

Interview: Andy Ross (AR)
Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)
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Transcription: Cathy Walker

KN [00:00:05] We want to start, Andy, by asking you when and where you were born and where you went to school.

AR [00:00:12] Yeah, I was born in the mid-fifties. I was born in a castle, which sounds grand, but it wasn't. Newcastle is my home town in the northeast of England, and an old derelict castle was a maternity home for the baby boomers at the time. I was born and raised in Newcastle, which is northeast of England, close to the Scottish border—coal mining, heavy industry, shipbuilding town. I grew up, went to school there till I graduated and left school.

KN [00:00:43] Can you tell us a bit about your family and your background when you were growing up? Was your family a union family, a progressive family, or were there politics in your family? Was there any of that in your background?

AR [00:00:56] Not really, in my immediate family, as in parents. They both came from completely opposite sides. They both grew up as kids during the war. My Dad was a single child whose father worked for somebody equivalent like the Eaton's family or the Woodward's family. They owned a large department store and he was the head gardener, so they were in a more rural area, went through the war without really shortages. None of this. My mother was a coal miner's daughter from the Yorkshire coal fields, one of nine kids, come from a long background of coal miners. As I got older and knew some of my relatives on my Mum's side when I was a teenager, we talked politics, but around the kitchen table, not really. It was not part of our day to day life.

KN [00:01:50] Given that, can you talk a bit about your early work experiences, including when you first came in contact with a union workplace and what that was like?

AR [00:02:02] Newcastle is a highly industrial town, so unions were all around and I remember when I was a kid there was major, major disruptions going on. Most of the coal fields were closing. The little sort of area that I grew up in, at one time, while it's part of the city now, was separate and there was four coal mines. The last one closed when I was about seven or eight years old. Surrounded all around us were large unionized areas. In fact, all of the recreation facilities where I grew up were as a by-product of the coal miners' beneficial society. All the soccer fields and tennis courts and everything were all provided free for kids from the coal miners. We were aware of it and grew up around it and there was industrial disputes going on, but it's when I was a kid it happened around you.

AR [00:02:56] My personal experience with becoming a union is my first job when I left school. I went to work for a large industrial organization called Anglo Great Lakes. They made graphite predominantly for the steel industry, the electrodes for steelmaking. I worked in a research and development and that was my first union job. It was a huge plant, maybe 5,000 people, two unions. There you had the guys that worked in the actual facility, and then there was ourselves in research and development and the quality control guys, separate union. I was part of the Transport and General Workers Union. Back then, while it was unionized, you weren't automatically a union member. You had to get signed

up by the local job steward. Bobby was our job steward. I remember him well. He was like your good old uncle. He'd come around and sit round and talk to you and you had to sign on every year if you wish to be a union member.

AR [00:03:57] I remember my first day on the job was a Monday, sort of getting used to it. We had a controlled entrance into our facility because we actually made something for the military, so we were under the strictest supervision, although it was a tiny part of the production. Started on the Monday and on the Wednesday I got in, there was a picket line. I'm thinking okay, I didn't know what the issue was and it wasn't, I think it was a wildcat that was going on. Here I am as a teenage kid, first days on the job and we had security guards who say, 'No, it's not you guys, you can go over.' There's no way anybody cross the picket line, so my first Wednesday was a couple of hours on the picket line. I remember that well.

AR [00:04:41] It was different those days. I don't know if we get older people that might remember the old Peter Sellers movie, "I'm All Right, Jack". There was still a bit of that. Everybody, every trade had their distinct responsibilities. If you needed a job doing, you needed electrician, they did the electrician's part. If you needed the millwright, they did the millwright part, etc., etc., etc.. It was a great experience because back then all post-secondary education was free in Britain. It was pre-Thatcher. In my situation and quite a lot of people I would get the job, but they would also then pay for you to go to school while you were working, and still on salary. You're getting paid to go to school and they were paying your courses, so I was doing that as well. I only worked there for just over a year and a half, and then left both the country and the union movement at that time.

KN [00:05:37] You left the country, you came to Canada?

AR [00:05:38] No, I went and travelled around Europe and I ended up living in Amsterdam for three years, running a bar and a hostel in the red light district. No, it wasn't unionized.

KN [00:05:53] When did you come to Canada and how old were you when you did?

AR [00:05:56] I came to Canada in 1981. I was 24. I'd met a Canadian woman in Amsterdam and we were married. We were actually married on the island, but still living in Europe. We decided we were going to move to Canada at that time. It's a bit of an adventure, do a bit more skiing and see a bit more of the world.

KN [00:06:25] Did you move straight to B.C.?

AR [00:06:26] I did, straight to B.C. That was really the only choice that was going to be.

KN [00:06:32] Can you tell us a bit about your early work experience in B.C. and also your early union experience, perhaps, in B.C.?

AR [00:06:41] When I first arrived, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. At the time my now ex-wife and I were sort of separating anyway. We knew that, and it was amicable. I wasn't sure, but I knew I wanted to change something. The economy was going pretty good in 1981, but just to get a job when I first got here, I stayed in what I knew, and worked and managed a restaurant for a while.

AR [00:07:06] I remember I was taking the bus home late one evening, from work regularly, and it was always the same bus driver. We got talking and he said, 'Well, why

don't you come work for us? You can get this time off.' because I wanted to go skiing and all this. Out of a bit of a whim, I put my name in and started my work in November of 1981 as a bus driver for then Metro Transit. They'd just broke it up the year before from being part of B.C. Hydro. At that time when I joined, the union was the Amalgamated Transit Union, ATU. Unbeknownst when we started there, I didn't realize they were in the middle of being raided by a brand new Canadian union, ICTU, the Independent Canadian Transit Union. I had a bizarre day one day and still in training, haven't graduated from training yet, we get our union induction from the ATU local president. The next morning we were in the coffee shop and we see the same guy hand his resignation papers in and he quit as union president. That was in December. Then in February the vote was revealed and the Independent Canadian Transit Union became the union representing then Metro Transit, which became B.C. Transit.

KN [00:08:24] Metro Transit was buses throughout the Lower Mainland?

AR [00:08:29] And Victoria, it was part of the old B.C. Hydro. When B.C. Hydro was being split up at that time there was a few, they spun gas off and they also spun the bus system off as well.

KN [00:08:44] You were a bus driver and you were in ICTU. Along came Solidarity in 1983, where lots happened in that year. Can you identify any experiences you had during that year that you were involved in Operation Solidarity?

AR [00:09:00] There was a number of things going on at that time. It was kind of a traumatic time at the bus company anyway, with the internal changeover, wildcats happening all of the time, and it seemed there was always some dispute bubbling and brewing. I guess the highlight that I and many people around at the time will relate to, has to be the march into Empire Stadium. I remember it well. There was all kinds of threats going round about consequences for taking job action. I don't think anybody ever concerned about that. All the drivers met down at Adanac Park on Boundary Road, marched up the hill along Hastings Street and into Empire Stadium. It was unbelievable. We were one of the latter groups to come in and there's probably a couple of thousand of us, all in uniform marching in. By that time the place was full of people cheering. To be honest, I couldn't hear much of the speeches. We were right at the back. The feeling of that day, the empowerment, and the hope that things could change was really something. It was really something that stayed with, especially going into '84, which was quite a eventful year at the transit.

KN [00:10:18] What happened in '84?

AR [00:10:21] I guess it had been brewing for a little while, but negotiations were under way, first negotiations with the new union. Our president at the time, Colin Kelly, was sort of leading the pack and there was all kinds of issues that were kind of driving it. The company were going after a couple of things. They wanted part-time drivers. That was a big issue. I think they really wanted to go after the union to test its strength because it was so new. The other issue was the sick plan. They wanted to completely change the sick plan. So '84, we saw what we call the un-strike, which was a whole course of actions, which, kind of different at the time, where we didn't just walk off the job, but we did things like the drivers stopped wearing uniforms. I remember a couple of classics. There was one guy used to work downtown at night. He dressed top hat and tails like off a Fred Astaire movie, then another guy alone, about six foot four, great big guy dressed as a nun for his shift. It was all of these things going around, and part of it was to try and generate support

amongst the public and also to put some pressure on the company that this was solid and it was well supported.

AR [00:11:44] One of the other things we did as well is at certain given times we announced to the public that all the buses, regardless of where they were, were going to stop. It would either be for half an hour or an hour. That was the next escalation. I remember I was doing a bus route that ran out to Ladner at the time, had the same people from downtown to Ladner every night. I told them, and it just so happened that I said, 'Look, I'm going to get you all home before this impacts.' I remember one of the people said, 'Well, what about you?' I said, 'Well, I'll park on the side of the road till it's over,' so they invited me in for dinner. I spent my hour parked on the road having a very nice meal at some very friendly people's house in Ladner. Those are the kind of things that happened up until the time—we have signups every three months. There was a dispute on the signups, so we took the position as a union we weren't going to sign the sheets because they weren't respecting the conditions of our agreement. The company said that was a strike action. We said they were locking us out, and out we went. It became at that time the longest transit strike. We were out for three months.

KN [00:12:50] That was in what year?

AR [00:12:51] 1984 through the summer, as usual, as you can expect--brand new union, no strike pay, so it was pretty tough for lots of guys. I was a little bit protected. I didn't have any mortgages or debts at the time. We knew it was coming so a lot of us had been putting some money away where we could. The local credit union, I remember the Teachers' Credit Union we were affiliated with, 41st and Oak, were fantastic. When things were getting hard, you could go and sign on there with just your signature and get enough to get you through the month. We went through that summer and were eventually legislated back to work. It was touch and go. There was a lot of sentiment. I remember at the meeting, when we were told we were legislated back a bunch of people were still contemplating not going back anyway, but we did go back. We were back into work after that. The sick plan was changed. The part time drivers did not come in, but this was bubbling over for a while and it did cause some internal disputes within the organization as well. There was turnover at the—there was three locals and I remember Colin lost the next election. The guy that was head of maintenance, Gerry Krantz, stayed. The guy over in Victoria, Fergie Beadle, I think he stayed. Ironically, all three of those ended up working in management for the bus company.

KN [00:14:23] What happened to ICTU?

AR [00:14:25] ICTU went through spurts and phases. I guess one of the consequences is during the course of the breakup with the ATU, things were said, and what ended up as the largest libel suit in Canadian history resulted from that, with ICTU losing. The union office on Imperial Street, where I had my induction with the ATU local president, remained an asset for the International. Ironically, my later union, COPE 378, at the time OTEU, eventually ended up purchasing the building. When I first started with OTEU, that was the building I started my union career. ICTU actually grew and expanded. They moved out to Ottawa and some other places and they were in an expansion mode. Then they kind of reached a point where they weren't expanding anymore. There was internal issues going on. One thing I wasn't crazy about at the time, personally, I loved the guys I worked with, good union, solid, but being outside the house of labour was not a great place to be. There was no sort of short term fix in sight for that likely to happen. There was formative

years and the '80s it was still, it was wildcat city. Wildcats were regular for quite often issues that you never even found out what started them.

KN [00:15:58] You mentioned COPE 378. When did you first become part of COPE 378?

AR [00:16:05] As I mentioned before, they weren't COPE back then. They were OTEU, Office and Technical Employees' Union. I started being a part-time instructor while I was a driver, which was, there was a few people—that was the different jurisdiction, that was OTEU. I was working, I think in 1990, I spent six months of the year being a temporary instructor. While I was still a driver and still part of ICTU, I was also part of OTEU, and that was my first exposure to that. In 1991, I applied for and got a full time position and then transferred over as a full time member of OTEU.

KN [00:16:58] Then you were involved in OTEU and eventually became an activist and got into some leadership role. Can you talk about that, getting involved and becoming involved in leadership?

AR [00:17:13] While I was still temporary instructor, there was an issue going on with the regulars about compensation. We were on a job evaluation system and there was a dispute about the way the job was being evaluated. Basically the instructors should have been upgraded a pay rate, but the management were dragging their feet and they weren't acting. At the time, things were really buzzing in our department. There was a hiring fair going on, so we're bringing lots of new guys in. That was the time as well, we were just starting to bring in the first-ever wheelchair-equipped buses into Canada actually, but into Vancouver, so everybody has to be trained. It was a big deal, so there was a lot of us work. There was actually more temp instructors than full time instructors at the time. Myself and one of the other temp instructors said, 'We're going to support the instructors,' and we're going to—we had a sit down strike in the department. I remember the manager coming in and saying all kinds of things and kind of cajoling us. He was trying to be, we're good buddies, we should sort this out. Then they resorted to saying it was illegal. We said, 'Well, if that's the case, we're all going back to work and we're going back to our regular bus driving jobs,' which we knew they could not deliver on the rollout of their new wheelchair delivered buses, which was a big deal. That was capitulated. During that time, I met the rep from OTEU, a guy named Art Hobbis, who became, I would say, one of my mentors in the union movement. As soon as I became a full time member, he recruited me to become a steward. Eventually I worked as a part-time union rep, as well. That was my involvement. It was almost instantaneous. It predated becoming the full time member.

KN [00:19:17] When did OTEU become COPE?

AR [00:19:24] That was a long process. OTEU was affiliated with the international union, OPEIU, the Office and Professional Employees International Union, 378 became a local of those back in 1955. Local 15 was predated, as they were ten years earlier. At the time, the good old Bennett family there in B.C. with the Socreds would not allow unions to use the word 'professional' in the name. British Columbia was the only jurisdiction in North America where we had to have OTEU instead of OPEIU. We stayed OTEU until the nineties when the NDP government came into power and got rid of that. We then changed our name to OPEIU so we were in line with all of the others. That led to the 2000's where for the second time in my union career we disaffiliated with an international union. In 2004, in Miami, of all places, we broke away from the international at the convention, which is a whole story all by itself with books written about that. In a room in a hotel in Miami they brainstormed as quickly as they could, and COPE was the decided name, the Canadian

Office and Professional Employees. It was similar enough. We in B.C. went crazy on it because there was the civic party in Vancouver at the time. The bigger thing is, it was always being confused with CUPE. Quite often, even though we'd give all the information if we had a story on the news, it still came out as CUPE. People couldn't understand the difference. Nowadays, and this since I left office, they actually do business as MoveUP, the Movement of United Professionals, although they're officially still COPE 378 and still part of the COPE national union.

KN [00:21:38] You talked about the transit strike in '84. I think there was another one around 2001. What was that? What were the issues in that strike, do you remember?

AR [00:21:49] I remember this one. I headed up our bargaining side. There was a couple of parties involved in this because the drivers by that time had become CAW just fairly recently, and ourselves. There was a couple of things that led up to this. In '99, the old B.C. Transit crown corp was split up. Victoria stayed part of B.C. Transit but broke from our agreement, and we became TransLink. With this breakup, this was sort of the demise time for ICTU. There was a battle for members going on and the two leading unions were the CAW and CUPE. It went backwards and forwards for a while there until it all got settled out. At the end of the day, CAW ended up representing the bus company and CUPE, Skytrain.

AR [00:22:51] This came up for 2001 was bargaining year and CAW, I guess wanted to show what they could do, and they used a typical private sector tactic. They put deadline bargaining on, which was not the norm. They said, we need a deal by the day that the contract expires, which was the provincial deadlines, April 31st. We were in a similar situation with our union, our contracts expired at the same time. We knew there was going to be some issues. Our big issue at the time is they had split our bargaining unit into two, one being, of course, Mountain Bus Company and the other being TransLink. All of the transit unions the year before, in 2000 had filed with the labour board to be the companies to be considered the true employer. The legislation prevented them being tracked as a common employer, something that Joy MacPhail and I still argue about. She was the minister of transportation at the time. We argued that for all intents and purposes, they should be treated as one. Leo McGrady put forward great arguments. We lost that hearing at the labour board by a 2 to 1 decision, and the appeal. We thought we would win it if we took it to court, but it was very expensive and circumstances which I'll get to after we talk about the strike, made that redundant at the time. The drivers were going in and they were looking for very similar situations as some of the first one, which was part-time drivers, obviously compensation issues, and sort of determining where they were as details around the long term plan. We were more interested in protecting our survival.

AR [00:25:00] The concept behind setting up TransLink was to have a planning and organizing company, TransLink. Then the original idea was to pretty much contract out the services to other places. We were trying to hold tight the bargaining unit together and we ended up with a ridiculous situation where we'd go bargaining—our bargaining committee was identical—it was the same people. We'd have two management groups on separate rooms side by side, and we had to go present the same arguments to the different people simultaneously. We knew there was no way we were going to be getting anywhere with it, but the membership was solid. There was no way that they were going to budge. On May 1st, 2001, the system ground to a halt again for the second time in my career. This time it went even longer. It went on to become again the longest transit strike in B.C. history. Again, we were legislated back to work. When we started the job action, the NDP were the government in their failing days, and we all remember what happened in 2001. Gordon

Campbell and the Liberals came in. Vince Ready was appointed mediator and actually Vince came out with his recommendations in the middle of the summer. Len Ruel was leading up the bargaining for CAW and Len and I spoke daily. We were friends outside. I remember we had a press conference with Jim Sinclair, who was the president of the B.C. Fed, and Len said they would return to work under the conditions that Vince had laid down. I spoke for us and said, look, we weren't included in this, but under those terms and conditions, we're prepared to do it. We'll put the buses back on the roads. The company rejected it and we was dragged out again for longer and longer. Eventually we were sent back to work and by legislation.

KN [00:27:03] With the recommendations?

AR [00:27:04] With the recommendations pretty much untouched from what they could have been. It was it was fairly impactful. It impacted lots of people, obviously. There was a million stories came out of that. One of the things that happened during this strike is it really cemented in everybody's mind—George Puil, who was the brand new chair of TransLink, and who was the guy that really was behind this whole idea of contracting out all of this work, became Mad King George and the public got behind that. The result of the 2001 strike was, realistically, the NPA in Vancouver were decimated the next election and have never really recovered since then. They did get one mayor with Sullivan in again, and they may be grouping under different names, but that kind of municipal dynasty, the transit strike was the hammer blow to where they were.

KN [00:28:11] In addition to the transit strikes, you were engaged in a number of other job actions, at least your union was, one of them dealing with the BCAA, and another one with Terasen Gas, which is the forerunner of Fortis. Can you talk about those two events?

AR [00:28:35] They were completely different kind of actions, but interesting in their own ways. We attempted to organize BCAA, which is one of the largest societies, well known, fairly well respected around the province, but weren't treated particularly well by the employer in so much as favouritism was a big issue that as usual, it was how people were being treated, not anything else that drove it. We were contacted and one of our chief staff, Dave McPherson, took over the campaign and the BCAA fought us tooth and nail. They did not want a union and ironically their head office was about 200 metres away from our union office. We had quite often walk over there and go for lunch wearing my union shirt and it was like you'd dropped a swarm of killer bees into a place. They would scatter like crazy, but it ended up being a year less a day on the picket lines with multitudes of labour board hearings, legal proceedings, all kinds of issues going on, some very, very innovative things that we were trying to do at this time.

AR [00:29:59] I remember a few of the issues that we had. One ended up setting a kind of precedent case in the courts. Computers were still kind of not as commonplace as they are now. We had a lot of IT guys so we put them to work and we did one thing. We recreated their website and had it so quite often, if people searched, they'd go to ours first. Under legal advice, we were too close to what they looked like, so we had to take that down before we got sued on that. In fact, we did lose part of it for infringing on a copyright colour, if I remember rightly. I'm no IT guy, but we were allowed to go after their metatags so we could actually interrupt searches and stuff and direct them to our messaging as well. We were pretty successful on that. Then again, the mad professor, Dave McPherson, came up with an idea and we put stickers on coins. Thousands and thousands and thousands of stickers on coins that were circulating around all over the province, apart from doing the regular job action stuff you would expect. We were forced to sign each

location, location by location, and we didn't have them all, so it was predominantly in the lower mainland, but across the province as well.

AR [00:31:36] At that time there was still travel and insurance being done by BCAA, and it kind of built to a head going up because BCAA is a society that had to have an AGM. Usually, it's a few people show up and it's all proxy votes and it's all done. We rallied up the crews and it was at the Executive Inn in Burnaby and BCAA at this time had hired an American strike-breaking crew and it was fairly tense. The place was packed, there was an overflow. They were refusing certain people entry. We planted questions and we brought politicians and local people in and it was just a nightmare. The people on the board who, this was usually a social gathering, suddenly saw things changing. It was not business as usual. We even targeted a few of those. Minter Gardens—Minter was one of the board of directors, so a bunch of people went out and not picketed, but leafleted outside of Minter Gardens. They didn't like that. There was another guy whose name I forget, in Nelson had a tailor shop, I think, and I remember the West Kootenay Labour Council having demonstrations outside the tailor shop. The writings were on the wall and after, as I say, a year less than a day, we got our first collective agreement at BCAA after a bunch of very innovative and bit of a strike. Actually one of my long time colleagues who was in New West office, in New West where I live, he just retired last year and Paul was on the line every day there and still there. It was quite an event.

KN [00:33:21] Can you remind me of what year that was?

AR [00:33:22] 1999 it started. 2000 we got the first collective agreement.

KN [00:33:27] Thank you. What about the Terasen Gas?

AR [00:33:32] Terasen is so wrapped up in the politics of what has happened in this province in energy. As a bit of a back story, the gas used to be part of B.C. Hydro, the gas division, and B.C. Gas was formed when that portion of the gas came out of Hydro and also joined with Inland Gas to form B.C. Gas. At the time there was legislation saying it could be, I believe it was 20% foreign ownership and that stayed like that for quite a long time. Very stable at B.C. Gas, things ran along there and it was fine. Then there was pressure to change the way it was structured. Ironically, in the midst of one of our big campaigns against B.C. Hydro, the Libs slipped in a one line piece of legislation at the bottom of a paragraph that had nothing to do with gas that changed all of that, and allowed for higher foreign ownership. We could see things were changing in Terasen Gas. We were going into bargaining. Actually this was the first year that I became president, 2005. I remember I was supposed to go have breakfast with the president of Terasen and he didn't show up. The vice-president of labour relations said, oh, he got, he was involved in something urgent that came up. Then the next thing we knew, they'd been bought out by Kinder Morgan. This whole deal to change the ownership of everything, obviously the wheels have been turning in the background.

AR [00:35:14] At the time, they were trying to change all of the working conditions for our members. I know they were going particularly after the sick plan, they were trying to change a whole bunch of issues. There'd never been any, I don't even think there'd been job stoppages at Gas at that time, so we weren't really clear where the membership were, so we did an escalating job stoppage for the first time. We closed down portions of the various departments across the province. This was getting interesting because it was going to escalate. There was a offer put on the table, which I believe, the company certainly thought it was going to go on. I think the bargaining committee at the time thought

it was going to go on, probably might even recommended it, and it was turned down by the membership quite significantly. That ramped things up. We actually got to the deal just before we were talking about a complete shutdown at the time.

AR [00:36:18] As history has shown, Kinder Morgan really wasn't interested in providing gas. They wanted the pipelines, which is another story that we're living through right now with the dualling of the Trans-Canada. Ironically, when Kinder Morgan bought the company, I didn't know anything about them at the time, so we did some research and I talked to some of my colleagues down in the States, and their safety records weren't very good at a lot of their locations. We met, I remember meeting at the Hyatt with the new people from Kinder Morgan. They were asking for good relations and all this. I asked them a bunch of questions. They weren't very forthcoming so we put a press release out, not very complimentary. I guess it was a no news weekend because I got interviewed on a Sunday and we got the 6 o'clock news about how unsafe Kinder Morgan pipelines were, and that just drove them crazy. It was only a couple of months later they were working on the pipeline down in Burnaby. I don't know if you remember, there was a pipeline that was hit and sprayed a whole bunch of houses and devastated the area. Unfortunately for Kinder Morgan, if that wasn't bad enough, one of the houses that had to be basically rebuilt was one of our staff member's. (unclear) She happened to live out. She came out of that very nicely. Kinder Morgan did not last very long before they sold off the supply side of the gas to Fortis. We already had relations with Fortis up in the Okanagan and Kootenays because they bought the Old West Kootenay Power Supply there. They're separate companies, separate operations but the same company. We did have a bit of a working relationship and initially as well, it was a much better working relationship we had at that time.

KN [00:38:12] Your union also ran a number of public campaigns and the one that really comes to mind is Citizens for Public Power, which I believe was initiated in 2001. Can you talk about that initiative, what it was all about?

AR [00:38:30] The union proud that had run some campaigns, not unlike many unions at the time, which were kind of information and trying to get your point across and get some profile. I think the Citizens for Public Power was certainly for us the first time we took a step in a more strategic and long term way of working with others to assist. We formed this organization called Citizens for Public Power, and we did a number of different issues around there. We sponsored a bunch of public forums where we brought in speakers to talk about what was happening. You have to put this in context. This is 2001. The Libs have just come in and they are gung ho to dismantle public services. ICBC was on their targets, BC Hydro was on their targets, and so we knew this was coming. We didn't know to what extent at this point. As Citizens for Public Power, I remember down at the Vancouver Public Library having Joy MacPhail and Bill Vander Zalm on the same panel talking against the direction the government was going in, which another surreal moment. We also launched a class action suit to try and prevent some of the actions that provincial government were taking. This was done. The IBEW Local 258 at Hydro joined with us and a lot of other outside organizations.

AR [00:40:07] We started Citizens for Public Power because our polling told us that when we asked people what they thought about B.C Hydro, it was highly regarded. People in B.C. like B.C. Hydro. Then we'd tell them what was being planned. They didn't like that at all, but they didn't really believe it. We knew sometimes as a union that you will be pigeonholed into just being for self-preservation, so part of our idea was, let's bring these outside voices in to validate our positions. We did a lot of work around this. We got

involved politically. We got involved at the Utilities Commission meeting, making submissions as an intervener on issues. We found pockets in areas that had been impacted to some extent.

AR [00:41:00] We brought in people from jurisdictions across North America, specifically out of the States, because about that time was the time when Enron was going sideways and you were seeing brownouts across Texas and California. At the time, B.C. was selling electricity on the spot market and making a lot of money. The government's eyes were lighting up. Their whole idea was to split up our public owned utility and make it into a commodity market, a bit like what Ontario was doing the time. They went so far as to split up the transmission lines, so the transmission now became a separate company. A lot of that was to provide what they were going to do with some big industrial mining plants up north where they could build these lines, bill it back to the consumers of B.C., and subsidize the building of these power lines where there weren't any, for massive draws for electricity for mining, most of which did not happen. That, by the way, didn't last very long because it did not work very well.

AR [00:42:06] Also, they did bring in Accentia, who is still around now. They advise, they are consultants for business. They split Hydro up and took 1,500 of our members in customer service and IT and split them off into a separate certification and bargaining unit, took them out of the pension plan, all kinds of stuff. These were the kind of things we saw coming. I don't know if you remember at the time, the move to smart metres. Smart metres do have a lot of advantages, but they're extremely expensive. When the government came in and announced this, it was hidden in budget papers and my colleague Gwenne Farrell found this and looked, there's going to be a deferred cost put onto Hydro which takes it off the government books. We're in the billions of dollars for these initiatives. We couldn't get a newspaper or anybody to look in this or print it and oh, it was just a crazy time. So Citizens was a tool that we tried to use to get this message across. It had some success, but ultimately it didn't get us where we needed to be as time moved forward and it progressed into other campaigns as well.

KN [00:43:25] Thank you. Your union also had a good reputation in terms of some environmental initiatives it took. What were those?

AR [00:43:37] This was kind of the next level of the spin off of the Hydro issue. One of the things that was happening was Hydro was ordered to put a call out for power to allow IPPs, independent power producers, into the market. Again, it's all to this commodifying. This never made any sense at all, economically, structurally. The only people that made sense for was shareholders of private companies who are now being allowed to, by and large, they could get the rights of our runoff waters and produce smaller hydroelectric power plants to feed into the hydro grid. It didn't make a lot of sense for many reasons. One, these operate most efficiently when the freshets running and when it's running, we have more power than we can possibly ever use. We don't need that extra power. Two, it causes a lot of balancing on the grid, which is not necessarily directly in the control of Hydro. Three, the government pegged the prices of this so high that it was costing us, we were forced, 'we' being B.C. Hydro and the consumers, being forced to buy expensive electricity from private companies, and we could have produced it cheaper ourselves. It made no sense, but the environmental part of it is the damage they were doing to the creeks and rivers right across B.C. in the process.

AR [00:45:11] We ended up working with and consulting with, then it was the Western Wilderness Wildlife Committee, [Western Canada Wilderness Committee], WC squared,

which led to what I believe might have been the first official coalition between a union and the environmental movement. We worked very closely together on the common interests. We had understanding that as representing people that produce power in the country, sometimes we would have different views, but it led to a very, very fruitful working relationship that exists till today. We became very involved with a number of their campaigns. They were very supportive with us. I guess one of the highlights for me anyway, was we did a province-wide tour to go and take our message to anybody that would listen to us. We had three of us speaking on the tour. There was myself for the union side. Joe Foy was the campaign director for the Wilderness Committee who led many campaigns around old growth and a real dynamic guy in every aspect. Ironically, Rafe Mair, who people remember as the talk show host, but also a Social Credit minister, who absolutely thought this idea of IPP's was ridiculous. We used to laugh after hours, the most radical left wing-sounding speaker on the tour was Rafe Mair, at times, who despised the current Liberal government and their views on energy policy. That continued with our working with the Wilderness Committee and some other environmental groups, but not as closely as that.

AR [00:46:58] That had a bit of an impact as well, because as climate change became more of an issue, I was also sitting on the board at Working Enterprises at the time. We'd started an initiative of looking at carbon offsets, and in 2009 I think our union was the first carbon neutral union in B.C., yes, and still remains so, using carbon offsets, but also with our environmental group looking at ways to reduce our footprint and in other aspects as well. I don't know if it was a direct rub off, but it certainly assisted in the process of greening up the way that we looked at our operations.

KN [00:47:39] Andy, in addition to, you were vice-president now of your union, and I guess you found the time to also become the president of the New Westminster & District Labour Council. You going to talk about that experience?

AR [00:47:55] Yeah, I joined the Labour Council pretty much as soon as I became a member of as I'd said, OTEU, and that was in the New West Labour Council, and I loved it. It was great. I remember going to my first meeting, we were at the old Carpenters' Hall in New West at the time, so there was a throwback. It's still probably looked the same as when they started unions in B.C. Dave Tones from the IWA was president at the time and I met all of these people from different unions. As I said, I'd just come out of ICTU where we weren't part of the larger labour movement, and I just found it so invigorating and there were so many people that I learned from. Looking back, there were so many people that I met at that time that have now gone on to become, you know, household names, leaders of their own unions as well. That I just thought it was a great organization. We were involved in our communities. Being really political, I sat on the political action committee and some of the things we looked at there was what we did as labour councils and what we did not do. New West became the first one. I remember being one of the authors that started changing the way that we reviewed who we would endorse for candidates. We started the more in-depth interview process, which a lot of labour councils have now adopted as the sort of template of how to go through this.

KN [00:49:30] You're talking about candidates for civic office.

AR [00:49:32] Yeah. Part of the thing that we looked at is, back then, unions as institutions kind of looked at who they were. Were you a federal union, a provincial union, or a municipal union, but at the labour council level, it was the same people doing the same political work. We said, this is ridiculous. We've got to get more involvement. There was a

few initiatives that were being pushed at that time as well. I remember again with W.E. we started the governance for civic politics as well. In New West we did, apart from revising our internal stuff, we also worked closely trying to build some civic parties within our jurisdiction, which back then ran from Boundary Road in Vancouver all the way out to Hope. We tried in Surrey and God bless people that work in municipal politics in Surrey. It's tough sledding. We were actually right on the brink of forming a civic party in Coquitlam when Jack Layton stole Fin Donnelly from us, and were on the verge (unclear). We did form some good coalitions at other places, course Burnaby was always solid and were a model we looked at. New West, became very, very well organized, and for a while there we even had some good work being done out in Mission and Abbotsford, as coalitions rather than parties. It was an innovative time.

AR [00:51:05] Then as things changed, I got onto the executive of the labour council. Then with more changes I was asked, when that became available, if I'd be willing to run for the president, and I said 'Yes, gladly.' Back in those days there was not designated roles. Everything was voted for on the executive, so I said, 'This doesn't make a lot of sense. We could get people excluded.' One of the first things we did was rewrite our constitution, modelled it more on representation to make sure there was more people at the executive level sitting at the table. Between moving the politics, moving the constitution, the next big issue came up while I was president was the formation of the Fraser valley labour council. We realized we had people driving in from Chilliwack and you know, it was quite a stretch. As we were seeing densification in the Fraser Valley, it became sense. When this came, this was not a war where we were split, this was done with full blessing of everybody involved, just to give local activists an easier access to their labour councils. I was quite involved in that process of setting up the Fraser valley labour council as well.

KN [00:52:31] After this, after your term on the labour council and serving as vice-president, you became president of COPE 378 from 2005 to 2011, six years there. Can you talk a bit about any of the issues or events during your presidency, what you found particularly satisfying in terms of an experience, and what you found really challenging?

AR [00:52:52] Yeah, 2005, my first year, there was a number of issues. The Terasen strike I told you about, that was working through. When I think back, I remember I was sitting in the office and I get a phone call and it was Sinclair over at the B.C. Fed. He says, 'I need you. Get ready. Teachers are on strike. We're going to shut down Victoria,' and then hung up. I thought OK, I'm not sure we've got a playbook for this because as you will remember, Ken, they weren't actually in a position where we could do this, so we went into full scale organizing on how can we execute this and make it work and not end up in jail or in court. That was a very interesting time and this was in the first term, but in hindsight what it did was it really built a lot of solidarity, one amongst our staff who really got into it in a great way, but also amongst our activists. It was sort of the first larger scale thing where were I was president involved in, coming together to address that.

AR [00:54:13] There was that that was happening but also in the midst of all of this, I remember things were going fairly well at the start and I talked with my table officers and said I could actually go on summer vacation. I was, I think on my second day of vacation when I got a phone call from David Black, who became my successor. This whole Accentia thing I talked about before, we had a call centre up in Kelowna, which used to be the call centre that co-ordinated for the Gas and all this stuff, and they'd called him and said they were shutting it down and moving all the services out of province. This came out of left field. We weren't expecting that. We had a template collective agreement drawn up,

ready to be signed. It was, it was 99% baked and we get this call. They moved them back east, I believe, first New Brunswick or somewhere like this and then offshore to the Philippines, and they were gone. That was my first or second day on vacation.

AR [00:55:13] All five years there was a lot of firsts. I remember that very well. It was stressful, obviously but you work through those. '06 was the kind of opposite. If you cast your mind back on '06, everybody was getting ready for the Olympics. They were trying to get all the public sector unions to settle so there was no disputes going through the Olympics. Carole Taylor was the finance minister at the time, and they were offering signing bonuses, some of the largest signing bonuses we'd seen for unions that were ready to settle. I believe our Hydro agreement was the first one that came up in the public sector. They'd actually been negotiating prior to these announcements and were pretty close to a deal. This, I guess, put the cherry on top. We called it the big screen TV settlement.

AR [00:56:12] I was really proud of our Hydro members because of the pay increases. They recognized that the lower wages were not getting—they get the same percentage, but it doesn't mean as much. They actually structured their signing bonuses so they were graduated, so the lower pay scales got a higher cash signing bonus than some of the higher ones. Not everybody like that, but the majority certainly did. That was a high point. '06 was a bargaining year for us. All our public sectors were up and obviously there was a lot of incentive to go through there. I used that as a bit of an advantage.

AR [00:56:48] For ten years I'd been trying to change the constitution and governance of our local. It was based on, really because our union grew out of Hydro, it was based more on a model for a one company thing rather than a combined organization as we'd become. We had about 90 collective agreements at this time. This process was just not working for us. For ten years I'd been involved and tried to change it unsuccessfully. We used the public sector bargaining ratification process as a way to get people out to meetings and they had to vote on the constitutional changes before they voted on the ratification. Of course it sailed through. While this isn't the sexy stuff, it actually changed the whole dynamic of the way our organization operates and governed for the better, in my opinion, and I would say everybody else's opinion. Now, despite the reluctance to change, it's embraced the change and I think it's become a better organization so internally that was good. There was a lot of internal changes that are structural and they're not really seen, but they make the fundamental differences and I was proud of that.

AR [00:57:59] If I'd have to say, and maybe this comes up later, but also one of the things that happened while I was president that I think might be the highlight is really kicking off our young workers. Up until that point, we had no real format. We formalized the group and we funded it. To this day they've become, for a small union in B.C. our young workers have been front and centre of almost all initiatives in the province and at the CLC as well. I was really proud of that. When I retired, the next election that took place, 25% of our executive board were young workers, which I still like that. I'll still hold that up as a highlight.

KN [00:58:48] During the period of time when you were president of your union and you served on the B.C. Federation of Labour executive, can you talk about your experience with the B.C. Federation of Labour, but I know you alluded to the 2005 teacher strike. Other than that, how was working in the B.C. Fed?

AR [00:59:06] Well, I started on council. My very first council meeting was in 1999 and I believe it was the only time that the B.C. Fed executive council had full attendance. The reason for that is Ken Georgetti had just announced he was going to step down and become the president of the CLC, and there was an election for who was going to become the president of the B.C. Fed. Under the Constitution it was the executive council that would have to choose and it was a tight two way race. Every single executive councillor was there at the Villa in Burnaby and the electioneering had been going on hard going into this event and nobody was really sure which way it was going to go. It was Jim Sinclair and Patrice Pratt were both running and I know both of them very well. I remember the day very well. We were sitting around there and right in the middle of it we got the announcement, Gerry Stoney, the old IWA leader, just passed away at that time as well. In the midst of all of this, some of us that knew Gerry very well and I knew him from the labour council, it was an eventful first meeting, to say the least.

AR [01:00:25] I was on council and I got to know obviously quite a few of the officers and I participated with my then president, Ron Tuckwood with the ranking officers meeting at Harrison as well. I have to say at that time the reception I got from the leadership of the other unions was amazing. They were very supportive, always willing to help. What also impressed me is the amount of discussion we would have that where we don't necessarily all agree, but coming out of the room unified and solid. Also what's striking is the unions then, they're not here anymore. There's no IWA, there's no CEP, there's no Telecommunications Workers. These are all private, big unions when I started working at the Fed, that are no longer there anymore. I mean, we did see the rise of the public sector both in density and in unions. I remember the Teachers joining when I was there. That was one of the highlights as well.

AR [01:01:33] My experiences with the B.C. Fed, both on the council and when I became an officer, was really positive. There was really, I believe, a will to work and get things done. We had a common enemy which made it easy, but we were always, you know, we were always having those fights and those disputes with the Libs. During the nineties when we were in government, I saw something that, when you look back with time and I'm sure Sharon can relate to this, when we were in government in the nineties, the ability to pick the phone up and talk to the premier or the minister and we might not always agree, but you could see there was a goal in the end. Then suddenly be thrust into 2001 and the change. I'd come through as my vice-presidency being able to talk to the minister.

AR [01:02:30] I remember being president trying to have a meeting with the Minister of Energy when all of that Hydro stuff was going down. I forget the guy's name, he's from the Peace River. He wouldn't even reply. He wouldn't even reply to a letter. I remember we sent him a letter asking for a meeting, suggested some dates—he was unavailable. Then we sent another letter saying we'll meet you anywhere, any place, any time, and got a letter saying he wasn't available for that as well. It was just ridiculous. We eventually did get a letter, but never a meeting. The only reason he wrote is he was instructed by Carole Taylor at the time when we were in bargaining that he had to respond. Those were the changes.

AR [01:03:09] All through I always felt that when we had an issue, especially as a smaller union, if I pick the phone up and talked to any of the leaders of the Fed, they'd always be there for you. There was some when I started some, these were like giants, John Shields was BCGEU, people that came through Solidarity and lived all of this stuff. IWA were just going through the changes at the time and it was changing over. I remember Dave Haggard had just come in, which led to some issues. I remember the B.C.Tel stuff. B.C.

Tel had just been taken over and were coming into being Telus and the long TWU strike which really they never recovered from, of course became part of Steelworkers. Kenny Newman from Steel. I mean, these guys, Brooke Sundin, they always had time. I never got the impression that you were just being brushed aside. They always had time to guide and assess, of which I was very appreciative.

KN [01:04:15] I'm just wondering, given that you've covered a lot of ground, but I'm wondering if there's anything else you would like to say about your experience as an activist in the B.C. labour movement that we haven't covered, anything stands out that you want to mention?

AR [01:04:29] I also did work with the CLC and also some global union federations as well. I think this is true for most people in most unions, you're always inside your own world looking at your own problems. Sometimes it's good to see a different picture from outside of there. I think the exposure to the larger pictures in the labour movement really assisted and helped our own organization. We really, during our Citizens for Public Power in our public campaigns, we did a lot of work with utilities and other unions across North America, both in hydro and in gas--gave us some great ideas. Then we did some campaigns. I guess the biggest one was with the mineworkers in Mexico, along with the Steelworkers when Pauline Gomez was living in exile here. I did a lot of work with the mineworkers down in Mexico City working, getting Juan out of jail, when they threw him in jail after being up here at the CLC convention, worked with the utility workers in Mexico City when the armed police raided and took over their union.

AR [01:05:47] You see those things and bring them to light back to people in our own union and tell those stories and bring those guests in to show that there's a much bigger connected world out there than just the one that we're living in here. I remember getting questioned, why are we doing this? We should just be bargaining an agreement and we're going, all these things impact us. I'm glad to see that that's caught some traction. There's more involvement and there's a broader understanding amongst the membership. I'm proud of the role that we played as a tiny little union in B.C. that we're part of it and the welcoming way that we are treated when we meet unions from around the world.

KN [01:06:28] After stepping down from an active leadership role in your union, you went on to take on a number of new challenges in your life. Can you mention what these might be?

AR [01:06:36] One of the things I always liked was teaching. I was an instructor at Transit and I never met a microphone I didn't like. One of the things that I kind of enjoyed was parliamentary procedures and public speaking, so I worked with the Winter School for quite a while, teaching that course for them up at Harrison. That kind of spun off where I would get engagements for other unions and through our work with the wellness committees, some smaller, not-for-profits. I've done a lot of work helping them either structure or run meetings, writing constitutions, helping them with procedures, leadership development, things like this. I did that--none of this planned, it sort of just happened.

AR [01:07:30] I got involved with the city of Burnaby on a couple of big events where Paul McDonnell, who passed away just a couple of years ago, was city councillor. Back in 2012, Burnaby were hosting the senior games and they needed some assistance so he recruited me to become the vice-president of the organizing committee, which led to then running the World Championship taekwondo for the city of Burnaby. Then Hockey Canada asked me to assist in the World Juniors, so things like that happened. Also, with my connections

to labour and especially transportation, which was the field I was in, I did chair the first B.C. Fed Transportation Committee.

AR [01:08:11] When we changed governments and they were looking for reappointments, I got the first union member to be appointed to the Board of TransLink. I was not sure how that was going to go, but five years later it's moved on and actually it's a very productive working relationship with the various board members and currently I'm the vice-chair of the board of directors at TransLink. Subsequently, I was invited by the Ferry Workers' Union to be their nominee on the board of the B.C. Ferries. I sit on both of those boards now, as well. Between that and doing the consulting, it's kind of a semi-retirement. Not quite what I planned, but every day is an interesting day, and I'm glad to say that it does make a difference. It makes a difference on having those different voices in the room.

KN [01:09:12] Andy, you've alluded to the fact that there's been a lot of changes that you've seen in the labour movement during your experience. I'm wondering if you have any words of wisdom for somebody today. You alluded to your young workers' committee in your union. If you have any wisdom today for somebody who's just becoming active in their union at this time in our history, is there any words of wisdom you would have?

AR [01:09:34] Well, I don't know about wisdom. I think maybe encouragement. I think everybody lives in the moment. When you're first coming in, it can seem maybe a bit overwhelming or intimidating to think that you as the individual can really change anything, but that isn't the case. Margaret Mead said it very well, 'It's that small group of people that will make changes.' I think I would hope that whether they're young or new to the union movement that, always think of what can be done and not, what cannot be done, to ask the questions. When I say push the boundaries, I remember when I talked to my young workers, I said, 'Look, I want you guys coming in and I want you to shake things up and ask all of those difficult questions. As long as you don't upset me, I'm quite happy with you doing that.' I think it needs to be done.

AR [01:10:27] I think you need organizations that are receptive to these new ideas as well. I really would encourage, I think there is a unique opportunity out there right now. This is not the world I grew up in. We grew up in, in the social, economics society. If younger people in this world want to find their place, it's a chance for them to make that mark. I believe the union movement is still one of the greatest ways that they can possibly do that. Unless you're born with billions of dollars, if you want to make society change, this is the most effective way of getting it done. I really encourage them not to look too inward, look at the bigger scope, get involved in your community, into your politics at every level, into what's happening around the world, and make a difference. That difference might be small, but it's a difference.

KN [01:11:22] Lastly, I would ask you this question, Andy. Why do you think, and I presume you do think it is important for young activists today, such as the ones we've been talking about, to know something about the history of their union and the history of the union movement in general?

AR [01:11:41] There's so many ways you could answer that. The classic is those that don't read the history are deemed to repeat it, is the easy answer, but I think it is that, but it's so much more. Whatever generation you are, you grow up with expectations that things are where they are, without really questioning them unless you're given reason to. The classic line 'unions, the people that brought you the weekend' nobody would think that you wouldn't have certain things now. I remember telling the young workers, you've got your

pension, you've got your sick benefits, you've got stat holidays, you've got this, you've got that. They didn't just happen. At one time there was a bunch of young people sitting around with an aspiration and a dream. It didn't just happen. It took a while and there were setbacks and there was all kinds of roadblocks thrown in. Some day you're going to be sitting at an older age looking back, that people take for granted for work that you did, if you do it right. What you need to do is find out what those things were, what were the roadblocks, what were the successes. Not that it's going to be identical today, but learn from that and what was, been effective and how it changed and how long it took to change, because these things don't just happen.

AR [01:12:57] Classic example is our health care system. You know the glib answer, what happened? Oh, Tommy Douglas said we'll have health care. No, it wasn't quite like that. I think that learning that history so we have a better understanding, positions anybody to be able to make changes for the future with a better insight and a better grasp of what it really takes to make social change in a wholesale way. That's vital. That drills right down to the smaller knowledge of your own organization, whatever it is. It's good to ask, this is what we are today. Why are we like that? That would lead to the question, is that how we have to remain? Is this the best way to do the business? Is this really working for our membership? Those kind of questions--I think you need that history to be able to put it into a context to allow you to move forward.