

Rod Mickleburgh and Ray Haynes Nov 2022.mp4

Transcribed by Donna Sacuta

Rod Mickleburgh [00:00:03] Thanks very much Donna. I must say it seems strange to be up here on the podium of a BC Federation of Labour Convention after all those years I spent down in the trenches covering the Fed for The Sun, the Province, CBC-TV and the Globe and Mail in the days when there actually were labour reporters. But I actually, I'm very proud to be here on this particular occasion and it's inspiring to hear from all those young workers. But to tell you about a very special labour leader, someone who has been part of the BC labour movement, if you can believe it, for most of the past 74 years. And that's longer than Queen Elizabeth reigned over England. And I'm talking about Brother Ray Haynes, head of the BC Federation of Labour from 1966 to 1973, and arguably the most influential leader in history of the B.C. Fed.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:01:05] Under his hands-on leadership, the B C labour movement became by far the most militant in the country as it fought tooth and nail against hard-nosed employers, and the reactionary anti-union government of W.A.C. Bennett. The son of a Vancouver police detective, Ray Haynes started his working life on the greenchain at the long-gone Canadian White Pine sawmill on the Fraser River. It was there that he learned the basics of trade unionism from the IWA. And that's 20-year-old Ray Haynes, second from the left there with the big grin and the hat.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:01:42] A few years later, Brother Haynes was working of all things as a tea blender, whatever that was, in the wholesale division of Hudson's Bay. Fed up with the pay and working conditions, he organized the place. [applause] Signed up 29 of the 30 workers. That skill didn't go unnoticed, and he was soon hired by Retail Wholesale [Union] where he rose to International Representative and then to Secretary Treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour in 1966. The top person was always the Secretary Treasurer in those days.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:02:24] It's hard to imagine today how tough it was for unions back then. It was a time when labour leaders regularly went to jail for defying court injunctions against picketing. Ray liked to recall, "I'd been on the job one day and already 10 more people were in jail for contempt of court." He was often down at the courthouse speaking out against the latest jailing. Labour was in almost constant warfare, strike after strike, protests seemingly every day. And that all-out fight against the terrible anti-union legislation brought in by the Socrids.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:03:03] He galvanised the Federation to treat every dispute as its own, rallying support for unions when they needed it, and enforcing policies that remain today, respect for picket lines and hot boycotts. There's Ray supporting one of the postal worker strikers, I'll say no more. It was a different time, and Ray Haynes and the Federation were everywhere. When he talked, people listened.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:03:32] At the same time, Brother Haynes broadened the interests of the Federation beyond the immediate issues of the B.C. labour movement. The organization backed Cesar Chavez and his courageous campaign to organize California farm workers, California farm workers to the hilt. [applause] And some of you may be old enough to remember that struggle. By declaring a boycott of non-union picked grapes in unionized supermarkets in BC, and it was the most effective such action in North America.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:04:07] As the Vietnam War raged, Ray Haynes was a frequent speaker at peace rallies, opposing the war, like this one at Peace Arch Park. In 1971, he did something remarkable. He called on union workers to stop work for 30 minutes to protest the United States' plan to test an atomic bomb on Amchitka Island in Alaska. Hard-hatted construction workers paraded through downtown Vancouver in response. "For the first time in North America, said Ray, "Workers are downing tools, not over wages, not over working conditions, but because of a danger to all mankind.".

Rod Mickleburgh [00:04:50] But nothing highlighted the powerful force the BC Federation of Labour became under Ray Haynes' leadership. Nothing highlighted it more than labour's four-year fight against Bill 33, one of the most anti-union laws in Canadian history. The Bill created a Mediation Commission that had the power to settle any labour dispute in the province, private sector and the public sector, by binding arbitration. What did the Fed do? They organized a four-year boycott of the Commission. It held and the Commission proved a total failure.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:05:29] There was also constant struggle on the ground. In fact, there was so much industrial relations turmoil that voters finally turned their back on W.A.C. Bennett and elected BC's first NDP government led by Dave Barrett, who changed the face of the province. [applause] Not everyone in the labour movement loved Ray Haynes, it was the BC Federation of Labour after all, and he had to fight off a few challenges over the years, but he won them all. But after seven tumultuous years at the top, he stepped down from the Fed in 1973.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:06:09] But you can't keep a labour man down, and he was soon back in the labour movement, hired by the BC Nurses' Union, a different BC Nurses' Union, to lead a tough organizing drive in BC's long-term care facilities, helping with arbitrations and being a mentor to union members. After that, there was work for more unions and many years as the Sunshine Coast representative for the BC Federation of Retired Union Members, though I'm not sure Ray ever really retired.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:06:41] During his many years on picket lines, legal and illegal, Brother Haynes somehow managed to avoid being arrested. Finally, in 2012, as part of his lifelong commitment to environmentalism, he was among a group of protesters who blockaded a coal train headed to Robert's Bank and was arrested. He was 84 years old and still on the line. [applause] Brothers and sisters, I ask you to acknowledge the great Ray Haynes.[applause] Ray, get up there. Wave!

Ray Haynes [00:07:53] Thank you.

Rod Mickleburgh [00:07:57] Ten words? OK. Go on.

Ray Haynes [00:08:03] Thank you very much. It's all too much for me today, and I was told that I didn't have to speak, but I can see that with that kind of introduction, wow, if I didn't speak, I don't know what I would do. I was here for, as you heard, from 1966 until, 1965 until 1973. I had a terrific life. I have to tell you that. And I try and tell young people now that, "Don't take a job that you're not gonna be happy with just because it pays a bit more money. That's very important that you get a proper salary. But you sure gotta have a job you like.".

Ray Haynes [00:08:52] I used to be able to jump out of bed every morning and rush to the BC Federation of Labour and I enjoyed it very much. I left in 1973 thinking that I would

have a new kind of life and instead I was back very quickly doing labour work on a contract basis and then finally 10 years which were very good with the BC Nurses' Union where I myself and two nurses, organized about 1,000 long-term care workers, and I've always felt good about that.

Ray Haynes [00:09:41] When I quit the BC Federation of Labour, they had to hire two guys to do my job. [laughter] The President and a Secretary Treasurer. I found out later though, that they had to do that to clean up the mess. [laughter].

Ray Haynes [00:10:04] I always thought that this Federation spoke out more than any other Federation. I don't want to belittle the others, but I can tell you that we were the only labour federation or that kind of a group in North America that did such a job on the grape workers' strike. We got invited down to Cesar Chavez's location down in the States. So we, we did a lot. We actually said, "Don't buy the grapes," and everybody else was saying, "Don't buy the grapes." Then we said, "Well, that's not quite enough. Let's not handle the grapes," and we had a couple of produce outfits and we stopped handling them. We convinced the Teamsters to stop handling the grapes and I think that was a contribution, quite a contribution to winning the strike. [applause]

Ray Haynes [00:11:06] I got a kick out of, I got a kick out of the fact that the labour movement was a very important movement, and they only had three labour reporters covering the situation at that time. And now, I don't know what the labour movement's gotta do to get something in the press, but it's very, very difficult, and they don't have anybody really as a labour reporter.

Ray Haynes [00:11:41] So we've still got a big job to do, and I'm very honoured and pleased to be invited here today and I happen to be in town tonight for a poker game, so [laughter] with some old labour friends, it was a way we celebrated the convention. We'd play after the service here, sometimes till two o'clock in the morning. Some guys went longer but I got out at two.

Ray Haynes [00:12:16] It was an honour to be in the Federation at that time. I don't know what else I can tell you, is that I'm just so happy to see all these faces here and everything. Keep up the good fight. I got a couple more years behind me, so I'll try and be with you. [applause]

Ray Haynes [00:12:42] I did get arrested. I never got arrested for all my labour stuff, I don't know why, but I did get arrested for blocking a train down at White Rock, but it was a bit embarrassing because when they tried to get me in the police car, they had a terrible time. My legs were falling apart and all that kind of stuff. And then when we went into the police office, everybody had to lay on the floor. Not me, they gave me a chair. [laughter] So I've had a chair here today and I thank you very much and wish you well. [applause]

Sussanne Skidmore [00:13:20] Thank you! Now give me a hug. Bit smile over here. Thank you for coming. This is a gift from us. It's our BC Fed T-shirt. It's a new one. Brand new just for you. Yep, there you go. Awesome, thank you. [applause]