Interview: Wayne Peppard (WP)
Interviewer: Sean Griffin (SG)
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Transcription: Cathy Walker

SG [00:00:05] Okay, Wayne. I'm going to start with the basic details, your full name, date of birth, that sort of thing.

WP [00:00:10] Yeah. Wayne Robert Peppard May 13, 1947, born in Fort William, Ontario, now Thunder Bay.

SG [00:00:19] I was just going to say Fort William used to be one of those Twin Cities.

WP [00:00:22] That's right. Port Arthur and Fort William.

SG [00:00:24] Yeah. Set your age as to where you're born. When did you move out here?

WP [00:00:33] '53, '52, '53 somewhere, I was five years old. My parents decided to move out. My father got employed by my mother's aunt's husband, who was Karl Anderson of Emil Anderson Construction. He worked with them for a while. He was a steam operator, steam shovel operator, then moved on. Did Kemano, worked up at Kemano for a while. The last job that he had before he stayed home was building the Celgar pulp mill. They decided to stay.

SG [00:01:17] How did he come to, or how did the company come to have all this wide expanse of work, or did he just follow another?

WP [00:01:26] It wasn't just that company. He worked with Emil Anderson on road construction, and then because he was a member of the union, he got sent up to Kemano. Subsequently when you're in the union, you get dispatched to different jobs.

SG [00:01:41] So these were the days where union dispatch gave you a certain direction towards a living?

WP [00:01:46] That's correct.

SG [00:01:47] Yeah. That's almost completely gone now, isn't it?

WP [00:01:51] Yeah. He had served in the Navy on a corvette. They dropped the mines on the submarines in the Atlantic. He was chief petty officer of the boiler room so he gained an incredible amount of experience on steam. When he got out he became a steam shovel operator. When he came out here, I think my mother told me there was only three steam shovel operators in B.C. at that time.

SG [00:02:19] He's obviously a pretty versatile guy.

WP [00:02:21] Yeah.

SG [00:02:22] The apple hasn't fallen far from the tree. You also mentioned to me when we were talking earlier that there had been sort of a pulp exodus that came later after your dad came out of northern Ontario. Tell me a bit about that.

WP [00:02:39] Yeah, well, we had come from northern Ontario and certainly there was a lot of pulp mills back east, of course, earlier than here in B.C. During the '50s in particular, there was a lot of speculation about pulp mills being built in B.C. and they began to be built throughout B.C. Where they went for the operators of the pulp mills was to the pulp mills back east, so a lot of people from back east took the advantage of moving from there to come to here to operate the new mills.

SG [00:03:20] Were some of the mills closing back east?

WP [00:03:23] No, I think they were just speculating on maybe what the life would be like here and maybe wanting to get out of there and start something new.

SG [00:03:36] Did sort of old friends of your family come in that period?

WP [00:03:40] I don't know that for sure, because dad didn't work in the pulp industry at that time. Right. Yeah.

SG [00:03:48] What about your mum? Was she working at the time?

WP [00:03:50] Well, through the war, she worked at Canada Car outside of Fort William. They were doing parts for the war effort. Of course, that was the Rosie the Riveter time, right. There was a lot of women working in Canada Car.

SG [00:04:09] After the war, did she continue working?

WP [00:04:12] Not until she came here and then of course, at that time, we didn't have all that much money. We were working poor. She gained work in a dry cleaners in town and worked there for a number of years. I ended up working there for a while as well.

SG [00:04:32] Basically a two parent working family.

WP [00:04:33] Oh, you betcha. Yeah, that was the only way you could make it.

SG [00:04:36] Even then, it was two incomes were kind of a requirement.

WP [00:04:40] Yeah.

SG [00:04:43] When you were growing up with your dad getting jobs through the union and whatnot, was the union a topic of discussion do you recall growing up?

WP [00:04:50] Not really. You know, my dad died when I was 16. At 16, up to that point, I was more interested in girls and cars and motorcycles and whatnot and my friends, than I was sitting around the table talking about unions or anything. I think that if there were those kinds of discussions, they were probably between my mum and him rather than my sister and I, particularly at the dinner table. Of course, everybody was really busy with two parents working and kids in school and whatnot. Dinner was often whatever you could get when you got home.

SG [00:05:31] Well, it's interesting because I grew up in what was then rural Burnaby in the '50s. All of the people worked in the resource industries and whatnot, but it's obviously different from growing up in a place like Castlegar, the Kootenays where you grew up.

WP [00:05:46] Well, it was a a resource town. You either worked in the sawmill, at Safeway or one of the local commercial stores, or Cominco, or at the pulp mill. That's basically all there was. Or you worked in construction and you were gone and back, gone and back, depending on the boom and bust of wherever you were. It was still a resource community. It was small enough that you knew most everybody. Particularly when you were in school, you were in school with everybody. It was quite a mix. There was the Japanese internment that had happened so there was a lot of Japanese kids and families. The Russian immigration of the Dukhobors, various... I remember when Czechoslovakia happened, people came from Czechoslovakia. There was a lot of—it was very multicultural, in that sense, although dominated between Dukhobor and 'white'.

SG [00:06:58] What was the attitude at that time too, towards the Japanese, for example, who had been recently interned?

WP [00:07:04] Well, that was later. The internment was during the war. We're talking about the '50s, '60s so they were pretty much ensconced in the economy. It wasn't anything special at least from my perspective they weren't pointed out or didn't show any racism at that time. I didn't feel it, although with the Dukhobors, it was very different.

WP [00:07:39] You have to say, later on, during my time there, the rednecks certainly came out hard when, for example, the draft dodgers came up and started purchasing land and moving into the valleys.

SG [00:07:58] It was kind of a division at that time.

WP [00:08:00] Oh, yeah.

SG [00:08:03] You had mentioned to me, too, you had a bit of a rebel shift yourself during high school and after high school, that decided to do a whole bunch of different things and so on.

WP [00:08:15] Well, when Dad died at 16, you know, that's an impact on your life. It kind of sets you up for what it's going to be when you're the quote unquote 'man of the family' sort of thing. Mum's working steady, my sister is working. I'm working.

SG [00:08:35] You're the oldest in the family.

WP [00:08:37] Well, I'm a year older than my sister. It was a struggle and I never really realized how much of a struggle it was until probably I was 40, 45. When you look back and think about the things that you did, because I joined a motorcycle gang, I did a few drugs, of course, you know, that's what it was at that time. It wasn't an easy life particularly. When I look back on it, I think how that kind of made me feel a little anxious about the world I was living in and paying more attention to it.

SG [00:09:18] Did you have that awareness at that time that—

WP [00:09:21] No, you know life was just, it was on a rollercoaster. Yeah.

SG [00:09:29] What was your your entry into the work world, the sort of the unionized work world?

WP [00:09:37] Well, my first job was with Safeway and it was unionized and my second job was at the dry cleaners. It was not. Later on in my years as I got older, out of high school, I worked at the sawmill for a while, I worked at the pulp mill for a while and at Comino, before I first left Castlegar. For a while I went on a journey up north, ended up working on pipelines up in northern B.C.

SG [00:10:15] That's a long haul.

WP [00:10:17] It was. Yeah, hitchhiked all the way. That was a trip.

SG [00:10:21] You had a buddy?

WP [00:10:22] Yeah. A friend of mine and I, we decided we had had enough of working in the smelter. It was not a nice job, so we decided we were going to head north and seek our fortune up to Fort Nelson.

SG [00:10:39] Was anything in mind?

WP [00:10:41] Not really, no. We were going to go up and we would go into the Canada Manpower (Manpower at that time) looking for jobs. Along the way in Fort Nelson, we'd go every day real early in the morning, get up early, go for our walk down on the river or whatever, then go to the Canada Manpower and be there looking for something. Finally, we got a job on a pipeline doing some clearing, with the chainsaws and stuff. That was my first kind of job up north, working on heavy construction.

SG [00:11:22] Would that have been the Labourers' Union?

WP [00:11:24] It was. Yeah. Local 604 of the Labourers' Union.

SG [00:11:30] Just take me back a minute to Cominco. A lot of people who worked at Cominco, the stories they tell are pretty grim. Was your's pretty much the same?

WP [00:11:37] Oh yeah, I was in the lead furnaces. It was like being in the gates of hell, hot, burns. I was cracking the pots so they could be poured and chasing them around and stuff. It wasn't a nice job at all.

SG [00:11:59] I presume like so many things, this was the baptism that you had as a young worker going into Cominco. What was the sense that people had of 'I'm going to get the hell out of here as soon as I can'?

WP [00:12:13] No, I don't think so. I think there were some of us that felt that way because we had a little more of a rebel in us I guess, but most of the people there, that was their families, that was their history, although at that time CM&S or Cominco didn't have the workforce that it had had before and it was rapidly going down as technologies changed, etc.

SG [00:12:46] This would have been in the days of Mine-Mill too, wouldn't it?

WP [00:12:50] Yeah. It was after Mine-Mill, it was Steelworkers.

SG [00:12:59] They'd merged with Steel by that time. How old were you at this time then?

WP [00:13:02] What would I be? 17, 18. Right. Yeah.

SG [00:13:09] You've worked here in a whole number of union jobs and whatnot. What actually took you on the road to union activism at some point? Which clearly it did, because that's where you ended up.

WP [00:13:21] I became a member of Local 170, the Plumbers and Pipefitters, and just got my 50-year pin actually. That was my first real introduction into the union environment I would say per se, rather than just a job that's union.

SG [00:13:45] Where were you working at the time when you joined the UA.

WP [00:13:47] I was working in Nelson and Castlegar around that area for a small contractor. I remember after the pipeline I went down to Castlegar. I went to Canada Manpower again. They ended up sending me to a contractor, a small contractor, plumbing contractor and asked if I wanted to get an apprenticeship, so I did, got my apprenticeship, served that through the four years, not just with that contractor but with others. At that time we were building the rec centre in Nelson, the swimming pool, also the Chako Mika Mall and stuff like that. I worked on the provincial building, that sort of stuff.

SG [00:14:41] Is that the main mall in Nelson?

WP [00:14:41] Yeah. When I was at the Chako Mika, I was working for, of course a unionized company again and I became, I was still an apprentice, but they made me shop steward. That was my first real introduction into I would say conflict resolution. When something happened, you had to be pretty careful. Somebody comes running up to you with a problem and starts screaming at you. You listen. You jot it down. Always kept my notes. You didn't make a decision until you talked to the other side too and found out what their view of things were. That was a basic lesson for me going forward in my life.

SG [00:15:36] But it's at a fairly young age. You're using, learning what are some pretty great skills.

WP [00:15:43] Well, I was in my mid-20s by that time. Yeah.

SG [00:15:48] You had to kind of learn it as you went.

WP [00:15:50] Yeah. There was nobody teaching this.

SG [00:15:51] No training at that time.

WP [00:15:53] No training.

SG [00:15:54] Yeah, that was often the case, I guess. Training, simply, you went out there and became a shop steward.

WP [00:16:00] Yeah, and then, I guess I was doing fairly well because my union made me the area rep for the area. So I was, it wasn't anything special, but certainly I had a stronger

link with the actual union itself rather than just with the contractors and the people I was working with.

SG [00:16:23] Right.

WP [00:16:26] That kind of led me into that direction of working with the union. Of course, at that time, we had the Sandman happening so we were striking, had picket lines up at the Sandman. It was a real introduction to me of actions that needed to happen and learning that you had to fight for things.

SG [00:16:54] Right. Well, this was in the early '70s I guess.

WP [00:16:58] Yeah.

SG [00:16:59] I can remember there were huge campaigns down here at the Sandman.

WP [00:17:02] Yes.

SG [00:17:03] They were pretty well province-wide.

WP [00:17:05] Oh, yeah, for sure.

SG [00:17:07] Why Sandman because the Gaglardis were leading the charge?

WP [00:17:08] Yeah. Very anti-union. Yeah. Of course, from there, the open-shop really started to get a foothold as well in Alberta and CLAC or the Christian Labour Association of Canada. That became the next kind of direction that I was led into in terms of how do we maintain our workforce? What do we do to fight CLAC? We saw them as a yellow-dog agreement union, not even a union, and just a way for contractors to not have to deal with real unions.

SG [00:17:55] What was the sense in the workforce of that campaign? I mean, obviously, the union leadership would have been acutely aware of the stakes, but was that true also of the average—

WP [00:18:06] Rank and file? You bet. Yeah, absolutely.

SG [00:18:10] They were pretty much aware that this could lead them into oblivion, sort of thing.

WP [00:18:11] Yeah. Not into oblivion, but in a real struggle and it did. It did end up being quite a struggle.

SG [00:18:21] Did you achieve any successes in that up there?

WP [00:18:24] Well, I don't know that we achieved successes. I think it was the education of the rank and file and also for myself connecting with not only our own local, but also other locals and in fact, the Canadian Building Trades, because we developed programs for and strategies around CLAC at that time.

SG [00:18:52] Was that anti-union campaign focussed on residential or was the problem was that it was moving into big construction?

WP [00:19:01] Yeah, it was. At that time they were gaining a foothold and that was troublesome. I remember one time we went over, there was a natural gas pumping station in the South Okanagan that was being built. That was kind of an indication of how clearly they were gaining the foothold and what a threat it was.

SG [00:19:29] I've also heard from many people from the Kootenays that watershed issues are a huge issue because of the impact on drinking water for the whole Kootenay watersheds.

WP [00:19:45] Yeah.

SG [00:19:46] You became involved in that yourself, too. What took you there?

WP [00:19:49] Very much so. Well, my own watershed, you know, there was always a constant pressure from contractors who wanted to log in the watersheds. At that time, of course, Colleen McCrory was big in the valley and Herb Hammond, who was a forester. Those are people that I kind of connected with in terms of my personal activities for my community which was, I lived in South Slocan. I began to take kind of leadership roles in that.

WP [00:20:35] When Herb Hammond decided, we had a meeting at our place and there was a few of us there decided to start the Slocan Valley Watershed Alliance. It burgeoned. It really took hold. There was a lot of really good stuff that we did, anti-clearcut, that sort of thing. Protection of the water resource was primary for us along with the wildlife, because, Herb had written a few books and stuff about what the importance of the forest is.

WP [00:21:16] I began to learn about that and that was very critical to me in the next few years as well. We ended up actually stopping logging in our watershed and a number of other watersheds as well, where people would sit down. We were arrested at one point up in the Slocan Valley for sitting and stopping the loggers from coming in. That was a very interesting time for me because I was becoming a lot more environmentally aware about the environment around me, not per se large, but at least the environment around me. With the influence of people like Colleen and Herb, of course, it became much more a study for me of what I needed to do and formed the basis of me going forward.

WP [00:22:18] Soon after that we found the CPR had been Spiking, using Spike, which is a pesticide or herbicide on the tracks. Of course, watersheds, the tracks run right up the valley and right everywhere, right next to the wells and the creeks and the rivers. We actually found the containers, empty containers in the lake, for crying out loud, just dumped off. We knew that it was very dangerous so we ended up in a protest. I kind of led the protest and we stopped the CPR from using Spike in our region, in our area. That ended up we're sitting on the railroad tracks, stopping the machine from going and chasing it away. They'd been hiding it in Cominco at that time. They ended up very interesting times but that's a whole other story.

WP [00:23:30] Nevertheless we did stop them from using it in our area. In fact, at that time, one of the people that was working with us was an engineer and kind of directed CPR towards using steam, so there was an actual steam machine that they built and started using. It was quite effective. In fact, they moved it around even up north for a while. I don't know what happened after that, but nevertheless, it was an interesting time for me.

WP [00:24:06] Once again, it was about water. It's essential. It comes through in the rest of my life as well.

SG [00:24:15] Right. It also sounds that you were looking for solutions to this.

WP [00:24:19] That's correct. Yeah, and working with my community, as it was always with my community.

SG [00:24:24] It was obviously a bit of a distance from your work at the plumbers' and whatnot.

WP [00:24:28] Yeah.

SG [00:24:30] What was the representation in the various community groups that were active in this? Was it a lot of people from industry?.

WP [00:24:39] No, it was mostly local people who were directly affected. I could say later on, if I can move on, I worked with Corky Evans for a number of years. Corky and I got along very well but that was one of the issues where we differed fairly strongly. It came to a point that when Corky was, he ran the first time and just about won against Dirks, Howard Dirks. Then the second time he ran and—

SG [00:25:20] Dirks was Social Credit.

WP [00:25:25] Howard Dirks was Social Credit, yeah. The second time, when he ran the next election, I actually decided that I was going to challenge him based on my environmental stuff for the most part. I always thought of it as jobs and the environment through those years, because the struggle was even with my own union and other unions, that they did not support the environmental movement at all, or very little. When I ran against Corky in the nomination, my union would not support me at all.

SG [00:26:11] This was for the '91 election.

WP [00:26:14] I think '91 or '96, I can't remember exactly. It ended up being a year-long campaign. That was another real growth pattern for me, because in running against somebody like Corky you have to know what you're talking about and you have to be clear, concise. I started out doing my speeches, reading notes but by the end of a year, I got to know the issues very well, and the positions. I could go from talking to just six people in the meetings I'd been used to doing in my environmental stuff, six to 10 to 12 or whatever, to speaking before 600 people at the nomination.

SG [00:27:09] What exactly were the dividing lines here, that Corky and others were supporting greater resource extraction?

WP [00:27:15] Yeah, for the most part, Corky was, no, I don't blame Corky for what he did. He went by the NDP policy. That's what he was going to do. He was going to be an NDP MLA and support the NDP policy. I had my concerns about some of the policy and in particular the forestry issues. Forestry and water.

SG [00:27:45] The conflict that existed between them, forestry and water.

WP [00:27:47] Yeah. Then, when he did get elected, of course Harcourt was in. Harcourt did a fairly interesting thing with the environment. He brought, he instigated a program where all of the communities would come together to talk about what the resources were and how they would be managed, etcetera. That was very new and very exciting actually for us. The CORE process, so we participated heavily in the CORE process. We were very pleased that it was happening. That was also kind of like a growth to me because like I said earlier, when I was talking about being a shop steward, you've got to listen to all the sides.

WP [00:28:44] When you're in either the resource development side or the heavy environment side, you often are just clashing and not listening. I think the CORE process really gave us a really good lesson, education on listening to each other, listening to the people, the trappers, for example, who I'd never listened to, or the snowmobilers, or you name it. We were all sitting around the table talking to each other. I thought that was pretty progressive.

SG [00:29:19] Nonetheless, from what I understand, your passion for this work also cost you in terms of some of your relationships with other unionists and even within your own family?

WP [00:29:31] Well, not within the family so much. My fellow unionists, I think if I can say the rank and file I could talk to because they were part of my community. The union was much more difficult because it has its policies as well and its Constitution, etcetera and it's got its raison d'etre which is to put people to work and etcetera. I quickly learned that social issues, social environmental issues were hard to bring forward in a union environment at that time. Much more this now, it's certainly changed a lot.

SG [00:30:25] Particularly in a resource town.

WP [00:30:28] Yeah.

SG [00:30:31] I understand that at one point your partner couldn't deal with a lot of the conflict over this.

WP [00:30:38] Well, after all, the effort that I put into the campaigns, environmental campaigns was a stress. There's no doubt about it. We had, two young kids. My girls. Then working away also when I had to work, I had to go away. That's another stress, too. That's part of, very common in the construction industry, that's for sure. We separated. Still I mrsn we're good friends, etcetera, and our daughters are doing wonderful, but those were very stressful times. Working construction or leading environmental campaigns are tough on families.

SG [00:31:30] That's for sure. One of the things that also came out of all of this, from what I understand, for a lot of people, is the link between jobs and the environment and then health and safety and the environment and the connection between those two. You yourself were involved to some degree in that through the union.

WP [00:31:54] Well, for a period there, I worked at Cominco when they were rebuilding. I ended up being the chief steward on the project for the unions. Cominco is a dangerous place to work. It always has been and probably always will be. When we were there we had a number of our members were being knocked down by gases, gas releases. I kept trying to fix it and meeting with the company and meeting with the contractor etcetera but

we were getting really, not getting very far. You have to realize that on a construction project, it changes every day, every hour.

SG [00:32:52] What kind of gas releases were released?

WP [00:32:55] Sulphur. The evacuation routes or the routes to get out change, because it's cluttered or something else is happening there, whatever. I guess the crux of it was three guys, four guys, three or four were going up to a tower. They got to the top stairs and wham, they went down.

WP [00:33:29] The next day I got to work and everybody was on a sit-down. That precipitated a number of charges against the company once WCB was brought in, WorkSafe. They initiated some charges. In our industry when you're working on a site in construction industry and if something happens you may be there for three months or three weeks or three years, but you leave and you go. When something like that happens and there's charges, often the job's finished before all that's starting to work. Anyway, I carried through. I did a report. I presented it and the initial charges were laid aside by the regional director.

WP [00:34:32] I appealed to Vancouver and I came down and made a presentation. That's one of the first times I met Lee Loftus, who was very much in the labour movement down here, the construction labour movement down here and on health and safety issues.

SG [00:34:54] From the Heat Frost Insulators Union.

WP [00:34:56] Yeah, he's now on the board. He helped me through that and we ended up getting one of the charges, some of the charges just changed and sustained, one dropped and a new one put on which created a fund for the future for those that had been affected by the gas releases.

SG [00:35:27] These charges against Cominco or against construction?

WP [00:35:30] Cominco.

WP [00:35:31] Yeah. So that was, once again, all of my training from before my progression, had led me to the point where I could do something like that, that I was not afraid to make mistakes. We all make mistakes. I wasn't afraid to challenge where I thought it was right, and continue with it, not just back off when you move on to another job.

SG [00:36:10] You'd said to me when in earlier discussion that one of the things that you learned out of sort of life experiences as a kid and later on, that you wanted to right wrongs and that became part of your—

WP [00:36:23] Yeah, I think that I was part of all of it. That's just the development. If you're in touch with your community, for the most part and you're listening and you have concerns like social concerns or environmental concerns or labour concerns and you feel strongly about them, you're going to do something.

SG [00:36:48] Well, that's the difference between an activist and a non-activist. Some people say I can't do anything about this and can't get involved. Others, like clearly you, decide you need to take action to move it.

WP [00:37:01] Yeah. I saw my union and my community as the basis for that.

SG [00:37:09] In the later '70s, pardon me, in the '90s you made the decision to leave the Kootenays and come down here?

WP [00:37:19] Yeah. Actually it was Glen Clark Government was in place in B.C. He put together what was called the Fair Wage Act. I was the second Fair Wage Officer that was—I made my application from back there and it was accepted. I was brought down or I came down here to work as a Fair Wage Officer under the Fair Wage Act with Employment Standards.

SG [00:37:55] How did you make that application?

WP [00:37:55] A friend of mine up there who thought, who knew this was happening and thought that I would be a good candidate, fellow unionist, and I was looking for something more secure, I guess. By this time I had a new family. My partner had two girls. I had two girls, so we had a growing family. We talked it over and I decided I would give it a try. I came down and the job was to go around to the provincial government projects and ensure that people that were working there were paid properly and also that they were registered as apprentices or working in the jurisdiction that they should be working in. That was a real eye opener too, seeing the abuse I guess is what I could call it of workers.

SG [00:39:12] So what kinds of things did you encounter?

WP [00:39:16] Cash payments in the washroom. Two books, three books.

SG [00:39:21] Why in the washroom?

WP [00:39:23] To get out of the way so nobody would see. Yeah, under the table, that sort of stuff. I'd go on a job and there'd be maybe 13 electricians, what I was told were electricians, end up not even being apprentices, not registered apprentices anyway, and no journeyperson on the job. It was that kind of thing that really struck me.

WP [00:39:57] It really helped me as I was going forward, my next development, because I went to work for my union for a while there as communications and organizing under Jim Duggan, a real mentor to me. The man was phenomenal in terms of educating me about labour in the Lower Mainland for the most part. Because I had lived in the interior all the time, come down here, I didn't know who was who, I didn't know what was what.

SG [00:40:34] Backing up a bit, in terms of the fair wage thing, were you finding you weren't getting support from the bureaucratic apparatus in—

WP [00:40:42] Oh, no, I left to go to work for the union. I was quite pleased with the work we were doing. Jim was elected business manager of the union. He asked me if I would come to work for them and so I agreed.

SG [00:41:02] This is local 170 down here.

WP [00:41:04] Yes, Plumbers and Pipefitters.

SG [00:41:07] You took on communications work at that time?

WP [00:41:09] Yeah. Did a newsletter and any communications that had to go out, I would do that, also work with the organizers, going out to sites and picketing and handing out leaflets, etcetera. That was the time of the leaky condos issue as well, so there was lots to do.

SG [00:41:34] It was essentially a continuation of your work in the Kootenays, but in a different environment now.

WP [00:41:41] Yeah, activism of some sort.

SG [00:41:47] Then you were saying, Jim had a heart attack?

WP [00:41:50] Yeah, Jim had a heart attack. He was going to run for the second term and he had a heart attack, just before a massive heart attack and that was it. He couldn't go back to work. The new business manager who was elected in November took office in January 1st and the first thing that he did was to fire me. Which was fine, but Jim talked to Gary Kroeker, who was the president of the building trades at that time. I ended up going to work as the area rep for the Allied Hydro Council for all the major dam projects in B.C. Also for the highway construction, the end of the Island Highway, the subsequent HOV and a few other projects.

SG [00:42:55] What kind of work did you take on there?

WP [00:42:59] I would look after the negotiations, grievances, any issues that might be happening between Hydro, BC Hydro or CHC which is Columbia Hydro Constructors, who were the BC Hydro arm that was overseeing the dam construction, and the Allied Hydro Council which was a council of the unions that worked on the projects.

SG [00:43:34] This was also?

WP [00:43:36] Water, again, it was water. Brought me right back to water.

SG [00:43:40] This was also a time when government policy on dam construction was changing, too, wasn't it?

WP [00:43:48] I don't know that policy was changing. WAC Bennett first in 1963, wanted to build the Peace and and Mica so what he did was he asked one of his aides to go and talk to the unions. At that time, of course, the St. Lawrence Seaway project, which was the first PLA, Project Labour Agreement, in Canada had been a real success. That was subsequent at the same time as Cape Canaveral because there had been a lot of unrest in the labour movement throughout North America at that time and project labour agreements were to become kind of the mode to get rid of those jurisdictional issues and also to provide peace on the worksite.

SG [00:44:51] What year are we talking about here?

WP [00:44:52] This was '63. The first Allied Hydro agreement was signed then with the building trades unions and then those two projects, the two big northern projects.

SG [00:45:15] Mica dam was it, or?

WP [00:45:16] No, not the Mica. The Bennett, yeah, the Bennett Dam. That was the Bennett Dam. Then when those projects were completed, around 1995, the Clark government was in so they decided to re-institute or renegotiate the agreement and put some more projects in. The projects that were brought in were the Mica Revelstoke development, High Arrow, a number of other projects that was renegotiated at that time. It was after that I became the Allied Hydro rep. The fellow who had been the rep died and I was brought in to take over.

SG [00:46:15] Obviously, there's a whole different social era here where a lot more discussion that would have included environmentalists and First Nations and so on. How did they factor into your sort of working at—?

WP [00:46:29] You know, I was really pleased both with the Highways agreement and the Hydro agreement, because they were very progressive in their time. There was a very openness to, and written into the contracts, women in construction and First Nations involvement. Those hadn't happened before. I learned a lot about that from the beginning, becoming the rep for those two about what the agreement was really about. It had some social aspects to it. I thought that was pretty fantastic. I got the opportunity through the years to be able to help improve that up and to, and subsequent to, recently with the Community Benefits agreement.

SG [00:47:28] One of the other things you did around this time was, I presume it was around this time, was to pick up a thread from the Kootenays, you became a director of the Labour Environmental Alliance.

WP [00:47:40] Yep.

SG [00:47:42] Which is where we met.

WP [00:47:43] That's correct.

SG [00:47:44] What brought you there?

WP [00:47:48] When I came down here, I forget who it was. It might have been Colleen had told me that I should get hold of the Labour Environmental Alliance and Mae Burrows and just see what's happening and maybe connect. I came down here and got to know Mae and then subsequently you and others. I was able to, because I had a job, I was able to participate in other things as well, as I was learning who was who down here.

SG [00:48:30] Did this connect you to a broader group of people that was—?

WP [00:48:32] Oh, very much so. Yeah. Once again I go back to community. I found people that were involved in their own communities and, Mae coming out of a labour background as well, focusing on pesticides and home products and things like that. You have to remember we're just coming out of the war in the woods as well, which was very disruptive to both the environmental movement and the labour movement.

SG [00:49:07] One of the issues that's emerged, of course, more recently is the concern that a lot of people had over the decision to proceed or not proceed with Site C.

WP [00:49:18] Yeah.

SG [00:49:19] I know the Allied Hydro Council was very much involved in that.

WP [00:49:23] Yeah.

SG [00:49:24] How did you feel about that?

WP [00:49:26] Well, I was certainly employed to help them. Once again, my background is water. I know that because of my background as an environmentalist, there was a lot of people that were very disappointed in me doing what I did. I understand that when you take on leadership roles, you're bound to have people that do or don't like what you do at times.

SG [00:50:03] Don't like those roles.

WP [00:50:05] Yeah. I made my decisions on supporting Site C based on the information I had at the time and my interest in water. This is subsequent and thinking about it a lot, is that the water is not just about the power. When we look around us right now and see what's happening to the environment, the water resource is going to be incredibly important to us going forward. It's not just about the power, it's about how do we harness that water for our own protection and able to do that. Why do you think that the United States wanted to divert the Kootenay, and the Columbia into the Kootenay? They recogn ized very strongly what the value of the water resource is. Subsequent to that, of course, we had the negotiations, renegotiations over the treaty, the Columbia River Treaty, that shows you how important those resources are.

WP [00:51:24] When they're looking to draw your resource or what is our territory anyway, we haven't talked about First Nations stuff, but B.C.'s water resource in order to feed their breadbasket and their power, you begin to understand how important all of that is. I think that the decision to proceed with Site C was a difficult one. I understand that people were very, very, very disappointed. We'll see what happens going forward. I stand by my decision, good or bad, you always do. Whether I should be proud of it or not proud of it, we'll see.

SG [00:52:17] History will write that.

WP [00:52:17] History will write that.

SG [00:52:19] In 2003, you became the executive director of the B.C. Building Trades Council, which was a new position, as I understand, that had not existed prior to that?

WP [00:52:30] That's correct. Well, no, Tom Sigurdson was the first executive director. The building trades prior to that was in some pretty dire straits economically and politically. At a convention that I actually attended, they decided that what they were going to do is they terminated the convention because of the situation and went into some private negotiations and ended up rather than having a president and a whole staff and everything that's all paid, they decided that what they would do is hire an executive director outside of the council. Or not outside, but from either the general membership or everywhere non-elected. That became the way that they did it. Tom became the first executive director and he served for, I think, about seven years or so. Then he went off to Ottawa to work for the Canadian building trades at that time, so there was an opening. I applied and went through the interview process and was chosen to become the second executive director.

SG [00:53:55] There were new opportunities here to do some work?

WP [00:53:56] Oh, you betcha. Yeah. All the stuff that when you look back on life, when you're 75, you think, you see a progression, the good, the bad of it, everything, the difficulties and stuff, but it all the growth was good for me. I brought a lot of things to that job that I think were valuable. You know, my environmental experiences.

SG [00:54:25] That would have been fairly unique among people in the trades, wouldn't it, you're that kind of environmentalist?

WP [00:54:30] I don't know about unique.

SG [00:54:33] There wouldn't have been many people who would have that kind of background?

WP [00:54:34] Yeah. Bringing the social and environmental aspects to the building trades was not going to be easy. I didn't do it alone. I mean, there was people in the unions. There was people all over that were doing all kinds of things but I just happened to be in that role at that time. As editor of the Trade Talk magazine, which we're very proud of, having lasted so long, still going on, I brought a lot of environmental issues into that. When I look at what, not just environmental, in terms of like the asbestos issue with Lee Loftus and the IBEW on the panels, solar panels, IBEW on the solar panels.

WP [00:55:42] Things like that were happening. There were changes, all through construction. The difficulties between the trades has been the architecture and the engineering. The curtain wall now is a very complex thing. It's not just a window, it controls the environment, the curtain wall on a high rise. Those sorts of things. There's lots of things that are happening that are changing the construction world. They're fairly exciting, actually.

SG [00:56:16] Obviously, you need to bring in a whole lot of expertise to all of those issues.

WP [00:56:20] Yeah, it comes from everywhere. It comes from all kinds of people.

SG [00:56:25] You mentioned to me, too, that one of the things that you were particularly happy with was the negotiation of the community benefits agreements.

WP [00:56:33] Yes, I was. I had retired from the building trades in, what was it, 2010 and the Allied Hydro Council kept me on for a while, certainly. We went into negotiations a couple of times. The last one we managed to get a fairly decent agreement going forward. I just have to give CHC, Columbia Hydro Constructors people we were working with the benefit because they were really very good with us. We negotiated a fairly decent agreement, and I decided that was it for me there too. So I left that.

WP [00:57:24] Then the government had asked the building trades to sit down and talk about the community benefits agreements. I sat in on the initial meetings at the Premier's office. Actually Jim Sinclair was chosen to kind of lead the building trades on this one, and to put together something that we could put forward to the government. I participated with Jim and all that sort of stuff, but then Jim was put on the Fraser Health Board. Therefore there was a potential conflict of interest there if there were hospitals to be built so Jim had to back off. I was given the go ahead to take over and look after the proposal that we were

putting on the table and lead the negotiations, which I did. Of course what we did is we took the best of the Allied Hydro agreement, the Highways agreement, and we had long discussions with some First Nations people about First. Nations integration. Of course you put 'community' in front of everything and I'm there, anything you want to put community in. I was very, very pleased to have been a part of that.

WP [00:58:59] By 2018, summer of 2018, we negotiated an agreement with the government. In that agreement there's primary focus on hiring of those not traditionally working in the building trades. Setting not quotas, but looking at how we can best employ and gain access to people in the communities where the work is being done. I lived in a boom and bust environment, in Castlegar, when the High Arrow was built for about three, four years, it was just nuts there. Then all of a sudden everything's gone, stores are closing down, etcetera. I really appreciated the fact that this government was going to put that aside and say, 'If we're going to build in your community, there's going to be benefits to you'. Helping to negotiate that, was I take pride in that very much pride.

SG [01:00:02] Yeah. Sounds like kind of a crowning achievement on a work life well lived.

WP [01:00:07] Yeah.

SG [01:00:09] When you retired, basically not from paid employment, and took on all kinds of other responsibility.

WP [01:00:17] Well, yeah, that was paid. Yeah, I was getting paid. It was when I, after we negotiated the agreement and I decided I was going to leave that, because I'm still trying to get out, not entirely out, because I love the people I work with and the touch that you have when you're doing those sorts of things.

WP [01:00:46] I decided to leave. Then the new corporation, crown corporation, BCIB, who was going to look after hiring all of the employees on these projects, said, no, you're not leaving. We need you to come and help us to understand the agreement and to teach our people, our staff, what the agreement is about. I've done a bit of that over the years. The first three years was pretty hectic. It's just down to about two or three hours a month now, which is fine with me. I just teach the agreement.

SG [01:01:23] Right. You also said to me that you didn't see yourself as one of those who had such a broad vision, but rather taking different points of view and putting them together and coming up with solutions.

WP [01:01:34] Yeah, I had a brother-in-law who accused me of having no ideology. I agreed. I said, 'when you've got an ideology, you tend to defend it rather than engage.' I've always thought of that as, compromise is politics, that's what it is. You know, you can't go into politics if you're not going to compromise. I've watched a lot of friends, Ed Conroy, Corky, everybody go. A lot of my friends became MLAs. I've watched what it did to them and how hard a job it is because, you know, you go in with all these ideals and you find how hard that is. Incremental moving, I know it sounds bad but everything I ever did was to move things forward. I didn't know how far it was going to go or how effective it was going to be. That's what I did, was try to move things rather than get stuck in ideology.