

Interview: Rod Mickleburgh (RM)
Interviewer: Ken Novakowski (KN)
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Transcription: Jane Player

RM [00:00:05] So Ken, where were you born? Oh, sorry. All right, enough foolishness. Away you go.

KN [00:00:11] Good morning, Rod.

RM [00:00:12] Thanks Ken, same to you.

KN [00:00:14] We're here on May the 22nd, 2025.

RM [00:00:18] On the unceded territory.

KN [00:00:20] To interview Rod Mickleburgh, a long-time labour reporter for a number of major newspapers, as well as the author of *On the Line, A History of the BC Labour Movement*. Rod, we'd like to start by having you tell us where and in what year you were born.

RM [00:00:36] Do I have to tell the year? Anyway, well I was born at Vancouver General. My mother hoped that, you know, they were kind of left-wingers and they hoped I'd be a May Day baby, but I, for the first time, one of many times, I disappointed them and showed up on May 3rd in the late forties. And both my parents, you know, their roots were all in BC, in Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. And our first home was on Quebec Street. And it was the forties, no one had a lot of money, and they were involved in politics and so on, and when I was two (they didn't ask me), they went East. My dad got a political job back East and so away we went and it pretty tough for my mom leaving all her family and sister and brother, her father and you know cousins and everything behind in Vancouver but we ended up in Toronto where I, where we lived 'till I was nine, and then we went to the grand town of Newmarket about 30 miles north of Toronto. So, that was what was happening.

RM [00:02:01] I was actually born in Vancouver, one of the few.

KN [00:02:03] You indicated that your father was politically involved. Was he involved in progressive politics and was he a union guy?

RM [00:02:13] Well, it was mostly progressive politics, you know. A lot of work on behalf of peace and stuff like that and good causes and all that sort of stuff. It didn't pay much. I mean we were poor. I mean, I'm sounding like Monty Python, but I mean we were poor. As a kid you don't realize it, right? Because there's always food on the table and you're happy, you're growing up, you are a kid, and also as a baby boomer everyone is the same age, and like, everyone just sort of wore ordinary clothes. There wasn't big extremes of wealth and poverty, but we were, at a certain point, we were on a third floor walk up, crammed into a few rooms, and in fact this is why we ended up moving to Newmarket. And I just realized looking back that we were poor, but I never felt that way when I was growing up.

RM [00:03:14] But then in 1955, my mother gave birth to twins at the age of 35. And that changed everything for our family because suddenly there were four kids who were living

in this cramped place. My mother, whose background was a teacher, she'd taught in BC, but she didn't have an Ontario teaching certificate, and she'd been supply teaching and stuff, but she also was a bit of a stay-at-home mom. And my dad wasn't earning much money, and suddenly there were two more mouths to feed and my mother had to go back to work.

RM [00:03:51] And in fact, that is an interesting story. Well, maybe I won't tell it. She noticed an ad in the paper for Newmarket High School looking for teachers, an English teacher. So, she took the bus up to Newmarket— never been there before, of course— was interviewed, and we needed this job, right? The family needed the job and the income. And so, she wasn't quite sure how the interview had gone, and she was nervous about it and stuff like that, and the crusty old principal came out after the interview and said, 'Mrs. Mickleburgh will be starting with us in the fall,' telling his secretary that and everything lifted, right? And then we, you know we actually—it's hard to imagine—we actually were able to rent this quite large house for \$100 a month. Because the people that had built it were moving out. And it was an incredible house. There was room. And the story is told in our family of my brother and sister (named Paul and Pauline, the twins), they were deposited on the floor and they just started crawling everywhere because there was so much space compared to where they used to be. I mean, we put them in a clothes hamper and put them out on the roof, you know, for them to get a bit of sun because there wasn't— you know, that was the thing. I mean, we just didn't have a lot of room. And so, things just started to get better for our family in Newmarket because my mother had a steady income.

RM [00:05:32] My dad still didn't have much of an income but—I mean teachers weren't paid a lot but it was steady income, and it was the 50s. It was cheap, you know. She went shopping every week for groceries at Loblaws and never spent more than 20 bucks. To feed a family of six, right? It's not like we dined on steak or anything like that, but the basics were always looked after. As a kid, I remember the difference in our circumstances was suddenly like there were cookies and there were cakes and treats, right, where we never had that in Toronto because we had to watch our pennies. But that was great.

KN [00:06:11] So you essentially grew up in Newmarket.

RM [00:06:14] You know, going to Newmarket was just one—I mean, I've had a very fortunate life, Ken. A lot of things happen out of chance, you know, that aren't ordained or anything like that and not done on purpose that were great. And growing up in Newmarket was one of them. I mean it's the funniest thing. What is it about a kid that gets an interest in something? What sparks it, right? I can remember this to this day. In Toronto, we used to get the Globe and Mail, and so I was about eight or nine, and one day I just started reading the sports page of the Globe and Mail. Now why did I do that? I have no idea, but I just start—and I would read every word. I mean, I was a reader, and I didn't know what—I remember reading a golf story, and I did know what a bogey was or a birdie was, or anything like that, but you kept reading and you sort of figure—I read horse racing stories. I read every word. I read about the Leafs.

RM [00:07:13] And like, out of nowhere—because neither my parents liked sports or anything like that—I developed this huge passion for sports. And in a place like Toronto, I'd be swallowed up, because I wasn't a good athlete. I was, you know, I wasn't uncoordinated or anything like that, but others were way better than I was. And I got to Newmarket and I played sports. And in the small town, you could play on the town team. You could play on the high school basketball team. You weren't very good, but you could

make that team. You know, you could go golfing. I could become the town tennis champ for my age. Right? And it's a small town, it's manageable. You know most of the people in the town. And it just, you'd find people who are like you, you know?

RM [00:08:04] And it was just such a wonderful environment to grow up in compared to—I'll never know what it would have been like to grow up in Toronto, but you felt that you would have swallowed up. Without the opportunities that you had to relish your interests. You know, and going to Newmarket High School, you could be one of the smartest guys in the class, and you know it just—but everyone got along. We had fun, you know. And so that was, that was a great determinant. I developed such an interest in baseball. And so, there were a couple of friends that also had this great love of baseball. And I subscribed to Sport magazine. I read everything, I read everything. I'd go to the library and get out sports books. And I don't know where that came from, but it's just been part of me my whole life. And so, then I developed an interest in—I thought, what am I going to do with my life? And I thought God, I'd love to be a sports announcer, like a play-by-play. Because I'd listen to the ball games at night, from Saint—you could get the games of the St. Louis Cardinals or the New York Mets or the New York Yankees.

KN [00:09:13] On the radio.

RM [00:09:13] On the radio. And plus the local team, the Toronto Maple Leafs, who were in the International League then. And so, I was just immersed in this, and I thought being a baseball play-by-play announcer, I couldn't imagine anything better. And also, maybe even being a sports reporter. And I can remember thinking well what should I (as I was approaching graduating year in high school) I mean, what should I do? Should I go to journalism school or should I get a degree, right? And I remember I wrote to a guy named Scott Young. Do you recognize his last name?

KN [00:09:52] Yes.

RM [00:09:53] Father of Neil Young. But in those days, he was this really prominent sports writer. He was also on TV and Hockey Night in Canada. But he was such a great columnist, and I sort of idolized Scott Young. I read every word he wrote in every column. He was just so good. And I wrote him a letter saying, my quandary, "What do you think I should do?" And he actually replied and said, "You don't need to go to journalism school. You can pick up how to write for a newspaper by doing it. Get an education." Which is what I did. I went to the University of Toronto.

KN [00:10:35] Interesting. So that sort of is the genesis—

RM [00:10:38] I should mention also—

KN [00:10:40] Okay.

RM [00:10:40] My youth in Newmarket. In 1959, we won the Ontario Baseball Association Championship by beating Petrolia two straight games. And I was the bench—I didn't play in any games, I was on the bench, right? But I was part of the team. And when we made that final out against Petrolia and won the Ontario Championship. It may have been one of the happiest moments of my life. As kids, you just went crazy. But that's an opportunity that I could never have had in Toronto. You know, I could have played sandlot ball or something, but here I got a chance to be part of a team that won the Ontario Championship. And our shortstop was Gerry Meehan, who later became a star hockey

player for both the Leafs and the Buffalo Sabers. And he was our shortstop. So that's the sort of opportunity that a small town gave you. And I relished just about every moment of it. I loved it.

KN [00:11:41] So this basically accounts for your interest in sports from a very early age, as well as in journalism. And eventually, early in your career as a journalist, you worked for the Penticton Herald, the Prince George Citizen, and the Vernon News. Can you tell us those experiences and what you might have learned from that?

RM [00:12:02] Well, a great influencer in my life was working on the student newspaper at U of T, The Varsity. I didn't go there in the first year, but I thought—but I was determined. I mean in those days student newspapers were huge. I mean it's not like today where no, you know, who cares, right? And you'd get the best and the brightest. I mean Michael Ignatieff worked on The Varsity. Bob Rae worked on The Varsity. And they were bright people even then, but they thought it was worthy of them to work on The Varsity.

KN [00:12:33] And Rod Mickleburgh.

RM [00:12:34] And this guy Mickleburgh. And here he is. I'm still in touch, sort of, with Rae and Ignatiev, because we're, you know, you forge a friendship. But anyway, I walked into the office of The Varsity, and I'm kind of a shy guy (it may seem strange as I've got the gift of the gab), but I was kind of a shy guys, a little nervous about it, but I was determined to do it, walked in. And to the sports department, said I wanted to work on the sports department and they assigned me to a story, tennis story and I came back and—like I knew how to do it. I don't know how I knew how to it. Well, I'd read a million sports articles so, I mean that was that was obviously part of it. But I—I just took to it, I was confident. And the year later I was sports editor of the paper and I was a big hit because I was funny and yet, I really loved the sport, so they got some laughs and they got the report on the game, right? And I just had such self-confidence because I knew what was funny, so I could be funny and do outlandish things, but also not lose sight of the lede that the team won or lost. And so that was still my goal, to write sports.

RM [00:13:50] And so, I failed to graduate. It was the 60s, you know. I wasn't in the classroom. I didn't want to be in the class room. I wanted to be on the varsity. That's where things were happening, the 60's politics. I mean, tremendously interesting people. And I didn't graduate, and it took all my time. And so, I came out to B.C., back to the roots of where I had all these relatives and cousins and everything like that, and it's B.C., right? And, I was following a girlfriend. Anyway, so but I needed a job. I was staying at my aunt and uncle's who were getting quite tired of me because I was having fun but I couldn't stay there forever. I was washing dishes out at UBC [University of British Columbia], and there was an ad in the paper for the sports editor of the Penticton Herald. There was also an ad for a reporter on the Caribou Observer in Quesnel. And so, I wrote applications to both these places. They both accepted me.

RM [00:14:58] So, then I thought, well, should I go to the Caribou Observer or should I go to the Penticton Herald? And the Penticton Herald was a Thomson newspaper. So, I knew that. And I knew something about the editor of the Caribou Observer and Quesnel. So that seemed like it was a more attractive job, even though I hadn't done news reporting. So, I—but I asked my uncle who was in the BCTF at the time, Ed Nelson—their communications guy, was a guy named John Arnett. Have you ever heard that name? And his brother was Peter Arnett, who was the legendary famous correspondent for AP in Vietnam. So, John Arnett had been around, so I asked him which paper I should go to, and he said (and it

was actually what I thought too), 'Go to the daily, rather than the twice a week paper and you won't have to stay there,' and so on. And so that's what I did and I became at the age of 22 or something, the sports editor of the Penticton Herald.

RM [00:16:01] And the old publisher came by my desk because I'd written—you know, you're young, right? Boy, I'm going on and on, and we haven't even started talking about labour, but it's my youth, and I'm proud of it. [laughs] You know, the ad said in the Sun, 'Experience covering sports, especially baseball,' or something like that. And I said in this letter, okay, I've covered hockey and football and stuff, but even though I love baseball, I've never actually covered it. But I love baseball and I know all these weird statistics. Like the only unassisted triple play in World Series history was by Bill Wambsganss in the 1919, 1920 World Series. And anyway, so after they hired me, the old publisher came by. He was the guy that had built the Penticton Herald, and then in his later years, sold out for a sinecure to Thompson, right? Because they kept him on as publisher and stuff like that. And he'd come by my desk, every now and then he'd whisper under his breath, Wambsganss, eh? Wambsganss. [laughs] Because it turned out he remembered that. Because he was of the age that, you know, 1920, he would remember this play from the World Series in 1920. And he said it was the best letter of application that he'd ever received. But that's my confidence. I just spun it out and said, 'I'll be good,' and all this. I've really wanted to work for the Penticton. I just—I just spun a narrative. And the guy at the Caribou Observer, a guy named Pete Miller, about why he decided to hire me. My application was the only letter that didn't have any spelling mistakes in it. [laughs]

RM [00:17:50] So anyway, I became the sports editor of the Penticton Herald, and I covered all the sports. I laid out the pages. I wrote the stories, and I also had the overnight shift. So, I had to strip the wires and leave all the wire service stories for the guys that came in the morning and put the paper out. And you know you're young. The Herald wasn't much but a bunch of young guys, like myself, all showed up there at the same time, and we bonded, and I'm friends with them today. And you're young and you're having fun, right? Yeah, you've got your job, and you're making jokes about The Herald, which wasn't a very good paper. But who cares, right? You did your best for the paper. People loved me as sports editor because I was fun. But we weren't going to stay at the Thomson paper. The editor was appalling. And he fired the photographer, Pete Duffy, and that got us off—'We gotta get out of here.' So, they all ended up going up to Prince George, and one of them phoned me and said, 'Hey, there's a job as a reporter up here.' So, I thought, 'Why not?' Even though I'd never been a news reporter—I'd always done sports—I said 'Sure.' And so, they hired me at the Prince George Citizen.

RM [00:19:05] Much better paper than the Herald. It was a Southam paper, which was a great newspaper chain. And I started writing news. And I didn't find the transition that difficult, you know? I just—I knew how to do it. You know, I could write clear sentences. They had some veteran desk men on there that helped me and said, 'Look, in your story, you always have to try to attract the reader. Have an angle, you know. Put something interesting in the first sentence.' I understood that, and so you'd get this boring story, this boring interview and you think—but you'd find one little thing about them that maybe is a little off-kilter or interesting and that would be your lede, right? But still I was only there for three months. But when you're young, like three months is a long time, and I have vivid memories of Prince George and—an industrial town, a place I'd never been, three pulp mills. I remember doing a story on the tourist of the week. The junior reporter—I got these stories, and so I went out to the tourist booth out on the highway and these—I put this in the story. It's hilarious, it's the way I ended it. These tourists there they're pleased they're going to be the tourist of the week. Maybe they got a free restaurant meal or some perks

or something like that, and they're—so we did the interview, and the guy said, 'By the way, do you have any pulp mills around here?' I said, 'Yeah, three,' and he says, 'Yeah, I'd recognize that boiled cabbage smell anywhere.' I put that in the story. The tourists of the week. But you could have fun, right?

RM [00:20:53] And, oh man, I'm leaving out stuff from the Penticton Herald. But anyway, the guy who had been the news editor, the Penticton Herald, had been impressed by me. He was now the editor of the Vernon News, another Thomson paper. They just bought it, and they were going to go daily. They were twice a week, the Vernon News. So, he offered me the job of city editor as the paper went daily. And I thought, 'Well, why not?' So, down I went to Vernon and the paper didn't go daily. So, it was delayed, and so I was just a reporter on the Vernon News twice a week, and I absolutely loved it. It's the happiest year I ever spent in journalism because it was a small community. Vernon is beautiful. I really liked the people there. I was part of the community telling their stories in a community newspaper. And people would recognize you on the main street and want to talk about the story you'd written. And of course, I had fun. Again, there was always a lot of humor in my stories. So, that was different than what people were used to reading. Plus, they were good stories. And we were young, again I—and a whole bunch of us rented a house in Vernon, and it became like the hippie crash pad for anybody. I'm telling you, it was so much fun. I'd go off to work with my tie and jacket and come back to you know the 1960s and, you know, all these draft dodgers and hitch hikers and, you know, band guy. I think it was just a non-stop revolving door. I think we added up once how many people stayed there at various times it was like 26. You know, one guy was sleeping on the back porch, and all they did was eat sunflower seeds. The seeds were all over the back porch. Sleeping in the basement. But it was so much fun. And you're young, right? You're doing community journalism. It was wonderful. It was just a very, very happy year.

RM [00:23:01] But then, hell, I had 2,000 bucks. I had a girlfriend. Two thousand bucks, let's go to Europe for a year [laughs] and so went to Europe for a year on two thousand dollars. You could do it in those days. Anyway, I'm getting pretty long-winded because I love talking about the good old days. And came back from Europe, which was wonderful, and had no job. Crashed with pals in Vancouver. They got tired of me sleeping on their couch, and I don't—can't remember how this happened but it came up that there was a job in Edmonton at the Edmonton Journal. And they demanded that I phone up and find out about it. And so, I did. And I don't know why these guys, why I get hired, right? Because I, on a twice weekly paper, the Vernon News, I had no name or anything, but maybe they were short of reporters. And I might've had some good references. I can't remember. And the managing editor hired me—guy named Don Smith. I thought, 'Oh my God.' All these places I'd been before, I'd sort of known somebody. I knew nobody in Edmonton—and it's Edmonton, right? So, I went from Vancouver. And I was thinking, 'God, I don't really wanna go and my friends threaten, 'Look, if you don't go, we're gonna tie you up and put you on the train. Go!' So, I took the train to Edmonton and, you know, packed up my belongings in a couple of cardboard boxes. The first couple of nights I stayed at the YMCA in Edmonton and spent a year in Edmonton working for the Journal, and once again had a wonderful time. It was my first big city daily too, and I wasn't a star reporter then. I didn't like the paper much and I don't know, I wasn't great. I was fine, but I wasn't great.

RM [00:24:53] But the best thing was, once again, there was a house that I was part of, the Poundmaker House. There was an alternate student newspaper published because the student council at the University of Alberta had withdrawn funding or they were fed up with the student newspaper. It's the Gateway?

KN [00:25:13] Yeah.

RM [00:25:13] The Gateway. And so, they started an alternate paper, all the staff, called the Poundmaker and published independently. Well, the Poundmaker was put out from our house in Edmonton which is just a block or two from the University Alberta campus. Again, we're all young, we're having fun. We're all kind of political. We all like to party. You know, go for beers in the Strathcona area of Edmonton. And again, it was just a very—it was just fun, you know. Plus, I'm doing journalism, right? I had certainly the best paying job in the house. Then it ended in this great tragedy, which I have to mention, because it's just one of the most dramatic things that I know of that I've come across. The two people that took me in at Edmonton originally, Terry Pettit, who was a reporter at the Journal and heard me saying I was looking for a place, and her husband Ron Yakimchuk, who was the editor of The Poundmaker. So, they invited me to stay with them in their apartment. It was a door. My bed was a door on these concrete blocks, right, with a thin mattress on it. So, I was telling all my friends, 'Well, I'm sleeping on a door in Edmonton.' But after a while, not long after, that's—then we all moved into the Poundmaker house. And so, Terry Pettit, who is the police reporter at the Journal and Ronald, this lovely guy, they decided we'd had enough. Not had enough. They wanted an adventure, and they pooled all their money. They were going out to the Maritimes to buy a farm or, you know, live off the land, whatever. And they were headed for a friend's wedding on the way, in Montreal. And they're driving this beat up Volkswagen Beetle. And so, like it just—I said, 'This is never gonna make it across Canada.' And so, I bet them \$50, they wouldn't make it to their friend's wedding in time in Montreal, and so off they went. I remember it as clear as a day, beautiful sunny Saturday afternoon in June. I got a postcard from Terry from Dryden, Ontario, because they were making good time, and she remembered the bet, and it had only one word on it, nyaaah. In other words, 'You're gonna have to pay up. We're doing good time. We're making good time; we'll be at the wedding.' It's the last anyone ever heard from them. They just disappeared, and no one today knows what happened to them, where they are—they're obviously dead—under circumstances, we don't know. And for the longest time I couldn't stop, I'd have dreams about them, that they'd returned, and everyone was so happy that they showed up, right? And it's just one of those things that I think about to this day.

KN [00:28:19] A real tragedy.

RM [00:28:20] Well, it's a tragedy on so many levels, right, and it's the mystery of what happened to them. It's one of those unexplained things, and it, you know, like people have found out about the story and there's all these online things on what might have happened. Somebody spotted them in Parry Sound, Ontario or they were seen there. Do you know this, and—you know, I wrote a piece on the 50th anniversary of the day they left for the Edmonton Journal and got a quite a big response on it. And I love Terry and Ronald. Very, very close to them, and it's just one of those things you could never imagine happening. So that's the way my trip to—although when I left—I left Edmonton shortly afterwards. We didn't know that, you know, what was going to happen. They hadn't showed up at the wedding. We heard that but we just thought well you know—

KN [00:29:15] They're somewhere.

[00:29:16] They're somewhere, right, and that's what the cops said. I mean, I think if the cops had taken the reports of them being missing seriously, the trail would have been hot, because they had such a recognizable car, you know. But it's the usual thing, 'Oh well, people go missing all the time, they're young,' blah, blah. 'They'll turn up.' Until it was too

late, and they've never been able to determine what happened to them. Maybe they drove off the road; they were murdered. It's just this big mystery. The car has never been found.

KN [00:29:48] So, shortly after that, you actually landed a job with the Vancouver Sun in 1973 as a labour reporter. This was a new experience for you. You were one of two labour reporters at the Vancouver Sun. Can you talk a bit about how you came to really like the labour beat?

RM [00:30:10] Well, through circumstances, and I'm getting long-winded. It's not my life story here; we're here to talk labour. It's actually interesting how I got on the Sun, but we won't talk about it. If you buy me a beer Ken, I'll tell you about it. Anyway, so I ended up at the Vancouver Sun in the summer of 1973, and they couldn't offer me a job, but they said, we'll take you on as part of our temporary summer staff. I thought— because I had two other job opportunities that were solid, and this was an iffy thing—but I thought, because I'd always wanted to work at the Sun. My God, Vancouver, my connections, The Sun was such a big paper then. That was my dream, to work at the Sun. So, I thought, 'Well, if I'm good, they'll keep me on.' So, I joined the paper in July of '73, and I did news, and I did it well, no problem. So, they decided to keep me, and I came into work one day, and they said, 'Oh, we're assigning you to the night labour beat at the Vancouver Sun. I'd never covered labour. I didn't ask for this beat or anything. Arbitrarily assigned to it.

RM [00:31:23] People have a hard time imagining this today, but in those days, as you can figure out, the Sun had two full-time labour reporters. They had the veteran guy on days, and then they had a guy on nights. And I was assigned to be the night guy. And again, it's one of those fortunate things that happened in my life that I didn't look for. It just happened. And it was one of the best things that ever happened to me because I love doing labour. Not only did I love doing labour, because it's like underdog stories, it's class struggle, all this kind of stuff. You're reporting on workers trying to improve their lot. Plus, there's interesting people. Your average person isn't a labour leader. They were colorful guys. They were passionate, they were fiery, they really believed in what they were doing. So, that was all great to cover. Plus, I was on the front page all the time because labour was so big in B.C. then, and the Vancouver Sun took it seriously. When the president of the BC Fed [BC Federation of Labour] spoke, it was on front page. He said something dramatic. You can't imagine that today. Most people wouldn't even know who the president or the BC Fed is. As I say, two reporters full-time, there was that much news, and I was the front page all the time. And then it was great working nights because you didn't have deadline pressure. So, you'd phone these guys up at night. You should see my Rolodex. It's incredible, all the names of all the labour leaders. Most of them—just about all of them—gone by now. And you get a chance to talk to them at home beyond just finding out what was happening, you know. And you'd get to know them. And I can't believe how lucky I was to get to know these great labour leaders of the past and just talk to them. Plus, everything was happening. I mean, the NDP had got in. The Barrett government had got in. The new Labour Code had come in. Paul Weiler, the brilliant Paul Weiler, was chairman of the BC Labour Reporter, and we bonded. He was only a few years older than I was. Well, not that much older than I was. Guess what? He liked sports. [laughs] So, I'd phone him up at night, we'd talk about sports for half an hour, then we'd get to the thing. Everything was happening in labour then. I mean it was just happening.

RM [00:33:56] The labour code was incredible the way it changed the labour situation in B.C. Workers finally had a fair shot and they were taken seriously. It was like night and day, and organizing—and employers could be found guilty of unfair labour practices. It just totally leveled the playing field, and plus it was like unlike any labour code in North

America. It was the most progressive labour code in North America. Right here in B.C. and I was covering it. I had a ringside seat, and they had the brilliant chairman, Paul Weiler. It might never have worked without someone like Paul Weiler. The guy was brilliant, and management went along with it. Imagine getting a ringside seat for all that. Plus, the stupid labour movement, the Fed opposed the labour code, which was really dumb. But anyway, it still created a lot of copy. And there were big strikes. The IWA [International Woodworkers of America] had 50,000 members then. Jack Monro had just become the president of the IWA. So that was colourful. And there were feuds in the labour movement.

RM [00:35:13] And the other thing that I ended up covering was the independent Canadian union movement, which was just starting to come into its own there. I mean, I knew nothing about labour, but the previous night labour guy, a guy named Dick Shuler, he was the guy I was replacing because he'd left. And the Canadian unions didn't get along that well with the day labour guy George Doby, who I grew to love, the old veteran guy. So, they would phone at night with their stories, right? Dick Shuler. So, there was a new guy. So, I got this call from George Brown of CAIMAW [Canadian Association of Industrial Mechanical and Allied Workers] saying, 'George Brown, of CAIMAW.' And I didn't have a clue what CAIMAW meant. What is CAIMAW? I knew, I could tell the Steelworkers [United Steelworkers of America], the IWA, but CAIMAW, it didn't even have a name even. Like it's, it doesn't say workers or anything. He just said CAIMAW. And I had to look it up afterwards because I didn't want to admit that I didn't know what he was talking about. But he was telling me it was—they'd just won their first certification vote raiding the Steelworkers. So, it was a big deal for them. And I just wrote up a three-inch story or whatever it was maybe a bit more than that. But I had no idea what the independent Canadian union movement was, what CAIMAW was or anything. But they were starting to really come into their own then. The PPWC [Pulp and Paper Workers of Canada] and they were raiding all over the place, and they were becoming big news, and they always phone me at night. And it wasn't like I was pro—although the Steelworkers would often accuse me of being pro-independent Canadian—I thought they deserved—they were a legitimate part of the trade union movement, and they were creating news. Something was happening. If they were raiding successfully that often meant there was a problem with the union that held the certification because workers don't like change but if they're fed up with their representation, rightly or wrongly, you know, they'll look elsewhere. And so that was a big part of my beat, was covering the independent Canadian unions. And they were creating a lot of news. And when George Brown died, it became Jess Succamore. Certainly well-known. But I remember talking to Jess for the first time. I'd never talked to him before because I always dealt with George Brown. And he was so shaken by George's death that, you know, because it was unexpected, right? And George was still young, died of a heart attack, I think. He said, 'I don't know, Rod. I've got this job. I don't think I can do it without George. He's my mentor. He taught me everything I know. You know, I'm gonna do my best.' But he was shaken. And eventually he became Jess Succamore. Not too shaken. With a lot of confidence in himself. But you know, I can still remember that phone call about his lack of confidence that anyone like him could replace George Brown. So, for me it was great. I mean I just loved it and they were great labour stories.

KN [00:38:17] One of the highlights would have been, I think, your work on the labour beat covering the June 1976 strike by CASAW [Canadian Association of Smelter and Allied Workers] at the Alcan plant in Kitimat. Can you tell us a bit about that strike, but more importantly, you know, your coverage of the dispute as it unfolded.

RM [00:38:36] You said a bit? See, I have—

KN [00:38:39] Yeah, just a bit.

RM [00:38:41] I'm sorry I'm really going on and on, but how often—you wind me up and away I go, right? And I'm not talking about labour because I like talking about my good old life. But that wildcat strike in Kitimat remains one of the most memorable events that I've ever covered. It was so dramatic in a way that's hard to articulate. But you know, we went up there because it was first of all, it was a wildcat strike, and they were threaten— if the smelter had gone down, I mean, that would cost the company millions of dollars, 'cuz it goes down, and they have to start it up, and the pots go cold, and it's really an expense. So, they were trying to keep—because it was a wildcat strike it wasn't, you know, they weren't prepared for it or anything like that. And it was a wildcat strike against wage controls, probably the first one in Canada. They wanted the contract reopened because the federal government had imposed wage controls at that point.

RM [00:39:38] So, the company tried, wanted to, were desperate to keep the pot lines going and so they, management was—the smelter didn't go down. So, there's a dramatic thing where the managers were trying to keep— and some workers did go into work— trying to keep the potlines open. So, that was dramatic and with the union all against, you know, against the road—there's only one road in and out—with their barricades and so on, and everybody knew the police at some point were to have to come in. So, the Sun sent myself and reporter Brian— cameraman Brian Kent up there. We only thought we'd be there for a day or two, and it just kept going on, you know. We had to go to the mall and buy underwear and toothbrushes and everything because we hadn't prepared for this. And you're just waiting; everybody in the town is waiting for the police to come. And meanwhile, all this stuff was going on with the union. And I was—as it turned out, the head of the union, Peter Burton was good friends of a friend of mine, very good friends of a good friend of mind and sort of we knew each other. Plus, he'd also played basketball. I'd covered him playing basketball at Western Ontario. So, we had that in common. And it was just these young rambunctious guys that provided nothing but copy, you know, and this dramatic confrontation. You know, the noose was tightening because they'd get injunctions against them, and then they'd defy the injunctions. So, are they all going to go to jail or are the got cops going to swoop down on the picket line? So, there's drama waiting, plus there was a lot of media up there, and the media bonded. We had so much fun. You know, this big story, but in a sense nothing happened for a while. And so, we— things just kept happening, and we called it the Kitimat Curse. At the end of it, all the media, we got t-shirts printed up saying, I survived the Kitimat Curse. And it was just memorable, and the stakes were high.

RM [00:41:55] And then finally, after about a week, what happened was one of the managers working on the pot line (he was 35, 36, a bit overweight), and it was sweltering inside the smelter, and he had a heart attack. And it was terrible. I mean, it was obviously the conditions. He wasn't used to that. He was a manager who worked in the office or something like that. And he died of a heart attack at like the age of 35 or 36, and his widow was so bitter about it to the company for forcing her husband to work under those conditions. Anyway, that really hit like a thunderbolt in the community and so on. And so, the company wanted to go to his funeral. So, the union agreed to let the busses, like all the company guys, go out to attend his funeral. This was on the Friday. And then when they tried to get back, the Friday afternoon, the union said no and barricaded the line and didn't let them through. I guess they got in some other way.

RM [00:42:59] But that was a sign that the cops—which had played actually a pretty impartial role—they wanted—they didn't want to be the bad guys in the community, and

they had this great cop, RCMP cop, I was very impressed by him, a guy named Dalton, who talked to both sides and wanted it to be resolved, said, 'You know, injunctions, that's not our job,' you know? It's only our job if there's criminal action.' And people would expect them to rush in, and he wasn't having any of it. He said, 'We don't want to split the community on this.' He was a very, very progressive cop. But once they barricaded the road and didn't let the company back in, everyone knew the cops had to come. The cops couldn't stand by and let that happen. So, people thought they'd come on the Friday night, right away, right? And so, all these strikers and a lot of Portuguese families came out just to stand there, and some of them had picnics, (they brought their wives), and there was just, the road was just clogged with people. It was incredible. Well, the cops aren't stupid. They're not gonna go into that situation. But it was this almost festive air, people willing to be arrested and, you know, not the rabble rousers. You know, they were the ordinary Portuguese workers, if I can call them that. They were all out there. They hadn't been seen in the strike but they wanted to support the union and stand in solidarity. And it would have been a nightmare if the cops had come in that Friday night, but the cops weren't stupid, this guy wasn't stupid. So, anyway, nothing—we were all there too waiting for the confrontation. Nothing happened.

RM [00:44:33] All the media guys went back to the bar and had a good time. Whereas, I had to write my story for the early edition of the Vancouver Sun on the Saturday. So, I thought, well, I have to stay up and see what's the latest news, right? I can't pretend that nothing might happen. So, I was friends with Peter Burton, who was the strike leader, and there was another radio reporter named Joan McClellan. And Burton was gonna go out to the picket line in the morning, very early in the morning, like four or five a.m. And so, we went out with him. And sure enough, at about six a.m., you could see these busses coming with their—there was only about 30 guys left on the picket line at that point. This bus coming, these busses coming with their bright lights shining, just out of the fog, the mist of the morning. I can still see them just coming. And then all—they stop, and then all these cops come out, about 150 of them with their visors and riot shields, and they're banging on the riot shields as they are marching in formation. You know, and these 30 bedraggled, sleepless guys, tired guys on the picket line, you know, standing there waiting for them. I remember Peter Burton saying, 'Well there's no,'—because they all are going to resist arrest and all this sort of stuff, like the sixties, right? And I remember Burton saying, 'Well there is no point in doing anything with numbers like this against us.' One of the guys picked up this log and starts charging toward the police, and all the guys on the picket line saying, 'Holy fuck, don't!' But he was joking, right, because it was so ludicrous. But I can still remember that moment. So, they just placidly, peacefully got on the bus and away they went, and like, then the police demolished the barricade, and like it was all over in a few minutes. It was incredible and—but what was amazing was, of all those media up there to cover it, only two people were there to witness the police. Everyone was there for the police to come, and when it happened, there were only two media there. There was myself and Joan McClellan. So, I had a ringside seat of the police coming because they came early in the morning, which was the right thing to do, you know. And it was dramatic.

RM [00:47:02] And then it just became more dramatic—not more dramatic. Nothing could be as dramatic as that. The guys were all carted off to jail. And then they came back; they were released and did this hero's welcome. But then the strikers at the Arvida aluminum plant in Quebec were actually on a legal strike. And they sent guys out, and they set up a picket line. So, the wildcat strike continued with people respecting their line. But eventually that didn't work; it was ruled an illegal picket line. And so, they really—they had no option. By this time, lots of workers were going back to work. They were hooped. There was no way they could keep it going. But they were always voting. You know, everything was

decided at big union meetings with a vote. So, the recommendation was go back to work, you know, with our heads held high. And Kent Rowley was there from the Confederation of Canadian Unions, a real firebrand speaker from Quebec. He loved the Kitimat guys because they were young and fiery and revolutionary and stuff like that. Because CASAW was an independent Canadian union and part of the CCU, and Kent Rowley said, 'Well before the vote, can I have a few words?' And Peter Burton said, 'Oh sure.' It was sort of like Mark Antony getting a few words at the funeral of Julius Caesar. Brutus says, 'Oh sure, you can have a few words.' So, Kent Rowley made this fiery speech and got the crowd all fired up again, and Peter Burton is thinking, 'Holy fuck. We got to go back to work.' And so, they held the vote, and the vote was a tie (so they said). Anyway, it was a tie, and Peter Burton broke the tie. So, they went back to work. And there's all sorts of other stuff that happened.

RM [00:48:56] But what was great about it was, first of all it, was a huge story. It was on the front page all the time. There was the drama of not knowing what was going to happen. And it was big. And there was all the media bonding and having a great time collectively covering this really big story. Plus, all these guys were young. And I, you know, I bonded with them. Like, I love these guys, right? They came down to Vancouver when they were—you know, they had court cases for contempt of court, and Alcan sued them and all that stuff. We'd all get together at my place and just reminisce and just have fun. They were these young guys. And so, they liked me, I liked them. They liked the other reporters too that had covered the story. It was just this amazing event. So many things came together on that one story that it was just so memorable and the way the cops came and everything. It was just everything a news story could be.

KN [00:50:04] Okay, you mentioned early in your remarks—

RM [00:50:07] That's just a bit. I could go on and on.

KN [00:50:09] You mentioned earlier in your remarks, Rod, that the strike was against wage controls. Can you remember anything about the one-day strike? General strike across Canada, actually called by the Canadian Labour Congress.

RM [00:50:22] Two million—was it one million or two million—walked out, but only for a day. This was the slogan on wage controls, 'Why me?'

KN [00:50:32] October 14.

RM [00:50:33] Yeah, that's right.

KN [00:50:34] 1976.

RM [00:50:35] Yeah. Well, I remember that day quite well, of course. I was part of the Newspaper Guild, the whiny Newspapers Guild (union), and as members of the BC Fed, we were committed to the one-day strike. So, all these reporters—they're not all union people. They all support the Guild, but they're really not union people, and they thought, if we go out and support—you know, take the day off and support the fight against wage controls that will show we're biased and political. And we have to be above the fray. And nobody asked us. We didn't get a vote. So, there was all this whining among the members of The Newspaper Guild about, you know, we don't want to be seen as partisan or taking a position, or people won't trust our stories because they'll say you're, you know, you're just rabble rouser union guys and stuff. So, there was so much upset among the Guild

membership from these conservative forces. It certainly didn't bother me because I was always able to separate being a member of a union because people would say, 'How can you be a member a union and cover labour objectively,' right? And I'd say, 'No, no. Being a member of the union deals with my working conditions. Being a reporter has nothing to do with that. That's why I'm a part of the Guild, not because I'm pro-union'—but I was— but anyway, 'not because I'm pro-union, because I want to have a say about my working conditions, just the way you do, and that's why I'm a member of the Guild,' etcetera. 'You know, you have to separate the two. You can still trust my stories.' Anyway, they got the BC Fed to agree to let the Guild members work on October 14th on the grounds that, 'Well we want this story covered by union reporters.' But the paper didn't publish that day because, of course, the craft unions, the printers, and the pressmen, they were all for it. So, we just sort of had the day off and pretended to cover the strike. And it was fun. And we got paid for the day. And some of us, I think, did I donate my money back somewhere because I didn't feel right taking a day's pay when everybody else hadn't. But that was the good old Newspaper Guild in its rabble-rousing solidarity whining and getting to go to work and getting let off the hook by the BC Fed.

RM [00:53:07] But it was a great day. Everyone was such a good mood. Like there was no anger or anything like that. People were just pumped by the fact there were so many of them. There was a big demonstration and stuff like that, and then what happened was once that was out of their system everyone went back to normal. All the anger against wage controls disappeared. Because it was like, Paul Weiler described it as a cold shower effect. Once you've done that, that's it. You're not gonna gird up everybody again. So it was only one day. They all got it out of their system [waves clenched fist]. You know, the fight back just disappeared. But what was amazing is that—and this got headlines across Canada. So, of course the employers in B.C. went to the labour board, ahead of time, to get an injunction saying this was an illegal strike. And Weiler, this brilliant, Paul Weiler, this brilliant decision said, 'No, it is not a strike under the definition of the labour code which says a strike is designed a collective action in pursuit of better working conditions and wages,' or something like that, said, 'That's not this. This is a political strike, and that's not covered by the definition of strike' So, he gave a green light to the one-day walkout, and the Socreds who were—Social Credit was in power then—they were apoplectic, and they quickly changed the definition of strike. But it was such a landmark courageous ruling by Paul Weiler. He said, 'I'm looking at the definition of strike. This doesn't meet it, it's political, it's a political action.' So, away you go boys, you got the green light from the Labour Board. That really helped too in the turnout because they couldn't be sued, right? So, that was October 14th. It was a great day, and there's a funny picture of me. These reporters, it was just so much fun. We didn't have to file a story or anything. Raising my fist [raises fist] on the street, having fun. Mr. Objective Labour Reporter.

KN [00:55:16] Well, you alluded to that objective aspect. And so you must have known people on both sides, on the labour side and the management side. How did you get along with management representatives when you had to talk to them?

RM [00:55:28] Well, you know, this was great. I mean, it was such a good time to cover labour because labour was such a force in the province. But the thing was, so were the employers a force in the province. And I think unique—I don't know what it's like in the rest of Canada—but the employers, because they're faced—this was the most militant labour movement by far and probably in North America. I don't know a lot about Quebec, but okay, exclude Quebec. It was so much more militant than any other province. And the BC Fed, what the BC Fed went, and they took action. I mean, they supported strikes, you know. They issued hot declarations. And when they threatened to do something, they

went—you know, it was serious stuff. So, they were very, very strong. It was militant. So, the employers also organized, you know. And so, you had these very powerful employer organizations like the forest companies. Forest Industrial Relations, the Pulp and Paper Industrial Relations Bureau, Construction Labour Relations Association, the government, public sector had one. Well, you had that in—

KN [00:56:37] In education eventually.

RM [00:56:39] Yeah, eventually. The Greater Vancouver Regional District Labour Relations Bureau, whatever it was called, with Graham Leslie. These very powerful employer organizations who were always part of the story, plus the Employers' Council. Just like the BC Fed, the Employer's Council was very strong and they could corral, I mean, you know, get their members to agree to stuff. So, you have these two forces. So, I talked to a lot of these employer reps, and I got along fine with them because they recognized my interest was not in just writing, you know, pro-union stories. My goal was to provide information to people, and the employers are part of the story. There's no point in just writing a pro-union story. I had a point of view which was sympathetic to unions, and so I decided what information should be in the story, but the employer is still part of the story. And you know, these guys knew what they were talking about. They had a strong point of view, and that was reflected in my stories, and they knew that they could get a fair shake from talking to me. I didn't distort their quotes or anything. I made them part of the story, and they appreciated that.

RM [00:58:03] And then, I really bonded with—I grew to love this guy, Bill Hamilton, who was head of the Employers' Council, who was really a Red Tory, right? He, of course, he was pro-employer, he was pro-business, and he was conservative. But he accepted that unions were a legitimate part of society, and he could oppose them, but he wasn't anti-union. And he'd been a former postmaster general under the Diefenbaker cabinet, so I was sort of thrilled to be talking to Bill Hamilton, who I actually remember. You know, we really got along because he knew I understood labour, and I appreciated his point of view—that it wasn't just knee-jerk anti-unionism, and we would sometimes work together on stories. Like he said, 'Rod, I want to get this out to give a signal or whatever it is to the unions, or I think we need to take a position on this,' you know. I had so much time for this guy. You see, he didn't fit the stereotype of the employer with the black hat smoking a cigar and anti-union, right? He wasn't like that at all. Eventually the employers got tired of him because he was so fair, and they turned on him. And the Socreds hated him, you know, because when they brought in—for one thing, he took a position in 1983. You know the 26 bills or whatever and that anti-labor legislation, he took a position against it. That just infuriated a lot of the employers and the Socreds, and so they finally pressured him out.

RM [00:59:47] But there's an example of an employer. I mean, you can't stereotype these people. You can't just put them into a category, employer bad. I mean, they represent a point of view. The employer has a position at the bargaining table, and if they're fair, you know, they're part of the story. And they're not all bad people. Keith Bennett of Forest Industrial Relations—I really got along well with Keith Bennett because he respected me and my reporting because I—he knew that I knew what was going on in labour. I knew, I understood collective bargaining, you know, and he could get a fair shake. And, we talked a lot—at night. So, I liked these guys. No, I didn't like—well actually, I liked Keith Bennett. I liked Bill Hamilton. But I respected them. And they were, again, they respected me, and I never got a reputation as a biased—I mean, people would think I'm overly sympathetic—but my reputation was good. They always talked to me because, you know, I was fair.

That's the thing. You have to be fair. You can decide what information to use in a story, you know, and your story might end up being sympathetic to unions, but you have to be fair as a reporter. And that's the whole thing. You don't have to objective, that whole idea, reporters have to be objective. No. You know, you're allowed to have a point of view as a reporter, but, you have to be fair. And that was always my guiding principle, was to be fair. Because, you know, if you're just, if you're not fair, what's the point of your story? You're only preaching to one side, and they're the only people that end up reading you. Whereas, if you're fair, everyone will read it [laughs], hopefully, in those days.

RM [01:01:33] I should also point out, this was a golden age of journalism. I look back and, you know, my big line, we were Young Turks, right? Little did we know as we whined and complained that we were living through a golden age of journalism. Cuz, we complained about our editors and our publishers and the corporate ownership of the media—because it should always be better—and the editorials, all this sort of stuff. We complained about all of that, all the time. Cuz it should always be better. So, I criticized the mainstream media all the time. Get me in a bar, wind me up. And now I'm the biggest defender there is of the mainstream media because of what we're losing. And we're losing it. And it's a very serious situation. So, anyway, I liked being a labour reporter.

KN [01:02:22] Okay, and you ended up, after working for the Sun, you ended up in 1981 working for The Province as a labour reporter. And you alluded earlier to the Solidarity Strike of '83, the 26 bills of the Socreds. Can you talk about that whole experience? Because you covered that for The Province. Can we talk about—

RM [01:02:42] Ken, how long do we have?

KN [01:02:44] From the perspective of a labour reporter?

RM [01:02:46] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Again, that goes with the Kitimat Wildcat strike as pretty well one of the most—if not the most dramatic story—that I've ever covered because we were on the verge—I mean, there was a long build-up, and finally, in November, we were on the verge of a general strike, and it was really going to happen. It wasn't made up or anything like that. And there were all these various balls in the air. And it was, I mean, who's ever covered a real general strike, not since 1919. And there's been small ones, like the one-day walkout, and there was the month-long walkout by Vancouver workers in support of the Winnipeg general strike. But, I mean, and the labour leaders were petrified of it because Bennett was calling their bluff on the 26 bills that they brought down that spawned the Solidarity Movement, plus the Coalition, which was the non-trade union arm of Operation Solidarity. Rallies—unprecedented organizations and rallies—and ordinary people joined in; it wasn't just unions. The incredible rally at Empire Stadium, when they packed Empire Stadium. More than 30,000 people at that rally. I'll remember the firefighters' band coming in, and the people just went crazy. There was such a force of solidarity.

RM [01:04:16] The October march, downtown, 60,000 people. I mean, that's the biggest protest march, basically there's ever been in Vancouver if you discount the peace marches. I mean it was incredible. After this long period of like two months of nothing happening, and people thought the movement was dying, right? Because nothing—Kube didn't know what to do—he was organizing it. Art Kube was head of Operation Solidarity as president of the BC Federation of Labour. And organizing petitions as if that was going to influence the government. So, he didn't want to call this demonstration because he thought it would be a flop, right? And that would be the end of Operation Solidarity. If you

called a big protest rally downtown Vancouver and it flopped, you're finished, right? Instead, more than 60,000 people showed up out of nowhere. And that was a real turning point. They couldn't avoid the general strike at that point because Bennett was not backing down, the Socreds were not backing down.

RM [01:05:18] And it all came down to—the BC Government Employees' Union was negotiating a new contract under these amazing anti-union bills—that you could be fired without cause, that you could only negotiate wages and pensions or something, you couldn't negotiate anything else. You know, it was amazing. But they were in a legal position to strike. So, all these negotiations were taking place down at the BC Labour Relations Board, and it was packed with media. Packed. We were all in one room, and one guy would leave the negotiating room so all the TV cameras would suddenly stand up. There was this huge noise of everybody getting up off the floor, and you know, and all their lights and everything, and the guy was just going to the washroom. Right? Stuff like that. It was around the clock as the BC Government Employees' Union tried to negotiate a deal before their strike deadline expired. And it failed. I mean, the BCGEU went on strike. Once they were on strike, then we had—it was gonna be an evolving general strike in which first the teachers, as you well know, Ken, were going out, then a different group, Crown employees, and then the ferries were gonna go out. And that would have really been huge. So, the teachers went out, much to everybody's surprise, because people thought they were the weak link, and their vote in favour of walking out was like, was very low, was it 50 something?

KN [01:06:57] 60.

RM [01:07:00] So, people thought as a strike mandate that was very low. And the weather was foul, but the teachers were democratic, and the 40 percent were opposed to walking out but they accepted the vote as a majority vote, and said, 'Okay we don't agree, but we're, you know, we're going out,' and it surprised everybody—the solidarity of the teachers. That got the government's attention finally thinking, 'Maybe we've really got to do something,' because they just kept thinking it would fall apart and falter. So, then these negotiations started behind the scenes. By this time Art Kube was sick at home; so, you had that drama. You know, he had TB, not TB, pneumonia. There's a picture of him sitting in his bathrobe. Meanwhile, these dramatic events unfolded, and Jack Munro and Mike Kramer took over from the union side, and Norm Spector, who was Bill Bennett's right-hand man, took over those negotiations. They were up on the second floor of the Labour Relations Board where people really didn't know what was going on. But, you know, this was a very serious situation, if there had been a general strike. Very serious. It gets talked a lot about it, but it's serious business. You know, I knew all the players. So, I pretty well had a—they were talking to me, and I knew a lot about what was going on. But of course, they trusted me; that's why they told me stuff. I didn't rush it into the paper, right? I just knew what was going on, plus this was very sad, the bloody Province by then had gone tabloid. I was The Province labour reporter, so my stories were like 14 inches long. I had all this knowledge of what was going on, and I could have written terrific stories telling people what to expect and where the talks were at and stuff, but I had 14 inches. So, all that knowledge I had was basically wasted; so, it was very, very frustrating.

RM [01:09:16] And then finally they approached an agreement with the BC Government Employees' Union. A lot of this is confusing, I guess, if you don't know about Operation Solidarity. So, then they had to figure out—that looked like it was going to get a settlement, but they had pledged, of course, to stay out as long as there were still negotiations with Operation Solidarity and the government, as long the Operations Solidarity picket lines

were still up and so on. And what the deadline was, Monday morning, when the ferries would go out—ferry workers would go out. And so, everyone was very tense about that. So, they had a framework put together between Spector and Munro and Kramer on how to settle the Operation Solidarity job action to get that called off, and it wasn't much. It was really not much but it was something, you know, that they could say they'd have achieved that.

RM [01:10:18] And so, this is still—this is my belief—on the Saturday, the Vancouver side, I think it was Jack—sorry, I don't know this, so I'll take that back. But Terry Glavin had a story that said, 'Here are Operation Solidarity demands,' and it was the line story in the Vancouver Sun. So, what happened with that is people didn't really know what was going on, but it said that there were negotiations going on. And the reaction among Socred cabinet ministers and backbenchers and Bill Bennett's phone—cuz he didn't mind this going on, he wanted to settle the thing. His phone lit up, and people said, 'Why are you negotiating with these lawmakers, uh, lawbreakers? These are radical revolutionaries who are out on illegal strikes and you're negotiating with them,' etcetera. Internally, there was big fight back against that, to Bennett, and so that was going on. And then Bennett, who was a real street fighter, realized, 'The unions want out of this a lot more than I do.' And he could sense weakness in their position. So, even though they had the framework agreement that they'd agreed to informally—oh, and then the trade union movement made a fatal mistake—and which they admitted. Jack Munro said that was a big mistake. They thought, 'We don't trust this framework agreement. We want to get it right from Bill Bennett himself because we don't trust them.' Right? And so, they made that decision to go visit Bill Bennett in Kelowna on the Sunday night with Monday morning looming.

RM [01:12:00] And I was one of the first people, first media people, if not the first, to know about this. They were going to plan to go to Kelowna, but it was too late for me to go. I told my desk about it, but we can't go, it's too late, even though I knew it was gonna happen. I was sort of competitive with the BCTV reporter who was there, I'll mention no names. And CBC had their national reporter, Kelly Crichton, there covering it, and I sort of bonded with her, and helping her out because she was new to Vancouver and stuff like that. And I tipped her off that this was gonna—they were going to go to Kelowna because no one else knew about it, right? But my sources had told me, and Munro had told me, 'Yeah, we've worked out this agreement. We're gonna go to Kelowna. This is what they're going to agree to,' so I'd be—not that I'd rush that into the paper—I was ready to write that when it happened. And so, I tipped the CBC off, and they were able to get a plane there. Charter a plane and be there for the big confrontation on the Sunday night. So anyway, that's a little media stuff there.

RM [01:13:13] So, I mean Bennett is such a nasty guy, right? So, Bennett goes with, uh, Munro goes to Kelowna with Gerry Scott. Goes to Bennett's house. Bennett comes out to greet them, and he can't resist this, 'Where's Art, Jack?' You know, it's just really nasty, right? Where's Art Kube? And so, they go into the house and Bennett doesn't think he has to give up anything. He just sits there, you know? Basically, 'Oh yeah, well, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.' And the labour leaders, Munro and—is desperately on the phone back to—actually down in the BCGEU headquarters where everybody had gathered to make the decisions, including the BC Fed steering committee or whatever it was called. And Kramer was handling the phone call. And basically, we gotta get—we got to call it off. And basically, nothing was agreed to. Bennett just called their bluff because he could figure out they wanted out more than he did. I mean, they were terrified of the strike escalating because then it was really serious, right? They wanted out.

RM [01:14:25] And so, the so-called Kelowna Accord, whatever it was called on that dark porch of Bennett's house in Kelowna announced that the strike was over. And people thought, 'What! What have we got? We got nothing.' You know, and the bitterness has lasted for a long, long time. Meanwhile, the BCGEU they were the big winners. They actually got a decent settlement out of the government. Down at BCGEU headquarters, even though the strike was still on until Solidarity settled—I mean, somebody brought in champagne. I was down there, and I'll tell you, it was not an edifying sight, as all these people sort of getting drunk on champagne and celebrating while the strike was being sold out in Kelowna. I remember one particular labour leader—I won't mention his name—being sick in the corridor, you, know. It was it was not great. It was a dark time as far as I could see for the labour movement. It was not—it was after all that promise of the summer and all those things that it ended with, it ended like that with nothing really to show for it—this amazing movement. There never been a movement—it was the longest, most protractive protest movement in Canadian history, really, because it stretched over all these months. And I know Ken you have a different—you thought it was a it was great thing for the BC Teachers' Federation because they did walk out, and you became a union at that moment. I mean, I think is your analysis. It's hard to think of a more dramatic event to cover than a pending general strike which was not just rhetoric—it was really going to happen, and it went right down to the wire. And the drama of the Kelowna meeting with Bennett and all these different things that were going on. As I say, it was frustrating for me because very little of what I knew about that dispute was reflected in my stories because they were so short.