

## Episode 1: Joe Naylor

### Transcribed by Patricia Wejr

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:00:26] Welcome to the very first episode of On the Line, a podcast that aims to shed light on British Columbia's rich labour heritage. My name is Rod Mickleburgh. In this episode, we'll be telling you about an unsung hero of this province's early labour movement, a socialist coal miner named Joe Naylor.

**Music: 'Nanaimo Jail' performed by Jon Bartlett** [00:00:49] Nanaimo jail. Nanaimo jail. Full of good union men. They are good men. They are true men. Fighting for the UMW of A. Nanaimo jail. Nanaimo jail. Full of good union men. They are good men. They are good men. Fighting for the UMW of A...

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:01:14] Let's start with the famous Ginger Goodwin, one of the most well known figures in BC labour history. Goodwin was shot dead by a special constable in the hills overlooking Cumberland on July 27th, 1918. A skilled organizer, socialist and a vice-president of the BC Federation of Labour, he'd been on the run from military conscription that would have sent him overseas to the killing fields of World War I. On the day of his funeral, outraged union members in Vancouver walked off the job for 24 hours. It was the first general strike in Canadian history. Today, his story is commemorated in books, plays and songs. An entire mountain and a stretch of highway are named after him, and there are annual pilgrimages to his gravesite in Cumberland. But nearby Ginger Goodwin's large, distinctive headstone, almost unnoticed, is a simple metal plate affixed to a chunk of stone. This modest marker identifies the grave of Joe Naylor, who seems as forgotten today as Ginger Goodwin is remembered. Yet without Joe Naylor, would Ginger Goodwin have become BC's most celebrated labour martyr? It's a fair question. Why? Because when Goodwin showed up in Cumberland to work in the mines just before the great Vancouver Island coal strike that began in 1912, it was Joe Naylor who took the young Goodwin under his wing. Although there was a 15-year age gap between them, the two became fast friends. They fished for trout, attended local dances, shared a love of soccer, and of course, mined coal. Along the way, Joe Naylor mentored his younger friend in the ways of trade unionism and socialism. By the end of the two-year strike, Ginger Goodwin had embraced Joe Naylor's strong socialist principles and his belief that an organized working class was the only way to effect real change. [instrumental musical interlude]

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:03:33] After the strike, like so many others, Ginger Goodwin found himself blacklisted from the Cumberland mines. He moved on to Trail, where he came into his own, organizing and leading a strike at the Trail smelter for an eight-hour day; running for the provincial legislature as a socialist, and as we have heard, becoming a vice-president of the BC Federation of Labour. The president of the Federation, elected at the same convention, was none other than his old friend, Joe Naylor. Joe Naylor did not leave a legacy of speeches and fiery actions against the ramparts of capitalism. That was not his way. But during the second decade of the 20th century, he was the most radical union leader on Vancouver Island and one of the most prominent labour militants in British Columbia. There was a reason that a special undercover agent was posted in Cumberland for years, just to keep an eye on him. This is his story. Joe Naylor was born in the bleak coal mining town of Wigan, Lancashire, in 1872. You may have heard of Wigan. His birthplace became quite well known when George Orwell published "The Road to Wigan Pier", his classic account of working class poverty and hardship in 1937. Not much had changed in the 65 years since Naylor was born. It did not take young Joe long to join the ranks of local coal miners. They laboured under terrible conditions for some of the lowest

coal mining wages in the country. And it was dangerous work. Between 1850 and 1914, at least 90,000 miners died in the UK, a shocking average of 1,500 fatalities a year. No wonder Joe Naylor was among hundreds of thousands of British coal miners who abandoned their grim jobs and lit out for what they hoped would be a better life in North America. Joe Naylor first wound up in Butte, Montana in 1908. The area had some of the richest ore fields in the USA, but as in Britain, working conditions were abysmal, the death rate even higher. Many of Joe's fellow miners were Irish who had their own song about the misery of the mines in Butte.

**Music: 'The Bute Miners Song' performed by Jeff Burrows [00:06:04]** 'Twas once in the saddle, I used to go dashing. 'Twas once, says a cowboy, I used to be brave. But ain't it a pity, I came to Butte City to work for Jim Brennan. And now to my grave. Then hurrah for old Ireland, the land of good miners. The dear little isle that I see in my dreams. I'll go back to old Ireland, to the girl who waits for me. To hell with your mines and your mining machines.

**Rod Mickleburgh [00:06:52]** Joe Naylor also found a thriving union movement in Butte. The local miners first organized in 1885. They soon became one of the toughest unions in the United States, not above threatening to lynch a mine superintendent—they didn't—to win a closed shop. In 1893, they took the lead in forming the Western Federation of Miners, one of the most militant and radical unions North America has ever seen. Still, Naylor did not stick around Butte for long. After only a year, he headed to where the Union Jack still flew, across the border to BC, and found work in the coal mines of Cumberland. He arrived to a union environment that was a long way from the labour hotbed he had left behind. Despite nearly 40 years of struggle, Vancouver Island coal miners were still without a union recognized by the Island's ruthless mine owners. Merely being identified as pro-union could be enough to send a worker down the road. Those who dared to go on strike, were blacklisted. As a result, workers' rights were almost non-existent.

**Rod Mickleburgh [00:08:12]** As the new miner in town, Joe Naylor focussed first on politics, shaped by the working class socialism he had already encountered back home and in Butte. He quickly became active in the Socialist Party of Canada. The party had a strong following in British Columbia. Working class ridings regularly elected socialists to the legislature until 1916. In 1902, a handful of socialists had held the balance of power. They used that leverage to pressure the government to proclaim an eight-hour day in the mines and bring in the province's first Workers Compensation Act. Joe Naylor was recording secretary of the Socialist Cumberland chapter. They held a business meeting every Sunday afternoon in the Socialist Hall across the street from the post office. After that, there was a propaganda meeting to discuss, quote: the principles and programs of the revolutionary working class, unquote. Economic classes were offered Tuesdays and Fridays at 7 pm. A glimpse of Joe Naylor's strong beliefs can be found in a letter he wrote to the Cumberland newspaper opposing the formation of a local troop of Boy Scouts. Who could be against the Boy Scouts? Well, in those days the organization had a strong element of militarism, complete with bayonet training, a point that Joe fastened on.

**Jeff Burrows voicing Joe Naylor's letter [00:09:45]** Bayonets are made by the working class. Nicely polished by the working class, and then patriotically thrust into the working class, for the capitalist class. It is the capitalist class that seeks to organize the Boy Scouts to perpetuate the means of holding the working class in slavery. The Boy Scouts' movement is an obstacle between us and our goal of the complete overthrow of the present form of society. And we, the members of Local 2299 of the United Mine Workers of America and the Socialist Party of Canada are bitterly opposed to it.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:10:24] By then, Joe Naylor was president of the United Mine Workers, Cumberland Local. The tough, seasoned union had been invited by Vancouver Island coal miners to help them wage one last all-out fight to organize the Island's coal mines. The result was the great Vancouver Island coal strike, the fiercest, most protracted union battle in this province's history. It lasted nearly two full years. The epic confrontation began as a flare-up over safety. After the deaths of 373 coal miners over the previous 28 years, the government had finally allowed worker-appointed miners to inspect the mines and report possible dangers. But when a safety-conscious miner named Oscar Mottishaw reported finding gas in the number two mine at Extension near Nanaimo, he was fired. He managed to find a new mining job in Cumberland. When management found out who he was, Oscar Mottishaw was sacked once again. Joe Naylor headed a miners' committee that tried to get the owners to overturn his dismissal. They got nowhere. Miners in both Cumberland and Extension protested by staying home on a one-day holiday. The next day, September 17th, 1912, the mine owners barred their return to work. They were locked out. Several years later, testifying before a Royal Commission, Joe Naylor said the miners had not been looking for a dust up at all, at least not then. "It was just a protest," said Joe. But 1,600 miners were now off the job. The war was on. This was no longer about Oscar Mottishaw. This was a bruising, bare-knuckled fight to force the uncompromising mine owners to recognize the United Mine Workers of America as the miners' union of choice. The notorious James Dunsmuir had sold his family's mines two years earlier, but the new owners were every bit as hard-nosed and anti-union as the Dunsmuir's. Right off the bat, they evicted the striking miners from their company-owned homes, forcing them into tents or wherever they could find a place to sleep.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:12:51] At first, Chinese and Japanese miners in Cumberland joined the walkout. Asians, however, were excluded from union membership, so they had no union protection. When the mining company moved to throw them out of their homes and threatened to deport them, they felt they had no choice but to go back to work. Squads of provincial police surrounded their living areas so that white miners could no longer talk to them. This was a time when racism against Asian workers was rampant in the labour movement. White workers believed the low wages paid to miners from China and Japan undercut their own rates, and they were often used by the mine owners to break strikes. Asian exclusion became a fundamental union demand. Of course, racism was not unique to the labour movement. In those days, it ran through all white society, but Joe Naylor was cut from different cloth. At the 1914 convention of the BC Federation of Labour, he took a stand against his own Local's support for a motion to exclude Chinese and Japanese workers from Canada. The motion vilified them as the curse of BC. Joe Naylor took issue. He told the convention:

**Jeff Burrows voicing Joe Naylor's statement** [00:14:13] There are no foreigners in the working class. The only foreigner to our class is the capitalist class. The white men are the real curse of this province. It isn't the Asiatics at all.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:14:28] Naylor said he sympathized with Asian workers who were forced to work as strikebreakers. Instead of excluding them, he said, the way to prevent them undercutting wages was a minimum wage that would apply to all workers regardless of where they came from. Needless to say, this set him apart in a very principled way from most of the labour movement. As an interesting aside, Joe Naylor had his only known portrait taken by Cumberland's resident Japanese photographer, Senjiro Hayashi. By the end of April 1913, the miners' strike was losing steam. Although they had managed to turn back some strike breakers, they could not stop them all. Seven months into the strike, the

mines were close to normal production. So, at a fired up mass meeting of miners on May Day in Nanaimo, the decision was made to shut down all mines on Vancouver Island. The next day, 3700 miners were on strike from Nanaimo to Cumberland. Emotions were soon running high between the scabs and the strikers. In July, a melee between the two groups broke out in Cumberland. According to an account of the skirmish in the socialist paper 'The Clarion', despite many provocations, the miners, under the calming leadership of Joe Naylor, had remained peaceful. That changed when a man named Cave led a large number of strikebreakers into town. They began harassing and taunting the striking miners. Naylor tried to get Cave to calm down. Instead, he challenged the stolid union leader to a fight. At that point, a striker struck Cave and the fight was on. The scabs were soon vanquished, 'The Clarion' reported. The provocative Cave hightailed it out of town, never to be seen again. A few days later, police arrested Joe Naylor on a charge of unlawful assembly despite his peacemaking role. They threw him in jail where he was held without bail. A fellow, identified only as Lester went to visit him behind bars. He recounted his visit in the pages of 'The Clarion'.

**Eric Jarvis voicing Lester's account** [00:16:49] Joe was pleased to see me. He was cheerful, but a blind man could see that Joe felt like a caged lion. Joe likes to be up and doing. He's one of the most active members of the movement and to be chained up at a time like this is very trying.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:17:04] It was no surprise that Joe Naylor had been targeted by the mine owners and anti-union police force. Not long after the strike began, William Colson, general manager of Canadian Collieries, asked his superintendent in Cumberland to forward the names of the worst agitators who had advocated for the original one-day protest strike. Joe Naylor's name was top of the list. He was far and away the most popular and influential union leader in Cumberland, respected for his integrity even by many of the strikebreakers. 'The Clarion' didn't mince words. "Being a class conscious man," 'The Clarion' said, "he was naturally a thorn in the side of the capitalists and the obvious prey of the rapacious thugs that are at present infesting the Island." After several months in jail, Joe managed to obtain bail, and he was released. Not long after that, the charge against him was thrown out of court. However, not even the support of trade unionists up and down the Pacific Coast, an inspirational visit from the famous miners' angel, Mother Jones, nor the incredible heart and valour of the striking miners and the spending of \$1.5 million by the United Mine Workers to support the strike could overcome the forces arrayed against them. At one point, even the militia was sent in, complete with a Gatling machine gun mounted on a flatbed railcar, to arrest scores of strikers, after a series of desperate attacks against scabs in Ladysmith and Extension. After two bitter years of struggle, the strike was called off. The union-busting mine owners had won. In the back to work agreement, the companies had promised not to discriminate against anyone who had worked for them when the strike began. The promise lasted only as long as the time they took to make it. Large numbers of strikers, including Joe Naylor, were not hired back. The blacklist led to a sort of code among miners who felt they had to hide their union allegiance. They would ask another miner whether he was from Bevan, a small community near Cumberland. Its Number 7 coal mine had been a union stronghold. It was also the mine where Joe Naylor had worked. If you answered that you were from Bevan, it was a signal that you were a union man. The jocular subterfuge led to a wonderful song from the time, "Are You from Bevan?" sung to the melody of the unfortunate but tuneful, "Are You from Dixie?"

**Music: 'Are You from Bevan' performed by Phil Thomas and band** [00:20:00] It was way back in 19 and 12, our gas committee was put on the shelf. First we walked out, next

we were locked out then by a foul we were all but knocked out. Our union miners faced guns and jail. Hundreds of us were held without bail. By August 1914, our labour they were courting, but they blacklisted me. Are you from Bevan? I said from Bevan. Where those fields of stumps they beckon to me. I'm glad to see you. Tell me how be you. And those friends I'm longing to see. If you're from Union Bay or Courtenay or Cumberland, any place below that Bevan second dam. Are you from Bevan? I said from Bevan, 'cause I'm from Bevan too.

**Rod Mickleburgh [00:21:02]** Joe Naylor spent the next ten years in Cumberland without regular employment. He survived by living frugally in his small lakeside cabin. He fished and he hunted, and he worked as an occasional organizer for the Mine Workers Union, but there was no letup in his political and trade union activism. As a reaction to a worsening economy and the terrible, pointless carnage of World War I, BC labour was moving more and more to the left. At the Federation of Labour Convention in 1917, almost everyone on the new executive was a socialist, with Joe Naylor as president and his old Cumberland comrade, Ginger Goodwin, as a vice-president. All of them were passionately opposed to military conscription. They saw conscription as forcing workers into a bloody war that pitted members of the working class against each other on the battlefield for the benefit of profiteers, politicians and out-of-touch generals. According to the union paper, 'The Federationist', the convention was special from the start, with none of the, quote: petty squabbling and personal bickering that marked some of the previous gatherings, unquote. Workers were looking for change. Big change.

**Rod Mickleburgh [00:22:29]** A year later, as we know, Ginger Goodwin's refusal to be conscripted led to a shooting near his hideout in Cumberland. Goodwin's casket was paraded through the dusty streets, the largest procession in the town's history. Joe Naylor was one of three speakers paying tribute to the man they loved. Meanwhile, even though Naylor was no longer working in the mines, authorities had not given up trying to nail him. Shortly after Ginger Goodwin's death, he was arrested again. This time, he was charged with assisting those hiding out from conscription, by supplying them with provisions. He was committed for trial in Nanaimo. If convicted, chances were good that Naylor would have been deported—a tactic that was being used increasingly by the federal government to rid the country of socialists and other perceived radicals. As was the charge of unlawful assembly during the coal strike, this charge, too, went nowhere. As reported in 'The Federationist', Justice Denis Murphy told the jury that they should not proceed unless the prosecution produced sufficient evidence to justify the charge. The judge was sceptical. Naylor, he said, was before the court on, quote: the slimmest evidence, unquote, he had ever seen for a man committed for trial. Jurors quickly decided it would be a waste of the court's time to even listen to the charge. Naylor was cleared. This second brush with the law hardly slowed him down. The end of World War I on November the 11th, 1918, spurred the most intense period of radical trade unionism Western Canada had ever seen or would see again. The high watermark was the six-week Winnipeg General Strike in 1919. Shortly after the general strike broke out, the anti-union 'Winnipeg Citizen' newspaper compiled a list of those it feared were behind the city's Bolshevik agitation. Even though he had never come close to Winnipeg, guess whose name was on the list? Yep. Joe Naylor. Joe Naylor started the Winnipeg General Strike? Who knew? The 'Winnipeg Citizen' was influenced by the recent formation of something new in the labour movement—the ultra-militant One Big Union, which Winnipeg authorities blamed for the strike. The OBU called for direct action and general strikes to take on capitalism once and for all. The organization vowed to end political repression and fight for far reaching measures such as the six-hour day. It was time, the OBU declared in ringing tones, for the working class to prepare itself for the day when production for profit will be replaced by

production for use. Industrial workers across western Canada flocked to join up, quickly reaching a peak of more than 41,000 members. As a member of the OBU's first Central Committee and secretary of its Vancouver Island unit, Joe Naylor was in the forefront. In 'The Federationist', Joe Naylor proclaimed:

**Jeff Burrows voicing Joe Naylor's statement** [00:25:50] It seems the spirit of unionism is growing everywhere on Vancouver Island.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:25:54] Dangerous working conditions in the mines could be overturned,

**Jeff Burrows voicing Joe Naylor's statement** [00:25:58] If the men themselves would only join together in a progressive organization with the principle imbued within themselves, that an injury to one is an injury to all.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:26:09] That now included Asian workers. The OBU embraced Joe Naylor's long standing opposition to Asian exclusion. Echoing his farsighted beliefs from years earlier, the OBU agreed that Asian workers should not be shunned but should be encouraged to join previous all-white unions. 'It is a class problem, not a race problem that confronts the white worker in BC', said the OBU. Joe Naylor couldn't have said it better. After that initial spark, however, the OBU died out almost as quickly as it began. In BC, the organization was hounded by security forces, egged on by Premier John Oliver, who denounced the OBU as, yawn, a Bolshevik plot. Mainstream more moderate unions opposed it, while employers refused to negotiate. Also hampered by internal squabbling in little more than a year, the OBU was a spent force. The Socialist Party was also dying out, eclipsed by a new left wing party, the Communist Party of Canada. Joe Naylor wasn't interested. He remained a socialist to the end. In 1924, mine owners finally felt secure enough to let Joe Naylor resume his old coal mining job in Cumberland. By then, he was in his early fifties. But not until 1937, 23 years after the great Vancouver Island coal strike, were the United Mine Workers able to organize and sign a contract covering the Cumberland mines. At the age of 65, Joe Naylor had a union job at last. He continued to work in the mines until he was 71, putting in his final shift in 1943. Over the years, there was never any shortage of visitors to a simple cabin on the shores of Comox Lake. Bronco Moncrief, the colourful mayor of Cumberland for many years, remembered delivering the 'Vancouver Sun' to Naylor in 1942: "He was a big, powerful man and rowed a 16-foot boat. My eyes popped out when he offered me stew and dumplings, warmed up from the day before, for breakfast." Others recalled Joe rowing kids across the lake and teaching them the words to the socialist anthem, 'The Red Flag'.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:28:45] Joe Taylor died of cancer in 1946. Friends sat shifts by his bed in the Cumberland Hospital until he breathed his last. He was laid to rest in the same historic Cumberland Cemetery where his friend Ginger Goodwin had been buried 28 years earlier. At the gravesite, Local Mine Workers' President JH Cameron gave a brief resume of Joe's life, paying tribute to his lifelong support of the labour movement. As mourners bowed their heads, Local Secretary John Bond read out the burial service of the United Mine Workers. Taken from the union's 1912 constitution, it goes: "We are assembled here today to pay a last sad tribute of love to our departed friend and brother. And now we pay the last sad rite, placing on your grave these evergreens as a token of respect that thy memory shall be with us always. Though thou has paid the debt and has gone to the realms above." Rest in peace, Joe Naylor. 1872 to 1946. Unsung hero of the BC labour movement. Socialist, pacifist, organizer, comrade, teacher. Modest, principled and

unrelenting supporter of working class aspirations for a better world. We hope we have done you justice.

**Rod Mickleburgh** [00:30:16] Thanks to Bailey Garden for editing, Patricia Wejr for research and Roger Stonebanks for consultation. Jeff Burrows was the voice of Joe Naylor and sang the Butte Miners Song. Eric Jarvis was the voice of Lester. This podcast is produced by the BC Labour Heritage Centre. In 2016, the Centre installed a bronze plaque commemorating Joe Naylor outside the Cumberland Museum and Archives. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time, On the Line.