Interview: Peter Burton (PB)
Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)
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KN [00:00:05] Monday, November 28. We're here to interview Peter Burton, who was the president of CASAW (Canadian Association of Smelter and Allied Workers) in 1976 in Kitimat when the wildcat strike occurred. Peter, maybe you can tell us a bit about your background, where you were born, your family. Did you have a union or a progressive background in your family or at home or school? Talk a bit about what you did before you came to work at Alcan.

PB [00:00:31] Sure. Well, for what it's worth, I was born in Pembroke, Ontario, which is in the Ottawa Valley. When I was about two months old we moved to Toronto. My father was just getting demobilised from the army.

PB [00:00:47] My father was actually overseas in the First World War, and then he was in the Army for six years. Five years or six years in the Second World War. I really grew up in Toronto. My father was a senior, I guess ultimately, a senior bureaucrat with the City of Toronto. He was the traffic engineer for the City of Toronto, when he retired in 1961 at 65 because he was born in 1896.

PB [00:01:18] It certainly wasn't a unionised household. I do remember my first summer job. Surprisingly, it was for the City of Toronto. CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) was going to go on strike and I was distressed because I wanted to make money. I remember my father saying, if they go on strike, you go on strike and never cross the picket line.

PB [00:01:41] It wasn't that—I guess I would say—though again if you think he was born in 1896, he got an engineering degree. He came from a class that was not by any means affluent but relatively unusual in the Canada of the period. He was a fairly liberal, tolerant guy. I was raised in a, what one would call a, certainly for the period, you know, there wasn't the racist attitudes that are now more subterranean, but then were quite prevalent and prominent.

PB [00:02:22] I went to university, and starting in high school, I [unclear] war. Again, remember the Vietnam War, which a lot of people don't remember much of now, was a fairly polarising experience for a lots of us, was a radicalising experience because it forced people to ask questions that really if you grew up in the fifties and early sixties that weren't really being asked. The Vietnam War forced people to confront a bunch of questions and for lots of us, you know, became at least an introduction to more progressive or left wing politics. I guess, you know, I certainly wasn't very well formulated, but I was just working in Toronto. I graduated from Western in '66 and then I worked for a couple of years. I actually worked at Expo '67 for a whole year. I started well before the fair and worked until after it ended doing different things. I was 21 at the time. Then I went back to school. I went to U of T for a year and just discovered, you know, the only thing that really motivated me at the time was playing basketball.

PB [00:03:43] After that I worked a bit. I came out west with no great plan. I had some friends who were going to graduate school at UBC. I ended up staying with them. The first

job I got out here through one of them was volunteering and essentially running (and for a modest salary) the Vancouver Committee to Aid American War Objectives, which was was assisting draft dodgers and deserters. I did that from about September of 1969 till around September of 1970. Around September of 1970, I started working at the Georgia Straight writing, essentially writing, editing. I don't know if anybody remembers a guy named Tony Tugwell who is now deceased, but the Georgia Straight went two issues a week, which was a lot of work. When I first started they paid $0.50 a column; I have a tendency to be verbose, so it was good for me. I worked there for a couple of years.

PB [00:04:55] It was an interesting period because we had a very diverse group of people around the Georgia Straight. You had a sort of more or less hippie, although you had those of us who thought we were really kinda hard lefties or something. In retrospect, it's, you know, a bit out of the Doonesbury cartoon (laughter)—the middle class kids telling working class people how left wing they should be.

PB [00:05:19] In the course of that I met a woman who eventually—well, it was a split in the Georgia Straight. Dan McLeod still the publisher. There was an alternative forum called the Georgia Grape, really stupid name. I met a woman and so I continued working at that. I met a woman and we started living together. She got a job teaching in Kitimat and I barely knew where Kitimat was. I remember going and finding somebody's graduate thesis on the urban design of Kitimat and how insane it was to build flat roof houses in a place that gets the weather that Kitimat gets. Anyway, we moved to Kitimat and she was teaching in the high school there. Neil Warboys and his wife Jackie were teachers in high school at the time.

PB [00:06:17] I got a job first working for Eurocan Logging. Eurocan was a Finnish-built pulp mill that had started a few years earlier in Kitimat. I didn't have any desire to go to work for Alcan. I knew enough about Alcan and read a bunch of stuff about Alcan and its mining practises in Australia and dispossession of the Australian Aboriginal people from their land so they could access the bauxite. Alcan's withdrawal from Jamaica when the Manley government sort of wanted more money for the bauxite from Jamaica. That's why they moved Australia so I didn't really want to work for Alcan.

PB [00:07:07] Anyway, I worked in the logging and I got laid off there and I got a job in the pulp mill working for Eurocan pulp mill. I worked there for a while and then I got recalled to the logging. I actually think I was probably about that time, how old was I—27 or 28. I smoked a lot, drank too much. I was overweight and I think I was probably the worst chokerman in the history of coastal logging. It was still an interesting experience to work, you know, in the bush. I went back to the logging. I had a minor operation. The IWA went on strike. I went away. They said, okay, you can come back to work. I was actually in California so I sent them a telegram saying I quit.

PB [00:07:55] When I came back I needed a job because by then my then wife was pregnant and Eurocan had just laid off a whole bunch of people from the pulp mill because of recession. Alcan was hiring so I went down, applied for a job and I got hired at Alcan in 1974. I moved to Kitimat in '73 and I got hired at Alcan in '74. I think it was around September, October '74.

PB [00:08:35] Because of the background working for the Straight, etcetera, I ended up fairly quickly getting involved in the union at the level of—first I became a shop steward, which I'd never been before. CASAW had replaced the Steelworkers as the union. There'd

been an effort in—first by—in 1970, which was unsuccessful. CASAW had replaced the Steelworkers I think in '72—raided whatever.

PB [00:09:12] It was where I met lots of people who were on both sides of that divide. The unions still had a, basically a Steelworkers' structure—steward, chief steward, an elected business agent, a guy named Rory Leblanc who'd been a Steelworkers' supporter in the divide, but who was actually a pretty decent guy and a pretty effective, you know, elected business agent. He was the full time staff person. In the Steelworkers' structure, before this, they had a regional director, etcetera, but they still had an elected business agent, as I understand it.

PB [00:09:50] Anyway, I started writing the union newsletter because I had a background, etcetera. Kitimat at that time, you know, they had a very high turnover rate. Even during a period of recession or retrenchment, Alcan chose not to lay people off, but rather just to redeploy them.

PB [00:10:20] I got hired and ended up being moved around to different jobs. One of the discoveries for me was a lot of people don't like that. They like to work at one place and stay in the same place. On the other hand, I like to move around and, you know, I have the attention span of a hummingbird. I like to go somewhere else and learn something else all the time. I got in the space of the sort of '74 to '75 period—I think in there I might well have become a guy who left and I became, got appointed, I think, as Treasurer as well of the local union.

PB [00:11:02] I also got the opportunity to work in a lot of different parts of the of the operation and get some sense of what it was like. The only place that really I never worked (I mean I went through lots) were the potlines. At that time there were one, two, three, four, six, eight—eight potlines. The workforce, which I think now is around 1,100 or 1,200 hourly paid workers, was about 2,000 or 2,100. Now, I gather it's—I don't know if I'd go so far as to say clean, but it was definitely not a very clean operation at the time from a worker health and safety perspective.

PB [00:11:48] Anyway, so I got more involved in the union and they were bargaining in '75 when the wage and price control program was introduced by the federal government. For anybody who remembers, inflation was running at very high rates. Alcan historically had always paid essentially the same as the pulp unions—pulp and paper unions. At the time, of course, it was still the Pulp Brotherhood and the Paper Workers Union. They were still two separate unions; they hadn't yet merged. There was also, of course, the PPWC (Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers Union of Canada), which was in Prince Rupert. There was the PPWC competing with the two pulp and paper worker unions. They settled; I don't remember what the numbers were.

PB [00:12:45] Then the Alcan bargaining got caught by the initiation of the wage and price controls. The union, of course, was demanding what it had always had from this perspective, which was the same level of wage increase as the pulp and paper workers had received. Alcan took the position that they couldn't legally do that. It was quite significant for the company—becomes a feature in any dispute—became a feature in the dispute in Quebec in 1976, which was at the same time and went on for much longer than the wildcat strike in Kitimat.

PB [00:13:25] Anyway, I became involved in the union. The union essentially settled for, if I recall correctly, on the basis that they would appeal for an exemption and Alcan would

support them. I may be wrong on that part—for an exemption from the restrictions because of the historical relationship to the Anti-Inflation Board. They lost that. Then as a result of that there was a collective. agreement with the maximum rates established by the Anti-Inflation Board. That was the source of significant discontent.

PB [00:14:06] The other feature of—because of the nature of aluminum production and the technology, Alcan was not on a day-to-day level a particularly hard employer, in contrast, for example, to the mining industry in British Columbia at the time. Because they're vulnerable to not just the organized acts of sabotage but to individual discontent could actually cost them a lot of money without necessarily getting caught and without necessarily agreeing very much. At a day-to-day level, but as a general kind of theme, the flipside of that is they were very tough on sort of big issues. They were also—I can't remember the numbers, but they had thousands of employees across Canada, the bulk of them in Quebec, but they also had manufacturing plants.

PB [00:15:01] They're very sensitive to, if they did something here, that would have a ripple effect across the country for all of the different bargaining units. You know, they had multiple bargaining units and thousands of employees across Canada. There's a lot of discontent after that settlement. A lot of people felt they'd been cheated or robbed of what they were historical expectations. Then there was also just for—I don't know if I could—if I even understood at the time, a growing kind of discontent with what was going on. Again, you had a very skewed workforce.

PB [00:15:43] You had a workforce that had probably only 20, 25 percent of them had been there since the early fifties when it first started operating. Then you had the great bulk of the workforce was relatively young. There was almost nobody in the sort of—if you look at the seniority curve from almost no one from four years to 18 years kind of thing. It was a very skewed workforce and I think one of the products of younger people, and it's all male and they're starting to try to introduce some women in the workforce, which is a whole interesting side story about how difficult—nothing that would surprise anyone thinking of the times. Inherently, younger men (laughter)—there's a reason they're dangerous in the world. You know, they have lots of energy and ambition and not that bright. There was just kind of growing discontent, which I wouldn't tie directly to the outcome of the '75 bargaining. Maybe some relationship, but also just the day-to-day level of perception that Alcan was treating people more harshly than it had in the past, tightening up around a bunch of issues, so that you had kinda of the two things going on at the same time.

PB [00:17:08] In any event, there were elections for president coming up in '76. I'd only been there two years. I had people encouraging me to run. I don't know; I've never been, personally, I've never been very ambitious. I probably have an ambitious personality, but not a focussed ambition, if that makes sense. Anyway, I ran for president and I ended up running unopposed. The guy who had been the president decided not to run, so I got elected. Did I run unopposed? No, somebody ran against me and I won. So I became the president and I came from a relatively early '96—.

KN [00:17:50] '76?

PB [00:17:54] '76 sorry. Rory stayed on as business agent, which was fine. He and I had our differences. He was older, probably 15, 20 years older than me, certainly more experienced than me. You know, Alcan always believed that the—anyway, so, one of the things when I ran for president, I said we would try to, you know, rectify the injustice that

people perceived had been done to them in '75, but didn't have a particular plan of how that was to be done. Alcan and others always believed that we actually—that there was a big plan to have the wildcat strike. Would that that were true. It actually started on June 2nd, I think 1976. It started with—as a result of some very specific local discontent. Again, I had a hard time then separating out the local and specific discontents of different parts of a large workplace from the broader discontent with how people perceive being treated in the '75 bargaining. I think the two, in a sense, coalesced to create a significant level of discontent amongst the workforce broadly, amongst the membership broadly.

PB [00:19:32] It started with, in—I can't remember the name of the site—it was a huge welding shop. You had several hundred welders working there and they refused to work. The company called us; we were out. Talk to the guys and Wiho Papenbrock, who later went to work for the BCGEU (British Columbia General Employees Union) and is now retired, living in Cologne, as I understand. Wiho was the vice-president or secretary-treasurer of the union. Yeah, I can remember Wiho and I got high and saying to him, 'Well, I don't know where the hell we're going on this. It's kinda exciting eh?' (laughter) Anyway, so, then the guys in the tradesmen and the mechanic shops and a bunch of the other shops, which were three-quarters of a mile away, they decided to down tools too. That's really when it began. It escalated very quickly and eventually there was a general walkout. I think that all kinda happened within the space of about, if I recall correctly, in the space of about six or eight hours.

PB [00:20:46] Then, of course, there's only one road into the plant. They put a picket line up at the plant. The company had, you know, its managerial staff and was able to keep the place operating. The reason I mentioned the Steelworkers' strike and the orderly shutdown, if you have a disorderly shutdown, a cold shut as opposed to a hot shut, then the costs for the company of restarting the operation escalate dramatically. What you would have is the metal freezing in the pots; there'd be great damage to them, the metal freezing in the casting furnaces, etcetera. They were very anxious to avoid having to shut down in that fashion. To some extent, so were we because, of course, if you have that kind of a shutdown, people are going to be out of work a lot longer than they would be if you have an orderly shutdown where the start ups still will take time. Quite in contrast to pulp mills, which at the time had lots of wildcat strikes. Harmac being the most famous because you could actually shut it down, start it up relatively easily in a pulp mill. The smelter simply wasn't. You know, that's a very different dynamic.

PB [00:22:01] Now, they were bargaining and we spent some time in contact with them. They were bargaining, the union representing Alcan smelter workers in Quebec, and the smelters were, if not exclusively, primarily in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean central region. The Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region was the only region of Quebec that voted yes in the first referendum. It's overwhelmingly Francophone and only about three percent of the people at the time were, had English as a first language. They had a long history of, with Alcan and with Price paper. Until 1964, the collective agreements for the workforce were only printed in English. You have an overwhelmingly fresh workforce and the collective agreements were only printed in English. You had multiple levels of hostility to Alcan and deep levels of seniority. People who'd worked multi-generational workforce—so a very different dynamic in a place like Kitimat that's both new and younger, etcetera. We spent some time with them, met with them a bit. Anyway, the wildcat started. First, if I recall, they weren't on strike I think when we started, but they went out fairly soon after and I'll describe what they did as I understand it.

PB [00:23:36] The picket line went up and most people supported the strike. We received an order very quickly from the Labour Relations Board to return to work. I was young and perhaps more idealistic than I am now—certainly younger and certainly, anyway. We held a vote and the vote was overwhelmingly to stay on strike. Paul Weiler, who was then the chair of the Labour Relations Board, concluded that they'd made a serious effort by responding to Alcan's entreaties and moving too quickly and giving an order to return to work when the emotions were still running very high. Rory LeBlanc spoke against staying out. Rory, who was the business agent, spoke against [unclear] but the vote was overwhelmingly to stay out. Then Alcan filed the order in court as the Code allowed and we were served with that.

PB [00:24:57] So we held another vote. I don't know if you covered this in your review but there were four big disputes in the sixties—I can't remember—like Lenkurt Electric, Atlas Walk, etcetera but it was also Fisher. Paddy Neale went to jail for three months out of the Atlas Walk—or one of those strikes. It was also a Fishermen's Union strike. Homer Stevens and Steve Stavenes etcetera were the leaders of the Fishermen's Union and they held a vote on whether or not to obey—this is a pre NDP labour code—whether to obey a court order to go back to work. Homer Stevens and Steve Stavenes seems got a year in jail for contempt. One of the things about contempt is there's no good time remission for it. It's not like any other form of that service. You are sent to jail for criminal contempt. So, I knew that. I'd been reading enough labour history to know that. I was kinda somewhat conscious of what was going on.

PB [00:26:04] Anyway, Alcan started bringing in supervisory staff from Quebec and bringing them into the smelter by boat or by helicopter. They didn't really offer any inducements, but some of the membership started one way or another, by boat or by helicopter, going to work in the smelter. Then they would stay; once you went in you basically—it would have been too dangerous for them to then come back and be around town. It was an interesting workforce; there were lots of Canadians of Western European origin, I guess I would say. The workforce was really split between a big German community, a big Portuguese, mostly—almost exclusively from the Azores, a big Italian community and a big Greek community. They were all represented in the workforce. Some of the early days of Alcan, some of the stories were great. You know, inter ethnic rivalries at soccer games that they would play, you know, all post war until they started up.

PB [00:27:21] Some of the people, some of our own members started going to work and they were able to maintain operations throughout. The picket line—well, first of all, was barricading the road. It wasn't just a picket line, it was blocking the road. You would—and various times of the day or night over the first period there would be anywhere from, you know, 30 or 50 to six or 700 people. You know, a lot of it became party time. That went on for a while. You know, the RCMP—and I can't remember his name—a staff sergeant for the RCMP. He was actually a pretty decent guy. I mean, we met with him. Then Labour Board—Peter Cameron and I were acquaintances, since we've become good friends. Peter was a member of the Labour Board, so he was asked to go up and talk to me about, you know, what were we doing, what we were trying to do, on Weiler's behalf. He and I laugh all the time because he said, 'What's your strategy?' I said, 'Hey, what's a strategy?' It was really in some senses quite an emotional reaction, the coalescence of hostility towards the company and towards the federal government because of the Anti-Inflation Board stuff, and then had a vocal grievances coming together to create quite an emotional atmosphere. Then you have the sense of people being pushed around by the Labour Board and the courts, etcetera. So we had two votes. We had another vote; and again, even more people voted to stay out now. I subsequently went to law school and

understand the problems from a legal perspective with that particular approach. I probably understood legally at the time, you know, it was a bit of so what.

PB [00:29:23] It went on for quite a while. You know, anybody who's ever been through one of those events, all sorts of stuff happens. People do things. People you don't know do stuff. There were people on our side who would, you know, cross the river because there was a—not a huge river, but they'd have to go up river and they'd cross and go into the smelter and do some damage at night. Sometimes they'd get caught. The people that caught them would say, 'Look, you know, you're going to go to jail.' You know, because it's a small town (10,000, 12,000 people or whatever it was) people knew each other, lots of cross boundary friendships, as it were. Then I think (I mean you'll have the records) I think it was the night of about June 12, you know, so it had been going on for about 11 days. There was a point where the company kind of made an initiative to see if they were to try and explore if there was any room to kind of resolve it in an amicable way. I guess in retrospect, I would say I just lacked the wit or wisdom to try to take that further. I mean, who knows whether it would have been productive, but we didn't go down that road.

PB [00:30:42] Just as a sidelight, I got a call from a guy, I think his first name was Bill, (but I may be wrong about that) Bill Montgomery, who was a very senior official in the Steelworkers Union, asking if they could help. The reason that he called me is—I don't remember, but I think his wife was my father's second cousin or something like that so I'd actually met him when I was young through that. 'No we don't need any help the Steelworkers.' Perhaps we did, but again I didn't have the, you know, the wit to recognise it.

[00:31:21] So it carried on and then on the morning of the twelfth (I think it was the morning of the twelfth, thirteenth). Well, the night before there'd been hundreds of people, of course consuming lots of alcohol, with that. At the picket line or at the barricade on that morning, I was sitting in a car with Mickleburgh and a woman named Joan McClellan, who was a CBC reporter for Prince Rupert. We were sleeping. There were maybe 30 odd people there. It was about 4:30, 5:00 o'clock in the morning. Through the mist you could see this long stream of headlights coming out from those RCMP cars and buses. I don't know how many officers they had—a lot. They were fully decked out in riot gear and, you know, the shields and batons. They had dogs; they had guys with shotguns. The media guys didn't know what was going to happen. The only reporter who was—the only two reporters there were Joan and Rod. All the television guys were trapped behind the thing. So there's no footage, actually, which is unfortunate. My notes just note the television guys had basically slept in. They didn't think anything was going to happen and so they missed it, which was too bad. It would have made dramatic footage. We got—I got out of the car and they came in and they said, you know, from a distance away, 'You have five minutes to surrender.' It wasn't like disperse and go away. 'You have five minutes to surrender.' I remember a guy named Ross Slezak, (he's dead now) looked like Hagar The Horrible—a really nice guy Ross. He picked up a big wrench and yelled, 'Charge!' I said, 'Ross, put that fucking thing down and fuck off, will you! This is not a time for humour.' (laughter) You know, these guys don't look like they're into the irony of the situation. Well, I'm sure I didn't say that, but that's how I felt. This is like, you know—so we surrendered.

PB [00:33:40] They put us in a bus. They drove us up to Terrace, and threw us in jail in Terrace. We were there for many hours or something like that. Then we were released and given about four hours of emergency relief if the pumping station went down. What he told me was that these guys— none of whom I knew, none of whom were active in the union— had actually planted dynamite charges around both and were ready to blow them up but

they wanted my permission to blow them up. I said, 'You know, even if you hadn't come and asked me, nobody would have believed that I didn't know about it and I'd go to jail for a long period of time. You know, I'm not totally stupid.' I said, 'But way more fundamentally than that, there's 20, I think 2,500, 2,500 hourly paid workers. They'll be out of work maybe forever, but certainly for a long period of time. They'll make that decision. Not some group of guys who anonymously want to blow it up.' It was very clear that somehow the police had found out about it because very soon after that there were sniffer dogs all over the place and they, you know, were in fact, one of the guys who was active in the union, the dogs found traces of smell of dynamite in his car. He got hassled for a while. I mean, that was probably the most dramatic example, but there's lots of that kind of stuff going on during that period.

PB [00:35:10] Anyway, once the police released us, we carried on. I think the numbers of people of our own members who were going to work started to increase. The company was able to maintain not so much production, but they were able to maintain the operation. Out of the arrests, 31 of us, 31 or 32, were charged with mischief. Mischief under the Criminal Code is a hybrid offence. It can be a misdemeanour or it can be a more serious charge with the sentence varying depending— maximum sentence varying. I think six months and it's a misdemeanour and five, up to five years, etcetera. We were charged with mischief.

PB [00:35:59] The strike carried on until, I think—what the 21st of June we'd receive another court order. We had a vote. The vote was a tie. The company—it's funny, they never, and I'm sure others never believed it actually was a tie. Under Robert's Rules of Order, I got to cast the deciding vote and I said, 'No, we're going back to work. It's over.'

PB [00:36:26] Kent Rowley, who was the head of the Canadian Confederation of Unions with which CASAW was affiliated, had come out some time, I think, after the arrests. For those who, you know, Kent was a—despite his differences with the mainstream labour movement and the CLC, he was quite an unusual guy. He'd gone to prison in Quebec. He was in the Communist Party. He spent three years during the war in an internment camp. Then, when after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, they released all the communists from the internment camp, he joined the Canadian Army, went overseas in the Canadian Army as other members of the Communist Party of the period did. He'd split from the Textile Workers Union because in his view they were quite corrupt and he and Madeleine Parent formed the Canadian Textile Workers Union. He led some long strikes and Madeleine was convicted of seditious contempt, which was overturned. But Kent, I remember him telling he had a meeting with Maurice Duplessis. Duplessis said, 'If you don't end the strike, then we'll do this.' He said, 'We're not ending the strike.' He said, Duplessis said, 'Well, you're going to jail then for three months.' That's what he did. He ended up getting a three month sentence out of that strike.

PB [00:37:46] He told a great story, by the way, about an illegal strike they had. Anyway, it went on and a Quebec police guy came in and said, 'If you don't end the strike, we're going to, you know, bring out the guns.' Kent said, 'Every man in Beauharnois County is a hunter and they hate Dominion Textiles Company and if you start shooting, none of you will get out of here alive.' (laugher) The police said, okay, we'll give you safe escort out if you agree, (unclear) we'll give the, you know, a safe (unclear) we'll withdraw our picket lines if you do this. He said, 'So I got on the front motorcycle and as soon we got to picket line and I hopped off and we beat the shit out of the cops.' (laughter) That's why he got three months in jail. He was there; his view was that we shouldn't settle and that I made the wrong decision in voting (unclear). As long as we had the support of a third of the

workforce we could win this battle. Well, I disagreed and so that was the end of the strike and we went back to work.

PB [00:38:43] The next day Alcan filed contempt of court (unclear) initiated court proceedings against, I think about—the union and about 34 of us. They fired the law firm that had represented them and replaced them with what is, with Russell and Dumoulin, now Fasken Martineau Dumoulin. The timing became quite significant in the way things played out. I think the strike ended on June the twenty-first and they filed the contempt papers on June the twenty-second, I think, the day after the strike ended, after the vote ended. The union and myself and some, not all of the executive, and the people who had been more active during the dispute, more active on the picket lines. They also—and I don't remember the timing, but not too long after they initiated a lawsuit against the union, myself, Wiho Papenbrock and a guy named Jim Brisebois who was the treasurer, for 1.3 million dollars—against the union and the three of us as individuals for 1.3 million dollars. That was kinda the end of the dispute. The company, despite all of that, started to make efforts to have normalized relations again because on a day-to-day level they were too vulnerable to individual or group hostilities. They wanted to try to normalize relationships and rebuild some relationships. On the one hand, you're being prosecuted and you know and all this other stuff is going on. And oh, they fired—that was the other thing—they fired 30 odd people, including me. So I don't know if you want to stop anywhere?

KN [00:40:46] No.

PB [00:40:50] The first issue up was the terminations. The vice-chair who heard those terminations at the hearing in Kitimat was John Baigent who, you know, was (he's not practising anymore) John's a great lawyer. He's just a great lawyer—a really good guy—but a great, great lawyer. He was the vice-chair. He overturned the terminations and I think substituted six months.

PB [00:41:32] Now, in the interim I had resigned as president and run for business agent and got elected as business agent, which was the salaried job. I was no longer the president that time the legal processes started, I was the elected business agent. John reversed the discharges and substituted six month suspensions. You know, you could have been an argument that because I was on a leave of absence, the company couldn't fire me. I think legally I was wrong. You know, politically it was—politically you couldn't do it and morally it would be wrong to say somehow I should be treated differently than everybody else because I happen to be on a union paid leave of absence, you know. I certainly wouldn't have taken that position then or now.

PB [00:42:31] That was the first thing that was appealed by the Labour Board. Oh, during the strike itself one of the things that happened is we made—I don't know how many but more than a few. There was a lot of media attention to the strike but in Kitimat, at the time, I think we got The Province like three days later. You know, it's well before all the modern telecommunications. CBC News was always a week delayed, like, we didn't, you know, we only got CBC News. We would get lots of media people and the biggest problem was that they had no underwear. They had to, you know, they had to go by clean underwear and stores were running out of clean underwear because all the media guys were buying it all. So there was a lot of media coverage.

PB [00:43:18] We flew down to the Labour Relations Board to various hearings there. We met with Alan Williams, who was then the Minister of Labour. Basically we were pretty obdurate. We kind of knew what we wanted, we kind of knew we weren't going to get it,

but we were pissed off and we worked, you know, at the federal government. I think there was another ruling from the Anti-Inflation Board, just a kind of boots and suspender thing from their side. I remember going from a meeting with Alan Williams. The deputy of labour at the time was Jim Matkin who later went on to do various things. Makin and I are in a taxi cab and we're riding along, cause he's academic— again I really liked Jim—I liked him then and I like him now—but we're riding along and he is explaining to me that if we were doing this in France, here's what would happen and da-da-da. All of those places, we'd actually be legally quite fine, but not in Canada and they were going to crush us. It was all very (laughter)—kind of done in his academic tone. Oh well, what the hell!

PB [00:44:27] Never underestimate, I guess, youthful bravado or something. So you had a question. I remember speaking vaguely—remember speaking at a rally, and I don't remember what I said. You know, we knew we had the support of other unions, but in a sense, if you're in a place like Kitimat, that support is moral. There's not much beyond that.

PB [00:44:59] We also [unclear]. The other interesting thing that happened was for those who remember, there were a variety of sort of left wing groups, In Struggle, led by Charles Gagnon [unclear]. The other one, which was the other Communist Party of Canada, hardly any brains, but the one that a number of people who—.

KN [00:45:19] CPC-ML (Communist Party of Canada-Marxist Leninst)?

PB [00:45:21] Not the CPC-ML, you know, that was Hardial Bains's group. There was another one. They were competing and they all came to town. This was, you know, at various points before and after. In any event, the strike was over. Things were getting back to normal. We had bargaining coming up in 1977 because the collective agreement was expiring. There's an interesting AIB story around that, which actually tells you how [unclear] about access to power.

PB [00:46:01] The next legal proceeding was (and I can't remember the timing of them all in sequence terms) was the criminal trial for mischief. Selwyn Romilly, who's I think still a judge in the B.C. Supreme Court, was the provincial court judge hearing it. They tried me first—logical from their perspective. I don't think it was deliberate—I'm pretty sure it wasn't—but all the evidence that they introduced—you know, maybe in retrospect, knowing more about the legal system than I do, they wanted to lose—I don't know, but all the evidence they introduced were pictures of me talking to the police or me talking to management at the spare gate. They had no evidence that I was actually (this is the trial for mischief) that I personally was actually part of any blockade, which was the mischief. There was one picture in which clearly I was speaking to the crowd, but they couldn't, the witness couldn't identify that it was me. I could tell you it was me. I had my back to the camera, right; so they're on the other side. So I got acquitted of that, of the mischief charge.

PB [00:47:20] They dropped the charges against everyone else. From their perspective, you know, convicting somebody else and letting me walk away with, would have been humiliating, I think. I got to go to the RCMP station and watch them burn the fingerprints and photograph that they'd taken. It was actually a great photograph and I asked the guy for it, but he wouldn't give it to me. Pound sand buddy! (laughter) Anyway.

PB [00:47:49] The company appealed Baigent's decision. We came down for that, a few of us. Don Monroe, who had recently been appointed as a vice-chair of the Labour Relations Board was the vice-chair hearing that and he upheld Baigent's decision. That was the end

of the discipline part. The mischief criminal charge had been resolved with my acquittal. The next issue up was the contempt charge. We had two lawyers, Leo McGrady, who you'll know, and Ian Donald, who is now the, you know, on the B.C. Court of Appeal, has been for a long time and whose dissent was the basis for Supreme Court of Canada's decision on [unclear].

PB [00:48:40] We came down for the contempt thing and I remember either Ian or Leo telling me to bring my toothbrush because I wouldn't be going home for a couple of years. The judge hearing the contempt was Mr. Justice Henry Hutchin, who's since deceased and I think later was on the Court of Appeal. He heard the arguments. Allan McEachern, who later became the Chief Justice of B.C., was the Russell DuMoulin lawyer prosecuting the contempt charge. Mr. Justice Hutchin found that the application for contempt citation had been made the day after the strike was over and that what we had defied was not an order of the court per se, but an order of the Labour Relations Board statutorily treated like an order of the court and distinguished that from the earlier decisions where people have gone to jail for contempt because those were court orders. He found that, in fact, what we were defying was a Labour Relations Board order and that the contempt had essentially been purged by the return to work the day before, which was the issue of Alcan, because they claimed that they had given instructions to their previous law firm to initiate the contempt proceedings before [unclear] that guy went down and blew up the thing and killed a bunch of people. I personally have no doubt he didn't intend to kill anybody. He wasn't—he was threatened damage to Peggy Witte, you know, her horrible stuff, and CASAW, which was the union there, because I bargained up there when Falconbridge still owned it before they sold it to her. Again, it's a reflection of individuals expressing their anger and, you know, giving a little insight into partisan operations in wartime. You know, people come out of the woodwork that you wouldn't expect to be the people doing that kind of stuff.

PB [00:50:43] Anyway, so the next thing up was the lawsuit for 1.3 million dollars. Now, we were going into bargaining for the 1977 bargaining and I was going to be chair of the bargaining committee. Now, I'd never done any bargaining before. We'd gone through the collective agreement and identified all the things that were wrong with it, which you could do with any collective agreement. I learnt a lot from that round of bargaining. I like to think I learnt a lot because the company said, you know, if there's a problem we're prepared to discuss it and try to address it, but we're not prepared to discuss abstractions that you, as you know, would-be-intellectual think are problems.

PB [00:51:28] We made a vacation enhancement proposal, for example, that looked at the skewed workforce distribution and would have cost them nothing in the three-year term that we were talking about. They explained that it would cost them millions of dollars because if they gave it to us and applied it to a place like the Quebec it would cost them millions of dollars, which reminds me to go back, you'll have to edit this. While we were on strike, they went on strike in Quebec. It was a legal strike but because they'd had experience, they did things like this. They went and they did an absolute—I mean, the hardest possible shot of an aluminum smelter you could possibly have. They essentially wrecked the place. They went into the president's office, told them to get out. They destroyed all the files, but in the hard parts (because they represented office workers there at all the three smelters in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint Jean region) they turned all the acid tanks on and drained the acid—I mean they really did it deliberately, etcetera. Their thesis was that by cranking up the costs so much for restarting the operation that Alcan would more readily meet their demands.

PB [00:52:46] During their strike, once ours had ended, and they sent some guys out—the union sent some guys out to, you know, bolster our morale during the strike and etcetera. One of them they found with the helicopter was planning to pick up some guys. One of them, you know, punched out one of the guys and we got charged and nothing much happened as a result, but, I mean, they were good guys. They were tough. Really tough guys and they really hated Alcan. Kent Rowley and a guy named Wes Passingham and I (who subsequently died, a very good guy) went and we went up to the Saguenay region and went around and went to a bunch of meetings and I can remember my French was passable but if you start drinking vin bleuet at 7:00 o'clock in the morning, at 8:00 o'clock in the morning, it's way better. I don't know if you know what vin bleuet is; it's blueberry wine that they make in that region. We went around—we were up there for three or four days. It was, you know, morale building for them. They were—it was a long and bitter dispute. Alcan, in fact, the way that they had started it had the reverse effect. It probably prolonged the strike by several months. I can't remember how long it was in the end. It became important for us, because it really fuelled the idea that there was a conspiracy between us and them to have the wildcat strike timed around the beginning of their thing. And if you take all your time with taxes [unclear] So you type stuff out and you code them and then it would go and. We had lots of stuff going back and forth explaining what was going on. There wasn't a conspiracy for us to go and run the wildcat strike. It was way more [unclear] whoever it happened to be.

PB [00:54:56] We did the deal. One of the issues that led us to this was, you know—so we've got this 1.3 million dollar lawsuit. When we were doing the ratification of the deal, there was a lot of hostility to the fact that we had settled the 1.3 million dollar lawsuit and the settlement, the company withdrew the lawsuit. We did the discoveries and the lawyer for Russell DuMoulin was a guy named Mike Hunter, who died, sadly, a couple of a couple of years after he retired. He and Kevin O'Neill, who is still with Fasken, in the discovery asked me why we didn't shut the smelter down. They were so delighted with my answer because I said it's a bit like, you know, taking a hostage in a kidnapping. Once you've killed a hostage, you don't really have any bargaining power. They were pretty sure that George Murray, who was the judge during the trial, had it gone to trial, would have found a way to throw me in jail, despite the fact it was a civil matter, because even the Vancouver Police Department's lawyer, after the Gastown riots, I mean is a pretty hawkish law and order guy. We said, you know, no, put it on the bargaining table. You know, the reality—and so at the meeting after, you know, which was quite contentious—I had a guy throw his shop steward badge at me saying, you know, you're a traitor and sell out. I said, 'Look, what is it you would give up to save the union 1.3 million dollars?'

PB [00:56:30] The settlement we entered into, I think the union agreed to pay them $100,000 over a period of time, but it was kind of double or 150,000. Kind of double indemnity for whatever balance if there was another illegal strike during the period that it took to pay off, which was concurrent with the collective agreement. I said, 'Well, what is it you'd give up? What benefit would you give up—a day's vacation, a week's vacation? What is it you'd give up, you know, to save the money? We're not going to go on another illegal strike during this period, most likely, you know.' I still think that was the right judgement from the perspective of the average worker. I mean, from some theoretical union perspective, maybe not. I sat years years later, on a Harmac, as the union's nominee on a Harmac arbitration board and exactly the same issue. I met with the union executive before I started and said, 'The company will settle this for 25,000 bucks and a promise not to do it again.' They said, 'We'll lose the next election if we take that deal.' Well, they all lost the next election anyway because the result of the arbitration cost them, if I recall, 1.4 million, 1.5 million dollars. You know, they've been illegally on strike and cost

the company a lot of money. You know, the law is pretty clear. By that time I was a lawyer and I actually understood this stuff, more clearly. We settled the 1.3 million dollar dispute for that kind of settlement, the '77 collective agreements was ratified.

PB [00:57:59] For myself, by that point, I was kind of burned out. I don't remember—did I quit as business agent or just take a leave of absence—or I went back to work in the smelter for a while. Of course I worked in the labour pool because I'm actually—why did I go to law school because I'm actually not very good at anything with my hands or anything mechanical. I worked all over the smelter. I sandblasted and I worked on the railroad because they had a little internal road. I got to do all sorts of great stuff all over the place and had lots of fun. I worked on a labour pool crew. Then I think I went back to work for the union. By then I was divorced or separated. My ex wife decided to move back to Vancouver with my daughter and I certainly wasn't going to stay in Kitimat. I was done. You know, I'd gone from being very popular to not being that popular, which was fine. I moved to Vancouver and didn't do much for a year. I did some work for CAIMAW, sat on some arbitration boards, that kind of stuff. Then I went to law school starting in 1979.

KN [00:59:15] So Peter, just following the strike, I mean, was there ever any assessment of its impact on wage controls or anything that happened subsequently?

PB [00:59:26] You know, I don't I don't recall ever reading any academic assessments. I tended—it's interesting because I've tended to be almost over time, cynical or to disregard both my own leadership role that I think there were things had I had more experience would have done differently that might have had a more positive result. I tended to see it as as a one-off, something that didn't have any enduring value. I think—partly your questions made me think about that—I think that it certainly was a contribution to the federal government moving off the position. It was a reflection to them, I think, of what would happen if they tried to sustain this program on the long term. You know, I think there's lots of problems with the idea of theory of free collective bargaining in the public sector. The great tragedy—to some extent it is a tragedy—is that, you know, private sector, collective unionisation of the private sector is diminishing to the point, towards the point of invisibility. We're not quite as bad as the Americans, and only in Quebec that it's really sustained by the sort of endorsement of the legal system there, and to some extent, by the adaptation of different models of collective bargaining from the Wagner Act model of collective bargaining—it is pretty uniform everywhere else.

PB [01:01:13] I think, yeah, I think it did probably made a contribution, along with stuff in Quebec, that told the government that it was politically unsustainable. There was also, of course, concurrently a lot of criticism coming from the managerial class who were also caught by it. We're very happy that a guy who worked for—I can't remember which bank it was—told this great story that the president of the bank met with at all the senior executive said, 'I've got news for you. The federal government has lifted the wage control off senior executive who are position and it amounts to [unclear] and the other part of the good news, which I know you all agree with, I'm taking it all' (laughter) and he wanted to know if anybody disagreed and no one did. (laughter) Right. So, yeah, a little less of hierarchical power. I think it did make a contribution. I think the fact that CASAW was not, so, you know, one could ask this question: If it hadn't been CASAW, and it had been part of a larger organization, would it have occurred? Probably. Would it have been sustained for as long? I think the answer is almost absolutely not. If it had been part of a larger national or union or international union, whatever characterisation you want, it wouldn't have been sustained for as long, with the possible exception if it had been part of CAIMAW, the CAIMAW of that period. It would not—even there I don't think it would have been.

PB [01:02:44] For one thing, it would have put the larger organization at risk, financial risk. We know from subsequent events like the Pennyfarthing strike, etcetera, McEachern's contempt findings were very threatening to the welfare of the leadership and staff of the building trade unions way more than to the membership of the building trade unions. I'm not sure if we'd been part of a larger organization that it would have endured for as long as it did. On the other hand, if we'd been part of a larger organization, there may have been, and I'm not, but I have no problem being self-critical. I was relatively young; I was 30 years old. I didn't have a lot of experience. If I was in the same situation now, I might not do the same things, but if I would, I would have seen that there were some opportunities to make some progress that would have been better than what the result was for the average worker. I mean the union as an organization is important, but the union's purpose is to represent workers, it's not to sustain itself as an organization and provide jobs for its members, just as its purpose is representation of its members. In a broader sense, I guess to try to represent a progressive force. I mean, we forget that when Dave Barrett got elected as the president of the, as the leader of the NDP, he was opposed by the entire trade union movement who saw him as not, you know, it was not [unclear] again. Those of us who saw ourselves as being on the left of them saw the trade union movement as being on the right wing of the NDP, you know, at the time. Of course, it was primarily a private sector union movement at the time. I think, I guess I would say it had mixed results.

PB [01:04:52] It was certainly applauded and represented a genuinely on emotional level reaction of ordinary working people to what they saw as a series of events. I think it probably played some role in the assessment of it but, you know, it was in '76, it was '77 when they made the change, and in '78. It certainly didn't change the federal government's view at the time, but probably, I think it probably had some contribution at least to the decision making that this kind of thing couldn't be sustained.

PB [01:05:29] It probably had another contribution in, one sense. If you look at the Socred wage control program that was introduced in '82 and ran through till Vander Zalm and then was reinstated in a different form in '90, the form of it was much more clever than the form of AIB.

KN [01:05:54] Are you talking about the Compensation Stabilization program?

PB [01:05:56] The Compensation Stabilization program ran at two levels: the guideline level and the regulation level. It was always clear to everybody that the regulations would be more punitive than the guidelines [unclear] there was never any regulation. Everybody settled under the guidelines, including, you know, the unions that denounced them and da-da-da. Everybody did because from government's perspective, I think the governments learnt, or at least the B.C. governments learnt, was even those formulations in a sense create their own rigidity. If you say the maximum allowable is this, well that's the platform and everybody is going to try and get above it. It reduces from government's perspective, flexibility; from the unions' perspective, it also reduces flexibility and you can argue whether that's good or bad. I'm not sure people learnt a bunch of things from that period of which this was a part. You know, I remember Mordecai Briemberg saying, at the time, that the question with these kind of events is did they contribute to some broader learning.

PB [01:07:04] You can say that's not the only question; there's multiple questions. I think in that sense it ended up being a bit of a one-off. I don't think it contributed, again, because CASAW was not part of the BC Federation of Labour, etcetera. You know, if the BC Federation of Labour and its unions adopted this as a thing that they would have been

encouraging the Confederation of Canadian Unions so there wasn't much incentive in the kind of the organization of the labour movement to take this and use it as a broader teachable moment or whatever.

PB [01:07:41] I think it had an importance at the time. I don't think it had a huge enduring importance except when you look again at the long continuity of labour history in British Columbia. Events like that really were—I don't think they are anymore, I don't think they have been really since then, or at least since the end of the wildcat strikes in the pulp unions—part of a long history of worker eruption in very much of a similar fashion, at least as I understand it. When you look back to, you know, 1904, the Dunsmuir coal mining stuff. Lots of them were losing battles, but nonetheless they were still events that that affected the way people saw the world and made political judgements.

KN [01:08:32] I imagine that that's exactly why people today in Kitimat want to commemorate that event as they have with the plaque, because looking at B.C. Labour history, they would see it as a very significant moment.

PB [01:08:46] As a continuity, as part of the continuity—.

KN [01:08:47] Of work.

PB [01:08:48] Yeah, exactly.

KN [01:08:49] Also the government because they didn't like the way they were being treated.

PB [01:08:54] You've probably read E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class. What's striking about that (and you could argue he's wrong) but that was the development of a class consciousness of the working class as a working class and as a vital entity in its own. There's a, you know, a book out now called Chavs, which is how did we go from seeing working people as vital and important on their own to seeing working people as chavs, which is the English term for, you know, and which mixes the lumpenproletariat with the proletariat and how did we, how did that happen ideologically.

PB [01:09:35] You know, I've worked really since 1991 for government, and I have way fewer friends everywhere (laughter) even on the government side. Probably, may never had any friends. To me, conservative as they often were, the diminution of private sector unionisation, the inability of union organizing to penetrate the new sectors of the economy means it's an open playing field for the most reactionary forces in our society. There's not a balancing countervailing pressure that is, broadly speaking, progressive with all its contradictions and problems and challenges. Public sector unions (I've spent the last, a long time working around that) are inherently conflicted by, you know, their dual or triple roles, whereas private sector unions are not. You know, in a sense, it's a different model from my perspective.

PB [01:11:01] The arc of the laws turning in favour of collective bargaining at a time when private sector unionisation is disappearing is bizarre. You should have different forms of representation. If the union can demonstrate that 20 percent of the workforce, or 25 percent of the workforce, want some form of representation, then the employer has an obligation to at least discuss with them—maybe not bargaining—maybe the result in Fraser for agricultural workers in Ontario. If it can demonstrate that it's got 50 percent, then the employer has a higher obligation. If it can demonstrate it's got 70 percent it has

something, what would we would call that? if you don't do something like that, we're going to carry on the way we are, where as the resource industries shrink less of us of the workforce become unionised. In an economy like British Columbia, where in the private sector it's really, you know, Alcan and whatever it is now, and whoever it is that now runs the smelter in Trail.

PB [01:12:01] You know, there's no really big employers anymore; there's small employers. Fifty, a hundred, a few hundred at the most, so you're only going to have small bargaining units. Those employers see the form of unionisation and the culture that we've developed out of the big industrial model of trade unionism, those employers actually see that as terribly threatening to their economic viability and competitive markets. I don't see people thinking about alternatives. I see us all locked into a kind of Wagner Act model and anything else is not viable. Whereas the result is the public sector will remain unionised; government will be more or less obnoxious depending on the government at any point in time. The rest of the workforce will be deunionised and not have any of the kind of benefits that clearly flow from representation.

KN [01:13:01] Okay, that's a summary of your thoughts on that. I just have one more question for you.

PB [01:13:07] Sure.

KN [01:13:09] Looking at this question quite generally, we can look at it in respect to what happened in Kitimat in 1976 or generally, as we've been talking about, various aspects of labour history. Why might you think it important for young workers today, particularly those that might be in a union, [unclear] union, to know about labour history, the history of their own union or the history of labour generally?

PB [01:13:42] That's an interesting question. Your question in this context made me think about it somewhat differently. If you look at people like Peter Cameron and I (we're not exclusive people, we're on on the management side), people who work for a public sector union like the BCTF (BC Teachers' Federation), but during the periods, or at least their formative were during this period, none of the young people are ever going to have those experiences again. The level of conflict that characterised B.C. labour history up until the mid seventies or early eighties at the latest has simply ceased to exist. There's very few, relatively few strikes, relatively few days lost. If you take the private sector, even as the percentage, relatively few strikes. The public sector has some. It doesn't take very many to run the numbers up but, you know, if you dig down below the numbers, there's relatively little of the kind of conflict there was—certainly nothing like when Peter was vice-president of CAIMAW. They had a nine month strike at one mine, followed by a six month strike at the other mine against the self acclaimed stormtroopers of the mining industry, Noranda, whatever its parent was.

PB [01:15:04] It's important, it seems to me. You have people going into collective bargaining who don't actually understand (on both sides), who don't actually understand that bargaining is about power positioning and conflict and that conflict is not a bad thing. Conflict is actually necessary. I've said this to people on the employer's side. Why are you so worried about grievances? Grievance actually represents somebody's complaint. Have an effective grievance procedure that works well. You don't want them sitting there listening to employer theory. The longer they sit, they can just go away. Actually means that, you know, you're not understanding your own workforce in terms of trying to become a good employer. From the union perspective, why would you want to sit on them. Okay,

yeah, it costs you money to process them. Find more efficacious ways to process them. I actually think understanding that history in the unionised context for people on both sides is an important element of them understanding how to conduct themselves now. Don't be captive of the past, but there is a past and some of it might return and become part of the future.

PB [01:16:14] Then the other thing, I think, and this is more broadly, is I think not the propaganda from the right, in its mildest form, takes this. Unions were necessary once, but they no longer are. Oh, okay. Well, what were the concrete achievements of the trade union movement since, you know, the 1850s through the period. Yes. The eight hour day. Okay. Well, we no longer have an eight hour day. We have mixed days. Should we have nothing? The other thing, who knows what's going to happen in Europe. The UK is pretty lost, but the Europeans (and I've been to three or four conferences, partly because they're fun to go to) the Europeans do a lot of comparative industrial relations. They do a lot of studies around the world. They do a lot of you know, and stuff. I read a book that came out a few years ago called, The Problem of Intellectual Workers, unionisation in intellectual workers. They have much higher rates of unionisation and different forms of representation than we do. They have social contract forms in one form or another. If we don't understand our own history, then it becomes very difficult to look at the history of others. You know, inter jurisdictional comparatives are very difficult for anybody to do. To do them well you actually have to understand the context. There's a reason Denmark is Denmark and none of the rest of us are. That's because they had 105 year political struggle that achieved a broad social consensus about what the nature of the society would be.

PB [01:17:58] Sure it's under [unclear] It was a particular product and you can't just replicate it, but you could take pieces of it and say, you know, these are aspirational goals. Again, if you don't understand your own history how can you understand the history of others and how you might make progress in your context rather than understanding achievements of others in a contextual—or defeats of others—in a contextual sense. I guess I think there's multiple reasons why, but I think it requires a level of nuance and sophistication that contextualises that history for people and doesn't overly romanticise it. I think a lot of labour history has a tendency to overly romanticise things like the Kitimat event. I think the romantic part is important and, you know, a life without romance is kind of weak. You need to be realistic and realistic as you try to advance goals and even understand why you have those goals or what they are. Otherwise you're trapped in the, you know, that thing that Robbie Williams does. We want more, more, more now, oh, that's enough. You're trapped in that in the long term. That's that's actually not going to get you anywhere. .

Speaker BG [01:19:17] I just wonder if to finish off the interview you mind just kinda of quickly running through your timeline post law school.

PB [01:19:26] I went to law school, I worked part time in my first year, I worked full time for CAIMAW (Canadian Association of Industrial Mechanical and Allied Workers), which then became part of the CAW (Canadian Auto Workers). There was an internal split at CAIMAW and I was on Peter's side—anyway, I had enough. What did I do while I worked for the Professional Employees Association, which is the small professional union in the government for representing mainly the government for a while. I did a lot of work for NABET (National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians) which eventually became, was representing technicians at the CBC, but in private radio and television tended to represent more all-employee-bargaining units. I did a lot of work for them for a

period of time, including some bargaining. Then I was offered— they may have regretted it subsequently—but offered—Joy MacPhail had been the Director of— Coordinator of Collective Bargaining and Arbitration (it was called) at the BCGEU and she quit. Her predecessor had been (unclear) parted company and Joy quit. They offered the job to me. I you know, I said no but the second time they asked me, I said yes. I started work at the GEU a week after Vander Zalm announced the privatisation program and I became lead person for the union on terms of that. I worked there—for a variety of reasons I decided I didn't want to continue working for unions, but I didn't want to go to work for the Socreds. My wife got a job interview after that, then wife. So I moved to Victoria. I worked in Glen Clark's office (he was the Minister of Finance) you know, just on contract for a period of time. Then, you know, was involved in the process that resulted in what's called the Korbin Commission. What was clear was that government had no—the government got its clock cleaned, the new government got its clock cleaned by the HEU and the strike in 1992, somewhat by the BCGEU, even in the public's [unclear].

PB [01:21:49] There was a strike by—I won't say who particularly [unclear] somewhat disparaging—but there was a strike with a big institution, which has two bargaining units, predominatly male bargaining unit and a predominantly female bargaining unit. The issue was, you know, wage equity. The predominantly male side said wage equity means we did exactly the same as they do. In other words, no progress on the question of [unclear] and the NDP had no tools to handle it. No tools in two ways. They had no capacity to influence the outcome. I mean, the only thing they had was the guy who was then the assistant deputy responsible for public service who would be sent out to try to solve these problems—but they didn't have any tools. Anyway, all of that went to the Korbin Commission and I was involved in that. Then I did work after that and I worked for the Public Sector Employers' Council from when it started and sort of later in '73—

KN [01:22:56] Is that '93?

[01:22:57] Sorry, '93. I left government in '97. I spent the last six months of a sort of transition executive for the formation of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Then I contracted, and you know, I've either contracted—and then I ended up oddly, being an employee seconded to the Ministry of Health for quite a number of years through the 2000s and worked primarily, I guess, in health care labour relations in the current structure around PSEC (Public Sector Employers' Council). I've been involved in various other things during that period and other parts. I've mostly worked since '91 for the government, more intensively, you know, in the last few years but I think we've come to a mutual parting of the ways. They don't like me and I don't like them. So, it's okay, it's life. There's an aging out process taking place. People like me are, you know, like most people my age aren't working, and didn't used to work at all. I've certainly been involved in some of the, well, where from the employers' perspective, the restructuring the government's relationship with some of the employers, and from the union perspective, some of the harder things that the Liberals have done.

PB [01:24:25] I think the point that the unions have missed is that depending on who wins the next election, you know, that things will change, but they're not going to change dramatically. They actually have to find a different way to have a dialogue with government about—I can't use the word social contract or social accord or any of those kind of terms the government freaks out. Nobody understands what it means, but actually strike a different kind of accommodation that actually better represents, I guess what I would say is the public interest rather than a purely political definition of it, or a purely unionised definition of the public interest. I think to some extent we're failing In every part of the

public sector at doing things that actually genuinely represents—and some of that of course is funding you can an argue about whether it's adequate or not. I would make this final point: Every single collective agreement in the public sector is focussed almost exclusively on the providers of services and does not in any significant way look at the recipients of public services. There's a line in the Korbin, or two, in the Korbin report, which I wrote, which is that the public sector exists to provide services to British Columbians; it doesn't exist to provide jobs to public sector employees and managers—it provides, to provide services. The measure of the effectiveness of government is how well it provides those services, not how well it treats the people who provide the services.

PB [01:26:06] You can't distinguish the two because the effectiveness of the provision of services is to some extent can reflect on how effectively, how committed, whatever you want to say, the public sector workers are to the services, but that's not the same as their wages and benefits. Those are different kinds of issues. It's a different level of engagement and I think, you know, I can say anything I want because it doesn't matter. I think that successive governments have simply missed that point and the unions consistently missed that point. Despite the rhetoric of their devotion to the public they serve, you know, that's mostly rhetorical when you come down to it so.

Speaker BG [01:26:47] Great.