

Interview: Jef Keighley (JK)

Interviewer: Sean Griffin (SG)

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Transcription: Bailey Garden

SG [00:00:05] Jef, maybe you could just start by just giving your full name and your date of birth, and where you were born and so on.

JK [00:00:11] My name is Jefri William Keighley. I was born in Vancouver, B.C., at Mount Saint Joseph's Hospital and age two days old I moved to my parents Veterans Land Act holding property on Burnaby Mountain.

SG [00:00:27] And any siblings? Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JK [00:00:28] I have a sister that's six years older who is an artist, and I have a brother who's five years younger who is a punk rocker, Joey Shithead. When he came and announced his chosen stage name, my mother said, 'Can't you have chosen another name?'

SG [00:00:47] But he's re-taken back to Keighley name, from my understanding, more recently, eh?

JK [00:00:51] He had it legally changed because he thought it might favourably affect fan recognition, and several years after that I said, 'What effect did it have?' He said, 'Not at all.' So, he changed it from a G-H to a T-H.

SG [00:01:05] Right. So, what was your family background growing up in terms of, was it trade union background? Did you have -- was your father working in a unionized industry?

JK [00:01:14] Yeah, my father was a machinist. He worked at Vancouver Iron and Engineering Works, the largest machine shop north of San Francisco and west of Toronto at the time, right down in False Creek. My mother was, when we were all younger and going to school, was basically a housewife. Then after we -- after my brother eventually started school, she started working at Eaton's in various departments. My father's side is English from Ilkley in Yorkshire, and they came out in 1910 to North Vancouver. My dad was born in 1913. My mum was born in 1925 in Finland. Finnish socialists, and they came up initially to Thunder Bay, which was then Port Arthur. Worked in Detroit for a while, went back to Finland and then came up to Vancouver and he was -- my Finnish grandfather was a master boatbuilder and a fisherman.

SG [00:02:19] Hmm. Yeah, I understand that he had made quite a name for himself here in B.C. as a boatbuilder as well, right?

JK [00:02:24] Yeah. He is reputedly to be the first person to build a commercial boat out of plywood up to that point in time. This is prior to the war.

SG [00:02:31] Commercial fishboat.

JK [00:02:32] Commercial fishboat. Up to that point in time, all they would do is maybe runner boats up to about, you know, 18, 20 feet, and he decided that a boat was a boat was a boat. All you really need to do is displace water, and if you made it lighter, you could be faster. All of his friends said, 'Billy, you need big, strong boat to go fishing, you're crazy.' And so, he built his boat over the winter, and the first season out, he was making three trips into the Steveston canneries for every two that everybody else was making. Once he was loaded with fish, he wasn't all that much faster, but as soon as he unloaded, he was back up to the fishing grounds in no time flat. Then that winter his buddies said, 'Billy, can you build me a boat?' And so, he spent the winters building boats for other fishermen and fishing in his own boat. They lived down where Windermere Park is, just to the west of the Ventura Grain Terminal. Used to be Alberta Grain They had a Finnish squatter's community, and the front porch was on the land and they tied the fish boats up to the back porch. Then when the port pushed them out because they needed the land for expansion, they lived in various parts of East Vancouver, and they moored down in Finn Sloop. So, he was -- and he was up and down the coast from basically Prince Rupert to Juan de Fuca and up and down. Wherever the fish was, he went fishing.

SG [00:03:59] So obviously, this family background -- did you learn about this much later, or was this part of your family history growing up?

JK [00:04:06] It was part of the family history growing up. I mean, they were Red Finns. They were Finnish, Swedish speaking Finns, and there had been a civil war in Finland and the Whites had won and the Reds had lost. He decided, that's when he first packed up. The family came to Canada, walked across the border to Detroit because there was very little border controls back then in the twenties; and worked at a Detroit Ford plant. About a year and a half into his employment there, somebody died on the line, and they only stopped the production line long enough to get a replacement worker in. And the person had to work alongside the corpse until the end of the shift. They only took the corpse of at the end of the shift, and he said, 'This is an inhuman country, we're going back to Finland.' So, he packed up the family. They Went back to Finland, got to Finland, and only then did it occur to them that they'd still lost the Civil War. It was still a very poor country. So, he saved up his shekels and came back to Canada through Pier 17 and was headed to Toronto. All the rest of the Finns on the boat, said, 'Billy, you're a fisherman, you're a boatbuilder. Come to Vancouver.' So, he extended his train ticket in Toronto, and showed up in Vancouver and built boats and fished up and down the coast until he eventually died. Just several years before I was born, in the late forties with a heart attack.

SG [00:05:32] So in terms of working with him or anything like that, that wouldn't have been an influence on me. So, what were the influences growing up in terms of your work and your direction you took in your own life and so on?

JK [00:05:44] My dad was a shop steward for the Machinists' Union, but he was fairly conservative. He always voted -- with the exception once when he voted for Ernie Winch in Burnaby as an NDP (New Democratic Party) candidate -- he always voted conservatively federally, and he voted for Social Credit provincially; whereas my mum always voted for CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and then later the NDP, so they cancelled each other's votes. My dad loved to argue and basically my dad, I learnt how to argue from my dad because he would take stupid positions and then you'd sort of box him in. Then eventually when he was running out of room to defend that position, he would take a leap of logic and end up in a different place, as if he hadn't been arguing the first position in the first place. But I got the, sort of, the sense of argument from my dad, but I got my sort of social conscience from my mum; because she was the daughter of a Finnish socialist and

she'd grown up with those values and she passed them along. My dad was out of town. He was one of the major installers for BC Hydro Dams for a well over a decade. So basically, for most of my sort of formative years, in my sort of eight, nine years old through my teens, my dad was out of town and my mum was the mum and the pop. So that was the influence I got.

SG [00:07:03] But in terms of where you went in the workforce, was your father the key influence in terms of the kind of work you did?

JK [00:07:12] No. When I was in high school, I had -- I did pretty well in school until I got to my late teens and decided that goofing off made a lot more sense. So, I ended up -- I failed my physics 12, so I ended up having to go to grade 13 to pick up the physics credits. I was -- I at one time thought of going into law or engineering, and then I did a whole bunch of factory jobs and construction jobs in my late teens. My first paid work was January the 2nd, 1967, when I was -- my 17th birthday had just been a day earlier. I was out in a construction job, and I was standing in 20 inches of water with gumboots and nailing down whalers that were under muddy water that was, had a half an inch of ice on it. That was my introduction to construction in Vancouver.

SG [00:08:16] From there, you were -- where else did you work?

JK [00:08:19] Oh, I worked at Eaton's Automotive for a short period of time until I got a better job at MacMillan Bloedel Bag Plant. Bottom of Greenall, just not very far from here, actually. That was a P.P.W.C. certification, and I worked there for a good number of months. I then worked at the Canada Metal Lead Foundry underneath the Granville Street Bridge on the downtown side, and that was the old American Molders Union, right. That was actually one of the better introductions to American unions, because they were virtually non-existent. We had on the bulletin board in the lunchroom, a union bulletin board, and I forget what the actual date was, but I recall at the time that somebody had -- whatever the body of the letter that was originally posted, it had a long since been torn off; leaving the masthead, which had the union locals' address in Portland, Oregon and the phone number, in case you needed to get a hold of them. Because we were working with lead, I mean, the only thing you knew was unionized is you paid union dues. There was -- they did nothing, absolutely nothing for you. At one point, you were supposed to, under the contract, it said you had to have your blood lead tested every three months. If you went over, I forget the figure, something in the range of if it went over 1100 parts per million. You had to be off work with full pay until your blood washed out to below, I think it was, six or seven hundred. Then you could go back to work until your blood level came up again, because it was a dirty, dirty plant. No health and safety, and even though it was supposed to be every three months, I was there a year before I got my first blood test. I think 2800 was a fatal dose.

SG [00:10:09] Who took the test? Who did the test?

JK [00:10:10] They brought in public health, and they did the lead test, lead blood. I, because I was the youngest and the newest employee, I was -- I only had 3500 parts per million. I was 700 over fatal. Everybody else was higher. So, I said to my foreman, I said -- these results came out on a Friday, and I said, 'Well, I guess I won't be here on Monday.' He said, 'What are you talking about?' I said, 'Well, I'm leaded out. I'm supposed to go home on full pay until I get unleaded.' And he said to me, 'If you're not here Monday, you don't have a job.' I said, 'Well, it's right in the collective agreement.' And he looks at me, he says, 'Why don't you call your union in Portland, Oregon?' Knowing full well that they

would do absolutely nothing. That was an instructive piece because later on in the history of CAIMAW (Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers) came out of a reaction against the Molders Union; and it wasn't that the Molders were dishonest. It wasn't that they were anything nefarious. They were simply absolutely useless. They were incompetent, they did nothing. They simply collected the dues, and whoever was there in the union office got a paycheque from the virtue of the union dues and did nothing whatsoever for the membership. So, I had no --

SG [00:11:30] No job steward on the job or anything like that.

JK [00:11:33] We had a nominal job steward, but you know, they could solve a few small problems; but if you had anything, if you couldn't solve it through a discussion at the plant, you were not going to get any support from the Molders' Union. So, when later on, I started talking at the hearing about the issue of the Canadian unions versus American unions, I had some live personal experience. I was 700 over fatal, and here was the union doing absolutely nothing.

SG [00:12:01] And just as an incidental, as I understand it, Canada Metal was one of the certifications that became CAIMAW later. Did it not?

JK [00:12:08] No, it never did become, but it was owned by Cominco. So that -- there was a big connection there. Eventually, that Canada Metal place actually shut down. It was just, the place had been pre-First World War and all of the -- it was so, it was such a dirty place. All of the beams had a furrow of lead dust on the top, and if a forklift ever hit a beam or a post, you'd be showered with lead coming down. We had all these -- one of my jobs was on the potline, and we had these old scrubbers that were supposed to scrub up at least some of the noxious fumes. They had long since rusted out and didn't work. One day, they got the -- Vancouver Health Department came down, and by this time, there were all sorts of high-rises in the West End; and they were complaining about the fact that these noxious fumes and smoke were emanating from our plant, and people were becoming concerned about the fact that they were in the smoke trail. Even though we were living in the small community, literally, you'd be walking around, there'd be the clouds. If you were this far apart, there'd be a cloud between you and every other object or person in the plant.

SG [00:13:23] What did they make in the plant? What was that?

JK [00:13:25] We melted. We got ingots of lead from Trail, and then we melted it down and we made sheet lead which we turned into -- we made solder, and we made sheet lead, which we turned into all sorts of plumbing parts. We sold sheet lead, we rolled it into sections and pipes and stuff like that for the plumbing business, basically.

SG [00:13:43] Just basically lead fabricating. Yeah, so you were working with lead all the time.

JK [00:13:47] Yeah. Yeah, and so the Health Department said, 'Well yeah, I know we're getting all these complaints.' This is under Tom Campbell, a pretty compliant Vancouver City Council. So, the advice of the Health Department was, couldn't we buy a bunch of really big fans and blow all this smoke out through the windows at low level, rather than having it come up the stacks that weren't scrubbing anything; because at least then it would sort of generally dissipate, and it would be sort of a haze, and people wouldn't be able to pinpoint the specifically where the smoke was coming from. So, the management

said that's a very good idea. That's what we did. We got a bunch of fans, and we blew all this noxious smoke out the window.

SG [00:14:28] So, all of this potentially could have affected kids who would have been the most seriously impacted?

JK [00:14:33] Yeah, one of the things that lead poisoning does is, your teeth fall out. Then there were -- I don't know if there was anybody over 40 in the plant that didn't have full false teeth.

SG [00:14:48] Not only that, but it makes you stupid after a while. Yeah, it really does affect IQ, even at lower levels.

JK [00:14:53] Absolutely.

SG [00:14:54] So, when you had this 3500 level, nothing happened. You ended up going back to work that Monday.

JK [00:14:59] I went back to work that Monday and begin looking for other work. I thought, 'I'm not going to sit here and kill myself.' My brother -- I got the job because my brother-in-law had worked there, and he worked as a -- he was an artist, and he was a starving artist. Every once in a while, he'd run out of money doing his art and he'd go get a job, and this was one of the places he continued to go back to. You can see my brother-in-law, his skin pallor when he would get pissed off and he quit the job, within a couple of months, his skin tone would turn healthy again and he looked like a normal human being. Then he'd go back to work either as a spray painter or a (unclear). You know, exposed to all these toxins. He looked like if he touched his skin, there was sort of tendrils would come off, and you can tell where he was working by the colour of his skin. I know that years later, when we were getting together, we joined later on -- we joined the CAW (Canadian Auto Workers). We'd get together three or four times a year. Seven, eight hundred, 1500 people. You could pick out the people from southern Ontario by the pallor of the skin. Didn't show up in the Maritimes folks, didn't show up in Quebec, didn't show up in northern Ontario, prairies or British Columbia; but you could look around the room and you're almost invariably right in saying, 'That guy works in southern Ontario.' Because people lived and breathed the toxic soup. It wasn't just at work, but in their community.

SG [00:16:25] In their communities.

JK [00:16:26] And you could see it in the tone in their skin.

SG [00:16:28] That's incredible. So after, if I understand, you also did a stint in Jamaica. After presumably giving up this work life, at this point.

JK [00:16:38] Yeah, when I was, you know -- I worked and eventually, I got myself into construction full-time as a carpenter. Originally with a muck stick, with a shovel, and a carpenter, and then as a supervisor on housing jobs and small-end commercial jobs.

SG [00:16:54] Had you done trades training for that or were you just kind of graduated into it?

JK [00:16:59] I worked for a guy from Austria, who was a master cabinetmaker in Austria. We would be on the job from the time we started knocking down the trees, to the time we

turned over the keys to the owner. He took me under his wing to show me and basically taught me, and so I ended up with one of the best apprenticeships that you'd ever find. I had friends of mine who were carpenter apprentices who'd been in the trades for five years, and the only thing they had done for five years was build wooden forms for concrete stairways in high-rises. Became journeymen carpenters because they'd served their time, but couldn't cut a rafter, couldn't hang a stair, hang a door, because they were used as cheap labour. Whereas I got, I started right. I saw everything happening for the whole time. So, you know, I was pretty handy, and I could pick up things. My dad was a machinist fitter, and I was always lying under a car, helping him fix things, doing whatever was going around the place. So, I learnt a lot from my dad, but then I learned a lot from a lot of the Austrian journeymen that basically said, 'We're going to teach you how to be a carpenter.' I was a quick learner, and it didn't take too long before I was keeping up with the best of them.

SG [00:18:19] That was very typical of that period, too. A lot of people learned the trade literally on the job without any formal training.

JK [00:18:25] In residential construction, during the -- even today, but especially in residential construction or small commercial construction, there was no union. It wasn't -- the Carpenters' Union was basically confined to high-rise or major building projects. So, you mean, and they just didn't have the wherewithal or the resources to go out and organize, you know, a residential job that might only last three or four months and then you move on to someplace else. It's a very difficult sector to organize.

SG [00:18:57] So on this job to Jamaica, was that your skill as a builder and so on at that time a factor in it?

JK [00:19:04] It was. I went to the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and didn't go to trades, but I was -- after several years in construction, I'd be sitting there January, February and looking at my friends, working on the job. They'd be 55 years old and, you know, the wind is coming up your ying-yang, and they're just shivering away. I thought, 'I don't know I want to be 55 years old, still shivering on the job.' So, I went to BCIT and took construction engineering and architecture. While there, during my second year, there was a notice on the board that there was a, at lunchtime, there was a CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) recruiter there looking at people that might be interested in working overseas. They were particularly interested in people with technical training. It was the first year that the Canadian University Service Overseas previously only sent basically teachers, but this year, they decided they would branch out. So, we were the first year that the majority of people were actually more technically oriented, because a lot of the countries that they were working with said, 'Okay, we sort of got the teaching thing down. We need to develop our economy and our infrastructure. So, we need some more advanced skills simply than mathematics and English and the rest of it.' So, I ended up going to see this thing at lunch time, getting some pamphlets, and I went home and talked to my wife at the time and said, 'What do you think?' So, we decided that we would sign up and head off. When I left Vancouver during that summer of '72, I had no idea where in the world I was going. So, they shot me full of every shot I could ever imagine, yellow fever included. Simon Fraser Health Unit, I got this old public health nurse, I was going for all my different shots and got to know her fairly well. I go in for this yellow fever shot and I roll up my sleeve, and she goes, 'No, no, no, no. Drop your pants.' I said, 'What are you talking about?' She holds up this needle and goes, 'This'll go clean through your arm.' It was a needle about five inches long. So, when I left for London, Ontario, for a week of orientation, neither I had no idea where I was going. I arrived in London, Ontario, and they

said, 'Oh, you're Jef Keighley. You're with Suzanne Victoria,' who was my wife at the time. He said, 'You're going to Jamaica.' And I said, 'Oh, okay.' So, I went to Jamaica and I ended up in the center of the country, literally. Out my classroom window about 300 feet was the beacon that marked the center of Jamaica, both lengthwise and widthwise. We were up at 3500 feet, and I was teaching land surveying and building construction for two years in Jamaica before I came back to Canada.

SG [00:21:49] Those were also the Michael Manley years, when he was there. He was elected president.

JK [00:21:53] Yeah, I got -- Prime Minister.

SG [00:21:56] Oh, Prime Minister, okay. Right.

JK [00:21:57] I arrived a little bit less than a month after Manley had gotten elected, and the party was still going on; because it was the first time a Social Democrat had been elected, and he was a left Social Democrat. He wasn't sort of a mealy mouthed one. He's still a Social Democrat but did some pretty amazing things in the time he was there. The very first -- and that was really a lot of my political awakening, seeing this transition that was going on in this country, and you're living there and you're working there. They were going from a conservative, very conservative, religiously bound society into one that was sort of breaking out and hungry for knowledge. The very first law that Michael Manley passed, and the People's National Party passed in Parliament was to repeal the criminal sanction on buying, selling or possessing a book on evolution. Prior to 1972, it was a prison term if you had Origin of the Species in your house. Yeah, and the very second law they passed was a law that abolished the requirement that a black suit and tie was required dress in the parliament and they adopted the shirt jack, which is short-sleeved. It's outside your pants, nice and breathable, and Manley said, 'This is a government of the people and this government's going to look like the people. So, you think, 'Woah!', I mean, and you start to see a wide variety of other changes going on. While I was there, one of the most interesting things happened was -- and I was, because of my mum's politics, my Finnish family politics, I had a sort of a natural proclivity to head in the left direction but didn't have a very -- I didn't really have a theoretical foundation whatsoever. While there, Canadian Dimension had arranged to send to every accused CUSO volunteer, anywhere in the world, three consecutive issues of Canadian Dimension as a sort of a freebie with the hopes that people would subscribe. I get this issue of Canadian Dimension with an explanatory note, and I look at this thing and I sort of looked at it. I said, 'Who the hell put me on some commie list here?' So, I had lots of time on my hands. I read through it, and I thought, 'God, this makes so much sense.' I began sort of waiting for the next issue to arrive, and the next issue arrived, and I thought, 'God, makes an enormous -- this makes so much sense of the world.' So, I wasn't halfway through the second issue when they had a subscription note in there, and I sent it off because I knew there could be a time lag between them getting it and arriving in Jamaica. Because I didn't want to miss issue number four, because I was only going to get three, right? So, between the experience of becoming politically aligned with the People's National Party, seeing what could be done by way of legislative change and seeing the sort of popular support that that was getting, and things like Canadian Dimension. Then, you know, you'd read through a Canadian Dimension, it would talk about some book that they were (unclear). You could actually write; you could send the money and they'd send you the book. So, I started sending away for different books that they were talking about and being reviewed, and thus began my progressive theoretical underpinning rather than simply having a gut reaction. Just because this just simply made so much sense then, you know.

SG [00:25:34] So obviously, going to take part in this CUSO project you were, more than a project, you were watching what was developing in that country as well.

JK [00:25:42] Yeah, I mean it was just, it was a transformation. It was interesting because just prior to our arrival or at the time of arrival, there was a real growing militant and violent black power movement growing up in Jamaica, because they've been so oppressed by basically imperialist forces, including Canada. At one point we were, I think, 130 some odd CUSO volunteers between the first- and second-year complement, because they were always overlapping and getting renewed. We had a list of everybody there and one day a number of us, we lived in close proximity, started putting pins on a map of Jamaica as to where all the CUSO volunteers were. Just out of curiosity. Alcan had two aluminum processing plants in Jamaica and it all but leapt off the page. 90% of every CUSO volunteer was within a 20-mile radius of the two Alcan plants. There are good Canadians and there are bad Canadians. You may be pissed off that this Alcan company rotting your roof and you have to replace your galvanized steel roof every couple of years because it just rots right through. Don't get too worried about that, because there's some good Canadians teaching your kids. We began to realize that we were a clear -- we didn't realize it until we could see this -- we were a clear, conscious element of Canadian imperial policy in the Caribbean. We were there to mollify the bad reaction that Alcan was generating. Alcan had gone in in the fifties, I ended up years doing research later on it. They'd gone in in the fifties, and they had acquired hundreds and hundreds of hectares of land -- it was acres, how they measured it -- at the princely sum of \$0.25 lease per acre per year, \$0.25 Jamaican. This bauxite was so rich that all they had to do was drive a front -- they'd strip off the dirt or the grass and shake out the leaves, they would drive a front-end loader into the earth, and for each one ton of dirt, 2000 pounds, they would end up with 500 pounds of pure aluminum. It's one of the richest ore bodies anywhere in the world, for any metal, and Alcan was getting it for a song. They had so much land, Alcan was Jamaica's largest dairy produce, because what do you do with all this land while you're waiting to rape it and mine it? You run cattle on it. So, the Alcan was the largest dairy producer in Jamaica by virtue of all this land that they'd gotten a lease for \$0.25 an acre back in the fifties.

SG [00:28:44] That's incredible.

JK [00:28:45] Yeah.

SG [00:28:47] What you wouldn't know until you went there, right.

JK [00:28:49] Yeah, and you know, and you go for walks and hikes, and you're walking across the settling ponds and there's this cracked earth. There isn't, you can't see anywhere within the proximity. You know, you put a brand-new zinc-coated corrugated steel roof, because that was the standard building material, and within two or three years it was nothing but rust. It'd have to be replaced in four or five or six years, and elsewhere in the country you could put up these roofs and they'd be lasting 20, 30 years. This was, there was so much acid in the bauxite producing process that anywhere down in the the wind furrow from the processing plant, they just rotted everything out. You knew that damn well if it's doing that to the corrugated steel roofs, what's it doing to people's lungs and skin? We never were able to get a good read on that, but I would be willing to bet that you'd be able to trace all sorts of illnesses and diseases in the smoke trail to the processing plants. Alcan was simply one of seven aluminum companies operating in Jamaica. The rest were all American.

SG [00:29:58] Right. So, one of the -- obviously, you've been associated quite a lot in your life with CAIMAW, and your name is sort of identified with CAIMAW. How was it that you came to work in a CAIMAW a certified plant that kind of got you launched on that?

JK [00:30:13] Well, after I came back from Jamaica, I worked for two different architects. One, Ron Howard, architect, for about six months until he and I had a disagreement. He didn't like the fact that I had actually introduced humanity to his workforce, and people didn't, no longer came in and went to their desk nose to the grindstone and actually socialized a bit. That was being disruptive, because they weren't producing quite as much as they might have. So, he asked me if I was happy there, and I said, 'Actually, Ron, I'm not.' So, then I went off to work for Thompson, Bird, Pratt and Partners, and we did the master plan for False Creek redevelopment until I realized that that was a bit of a gong show, a bit of a fraudulent process. Then CUSO asked me if I would head up the development education program that they were launching for two years, which we did. We went there and they wanted to see if they could create a volunteer organization, a much stronger one. After two years, my recommendation was it wasn't realistic. People had given their two years, they were getting back, they were having families, they were getting their careers restarted and it wasn't going to happen. They'd be better off abolishing my job and spending the money for seed money. So, they did that, and by that time, I'd been very heavily involved a whole bunch with the International Development Resources Association (IDRA) and a number of other groups. We were running around the province, basically -- we called it development education, but basically what we were doing was socialist education without the rhetoric to all sorts of people using film and discussions and stuff like that. So, it was becoming, picking up on my Jamaican experience, I'd left behind the art world of architecture and construction; because this just seemed a lot more interesting that, you know, you're basically creating something with people rather than simply with building materials. As I began to do that, I also came to the conclusion, and I've met a number of people. One of the things that interesting about CAIMAW people is that the philosophy of CAIMAW was that the responsibility of the union did not stop at the plant gate. If you're producing noxious fumes, they flowed past the plant gate out into the community, and you had a responsibility to your community and people were involved in pulling together all sorts of progressive stuff at the time. I ran into all sorts of terrific people. The Communist Party, George Hewison and others like that. Got to become really good friends, you know, other socialists like Gary Cristall and people like that. All of the general left, because that seemed to make a lot of sense. We started rebelling against the provincial government. We organized the Lower Mainland Budget Coalition, fighting against Bill Bennett and then later, against Bill Vander Zalm. Bills 19 & 20, all sorts of progressive stuff. I was involved in doing anti-apartheid work starting in 1976. We organized a -- what I didn't understand but was regarded by the South African anti-apartheid movement as one of the landmark conferences around the world. We called South Africa Time for Change, which we held at the church at 16th and Burrard. I didn't know who they were, but Desmond Tutu was there, Allan Bozak was there, the leaders of the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress), of the ANC (African National Congress). So, we were involved in a lot of anti-apartheid work, was involved in doing a lot of work with the Chilean exiles after the Chilean coup. Through that process, consistently, you'd have people like from Fishermen, Carpenters, letter -- or post -- CUPW (Canadian Union of Postal Workers), CAIMAW, PPWC (Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada) and so, you begin to see -- and Vancouver Labour Council -- and so, you begin to see who the progressive trade unionists are who get themselves involved in activities beyond the shop floor. With a very high percentage, the Canadian unions were out there, out in front. They weren't claiming the leadership, but they were in there in support of.

JK [00:34:48] We organized this -- the Inter-American Development Bank came to Vancouver for the -- to Canada, to Vancouver for the first time ever for one of their meetings, and they decided that they were going to have a completely closed meeting and none of the press would be allowed in. This would be, they're going to have this big international meeting. So, we organized a conference at the Britannia Centre called Butchers and Bankers, and we'd done a ton of research on the Inter-American Development Bank. Had all of their documents and stuff like that, and they refused -- and we were basically doing a socialist dissection of what was wrong with this whole imperialist endeavor -- and they made the fatal error and they refused to talk to the media. So, there was the media and here is this international conference in Vancouver with all these bigwigs coming from all around the world, including our federal government, refusing to talk to anyone. We were the only show in town. We not only, we had all of their documentation and we had our interpretation of their documentation, so we got huge press. That's when I met John Bowmann, who was then the editor of the CAIMAW Review. So, I got to know John fairly well, and he came across to me as a very thoughtful, hardworking guy. He wasn't -- he was very self-effacing. You know, what do you need? So, he was one of the early people who I met. I met Roger Crowther, who was a rep for CAIMAW, up through a number of those same progressive kind of things and met Cathy Walker. They all three came across to me as just being extraordinarily thoughtful, very hardworking, dedicated, putting in tons of money, idealistic. I mean, we were building a movement during the sixties and seventies. We weren't building a bureaucracy. As time went on, I began to realize that you could have all these different one-off coalitions. You could have, you could be working with the sort of liberal-center, which was -- CUSO was part of the liberal center. Friend of mine, Jim Monroe at IDERA (IDERA Resource Centre) which I worked with, he was working for the Challenge for Change program, which he euphemistically referred to as Request for Reform; because really, it was pretty, pretty milquetoast. He began to realize that if you're actually going to make some serious social change over time, you had to become aligned with an organization that had longevity. You know, an ad hoc coalition that might have a life of several months or maybe a year or two before it ran out of steam wasn't going to -- it might bother the edges of capitalism, but they knew that eventually you'd get tired and go away and the organization would fall apart. So, you needed some mechanism to have some political impact. You look around, by that time the CP (Communist Party) had, even despite its glorious past, it basically was a pale shade of itself. A lot of the damage had been done through the Eastern European stuff. The NDP (New Democratic Party) was already becoming too much an electoral machine and not, lost its desire to be a movement. Although I was involved with the NDP side. I had Friends in the NDP, friends in the Communist Party, and various socialist groupings. The Maoists, there was a big upsurge in the sort of CPC -- not CPC, In Struggle and all those different organizations were going on. They were all basically intellectuals wanting to find some sort of direction in life. It occurred to me that the only form of organization that had longevity was, in fact, the trade union movement. They had a reason to exist year in, year out, and if you were going to have any serious impact, that was where it would happen. Because I looked around at people like at Bill Zander, we talked about earlier, George Hewison. All sorts of people who were party people, and some of the better NDP-ers and other socialists, I mean those were -- they were in the labour movement, and they were making -- they were working hard. So, I thought that's where it should go and or I should go. I'd run into Roger and John and Cathy, and at one point they got a phone call from a friend of mine who is a mutual friend of Roger, and he said, 'Well, if you're serious about want to get involved, the Kenworth truck plant is hiring.' They were gearing up production there in Burnaby, just off of Boundary Road. So, I went out there and, you know, I'd been on unemployment insurance because I had recommended the abolition of my own job, which was the abolition of my income.

SG [00:40:02] Right.

JK [00:40:02] So, I was on unemployment and Jill was pregnant with Kristen. So, I needed to have some income, and that seemed to be a logical place to go. So, I went out there, and they interviewed me and they looked at me, says, 'You graduated from BCIT, you've taught school in Jamaica, you've been with the Canadian University Service Overseas as a development educator, you've been doing all this stuff. Why do you want to work at a truck plant?' I knew they didn't want to have the answer, 'So I can help organize the union against you.' So, I said, 'Well, you know, that was then, this is now. My wife is pregnant. We're expecting a baby in the next couple of months, and I've got some serious responsibilities. I just got to put that behind me, and I've got to sort of get my nose to the grindstone.' That's what they wanted to hear, so that's what I told them, and I got hired. They hired me, they were looking for someone with a strong back and a dull mind because they hired me to be a tire man. To basically assemble, for eight trucks a day, for -- what did we have? Eight, ten, ten Kenworth trucks a day or eight trucks a day, with ten wheels apiece. My job was to assemble the tires on the wheels, inflate them, stick them on the truck and go back and do it all day long, which is heavy, dirty, greasy work. I was six foot two, big guy, strong guy, and that's what they needed. Here, this was the guy who had to look after his kid, wasn't going to give him any trouble.

SG [00:41:40] Right.

JK [00:41:42] So, I worked at the Kenworth truck plant for 17 months, until the recession of 1979 when they laid almost half the workforce off.

SG [00:41:55] So, was CAIMAW evident? You know, we were talking about unions not being sort of present in the workforce. Was it clear that they were present in this workforce?

JK [00:42:03] Yeah.

SG [00:42:03] Yeah, different picture, eh?

JK [00:42:07] The history of CAIMAW was both doing fresh organizing with unorganized plants, and reorganizing organized plants with American unions, because we had a basic - - our raison d'être was, American unions had no business being in Canada. Canada is the only country in the world that's ever had foreign unions operational on their soil. So, you go to Britain and say, 'How many French trade unions are functionally in England?' They'd say, 'You blimey, mate?' If you went to Australia and said, 'How many Japanese unions are functionally in Australia?' They'd think you're absolutely bonkers. Canada, you know, the American union movement took our dues, organized -- we basically did the organizing to send dues to the United States. To a very large extent, to a large, large number of our CAIMAW certifications had been in American unions and basically been under the thumb of sometimes dishonest bureaucracies. As in the case of the Teamsters. Sometimes simply incompetent bureaucracies, as in the case of the Machinists and the Molders; and you had workers who were basically being held down. Their wages and their working conditions were falling behind because they belonged to unions that were basically doing absolutely nothing for them. So, they got in. They would choose CAIMAW because we were democratic, we were militant and we're Canadian. Our object was to eliminate American unions from Canada. We would refuse to go after a Canadian union. Certainly, no matter how bad the Canadian union was, or the local, our position was you have the

capacity within our national boundaries to make changes. Go do it, if that's what you want to do. We only ever went after American unions, and we did that with great success. What would happen is we ended up with all sorts of major disputes, because we'd have people who were getting out from under the yoke of the American union, and as soon as they had a chance to take a whack at the employer and get their own back, they did. So, we ended up with -- in the early situations -- with a lot of our certifications, we ended up with some fairly major strikes. At the Kenworth truck plant, CAIMAW came into the Kenworth truck plant just after the previous collective agreement had been signed, and it was a Machinists' Union certification; and what had happened was the Machinist business agent had come to the plant to negotiate the collective agreement. Had gone in to meet with management on his own. That not only was he just on his own, not a single member of the workforce even knew he was in the plant. Sat down with the human resources people and negotiated a contract, came out at lunchtime, called a meeting, stood up in the back of a truck frame, hauled out his Players cigarette package and read off the back of his cigarette package the collective agreement changes that he had just negotiated with the management. Without any knowledge of a single human being who worked in the plant and then said, 'I'm going to put this to a vote and I'm telling you, you better accept it, because if you don't, you're going to be on strike for months.' And people looked at each other and they'd had years of frustration and thought, 'Jesus fucking Christ, we're going to vote for this, and the first thing we do right after this vote is we're going to phone those CAIMAW people, because we got to get rid of these guys. This is absolutely pathetic.' So, we got a lot of our certification through very similar circumstances where people had been, for years and years, under an American union that basically simply had been collecting dues and doing sweet fuck all for the people on the shop floor.

SG [00:46:05] Right.

JK [00:46:05] And as soon as they had a chance to take a whack back at the employer, they did. So, we had a, you know, a long history of some fairly rancorous disputes with the employers; and initially, people would say, 'No, you can't go with that CAIMAW. They're just a tiny outfit. They'll never get this.' And in no time flat, we began to set the landmark agreements in every one of the industries we were in. I negotiated the Metal Industries Association contract. We took Canadian Car off the Machinists' Union by a vote of -- the vote was counted, and it was 50.7% in favour of CAIMAW. 50.7. Within six months, you couldn't have taken us out of there with a nuclear bomb, because people said, 'My god, these people actually represent us.' Within almost -- we were there for ten years before the company finally shut down and negotiated five ten-year, five two-year collective agreements with that outfit, and set the landmark contract every time. There were five different unions in the Metal Industries Association. We would negotiate the Metal Industries Association. We were always first out of the barrel. We would negotiate the contract, The Steelworkers, the Ironworkers, the Machinists and the Operating Engineers would sign an identical contract. Not one I was dotted differently, or a T crossed differently. We set the pattern, and everybody simply followed suit and we made major gains. We'd ended up with the company one day, within about two or three weeks of being certified, the company -- they were supposed to put a union label on the machines that were going to some plant, because it was going to a unionized plant. So, they said, 'Well, we need to do this.' And I said, 'Well, I said, 'We're going to have a union meeting in about three weeks. I'll raise it up. I'll raise it then.' And we would never go, we would never meet with management without local representation, ever. That was sort of watched for, because that's, we'd seen just too much of that. Like the Machinists' Union who had negotiated a contract without a single member present. So, we said no, and they said, 'Well, this machine's got to go out the door next week. We can't wait for three weeks.' And I said,

'Well,' I said, 'There's not much I can do about that.' They said, 'What? We want you to agree to this.' I said, 'Well,' I said, 'it may well be that the membership thinks that's a good idea. I'm quite prepared to put that forward to them.' And 'Well, we're not waiting three weeks.' I said, 'Well,' I said, 'we're not, I'm not authorized and nor is anyone.' I was there with a couple of shop -- a chief shop steward and a few other shop stewards. 'We're not authorized to give you permission, because that's got to go to the membership.' 'What kind of a union is this?' I said, 'It's a democratic union.' He said, 'How are we supposed to do this?' And I said, 'Well, I got an idea.' 'What's that?' Said, 'Tell you what. We'll set up a meeting for later this week. Let everybody know what's happening.' The shift change was 3:30. I said, 'We'll have the meeting in the cafeteria from 2:30 to 4:30, and you'll pay the day shift, an hour's pay to stay behind for the meeting, and you'll pay the afternoon shift an hour's pay to come in early for the meeting.' 'We're not paying people to go to a fucking union meeting.' I said, 'Well, then you're not getting (unclear)'. 'Well, all right. We'll do this, but it's never going to happen again.' So, we go. I mean, well, we've only been certified there two weeks.

SG [00:49:58] Right.

JK [00:49:58] Right, and so they, 'What? We're going to get paid to go to a union meeting?' 'Yeah, it's going to be in the cafeteria, you know, and the management, you know. No management there.' So, we're, Barry and I, going over the issues and we decided to turn into -- because the first time we had a chance to talk to everybody. This was absolutely perfect. We'd only been certified for two weeks on a vote of 50.7%, and people most went, 'Who the hell is this union? You know, we're tired of the Machinists, but we're really not quite sure what we joined.' So, we're talking about various things. 'Well, you know, they're actually -- they want to know what we think. So, we make our decision. Yeah, okay. We'll let them put our union label on the machine before it goes out the door. That was easy. At some point, it's getting on to about 4:30 by this time. You know, the day shift has stayed behind an hour, and they've been paid, and the afternoon shift has been paid; and the human resources guy comes walking in there in a huff. He starts -- I notice him in the corner in the cafeteria, and I stop, and I said, 'Mr. Link, can I help you?' 'Yes. I want to know how much longer this meeting is going to go on.'

SG [00:51:31] Right.

JK [00:51:32] I said, 'Well, I'll tell you what. For every minute you stand here, it's going to go on for at least two or three longer.' I said, 'This is a union meeting. You're not a union member. Turn around and leave.' 'What?' I said, 'This is union meeting. Leave.' And he was so flabbergasted. He turned on his heels, he ran out there, and I deliberately carried on for another 20 minutes just to stretch the point. People are 'We've never seen anybody talk to our management like that.' Well, I mean, the support and we're getting paid on company time to attend a union meeting? I mean, really in no time flat, the people started showing up at regular union meetings, and we couldn't have been taken out with a nuclear bomb because people said, ' This is what a union is supposed to do.'

SG [00:52:28] Exactly.

JK [00:52:29] And we would never do anything that wasn't discussed and ratified, without the membership support. You know, the company would say, 'Well, we need to get an agreement.' I'd say, 'Okay, well, we're going to have to take it to the membership.' 'But we don't have time.' 'Well, then you don't get agreements.'

SG [00:52:44] Right. I just want to go back to the Kenworth plant, because that's where you first began to be a shop steward representing workers on the shop floor. Can you just tell me how that came about?

JK [00:52:57] Yeah, we had a probationary period of 30 days, and the plant superintendent was an American out of Canadian Car -- or out of Pacific Car and Foundry in Seattle, and he was just an arrogant son of a bitch. He was going to show us what was up. One day, we had a -- we got all of our parts in from various manufacturers, and the process was if there was anything whatsoever wrong with the part, you do what's called red tag it. You throw it back in the bin and the manufacturer sends you another one in replacement because, you know, we were buying brand new parts and they ought to be good. The foreman and the lead hand on the opposite line to me -- the truck plant went down and then came back the other way -- had, it was one of those pneumatic rams that was on the truck. The purpose of the pneumatic ram was to move the dump box backwards to the tipping point, where the hydraulics can take over and dump the box that was going to go on the truck that we were just building. It didn't work, and rather than just red tag it, put it back in the box, the foreman and the lead hand decided they wanted to investigate why it didn't work. We had a 30-day probation. So, they decided that they were -- they effectively -- we had an air system in the plant that was 160 pounds per square inch, really, because it had to feed all the pneumatic tools. They go around, they get a little piece of a radiator hose, four-inch radiator hose that connects the engine to the radiator and they put a worm clamp on one end of this Ram. They find a four-inch solid, four by three-inch solid aluminum plug, which they put another worm clamp and they effectively made themselves a cannon. But they're not completely stupid, almost. Just to be safe, they put a mud flap over the end of this cannon they'd built, and then they pump 160 pounds of air into the Ram, and it goes off. There's a huge explosion, shaking the entire plant. Everybody in the plant heard it. Firing this solid aluminum plug 150 feet down the assembly line, bouncing off things and people, missing about ten people working on the line. If it hit somebody, if it hit him in the head, it would've taken their head off. Killed them instantly. It was one of those things, I was doing some stuff in the back of the truck, I look over on the line. It was one of those things that happened and it's like, I hadn't been paying attention to what they were doing, but instantaneously you can say, 'How fucking stupid could you be?' I jumped off the truck, and by this time, I'd gotten to know Larry Povolo, our chief steward, quite well. We didn't have a shop steward on our line at all. I grabbed the foreman by the collar of his white coat, and I headed off through the plant and I'm dragging this foreman, screaming and shouting. By this time, he's shit scared, because he thinks I'm going to kill him. And I was, I was going to kill him. I'm literally going at high speed, dragging him and he's trying to keep up, down to the chief steward. Down to the maintenance office where the chief steward worked. Told him what happened. Haul this guy into the plant superintendent, this American, threw the foreman in the chair. Went and I spent 10 minutes. 'How can you hire such fucking stupid people? They damn near killed people.' And I got to the point that I was probably repeating myself, and eventually the plant superintendent, this American, said, 'Are you quite finished?' And he was right, and so I said, 'Yeah.' And he looked at me and he said, 'How long have you been here?' I said, '31 days.' The probationary period was 30; and if looks could kill, I wouldn't be talking to you here today. He paused for about 30 seconds and tried -- he was seething, and he said, 'We'll get back to you.'

JK [00:57:04] Three or four days go by, go back to work, and three or four days go by, and Roger Crowther comes down the truck line. It was our national rep. One of the guys who had alerted me to the fact the company was hiring, who I'd known through the left of the NDP; and he says, 'What are you doing here?' 'Building trucks.' He said, 'Well, we got a

grievance meeting.' I said, 'Well, don't have a shop steward.' And he said, 'Well, we fucking do now, come with me.' On the way down there, he hands me this CAIMAW shop stewards' button, he says, 'Put it on.' So, I put it on, and we go down there and the foreman is made to apologize, because they'd -- he and the lead hand damn near killed people, and this wouldn't happen again and that. So I go back to work, a couple weeks go by, and it's decided that we should hold the shop stewards' election rather than simply appoint me. So, we set up a shop stewards' election, and the history of this plant under the Machinists' Union is most of the people were basically company toadies that eventually got -- the foreman would help campaign for the shop stewards. We had 13 people in our line, and so, it was Tom -- I forget his last name, big guy, big goofball. The foreman was pumping for him to be the new shop steward; because the history been they'd got a shop steward, that lasts for two or three months, they'd quit and they'd run for the remainder of a two-year term with no shop steward whatsoever, and the foreman could do whatever they wanted with impunity. So, the election comes up, and the foreman is going around personally trying to intimidate all sorts of people; but after this thing when I was dragging the foreman to the plant superintendent's office by his collar, people are going, 'The fuck is this guy? We've never seen this guy before.' Because I'm off in a tiny corner of the plant putting together tires and putting them on. Hardly anybody knew me. 'This guy's got more balls than Dick Tracy.' So, we had the shop stewards' election, and I win the shop stewards election 7 to 6. The foreman has gotten six people under thumb and, 'You'd better not support this guy.' Some people said yes, and so Tom, whatever his last name was, demanded that I resign because I only got seven votes. I said to him, I said, 'I think you're mathematically challenged. It's true I only got seven, but you only got six. In my book seven is bigger than six.' So within -- so I became a shop steward by election, and by the next shop stewards meeting -- we would have weekly shop stewards meeting in there. We had a little lunch area and the chief steward, Larry Povolo, who was out of the Italian resistance -- is just tougher than nails -- recommended that I be nominated for assistant chief steward. Other people said, 'Anybody who will stand up, anybody will do what you did deserves a shot at it.' So, I became, I was there two months and I was the assistant chief steward working with Larry Povolo. Larry had been in the Italian resistance. He'd been, lived in this village, Italian village in the Second World War, and about 30, 40 members of his family all lived in about five or six buildings surrounding his little plaza. Extended family. Larry had been out bird hunting with his older brother, and Larry was 15 years old at the time, and his brother was 17. They came back with some birds and stuff like that, and Larry didn't realize that going on, all of a sudden, his brother clamped his hand over his mouth. Shoves him into the ground under this bush, and they sat there watching 30 plus members of their family machine gunned to death with Italian soldiers with German officers in command. As soon as the coast cleared, they did their best to bury the family, and then they went up to join the resistance. This guy was -- he was tough as nails.

SG [01:01:39] Yeah, to go through that. You would have to be, wouldn't you.

JK [01:01:41] Yeah.

SG [01:01:43] That's amazing.

JK [01:01:43] He was a great mentor.

SG [01:01:46] So, these were the kinds of people that you had also been attracted to.

JK [01:01:51] Oh, yeah.

SG [01:01:51] In terms of becoming part of CAIMAW as well. I mean, you talked earlier about --

JK [01:01:55] Principled as hell.

SG [01:01:55] People coming out of, you know, the universities, coming out of all various organizations and whatnot. What was it do you think that attracted them, as you, to the kind of work that CAIMAW was trying to do?

JK [01:02:07] It was democratic.

SG [01:02:08] Right.

JK [01:02:09] It was militant. It was participatory. It was anti-bureaucratic. It was Canadian through and through. It was collaborative. We didn't do -- we were incredibly militant, but it was always founded on the basis of, we wouldn't be out there taking a position, fighting for a position if we couldn't get the support of the rank and file. You wouldn't be doing it; but my experience was that if you explain the facts to people in a non-rhetorical fashion, what should we do in this. With very rare exception, the average working person will take a more progressive rather than a less progressive position, because they've got a basic sense of justice and fair play. So, we worked on that, and we were absolutely, immensely proud of the fact that we would not -- we would see other unions do things, notwithstanding the opposition of their own membership. We worked hard to get people on side for progressive positions, and very largely did, because it just made sense to people. At one point, a good friend of mine and we were all -- a lot of us were involved in the South Africa resistance movements; and we had gone on, we'd taken the lead in the budget fight against Bill Bennett. It just so happened that we had had a regional meeting of our CAIMAW B.C.- Alberta regional meeting a week before the -- just as Bill Bennett's regressive budget stuff was coming down. We'd had a discussion, and should we fight against this? It was unanimous that we should. So, we could go forward, taking a pretty militant position, knowing that we'd had the backing of all of the locals. It was just, I mean, we would have had to quickly convene something. So, we were out front in opposition, but we knew we had the backing of the membership. So, this friend of mine said to me, he said, 'Well, if your membership hadn't supported it, you would have had to do it anyway.' I looked at him, I said, 'If our membership hadn't supported, we'd have to go back and try and convince them. We would not have been in a position to go forward and basically be advocating a shutdown of the province simply because we, the "left leadership" thought that was the smartest thing to do. If we weren't able to get the membership onside, then we'd have to work to get the membership onside.' It so happened that it wasn't any problem whatsoever. People were just appalled at what Bennett was doing, and as soon as you laid it out. So, we've had this meeting, we think, here's what we should be doing. So, that's what led to the Lower Mainland Budget Coalition.

SG [01:05:25] Right.

JK [01:05:28] George Hewison was chair, and I was the secretary. There was 12 of us. Fred Wilson was there, and we were at the Fish Hall, and we decided that we would be organizing the first fight against the budget. Bill Bennett's budget. We would have a march from Thornton Park, the C.N. (Canadian Northern railway) Station to B.C. Place, which was just built. It was the symbol of provincial oppression. We figured that we would get four or five thousand people turn out. We had 25, 30,000 people, because people were just so outraged. At one point, they had -- we were meeting at the Fish Hall on Cordova,

and we'd had several meetings and there was a couple of people saying, 'Well, here's what we should do. We're going to organize this.' And a couple of people that should've known better. People that you'd know well, said, 'Well, I think we should go back to a --' We'd had a meeting, and we couldn't get everybody in the door of the Fish Hall. I mean, the place was packed. It was a couple of hundred people outside, wanted to hear what was going on, people ferrying information back and forth. People were just absolutely appalled what Bennett was doing, and they wanted us to come up with a plan of action. A couple of people who should have known better said, 'Well, I think we should go back to the people and see what they want to do.' And I said, 'Bullshit. They elected us as a steering committee to come up with a plan of action, not simply to go back and say, well, what do you want to do? We should have some leadership, show some direction.' So, we decided we're going to organize this rally, and I had handwritten out enough copies of the notice for this rally at Thornton Park. By this point, Kube was, Art Kube was head of BC Fed (BC Federation of Labour) at the time, and we'd reluctantly gotten the BC Fed on board. They had wanted to have -- the BC Fed executive idea, to have a demonstration against the Bill Bennett's budget, was that they would ask each of the Fed affiliates to send two people to represent all of the various unions. Those hundred plus human beings would walk down Granville Mall in symbolic opposition to what Bill Bennett was trying to do. We thought, 'This is fucking crazy. People are pissed off. They're not going to be happy with two people from each union symbolically showing.' And nobody around our table, there was 12 people on the steering committee that got elected in these meetings, and we couldn't get everybody in the Fish Hall. So, during the course of the meeting, so we're all doing this, we all agreed this makes some sense. Some of our compatriots were saying we should go back and talk to people, but Hewison and others all agreed, 'No, we've been elected to do some leadership. Let's go with a plan, and the plan is, we need to get people out and we need them in the streets.' So, the naysayers were set aside, and during the course of the meeting, we get a phone call. Bill Clark, who was then head of the TWU (Telephone Workers Union) on the executive BC Fed, had been dispatched because he had good relationships with all of us. Not all the unions did. I was still CAIMAW at the time, I wasn't in the CAW. So, Bill, the message from Bill is we can't do this, because this could potentially cause a sufficient standoff with the provincial government, that it could foment an election. That the message was that the NDP didn't think they could win the election if an election was called. We thought, I don't think that's a very good reason not to carry on. So, the Fed was wanting to pull out, in fact, at the meeting. The Fed, they phoned. George Hewison left the room to get the phone call. Even though we had did this little poster -- and I had a dozen copies of this handwritten in my writing, and this was under the banner of the Lower Mainland Budget Coalition and the BC Federation of Labour. George comes back ashen and says, 'The Fed's pulling out. They won't support. What are we going to do?' Other people went, 'Oh, I don't know,' and I said, 'I know what we do. You phone them back and you tell them that we produced 20,000 copies of this poster. We've spent all the money we've got, and we don't have any more money. We did this poster on the basis of the fact that the Fed said they were going to support it. You tell them that we're going to put it out, and now it's up to them to explain why they're no longer supporting that which they had agreed to support two days ago.' Other people, 'We can't do that.' George's eyes light up just like the leprechaun, and he said, 'I love it.' And so, he gets back in the phone and he says, 'Sorry. We went ahead and exhausted our resources based on the agreement you gave us a couple of days ago. We're going to start distributing it. Going to be up to you to explain why you no longer support it.' 'Oh, my God. Oh my God.' Kube's going, 'Oh, let me get back to you.' 20 minutes later, Kube phones. 'Okay, okay. We'll support it, but we want to have a say in the agenda, who gets to speak.' We said, 'No problem whatsoever.' From that moment on, we started cranking out the

posters and we produced 20,000, all right; but only 12 had existed at the time of the phone call. 25,000 people plus showed up at Thornton Park and went to B.C. Place.

SG [01:11:53] And that was actually the precursor of Operation Solidarity, really.

JK [01:11:57] Yeah, and it then became, it was Operation Solidarity, which was the trade union group and then there was the Solidarity Coalition. So, I became the head of the Solidarity Coalition, which was the non -- which was the community group, even though I was in the union. Then the Operation Solidarity moved in, and of course, we all know what happened. Eventually, the -- and Art Kube had -- Art had done a really good job, and he was doing a remarkably good job, sort of riding herd on the more conservative BC Fed unions and his health caught up to him and he basically became hospitalized. Jack Munro basically took over the helm there, and went to Kelowna and met with Bill Bennett, and basically did the deal that sold everybody out; because, you know, the people were ready to shut things down. I remember we were moving ahead on that, and ICTU (Independent Canadian Transit Union) had left the Amalgamated Transit (ATU). It had done an atrocious job with the bus drivers, and so all the Lower Mainland bus drivers had gone over to ICTU. We were sitting with Gerry Krantz and Colin Kelly, putting the final touches on that. We had been informed -- ICTU, the bus drivers' union, had been informed by the BC Fed that they were going to be the first union out on strike without any consultation at all with the leadership of the union. So, the three of us are sitting there, and what do we do? I mean, and we came to the conclusion that, you know what? We abhor the lack of consultation that was going on, but we agree with the outcome. Notwithstanding the fact that the local leadership of the bus drivers' union had not been consulted at all, come Monday morning, we were going to shut down the bus system. We're sitting there and get a phone call to find out that Jack Munro had gone to Kelowna to meet with Bill Bennett, because they were fearful. The BC Fed, the conservative unions in the BC Fed, -- not all the unions, but the conservative unions in the BC Fed were absolutely petrified that this could get out of hand. That people could actually, you know, we could have chaos. Basically, our position had been, hey, you know, what? If they want to call or if this foments another election. Okay, that's fine. We will immediately call off a general strike because we'll need to be on their campaign to get rid of the Social Credit. So, we were all set to go ahead with a full general strike, and I think it would have been enormously successful. It would have fomented the call for a general election in the province of British Columbia, and we would have fought like hell to make sure it wasn't the Social Credit that got back in. Obviously would have been the NDP; but we'll never know, because Jack Munro sold out that historic opportunity. Yeah, it wasn't Jack Munro alone. He obviously had the support of other, more conservative unions, but he certainly didn't have the support of the progressive unions. You know, the deal went out and that was that. The biggest problem there is the disproportionate representation that the Building Trades had because of their small size. They were all relatively small unions. So, they had a -- it was bottom weighted for size of the unions, so the net result was the Building Trades had far more votes than an equal number of public sector unions. So, within the Fed, their voice carried the day and the province was sold down the river.

SG [01:16:02] I'm glad we got that sort of history of that. It's further down the road in this interview, but I just want to come back again to your own experience, and we're going to make the jump from your working as a shop steward in Kenworth --

JK [01:16:16] Yeah.

SG [01:16:16] To becoming a full time CAIMAW representative and so on.

JK [01:16:19] Okay so, well, in November 1979 -- the truck industry has always been the bellwether of the economy, because when the economy starts to dry up, shipments start to dry up. The trucking industry is the very first sector of the economy to start to feel the contraction, because all of a sudden there's not as many shipments. Truck drivers start getting laid off as that starts to take place. Companies that were contracting for new trucks said, 'Jesus Christ, you know, the economy's heading onto the skids. I can't afford to buy a new truck.' And so, in the last November, last week of November 1979, I was still working the truck plant. I was assistant chief steward. Larry, the Italian talked about, was away for whatever reason. So, we end up with a meeting with the management, and we had a very good relationship with all the technical and engineering staff because if we didn't do a decent job for ourselves, they couldn't get a decent increase. So, they fed us a lot of information. So, they started telling us that trucking companies are cancelling orders right, left and center because the recession is coming. So, I call for a meeting. We take the entire shop stewards' body to meet with management to say, 'Look, we understand a major layoff is coming. This is, you know, we're four weeks from Christmas. If that's so, for Christ's sake, would you tell people? I mean, they already spent a lot of money on Christmas, but if a whole bunch of us aren't going to have work pretty quick, you should tell them; because we want to basically stop that Christmas spending so that, you know, they're in a better position.' And the plant manager says, 'Oh, no Jef. Don't worry, don't you worry about a thing.' He said, 'We got solid orders right through to the end of May.' That was on the last Monday of November in 1979, and on Wednesday of that week, 179 of us got a layoff notice.

SG [01:18:25] Out of how many?

JK [01:18:25] Out of 450.

SG [01:18:27] So virtually half the workforce.

JK [01:18:32] People were so pissed off at the dishonesty of the company that on Friday of that week, there were enough tools in that plant to allow 450 people to do their work. By the end of shift at midnight on that Friday, there was enough tools left in the shop to allow 225 people to do their work. People were walking out of that plant, desperately trying to hold up the weight in their lunch box. The people just robbed the place blind; and if the company had told us, 'Look, this is coming.' Because they knew it ahead of time, the orders have been cancelling, because it was the engineers who were designing the trucks because they're all custom-built trucks. The engineers were telling us that a recession is coming. The management's denying it's true. So, I was one of 179, and so I got laid off just before Christmas and along with all sorts of other of my friends. Then Peter Cameron, who was our Regional Vice-President at the time for BC-Alberta -- I was very active in the union. He said, 'Look,' he said, 'You got some time on your hands. Would you mind doing some research for me?' I said, 'What do you want done?' He said, 'When we were up against the Steelworkers,' We'd had 19 votes against the Steelworkers and we'd won all 19 votes, and originally when CAIMAW first started up, the Steelworkers and other American unions would say, 'Oh, you can't go with them. They're a tiny little piss-ass Canadian union. They can't do anything.' And then it didn't take us long before we were setting the landmark contracts. You know, like the Metal Industry Association contract, where everybody else signed to a T exactly the agreements we did. So then eventually, the line said, 'Well, you can't go with CAIMAW, you'll get caught up in their big bureaucracy.' So, we started out as being ineffective and small, and when we were better than all the rest of them, then you didn't want to go in because of the bureaucracy.' So,

Peter said, 'Look, we're getting hammered like hell from the Steelworkers because they say, you know, we've got lots of strikes.' And we did have lots of strikes, but we had, for many of our members who come from American unions who'd been held down for years getting shitty contracts, as soon as they had a chance to actually stand up and be counted and go out and actually take on the employer like they wanted to do. We went out on strike and got really good contracts, and we set the standard in every single industry we were representing. Whether it's mining, it was manufacturing, hospitality. We set the standard; our contracts were always the best contracts. Then they couldn't say, 'Well, don't go with CAIMAW, because you'll just end up with a shitty contract.' People said, 'What do you mean? They got the best contract around.' At one point, at Kockums-CanCar, the Machinists -- I mean, we'd knocked the Machinists out. Glen Clark, before he ran for the premiership, was working for the Operating Engineers; came up and tried to raid us at Canadian Car, Kockums-CanCar. We're out there and we got a phone call. People are up there, and it's after work. People are hanging out. So, we're there, and I'm just walking around with the guys. We're talking, and they've got about half a dozen of the operating engineers rank and file out there. No, Ironworkers. Ironworkers. He was working with the Ironworkers. So, I'm talking back and forth and talking with Glen Clark, and people are going -- some of these guys who had come up to try and raid us to go to the Ironworkers, they're saying, 'Who's that guy there?' Talking, pointing at me. They say, 'Oh, that's Jef Keighley, it's our national rep.' 'Oh.' So, these guys all start gathering around and, they're going -- we're coming into contract season. So, here they've been brought out by Glen Clark to raid us, and every one of them forgets about the raid and they want to start talking about, 'Oh, you know, we could -- you think we can get this in the contract?' And they were throwing out ideas that they want to see in the next contract, because they know we set the standard. We're going, 'Oh yeah, yeah, we can probably do that. We'll have a look at that.' Clark looks around at all these guys and he says, 'Jef, I'm out of here.' He says, 'We're gone. We're not coming back.' Because he could just see that there was absolutely no point. When he brought all his stalwarts out to help raid CAIMAW, and they all turned to us for leadership, he could see the writing on the wall. They departed and we never heard from them again. So, the, you know -- where were we going?

SG [01:23:26] But at this time, you're already a rep, so just step back a bit as to how you got there.

JK [01:23:31] Oh, yeah, how I got there. Well, Peter asked me to do all this research.

SG [01:23:37] Right.

JK [01:23:38] So I went through the Labour Board, I went through newspaper clippings, I went to every source I could find to trace down Steelworkers certification and Steelworker disputes. One of the things -- and this is before the age of computers, it was all handwritten charts and then glued together. Four sheets of foolscap (paper) laying it out and charting it all out. The interesting thing was that the only place in Canada where the Steelworkers had any record of any disputes of any duration was in British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec. In British Columbia, CAIMAW was their rival; in Manitoba, CAIMAW was their rival, and in Quebec the CNTU (Confederation of National Trade Unions) was their rival. Every other location in the country, almost none. Under the Steelworkers constitution, they didn't pay strike pay until the strike went past the third strike -- third week of strike. When they did have strikes, they would miraculously almost always find a settlement in that third week, maybe sometime in the second week; but basically they would allow their own members to go blow off steam, lose three weeks of pay, and then settle before they had to start paying out of the strike fund. This charted out

just absolutely dead accurately. So the, this became of enormous value for us as a union saying, 'All right, the Steelworkers are talking about the fact that --' they were attacking us because, they said we always went on strike, and so we were able to say, 'Yeah, we do go on strike, but those decisions are made by our members, not by our bureaucracy. But look here, the decisions in the Steelworkers are made by the bureaucracy, not by the membership, and their contracts don't stand up. So, you're going to have to make a decision whether you want to have control over your contract or control over your settlement as a group of workers, or whether you want to belong to an organization that's going to make that decision for you.' And as soon as you can point that out, in black and white, people said, 'There isn't any question which union I want.' And we just kept rolling on. So we, shortly thereafter Cathy Walker, who was our Health and Safety rep, was pregnant with her first and only son. Peter Cameron, who was our Regional Vice-President, said, 'Look, Cathy's going off pregnancy leave, she'll be gone for six months. Will you consider working for the union for the six-month period?' I said, 'Yeah, I would.' And that turned out to be the longest six months of my life, because 25 -- took me 25 years before I retired, because when the six months was up, the union looked around and said, 'We're not going to let this guy go.'

SG [01:26:51] Partly as a result of that original research you'd done, I would imagine.

JK [01:26:53] Partly that research. You know, it just -- you know. My first round of bargaining, I ended up with five sets of bargaining simultaneously, two of which ended up in strikes. In both of those strikes, we set landmark agreements in the industries and people say, 'Hmm, you -- there actually is a win out there.' You know, we'd take a short-term pain for long term gain, and we just negotiated in every industry. We negotiated the best collective agreements, whatever the industry was, with very rare exception. We were represented in industry in British Columbia, Manitoba. We were less strong in Saskatchewan and Alberta, quite weak in both of those; but the two anchor places were Manitoba and B.C, but in particular in B.C., we set the pattern and everybody else followed suit. Like with the Metal Industry Association, there were 41 companies, and when we signed the contract, the Operating Engineers, the Steelworkers, the Ironworkers and the Machinists' Union, every one of them signed an identical contract. The only difference was the names at the bottom. There wasn't a t crossed differently or an i dotted differently than what we set the pattern.

SG [01:28:19] I wonder, do we want to take a break here at this point and let everybody get up and stretch your legs. Ready to go again. So, one of the things that really struck me when I -- because I first sort of came into the labour movement myself, sort of in the early seventies. One of the things that struck me was the amount of organizing that was going on already at that time, that was being done. The militancy -- that wasn't just Canadian unions, there were a lot of unions in general -- but the organizing seemed to be really coming, to a great extent, from the independent Canadian union movement. So, what's your sense of that in terms of, did you find that there was a lot of organizing potential out there when you came into full-time work with the union?

JK [01:29:06] Yeah, there was. There were -- people were, there was a sort of a resurgence of rank-and-file militancy. I mean, CAIMAW was created in '64 in Winnipeg and quickly moved by '67 to British Columbia as well. I mean, the economy was on the way up to a very large extent, fueled by the Vietnam War experience and Canadian plants supplying the American military support. So, there was an expanding economic base, and people were looking about and saying, 'You know, we're getting screwed. We're not getting our fair share of what's going on.' And so, from the sixties through into the

seventies, there was a real growth of militancy because people thought, 'You know, there is a ton of these companies getting very wealthy off our labour and we ought to get a chunk of that.' What the difference that the Canadian Union movement made, and I include in that all of the Canadian public sector unions, is that the Canadian trade union movement of the sixties and seventies took the questions of social issues and their social responsibility to be on par with their workplace responsibilities. UFAWU (United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union), which you're intimately familiar with. The Carpenters' Union, sort of the bright light in the Building Trades. CUPE, CUPW, the teachers. Those unions that were Canadian -- and even BCGEU, once they sort of got past their sort of awkward growth pattern, and they were sort of willed into existence by Dave Barrett. Without exception, those unions that were Canadian unions took a far more progressive role and got out there and they were more responsive to their membership. They were more responsive to their communities. It's not that the American Union membership didn't want to do that. That's exactly the same thing, but the American Union membership were being held back by the bureaucracy of the American unions, because they were very largely dues collection agencies. The American Steelworkers took Canadian Steelworkers dues, and successfully advocated for tariffs against Canadian steel going into the United States.

SG [01:31:49] Right.

JK [01:31:50] You know, and a whole bunch of American steel -- the Canadian Steelworker membership's going, 'What the fuck is going on here? That's our money. You're down there arguing to take our jobs away?' And to a very large extent, the greater efficiency wasn't -- there was greater efficiency in Canadian operations, because generally speaking, the Canadian operations were newer industrial operations than had existed in the United States. The U.S. American steel operations were much older, and therefore not nearly as technically efficient. So, they were out there protecting inefficient American operations, letting off the employers basically scot-free, just to protect the market for inefficient American plants so they didn't have to reinvest in technology. Basically, being quite prepared to sacrifice the membership, effectively to reward the employer, rather than force the American employers to build better or upgrade their plants. They created a protectionist wall around inefficient American plants, so they didn't have to invest in better technology.

SG [01:33:05] So when you were actually organizing, was there a difference in organizing a plant that was already certified that you were raiding or that people had invited you to come in, from one that you were organizing right off the mark?

JK [01:33:19] Yes. The organizing right off the mark, there is a much greater natural focus for people on their basic rights as workers on the job, and yes, they're interested in better wages. Yes, they're interested in better working conditions. Yes, they're interested in better benefits, but they were interested in having a sense of dignity. If you talk to someone who's been in the workforce for 20 years, particularly in the industrial workforce, and you say to them, 'What was your vacation schedule 20 years ago?' Oh, they sort of got a rough idea. 'How many stat holidays did you get 20 years ago?' They got a rough idea. 'What were your wage rates?' Oh, they got a rough idea. Say to them, 'Was there some time in your work experience when your dignity was insulted, or you were basically put in your place by management?' It's there, and it burns as fresh as the day it happened, and they're just so pissed off that they had to be humiliated like that. So, for organized plants by and large, I mean, the American unions tended to just sort of generally keep up as best they could; but they weren't setting, they weren't breaking new ground. It was the Canadian unions that were breaking new ground, but there wasn't a huge discrepancy in wages and

benefits between Canadian organized plants and American organizations. We were the leaders but where we led -- we led in rights on the jobs, and dignity in the workplace, where people could stand up. So, people came to us because they were just pissed off, and they'd had enough of the American union that did nothing. When I was 17 years old, I worked -- because my brother-in-law worked at Canada Metal underneath the Granville Street Bridge in the downtown side, and it was a dirty, filthy, lead poisoned environment that was certified with the American Molders Union. The only reason you knew the place was unionized is you'd had union dues come off your check every two weeks.

SG [01:35:44] Right.

JK [01:35:45] And on the bulletin board, there was the banner, letterhead from the union office in Portland, Oregon. They had the date on it, which I recall being six years old at the date, where somebody had torn off the text of the letter so they could leave the banner so you might get a hold of the American Union if you ever needed it. They were absolutely, they were useless. They were just completely absent. They did nothing, except collect dues. So, when a Canadian -- so we -- when you changed unions, I mean, you changed because you were not getting representation. It wasn't because your wages weren't as good as they could have been, your benefits weren't as good as they could have been. A lot of things weren't as good as they could have been, but they weren't terrible. What was terrible was the representation, where the employer would say, 'You got a problem? Too bad.'

JK [01:36:44] Can you give me an example of an organizing drive that you were a major factor, or that you led for CAIMAW?

JK [01:36:51] Well, Canadian Car, which later became Kockums Cancar, was one of the key organizers there.

SG [01:36:58] This is what year?

JK [01:36:59] Would have been 1981.

SG [01:37:03] Okay.

JK [01:37:04] And that's where we ended up with 50.7% in the original certification vote, but if you pulled the membership six months after that, it would have been 85, 90, and never went down from then.

SG [01:37:19] So what were the issues that brought people to you at that plant?

JK [01:37:24] People weren't feeling they were getting represented. They would have -- the shop stewards in the plant were doing a pretty good job of representing members as best they could, up to the point where it might have to go to arbitration, where money had to be spent. So, like in most of the plants -- and that was because of the good people there.

SG [01:37:56] Sorry, just to back up for a second. This was, they had been in Steel?

JK [01:38:00] They were in Machinists.

SG [01:38:00] Machinists.

JK [01:38:01] Canadian Car was the Machinists' Union, and the individuals in the plant had done a pretty good job. Many of our shop stewards had been shop stewards for the previous union, because they had some backbone, but they weren't getting any support. They were just -- it was like a light went on, when all of a sudden, they said, 'Here's what we want to do.' Initially, you'd get a new certification, and they'd sort of say, 'Well, we think the company is wrong. We think we should take them on.' We'd say, 'Okay.' 'Okay?' 'Yeah.' 'For how long? For up to how far?' 'Well, as far as it takes.' 'Does that include an arbitration?' 'If that's what it takes.' And we would spend a lot of money in arbitrations and hammer the hell out of the company. We had one company. It was a non-union place. It was the Arbutus Club, private member's club in the west side of Vancouver. We organized, there were the ice rink people and the food and beverage people, and they hadn't been organized before. John Furlong was the general manager. The guy became the head of the Olympics, and he was initially a complete, total ogre. I mean, as far as he was concerned, no one was going to tell him what to do. At one point, we had -- no union was going to tell him. He ran that place. Okay. We had, at one point, we had 13 outstanding grievances, all scheduled to go to arbitration. We had a whole number of them, and a whole bunch of the members of the Arbutus Club were themselves labour lawyers on the employer's side. They started hearing about, 'You lost another one, John? John, you lost another one. What did that cost?' '\$50,000.' 'Well, how about that one?' 'That was \$60,000.' We were winning everything, because they were foolish. They didn't pay any attention to anybody's rights, because they were just going to tell us what to do, and so I just started cranking out the grievances. We had 13 piled up, and at some point, somebody in the membership side had some knowledge of labour law ended up saying, 'We're spending a lot, a lot of fucking money here and they're losing everything. What's going on?' So, Furlong says to me, 'We've got a real problem here.' I said, 'We do have a real problem. You won't act like a decent person. You've got to start. You've got to start to change.' And by this time, his members are starting to get angry. They're starting to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of membership, the upper class, the membership money, to lose to us each and every time. So, I said, 'I'll make you a deal.' 'What's that?' 'We'll get Jim Dorsey in here. We're going to ask him to come in here, and we're going to ask him to sit down, and we'll spend maybe 2 hours on each one, and I know he'll issue rough justice and both sides will live with the outcome for all 13 grievances. We can probably get it done for the -- he'll probably do that, all 13, for the cost of what a single arbitration might cost,' I said, 'and I'm prepared to do that.' I was confident enough in the rights and the final agreement and he wasn't. I said, 'I'm prepared to do that. If you're prepared to do that, we'll live with the outcome.' And he pissed me off so much. I always -- there was one in there that was a complete and total loser, but I just put in, because I was pissed off. So, I figured we had 13, 12 out of 13 were sure winners and one was a sure loser. He went to his board, and they said, 'If Keighley's prepared to do that, you agree to that.' So, we did that, took about three or four days. Dorsey issued a decision, and we won 12 of the 13. We lost the one that I knew we would lose, because we didn't have any basis to win. I was just pissed off. At that point in time, Furlong sat down, and he said, 'Maybe we need a new relationship.' And I said, 'John, I think we do.' I said, 'Do you know what? This unit, there's only about 60 people in the unit. We had 13 grievances.'

SG [01:42:39] What kind of work did they do at the Arbutus Club?

JK [01:42:40] They were the food and service workers. They were the people who looked after the ice rink and the actual physical facilities.

SG [01:42:48] So a wide range of workers?

JK [01:42:49] Yeah, yeah. About 60, 70 people in the bargaining unit, but 13 grievances, you know. So, I said, you know, I got -- I said, 'This is a very small fraction of my responsibility. I don't have any real desire to be spending a disproportionate amount of my time coming down in the Arbutus Club, trying to sort out yet another silly thing that you had done, because you didn't have the sense to listen to what the problem in the first place is. If you're prepared to actually sit and listen to the problem and deal with it in a fair manner, I don't need to be coming down here.' He said, 'Okay.' And from that moment on, my need to go to the Arbutus Club dropped off dramatically, because he began to realize that if he acted like an idiot, he was going to lose. He was at the point with his board of directors saying, 'What are you doing, John? The union keeps winning everything. Maybe you should change your ways.' And he did, and actually became a remarkably decent person to deal with. He actually got to the point we'd phoned up and said, 'You know what? Here's the problem. And, you know, our managers,' I'd say, 'Well, look, your local manager's wrong. Our member was wrong to do that in retaliation, but why don't you talk to your guy and I'll talk to ours? And let's not spend -- we don't need to spend money on another arbitration.' He said, 'Okay.' And from then on in, we actually got a lot of things solved with just by phone calls and just by coming in, because he had been so badly burned. I think his job was on the line. I mean, if I hadn't agreed -- it was my idea, but if we hadn't agreed to this sort of rough justice for these 13 outstanding, the potential upshot of the payouts would have been three quarters of \$1,000,000.

SG [01:44:47] Yeah, very expensive. So just out of curiosity, were any of these grievances related to issues relating to women?

JK [01:44:54] Oh, yeah. About 80% of the bargaining unit were women.

SG [01:44:58] All right.

JK [01:45:02] One in particular. A woman had M.S. and she had, as a result of it, as an adjunct to her M.S., she had urinary tract problems. She needed to go to the washroom with some regularity, and rather than simply accommodate what was clearly a disability, her manager, a male, decided that there was absolutely no way that she should have any special treatment. She ended up being so intimidated, she started urinating in a bucket and putting it in the cooler until she could dispose of it. In the food cooler, until she could dispose of it when she had a break, rather than simply saying, 'Okay, go'. So, that was one of the early on ones that we had.' You know, I just said, 'Furlong.' I said, 'John', I said, 'You need to talk to your managers.' I said, 'You know, this is a human rights issue. This woman has a genuine medical condition.' They fired her. That was the very first grievance we had; I remember. We go in there, I talked to her ahead of time, and heard what she -- and she had put the stuff in the cooler. She knew you shouldn't put human urine inside the food cooler, but she'd been so intimidated, she felt she had no other option. So, it was the very first grievance we had, and I said, 'No.' I said -- and their position was, she had to explain herself. They didn't have to explain their actions. They terminated her. So, we had this grievance meeting set up, and I go in there and I said, 'Look. No matter what happens, long before you have to give any explanation, they have to fully explain what they did and why they did it.' And I said, 'I don't think they're going to have much of an explanation, but let's find out.' So, we go in there, and Furlong is yelling and screaming, and trying to intimidate. 'I don't have to answer any of your questions,' talking to me. He's pointing at her, finger in her face. Why would she do such a thing?' And just sat there and I said, 'Don't say a word.' 'I'm talking to her. She's my employee.' I said, 'She's not your employee. You fired her.' I said, 'Don't say a word.' 'You can't tell me. (unclear) I'm going to

(unclear).' I said, 'John, this meeting is over. I'd suggest you phone your legal counsel, and then after they tell you why you're wrong, give me a call and we'll set up another meeting.' So, 'You can't tell me what to do! I said, 'Sorry, John. We're out of here.' We left. Two days later, I get this sheepish call. 'Well, I guess you're right.' So, then we go down for the follow up meeting; then he wants to drag me off by myself, so he can explain to me why she has to go. 'John, that's not how we operate. Not going to happen.' So, they end up having to put her back to work, fully instituted. I think she got a couple of days because, you know, you shouldn't put buckets of human urine in the food cooler; but that was the sort of, that was the very first one. As soon as people started seeing, oh. They hadn't been -- that was a case of being non-union. We didn't, that didn't come from another union. That was, we organized that one, and people said, 'Hey, here's an organization that's actually prepared to stand up to -- stand up for us.' We ended up in a five-week strike there and had great success.

SG [01:48:35] Was there a sense too, that you were standing up for women as a union as opposed to others that may not have been?

JK [01:48:42] Yeah. I mean, our position was -- I mean, the nine-week strike we had at the Kenworth truck plant, Roger Crowther was the rep there. I'd since left the plant, and I was then working for the union. So, we had a nine-month strike, and that strike was over the wage rates for the seven women data processors that had joined the bargaining unit. It was all major production, and the seven women who were a discrete group, they were the data processors that joined the union. We got down to, we had a strike vote, and the strike vote was 51 -- no, it was --, but I forget what the actual numbers were it was two votes to the good to strike. It was in agreement that the bargaining committee alone would know the actual numbers, but if the bargaining committee said we had a strike mandate, we had a strike mandate; and if we didn't, we didn't. It was over the issue of the pay rate for the women data processors, and Roger had taken the -- Roger, and the bargaining committee, had taken the position. They'd gotten all the rest of it settled. So, they said -- and the company wouldn't move on pay equity for these seven women out of 450 people in production. So, our bargaining committee said to the company, 'Tell you what, you take a cent an hour off every one of the men that we've already agreed to, and you put those on the women so it doesn't cost you a single nickel more than what you've already agreed to, and we've got an agreement.' The company said, 'No, we don't believe that women should be paid equal to the men.' So, we went on strike for nine months on that, and it would literally not have cost the company a cent more than what they had agreed to before the strike started; and we cleaned their clock. We made major breakthroughs all over the place. I mean, we were -- I mean, we got -- the cheapest contract the company could have got away with was the one that we had proposed. Take a cent off all the men and distribute that to the seven women, we got a contract. We went from 13 stat holidays to 16 stat holidays. We added weeks to our vacation pay. We added huge chunks to the health and welfare package. We have major seniority language. I mean, the company would have gotten off way cheaper by settling, by taking \$0.01 off all the 450 men and giving it to those seven women. It probably cost them overall an additional 12% and the total labour cost in the plant to take us on for nine months.

SG [01:51:19] Nine months.

JK [01:51:19] That was on the basis. There was a two -- we did, we never did publicly announce it, but it's no problem now. The plants long since shut down. The company had been taking on all the different unions, Pacific Car and Foundry. They were both owned by Peterbilt and Kenworth. They'd been taking on every single union, whether it was the

UAW, the Machinists' Union, the Operating Engineers, and breaking every one of the unions that they took on, except us. We broke them. The proof of the pudding -- Pete Smith, who later worked for the union, he was on the bargaining committee at the time. Bill Schwartz was the negotiator, out of Seattle. When they finally signed the agreement after nine months on strike -- and they, we did really well in that settlement. I mean, we made them pay for putting us out for nine months when they could have settled simply by taking \$0.01 off every one of the men and giving to all the women. We made them pay, and at the end of the day, Bill Schwartz, the company negotiator, after he signed the documents, just couldn't hold it him. He took Roger's briefcase and went like, smashed it off the table. It hit the wall, papers all over the place. He said, 'You raped us. You raped us. You fucking raped us. And Pete said, 'That's when I knew we won.'

SG [01:52:38] Yeah, you kind of would, wouldn't you? That's for sure. I just want to raise an issue that's been around for a long time, and that is that you were in the middle of a sort of a key labour debate in the 1980s over the whole issue of whether or not you should go the direction of Canadian autonomy in your union and try and win that; or whether you should follow the route that CAIMAW took, to try and introduce a new Canadian union, for example. So, there were many people, of course, including those on the left, who felt the Canadian autonomy was the route to go. How did you sort of deal with that debate, and is that discussion resolved in your view?

JK [01:53:20] It's mostly resolved. The big holdouts are the Steelworkers, the Building Trades. Most of the Building Trades, with the exception of the Carpenters, out in B.C. anyway. Operating -- some of the other American unions, some of them -- but they basically, we forced them to be more responsive to their membership because when they weren't, they lost to us. So, the -- you know, when Operation Solidarity came along, we sat down in a meeting with Art Kube. We're in the basement of the Burnaby Winter Club, and we're sitting there. On principle, we said Canadian workers have an absolute right to join Canadian unions if that's what they choose to do. They've also got the right to stay with the American unions if that's what they choose to do, but we would not ever agree that American unions had some God given jurisdiction. But because of Solidarity, and coming out of the Budget Coalition and the need to fight the government, we had gone around to all of the campaigns that we had where we were organizing against American unions and we told the members there, 'We're putting every one of our organizing campaigns on hold, because it's more important that we build unity to fight against the provincial government than we maintain these, and we'll have to deal with this.' So, we basically let the BC Fed, Art Kube, know that in the interests of Solidarity, anything that we had going on is on hold and will not be resumed while we're still up against the provincial government.

SG [01:55:23] Was Trail involved at that time?

JK [01:55:25] They had been earlier, and they were later.

SG [01:55:28] Right.

JK [01:55:30] At the same -- right at that time there were, I think, four or five examples ongoing of BC Fed federated unions raiding other BC Fed federated unions, on the principle that they don't raid each other. So here we were, taking the position. There is no principle about raiding another American union if the American union is not doing its job. However, in the interests of solidarity, notwithstanding that we will put all of our campaigns on hold and we'll not undertake any new campaigns while we need to fight the common enemy, i.e. the provincial government. While at the same time all of these American

unions, who in principle didn't raid other American unions, were in fact raiding other American unions and refused to put their campaigns on hold in the interests of common solidarity. So, we had a meeting with Art Kube, and he remembers this quite fondly. In the basement of the Burnaby Winter Club, because we were meeting in the Operating Engineer's Hall just across the street, basically. We said, 'Look, Art. You know, we're there and we're going to support you because we think it's the right thing to do, take on the government. We want to be consulted, but we don't hold any belief that we have a right to dictate what's going on, but we need to be consulted if we're going to have a common fight.' And Art's going, 'Oh, but you know,' I said, 'Art, you know what the problem you've got is?' I said, 'You've got CAIMAW that doesn't believe that somehow any union has an iron lock on on a certain group of members, saying that we will not raid any other union in the interests of solidarity; and you've got your own members who believe, supposedly, in the sanctity of union jurisdiction, raiding each other like crazy.'

SG [01:57:44] Do you remember who it was that was raiding whom at the time?

JK [01:57:49] The Operating Engineers were raiding somebody. IWA was raiding somebody. OTEU was raiding some folks. I mean, there was a few. I can't remember them all. There were four or five active raids going. I said, 'Art, you got yourself a problem.'

SG [01:58:05] Right.

JK [01:58:05] I said, 'You have your members who say, in principle, they don't raid, but who are and aren't prepared to set that aside for the interests of common solidarity. You've got us, who don't believe that that's a principle, but are prepared to put it aside in the interests of solidarity.' I said, 'We think we're taking the more principled position in the interests of solidarity than your own dues paying members.' He said, 'I know, I know, but I can't do anything about it.'

SG [01:58:32] Which was probably true.

JK [01:58:33] Oh, it was true. So, we went along, and we were part of that, and then we got sold down the river when Art got sick.

SG [01:58:44] For sure. One of the things that CAIMAW is really, at least to my knowledge, been quite well known for is their revival of labour history. You folks were amongst those who got Miners' Memorial Day going.

JK [01:58:59] Barney McGuire and myself.

SG [01:59:01] Right, in Cumberland and so on. Where does your own personal interest in that come from, in that work?

JK [01:59:15] All of the leadership, both elected, and salary, and rank and file within CAIMAW; and generally, to a lesser extent, the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU), but particular CAIMAW, we're all basically, we're all lefties. We all had a pretty good understanding and reading of labour history right across the country and around the world, and we recognized the fact that we were making history and that we had a responsibility to make history. We were, but we were doing it for altruistic reasons. We had, within CAIMAW, we had everybody working for the union made exactly the same. Succamore, who was the Secretary-Treasurer, made exactly the same as I made as a National Rep. Even though he'd been there for years and at one point, obviously, I was fairly new, and

later not so new. We had a formula to set the maximum salary that a CAIMAW staff person could make, and it was based on the average of the four highest paying shops, provided they each had at least one -- the trades rate in the four highest paying shops, provided that each one had at least 100 people in it. So, you didn't find some sort of weird industry that got way off the cliff. So that we -- our formula was that, if mathematically applied, it would guarantee that at least 15% of our membership made more than the National Reps who were working 60 or 70 hours a week every week; and then we paid less, because we couldn't afford that.

SG [02:01:22] Right.

JK [02:01:24] We were, at one point, we had 50% of our membership on the picket line at the same time. We were, I think at the time, making \$16 an hour as national reps when the trades rate average was about \$18 an hour. In order so that we didn't miss a picket cheque to any of our members, we all took the cut down to \$10 an hour, so that we could free up money and make the picket pay. So, nobody was there doing it for a high salary. In fact, we were foregoing that right, left and center. We didn't have a pension plan. I mean, we were -- we believed in the principle, and we were living the principle. We figured things would take care of itself over time, but in the meantime, there's just too many fights to be had. We were, as long as we were in CAIMAW, there was before -- prior to joining the CAW -- we would, it would be fair to say that at least 15% of our membership made more on a 40-hour week than we made on a 70-hour week, and you don't find people like that because they're out to get rich. You've got to have an ideological commitment to the organization for people to be prepared and for their families to accept that you're going to work in ordinate hours. You're never around to do stuff that needs to be done around the family, and still basically be paid a relative pittance for the -- an absolute pittance for the time put in, but a relative pittance for any comparable job.

SG [02:03:05] I think that's true of many unions that have been, as you said, that ideological commitment.

JK [02:03:09] Fishermen, exactly the same thing.

SG [02:03:11] The left. The left leadership has often been that way, that's true. You talked in the beginning about a whole lot of various small fabricating plants and whatnot that were extant that you worked in. I had the same experience in small shipyards and so on, all of those are gone now, as are many of the fabricating shops. When did you see that change starting to take place amongst a lot of the CAIMAW certs there were? When did they disappear?

JK [02:03:38] '79. It was the recession of '79.

SG [02:03:39] '79.

JK [02:03:40] Yeah, they went the recession of '79, started with the truck plant, the truck plants and other similar industries. Carried on, the recovery didn't really come till '82. In 1979, we had about, between the four western provinces, we probably had close to 1500 members working in the foundry industry. When the recession sort of was looking to be behind us, by the time it got into '82, '83, we had 150 people in the foundry industry. The rest of it had all going offshore to third world countries, because it was relatively skilled, but only relatively skilled labour. You could do castings in China or Indonesia, Malaysia, at a fraction of what they were here or could be done for here. As long as it wasn't time

sensitive production, that it took two months to get here by boat mattered little if the labour cost to produce it was so much cheaper. So, we, by the time we -- and we just, the recession of '79 - '83 devastated the industrial unions of every description because companies were just going offshore. It was the social contract that basically came to an end with the end of the Vietnam War, because the supply -- so many Canadian companies were supplying the American war machine and that was a source of prosperity -- came to a grinding halt with the end of Vietnam, and the corporate sector decided they were going to band together and fight back. They were tired of losing a greater share of income to the workforce, and they were going to get it back, and they did.

SG [02:05:59] So how did that affect CAIMAW organizing? What did you find in your own experience changed?

JK [02:06:04] It was, in the one hand it was tougher, but on the other hand, it attracted people, because it became more apparent to more working people that you needed an organization willing and capable of fighting than had previously been the case. When the, prior to the end of the Vietnam War in '75, when you can sell just about anything to the American military at any price or through a Canadian supplier, there was prosperity, more prosperity throughout North America. The cost of labour wasn't that great a deal; but when that dried up, the cost of labour became a much greater deal and they started to offshore all sorts of product that had been done in North America. Both Canada and the United States, and they started hollowing out both economies, and working people paid the price.

SG [02:07:08] Did you find that that it was more difficult to organize, or there were fewer plants to organize in?

JK [02:07:13] Well, I mean in the traditional industries that we had grown up in, a lot of the plants that you might have wanted to organize no longer existed. I mean, we went from 1500 organized foundry workers to 150 in three years, and there'd been tons of other unorganized, and other unions faced the same devastation -- industrial unions -- and there were all sorts of non-union plants that never had been organized in those same sectors that no longer existed. They simply weren't there to organize. So, the service sector became a much more important area to look at. We had the White Spot workers had come out of -- they'd originally been, actually a creation of Nat Bailey, the owner of White Spot, because during the 1950s there was a major organizing campaign going in the restaurants and the hotel industries, and they were doing a pretty good job. Nat Bailey, who owned the White Spot decided that 'Jesus, if I don't do something about this, I'm going to end up unionized.' So, he manufactured his own union called the White Spot Employees Association. The first collective agreement, it was printed in the same booklet as the Constitution of the union, which he wrote. It limped along for about ten years as a, basically, a pretty milquetoast employer-dominated union, and then they sold out to -- who in the hell did they sell out to?

SG [02:08:49] General Foods.

JK [02:08:50] General Foods, sold out to General Foods. General Foods had them for ten years, and the White Spot Employees union changed themselves into FSWC (Food and Service Workers of Canada), became a little bit more legitimate as a union. Getting into the eighties, then they sold it to Peter Toigo, and Peter Toigo was a lot more brutal. They decided that they didn't -- they weren't able to keep up. I was assigned, as the National rep, to go over there to help them sort of get their house in order, before they even joined CAIMAW. I go over there, and they had to write a letter to the company. They'd get, I

mean, their style was -- somebody would show up at the union office about 10:00 in the morning, make a pot of coffee, and sit around and drink coffee until noon, then go for lunch for 2 hours and then come back and maybe make another pot of coffee, and that was done. They'd go home.' They were completely outgunned in knowledge and in resources, with the exception of Denise Kellahan, who eventually came to work for CAIMAW and then CAW. They had to write a letter to the company, they'd get five people to sit around an office for about 3 hours to compose this letter. You know, I go in there, I was seconded to go. I said, 'Alright, what do you need to do and what's the issue?' And I'd sit down, and I'd say, 'Okay, in about 15 minutes, here's the letter we need to send.' 'Oh, well, we need to get it -- we need everybody get together and talk about this.' I said, 'You're not going to have to talk about this. This is the letter you need to send.' And Denise was going, 'That makes sense to me.' It wouldn't take too long before the people started to fall by the wayside, because they were just completely, they weren't ill-motivated, they were just incompetent. They had very largely been promoted by some of the management people, because they were milquetoast. Denise was this breath of fresh air, and she could recognize, 'My God, there's this CAIMAW people who actually know what they're doing. They know how to tell the boss to fuck off and stand up and be counted.' And so, we did. I was there for three or four months, sort of as an add on to all my other servicing responsibilities and bargaining responsibilities. That helped, that basically helped bring FSWC into the CAW, with all of the White Spot and the Kentucky Fried Chicken certifications.

SG [02:11:31] So they never came into CAIMAW first?

JK [02:11:34] Like, you know, they came into CAIMAW.

SG [02:11:35] CAIMAW, and then went to the CAW from there.

JK [02:11:36] Yeah. I mean, there was -- we had, in Kentucky Fried Chicken, we had more life-threatening burns because of hot grease spilling on people then we did in all of our foundries combined.

SG [02:11:54] Really?

JK [02:11:55] Oh, because in the foundries, it was a male workforce. It was recognized as dangerous, and so we negotiated, and we took care in them, and the Workers Compensation Board looked after it. In the White Spots and the Kentucky Fried Chicken, it was just women, it was just fast food. How could it possibly be dangerous? There was more danger in a Kentucky Fried Chicken kitchen than there was in a foundry. So, we started challenging the company. 'Well, what are you talking about?' One of the women on our first bargaining committee, I forget her name now, she had been she had been splashed. The hot fat from the deep fryer. She'd been splashed, and with the exception of -- she had something shrouding her -- with the exception of cross one shoulder, down through the breast line there, the rest of her body, except the very backs of her leg in the back was like third degree burns. She was nothing but a massive scar tissue. That she didn't die was a miracle, and she wasn't alone. I mean, there were life-threatening injuries taking place in Kentucky Fried Chickens, and we're sitting there and said, 'This is atrocious.' And so, 'Come on, you know, it's just women. You know, I mean, this is fast food. You can't expect us to do that.' And we said, 'Well, not only do we expect you to do that, but we're coming up and bargaining. You know, if you don't smarten up, if you don't make these changes to health and safety, you're not going to be producing any chicken because we're going to make health and safety the first strike issue you've ever had at

Kentucky Fried Chicken.' 'You can't do that.' 'You just watch us.' There was enough stories going around. Everybody said, 'My God, there's an organization that will stand up and defend us.' We had, there was no question of the support amongst the workforce, which was probably 70% women. Finally, here's an organization. I mean.

SG [02:13:57] So were you able to make changes?

JK [02:13:58] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SG [02:14:00] In doing that work, eh?

JK [02:14:01] Yeah. I mean, it was -- it wouldn't take very long. We didn't even have to go on strike, because the company was just absolutely petrified of what we could and would do. They started putting emergency restraints on all the buckets and changed the work processes. I mean, it was still -- you're dealing with hot oil, so it was still dangerous, but we put huge health and safety language and job guarantees and hour guarantees in the very first collective agreement. It was like night and day. I mean, particularly the women workforce there, you couldn't have blasted us out of that place with a nuclear bomb.

SG [02:14:49] Right.

JK [02:14:50] You know, they just, you know, their life was safer.

SG [02:14:54] Mhm, and they continue to be a Unifor cert, don't they?

JK [02:14:59] Yep. Yep.

SG [02:15:00] Kentucky Fried Chicken?

JK [02:15:02] And most of the White Spots.

SG [02:15:03] Right.

JK [02:15:04] Not all of them.

SG [02:15:05] No, a number of have left the fold, I guess.

JK [02:15:08] They didn't leave the fold. What happened was the company smartened up, and they got some pretty astute anti-labour lawyers in there, which -- so a lot of the newer operations opened up non-union and stayed non-union, because they, finally the penny had dropped. You start, you keep treating people like shit, they're going to rebel against you. So, they put enough of a gloss on it that it sort of held off most of the future organizing for a fair amount of time.

SG [02:15:44] So in 1992, CAIMAW merged with the Canadian Auto Workers, which itself had been a breakaway from the United Auto Workers in 1986. I presume that you were very much part of that decision at the time. So, what's your personal take on the decision as it was made, and what's the process of making that decision?

JK [02:16:07] Uh, I know from my discussions with other CAW activists, and Bob White included that to a very large extent CAIMAW was a big chunk of the inspiration behind Bob White deciding and convincing the other Canadian leadership of the UAW at the time that

they could and would break away from the UAW. The UAW had, it was Douglas Fraser was President, international President at the time in 1990, 1988. They had ordered Bob White and the Canadian section to give major concessions to the automakers, just as they were giving major concessions to the automakers south of the border. Bob and the Canadian leadership say, 'We're not doing that.' So, they -- he attended his last board meeting. He was on the board of the UAW, because he was Canadian Area Director. Came back and formed the Canadian Auto Workers. Used -- they didn't even, didn't they were in such a hurry to get it done before Bob got fired, because they were going to fire him because he wasn't prepared to do what he was told. They simply modified the UAW Constitution only enough to create the Constitution for the Canadian Autoworkers, and even to this day, the Constitution suffers from being not a particularly good constitution because of source of its origins; although it was somewhat rectified with the merger of the CEP (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union) because their constitution was actually better. They weren't as militant, but their constitution and workers' rights was actually better under the CEP Constitution than in the CAW, because they simply took the UAW constitution and changed it around only minimally enough to do it. Then it broke away. So, we became the -- we had been the inspiration. They'd seen us go from this tiny little outfit that started in Winnipeg, to across the four western provinces, primarily British Columbia and Manitoba. In Manitoba it's mostly around Winnipeg. There's not a lot of industry outside of Manitoba. We'd been the inspiration that Bob White looked to. That if these bunch of Canadian nationalists could create a standalone union and make landmark contracts and stand up to the American corporations, the American unions, and the government, why couldn't they? So, we were the first union he approached to see if we would join, then the freshly minted, Canadian Auto Workers. We took two years to study it before we finally put it to a vote, and it was overwhelmingly supported by our membership. We were -- I remember meeting Roy Cabot, who was then the President of my own local at the time. We were on our 25th anniversary convention for CAIMAW. We were, to celebrate, we'd gotten a riverboat. We were all cruising down the Red River in Winnipeg, sitting on the edge, and Roy said, 'So, what do you think about it? Should we join the CAW?' I said, 'You know, it's a bit like, you know, we've been in this little boat, and we've been fighting all comers. We've been going from where we came from, complete domination of the American unions, to where we want to have our own Canadian trade union movement. We've been this little boat and we've had people taking shots at us, and we were bailing to keep the boat afloat. Along comes this other organization that got inspired by us, and they built a much bigger boat and it's a much stronger boat, and you know what? It's going in exactly the same direction that we're headed. So, I figure that we ought to jump on that bigger boat.' And he said, 'You know what?' He says, 'I think you're right.' He became quite a key person in terms of the rank and file organizing for joining the CAW. So, we took two years to think about it, put it to the membership. We concluded that, with some exceptions -- we weren't entirely in love with the structure of the CAW, because they had simply holus bolus taken the bureaucratic structure of the UAW. Changed a few words around to create the Canadian Constitution, but we figured that we could have some impact on that, and we did. Not as much as we'd hoped to do, but we figured, you know, why not jump on a much bigger boat heading in the same direction down the same river, then carrying on? We were just getting, by the time -- we'd had, our membership had grown to like, before the recession of '79, we had eight or nine thousand members. We came out of '83 with about 4400 members. It had been that devastating in terms of plant closures.

SG [02:21:35] Right.

JK [02:21:36] It was that it was a tougher road to go, to hoe, and we were very good at -- employers were just fearful of taking us on, and we were very good at being able to conceal our weak spots. I mean, there wasn't -- we didn't have weak spots, but most employers said, 'You don't want to take those CAIMAW guys on. They'll just get you.' And we depended on our capacity to do that, and it got to the point that employers simply wouldn't take us on. We had the Placer and CAIMAW wars at Endako mines and Gibraltar mines, which in a period of five years, we had the certification of both mines. Gibraltar was able open pit copper and gold. Endako was molybdenum, and in a period of five years, there was only seven months where both mines were operating simultaneously in five years. One was shut down, go back to work, the next one was shut down, and we won all of those disputes, hands down. Those things begin to take their toll, and we were just -- we were really, when the CAW option came along, we probably could have held it together for another couple of years, but we were just getting really, really hammered. Our capacity to patch over the apparent holes was getting more and more difficult to do.

SG [02:23:13] So presumably, that same situation was the case with CASAW and the others that came along.

JK [02:23:19] Yeah. They waited for us; you know. Basically, after we went in, they said, 'Well, so what's it like?' And we said, 'It's not perfect, but you know what? It's got possibilities.' Then so, basically CASAW folded in, chunks of a whole bunch of Canadians joined in. We basically said, 'Look, we're going to be, you know, given that we're heading into tough times. the recession had resolved, but it resolved by having a fraction of the industrial operations still functioning after '82 - '83 than had been functioning prior in '79. So, we lost in that '79 - '83 recession, we lost 35, 40% of our manufacturing capacity in British Columbia, and that was the most heavily unionized sector. So, we ended up shifting to a much more service-oriented economy because, you know, a lot of the industrial operations had gone offshore to much cheaper labour, and it wasn't coming back.

SG [02:24:34] So when you merged finally, Jess Succamore became the area director for British Columbia for the CAW. That must have been quite a remarkable change for CAIMAW generally, not to mention for Jess.

JK [02:24:47] Yeah. Yeah, and so when it came down to, 'Alright, now we're part of the BC Federation of Labour'. So now we had to appoint someone as our Vice-President to the BC Fed, and Succamore said, 'I'm not doing it.'

SG [02:25:06] Hmm.

JK [02:25:07] 'I'm not going to sit across the table from Ken Georgetti and pretend I have any respect for him whatsoever. You go do it.' So, I became the Vice-President for the CAW for four years on the BC Fed. Sometimes Ken and I went head-to-head, and sometimes Ken took the right position and I would support him. I discovered pretty quickly that they were really -- my very first meeting as Vice-President of BC Fed had to do with the casino issue, where Paul Wynn was trying to open up a casino here, and Georgetti had actually done a backdoor deal to try and get it in there. So, we had a BC Fed executive discussion, and that was my very first BC Fed executive meeting as a vice president. They're going around the table and 'This is really, you know, we really want to get into the gambling industry. This is really going to be good for our membership.' I thought, 'This is bullshit. I mean, this is a recipe for a disaster.' The issue started to surface, and Georgetti refused to have any comment, pro or con. He just wasn't going to talk. This is confidential to the executive. So, the press approached me and Marg Bezuk

from CUPW, and I didn't feel any loyalty to that. I said, 'No, I think it's a terrible idea. I mean, we don't want to build the economy on the basis of gambling. It's going to suck tons of money out of families and communities. We're not in favour of it.' And Georgetti was absolutely furious. How dare I speak out that there's (unclear)? We've got to have absolute solidarity. He was all set to rake me over the coals at the upcoming, my second meeting of the BC Fed executive. I said, 'All right, you fucker.' I sent a four-page letter. I said, 'All right, let's have a good discussion about this.' You know, and I laid it out chapter and verse what we organizationally thought made sense, and we didn't think building an economy based on families losing their incomes through their husbands spending money in casinos, coming home with empty pockets, made a lot of sense. So, I sent this four-page letter and demanded it. All right, Ken wants to have a discussion. We'll have a discussion. Then he looked at it and he realized that he couldn't publicly survive the rationales that he was putting forward behind this gambling stuff. I think I don't know for a fact, but I think he was doing a deal with Paul Wynn, who was behind the original casino concept. I don't know that for a fact, but in any event, just before the -- and it'd obviously gotten a lot of favour, my letter had gotten a lot of favourable support from other BC Fed executive members because I was the first person to articulate what was wrong with the position the Fed was taking. So, it was.

SG [02:28:52] And with gambling in general.

SG [02:28:53] Yeah. Yeah, and so though Brian Payne and Rod Hiebert and a couple of others who I had good relationships with, and that Ken knew I had good relationships with. I head off to my second meeting at the Villa Hotel, where the meeting was taking place, and I get approached by Brian and Rod off in the hallway. He says, 'Ken doesn't want to have a discussion about this.' I said, 'Why?' He says he doesn't think it'd be good for the solidarity of the organization.' And I said, 'Well, he's talking about sanctioning me and sanctioning the CAW because I had the temerity to speak my mind.' I said, 'You know, if he thinks that this buys my or our silence,' I said, 'that's not going to happen.' He said, 'No, no, no. There'd be no silencing, just if you can agree that we're not going to have a public discussion on this, you won't hear from him about what you say or don't say.' I said, 'Well, I can live with that.' And so we agreed not to discuss it and then we carried on, and he never again attempted to tell me what I could say or what I couldn't say. Just learned to live with it. Sometimes I, if he took a position that was worth support, I would support the position. If he took a position that I didn't think was worthy of support, I would oppose it. I learnt early on that the vast majority of the elected leadership to the BC Federation of Labour were all basically pretty decent people. They were, each of them, pretty competent within the bailiwick of their own union experience, but most of them didn't really have much of a world view, and they didn't really have much raw analysis of how to sort of figure through a problem. I discovered fairly early on that if you got into a debate, whatever the debate was, early on, first, second and third speaker, you could turn the tide of the discussion to a commonsense position and people would say, 'Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.' And you could actually steer the discussion to a decent outcome, and we actually made some good policy in those years. A couple of times we'd be having this debate, and Ken wanted to go one way, and Angie Schira was Secretary-Treasurer at the time, and I'd jump in there and I'd turn the discussion going one direction; and several times, I'd hear Ken lean over to Angie, not realizing was speaking as loud as he was speaking. He says, 'We're not going to win this one.' And I delighted in that.

SG [02:32:09] So, this was a role that you had never really sort of had before, because you weren't on BC Fed Executive Council until that point. So, I mean, obviously this --

JK [02:32:18] And I was there because Succamore refused to be.

SG [02:32:21] That's ironic, isn't it?

JK [02:32:21] Yeah, for sure. I mean, he would have been -- he would have been far more brutal, but in some ways, he might not have been as effective because I discovered that that by and large, that most of the people on the Fed executive were good and decent people. If you could jump into a discussion fairly early on and say, 'Look, let's look at this from these angles.' and basically put forward a non-rhetorical but progressive position that seem logical, the vast majority of people would say, 'You know, that makes some sense. Okay.'

SG [02:32:56] Well, it's called consensus building, too, you know, which is --

JK [02:32:59] Yeah.

SG [02:33:00] Which was probably not Jess Succamore's strength, in any case.

JK [02:33:03] No, no, and it certainly wasn't Ken's strength.

SG [02:33:06] No, no, that's for sure. So, when you became a national rep for CAW at this time, that must have taken you into areas that you sort of hadn't covered with CAIMAW, particularly your service local work and that sort of thing.

JK [02:33:22] I was -- they asked -- Peter asked me to work for the union, and in the first five months of -- the first months of my tenure as a national rep, I was negotiating five collective agreements, two of which ended up in strikes that ended up creating some landmark collective agreements. I'd never even been in a bargaining committee as a rank and file.

SG [02:33:54] This is with CAIMAW.

JK [02:33:56] Yeah.

SG [02:33:56] Right.

JK [02:33:56] So, I'm leading the negotiations, never having actually been on a bargaining committee.

SG [02:34:01] Right.

JK [02:34:01] The difference is I could look at stuff and figure things out. I didn't have to look at things three or four times to figure out which direction things were headed.

SG [02:34:10] Mm hmm.

JK [02:34:11] And then I was -- and...

SG [02:34:17] So, then it wasn't that much different doing the work for CAW, covering many of the same certifications in general that you had before.

JK [02:34:29] We ran our own show out in B.C. There were all sorts of people who didn't want us to do that in the CAW, including Buzz; but we basically, we had taken a rank-and-file position that that's who mattered, and that's who got to make the shots. The CAW was much more bureaucratic because of their history of the UAW and the fact that when they changed the Constitution, they barely changed anything. They just crossed out UAW, put in Canadian Auto Workers. Cross this out. They didn't really think through the process. They had, they were a very much a top-down organization, very centralist, and we weren't. So, a lot of the -- they got the CBRT (Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers) in there, a lot of the unions that they recruited to expand the traditional base, to expand into western Canada, were Canadian unions that had a much deeper, more solidly committed democratic tradition than had ever been the case in the UAW or that. So, we were forcing change in how the CAW operated. You'd see people (unclear) 'Well, how come these CAIMAW guys get to do all that? I mean, they're running their own show.' And Jim O'Neill, the Secretary Treasurer under Buzz Hargrove, Jim was to very large extent sidelined by Buzz. No one was as smart as Buzz. If Jim ever got a memo that was copied to Buzz, he would simply throw it away, because Buzz wasn't going to ask his opinion anyway. Jim came out early on, and we asked him when we're just sort of getting integrated into the CAW after January of 2000 -- or, 1992, and we're sitting there talking. We went for lunch and said like, 'So, how do you want us to function?' And Jim said, 'You know what? We came to you because of the inspiration that you provided. As far as I'm concerned, you carry on doing what you think you should do. You're doing it now in the name of the CAW rather than in the name of CAIMAW, and if we have a problem with that, we'll let you know.' So, he took a much more hands-off position. Some of the other people tried to put us in our place without great success, but we basically said, 'Hey, we're going to carry on with the militant tradition and the democratic traditions that we had. We're just now doing it in the name of the CAW.' Jim O'Neill had no problem with that whatsoever, and the same can't be said of Buzz.

SG [02:37:38] So, you always had that sort of conflict, or not conflict, but tension between one side and the other.

JK [02:37:44] Buzz is very much a hierarchical bureaucrat. He was an anti-communist in his earlier days, as working his way up in the UAW, and in his later days. One time, at one of our staff meetings, we'd made this argument. I stood up and made this argument against what he'd been trying to put forward. There was 150 staff people there, and you could just see, this was like he's just reverting back to his days of fighting the reds in the UAW. 'That's just a CAIMAW position.' And he might as well have said communist. That's, you know, it's like that's as crazy as that, but then people said, 'Actually Buzz,' People start going, 'Actually, Buzz, we sort of think that what Jef said makes sense.' And so, he really got even more pissed off, because we were actually making arguments, not just myself, but others were making arguments about the logic of what we should do in a progressive way that were being supported by his traditional UAW and CAW supporters. Eventually, he less and less consulted with the staff over what should happen, and more and more became dictatorial, because he knew better than anybody else.

SG [02:39:07] So, did you feel that sort of the democratic traditions and the way of working that CAIMAW and some of the other unions had had was being compromised to some degree by it?

JK [02:39:17] It was.

SG [02:39:17] It was, eh?

JK [02:39:18] It was, absolutely.

SG [02:39:18] Right.

JK [02:39:19] I have some examples which I won't go into, for the sake of protection of some good people, that we discovered through the admissions of employer reps we were up against that some of Hargrove's minions had had secret conversations with the upper management, unbeknown to myself or the members, as to where we should go, what compromises we were prepared to make. As soon as I discovered that, we decided that we might have been prepared to consider a couple of those compromises. The one particular thing we did strike on was three issues outstanding, and the company guy said, 'Well, we understand such and such.' Says, 'If we give you one or two of the three outstanding issues that'll settle it.' I said, 'Well,' I said, 'we've not had that discussion,' I said, 'and I'll tell you what, we can get a settlement provided we get three out of the three.' 'But we were told that if we even get two out of three.' I said, 'Well, you haven't talked to the bargaining committee, and from here on in, it's three out of three or nothing.' 'But we thought we had an understanding.' I said, 'Well, you know,' I said, 'we're the representatives of the membership, not Toronto.' Said, 'We're the ones who can end the strike. Not Toronto. Take your pick.' 'I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to do that.' And I said, 'Well, you know, Larry, I think that when it becomes known that you cost your company \$1,000,000 a day to hang on for what's really worth about 60 or \$70,000, I wouldn't look at your job security too well.' He tried to hang on for two days, and cost the company another \$2 million; and when it was over, they gave him the grace of hanging on to him for four months, so it didn't look too obvious, and decided that if this guy cost us these two extra days, how many of these months did he cost us where we could have gotten a settlement. We could have gotten a settlement, but for stupidity on the management part, but there were people within our organization phoning up the company behind our backs and that didn't endear them to me or me to them.

SG [02:41:52] So, you basically continued working on as you had then. You always had that kind of feel. It wasn't the easiest thing to do in certain circumstances.

JK [02:42:01] Yeah, and then there was a -- we had a -- I eventually left. We had an arbitration come up over who should be the Area Director. Hargrove appointed a person who hadn't been on staff, who had had very little experience. He had zero seniority, didn't know the provincial bargaining, and I put in a grievance, and they tried to have a couple of meetings. 'Well, what can we do to make this go away?' And I said, 'Give me the job.' 'Oh, we can't.' I said, 'Well,' so, we went to arbitration. I was the only person who had -- there was a few people who'd started an arbitration against Hargrove from the staff position, but they had been given something to make the argument go away, so it didn't go to fruition. I was the only person, until then -- I'm not sure if it ever happened after -- in the history of the organization that ever took Hargrove on to a full outcome. I was so disgusted by the process that I told my wife, I said, 'Win, lose or draw. When the decision comes down,' and we won, I said, 'I'm not prepared to continue on with --' and the people they had up as witnesses for the union basically made up the stories. Said what they chose to say, that didn't have any basis in reality. One guy was claiming -- we had an area director who was not, he was basically useless, and I basically had to write all sorts of letters on his behalf because he wouldn't pick up a pen or do anything in support of other unions. At the arbitration, we had 20 or 30 of these letters under the penmanship, the signature of then area director, all of which had been written by me because he wouldn't. When asked by

my lawyer, the union's, staff union's lawyer, 'If he didn't support these letters that Jef Keighley had written for him to sign, why did he sign them?' 'Oh, I had no other choice.'

SG [02:44:28] And you're not naming names here, I presume.

JK [02:44:30] I'm not naming names, but it would be easy enough to figure out who it is. Yeah, but I mean, the guy was just lazy as the day is long, and these are all issues that were fully supported and appreciated by the rest of the leadership of the BC Federation of Labour because it's the positions they were wanting to have happen. But he just wasn't doing his job. So, I, because I had been a Vice-President for four years and I got bounced out in favour of that guy, I would say 'We need to write this letter because that's what they're looking for.' 'Okay,' sign it and away it went. But, and --

SG [02:45:13] So, what was the outcome of the arbitration?

JK [02:45:17] I lost.

SG [02:45:18] You did.

JK [02:45:18] I figured. There was friends and good people in the organization said, 'Jef,' (unclear) I mean, he said, 'You know, you can't take this on.' It's just like -- the issue was the issue of seniority and competence, and I said, 'So, what you're saying is that I shouldn't stand up to Hargrove on the basis of both seniority and competence, because there's maybe a more important issue that down the line we could talk about.' I said, 'I'm not sure what that might be.'

SG [02:45:52] Right.

JK [02:45:53] He said, 'Well, but are you going to win?' I said, 'You know what? It's a 50-50 crapshoot.' I said, but I couldn't live with myself if I allowed it to just go ahead, and I lost.

SG [02:46:07] Right.

JK [02:46:08] And Jim Dorsey, who was the arbitrator, basically said, he basically psychologically sided with the position that I took, but then went on to say that in the union, like the CAW, the National President has the right to override the other principals. At the time, it was issue of seniority. I was unquestionably the most senior candidate and questionably the competent candidate. So, I went doing some research on seniority so I could use it in the arbitration to throw it in Hargrove's face. So, I looked at every one of the Big Three auto contracts, and you know what I discovered? The word seniority doesn't appear between the front and back cover of any one of the Big Three auto contracts.

SG [02:47:07] Really, eh? So --.

JK [02:47:07] Not once.

SG [02:47:10] So, the history of the union is not one of defending seniority as a method.

JK [02:47:13] The history of the union is the employer decides who goes where and who gets what.

SG [02:47:18] I see.

JK [02:47:19] And we had done the exact opposite. We had the best language in terms of seniority. You know, and I was researching, I got copies, got friends of mine to send me out all the auto contracts and pouring through. I think I'm ready, say, see this? Didn't appear between the pages and the covers. It wasn't an issue. The auto companies decided who worked and who didn't.

SG [02:47:46] And so, I guess Dorsey was basically playing on that same sentiment.

JK [02:47:50] Yeah. Yeah. You know, you can see from that tone of how he wrote it that he had sympathy for the position but said, you know, when one considers the history of the organization, it would appear that the president has pretty free rein to do what he chooses to do. And that wasn't it was a disappointing but not an entirely unexpected outcome given the history of the UAW in this area.

SG [02:48:18] And so hence your retirement in 2005.

JK [02:48:21] Yeah, I got the arbitration decision came out on Friday and I lost, and I took the weekend to think about it. I phoned Hargrove at 8:00 on Monday morning and said 'Buzz, I'll be retiring at the end of the month.' And he said, 'Fine.' And that conversation lasted 15 seconds. Didn't even last 15 seconds, 10 seconds.

SG [02:48:49] Well, on a happier note. One of the things I wanted to talk to you about is that you've also been something of a musician in the labour movement. Was this -- I mean, and obviously your brother kind of did that, although probably on a different genre.

JK [02:49:03] Yeah.

SG [02:49:04] But how did you come by that? Because you've got a great voice. You play guitar.

JK [02:49:11] That was -- I mean, my sister and my brother-in-law are both artists, and during their time in Vancouver, art school got introduced to Peter, Paul and Mary and you know, the Weavers and all those. Of course, my sister started bringing records home and I thought, 'This sounds like pretty good music.' I convinced them. I had a paper route for the Vancouver Sun for a couple of years, I was making actually pretty good coin for a 12- or 13-year-old kid. So, I bought myself a guitar and taught myself how to play guitar, and of course, the musical inspiration was, you know, Peter, Paul and Mary, the Weavers, all these various things. So those are the songs that, records that I had around. My Finnish family background were Finnish socialists, you know, and so there was a sort of a natural affinity for working people that came to me from my mother. My father, although he -- my mother always voted CCF-NDP, forever, my father voted Conservative-Social Credit, cancelling each other's votes out. Although my dad was a Machinists' 692 shop stewards for many years, so he had a union background, but he didn't carry his union background to provincial and national politics, whereas my mum carried it wherever she went. So, I got my sort of social commitment from my mum, my capacity to argue from my dad because he'd argue until the cows come home. When he got boxed into a losing position, 'Well, that can't be because of this, and that can't be because that, and no, Dad. That doesn't work because this,' he would go like a rocket, and he'd go up and he'd land in a different position. Taking it, forgetting the argument he'd been having for an hour and start all over again something brand new, because he was losing that one. So, I learnt to argue

because my dad was taking dumb positions. Great guy, but he took dumb positions, and more often than not losing to his 13, 14-year-old son. 15-year-old didn't get better. So, they got the compassion through my mum and the capacity to argue for my dad. So, it just seemed -- you know, and the music just made so much sense. I mean, I've never, I've yet to hear a song by a capitalist singing about the benefits of capitalism that anybody put any stock or trade in.

SG [02:51:34] I don't know.

JK [02:51:35] I don't think there are any.

SG [02:51:36] Not too likely, no, that's true.

JK [02:51:37] Yeah, so I wrote one.

SG [02:51:39] Oh I see.

JK [02:51:40] Yeah. Oh, It's Oh So Nice to Be a Capitalist. I still have the -- 'It's oh, so nice to be a capitalist. Live in my house up on the hill, counting my money and playing with my stocks and drinking and eating my fill.' And it goes on and on about seven or eight stanzas. So, I wrote songs and played guitar and the -- you can't sing passionately about making a lot of money. It just doesn't go together.

SG [02:52:04] No, that's true.

JK [02:52:05] You know, they're not compatible.

JK [02:52:07] But you put your own music to the service of the labour movement lots of times, too. I mean, I was just looking the other day at a photo that's on the web of some of the early days of Miners' Memorial Day. There you are, 1987, up in front of the crowd with the guitar singing. I don't know what you're singing.

JK [02:52:24] Yeah, beat the box just enough to, yeah. Just played a lot of labour songs, you know, the --wrote a bunch. That probably had something to do with my brother by then. But at the time I was like, I bought my first guitar at -- I made the mistake of getting an electric guitar, a Harmony, to begin with. It was a hollow body electric, so it had some volume, but not much. I never could afford an amplifier.

SG [02:52:50] I was going to say.

JK [02:52:51] Yeah, I didn't have much money for an amplifier, so there I'm thinking, 'Maybe this doesn't make any sense.' So, then I sold that for whatever I got for it, and I bought myself an acoustic, and that worked a lot better. Then years later, a friend of mine, she had had the Yamaki, which I still have. It's a great, basically a Martin copy, and it's got great sound. Bought it off of her for \$100, and I was over there playing it and she said, 'You know what, you don't -- your guitars crappy.' She says, 'You play this way better than I ever could. If you give me \$100, it's yours.' And I said, 'Well, you got yourself a deal.' And so, I bought the Yamaki, which I still have.

SG [02:53:32] You still have it, eh?

JK [02:53:33] Oh yeah, it's still my main instrument.

SG [02:53:35] That's still part of your daily life and whatnot.

JK [02:53:38] Yeah. So, we were camping out for two months in our North Van condo before we moved to a townhouse in South Surrey now, we've come back the Lower Mainland, and the Yamaki is still sitting there, and I still bang the box.

SG [02:53:55] Good. Also in your early life, you did a lot of skilled work and whatnot, finishing, carpentry.

JK [02:54:02] Yeah.

SG [02:54:02] All that kind of thing. Do you miss not doing that, or do you find a way to get back to it?

JK [02:54:07] Well, once I retired from the CAW, I mean, I had time on my hands. So, I built myself a -- we just sold our place in Half Moon Bay. It's a 4000 square foot house and a 1250 square foot workshop, and so I just sold that. We're now moving to a 3100 square foot townhouse in South Surrey Morgan Heights. So, I got back into doing a lot of work, and then after I retired from the CAW, I spent a couple of years, two years as the Executive Director for the World Peace Forum. Then I got back into doing construction and ran my own construction company here and up there, until I severed my shoulder, which put me out of commission. It was getting a bit boring anyway, so yeah, but I had a good-sized workshop and while I was doing that, music took second fiddle, but now I'm back to doing music.

SG [02:55:19] Good.