate actually had a different rate for women workers. And that was not uncommon at the time.

In fact, one of the biggest strikes that happened here, was in the Retail Clerks— the retail industry— where during negotiations they were offering one wage increase to the men, and a lower wage increase to the women. We are beyond that, of course, but minority workers still are experiencing that. I will tell you— and the statistics will bear me out— that minority workers who are part of a union make about thirty percent more than if they don't have a union. So while we have minority workers in the hospitality industry, in hospital work— that they have a better chance of parity— of making a fair wage— if they do belong to a labor union.

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The AFL-CIO also has constituency groups— The Coalition of Black Trade Unions, A. Phillip Randolph Institute, the Asian Pacific Islander Group, something for the Latino community— where they are trying to engage workers, minority workers, and connect them with unions. Obviously skill training through our apprenticeship program and other opportunities improve the odds that a worker can get a good job. Pierce Transit— the Amalgamated Transit Union- there are a lot of minority workers who are bus drivers in that system. And yet, they make a pretty decent wage because they are represented by a union. If you know the story about A. Phillip Randolph, he was an African American man who spent many years of his life organizing the sleeping car porters of the Pullman Company in Chicago. And that gave those workers really some dignity and a way out of horrendous working conditions. Dr. Honey has done several books on Martin Luther King and the fact that he was in Memphis when he was assassinated because he was supporting the sanitation workers who were members of AFSCME— the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. We have a lot of ethnic and minority workers who are members of AFSCME in our state and local government.

But truly, the way to economic justice is through a labor union. We also have— and I don't know, this may be a question that is a little bit later, but our labor council works very closely with our A. Phillip Randolph chapter. And what we are doing is outreach in the schools, trying to deal with the achievement gap, offer to pay summer school tuition for kids who need credit retrieval to get back on track to graduate. We are also giving them information about the building and construction trade apprenticeship programs, because if you are struggling in high school, you are probably not going on to college, but if you can get through high school and get into

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an apprenticeship program, you will not only get a job, but you will get a career— a career that has good wages, retirement security, benefits— and so we are working with our APRI chapter to help make that happen.

RM: Why do you feel that labor always has to organize? Do you think it is because of capitalism? What should we do as a society when capitalism runs amok?

PR: I think that labor does always need to organize. There are new workers coming into the workforce every day and I truly believe that the employer will withhold pay and benefits— and sometimes it is just to appease the stock holders, the shareholders— that they are more worried about the bottom line to their shareholders, than they are to their employees. And organized labor— being covered by a collective bargaining agreement— is the tool that helps equalize the power of employers and corporations and really— and labor unions do a whole lot more than just bargain for wages and benefits.

If you look back at all of the key legislation— child labor laws, safety and health on the job, overtime, minimum wage— if you look at all of that, it can be traced back to labor unions because we not only take care of the worker who is part of the union, but we take care of workers— all workers— so when we worked on the minimum wage campaign years ago— the initiative that set a minimum wage that was indexed to inflation here in Washington State— the Pierce County Labor Council played a huge role in that. Although when you look at it, most union members don't make minimum wage. They make far above that. So why would we be working so hard to increase the minimum wage? It is because we are trying to do it for workers and you raise the floor and just like when you raise the ceiling, it raises everyone. So, we were

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very key in that campaign— Initiative 688— that gave Washington State a minimum wage that was indexed to inflation. Which is why we have the highest minimum wage today in the United States.

So, labor always needs to organize. Like I said— a lot of the work force has never been through an organizing drive and they just assume that the employer is giving them all of these benefits, when workers who came before them fought for the weekend and overtime pay and safe working environment and many, many other things. So, it certainly is the balance to capitalism run amuck.

RM: Are there fewer skilled workers today than there were 5 years ago? In the interview with the TNT you mentioned that you were involved in an outreach program—

PR: That is the one I kind of talked about— our outreach. The building trades are really focused on letting students know that there is another pathway. That higher education— post-secondary education is great, but there also is another pathway. And they have put together a DVD. They have a thirty-minute DVD that is geared towards teachers and counselors. And they also have an eight-minute DVD that is kind of the attention span of a high school student, and it is just an exposure to the apprenticeship programs. They tell the student that going to college is a great thing— you might come out at the other side with a marketable degree, but you might have student loans and all kinds of other things. Or, you might go into a union apprenticeship program where you actually get to earn while you learn. So, for instance, a lot of building projects around our community and in the United States have a provision that they will utilize ten-fifteen percent of apprenticeship on the job so that someone who is actually going to school to learn the craft can go out in the

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field and work with a journeyman— they would never work by themselves— they work with a skilled journeyman to help teach them that trade. And in fact, that is how Bates Technical College was created. It was LH Bates Vocational School back in the '40s. It was skilled carpenters— Jack Skeins and many others— were carpenters during the day and they taught the craft in the evening at the vocational technical college.

So, the building trades is doing a very good job of trying to let kids know that there is another pathway and that this is an option. The problem we have is that there is currently about thirty percent unemployment in the building trades where even skilled journeymen cannot find work. So the opportunity for people coming into the apprenticeship program is a little less right now. But that will change. We also have an aging workforce, where the average age of a carpenter is— and this is from Dan Absher, who has Absher Construction, one of the largest construction companies in our county— that the average age is forty-seven. And it is a physically demanding job. So, these workers are going to be retiring in five-ten years and they need a pipeline of folks— young people— going into the apprenticeship programs, learning the skill so that as the workforce is aging and they leave, that there will be skilled workers to come up. And when you think of the IBEW apprenticeship program for instance— it is a four-five year program. So you can't just decide tomorrow that I need some electricians— it is a four-five year process. Four years for residential and five years for commercial.

So, it can't happen overnight, so we have got to continually do this outreach to get young people in the apprenticeship program. I think there are more skilled workers

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today. As people have lost their jobs, they are going back to school and being retrained. There is certainly a lot of technology that didn't even exist— the composites and alloys and nano-technology where people are needing to learn new fabrication. The Dreamliner, as I mentioned before— the Boeing aircraft— a larger and larger number of parts are composites to make the plane lighter and more economical to fly. I would say there probably are and there are probably going to be more in the future.

RM: Your position must be enriching and rewarding, (and a lot of hard work). As you reflect, what else would you try to change?

PR: It is a very enriching and rewarding job. That is very true. It is also a lot of hard work because when you are the head of the labor council in your community, you are tapped for a lot of different things. For instance, I sit on 14 boards and committees because they want a labor rep. The United Way wants a labor rep. The Workforce Development Council wants a labor representative. The Economic Development Board wants a labor representative— and so I am literally on 14 boards. And sometimes I have to become an expert— I may get a call on Monday and I need to be an expert by something on Friday because I am being asked to go down and testify before the legislature on behalf of workers. And I may not know but I certainly have resources. So, it is challenging in that regard. I guess— what else would I try to change? I know that folks are very busy. We have very busy lives and I would simply like to have people more engaged in the Labor Council, although we don't do too badly. We were the second largest labor council in the state and we have monthly meetings where we get probably fifty to fifty-five people attending the meetings. And

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in many other county labor councils, they get a handful. So, people are engaged here. I guess what I would try to change is the perception of labor unions.

Some people believe that they have outlived their usefulness and I don't think that is true at all. It is truly the way that workers have a voice on the job. So, I guess I would— one thing I would change is the negative perspective that some people have about labor unions. You only have to go online and if you Google “how can I prevent a union from coming into my company”— you will find lots of resources for employers trying to resist unionization of their workforce. And the scare tactics, the fact that labor history is not taught in our classroom— I serve on a labor education task force at the state level to try to change that— and maybe that is what I would change is that labor organizations could have a bigger role— the history in our school systems. And the few times we have gone, we have been able to go out and make presentations to high schools— many high schools have business week where they have employers come in and we have said to them, how come you don't have labor week? Or something where we can go and talk to kids. And we have been successful in going to a few high schools around here, doing the presentation on the apprenticeship program to let kids know— and we actually had teachers come up to us and say, wow, that isn't at all what I thought your presentation was going to be. I thought you were going to be trying to brainwash us about unions. I didn't think you would be telling us about opportunities for our kids or— I do a piece about our labor history, but we also have our labor agency where we— you know, we pay the light bill— the workers, not just union members, but workers who have maybe been hurt on the job, exhausted their sick-leave benefits— they don't have money to pay their electric bill, buy food— we have an organization where we help folks do that. And people just have no idea.

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They have no idea. They think labor unions are just there to get big, fat raises for workers. And that is not true at all.