

Interview: Gary Kroeker
Interviewer: Jim Sinclair
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Transcription: Patricia Wejr

Jim Sinclair [00:00:02] Okay. What is your full name?

Gary Kroeker [00:00:03] Gary Kroeker.

Jim Sinclair [00:00:04] Where were you born?

Gary Kroeker [00:00:06] I was born in New Westminster at the Royal Columbian Hospital.

Jim Sinclair [00:00:08] What year?

Gary Kroeker [00:00:10] November 25th, 1948.

Jim Sinclair [00:00:12] So did you grow up there too?

Gary Kroeker [00:00:14] I grew up in Port Coquitlam, the first 10 years. Then we moved to Terrace and spent a number of years in Terrace and moved back to the Lower Mainland. And went to work in New Westminster for Rayonier Lumber and spent a bit of time there until it burned down. And in the interim, I'd applied to go to vocational school here in -- PVI, it was called at the time, Pacific Vocational Institute, to take a welding and fabricating course. And unfortunately, all the classes were filled here in Burnaby and I got a call to go to Kelowna. So, I trundled up to Kelowna and spent probably seven months in the vocational school in Kelowna, taking the welding and fabricating course and blueprint reading and that was the start of my long welding career as I know today.

[00:01:14] So, when you were growing up what did your parents do?

[00:01:17] Well my mother worked at a grocery store in Port Coquitlam for a number of years until we moved to Terrace from about '52 to let's call it '60. And my dad, he had various jobs. He worked for Flavelle Cedar in Port Moody for a good number of years and I remember as a youngster -- I don't recall how old I was -- but I remember him taking us there on a Saturday and showed us how the whole operation worked, how the logs came up the deck and the wood got sawn and went this direction, went that direction. And it was kind of interesting.

[00:01:59] And then he left there and he worked in, I don't recall the name of the logging company but it was up in the Stave Lake area called Widgeon Creek and he worked there for a period of time.

Jim Sinclair [00:02:17] Was he a faller there?

Gary Kroeker [00:02:19] No, he was, let's call him a maintenance person sort of thing and to be honest with you I don't recall exactly what his job title was because now we're testing the memory cells but I don't recall exactly what he'd do. I know him and another fellow we're coming down off the mountain and the service truck that they were in or the vehicle

that they were in lost its brakes and over the edge they went, and tumbled and rolled. And so it was a kind of... bruised and battered up and banged up a bit but survived, well both of them survived luckily. And then from there he did some things on his own. Let's call it entrepreneurish. Tried to be a "Mr. Fix-it" and then he went to work for a factory. Yeah, quite a few different jobs. He was quite a chatter and tried out jobs as salesperson if I remember correctly, selling powdered milk. It was a company called Sunrise Industries and they sold those Kenwood Chef mixers and so on. And with every purchase you got two years of powdered milk. I don't know how I remember this stuff but anyway. And he sold one unit, I remember him telling this story quite a few times, to a large dairy farmer on Nicomen Island and he sold one but the guy really wanted the powdered milk to feed to the calves so that he could sell the milk and save the milk. So, it was kind of interesting from that point of view. And then he drove a bus for Greyhound for a bit and he was a guard at Oakalla for a short period of time. And then he was, I'm going to call it '59 '60. There wasn't a lot of work around. So, he went north and moved to Terrace and went to work for a company called Columbia Cellulose, which is a major, major forestry company in Terrace and they also had the pulp mill in Prince Rupert at that time.

[00:04:35] And so, needless to say off we all went to Terrace and that was quite a trek because my dad was already there and it was my brother and myself and my Mum. We drove up and it was seemed like taking forever because if there was one pothole, there was a gazillion potholes on that road. It was kind of unique travels in those days. Just the three of us. Yeah, but anyway. So, I lived up there for a number of years and my Dad, like I say, he worked for Columbia Cell and then one summer I went to work for Sandy Lumber which was a private family-owned sawmill company in Terrace, right darn near downtown. And I worked there one summer and said that I don't know if piling lumber is really my career path and I did go out and I did work -- you know, I took a bit of a sabbatical from school once and so well, you got a choice, work or school. So, I tried the working and I went to work for a logging company that was doing some work between Terrace and Prince Rupert on the, let's call it the opposite side from the highway of the Skeena River and tried that and said no, this is not good.

[00:06:04] This is tough, tough work and was making two dollars and fifty cents an hour at the time and you were in for ten days and out for four, was the work cycle. And so this one fella said well you want to stay in this cycle and keep on working. I said OK. And the fellows started playing poker one night. And I had my paycheque and after watching -- and I'm fairly young at the time -- and after watching for a while they said, well why don't you play? And I lost my paycheque and I said I've never played cards for money since. It was a tough two-week paycheque that somebody else got the cash besides me. But that was -- it's all about the learning and experiences as you go through life. And it was a good one at least for me it was a good one.

Jim Sinclair [00:06:55] So you went to school to be a welder.

Gary Kroeker [00:06:58] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [00:06:59] In Kelowna, and so where did you go after you did that?

Gary Kroeker [00:07:01] In Kelowna, I got a job in Summerland. They were building orchard sprayers. And I got to work on buildings or just sprayers and it was some stainless-steel experience and average building of trailers and doing this and doing that. So, I got a fair bit of experience and the fellow that owned the place, his name was Peter Yeomans and very meticulous individual. You better be right on the money or you're doing

that again. And so he taught you a lot of good habits, like if it's worth doing, it's worth doing rightly. And so it was very valuable and a couple of fellows that I worked with were good mentors in terms of learning the craft and like I say and the owner saying 'hey, I want it done right'.

[00:07:56] And then after that I left the Okanagan and moved down here to the coast and went to work for Carter Machine Works which built gravel truck boxes at the time. And that was an interesting, short period. I wasn't there that long, maybe six or seven months. And that was right on Braid Street, New West by the old Seagram distillery actually. And then went from there to work for Cannon, Western Bridge in downtown Vancouver.

Jim Sinclair [00:08:32] That was a big place.

Gary Kroeker [00:08:32] That was a big place. There was probably -- well there was three shifts working at the time and there's probably, I must say close to a thousand people working on that. It was a major project for Portland, [unclear] I think it was called and that was a good job. Well, again it was it was a tough...

Jim Sinclair [00:08:58] Was that your first union?

Gary Kroeker [00:08:59] There was actually three unions there was the Machinists who did all the maintenance and repair of all the equipment. Then there was the Marine Boilermaker. And, oh what was his name. [Terry]. Doug [Terry] was the business manager at the organization at the time. And who am I remembering -- Jim Green worked there at the time. Yeah. So that was about, oh probably... worked there until they finished that project then everybody got laid off. Oh, the other union was the Marine Boilermaker, the Operating Engineers Local 115 ran the cranes and so on. So there was the three unions that represented the fabrication end of things and then the outside, where they did the erection, the actual erection, the Iron Workers and Operating Engineers did that piece. And so I was an interesting job as well.

Jim Sinclair [00:09:59] So when you were growing up, your father had a lot of different jobs and you know, you saw that as part of a normal way of living in a way, he went from job to job. How many of those jobs did you get, was there unions talked about at that point with your father? What was his attitude, your mother's attitude? She was in a grocery store that was probably union too.

Gary Kroeker [00:10:20] As a, well let's call it as a youngster and I'm going to say probably, I'm going to say, maybe as I recall, five years old and older, there used to be a lot of talk about politics. And the family next door to us, the family name was Westerbrook and very very staunch CCFers back then and I can remember dialogue after dialogue around election time about the CCF and politics and I've got to say that my folks were on the side of the CCF. That's just the way it was and it turns out that that ended up being Dave Barrett's riding, back in those days.

Jim Sinclair [00:11:07] Back in those days, back in the '60s.

Gary Kroeker [00:11:07] Yeah, because we lived in Port Coquitlam at the time. You know I can't remember who the MLA was back then. But I know Dave Barrett ended up as the... in Coquitlam.

Jim Sinclair [00:11:22] And then he lost it.

Gary Kroeker [00:11:23] Yes, unfortunately.

Jim Sinclair [00:11:24] Yes, that's right, he lost in '75 and in '60 he won there I think.

Gary Kroeker [00:11:27] It could be, you see we were away then. We were up north at the time. But I remember the days of the CCF and that was, I'm going to say pretty much the family, because they came out of Saskatchewan originally, not me because I was born here, but the families are all out of Saskatchewan, aunts, uncles and so on. And I think they were everybody, well not everybody, but a majority were CCF supporters.

Jim Sinclair [00:11:57] So when did you get involved with the union? Like when did you kind of make that step to being involved?

Gary Kroeker [00:12:07] When I first became involved with the Operating Engineers, with the union movement, was probably, I'm going to go to Rayonier. When I first started at Rayonier, I'm going to call it short term work only because the place burned down. Honestly, I may have been there still had the place not burned down. Who knows? I mean it was just sort of a fate thing. I did put my application in to become a fabricator. But when you're making money sometimes your career path doesn't change because it's all about the dollars and cents and life is good. So the place burned down and so ironically I got the call. It's almost like it's still on fire and the phone is ringing, come to vocational school. So it was an omen in disguise I guess in a lot of ways. Yeah.

Jim Sinclair [00:12:58] So that was the first time and that was Operating Engineers in the mill?

Gary Kroeker [00:13:04] No, no. That was IWA at the mill. 1-357 I think was the local number if I'm not mistaken. I carried the card in my pocket for, oh years. Anyway, I just didn't throw it away. And I'm not sure whether I ever took a withdrawal from the IWA or not but it doesn't matter. And then I, like I say, went to vocational school and then moved to back down here. And then there's the Marine Boilermaker, I was involved there with the union. I was a member of the Union but I wasn't integrated into the hierarchy sort of thing and I believe I was a temporary member. I think Carter Machine Works, if I'm not mistaken. I'm stretching the memory cells. That could have been Steelworkers at the time. I'm not sure.

[00:13:59] Then I went to work for a company called Canadian Lift & Loader which was a Burnaby family business and went to work there as a fabricator and their plant was down on Main Street. They were in Burnaby and then moved to Vancouver down at the foot of Main right at Kent. And I was working there as a fabricator and they manufactured forklifts for both construction, forestry, warehousing, docks, the whole gamut. And they're from large, twenty-ton machines to smaller ones. Anyway. There's a variety of different sizes that they manufactured there and the time I started there; it wasn't union. And after being there, I'm stretching the memory banks here, but after a period of time we started talking about forming a union and the Operating Engineers Local 115 were contacted and lo and behold we all signed up and became Operating Engineers as the certified bargaining agent. In the interim, during the organizing period, I was laid off. I was a junior employee and I was laid off and part of the sales pitch from the union was they can't make any changes during the certification period. They can't lay anybody off, they can't do this, they can't do that. And lo and behold, I'm kicking stones down the street and I'm laid off.

[00:15:52] So I went to the union and said, 'Hey, I've been laid off' and 'oh well, let's see what we can do' and ta da ta da. And lo and behold, they came back and said 'well, we can...' They justified the layoff but you will be recalled. And luckily, I say luckily, I was recalled. About two to three months later I was back on the payroll and it was onward and upward from there. I became the steward.

Jim Sinclair [00:16:23] Tell me about the actual organizing, like what were the emotions that people had around that? Was there fear? What was there around that time?

Gary Kroeker [00:16:32] I'm going to say there was some some fear but there was still a lot of confidence built by the reps that were meeting with us at the time. And you know, there's a lot of assurances and I think it was about instilling the, or reinforcing the fact, that you're better off united than standing alone. And I think that sort of changed a lot of the attitudes of the workers. And there was still some that were skeptical because they were, sort of said hey, this is a family place. I've been here for a long time and I feel I owe them something and my going the the union, it sort of turns it the other way. But at the same time, I think over the period of the organizing, because it wasn't long, I mean it was just we met, I think...

Jim Sinclair [00:17:32] Those are the good old days. It was just one meeting and everybody signs up.

Gary Kroeker [00:17:36] And you had all your -- you had to pay one month's dues, when you signed up and I think that that -- you may want to put this in a book or you may not want to put in a book. I still think that that should apply today because once you've got money in the game or skin in the game whatever you want to call it your loyalty is going to stay with where the cash is. But when you just up, come along and say, hey sign here, I sign just to get you off my back, doesn't really invoke a lot of confidence or loyalty to the operation. And so, I kind of think that there should be some tie that way. I don't know, that's a tough thing to say but that's just the way I look at it.

Jim Sinclair [00:18:22] We used to collect. So, at this point the union is established. The company's response was?

Gary Kroeker [00:18:31] Very negative. Because they felt that because it was a family operation, I think they felt that they were -- I can't think of the correct word. We weren't loyal. Back to we've given you something and you in turn have turned on us and feel that you betrayed us. And not that -- I don't think anybody was looking for big dollars and cents. They were looking for more of the security side and that sort of thing. I think it was more about the security and the feeling of saying hey if something goes on, I've got somebody there to help me along the way and somebody to turn to, rather than relying on the company that would say well, yes or no. And I think that was really the the motivation.

Jim Sinclair [00:19:28] So you get involved in the union.

Gary Kroeker [00:19:32] We had a steward, selected a steward and a really nice man and I had lots of time for him because, well, him and I worked side by side. A fellow by the name of Mitch Tanaka, a Japanese Canadian and really a nice man. And his family were really nice. Anyway, he became the steward and for some reason after, I dunno, six months or so he said, no I'm not going to do this anymore. I wanna make a change and the crew asked if I'd be interested in taking it. I think I was out of the room at the time and I became the steward. That was kind of an interesting position.

[00:20:17] Because they were putting a collective agreement together, they were in negotiations and it got to push comes to shove and the union rep asked if they could bring the steward in and I participated in the negotiations of the agreement. And so that was my first real step into the, let's call it the workings of a union and found it really interesting. Learned a fair bit and it was onward from there and it was kind of ironic because after the negotiations and the ratification of the agreement -- and it was a good agreement, no question about it, for the early '70s, it was a very good agreement.

[00:21:08] And we got the pension plan established, the Local 115 private pension plan was established and I was walking down the floor one day and all of a sudden, I hear this out of my one ear, somebody made a comment that I was a sell-out. And so there was confrontation at that point because it was the farthest thing from the truth and because I was living under the same agreement as everybody else. And so this individual and I had a chitchat and I never heard another peep after that everything went well. Then later, probably a year later there was an opening at the Union for a rep and the business representative of the day came and mentioned it to me and said that I should apply for the job and I did. And in February of 1974 I went to work for the union as a business representative.

Jim Sinclair [00:22:21] 1974.

Gary Kroeker [00:22:21] Yeah, February of '74. Yeah, it's a long, long time ago.

Jim Sinclair [00:22:24] So basically you started in the company at Kent and Main and you helped organize the union there, you became the shop steward. So, in the course of about three or four years you went from being on the plant floor as a new employee to working for the union.

Gary Kroeker [00:22:40] Roughly three, three and a half.

Jim Sinclair [00:22:43] And so what was that transition like?

Gary Kroeker [00:22:44] Oh that transition, it was like, well it was like black and white, when you get right down to it. All of a sudden, you're going from wearing a pair of greasy coveralls to wearing new clothes every day and the only difference was, this was from daylight to well after dark we were always at work as a union rep. Whereas in the structured world, it was eight to four-thirty and you went home and no muss, no fuss, and you played with the kids. This way here, it was as long as you had a phone, you were working.

Jim Sinclair [00:23:21] Now at this point, tell me your family.

Gary Kroeker [00:23:26] Oh gee whiz. Okay, the family. Oh, what year did we get married. Oh-oh. Now you're asking a tough question. I was married in '74. We've got my wife Marlene and we've got two children. Well, not children anymore, they're adults. But the two children a girl, our daughter's the oldest and our son is the younger one, needless to say. And, yeah, we lived in Maple Ridge for... well, lived in Port Coquitlam first and then we moved to Maple Ridge, bought a house in '74. Yeah, right around the time I was going to work for the local we bought a house in Maple Ridge and sat back and said, how the hell am I gonna pay for this? Like twenty-five-year commitment, that's a lifetime. And fortunately, we've struggled through that, the high interest rates over the years and all the

rest of it. And touch wood, my wife has been able to be a stay at home mum. Not like it is today. Very fortunate that we went through the best of the best times in terms of the working career.

Jim Sinclair [00:24:45] And you still live in the same house?

Gary Kroeker [00:24:47] No, we moved from Maple Ridge, lived there for 30 plus years. The kids went to school and grew up there and then we moved about 10 years ago to Port Coquitlam. We'd been broke into three times in Maple Ridge for I dunno, they just liked the location, I guess. I don't know. And we got broken into three times and came home the once and there was a baseball bat laying on the couch and my wife said, hey you can stay and have a half a house or you can move with me and live in a whole house. So we both moved.

Jim Sinclair [00:25:28] So you're now at whatever age you were at that point, you're pretty young. In your early...

Gary Kroeker [00:25:36] Oh, in the '70s. Yeah, I was a kid, twenty-three, twenty-four.

Jim Sinclair [00:25:42] So twenty-three, twenty-four you began a full-time career in the union which then goes until you retire, basically.

Gary Kroeker [00:25:48] Yeah. To be honest with you, it makes my eyes water when I think of the confidence the membership had in me over that period of time. It was just incredible. Incredible. It was a great bunch of people. I've met just, I'm not going to say millions but thousands and I just owe them everything.

Jim Sinclair [00:26:13] So you had an affinity for this you figured out, once you started doing it and how much of that was your upbringing, too. Like it was the experiences, but how much did the values you took to that job get ingrained in you as a kid?

Gary Kroeker [00:26:30] Well I think, you know if I go back as a kid I was taught, you never quit. You never quit. You keep moving forward. You may not like it but around the corner there's always something better. So, I guess from that perspective, it probably ingrained the feeling -- because being as a union rep, probably on a daily basis there was 100 negatives and zero positives. Because that's what the job is all about. You know, a member's got a problem, either at work, at home or something and then you go to the employer and it's never good enough. And so it was all about the negatives and how do you deal with those negatives. And you just look around the corner and say the sun's coming up again and it's going to be a better day tomorrow and you move forward. And the friendships that you build along the way I think are the things that you take away the most. It's the appreciation. It may not be said but you know it's appreciated at the end of the day.

Jim Sinclair [00:27:33] So just in some way, sort of that progression in the union for you as a rep.

Gary Kroeker [00:27:40] You know. I'd want to use the cliché, right place right time but I think some of it is probably work ethic as well. Because the job was first. I gotta say that the family was secondary. The family was secondary and there's nights I still wake up, or not wake up, I go to sleep still thinking about the wrongs that were created with the family versus the good on the other side. And probably the family suffered the most though of

anything out of that being a rep. And I still I think it becomes, the job becomes a calling. And I know that's an overused term but I think it does become a calling because it's either you're in or you're not. And so I think that that side of it was back to the 'you never quit'. You keep moving ahead and you're trying to do the right things at the right time for the right reasons.

Jim Sinclair [00:28:49] So when you say you came along at the right time, you were promoted in the union obviously. .

Gary Kroeker [00:28:57] Yes. I started out well I'm saying as a representative and of sort of, well you're just a worker bee. And where you going -- you do your job and you do the best you can and then within the the operations of the organization itself there's the Executive Board piece. And first started out as -- I was elected as guard, was the representative that checks membership at the meetings and sort of -- I don't want to call them Sergeant-at-Arms. But that's basically what you become as the Sergeant-at-Arms in making sure that everything is running smoothly. And from there I became the Treasurer of the organization. There was days I used to think I can't add two and two but I became the Treasurer and learnt. And I got to say the organization was good because they give you courses and taught you a lot and you worked with some very experienced, committed people that showed you the tricks of the trade and look for this, look for that. And plus looking to the outside auditors that you worked with as far as being the Treasurer. And then from there I became the Recording Corresponding Secretary who is the secretary for the union for all meeting minutes of the executive board and so on.

Jim Sinclair [00:30:31] Now was that a full-time job?

Gary Kroeker [00:30:31] No, no there was...

Jim Sinclair [00:30:33] Well you kept your rep position and got the recording secretary.

Gary Kroeker [00:30:36] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [00:30:37] So that pushed you into the leadership, the political leadership the union.

Gary Kroeker [00:30:42] Yes. It meant one more Saturday a month that you got to work. That's really what it meant.

Jim Sinclair [00:30:47] But it gave you a profile.

Gary Kroeker [00:30:48] Yeah, that's right. It's all about getting to work one more Saturday a month, more than others and but again, it was for the right reason. You were doing the job and working on behalf of the membership and getting it done. And then in 1982, ah, 1992, the Business Manager of the day went into, or was elected - or 1991...

Jim Sinclair [00:31:24] We're talking Fred Randall.

Gary Kroeker [00:31:25] We're talking Fred Randall. In 1991, the Business Manager of the day, Fred Randall was elected as MLA for Burnaby Edmonds and thus he had to resign as the Business Manager of the local. And I was then asked to fulfil that expired position or unexpired position and took over as Business Manager at that point. And I was Business Manager up until September 2010 when I retired.

Jim Sinclair [00:31:56] So the longest serving business manager ever.

Gary Kroeker [00:31:59] So far, that's been the longest serving Business Manager without a break. And you know, again, I put the membership first and saying that it was their support, too, is just a great bunch of staff that worked there, both the administration side and the business rep side, a good bunch of people. And you didn't have to hold them by the hand. They knew the job and got it done and you got the glory.

Jim Sinclair [00:32:33] I want to go back just a bit to... of course you would have been probably still at the workplace. '67 they formed the B.C. Building Trades Council. '69 the contractors get together and form the CLRA. '71, '72, '73, '74, very tough negotiations but that would have been on the other side of your union at that point, the construction side, not the industrial side.

Gary Kroeker [00:33:01] Yeah, now in the... I've only read about, let's call it the '60s. So my history on the '60s is very limited but I can speak a little bit from, let's call it the '70s forward. And it was tumultuous times back in the '70s. Bargaining was very very difficult and I recall going to... I was still working at Canadian Lift at the time, I wasn't a rep. And I remember going to a meeting where the construction industry were on strike and there was a call for a special assessment of all the members to assist those that were on strike in the construction side. And we all went, probably shouldn't say all, there was just a horde of people at the membership meeting to vote on the special assessment to assist those that were on strike in, I wanna say '72 that may be incorrect but I think it was '72.

Jim Sinclair [00:34:13] Yeah, there was a strike then.

Gary Kroeker [00:34:13] And it was a lengthy one. And I remember going to that meeting and participating in the voting of the special assessment.

Jim Sinclair [00:34:27] Was that your first experience with a strike then?

Gary Kroeker [00:34:31] That that was my first experience of of strike. And that was, it was big. It was unfortunate but it was one of those things, I think it was, as you say, the formation of CLRA. And I think they were pumping their chest a little bit to say, hey there's a new kid in town and we're gonna show you where things are at. And it just became... Push became shove and ended up into a dispute, unfortunately.

Jim Sinclair [00:35:10] And did that set the tone for the '70s?

Gary Kroeker [00:35:12] I'd say it's... yeah, from my recollection, it really set the tone for the '70s and that there was strife, I'm going to say, throughout the '70s and into, I'm going to say, for a good 10-year period. There was a lot of strife in the construction industry. And I think it was a game that was all about who's stronger, braver, whatever. In that period, every set of negotiations, it seemed that there was a dispute. And, if I recall, there was a lot of talk in the middle '70s about the formation of a bargaining structure because pre, let's call it, well in '72, just dealing from then, all trades bargained independently with CLRA and so it became a bit of a...

Jim Sinclair [00:36:20] So at that point, the companies are all together now, you've got the B.C. Building Trades Council but it doesn't -- and BCYT -- but it doesn't actually negotiate, groups of unions get together to negotiate, but sometimes you get six unions

negotiating together and four who don't. And another time there was ten unions I read about and four didn't. So you had a pretty unstructured bargaining situation.

Gary Kroeker [00:36:46] Yeah, the bargaining was very unstructured. Now let's say that it started out individually bargaining, each trade would do their individual bargaining. Then there was a group of three - the Teamster, Labourer and Operator. You know, a tri-pact type of bargaining procedure. And then there was the group of six after that and it was all very unstructured. No real set rules guidelines, protocols in place to say hey, you must do this or you must do that and this is what we're going to do. It was sort of an unwritten coalition of the six and moved forward. And then in the -- I'm going to say the middle, later '70s, there was talk of having the building trades form a bargaining council where all 14 trades within the group would bargain collectively with CLR.

[00:37:48] And even though you were still bargaining collectively, each trade had their individual trade talks. And then there was what was called main table. And then there was trade talks. So the trade talks were individual trades where the electrical worker went and talked about his specific items, the operating...each trade would talk about their specific items. And then there was a number of proposals that were put forth that were the umbrella items for all crafts. Perhaps it could have been...

Jim Sinclair [00:38:22] So money issues?

Gary Kroeker [00:38:23] Money was one. Let's call it travel. Things that were common amongst all the trades. So let's call it safety issues or travel or money or those those sorts of items were the common, main table bargaining issues.

Jim Sinclair [00:38:43] Why do you think it was so difficult? I mean, from afar it looks like this is a no-brainer, right? Companies are together. The unions need to be together. And yet getting that council established was a decade long project full of strife.

Gary Kroeker [00:39:00] Well, when you're talking about leadership, everybody is an independent thinker. And I'm stronger than you. I don't want to pick on any one trade but if I pick on trades, it's more of an example as opposed to picking on somebody. The electrician thinks he's worth more than the boilermaker. The boilermaker thinks he's worth more than the pipefitter and the pipefitter thinks he's worth more than sheet metal and sheet metal thinks he's... So, you end up into this pecking order and they called it that, I think, back in the day. Who fell where in the pecking order of bargaining and it seemed that everybody wanted to get at the top of the pecking order and it was who's got more muscle who's got more stamina to say, hey I can beat him down and get it on my own. And that became a bit of a problem because now you're into the whipsaw affair where, well, he got a nickel and I want six cents. So, you got six cents, I want seven cents. And it just became that whipsawing effect. And like I say, throughout the '70s it was very very difficult.

Jim Sinclair [00:40:25] So did the CLRA play into that game or did they actually... Cause their rationale for getting together was they were tired of being whipsawed. Okay, so they went 'no, no, no, no. So, they went nope, we're not gonna allow that to happen anymore. And yet it's still continued to happen.

Gary Kroeker [00:40:40] Yes. I'm going to say right into -- I'm gonna say it was '78. There was some involuntary -- oh maybe that's not the right term. I think there was, I think it was '78 where they came up with the joint bargaining structure. Right. Albeit it was a voluntary basis. There was no real rules. Well, there was rules... or conditions. But if a trade decided

to do something on their own, they still did it on their own. And we're not going to go to this voting structure that takes two-thirds of this and one-third of that. It was, 'no, I've got my autonomous rights and I'm going to invoke them.' But I think it was in the early '80s is when there was legislation brought in place that forced everybody into joint bargaining as we sort of know today. And there was voting structures put in place. And how many trades it took to ratify and how many votes and so on and it changed the whole process.

[00:41:54] And I think a lot of that was engineered through CLR and the government of the day without a doubt. And it was very frustrating because again, it did end up creating other kinds of problems where the Contractors Association could settle with five or six of the unions and not settle with or settle with others. And you could still end up into a vote and some trades would end up having to accept conditions that they did not really agree to. And it was sort of a forced down your throat type of process and that created internal problems within the trades because again, why aren't you supporting me. And it just created other kinds of issues and it was all a part of, again into the conspiracy theory, that fit well with are CLR, the contractors because it was divide and conquer and they accomplished what they set out to do.

Jim Sinclair [00:43:13] So the lessons, as you're a young trade unionist watching all of this going on, you know, rising up to be, in essence, a senior person in your union by '92, what lessons did you draw from all of this as you watched all of this, relationships and bargaining relationships unfurl?

Gary Kroeker [00:43:36] You learned a lot about personalities. There's no two ways about that. On the 'I'm more macho than you, and my trade is better than yours...' And the thing that I'd I seen happen was the word unity within the group really got watered down and that was disheartening from that perspective. Because I always believed that you're better off united than you are divided and I don't know if that really answers the question. But that was the thing that really bothered me the most, is seeing the division within the trades because it was all good people. And not one person is an island to themselves, that it takes the group to get the job done. And that was sort of my look at it, saying why are we throwing stones at ourselves. We're circling the wagons and shooting inward. We should be circling the wagons and shooting outward. We weren't doing that. And it was frustrating from that perspective because I recall bargaining sessions, and we used to bargain out at UBC quite a bit, and I mean there was just days upon days upon days of useless time spent there. Because you didn't even get to meet with the contractors. You'd sit out there all day waiting for that hot call to say, 'OK, you're up, go and bargain. And it never happened. You'd have to go back the next day and then that would frustrate you because you knew that the other trade was in there.

[00:45:15] Well, I shouldn't say that... they weren't maybe trying as hard to get a settlement or they may have had a settlement and we knew it would be better than what you could get because you didn't have the same kind of stroke, but we forgot about that unity. If one's hurting, we're all hurting. And it was, like I say, we played right into the trade. Played right into the hands of what the employers wanted. .

Jim Sinclair [00:45:42] Now, so the same period of time as you're struggling to find a bargaining relationship, we get the formation of the ICBA in 1974 during the NDP and you know, the building trades comes together in '67. The CLRA comes together in '69 but then there's now starting to be push-back. OK. You collectively, between those two organizations, have 70-80 percent of the commercial institutional industrial work. And in industrial work, you probably have at all. So, you head into the '70s in that stage, but when

you're starting into the '80s, a decade later, what happened in the '70s that started to change the construction industry?

Gary Kroeker [00:46:26] Well, I think there was a couple of things that worked well for the ICBA back in the '70s and then this is just again my crystal ball. And they're formed and we went through the anti-inflation. What was it called? AIB, anti-inflation board, and we went through that.

Jim Sinclair [00:46:52] Six and eight.

Gary Kroeker [00:46:53] And so there's nothing you can bargain, zero. And so we had four years of that and then they had the time to build their base, the ICBA, in that time. Plus, there was, I'm going to call it, a change in management style. And when I say that I'm talking about where major industrial projects or commercial projects for that matter, were being built by, let's call it a PCL. By Dillingham Corporation or Commonwealth Construction, some of the bigger names that were around. Those companies direct hired. When I say direct hired, they would hire a labourer, they would hire an operator, they would hire a teamster, they would hire an electrician. They direct hired individuals. And they did the job themselves. And I'm gonna say throughout the latter part of the '70s we were seeing a bit of a transition from the major contractors, were starting to subcontract work. So, we'd come along and said, OK there's a subcontractor in electrical, subcontractor for plumbing, subcontractor for drywall, subcontractor for this. And now we're ending up with projects instead of having two general contractors on site, you had upwards of a hundred smaller companies. And that created a different atmosphere in terms of the overall method and way construction was done. And that bodes well for the ICBA, because it was the smaller employers that were looking for the helping hand of the ICBA in terms of voice in industry, became their collective voice. They didn't really like CLRA that much in real terms because that was where the big boys. And this is for the little boys.

Jim Sinclair [00:49:08] And their non-union boys.

Gary Kroeker [00:49:10] Pretty much.

Jim Sinclair [00:49:11] Pretty much non-union at that point. And so, talking a bit about the affiliation clauses, because it seemed to me that that was one of the weapons that the unions had in their fight with these people... so how did they work? I mean these were critical issues for the trades in terms of protecting their jobs.

Gary Kroeker [00:49:33] Yes. Well, the affiliation clause was probably used and abused both. It was used for the betterment of the workers as a whole but at the same time, it was abused. So a trade. And I use this sort of, they may have had a... were upset at a contractor or not getting along all that well. So, let's use our affiliation clause to disrupt this project.

Jim Sinclair [00:50:06] OK, can you explain to somebody who doesn't know a thing about it. How did it work. Like what did you use, how did it work?

Gary Kroeker [00:50:14] Basically, if we're just starting from the ground up? And so a contractor who is doing the excavation work for the building of a site and he may have been signatory to the teamster or the operative labour but may not -- the general contractor that they're working for -- may not have an agreement with the carpenter. And

so the carpenter would come along and say, hey guys we need your help. Invoke your affiliation clause because we don't have an agreement for the carpenter. Then maybe it'd be the electrician or somebody else saying hey we don't have an agreement with this general contractor and we're looking for the agreement. And then the only way we're going to get one is if you would invoke your non-affiliation right and force them to sign an agreement with us.

Jim Sinclair [00:51:09] So what was happening was, what could happen anyway, was that the non-union carpenter would come on that job site. That would trigger the affiliation clause because the affiliation clause said if you're not affiliated to the building trades then we don't have to work with you. Isn't that really the essence of it?

Gary Kroeker [00:51:26] Yes, we can withdraw our services.

Jim Sinclair [00:51:27] And so companies understood that after a few times that that wasn't worth bringing the non-union sector in.

Gary Kroeker [00:51:34] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [00:51:34] So that was a fairly powerful tool for the construction trades.

Gary Kroeker [00:51:38] And that was the creation of bigger non-union and saying, hey, we won't bring on anybody union and really watered down your affiliation saying hey but we're not there at all. And then the picketing legislation changed where you couldn't go picket the job and we had changes in legislation under the Labour Code where you couldn't just go and picket the job because picketing seemed to have a universal effect on people that said, hey, I will honour a picket line. Doesn't matter whether it's legal or illegal, I'm honouring a picket line.

Jim Sinclair [00:52:15] So one of the ways you started to deal with the non-union sector... was to picket them down.

Gary Kroeker [00:52:20] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [00:52:20] And it stopped people from coming on the site. And this would cause grief and there were a number of legal battles back and forth over that issue. I mean you spent a lot of money on legal battles trying to enforce that.

Gary Kroeker [00:52:32] Yes. That was a hard-fought battle. It was constant. Yeah. And I think there was another event happened in, I'm going to say the early '80s where there was a lot of federal government money available for cooperative housing. And it was tied to our RRSPs and... can't recall what it was called. You may have to look that one up, but there was just oodles and oodles of - I don't know if that's the right word. There was just all kinds of cooperative building sites going on and that created more non-union because people with suitcases, or not suitcases, briefcases. Hey, I'll out-bid that job and I'll go get it and then I'll just hire whoever I want to start building it. That was a -- oh, what was that called, dang it. But anyway, it was all tied to RRSPs. Even the Operating Engineers I mean we got three sites under that program.

Jim Sinclair [00:53:57] So it was a housing program. Well, you know, so the affiliation clauses are there but now they're being challenged. And I suppose the biggest challenge came when we're now into the '80s....the non-union sector has come into commercial, it's

starting to do more and more commercial work as you described it correctly. At some point they decide they can do it all non-union. Forget the affiliation clauses. We just have no union people there. The Sandman Inn becomes a symbol for the building trades. Gaglardi starts building the Sandman Inn, you guys invoke the affiliation clauses, they fire all the union people off the site and they build it non-union. And isn't this kind of a watershed?

Gary Kroeker [00:54:40] I'm going to say that that one becomes the most watched project in terms of how things changed as far as the construction industry is concerned in downtown Vancouver. At one point in time, you go downtown Vancouver, pre-Sandman, there wouldn't be a project that wasn't being built union. And Gaglardi said, 'I'm building it this way and brought on some -- started it out union and then brought on some non-union and the affiliation was invoked and he said 'OK, the whole job's going non-union. And from there it just escalated to the point of it became the flagship for the, I'm going to say for the ICBA and the non-union sector, saying if Gaglardi can do it, we can do it. And then the trades, I gotta say that we sort of backed off a little bit and, you know, work was a little tough in the '80s.

Jim Sinclair [00:55:44] Yeah, I'm talking about 50 percent.

Gary Kroeker [00:55:45] Yeah. And everyone said, hey, we've got to get our members to work somehow. So, we sort of turned a bit of a blind eye to the affiliation clause and said well, gee, it's okay for the operator to be there but Mr. Carpenter, you're on your own or the electrician might say, hey guys, yeah we got the job and Mr. Drywaller, you're on your own. And so, it became a -- because we had to get our individual union member to work. And so, it was another one of those divide-and-conquer issues that did not bode well for the trades and let's call it the recapture of some unity within the group. And then springing from there, I mean as we move through the, let's call it the early part of the '80s and our good friend Mr. Bennett, right after he's had scotch on his cornflakes, decides that, hey, they should toughen up the labour laws and all the rest of it. And then we have Expo 86. And I don't know whether you want to go there or not.

Jim Sinclair [00:56:52] No, I think so. I think it's a natural progression because at this point the non-union sector's growing but its ability to do a really big job, I mean the Sandman Inn was kind of where it stopped in terms of size of jobs. Some of the high rises started to go, some of the smaller commercial stuff started to go but Expo was the -- and I would say under normal circumstances had it not changed, Expo would have been all union and in fact, just bargained.

Gary Kroeker [00:57:19] And just prior to that, dealing with the affiliation, we had two major players. One was called Rebel Concrete, which was out of the Fraser Valley and we had Kerkhoff, who was out of the Valley. And those two became the lynchpin for the right to work and for the non-union sector and were the real builders of how we can break the building trades unions in British Columbia. And I don't know how they were financed at the end of the day but they seemed to roll along and get project after project after project and did well. So from that, carried on to a major project and False Creek called Pennyfarthing and the Building Trades said, okay, enough is enough. We've got Expo going on, we've got Pennyfarthing going on and we had a major rally to try and turn those projects around.

Jim Sinclair [00:58:33] That was their objective right [unclear]. It was a symbol, too. It was the B.C. Credit Union that was building the building. It was Pennyfarthing but it was a BC Central Credit Union building. In theory, credit unions were supposed to be on the side of workers.

Gary Kroeker [00:58:47] Yeah, that's right.

Jim Sinclair [00:58:49] But it became basically the hill to die on for a while.

Gary Kroeker [00:58:54] That was the hill to die on -- what was that '84 or '86?

Jim Sinclair [00:58:58] It was '85 I think.

Gary Kroeker [00:58:59] '85 was it? Yeah, okay.

Jim Sinclair [00:59:01] No, it would have been '84. Sorry. Because this was just before you were going in Expo negotiations with Pattison. So Pennyfarthing, but in the end what I remember was that at Penny Farthing, eventually the injunctions came down, arrests were made but in the end the building trades decided to pass.

Gary Kroeker [00:59:22] Well, it was the fear of the penalties because I think they were talking like fifty thousand dollars a day. Or, I throw out that number, it could have been higher but it was a pretty substantial amount that was being bandied around and I think the trades said, okay, as much as this is the hill to die on, maybe we should reassess where we're at. And I think if I'm not mistaken, right on the heels of that was still coming Expo and a number of labour leaders got involved with how to have that project go union. And then we had Solidarity. And that's a whole other topic.

Jim Sinclair [01:00:09] No, no. That's right.

Gary Kroeker [01:00:10] And we had another political group out there. It was called The Dandelions.

Jim Sinclair [01:00:16] Oh yeah, I remember that of Calgary. Yeah, it was the carpenters in Calgary that set that up originally.

Gary Kroeker [01:00:20] Yeah. I think there was a... yeah anyway.

Jim Sinclair [01:00:24] Well it was a different group. I mean that was more influenced by the Communist Party, I think.

Gary Kroeker [01:00:28] Well that's what they say...

Jim Sinclair [01:00:30] That's what I remember. Okay, so take me to the Pennyfarthing site, okay. So, here's a big project. What would have been different, I guess for the construction worker themselves, for the individual on that site? And it's now a non-union site probably and it's working away. And if that had been union what would the difference in wages have been, the benefits, like what were we fighting over here? Like we're not just fighting over union versus non, like we're fighting over the conditions of construction workers, right?

Gary Kroeker [01:01:02] Well I think it was a combination. One, it was the credit union. Why are you building it non-union? Two, there is a disparity between the trade rates and benefits.

Jim Sinclair [01:01:17] How big was that?

Gary Kroeker [01:01:18] Oh, gee Jim, you know you're really testing the memory cells here. I'm going to say probably in the vicinity of this probably... I'm going to use a round figure of 20 percent probably the difference.

Jim Sinclair [01:01:37] And that's in wages?

Gary Kroeker [01:01:38] Well let's call it the package, be it holiday pay, be it wages. However, so if it's a total package of twenty-five dollars an hour to keep a guy on the payroll, 20 percent of that. So cut the pie whichever way you want it, you know. And I think the other piece was, it was about...

Jim Sinclair [01:02:01] Work rules? Jurisdiction?

[01:02:03] Well there was that and I think the trades sort of said this is our stand, again we're back to that this is the hill to die on and goddammit, Kerkoff's not getting away with this one. Right downtown Vancouver, right in False Creek. This is in the heart of union land and you ought not to be there. You want to stick to three story walk-ups and that sort of thing but you're not building a commercial project under our nose.

[01:02:36] [short pause in recording]

Jim Sinclair [01:02:40] ... Schools and hospitals are exempted. But generally speaking, it's pretty solid. And then there's the conservatives, the Social Credit government takes over again and they get rid of all that, don't they?

Gary Kroeker [01:02:50] Well in the '70s when the NDP were in, the changes I recall with the NDP in the '70s was more the issue of changes to the labour code. I forget, Bill 28 or whatever the bill number was at the time and it balanced the labour code to say hey, let's have some equity for both sides of the equation. And in my experience, being the new kid on the block back in the '70s, you could take an issue to the labour board and you could sit down and find a resolve without a lot of legalese. And I think that was the real object of the exercise was we have a balance there. We don't need to bring in a lot of high-priced legalese. And the parties will get along. They may not like the end resolve, but it makes good common sense and there's a balance and I think the labour code really worked well. Now from the other side of the equation all you heard was 'oh I don't like the change in the labour code because it's given too much to the unions and they can organize me by only having 50 percent plus one and they can get a vote after only signing up 45 percent of the people blah blah blah. And so their fear was more about getting organized as opposed to those employers saying hey there is some fairness in the system and there's a balance.

[01:04:30] So I think that was the '70s. In the '90s, yeah in the '90s when the NDP, that's when we got more of the project labour agreement stuff for the re...

Jim Sinclair [01:04:43] Renegotiated Hydro.

Gary Kroeker [01:04:45] Yeah, we got Hydro back on the table, or the Allied Hydro Council and the Hydro contractors was revisited and that work. There was a lot of good things happened as a result of that. We had some upgrade work at the thermal plant in Port Moody which has unfortunately been closed. We got a bunch of work at Ruskin on the dam rehabilitation and rebuild there and the Keenleyside dam. The Pend d'Oreille, or Seven Mile. So, there was a lot of good things happened, and Revelstoke, with the new

generators. And so a lot of good things happened with that. And then as well there was the Island Highway contractors' group which built a billion dollars' worth of highways without disruption, without a problem. And even the contractors, some of the contractors that -- because it was open for everybody -- it wasn't restricted to union only. But when you did come on, here was the rules that you had to follow and it worked well.

[01:05:58] Even the contractors that were on the project, that were not signatory to any of the building trade unions prior, embraced it because it worked for them. It took away a lot of their clutter in terms of day to day, let's call it enforcement of safety and this and that and the other thing. That was left to highway constructors, it was left to the trades. Hey, you just leave us out of the equation on this one and it's all good. The objection that they had, was there was a small surcharge for doing the payroll. Oh, well that means you're taking money away from me. Well, and again, it all came down to the almighty dollar. It wasn't a case of whether it was working or not working. It was a case of well gee, there's money out of my pocket on this one.

Jim Sinclair [01:06:54] Right. So let's go back to the '80s for a second. In the '70s. So there's a crisis coming, and it's really about the balance. And it's not, as you described, the building trades are not only just fighting for conditions for construction workers, they're fighting for work.

Gary Kroeker [01:07:15] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [01:07:15] I mean this is the difference. It's not the same for a lot of other unions. You're not at the whim of whether your employer gets the job next week or not. Usually, you work for an industrial site, you're working in an industrial site or a manufacturing site, they have the work and they're either functioning or they're not. There may be a lay-off, a little bit of it, but at the end of the day is you don't go from full time work to no work at all on a regular basis which is what happens in construction. So we hit the '80s and so the battle was the non-union sector isn't just about the conditions, they're paying less to get the work, they're undercutting unions but they're getting the work and your members are now walking across the street, having to work on those sites so they're now getting enough work. Your members are having to work on those sites, right?

Gary Kroeker [01:07:54] Yes. And that's...

Jim Sinclair [01:07:56] What did that mean?

Gary Kroeker [01:07:58] Well for the worker, and I can understand where they're coming from, because it was about putting meat and potatoes on the table. So you know, sorry, I've got to put my strong beliefs of being a union member in my back pocket and move over there. But at the same time, we had a lot of contractors who what they called, double-breasted. And as much as it may be Company ABC that is signatory to all the trades, he just set up a new company called DEF and then over there, he's got his same workers going over there, or virtually the same workers, but it's non-union. And the other piece of the equation became some changes in legislation. When they had the 24 out rule, where if the contractor had no work for 24 months, his certification was gone. Then it just went out like smoke up the flue and...

Jim Sinclair [01:09:05] And how often did that happen?

Gary Kroeker [01:09:08] Oh gee Jim, now you're really testing the memory banks on me.

Jim Sinclair [01:09:10] No, no. I mean I hear these stories but did one guy do that or did twelve?

Gary Kroeker [01:09:13] Why not just use Peter Kiewit as an example. One of the major contractors in British Columbia who's not even a British Columbia contractor, no work for 24 months, [whistles], he was gone. And came back, all of a sudden, he's got this project, he's got that project and he signs a sub-standard agreement with a home-grown union, not with the regular trades. Yeah, there's a couple of reasons for him to do that. Again, it's only my opinion, a couple of reasons for him to be doing that. One is cheap, because my labour costs are down but my profit margin remains the same or increases because I'm paying less labour. But still I've got a better profit margin as a result. Two is some of it became a jurisdictional issue and when I talk about jurisdiction, where it may be a situation where there's a civil contract, so you've got your six basic trades are on the site and all of a sudden there's no work for one particular craft worker and they give the work... there is all of a sudden something comes up that's got to be done and they give that, assign that work to a different craft worker and it shouldn't work, or isn't trained in that field and has not made that their livelihood to do that kind of work. And that becomes another element of the whole process as the world of jurisdiction. And you know, I guess I always related to, I don't go to the dentist to have him look at my heart and I don't go to the heart doctor to have him look at my eyes. I go to the specialist and that's what these folks have done.

[01:11:08] And actually, it was the contractors themselves that have created that same way of doing business. Because as I mentioned earlier, that the construction industry changed in the '80s, going from where there was a major general that did all the direct hiring, have now gone out and hired a drywalling specialist, a electrical specialist, a plumbing specialist, all way down the line and spun all this subcontract work out because they understood that I'm better off to get the specialty contractor who only hires those specialty people to get the work done, to get it done faster, more efficiently and possibly cheaper.

Jim Sinclair [01:11:59] Possibly cheaper, yes. So, the jurisdiction dispute during the '70s, if a union decided that the other union was taking their work, they'd walk off the job.

Gary Kroeker [01:12:10] There has been cases of that. There has been cases of that.

Jim Sinclair [01:12:13] So the employers were pissed about that.

Gary Kroeker [01:12:15] Just to take a timeout, how honest do you want me with this comment? [laughing]

[01:12:19] As you would like to be.

Gary Kroeker [01:12:23] I don't know, I'm just the guy... I don't want to "p" a bunch of trades off ...

Jim Sinclair [01:12:26] I know you don't ... I'm writing a book about a bunch of trades. I'm writing it for all of them so I have to be careful, but it is true that jurisdiction became a real thorn in your relationship with the employers.

Gary Kroeker [01:12:38] Yes. The employers looked at jurisdiction as being an unnecessary component of the job, that if you're working for me I can assign you to do

what needs to be done. It's that simple. Now, there's exceptions to that, that I know I've got to have a ticketed electrician to do that work because that's what the regulations say. I need a ticketed plumber to do that because that's what the regulations say. I need a ticketed person to do this, that and the other thing. Some of the trades, well, can Gary actually use a vibrator to vibrate concrete in because he's normally running the excavator but there's no work for an excavator so I'll get him to vibrate the concrete in. He doesn't mind because he's not going home. He's still putting meat and potatoes on the table. But the guy that you just unemployed, that's his life as a labourer, put him on the street. He's the guy that's now kicking stones so it became a bit of an honour amongst thieves, that you don't take somebody else's work.

Jim Sinclair [01:13:56] Then again, who decided it was somebody else's work?

Gary Kroeker [01:13:59] Exactly. And that became another...

Jim Sinclair [01:14:02] So the employers would say it's our job to decide, it's not anybody else's, piss off and unions say we decide, we know what our jurisdiction is. And then you started fighting amongst yourselves. So Kinnaird comes back and says you have to set up a structure called, they called the J-8 site plan.

Gary Kroeker [01:14:16] Yeah, the Jurisdictional Site plan.

Jim Sinclair [01:14:19] So at the first year that they have it, they have 400 or 300 disputes at the Jurisdictional, huge number of disputes. Last year, I think there were three. So how did that work and why did it work? And does it still work? Does it still function?

Gary Kroeker [01:14:37] Okay, if we go back in history, again we're talking about a general contractor that's doing a major mechanical job and there's maybe five hundred guys on the job. 500 workers on the job. And they all show up, this one's doing this, the ironworker's does that, this one does this, this one does that and all of a sudden somebody's saying I think that's my work. And for one reason or another the other trades say no, no, it's not your work. Yes, it is. So, when you have a general doing it all, then you are prone to have more jurisdictional disputes. Again, that's come back to the point of there was changes in the way the industry did it, now that's the electrical contractor, that's the plumbing contractor, that's this. And over time, that's eliminated some of the jurisdictional disputes, even to the point where there's not as many jurisdictional issues because you don't have the same percentage of unionized work anymore. That's another factor.

Jim Sinclair [01:15:41] And there's another factor that after, you know, a thousand cases, people kind of figured out where the lines are. So you don't go back to get the same decision on the same work that you've already had once or twice before.

Gary Kroeker [01:15:52] Yeah, and again it's -- that's part of it, and again it comes down to, some of these, some trades, even on some, all trades do a little bit of criss-cross work anyway. So, where somebody may be doing somebody's work with this specialty contractor here, they may be signatory to this one over here and they're doing some of their work. So, it's a tit for tat type of an affair. Okay, I may lose over there a little bit but I'm not losing over here. So, everybody sort of recognizes that hey, I may be losing but I'm gaining. So, it's a little more understanding on the jurisdictional side because we all know that we're cheating one another.

Jim Sinclair [01:16:43] Yeah yeah, fair enough. Well it is about sorting it out.

Gary Kroeker [01:16:47] It's only when, like you mentioned there was three last year.

Jim Sinclair [01:16:51] Yeah, three or four.

Gary Kroeker [01:16:52] Again it comes down to what type of job it was and so on. I think it was the Rio Tinto that was the last ones that went on. Again, that was a major site with a multiplicity of trades all there at the same time, and one general contractor. So it was easier to go after, saying hey, that's a [unclear] or that's a this or that's a that and more tendency to -- and there were, I think, minor in nature. I don't think there were major disputes. Like there was nobody walked off the job. There was no time lost.

Jim Sinclair [01:17:30] But wasn't that deciding... I mean at some point did unions go okay; we can't really shut down these jobs all the time because our contractors are going to get fired now. We now have contractor clauses with their general contractor that says you guys leave the job you're leaving the job to. We're not going to let you play this game right, you're losing the contract if they're off the job. So it changes the dynamic doesn't it?

Gary Kroeker [01:17:55] Yeah, I think there's been a real change in the contracting methods or contracting languages for the subcontractors and they're getting to where they're more enforced than what they used to be. And I think they're -- everybody's tightened up, sharpened their pencils. Everything's gotten to the bottom line.

Jim Sinclair [01:18:18] So, we get to the middle of the '80s, we've sort of sorted out the jurisdictional disputes to a certain extent. We're not shutting down jobs all the time to do that. There was a story in '75 when they brought in the new language, allowed better picketing and the first time that job gets picketed down, it was a jurisdictional dispute. So, the president of the building trades says 'excuse me, can we please use this to fight the employer and not each other'? This wasn't put in here to fight each other. So, we've solved some of that dispute, internal stuff, there's a realism beginning to set in that we're losing significant work now. We're not just having one Gagliardi and one hotel. We're losing significant sectors, up 50 to 60 percent of commercials now moving to the non-union sector. And now we get to Expo 86 and under normal rules, that would be a project labour agreement and Pattison signs one with you guys to build the whole place. But what happens then is the government says no. So how did that all play out?

Gary Kroeker [01:19:13] Well, I think again, there was so much politics involved with Expo that it was incredible. There was meeting after meeting after meeting after meeting over how that project should proceed. And as I said, at first there was some indication that hey, we can put an agreement together and then that got turned around and said 'no, it's going open shop' and I recall one meeting of the trades saying hey, let them build it the way they want, we'll get a contractor on there then we'll pull the guys off and use our non-affiliation clause. And again, being in some tight economic times, some of the trades thought it was a great idea. And a lot said 'no no no no no' because my contractors already got the work and you know, I don't want to jeopardize my jobs. And it became a bit of an int... I don't want to call it internal but it became a bit of a battle internally as to how the trades should even proceed. And anyway, the long and the short of it, I think there was one short stoppage on east gate if I remember correctly but I don't think it was anything major.

Jim Sinclair [01:20:51] They declared in the labour legislation; they could declare an economic zone. And so, they declared Expo site a special economic zone and they made

affiliation clauses null and void. I mean that's the first time they actually reach into your collective agreement and say even though you're not using it that often and the legal framework at the Board is turning against you but that's the first time you see it saying this is gonna be null and void. You will not be allowed on the site, which effectively made an open shop.

Gary Kroeker [01:21:23] That's right. Yeah, and again, some of the bad players - Kerkhoff was the number one player and you know, the political blood runs thick in that world.

Jim Sinclair [01:21:37] Yes. So '86, Expo 86, so over the next period of time, what's happening now? So, you know, is the next big battle TNL is that the next big battle? TNL was in the early '90s as I remember it.

Gary Kroeker [01:21:53] I'm wracking the brain here.

Jim Sinclair [01:21:55] Yes. And that's Port Alberni and Worden is the president of the Association then. And that's over affiliation clauses too, in a sense, because the CEP has a clause in their contract that says you have to be a member of a building trades of the B.C. Federation of Labour and Mac-Blo says piss on ya.

Gary Kroeker [01:22:14] Yeah, and I'm just trying to think that one all through, because it started out with the carpenter, drywaller and I can't remember the contractors name.

Jim Sinclair [01:22:27] Some other contractor -- it wasn't TNL?

[01:22:30] No. It started out... I'm just trying to remember whether TNL was there at the time or whether they were the general contractor and brought in the... Maybe they were the general contractor, I'm just trying to think it through, Jim.

Jim Sinclair [01:22:59] TNL was the general contractor. They came from... they weren't local.

Gary Kroeker [01:23:04] Yeah, Jim Greatbanks is his name and I think he was originally out of PCL or one of the big contractors as well, not that that matters, but yeah they had the general contractor and hired a carpentry company to do some work. And the trades seen that as an opportunity to utilize the help of the CEP and their affiliation, their contracting language, along with the trade's brains and brawn, had to do something in Port Alberni.

Jim Sinclair [01:23:51] So what was the end result of that whole battle?

Gary Kroeker [01:23:55] Millions of dollars in lawsuit against the trades and pay as you go. No, seriously, it was picketing went on. I don't want to use these words, they used words of riots and so on and that was over dramatized what really went on out there and that was just a news catch phrase that they were putting out there. And yeah, was there inappropriate language used from time to time on the description by us as to what was going to happen? Probably. Was there an over dramatization of some of the events that apparently took place with no follow up, people getting threatened and this and that and blood in the streets and all those sorts of things? I don't think we were really seeing any of that. There was maybe some mirror breaks and some odds and ends but nothing where people were hospitalized and all that sort of stuff where in a typical riot you might find, but anyway. So like that that carried on for...

Jim Sinclair [01:25:09] Do you think that at the end of the day when the dust settled on TNL that that was another loss for the building trades?

Gary Kroeker [01:25:19] Yeah, I'll call it a loss. Only because it probably, between Pennyfarthing, the TNL and that short timeframe and Expo, I think there was a lot of people got disheartened and said, hey we're going to try it on our own and you know, again, the trades forgot about the unity side of things and I think that created some more, just drove the wedge in a little bit further in the unity part of the trades.

Jim Sinclair [01:26:00] At this point, the building trades splits. I mean it's an open split at this point over Worden's leadership and there seems to be two camps and it looks pretty dysfunctional.

Gary Kroeker [01:26:11] Yeah, no, the trades started to crumble around the edges because again, it was, yeah, there was a lot of politics involved. Why did you say this and why did you say that -- there was a lot of accusations and so on and I don't think we really got down on the meat and potatoes and saying hey, what needs to be done to move forward? We tended to, again, do what the trades sometimes do best is circle the wagons and shoot inward. And all too often we do that. Rather than sitting down from a pragmatic point of view and saying, okay, what's our road forward look like and how do we want to get there? We can continue to do what we've done, which hasn't worked or we can try something new and hopefully say hey, if one's wrong, we're all wrong, but try something,

Jim Sinclair [01:27:05] But that never happened.

Gary Kroeker [01:27:06] That never happened. Well, no, it didn't happen and then we've had a few changes in, let's call it the leadership of the different trades. That new leaders come in and they've got different ideas and that creates another issue because now we don't know the past. We don't know what was said and all we're doing is going on what we heard. We weren't actually there so we're taking the word of somebody that said hey, that must be true because that's just the way it is.

Jim Sinclair [01:27:46] So when do you take over? What year did you take over?

Gary Kroeker [01:27:49] I took over in February of 1992. February 29, 1992. It was a leap year.

Jim Sinclair [01:27:57] So you take over as the new Labour Code come in in '92 or shortly after in '92. And is there some sense now that the NDP's in power, there's some optimism that something could be better?

Gary Kroeker [01:28:12] Yeah. Well, there was a lot of optimism. And the the labour movement as a whole were really enthusiastic about having a new government and some of the hoped-for changes that were gonna come about and the things that everybody had talked about pre-election that it was going to happen and the labour code and health and safety changes and worker comp and all those important things that labour's backbone is built from. And there was a lot of, like I was saying, there was a lot of optimism and coming from that, the construction industry, we did see some improvements in terms of how publicly funded projects were to be carried out. And there was the...

Jim Sinclair [01:29:17] Highway constructors?

Gary Kroeker [01:29:18] No, I'm thinking of the Allied Hydro came first. The government saw fit to rekindle a fire under the Allied Hydro agreement that was in place for the building of the Columbia Hydro and the Peace power projects.

Jim Sinclair [01:29:35] Okay, so people don't know what that is. So Allied Hydro agreement is Bennett. Bennett says to the building trades, we need to build these things. We're going to build them. You can build them but we need a deal that says you don't shut them down, you don't strike them. And here's a project labour agreement covering all that stuff.

Gary Kroeker [01:29:53] Yeah, and we didn't want to borrow, I'm going to say labour didn't want to borrow from Bennett but he did come up with the thinking that, hey we're gonna build with B.C. workers. We're gonna do it under some terms and conditions that are favourable to both sides that are gonna be building these projects and it's going to be infrastructure that B.C. needs. And they entered into, put together a company called Allied Hydro Constructors and at the same time the building trades put together the Allied Hydro Council which was the formation of all the 14 trades of the day. And they sat down and negotiated an agreement which mirrored the construction industry agreement of the day, but it had items that were common to all the trades in terms of camp conditions, travel. Those things that were equity for everyone that wouldn't be different for one craft or the other. Everybody was the same. So that agreement got put together and it made a lot of good common sense and the trades embraced it wholeheartedly.

Jim Sinclair [01:31:11] They fought it at first.

Gary Kroeker [01:31:11] Oh they fought it at first, because it was not my idea so it can't be any good. You know, rather than saying there is, looking at it from a positive. But at the end of the day, even though there was some opposition initially, I think they found it very beneficial and it worked. It worked for decades actually because they built the world's largest earth field at the time, largest earth field dam at the time.

Jim Sinclair [01:31:41] The Williston dam.

Gary Kroeker [01:31:41] The Williston dam and plus Mica Creek and then onwards down to Revelstoke and the Arrow dams and the whole area, Duncan, Arrow and Keenleyside and so on were all built under that Allied Hydro, as well as the transmission lines that were put together for the shipping of the power. So it was a very, very good agreement and it put a lot of B.C. people to work. And it was the ability where the employer hired apprentices and trained people and gave them opportunities that they would likely not have had, had those projects not gone ahead because it would have been maybe out-of-province or somebody else or a foreign worker, who knows back in those days. And again, in that era there was a lot of foreign workers moving to British Columbia from elsewhere, particularly Europe. And those folks were bringing some crafts and they came in and were able to find employment and B.C. ballooned and built.

Jim Sinclair [01:32:50] So heading into the '90s you dust off the Allied Hydro agreement and you basically extend it to a whole bunch of new projects and upgrades.

Gary Kroeker [01:32:58] Yes. I think there was five projects initially if I'm not mistaken. There was the thermal plant, there was Ruskin, there was Mica, there was Revelstoke, there was Keenleyside.

Jim Sinclair [01:33:14] Waneta.

Gary Kroeker [01:33:17] Oh, and later on, they added Waneta later on but there were those five main projects and they brought in some folks that used to work for the Allied Hydro Council or the Allied Hydro Constructors. George Krstanovic and Anyway, George Krstanovic, and sat down and they had a couple of other folks as well from the employer side to put the agreement together. And there was things talked about, jurisdiction, like how do we avoid jurisdictional problems or do we do this and fine-tuned an old antiquated -- I don't want to say antiquated -- but an old agreement and brought it into the '90s as it were. And again, some of the trades were ver, very unhappy because it did give preference, that agreement, to local residents who were qualified to do the work and there was equity employment, there was Aboriginal involvement. So, it had a lot of good social components put into that agreement which was never there, which made good common sense. But having said that, not the trades oppose those things, but it was not the way it was in the '70s and therefore we don't like it even though some of these folks weren't even working in the '70s. It's kind of ironic from that perspective. But you know, at times we are a bit of a dinosaur and don't like to see things change and that's the way it is.

[01:35:03] So as well, once that was put in place then there was the talk of the Island Highway projects. And that kicked off and at the same time there was talk of the upgrading, four-laning from Cache Creek to Alberta, the Rockies. Cache Creek to the Rockies four-laning the Highway 1. So, there was lots of things that were going on. So again, the trades and pragmatic thinkers in government of the day said hey, we need a project labour agreement to build these projects and afford opportunities for locals, for skilled people. And the whole gamut, to work out their back door rather than going somewhere else to get workers. And the trades put together an agreement under the B.C. Highway and Related Construction Council. Again, some trades weren't totally happy because it was a change from their standard, let's call it formatted agreement. But at the end of the day there was millions of hours of employment and a lot of local people got an opportunity to work on a job and made a good living and it was very beneficial to just a whole host of people. And it didn't exclude anybody. It embraced contractors and workers alike. Even those contractors that were non-signatory to the building trades had an opportunity to bid on that work and were very happy with the process. They didn't take full page ads out in the paper saying we embrace the NDP government but at the same time they embraced the agreement saying hey, you've taken a lot of stuff off my plate and I get time to build the job or do the work.

Jim Sinclair [01:37:13] At this point, yes, and that would be seen as -- by the non-union sector-- as a negative.

Gary Kroeker [01:37:23] Oh definitely. We had, what's his name, I nicknamed him Mattress-face. Philip Hochstein, that's what it is, and say that hey, this is -- I don't want to use the word unconstitutional -- it's unfair to my contractors and their workers because you're excluding them. But he didn't get right into telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth. When these contractors were able to bid on that work because even his contractors were successful. The PCLs of the world, the Johnny Millers of the world, the [unclear] construction and a whole host of others that did that work and were successful.

Jim Sinclair [01:38:04] And what was the role of the building trades in all of this, the council. I mean did you see it, defend it?

Gary Kroeker [01:38:10] Well the building trades were really not... The building trades organization as we know the B.C.Y.T. was not a part of the agreement. The affiliates to the B.C.Y.T. were the B.C. Highway and Related Construction Council so it was another council that was set up separately because under the BC and Yukon Building Trades they, under that constitution and bylaws cannot negotiate collective agreements.

Jim Sinclair [01:38:40] And that was a change because in the initial days they used to negotiate collective agreements.

Gary Kroeker [01:38:43] Well they did.

Jim Sinclair [01:38:45] For the head of the building trades was also the head of the bargaining council.

Gary Kroeker [01:38:49] Yeah, well, but there were still what was called the BCBCBTU (Bargaining Council of BC Building Trades Unions). So, there was still -- the building trades still had that, if you follow the building scheme ahead, you still had the B.C. and Yukon Building Construction Trades Council, Bargaining Council. BCBCBTU - it was always hard to say. We still had the B.C.Y.T. That had their group here and out of that came BCBCBTU became the J8 Plan, became other organizations. In essence, the B.C.Y.T. as we knew it, really didn't do the bargaining although the folks that headed up the BCBCBTU were head of the Building Trades Council and the...

Jim Sinclair [01:39:44] One was a political structure and one was a legal one.

Gary Kroeker [01:39:47] That's right.

Jim Sinclair [01:39:50] There was a legal one created for bargaining only. And the other one was a political one created voluntarily, that you joined voluntarily.

Gary Kroeker [01:39:58] Yeah, and when the Allied Hydro Council was re-enacted, sort of separated the B.C.Y.T., there was nobody there from, like the head of the B.C.Y.T. did not sit as the president of Allied Hydro and likewise with the Highway Constructors, did not follow either.

Jim Sinclair [01:40:22] So it's evolving then. B.C.Y.T. starts to evolve away from hands-on bargaining and actually leading that to having a different dynamic in the B.C.Y.T. So does it become the physical spokesperson for the construction trades? Does it defend the Island highway agreement? Is it still the body that does the political work?

Gary Kroeker [01:40:41] It defended the agreements whole-heartedly because again, it's that same group of people. It's just a different voice and they were more the spokesmen of at that point calling it to deal with WCB, changes and Employment Standards, changes to... Labour code changes and those things but they didn't get involved in the day-to-day operation of the council and bargaining itself.

Jim Sinclair [01:41:13] And so what do you think on the organization piece, I mean obviously that was a hot debate organizing. Having an NDP government didn't really turn that around. You got more hours for your folks, you got some new members as long as they were working on your sites but did the actual construction industry grow, the unionized section grow under the NDP?

Gary Kroeker [01:41:37] I think it grew slightly. Not great leaps and bounds. There was a tabled Bill 44 by the NDP and there was some very good changes within that bill that would have been very beneficial to the trades in terms of being able to organize and build the membership base to allow them to fend off the "right to workers" and the ICBA and so on. And unfortunately, that Bill got withdrawn and got cast aside and to the, I want to say that there was some really upset people with that Bill being withdrawn. Because it was withdrawn in its entirety. It wasn't just section this and section that withdrawn, it was the entire Bill that was withdrawn and was very upsetting to the trades to the point where it really questioned how labour friendly is the current government. You know when you get right down to it. And it was very frustrating because there's a feeling and I say this in all due respect, between the private sector unions and the public unions, public sector that okay, there's a number over here and a smaller number over there so we can leave them over there. We don't have to do too much for them as long as we're looking after the big group. And there is that feeling and I don't want to say it's rampant but there is a feeling of that out there, that it's the public versus the private sector.

Jim Sinclair [01:43:32] So who leads the charge to kill that? As I remember it, it was Hochstein and the little old lady. And they did all this advertising. It was a public campaign by them.

Gary Kroeker [01:43:43] It was a big-time public campaign and how wrong the government of the day was in making these draconian changes to the Labour Code. That that's going to put British Columbia into the dooms of hell. And unfortunately, there was some folks within government that said, gee this does not bode well if we're gonna go into an election and therefore we ought to withdraw it. And, like I say, it did upset a lot of people, saying hey, we think we can... this is not gonna be a big thing to a lot of folks in B.C. But Hochstein seemed to have the ear of somebody to say hey, withdraw it or -- Hochstein and big business. And what influence they may have on their workers or to... who was the driver to change that.

Jim Sinclair [01:44:40] So one of the things you were given in Bill 44 was sectoral bargaining, ability to enforce collective agreements across sectors of the industry, no?

Gary Kroeker [01:44:48] Yeah, I don't recall... sectoral bargaining was a piece of it but I didn't see that as a big factor. Because I think, if I'm not mistaken, there may have been sectoral bargaining back in the '70s in the change of the Labour Code back then but I may be wrong. But I think there was sectoral bargaining back then and I don't think we ever utilized -- I think it was Section 40 -- where did I get that from?

Jim Sinclair [01:45:23] Sounds good.

Gary Kroeker [01:45:23] But I think it was Section 40...

Jim Sinclair [01:45:24] You've convinced us.

Gary Kroeker [01:45:24] Yeah, and I don't think we ever used it because for whatever reason, I don't think it was. Sort of said well no, we're better off going in this direction so I don't think they ever used sectoral bargaining.

Jim Sinclair [01:45:38] It's a new... it's certainly something people are talking about now because of the inability to organize including the construction industry, these smaller

employers. And it's very difficult to organize small employers. You would organize an employer and basically drag them into the collective agreement and with CLRA.

Gary Kroeker [01:45:54] Yeah, just sign here.

Jim Sinclair [01:45:54] That was sectoral bargaining. but that's all gone now, so how do you enforce that? Very difficult.

Gary Kroeker [01:46:01] Yeah, now you're in bargaining with four and five and eight person units and before we'd just sign a Letter of Understanding and tied you to this and tied you to that and it was all good, yeah. .

Jim Sinclair [01:46:11] No, those were the days, eh? So now the industry's at... so the NDP is defeated in 2001. The government announces no more project labour agreements on any public project and they rip up the Fair Wage Act which gave you public projects. Highway construction, I guess it disappears too?

Gary Kroeker [01:46:34] We've finished up, the Highway Constructors finished up the projects that they were doing. Oh, what's his name... Dan --he was a minister.

Jim Sinclair [01:46:50] Dan Miller?

Gary Kroeker [01:46:51] No, he was the Assistant or Deputy Minister for Highways. Dan oh, dang it. Anyway, Dan --I'll probably think of it at some point -- but anyway we got called to a meeting because I certainly headed up the B.C. Highway Constructors at the time, and they're called to a meeting downtown and said that's it, Highway Constructors is now shut down. Right now, as of us speaking. There will be no more projects under the BC Highway and Related Construction Council and Highway Constructors and I nicknamed him at that time, "Wrap-up Dan." And anyway, he's not a bad guy actually. He's just doing what he's told and picking up his cheque. And likewise, Hydro continued on because there was still Revelstoke going on. And I think they included, well Waneta was still going and there was talk about, I think there was talk about Revelstoke, the generator at Revelstoke. And I think that that's either wrapped up or I'm not sure right now but as those jobs wrapped up, there is no more work added to the Allied Hydro Council agreement. It sort of finished. And at the same time, I mean it would have been a great job when they built the powerline between Terrace and Iskut, \$750 million dollars' worth of work that went to an Alberta a company, would have been an excellent project for ah.. could have fallen under that Allied Hydro Council agreement but they saw fit not to. Likewise, the extension of the Kelly Lake to Lower Mainland Hydro project which went way over budget and so on, would have been another good project for the Allied Hydro Council.

Jim Sinclair [01:49:22] No. And you did get Hart dam because the company, you didn't get it from Hydro, the company signed it. SNC Lavelin signed it.

Gary Kroeker [01:49:30] Yeah, oh, unfortunately I was history at that point when they put that one in. I was already twiddling my thumbs at that point.

Jim Sinclair [01:49:36] Yes, that's right. So, what lesson do you, I mean politics and labour, that's always been a debate and I mean obviously a good chunk of the working class voted against the NDP in 2001, we get down to two seats. How do we deal with that fact that objectively it's pretty easy to see that at least historically anyway, and I would argue today, that the NDP represents a better choice than the Liberals or the Socreds for

the construction industry? You know certainly there was more respect for your right to exist and what you did, but yet it's been difficult for the building trades to be that political or to go hard on that.

Gary Kroeker [01:50:16] I'm going to say that typically -- now this is my little crystal ball that says that a majority of building trades workers are small L as opposed to big NDP. I think that they sort of see the work that they do is all funded from the private sector and if the private sector doesn't do well, they don't do well. And when you look at the big picture and all the negativity that comes out - 'you're killing big business, you're killing business, you're killing business'. The typical member within the building trades or typical construction worker sees that as a negative and there's gotta be a way around that. And we've had this little cliché or a little saying that "No Development Party, really I think hurts the NDP.

[01:51:23] You know, and then I just come back to Adrian Dix when he said no more Trans Mountain. You know, if the project never went, wouldn't have made any difference but he made the comment and bingo that turned a lot... Whether they be pipeline workers or not I think it sort of said, does it set a tone as no development. We're not going to build it and is the world all about health care, is the world all about education, is the world all about social conscious stuff. We don't have a big tax base; how do we build the other? I recall sitting in on, Mike Harcourt was the Premier, and he had these summits and I recall going to Victoria and participating in a summit and there was a number of ministers sitting at the table along with labour and academia and so on. And I recall saying hey, you know, if we don't build, there's no tax base and without a tax base, how do you have better schools, how do you have better education, how do you have better health, how do you have all those things? And people relate that, in my opinion, back to build, build, build. And I don't know how we square that circle of people's thinking and say, yeah, we can still build it, we're just gonna do it in a different way. We're not saying no, we're going to do it like this. But it seems that we've got this branded in us that no is the quickest way of approaching it.

Jim Sinclair [01:53:13] So let me flip that on its head for a second because you and I were both involved in the negotiations around the Olympics and the building trades were one of the biggest reasons that the Olympic referendum passed in Vancouver. You put a lot of money and energy into that and then we go and sit down with the Olympics, they're not really interested in having a project labour agreement to cover the Olympics. In fact I don't think, we might have got a general statement of something or other but we certainly didn't get a project labour agreement for the Olympics. And so is there a challenge for the building trades, who are obviously pro-building and support projects such as Site C and such as the Kinder Morgan, such as the Olympics and yet once the projects are approved, they go other ways to find the labour and the workers to do it and Kinder Morgan's the same way. They're basically giving the contracts to Kiewit, to two or three other Trans Mountain to the non-union sector, general contractors who are either non-union or have contracts with CLAC now.

Gary Kroeker [01:54:15] Yeah. Well, I guess that becomes a... I agree that they've used this as a bit of a pawn, without a doubt. And again, it's that, "geez, I hope, I hope that we get something out of this". And at the same time, when you look at those individual projects, pick whichever one you want. Take the Olympics -- there was a lot of building trades workers that got hours of employment under their standard agreements on those projects. Some trades didn't get a sniff but a lot of trades got a lot of work. Refrigeration got a ton on the slides and on this and on that, the electricians. And this is not throwing stones at those, but a lot of tradespeople got a lot of work out of those projects even

though there wasn't a project labour agreement in place. And I think that becomes the other piece of the puzzle, is how do we do that? And even take Kinder Morgan. There will be without a doubt in my mind, that every compressor station along the right of way will be done by a unionized contractor. The actual laying of the pipe, hey, maybe not. But there'll be aspects along the way that will be done by building trades workers and the majority of the work that'll be done, if it goes -- kinda question all that -- but if it does go the majority of the work right here in Burnaby, when it comes to building all those tanks, will be a unionized contractor. Doing the dock work and all the rest of it will likely be a unionized contractor. Some of the processing will be... the real specialty work, tough work, goes to a union contractor typically. Typically.

Jim Sinclair [01:56:17] But that used to be true for everything. And so is it not a worry, looking to the future now, that that's the 20 percent that's left for the unionized sector or the 15 percent that's left, and on the bigger projects it's more, but 30 percent or 35 percent. But the other side's building capacity.

Gary Kroeker [01:56:37] Oh, yeah.

Jim Sinclair [01:56:37] So those mechanical trades aren't necessarily safe either if there's more capacity built by the Kiewit's of the world. Eventually they'll end up, it'll be -- let's go back to Sandman Inn. You know, we kicked the union guys off and we built the whole thing. And everyone went 'you can't build it without us. And then people said, 'they did'.

Gary Kroeker [01:57:01] Yeah. But I still believe that if there was improved labour legislation, improved health and safety enforcement, and a few of those other issues, I think the union movement wins the day. I really do. I think right now, you know, a lot of people are sort of throwing their hands up saying, 'hey, well we can't get it because, we can't do it because, we can't do it because'. Look at the struggles that is going on up at Site C right now, just to get in the door to talk to workers took Labour Board hearing after Labour Board hearing after Labour Board hearing, just to be able to get on site to talk to people.

Jim Sinclair [01:57:48] Yeah, right. Well, I mean you get that there but you don't get it on other sites.

Gary Kroeker [01:57:52] No, no no, but I'm saying Jim, the legislation says, 'hey, you're allowed to talk to the workers at some point'. Well, talk to them off the gate. Well, you know when people are headed home it's a little tough. You should be able to get into their lunchrooms and go in there and talk to them on their free time. Not on work time, but on their free time. But we can't even get on the site to go and do that because you know, there's this, there's that, there's the other thing. It makes it very difficult.

Jim Sinclair [01:58:21] So looking back, you know, from when you walked into that job, Operating Engineers, organizing the union to today, what do you think were the achievements of the labour movement during that time for the Operating Engineers in particular, but also the building trades in general?

Gary Kroeker [01:58:35] I think for the building trades as a whole, I think that there's been a lot of accomplishments, there's no question about it. And if we go back to, let's call it the '60s and moving going forward, I mean some of the apprenticeship programs that have been built by the trades are just world class, world class. And unfortunately, the non-union sector has benefited by that and there's no fees attached. Health and safety

improvements, second to none. The work that the union movement has done on behalf of non-union workers is without question above and beyond. Educational assistance, SkillPlan that was developed by the building trades so that 'I'm trade X and I want to improve my skills to move into another craft'. SkillPlan was built to allow that to happen and it helped the employers, to say 'hey, I've got this guy, he's a little short on his math or he's a little short on this or he's a little short that'. Got SkillPlan involved and these good people have moved up. Jurisdictional assignment has been a real boon. Yes, job market has changed so there's not as many disputes but it's given some rules and guidelines...

Jim Sinclair [02:00:07] Something that's taken 100 years to solve.

Gary Kroeker [02:00:08] Exactly. So, I think in the overall...

Jim Sinclair [02:00:12] Pensions?

Gary Kroeker [02:00:13] Well, pensions are second to none. You know, yeah, there's been a real downturn in the marketplace and tough to make a buck but these workers have earned a pension that they can go into retirement with some dignity and holding their head high. And they don't need to worry about the public purse funding them and saying, 'well here's a dollar-fifty a month increase in your old age pension.' Wowee, what am I going to buy with that, you know? And so these folks have, and the health care plans that have been built [phone ringing]. The health care plans that have been built for the workers that, on retirement or in-between jobs, their benefits still carry on because of the system that they've got built in place. I think the achievements are endless if you take the time to be able to sit down and say 'hey, here's what's happened'. And the younger generation, they'll say, 'well, I deserve it anyway'. No, you have to earn it. You just don't get handed it. You have to earn it and your job is to continue that same thinking process and move forward.

Jim Sinclair [02:01:33] That's right. Homer Stevens said to me once, 'shut up my friend, the truth is if you don't learn this about the working class, there's two things". I said, 'okay tell me Homer.' He said, 'working class never got a damn thing they didn't fight for.' He said, 'a goddamn thing they didn't fight for. That's the first lesson you have to learn if you want to help working people'. I said, 'okay Homer, what's the second one'? 'If you don't keep fighting for it you don't get to keep it'. And I thought there was worlds of wisdom in that, you know? To me that said a lot about, that informed my view of the world for -- and I was like twenty-five years old when he gave me that lecture but that was what I learned and it was true. Everything you got, you fought for. Now camps, there's another example. What did you see, how did you see camp's change over the last 30 years?

Gary Kroeker [02:02:21] Wow, it's indescribable actually when you think about it. I mean we went from two guys to a room or two people to a room, I guess it would have been guys then, but anyway, two guys to a room to single accommodation, where there's internet hook-up, there's workout rooms, there's let's call it gymnasiums. There's just a multitude of facilities available for those that are staying in camp. Does anybody like a camp? No, it's like... after the first week, it's like being on holiday, it's great stuff. And then after that it's humdrum and "oh, I gotta go back to that same room again". But I think the conditions have really, really improved. It's -- I can think of examples, camps in the north where the snow would be blowing in and there'd be snow in the camp bunkhouse every day, to what it is today. And people tolerated it then and now it's sort of like, no no, we're not doing that. The food, and I don't know if the food has really improved that much. Well, I

think the cooks are as good and the food is probably not, but the accommodations itself is the big difference.

Jim Sinclair [02:03:52] And what a difference it made, I mean how much did it mean to guys to know they had their own room? How important was that?

Gary Kroeker [02:03:57] Oh, it was big.

Jim Sinclair [02:03:57] And that was negotiated back in the '70s.

Gary Kroeker [02:03:59] Yeah, I can go off to my room, I don't need to sit there in that big TV room and watch a show I don't want to watch. I can go to my own room and I got my TV and hook up to the Internet and do my little laptop thing or do whatever, FaceTime or whatever the case may be. All this technical stuff that wasn't available. Won, but that's an aside. But there has been just great improvements in the camp conditions.

Jim Sinclair [02:04:24] When you look back at the building trades, what would you say could've been done differently that would have made a stronger organization, during your time anyway. Looking at your experience as the President, what could you have done or would have done differently during that period of time if you had a chance? That's a tough question.

Gary Kroeker [02:04:44] Oh, that's a tough, tough one. I think the building trades tried to do as much as it was allowed to do and again, when you're trying to serve 14 masters, makes it very, very difficult. And have one common goal amongst those 14 because again, we're all individualists and all have a different set of interests. And there is some good common stuff, I think. I think the trades have done, or the building trades have done a good job trying to keep people informed better or improved. And do something different? I think it'd be, it's tough to pick on any one thing to do differently. Because again, you're dealing with that 14 individuals and you've got 14 different opinions. And it doesn't matter what you do, isn't right because it doesn't fit my agenda. And just trying to think of what would be different. You know, as we sit and think about it right now, I can't come up with one specific item. Because I think all the right things are being done, as much as possible. I just wish the -- I don't know how to put this -- well, I wish the international folks would have more push on the trades, all getting involved with the trades, B.C.Y.T., and make it work. And without the fear of somebody coming along and saying you can get out of my backyard because you don't belong here. I think there is value in the collective and how we build unity once again within the trades and have them understand that divided, they're conquering. And again, it's how do we lose that thought process of I've got to look after my group and me first. And society tends to look at it being me first and everybody else second and I don't know how we coagulate everybody into one. It's tough.

Jim Sinclair [02:07:34] Challenge of the working class, not just the building trades.

Gary Kroeker [02:07:37] Yeah. And yeah, if you don't fight for it, you don't get it. And if you don't keep fighting, you'll lose it. I don't disagree with you on that. A hundred percent.

Jim Sinclair [02:07:48] No, I think that's true. And I mean, I think in part the survival of the construction trades as we know it is on the line over the next decade.

Gary Kroeker [02:07:57] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [02:07:58] I mean let's face it, if the line keeps going, and not just in the construction trades but in the private sector in general, if you watched...

Gary Kroeker [02:08:06] Watched the line go down, yeah.

Jim Sinclair [02:08:09] We're going to hit pretty low levels. We're gonna go into single digit density which is the US model. And so one of the challenges I think for today's Building Trades Council is what's your unity? How do you create the unity necessary, and the strategy, not just the unity, the strategy necessary to go forward?

Gary Kroeker [02:08:29] Well, it's all about build, maintain, sustain. I think the more you get those all in there and building it is gonna be very difficult. Well, as long as we've got a government that's opposed to labour rights, it's going to be very difficult for any craft in the private sector. Public sector, they've got a different world. But on the private side, and you know, technological change is a big factor. You know, everything you hear, not everything you hear, but a lot of talk right now is all about the techno age and young folks are going to, I can sit in a phone booth and build my programs and give it to somebody else and they look at it and it's all done. I mean, how do we organize that sector or have them understand that they wouldn't be getting what they're getting if it wasn't for labour. And that's another message that how do we get out there? It's something we've tried and tried and tried for years. I mean you look at today the rallies, you don't get rallies like you used to.

Gary Kroeker [02:09:44] What would you say to a young construction worker that wants to get into the trade today?

Gary Kroeker [02:09:51] Believe, commit, work hard. Yeah, I think those are the three things that probably -- believe in yourself, commit to what you're doing and work hard and you'll succeed.

Jim Sinclair [02:10:15] What would you say to them about the union movement?

Gary Kroeker [02:10:18] Believe, commit, and work hard. But to me, it's simple. It's not that, it's not hard to do. I mean, how do you not believe in what rights you've got, what benefits you've got, what conditions you've got? Commit in moving forward to sustain those and build on them and working hard. It's sort of a no-brainer in a lot of ways. And because working hard is going to keep you on the job. Take whatever opportunity there is for training because life is about learning. And if you don't keep learning, you're gonna fall behind. That's as philosophical as I can get. you're pretty good, I think.

Jim Sinclair [02:11:17] [laughing] That's pretty good, I gotta say. That's pretty much it.

Bailey Garden [02:11:20] Right, so is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't talk about?

Gary Kroeker [02:11:28] Well, no I can't think of anything right off the top of my head. There's probably lots there but...

Bailey Garden [02:11:38] You know what, I'm sure once you leave but we covered a lot of topics.

Gary Kroeker [02:11:42] Yeah, right off the top I can't think of anything, other than... you know, I think the labour movement doesn't get the credit it deserves and I don't know how we change that process. We've got ultra-right media, both print, visual. We had a chance, way back. There's a newspaper called the Columbian Newspaper, out in New Westminster and it was folding and I remember somebody saying, "dammit, the labour movement should buy that newspaper".

Jim Sinclair [02:12:29] We've been saying that for years.

Gary Kroeker [02:12:30] Yeah. Well, no, we've got the Tyee and we've got other forms of communication. But it all, when the Vancouver Sun, and I only pick on the Vancouver Sun right now. We had Valerie Casselton, that's the only one I really remember is a labour reporter.

Jim Sinclair [02:12:49] She was the was the last one.

Gary Kroeker [02:12:51] Yeah, and she used to write some very good stories. I don't know so much today. But she wrote some, I'm going to call them, unbiased reporting. And she did a pretty good job I thought. That's been the last real labour reporter that the media has had in Vancouver. I recall when Ted Field -- was he CKNW?

Jim Sinclair [02:13:16] Yeah, Ted was there.

Gary Kroeker [02:13:16] I remember he was only about 20 years old, 21 hanging out around the bargaining sessions that the building trades used to have and he was just a young fella. And he was picking everybody's brains and he'd hang out 'til 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock in the morning. And you don't have, it's sort of like, 'oh yeah, well they're in bargaining and give us a call when you're done.' Nobody wants to dig for anything.

[02:13:40] At the Fishermen's Union we'd have bargaining all night, they'd be there all night. They'd be sleeping in the hallways with us. Because it was important to be covering the labour movement, eh? but the labour reporters are gone because the labour coverage wasn't considered important anymore. The right wing had dominated the whole agenda and...

Gary Kroeker [02:13:57] Unless you get a big movement, like May Day or you've got Solidarity...

Jim Sinclair [02:14:02] Or you have violence.

Bailey Garden [02:14:07] That'll sell newspapers.

Jim Sinclair [02:14:09] Yeah, if it bleeds, it leads they used to say, you know.

Gary Kroeker [02:14:11] Well, there you go.

Jim Sinclair [02:14:11] No, I think that's true. You know, I think that's true, but...

Bailey Garden [02:14:15] So if I can ask a question, we kind of addressed it, but why do you think it's important for a young person, whether in the trades or in another industry to understand the history of the building trades and kind of how we got to where we are?

Gary Kroeker [02:14:36] Well, I guess to understand what's happening today you have to look at the history and without some form of documentation for the younger generation to follow, words don't sometimes do it enough. And you've got to be able to sit down and read the book or have a pictorial or something for them to better understand where labour has come from and what it has done on behalf of working people. And with the younger generations' busy lives, because it's a lot busier than it was when I was growing up because we... It just wasn't as busy. Now these kids seem to be go, go, go and I don't know how you get to them. I really strongly believe that there ought to be something in our curriculum, in the school level, to understand where labour's come from and what role they played in our history as working people. The teacher, how to get there somehow. The principal, how to get there somehow and the storekeeper, how to get there somehow. We understand all that stuff and I want to go to McDonald's and go to work. I need this part-time ten dollar an hour job, hopefully 10 bucks. And well, what did labour do to contribute to getting these positions and doing those sorts of things. And unless there's something in our curriculum and that's been talked about for a lot of years and just hasn't come to fruition. I think it is on its way a little bit now, but it's a pretty small-edged wedge.

Jim Sinclair [02:16:22] The Federation had a program, for years it did that, sent people out to schools.

Gary Kroeker [02:16:26] Oh, no, no Jim, oh no, that piece I understand.

Jim Sinclair [02:16:28] We're talking about the curriculum, yeah.

Gary Kroeker [02:16:28] The trades have tried going to this school and that school and doing this and doing that but unless there's a half-hour or an hour curriculum once a month or twice a month or whatever it may be to let them understand, hey here's the way the kids in the coal mines worked. They weren't getting an education. You're sitting in this school, what has happened in the meantime to see this change and transition.

Jim Sinclair [02:17:02] Yeah, it's interesting for young people, the building trades probably has the most attachment to young people because they come to you to be trained.

Gary Kroeker [02:17:08] Yes.

Jim Sinclair [02:17:08] And one of the jobs that you've done, one of the most amazing things that you do, is that you train young people to have the skill and ability to go out and earn a decent living. And you're the only unions that really do that in the way that you do. You operate your own schools; you do all of that work and that to me is pretty profound when you think about it. That people get their experience and their training from the union.

Gary Kroeker [02:17:31] Yeah and just as an aside, and I forget what year it was now. There was talk about BCIT being sold. I'm going to say that was in the '80s, could have been the '90s. Maybe not '90s but in the '80s and there was talk at that time that the building trades should buy that and start their own university. Because it would just sort of make a lot of sense. But again, it was the dollars and cents side of things and well, I don't think you'd have a government that would allow that to happen anyway.

Jim Sinclair [02:18:09] You never know!

Gary Kroeker [02:18:09] Well, that's true.

Jim Sinclair [02:18:10] They're pretty fucking crazy these guys, when they decide to get crazy, you know. Privatizing.