

## Paul Lane interview

**Jon:** I guess just, first of all, I'm just curious how you've found it lately, being nonpartisan? How has that been for you?

**Paul Lane:** It's been absolutely amazing, to be honest with you. Because, you know, the massaging is totally but my own. I can speak my own mind, how I feel on the issues; I can speak for the people I represent. I'm not held back in any way by any party. As far as I'm concerned it's 1000% better; it's a huge improvement to the current party system, as far as I'm concerned.

**Jon:** One thing that really piqued my interest – you were having a back and forth with Con O'Brien. This was on Twitter and you were talking with him about Nalcor, the auditor general, and these kinds of things. And you have one line, you say, "I've written the Premier and asked him to unleash the AG on Nalcor," and then you continue, you say, "the problem with all this stuff is that it has nothing to do with Red or Blue, it's all about the cocktail circuit."

**Paul Lane:** Yeah.

**Jon:** Can you tell me what you mean by that line, "It's all about the cocktail circuit"?

**Paul Lane:** I guess it's my belief, uh, that, you know, under our current system, um, like the political parties, or the two main political parties (being the PCs and the Liberals) they rely quite heavily, obviously, on donations, and corporate donations. And there's obviously influence that goes along with that. I think it's pretty clear, you can see that even when one party – like even when one of the mainstream parties are sort of, um, fading out of power and losing favour with the public, you will see that it'll be harder for them to raise all those corporate donations, but they won't be cut off. You notice that the big businesses, if you look at it, they will contribute to both parties, but depending on who's in power or who's felt is going to be in power, that's who will get the lion's share. And so, you know, I believe we have a small province, and I guess there are a lot of influential people, people in authority, who, as far as I'm concerned, regardless if it goes Red or Blue, they're always gonna have that influence.

**Jon:** And these, to you – if I could take it a step – these are people with economic power more so than political power, yes?

**Paul Lane:** Yes. That's my view.

**Jon:** Okay. And I mean we have had people go and do – you know, all the information on the political donations is out there. And you can see exactly what you say, that the year before the Blue party gets in, all the money goes towards the Blue, except for a couple thousand from all the same donors give to the Reds as well. And then when it goes the other way. . .

**Paul Lane:** Yeah.

**Jon:** You can see the money shift right before the parties change. And the poor old Orange team always gets the exact same amount of money from their [one . . . 4:30] and then Loraine Michael is their biggest contributor otherwise, you know? So it's kind of sad.

**Paul Lane:** And by the way, Jon, let me just add to that, while I believe that that's a downfall to our system, in terms of the corporate donations and the amount, and quite frankly I believe we need some serious reforms. And I would love to see reforms whereby the amount of money that can be contributed by any given company or entity or individual, to a party or to individual candidates, would be slashed significantly, to put people on a level playing field and to eliminate any potential conflicts and any potential influence that, I guess, could come to bear as a result of that.

But by the same token I believe that exists with Big Business and so on, and the corporate sector, I also believe likewise that, you know, there are concerns here as it relates to the NDP as well and their close affiliation to unions and so on. So, I'm not saying that they have the same influence because obviously they don't and they've never been in power. But if we're going to make reforms around raising money and contributions and how much contributions any given party or candidate can receive, then if it's going to apply to corporations, it should also apply to unions equally.

**Jon:** Oh sure, and I'm certainly not gonna be the one who's going to step up and defend the NDP or the Federation of Labour. That's exactly, I think, part of the problem in the politics too.

**Paul Lane:** Yeah. I just want to make my commentary clear and balanced in how I feel about it, right? So, it would be unfair for me to attack those two parties, and attack the corporate influence, and ignore the fact that we also have a similar type of influence (obviously not the same degree or for the same amounts of money), but we still have that influence as it relates to the unions as well, right?

**Jon:** I will make that abundantly clear [*chuckles*]. And I'm right there with you on that.

7:10

**Jon:** So the question, then, for me is – I got just a couple more follow-ups for ya. What does that mean, then, about democracy in Newfoundland and Labrador? Because you hear people say – so if you were to say a line like this, “It's all about the cocktail circuit,” people would then turn around and say, “Oh, well, it's a conspiracy theory that you're weaving,” or “we have a well-functioning democracy.” What would you say to those people?

**Paul Lane:** Quite frankly, I don't believe we do have a well-functioning democracy. I believe that democracy ends, in our system, after you place your vote in the ballot box. And then for the next four years we, quite frankly, have a dictatorship – and when I say the word ‘dictatorship’ (because I've been called attacks about that), “Oh you're saying that we're like Nazi Germany or something,” [*chuckles*] No, b'y! Let's not go extreme with what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that, sure, there is democracy in terms of you get the vote; but after you get the vote, as Tom Marshall quite elegantly put it at one point in time when asked about some piece of legislation that went through the House of Assembly and there was some controversy (or maybe it was the budget, I don't know) and Tom [Marshall] put it so eloquently when he said, “Oppositions have

their say, government has their way,” and that is so true. Once a government is elected, they hold total power to do whatever they want. And under our system we don’t have – well, under our system we could have all-party committees, for example, that could be utilized. Like we don’t need to change legislation to make that happen; that already exists. But the problem is, is that when it comes to all-party committees for legislation or other matters, it’s basically at the call of the government or the majority of the House, which means, ultimately, the government would have to say, “Yeah, we’re gonna have an all-party committee to look at all this legislation, or to look at this matter or that matter, or something else.”

As you saw, there have been a couple of instances where they did form an all-party committee, I think, on mental health was one and the shrimp quotas, I think, there was one. But we could have – I mean, as far as I’m concerned, legislation should have to go through an all-party committee process before it ever reaches the floor of the House of Assembly. We’d have much better legislation than we have now, because, quite frankly, what happens is that government crafts a piece of legislation; they [. . . 9:56] we’ll get a briefing, probably the day before it’s gonna [. . . 9:58] in the House. It’ll get a half hour just to explain here’s what’s in it, by some staff people. [*chuckles*] And ironically, the government members get the same briefing themselves, because they’ll say, “You, you, and you, we need you to speak to this and defend this today, so you’re going to a briefing tomorrow morning, and they’re gonna tell you what it’s about so you can have some speaking notes, so you can support this,” whether you agree with it – not [do you agree with it, 10:28], so you can support this. And the opposition will get their little briefing and it goes to the House. And of course, then, when the opposition finds flaws or potential to improve it, and amendments, so of course you bring it up. But I’ve hardly ever seen an amendment accepted or happen, because that means that, as government, we have to stand publically and say, “Yeah, we never thought about that, so we’d rather put something through that’s flawed than to give in or to [. . .] we overlooked something that the opposition didn’t,” you know what I mean?

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Paul Lane:** So there are tremendous flaws with democracy. This idea of absolute power to do whatever you want for four years – no recall legislation, no way of getting rid of the government if they’re doing (or an individual member) if they’re not performing properly. So yeah, I mean there are all kinds of flaws to our system, and I think we need major reforms.

11:38

**Jon:** Let me put this back at you one different way. Am I keeping you here now?

**Paul Lane:** No, b’y!

**Jon:** Because I said ten minutes, you’re at 12.

**Paul Lane:** Listen, the last time I did one of these was with Hans Rollman (he’s with the *Independent*) and he was here for an hour and a half! Doesn’t matter, I don’t mind! [*laughs*]

**Jon:** All right, I won't keep you that long, I promise.

**Paul Lane:** *[laughs]*

**Jon:** Okay, so just on the question of democracy again, because I understand – even for myself, and I pay pretty close attention – a lot of the inner workings in the House are a little bit beyond me. And I can understand why a lot of people sort of wouldn't care a whole lot about it. Sometimes people would say too, they'd say, "Well, I cast my vote, the Government is in there, they make difficult decisions. If stuff comes up, the media is going to tell me about it, and if I need to I can get in touch with my MHA." Or protests happen and you see the government changes things, and then people sort of go, "Look, poof, democracy works." What would you say in response to something like that?

**Paul Lane:** Well, we've seen all kinds of things protested over the years that haven't changed. I mean, look. You wanna talk about democracy, just think about this for a second. We had this budget that just came down, Budget 2016, okay? Now, I was elected by the people of my district (just like 39 others), okay? I was part of the government side. I saw the budget two hours before it was read on the floor of the House of Assembly. You go into what's known as a Budget Lock-up situation (the same as the media does) where a couple of hours beforehand you go into the room, there's someone waiting for you at the door; they say, "Do you have a cell phone with you, Paul?" I said, "Yeah." "Hand over your cell phone," and they take your cell phone so you can't leak anything. And if you need to go to the washroom you basically have to raise your hand like you would in school—

**Jon:** *[laughs]*

**Paul Lane:** —and somebody actually escorts you to the washroom and stands outside the washroom door, while you're in there and walks you back into the room (again, so you can't leak anything). That's the first time you've seen the budget. You had zero input into the budget. The Cabinet crafted the budget. Members were not even consulted. This time around it was even a little different again than I was used to, in the sense that in addition to handing in the budget document, everyone was handed an envelope with your district name on it, and when you open the envelope it was a list of the things they were shutting down in your district.

So think about it now. I'm a member out in some area. I'm duly elected by the people. I'm part of the government and decisions have been made that, Oh you're losing this clinic in this community, this one here, you're losing two schools, four libraries, an AES office, here you go, that's what you're losing. And that was the first time that member knew anything about it or was consulted on it, was two hours before it was read in the House as a done deal.

Now, you tell me, is that democracy?

**Jon:** Well, certainly not...

**Paul Lane:** *[laughs]*

**Jon:** Even in the limited sense of this representative system that we've got, you know? And I think that's part of the critique here is, yeah of course, representative democracy is a limited form, but then what we've got is we've got representative democracy with the lid on tight, you know?

**Paul Lane:** Yeah. So, if anybody told me about that, that would be my response, quite frankly, is you tell me, is that democracy? You tell me, do you believe, as someone who voted for me, as your representative, do you believe that your views were represented at the table? And the answer, quite frankly, would have to be no.

**Jon:** I agree with you. I'm posing these questions to get you to answer them. I think, too, this idea that the media circulates the ideas and people get to debate it in this public forum, and you know things happen – why should we have to organize protests for three months and, you know, march all around town and put signs up everywhere? Like the amount of energy that is spent it's like, they could just hold a vote, it would be easier. Just ask people what they think, right? Now, I know that sounds ridiculous and most people they just laugh at you when you say it.

I just want to go back to this thing about the cocktail circuit one more time. Just to get you to clarify where they fit. Where does this thing that we might call the 'cocktail circuit' (and I think that has got to be title of what I'm writing), where do they fit in our democracy?

**Paul Lane:** Well, look, the bottom line is, is that our corporate sector, okay? We rely heavily on the corporate sector for the economy, for creating job opportunities, for obviously bringing wealth to the province, bringing in new dollars and so on, to the province, paying taxes, all that stuff. And I totally support all that and I understand it, and obviously they need to have a mechanism to get their view point across, no different than municipalities have a voice through Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, and certainly the business sector would have it through the Chambers of Commerce and the Board of Trade. We understand that. But, you know, the bottom line is, is that, um – and so there's obviously a place for that, because they're obviously important stakeholders, so I'm not suggesting the business community should not have a say. They absolutely should have a say. But, I guess, where I'm coming from here is that where you have parties, especially the two mainstream parties in particular that are relying so heavily on these corporate donations, and so on. And then when you hear about all the money that gets spent on these consultants reports and all these contracts that get [led, 18:19] and then you hear discrepancies that occur, like when the auditor general talks about the Public Tendering Act, and then all these consultants can be hired; they don't even have to go through the Public Tendering Act because it's considered a professional service, I believe. You know, and so when you look at some of these things, and some of the controversy around some of the projects that have happened here.

Like you look at Muskrat Falls. Muskrat Falls is the one that comes to mind, or Nalcor, when the outgoing chair of the board, Mr. Marshall (not Stan Marshall, Ken Marshall) made the allegation, and was there publically, he made allegations of conflict of interest by, I think it was the finance minister at the time when she was the chair, right? He came out and said it (that was in the news story) that there was conflicts of interest. Well, it was interesting that those allegations were made, but he was dating back to three or four years ago, saying, "Oh she was in conflict back then . . ."

**Jon:** Under the Williams government or under Dunderdale's government.

**Paul Lane:** Correct. So I have to ask the question, If he knew that she has in a conflict four years ago, why didn't you raise it four years ago? Why try to dig up the dirt and raise the allegations now, four years later? Because you've fallen out of favour. So it was okay when we were okay; now that you've taken me on, it's not okay.

Then you have to ask the question, Well who else might be in a conflict of interest who hasn't fallen out of favour? You know what I'm saying?

**Jon:** Well, I think, Paul—

**Paul Lane:** *[laughs]*

**Jon:** And if I could just lead on here, that there is something of a revolving door between it seems like the top levels in our government and the top levels in our business. And maybe you could speak to that, if you could, for a moment. And let me actually give you a line from a gentleman (and I think I'm just going to leave his name out of what I'm writing), this is something that ... .. [omitted] ... .. said when protesters showed up outside a McDonalds. He said, "Attacking a politician's business interests for a tough decision seems a good way to reduce the future pool of good candidates," which I interpret to mean as him basically saying, "Why would I want to run for politics? Why would I go through the revolving door if when I get to the other side people are going to attack my private interests now that I'm a public person?"

**Paul Lane:** Yeah, and I do not – I want to say this. I think that we have to try (and that's just my personal view) to separate someone's private life and private business, and whatever they're in, you have to separate that from the public office. And I agree with him on that. So long as there's no conflicts that exist, you know? But at the same time – and I understand, you know, and we also have this concept somehow (and we've seen it) that we need to keep electing these saviors, these so-called business leaders and all these people, that somehow they're the only ones that can run the province. They're the best people to run the province because they have a successful business or whatever. Uh, you know, at the end of the day – and that's not saying they can't run – but at the end of the day, what we need are people with good common sense, people who can listen to the public, and people who have a clear understanding of the day-to-day life and the issues facing the citizens. That's what we need. And that may or may not come in the form of a business person or a business leader, but for some reason we've convinced ourselves that the only people capable and qualified to run our government is somebody who's some big business exec or whatever, and they're the only ones who are capable of doing it. And I think history has shown us that that's not necessarily the case.

22:45

**Jon:** Let me just put this here as more of a provocation than anything, because I think you're contradicting yourself a little bit. Earlier you said that we've got this group of people that we

might as well call the cocktail circuit, and they are kind of the ones who are going to empower our political class or our political leaders. So in order to become a political leader in this province, you kind of have to get the nod from the cocktail circuit, don't ya? And who is that they're gonna give the nod to? So do we have this democracy in which we can elect who we want? Or are we just given the choices, you know, Blue or Red, here's the guy who's running the party, are we actually getting any real choices?

**Paul Lane:** Well, that's part of the problem; that's why we need reform. That's why I'm suggesting that, like from a reform point of view, there should be serious cuts (I mean very significant cuts, as far as I'm concerned) to the amount of money that any party can raise during an election process, the amount of money that any party can spend during an election process, the amount of money any candidate can raise. Like right now it is limited. For example, I could have spent \$40,000 I think it was in the last provincial election, okay? That should be \$10,000. I'm saying \$10,000. I'm throwing that out as a number. Maybe it should be 15 or maybe it should be 5 – I don't know. But it should be much less than 40. The amount of money that I could raise, the amount of money that I could spend, and the amount of money – and I shouldn't be able to get that full 10 or 15 from one person writing a cheque either. This is what I talk about reform. So that you can have more people and you can have putting people on a more level playing field. You know, the Liberal party or the PC party should not be able to go and spend a million dollars (if that's what the number is) with this big bus going around the province and all, you know, big money. Let's do away with that.

Let's take election signs, for example, which a lot of people would argue are only bad for the environment anyway, let's eliminate election signs on public property altogether. If someone wants to put it on their private property, on their lawn or something, they can fill their boots. But as far as saying, we're gonna put me up on the roadways, let's get rid of it altogether, or at least let's limit it. Let's limit all these things, you know?

Why not have, through Elections Newfoundland and Labrador, somebody had suggested to me – if someone wants to run, why not have Elections Newfoundland and Labrador create a webpage and give every candidate a certain amount of space, so many pages on it to put out their platform, their information about them, why you should vote for them, and make it an equal playing field for people? If you did all of these things and you eliminated the amount of money that's required, then you wouldn't need unions and you wouldn't need big corporations to fund these campaigns and you'd put it on a more level playing field so that the average person who has something to offer that doesn't have the connections, they have the ability to run and be successful.

**Jon:** Yeah. Like all the things that you're saying here, like all-party committees, limiting corporate/union donations, all these kings of things, I mean these are all pretty reasonable things, right?

**Paul Lane:** Yes.

**Jon:** To me, none of these things sound like they're radical or revolutionary ideas.

**Paul Lane:** No.

**Jon:** You're not asking for like direct democracy or a consensus government, and you're not asking for a radically different form of government at all. It sounds like you're asking for some pretty simple stuff. And what do you think is the likelihood that any of this is just going to come about because people will be persuaded?

**Paul Lane:** Um, I am [*pause*] I suppose you never say never, but based on my experience, what I've seen, I don't see it. Personally, I don't see it happening. Now, that's my opinion. I don't see it happening. Quite frankly you'll hear opposition parties in particular will cry foul some of these things when they're in opposition, and once they form government it all changes because now they have the power. It's interesting that the Liberal party, and so on, we're talking about we should have more (NDP more so, but even the Liberals as well) talking about all-party committees and talking about all these things that were happening in the House. And when they formed government, the response you got is, "Well, you were no better when you were there. You didn't do it for us, so shag you, we're not going to do it for you. Because now we're in power! Now is our turn to be in charge, you see?" It all comes down to, "Now it's our turn."

So I don't see it happening unless there is a major movement, a public movement. Whether that should come in the form of some kind of public campaign outside of the party system, or whether it should come by way of a new party coming on the scene that that would be their platform, for example, to make these changes and to force that issue and make it an issue. Unless something like that happens, I don't see the other parties that we have in place doing it, or pushing for it. I don't see it. Now, you might hear someone say, "Yeah, that sounds like some good ideas," but again, if they got in power tomorrow, you know, I don't see it happening.

But I think it needs to be a major issue in the next election campaign. Somebody has to make it a major issue.

28:52

**Jon:** That was gonna be my next question, is what would need to happen in order for a significant change in the system? And you've touched a couple of points here. My view is similar to what you've said around there would need to be some sort of groundswell or some sort of big movement. . .

**Paul Lane:** Yep.

**Jon:** We've seen something of a movement since April. What comment overall do you have on what you've seen in terms of that kind of a movement? And part of it has seemed to me to be a call for a more robust democracy. What comment do you have on the movement?

**Paul Lane:** Yeah. We have seen that, and I've had discussions with some of those people in some of those groups. My comment to them and to others would be, you know, it does need to happen as far as I'm concerned, but having these splinter groups (I'll call them splinter groups – I don't mean it disrespectfully), but the reality of it is a small group here, a small group there

under different names. I think there's Free Newfoundland is one group and then there's the People's Party is another group, and then the libertarians are another group, and then there's. . .

**Jon:** Coordinated Approach and Social Justice Co-op . . .

**Paul Lane:** Yes. That is not going to work. I think anybody who believes that we need democratic reform, I believe they all need to unite and come together under one umbrella. They need to come up with a solid plan. They need to develop policies. They need to come up with a way of getting that out there to the public, whether it be through social media or through an actual campaign if you will. It has to be done in a coordinated fashion. It has to be done professionally. It will do nothing for the cause if you have radical people that are going to be out there referring to the Minister of Finance as the McMinister or Nugget or whatever, you know, whatever these slurs, which I think are disgusting personally. That's just my personal view. Regardless of how people feel about the budget, some of the personal attacks that have been placed on people and their families and stuff I cannot and I will not support it. But you need to eliminate that from – you need to set up a credible organization or a credible alternative. It has to be united, it has to be coordinated, it has to be professional, it has to stay out of the gutter, so that you give the people, in their mind, an alternative. But if you start throwing in some of this radical stuff and whatever into the mix, then it will take away from the credibility of it, as far as I'm concerned.

**Jon:** And what kind of interest, personally, do you have in being involved in anything like that?

**Paul Lane:** [*chuckles*]

**Jon:** I mean you sound to me like you're the natural – you're the voice now of this kind of . . .

**Paul Lane:** Yeah. And I have been asked that now, you would not believe the number of times and the number of people who have approached me and asked me about that. I believe in that cause. I think I would like to be involved at some level in promoting that, obviously. To say though that I am the voice or I am the leader of this movement or whatever, that's something that I haven't totally gotten my head around or decided. Not so much me as my family, to be quite honest with you. I mean, I signed up (if you will) to be the MHA for the district of Mount Pearl Southlands. That's what I signed up to do, and that in itself can sometimes be a bit of a daunting task. There's a lot of work and you're constantly getting calls from people in your district with issues, and so on. And I love doing that stuff. What is being suggested to me goes way beyond the scope of what I had intentionally, I guess, signed up to do.

But you know, even already, ever since that fateful day that I voted against the motion and the next day got kicked out for it, since then I have been overwhelmed with calls, emails, Facebook messages – I can't, quite frankly, I've got a job to keep up with it, and it started off as more around kudos and thanks for what you did and whatever. And I don't really feel like I did anything, only vote with my conscience and the people who elected me. But anyway, in a lot of people's minds it was something much greater than that, and I thank them for the kind words I've received. And I can't believe – actually I've been getting messages from all over the province and Labrador, and even the ex-pats and so on. But now it's also morphed into

everybody who has an issue with government on some policy or another, I seem to be the go-to guy. I'm getting overwhelmed with "you need to look into healthcare on the northern peninsula," you need to look into what they've done here in Bonavista," "you need to look into . . ." you know what I'm saying? I'm one person with a constituency assistant and I have my own district to look after. Now, we have looked into a lot and I've spoken out on as much as I can, and I'm humbled by the fact that people are coming to me, but it is getting, you know, it's starting to get difficult to manage. All these global issues. And then in addition to the sort of global policy issues, now I'm also getting people saying, "Can you look into my personal workers' comp claim?" And I have to draw the line somewhere. I mean, I just don't have the resources, the time to be everybody's MHA.

**Jon:** I follow you on Twitter too and I see you've got a pretty full calendar. You pop up at events left, right and center.

**Paul Lane:** [*laughs*] Yeah.

36:02

**Jon:** Without asking you to name any names, have you been approached by any people who are sort of well known or that would be part of this kind of, I guess the movers and the shakers in the Newfoundland and Labrador political or economic scene about different ideas? Because I see op-eds pop up in the *Telegram* from people like Maurice (I'm trying to remember his last name) Adams, I believe. And some of these people who were involved with Vision 2041 or these other kinds of groups. I mean, they seem to be saying slightly more [*pause*] where they before seemed to be resting their faith in a Liberal government coming in, now they seem to be talking about participatory democracy and these kinds of things are coming up in what they're saying now. So they seem to be moving in a somewhat different direction. So without wishing to name any names, have you spoken to any recognizable politicians or business people, or community movers kind of thing?

**Paul Lane:** I can say to you that I've spoken to people of all walks of life (if I could put it that way), of different interests, and there is a strong desire for change in the system. I really believe that if there was a significant alternative available to what we currently have, I think at this stage of the game I think there would be an awful lot of people that would be willing to embrace that. But to create an alternative, as you may or may not know, there's significant (I'm sure you can only imagine) the amount of work that would be involved to create that, to bring that together . . .

**Jon:** And money.

**Paul Lane:** And money, although there's an awful lot – like somebody reminded me, I had a meeting with a couple of people last night actually, around this whole thing. I was sort of reminded and shown that you'd be surprised, there's an awful lot of stuff you can do, and you can do it in a very cost-effective way, if the will is there and you have the right people and committed people. But yes, you're absolutely right. You can't do it for nothing. And fundraising would have to be part of that equation. But I would be very careful on the fundraising side,

because you wouldn't want to fly in the face of one of the major things that you're trying to eliminate, you know?

**Jon:** Yeah.

**Paul Lane:** So yeah. But I've spoken to all kinds of people. And quite frankly, one of the things that's really surprised me is the number of people I run into where, uh, who one would consider long-time Liberals, staunch Liberal supporters, former candidates or members or what have you, like people in the party, people you would associate as strong members of the Liberal party, who I've run into who, as I was approaching them I was saying, "Okay, I'm gonna get it this time . . ." like waiting for the blast, right? Waiting for the "you traitor" type of thing.

**Jon:** [*laughs*]

**Paul Lane:** And instead holding out their hand or tapping me on the back and saying, "Way to go, Paul. I support you a hundred percent." I was shocked by – some of them really shocked me, to be honest. I believe that the Liberal government is in a total mess right now, even internally. It's not just the external group; it's internally, which quite frankly that's one of the reasons why, as far as I'm concerned, why John Ottenheimer was let go. That was pure politics. I know there was people in the Liberal party really upset. I know they were getting calls up in the premier's office about that because I talked to people who told me they called him. Called up there, really upset, "How could you have John Ottenheimer, you need to get rid of him ASAP" and stuff. [40:57]. So they're having a lot of fallout even in their own party, and that was the reason why he was gone, and I'd say that's the reason there's all these shakeups, communications . . . it's as much about the upcoming Liberal convention as it is about running the province.

**Jon:** Yeah, they're trying to smooth things out with the right people, or trying to keep the right people on board, or do whatever needs to be done. And I mean this fall mini-budget, I think – well maybe I can put it to you: what do you think is gonna be the result of that mini-budget? And is it gonna calm things down or make things flare up all over again?

**Paul Lane:** Well, my personal view, and I stand to be corrected, they're almost in a – they're in a no-win situation now. They've created a no-win situation for themselves because if they sort of draw in their horns a bit on the mini-budget – because I believe they had, there was gonna be major cutbacks coming this fall, I believe was the intent. That's just my opinion. Again, how would I know? I wasn't in the Cabinet. None of this was shared with caucus. But I believe in the fall mini budget, and I think that the Minister of Finance even said herself, she talked about the two levers. This will be the Revenue lever and then the fall budget will be the Spending lever. But they're in a no-win situation now because obviously if they decide, okay, we're not gonna make all these cuts that we were planning on making, they're gonna have the business community are gonna be going nuts, the Employers' Council, Board of Trade and so on. But not just the business community – regular citizens. Because you would not believe the number of people I've spoken to, constituents of mine and others, who are saying, "How dare you raise my taxes while you have this bloated public service, which is per capita bigger than any public service in the country?" So you have an awful lot of people, Joe Q Public, who believes that the public service needs to be cut substantially and you should have done that before you started

coming to me looking for more money; you took the easy way out just to tax me to death. That's how a lot of people view it.

**Jon:** Yeah, there was a lot of those people in the movement.

**Paul Lane:** No doubt. So you got that side. But on the flip side, if they go through with all these cuts, and they do it in a significant way, then whatever communities lose services or facilities, they're gonna go nuts. All the people that are gonna get laid off or whatever, they're gonna go nuts. The unions are gonna go nuts. So either way, I think that no matter what they do, there's gonna be a major racket this fall, one way or the other, as far as I'm concerned. I don't see how they avoid it.

**Jon:** I agree with you 100% again.

**Paul Lane:** *[laughs]*

**Jon:** I think we've pretty much been on the same page about everything so far, but I need to hear you say it, you know? Listen, I don't have a whole lot – I have one more specific question – but otherwise, you know, I just . . . why don't I ask you my specific question, and then if you got anything else you'd like to add, I'm happy to hear it.

44:34

**Jon:** Again, I keep going back to this lovely line about the cocktail circuit – or here's the question I had. Do you feel that you're gonna take heat from making comments like this, or from speaking so plainly to people like me and in interviews and things like this? Do you think the main parties and the cocktail circuit that backs them are gonna try and marginalize you?

**Paul Lane:** I don't care. *[pause]* Simple. *[laughs]* I really don't care!

**Jon:** Okay . . . You're a liberated man.

**Paul Lane:** That's it. You know, listen. I was liberated (if you want to call it liberated, okay), let me put this in context. I was liberated, or I liberated myself (I guess I would say), what, three years ago when I left the PC party on my own accord. I was, after two years of playing the game (it is what you're doing), two years of playing the game and playing it very well from the party's perspective, from the party line, right? I mean people . . .

**Jon:** You were a bull dog.

**Paul Lane:** Yeah, I took a lot of flack. I took a lot of flack because people were associating me with, what was it they were calling me? The attack dog. Dunderdale's attack dog, the defender of Dunderdale, this and that and everything else. The bottom line is, is that anything that I've ever done in my life, I've given 110%. There are no half measures with me. If I decide I'm gonna do something or take something on, then I'm generally not like the average person; I'm one of these

people who, some people would say you're over the top. You're, you know? That's just kind of the way I am when I take something on. So at the time, I guess, playing the game in my role as caucus chair and member of the government and being asked, as other members were asked, like to put out the party message, to what have you, I did it to the best of my ability and I was relentless. And I guess as a result of that, I kept getting asked by the party, "Okay, well, will you do this interview, will you do that interview?" and I gladly accepted, you know what I mean? Because it was my role and I was doing . . .

But once I woke up, I'm gonna call it, to the reality – because you've got to remember, when you get into this first you're a greenhorn, and you're not familiar with the system or whatever. It's kind of intimidating to some degree, and if you're part of that group and you're being asked to do certain things. If you look at a guy, like a Jerome Kennedy or whatever, you're saying, "Jesus, Jerome was a brilliant guy or whatever. If he's saying this is right, it must be right." So now they're asking me to be the spokesperson on this or that, you take that as sort of a compliment, a positive thing and you do the best you can. And then they say, "B'y, you did a great job. Can you do this one for us?" and you're getting that positive affirmation and you keep on going and you do what you feel, the role that you've been given, and to do it to the best of your ability.

But I guess at some point you wake up and you sort of come out of the little bubble, because when you're there you are in a bubble, you know, in government and you have this whole groupthink mentality going on. But once I sort of realized, I guess, what was going on and the decisions that were being made and the role that I was playing in it, in terms of promoting the message and so on, and once I really realized all that, and [shortly, 48:41] after Dark NL, that was really the sort of the straw that broke the camel's back for me, I decided, hold on a second here, you know? Some of this stuff, a lot of this stuff that's happening I'm not agreeing with. Bill 29 was a big one. I brought it up numerous times; it got ignored numerous times. Finally, we had a caucus retreat was the last time where we're supposed to deal with that and a number of issues. Nothing got dealt with. I said, shag this. I've had enough of this. I'm not gonna be a puppet anymore. And I liberated myself.

And I did pay a price politically, I believe, for that. I took a lot of heat or whatever, and yes, thankfully, the people did elect me again. Certainly never got the high numbers that I would have liked to have gotten, but nonetheless I did get another opportunity. But when I made that decision to leave the PC party, at that point in time I vowed to myself that I would never, ever, ever again be anybody's puppet. I cut those puppet strings for good. And I vowed that I would never go back again. So of course, the two years I was with the Liberals, you're in opposition, you weren't constrained per se in opposition. It's just like keep the issues going and whatever. It was a different dynamic, but of course once we got in and we formed government, then we saw the same thing happen as happened before. You had that small group in the Cabinet; they were calling all the shots. You weren't informed about anything. You weren't included in anything. And then of course we saw this horrible budget that I was expected to support. And I knew from day 1 that I wasn't gonna support it, but it was a matter of, you know, um, I can remember when I saw it, and I remember going home and saying to my wife, "I'm not supporting this budget!"

**Jon:** *[laughs]*

**Paul Lane:** "There's not a chance in hell I'm voting for this!" Right? But I said, "But I have

time, because it'll be several weeks before it actually gets voted on, so I have lots of time to keep bringing up to caucus and have meetings internally and try to get it changed." And I did that week after week after week after week, until it became abundantly clear that – well, that day actually, we had a caucus meeting the day of the that vote, that I voted on that, and they said at that time (I brought it up again and put it all out there on the table), and they said, "Don't even bother to bring it up again. It's pointless to keep talking about this week after week, nothing is changing." I said, okay fine, nothing is changing. Forget it. I guess . . . So I knew then that that's what was going to happen. But the point I guess I'm making is that I liberated myself when I left Dunderdale after two years and, really, I've been liberated, if you will, ever since. And I said, never again will I be a yes-man, and I won't.

**Jon:** And I guess, I think one of the most dangerous things that can happen in a system that's kind of full of shadows is when somebody just points the light on things and just says what a lot of people believe, you know, that becomes a little bit threatening to government and to power generally. Listen, I don't have a whole lot more. One final question, I guess, if I may, and it just came up in something you just said there. You said about your wife, you went home and you said to your wife, "I can't do this!" what did she say to you? Jesus, Paul!

**Paul Lane:** [*laughs*] Well, you know, like she is totally against this budget like everybody else. She is totally rotted with the government and the budget as well. But there's no doubt when I said at first, "Oh my god, don't tell me, not again!" Right?

**Jon:** [*chuckles*]

**Paul Lane:** It was like, Jesus, you know, you just went through all this turmoil and everything else, and now you're gonna get possibly thrown out and we're gonna go through this again?" And we had that discussion and, you know, because it was [concerning, 53:15], you know, when I left Dunderdale and a lot of the flack that I received, I mean it was very much sort of a split down the middle type of thing, you know. I guess there was a lot of people who, uh, you know, were upset about it, but there was a lot of people who supported it as well, because a lot of people didn't support Dunderdale and that. So yeah, it was a concern at the time. "Oh Jesus, I've got to go through this again." But at the end of the day, she supported me and she said, "You know what? You're the one who has got to look at yourself in the mirror in the morning, not me. So you gotta do whatever you think is best. If that means voting against it, so be it," you know?

We also took a financial hit for it.

**Jon:** Oh I know, because you were . . .

**Paul Lane:** The Deputy . . . Committees. So that was a \$15,000 cut. Actually, it was \$25,000 when I left Dunderdale because I was Parliamentary Secretary then. We could have a discussion another time whether this should be paid anyways, because I think this whole whip and caucus chair is a total waste of money anyway. It's only a way of basically throwing a few plums, I guess, at members who are doing a good job in the eyes of the premier. That's all these are, little plum perks that should be eliminated anyway.

But I guess back to your original question about if am I upset about backlash – look, at the end of

the day, I was elected by the people. The only backlash I'm concerned about are from the people who elected me. I could care less if the Board of Trade or anybody else is upset by my comments. I don't care. It's as simple as that. I have nothing against the Board of Trade or the Chamber of Commerce. As I've said, and I'll make that quite clear once again, business has a significant role, they play a significant role in our province, in our communities from the perspective of bringing wealth and economic development and employing people and [playing takes]; and some of them are very good corporate citizens and they do stuff for charity. It's all good, and I support our business communities. So it's nothing against them per se, in that regard.

But if someone is gonna get their nose out of joint because I believe our system is not working for us and that there's too much corporate money and union money and everything else going into political parties, and thus creating an unlevel playing field for people who want to run and possibly undo influence, and so on, on government decisions or whatever – if we can do things to change that, eliminate that, you know, whether it's real or perceived, then I think we should do it. And if someone wants to get their nose out of joint with me because I'm coming clean with my views and I'm not gonna be politically correct, then b'y, I guess too bad for them. And don't vote for me next time, if I run, if you live in my district. And if you don't live in my district, well then it's irrelevant from a political point of view anyway.

**Jon:** And you know, the truth as far as I understand it is that small business owners and most businesses would benefit from the kinds of reforms that you're talking about.

**Paul Lane:** Absolutely.

**Jon:** you're not suggesting anything that's like – you're not asking for a Communist revolution here or anything.

**Paul Lane:** No.

**Jon:** If anything I'd say that a lot of the views that you express are very centrist and very about balance between public sector, private sector. And I guess I hadn't noticed that the Board of Trade folks or the Employers Councils folks have been giving you any flack, but have they been?

**Paul Lane:** No.

**Jon:** I hadn't seen anything like that.

**Paul Lane:** No, no they haven't. I was responding to your question about do you think anybody would be upset with me, or my comments would be threatening to business or [people in power, 57:55] or whatever. And by the way, you're right; this is not about small business. I mean, look. I received plenty of donations, corporate donations, when I ran from numerous sources, and that was municipally and provincially. Like a lot of local businesses like, a hundred dollars or two hundred bucks or something like that, and that's not what I'm talking about. There's no issue with that.

**Jon:** No, no.

**Paul Lane:** These big corporations that are gonna write the Liberal party or the PC party a cheque for \$10,000 and then they're gonna sponsor their golf tournament every year, and then they're gonna buy \$5,000 tickets to these dinners and stuff like that. That's the kind of stuff that needs to be stopped, as far as I'm concerned.

**Jon:** I have those lists. I have the lists of all the political donations from the – a lot of it is construction, and a lot of these other firms like architecture and all of these kinds of people who are gonna be bidding on government contracts, right?

**Paul Lane:** Correct.

**Jon:** Small businesses aren't bidding on anything.

**Paul Lane:** No, it's not about the small business. That's not the issue. It's about the big-time businesses and big time corporations and big time people of influence.

**Jon:** That's why, I'm sorry –

**Paul Lane:** That's why I say the cocktail circuit because you gotta remember that regardless if there's PCs or Liberals in government or whatever, I really believe you sort of have this elite group that are in on everything. They own multiple businesses. They have business interest all over the place and they're in the know and they have connections in all parties because they make sure that they have connections on all sides. It's not just necessarily about winning a contract as much as even, you know, people could argue do they – and I'm not saying they do (I don't want to be to accuse anybody of things that I can't prove), but people would ask, "Do you have the inside scoop of things that are going to be happening in the future?" Where you can acquire land or property or whatever, knowing in advance that this is planned two years or three years down the road, and all of a sudden it's gonna be a huge impact on your investment.

**Jon:** You'd have to say it's a pretty big coincidence that the same families have been snapping up all the same stuff for generations.

**Paul Lane:** Correct.

**Jon:** Would you say . . .

**Paul Lane:** I don't know. I haven't been privy to these conversations, you know what I'm saying? I haven't bene privy to any of this. But you're right, it is [*pause*] it seems like all of the major things that are happening always seem to come back to the same players, doesn't it?

**Jon:** Yeah. And for them, the cocktail circuit, the system is working just fine the way it is. Why would they want to change anything?

**Paul Lane:** They wouldn't. They wouldn't.

**Jon:** Red, Blue, whatever.

**Paul Lane:** Yeah, they wouldn't. But what needs to happen, as far as I'm concerned, is that those players need to be made, um, not irrelevant (irrelevant is not the right word), but from a political point of view, then they don't need – we need a system where they have no more influence than you or I as individuals.

**Jon:** I do, I 100% agree with you.

**Paul Lane:** You know what I'm saying, right? You get what you're saying, right?

**Jon:** Oh my god, yes. Paul, what I'm going to do is I'm going to turn off the recording right now, can you hang on one second? I guess, first, was there anything else you wanted to say on the record?

**Paul Lane:** No, b'y, there's nothing more I can say other than I was elected by the people of Mount Pearl-Southlands and that's who I represent, and it'll be their interests that I'll be bringing forward. It's the issues of the common person and obviously there has to be a role, as I said, for business, both big business and small business. They have a role. Their interests have to be considered in the scheme of things as well. But at the end of the day, we also have to be concerned for the everyday person that we were elected to represent, whether they be of means or not. And certainly we have to protect the most vulnerable, and that's where it's at for me. I'm sick and tired, quite frankly. I played the political game for a couple of years. I did it to the best of my abilities; some people would say I excelled at it. Some people will say they were disgusted by it, depending on who you ask, but I did play the political game for a couple of years. I cut the puppet strings and I said never again, and it will be never again. And any decisions I make, or any words that come out of my mouth, will be my words from now on. I will not be listening to any spin doctors. There is no messaging. I have no communications gurus or spin doctors telling me what to say, nor will I, and I want to keep it real.

**Jon:** All right. Just one sec, Paul, I want to say a few more things, but I'm going to turn off my recorder now.

**Paul Lane:** Sure.

END OF RECORDING