

A HISTORY OF IUOE LOCAL 115

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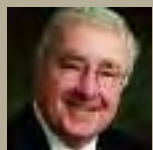
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A MESSAGE FROM
 IUOE GENERAL PRESIDENT
 VINCENT J. GIBLIN

Local 115's reputation as one of the most progressive, most influential trade unions in Canada is well-deserved. The Local, its leaders and its members through the years came by that reputation honestly -- they earned it.

From its humble beginnings during the Great Depression years, Local 115 achieved prominence by leading the way, not by waiting for someone else to show it the way.

Thanks to strong leadership during its 75-year history, the Local met many challenges head-on, overcame daunting obstacles, pioneered and charted new directions, and grew and prospered.

A representative sampling of the exceptional leadership Local 115 has enjoyed has to include the names of Mike Parr, Bert Brooker, Fred Randall, Jim Biddle, Tony Tennesseey, Jack Whittaker, Frank Hunt, Ernie McCallum, Dave Hodges, Andy Livingstone, Bill Blackwood, Jack Barrett, Jack Flynn, George Jones, Al Fowler, Cliff Parker and Gary Kroeker.

But most importantly, the successes enjoyed by Local 115 always have been driven by the lifeblood of the local, its members.

It is the members, the men and women who pull the levers, service the equipment, survey the sites and perform the myriad skilled jobs that built, build and maintain the infrastructure of British Columbia and the Yukon Territory; it is they who are the face and the backbone of Local 115, and it is the extent of their involvement and their loyalty that will shape and ultimately determine the future of the Local.

I urge all the officers and members of Local 115 to remember that you have what you have today thanks to those who came before you -- and left Local 115 better than when they first joined it.

Your commitment should be to do the same for those who will come after you.

Congratulations on your first 75 years. I wish you Godspeed and good fortune as you embark on building upon what is an acclaimed, proud tradition.

Fraternally,

Vincent J. Giblin | General President



A MESSAGE FROM
 IUOE LOCAL 115 PRESIDENT
 BRAD MACKENZIE

It was my honour to chair the 75th Anniversary Committee, which was charged with responsibility for organizing our celebrations of our diamond jubilee year. And what an amazing year it was!

Whether we work in an office or in a plant or on a construction site, we don't stop often enough to smell the roses -- to take stock of where we've been, what we've done and where we're headed. The last numbers of years have been difficult ones for all of us, but 2006 will surely go down as a highlight year.

I was overwhelmed and proud to see close to 3,000 members, families and guests celebrating our diamond jubilee by attending our general meetings, our Heavy Equipment Rodeo, the fabulous gala evening at the Bayshore, our Labour Day Picnic and our Christmas Dance in December. The success of those events was entirely due to the hard work of my committee comprised of Brothers Brian Cochrane, Brad Randall and Frank Carr, along with a number of members of our office staff.

The committee was also responsible for producing this book, which will play an important role in helping all members -- particularly the new generation -- to appreciate the rich tradition of perseverance which built this fine Local Union. We are indebted to the financial support from our contractors, other unions, suppliers and other friends of IUOE Local 115 for making this book possible.

It was the foresight of our Executive Board and our Business Manager Gary Kroeker who decided that 2006 was the year to recognize the contributions our members make to this union and to our great province and country. I also want to thank the Lynn Communications Group who helped in the coordination of our diamond jubilee activities.

All of us -- members, representatives and officers -- must now turn our attention to addressing the challenges which will face our membership and our Local Union in the run-up to 2031, when we will celebrate our 100th anniversary.

Sincerely,

Brad MacKenzie | President, Local 115



A MESSAGE FROM
IUOE LOCAL 115 BUSINESS MANAGER
GARY KROEKER

The year 2006 marked our 75th Anniversary, and the year was filled with a range of special events in which the membership participated with great enthusiasm.

As you review this commemorative book you will read about our proud past dating back to the origins of our trade here in British Columbia as far back as 1906, and our history as Local 115 of the International Union of Operating Engineers dating back to 1931.

The years leading up to our 75th were filled with ups and downs. There were many years of struggle and hardship. And there were the glory years of building the Province of B.C. and the Yukon Territory.

This book highlights the many projects, historical buildings and major infrastructure projects which our member built using all the skills of the varied trades represented in our union membership. Many members today, particularly the younger members, do not realize the enormity of the achievements brought by those who came before us in this local union. They were a proud bunch, proud of their craft, proud of the work they performed and the skills they brought to the job and the projects they completed.

As we look back on our past we must take heed of the accomplishments of our predecessors. Pride and professionalism were the watchwords. It was about a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. No job or task was too big or challenging for the members of Local 115. It was all about just doing it!

As we look forward to the future we must ask where do

we go from here?

The Union was built from the smallest of roots. In 1937 there were 7 people in our union. Now there are over 10,000 members.

The future of Local 115 is about growing bigger and stronger. It's also about doing what the membership of the past did in order to grow this union, which was to organize the unorganized. We must continue to seek out new sectors of potential membership growth and areas of representation.

We must promote new ideas and stay on the leading edge of innovation, always looking to improve ourselves as individuals. Our union has to re-dedicate itself to handling old challenges in new ways, and embracing change as it comes to our workplaces, our economy and our futures.

We must continue to train, educate and mentor the youth so they too can develop the pride in their accomplishments that our older members enjoy.

They can also expect to have a solid career in an ever-changing industry and workplace. They and their families deserve to enjoy the fruits of their labour in the years to come, and at the end of their working days they have a right to benefit from a pension which allows them to retire in comfort and dignity.

A large part of our success in the future will come from our strengthening relationship with our contractors, who are our partners in the workplace. Over the last number of years we have worked diligently with our contractors

to embrace as much work as we can handle, and they have responded extremely well in working with us on common goals. I might add a note of appreciation for their support, along with other suppliers and our friends in the trade union movement, for supporting this commemorative book through the purchase of messages of support.

We are all very proud of all those who had the drive, the dedication and the determination to beat all odds and build the first 75 years of this great union. For this we all say thank you! It is now up to us to take up the challenge to continue the legacy of building upon our foundation and organize all workers.

We must strive for and provide a sustained work environment where we are well-paid for the work we perform. We must maintain a health care benefit plan and defend the national program for universal health care. We must maintain and build upon the Pension Plan which provides security, comfort and dignity for the members.

Our challenges are many and our struggles will continue, but we will prevail.

We are the Operating Engineers. We are Simply the Best.

Gary Kroeker | Business Manager, Local 115

INTRODUCTION

The early years of our trade

Predecessor of the operating engineer was the steam engineer. It was the men who ran steam engines to generate heat and power who formed the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) in 1896.

Known then as the National Union of Steam Engineers (NUSE), the union arrived in Canada at the start of the 20th century, not long after American steam engineers had organized the first locals in the United States. Local 360, the first NUSE local in Western Canada, was chartered around the turn of the century in Dawson City, Yukon Territory. Like most of the other early locals, it was mainly an organization of a few local stationary engineers who, as part of the great socialist awakening in the early 20th century, believed in the righteous new struggle of international labour. But that was not all that was new.

Technology played a key role in the organization of steam and operating engineers. Coal-fired steam engines were the mainstay of power generation throughout the 19th century, and popularized by James Watt in the late 18th century. By the mid-1800s, steam engines were everywhere. Steam drove the railways as they opened up North America to the Europeans. Steam powered the pumps, buckets and lifts of the first large underground mines. The legendary steam donkey-engine made possi-

ble the large logging operations. Steam tractors made possible the large and productive prairie farm. Other adaptations of the steam engine ushered in the era of the skyscraper and the miracle of incandescent light in every city building. Carrying millions of immigrants to the new lands of North America, steamships began to replace sailing ships and revolutionize ocean travel. The use of the steam engine and the need for skilled operators rose dramatically in the 19th century.

What began as the NUSE was actually a union of steam engineers from three different trades: the portable engineers, the stationary engineers and the hoisting engineers. Though amalgamation had its advantages, the differences between the trades were often greater than their similarities. The only common denominator was the steam engine. The steam or power shovel was first invented by William T. Otis in 1839, but it did not see extensive use until after the American Civil War, when it was developed as a railway workhorse. The men who operated the shovels were known as portable engineers, to distinguish them from the stationary engineers.

The standard railroad shovel was an awkward device by modern standards, limited to railroad tracks and a 180 degree swing. It required three men to operate it: the fireman who fed the boiler, the engineer who operated the hoisting

and swinging action, and the crewman or boomcat who operated the separate crowding mechanism. In addition, a "pit crew" was necessary to build and clean the tracks.

THE OPERATING ENGINEERS

First power shovels were indispensable

Marion, Bucyrus, Ledgerwood and American Hoist were some of the early U.S. manufacturers of power shovels. From Great Britain came a full-swing power shovel in 1898. A lighter, more versatile model came into use in 1911, and this quickly proved indispensable for excavation work. The most remarkable features of the 1911 shovels were the first-ever crawler tracks, which added mobility to the machines. Although a gasoline power shovel was first used in 1914, it was not until the 1920s that oil and its derivatives began to replace coal and steam in the heavy equipment. Technology first had to experience a world war and the development of tank warfare before the crawler tractor arrived.

The invention of the first practical hoisting engine in 1875 introduced a new trade to construction sites: the hoisting engineer. With the steam hoist it became possible to construct taller and taller buildings. Often, the men hired to run the hoisting engine would also be responsible for operation and upkeep of other steam engines on the site. As new technology brought new machinery to the industry, the hoisting engineer broadened his skills until it became necessary to redefine the trade itself. In the meantime, both the hoisting and portable engineer



This train carries the first load of copper from the Phoenix Mine to the smelter in Grand Forks in 1900.



John Healey, a stationery engineer, is at his post tending a sawmill dynamo in the 1890s. small steam plants such as these, tended by an engineer, were the main source of heat and light in our cities at the turn of the century.

operated steam engines for a wide variety of construction purposes. The stiff-legged derrick, the concrete mixer, the air-driven rock drill - all came into use at the hands of the steam engineer.

Although the stationary engineers were the initial organizers of the NUSE, they were a different breed. The development of small-scale electrical generation through the use of steam gave the stationary engineer his bread and butter. Apartment buildings, stores, factories and mills, before the development of centralized power plants, had their own dynamos in the basement. A 1904 article in the International Steam Engineer described the stationary engineer.

The man whom I would consider a practical engineer is one who has served his time as a machinist with an engine builder; he should have seen service in the fire room; he should understand every moving part of any make of steam engine . . . be able to repair any portion needed to be repaired or renewed; he should have a technical knowledge of ice machines, dynamos, elevator machines, compressors, pneumatic machines, gas engines . . .

THE OPERATING ENGINEERS

The occupation of the stationary engineer reached its peak between 1879 when Edison invented the incandescent light bulb, and the 1920s, when central power plants had all but replaced the isolated plant. At the central plant, skills became more specialized. The role of the

stationary engineer as someone who had sole responsibility for interior power was diminished. In their heyday though, stationary engineers in the United States numbered about 250,000, far more than any other steam engineering trade. Given their strength, they organized. In January 1918, a letter from J. R. Lyon to the editor of the International Steam Engineer, described the birth of the NUSE.

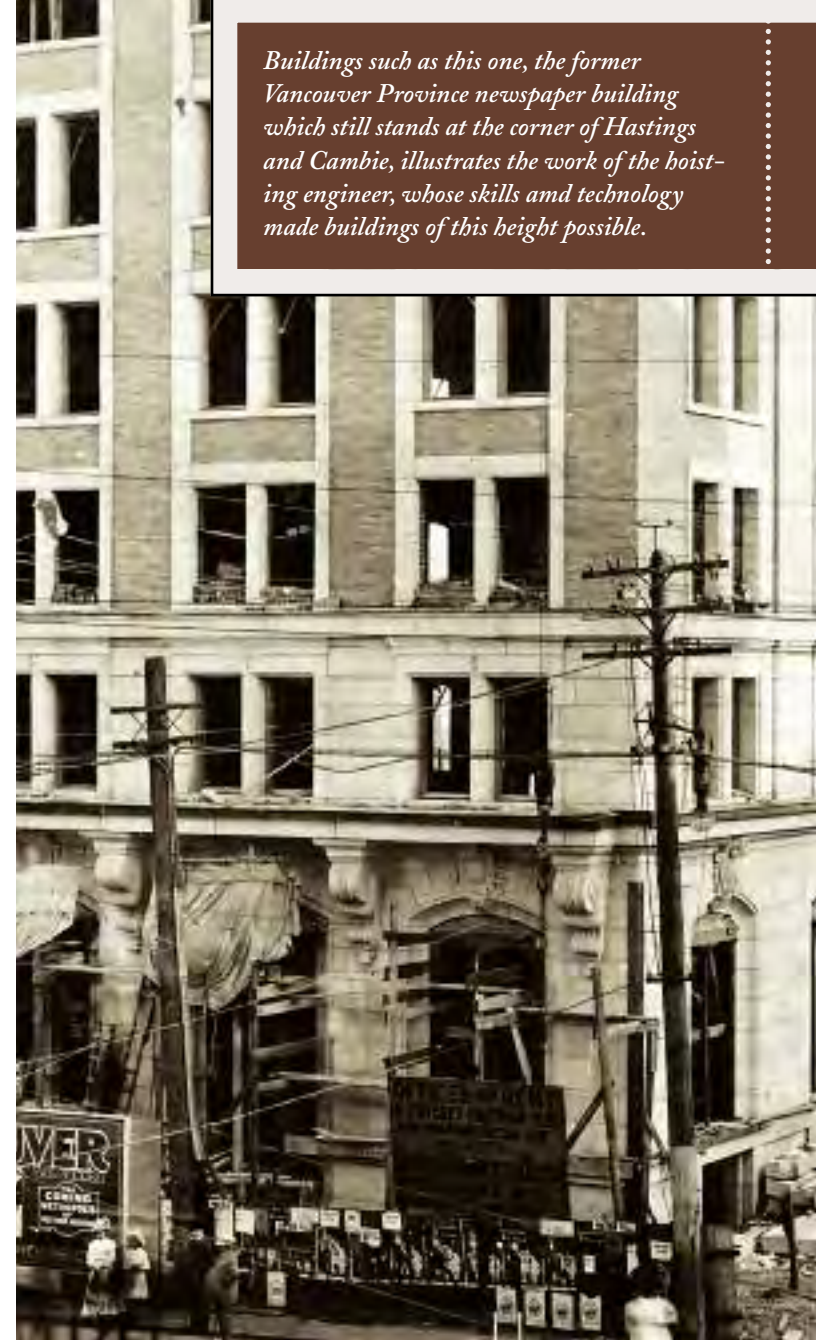
In December 1896, the American Federation of Labour held its convention in the Odd Fellows Temple at Cincinnati. I was at that time the engineer in charge of the Odd Fellows Temple, the convention hall. On the second or third day of the convention we received a visit in the engine room from delegates who inquired if there was such a thing as a union of engineers in Cincinnati. We had to admit there was none. They then stated that in their opinion it was about time for the Engineers of the United States to get busy and form a national organization . . .

THE OPERATING ENGINEERS

The NUSE soon joined scores of other American unions making inroads into Canadian labour at the turn of the century. Working conditions, wages and trade skills were similar on each side of the border, and workers saw their organization as a worldwide rather than a national movement. In 1897, the NUSE became the International Union of Steam Engineers (IUSE) so that Canadian locals could participate. A second name change in 1912, to the International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers (IUSOE), marked the increasing use of the internal combustion engine. It was a promising new world, filled with wonderful inventions; before long the steam engine would be old hat.



Buildings such as this one, the former Vancouver Province newspaper building which still stands at the corner of Hastings and Cambie, illustrates the work of the hoisting engineer, whose skills and technology made buildings of this height possible.



CHAPTER 1

Little Locals That Couldn't

At the turn of the century British Columbia was a vast, untamed wilderness linked to the rest of Canada by a ribbon of steel – the railway. At the end of the line Vancouver was a smoky, sprawling mill town surrounded by frame houses, all of which were in the shadows of mountains almost entirely stripped of their forests. This was Vancouver at the beginning of the 20th century.

When the international trade union movement first arrived in town few knew what a trade union was, and fewer still knew anything at all about international unions. They learned quickly. In the mills, mines and sweatshops, it was the ruthless reaction of the bosses, as much as the action of the workers, which spurred the rapid growth of the B.C. labour movement. In those few short years, the province had spawned the most intense labour activism in the country. B.C.'s Premier, Sir Richard McBride, supported the bosses. Together, their guns and clubs put a tragic end to many of the initial union organizing struggles.

Against this background of bloodshed and terror, amid racial and class hatred, Local 397 of the International Union of Steam Engineers was chartered in November 1909, for the very specific and daring purpose of improv-

ing the wages and working conditions of B.C.'s steam engineers.

Initial attempts to organize were also hampered by a lack of focus; the young local represented both hoisting and portable engineers, but also stationary engineers and several other categories. Together, they lacked a unified sense of purpose and direction.

We could never get anywhere as long as we had the stationary men in the same local. They had steady employment. We called them "cellar farmers." They couldn't understand why we were going after another dollar a day; they just stayed at the same rate. They were a millstone around our neck at that time.

BILL BLACKWOOD

The stationary engineers had it best because their trade was best understood and they were respected for their knowledge and special abilities. Most of them also belonged to professional associations so they did not need a formal union as much as the other categories, whose work was more transient. They also tended to think less of other engineers outside of their ranks, believing they were less skilled. Fred Blumberg, first business agent of Local 397, had an argument for these engineers.

A number of engineers have a very high opinion of their abilities. We take this opportunity to remind them that abil-

ity does not count for much in this world of profit, and in most cases, the man that gets the job, when the labour market is overcrowded, is the man who works the cheapest and who is the hungriest; he has a contract with his stomach which he must carry out at least once per week, or he ceases to exist. If you want to get a larger return for your labour power, come and join us.

THE FEDERATIONIST

Newspaper of the B.C. Federation of Labour

What the Local promised its new members was simply a fair wage of \$4.50 for an eight-hour day. With a wage like that, a fellow could get himself a new blue serge suit or enough coal to heat his house for a month, all from a day's labour; that is, if he didn't lose his job in the process. On the other hand, non-union engineers were often working 14 hours or as many as 18 hours a shift. Other factors in the labour market combined to reduce the going wages of the non-union man, as Blumberg asserted.

In his opinion, the engineers should be more strongly organized in this city. There was a large number of them, and owing to the peculiar nature of their work – working for less wages than received by Hindoos and Chinks employed by "patriots" who own the sawmills along the waterfront . . .

THE FEDERATIONIST

Hostility towards non-white workers was greater than ever in the first decade of the century, and all-white trade unions were no exception to the bigotry. For the white worker, Orientals and East Indians became the scapegoats for all immigrants who took jobs at reduced wages. This was evident in the 1909 provincial election demands of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, which included:



One of the earliest boiler-fired power shovels, with a child at the controls. It required a fireman and an operator, but this one had steel wheels so was not restricted to railway tracks like earlier models.

Road construction in the early 1900s was made easier by the development of the steam-driven shovel, but it could only operate from tracks laid by a special crew.



- a 48-hour week and compulsory half-holiday weekly
- income tax exemption raised to \$2,000
- adult suffrage
- state ownership of railways
- free land for settlers
- abolition of poll tax on all white men
- abolition of Asiatic labour from mining, fishing, logging.

Anti-Oriental sentiments had already led to violent riots and beatings in Vancouver. The provincial government supported the white majority with discriminatory policies, but the federal government tried to keep its hands clean. When the VTLC sent a telegram to Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier in 1909, stating “we refuse to be reduced to an Oriental standard of living,” the Prime Minister penned a terse reply.

*Wilfred Laurier
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
September 16, 1909*

Your telegram received. Quite disregarding the offensive language, I have to inform you that no request has been made of this government by anybody for the importation of Asiatic labour.

With no full-time administrators in the early union and few lines of communication, workers often had no way of knowing about the IUSE. Many engineers were employed out of town on railway, mining or logging jobs. If they didn't work with other steam engineers, they could work for years without ever hearing of Local 397. Ernie McCallum earned his 5th class steam engineer's ticket in 1907 and worked for five years, first as a steam donkey fireman and then as a derrick operator, without

knowing of the IUSE. It was in 1913, after the union had changed its name to the International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers (IUSOE), that McCallum first heard of it. He was working on a railway bridge at Kamloops Junction when a fellow worker told him about Local 397, and he joined as soon as he returned to Vancouver.

If you go back to the time when I started with the union, the working conditions were rotten. Rotten! If you ever needed a union, you did then. We worked on the Kamloops [CNR] Bridge for a 10-hour day. I don't think we got any premium for overtime. No holidays. We had Christmas Day, but that's about all we had. We had a raise to 50 cents an hour and we thought that was fine.

ERNIE McCALLUM

Bill Blackwood got his first job as a union engineer on the CP Railway Bridge at Pitt River. Projects and workers seemed to be more organized closer to Vancouver.

We built up quite an organization. Working on the Pitt River Bridge, we had about 30 men at one time. We had an old Australian named Pendergast as business agent; he was

a tough old bird. He'd send out these fellows who only had a 4th class ticket. He'd ship them to the only project in the province that amounted to anything - the CPR Bridge - and we'd have to break them in. We had quite a reputation for being capable and aggressive, though.

BILL BLACKWOOD

Working conditions and wages began to slowly improve in 1912 and 1913. The construction industry in Vancouver was moving ahead at a frantic pace. In 1913, revenue from building permits reached a record \$20 million. In addition, a new transcontinental railway, the Canadian National, was being forged through B.C., and most of the bridge construction was union-organized. Local 397 had a membership of 230. At a 1914 meeting of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, in the newly-completed Labour Temple at Dunsmuir and Homer, IUSOE members reported that all union men had jobs. The union wage scale had risen to \$175 per month, with



A classic shot of a Bucyrus Shovel loading ore at the Phoenix Copper Mine near Grand Forks in 1915.

an eight-hour shift on city jobs, nine on bridges and ten on out-of-town jobs. As well, the old International Union of Steam Shovel and Dredgemen had amalgamated with the IUSOE, and Local 397 became Local 620.

From Promise to Darkness – the World Goes to War

Life might have continued to improve had it not been for the outbreak of war on August 5, 1914, when Great Britain declared war against Germany. Most young Canadian men enlisted without hesitation. Over 400,000 Canadians, many having arrived as immigrants not long before, were shipped to Europe. Sixty thousand of them never returned and half of those who did returned crippled by horrendous battles and would never be able to return to the life they had left behind in 1914. What had begun as a promising decade for Canadians turned out to be the darkest in their history.

Any engineer willing to join in the war effort in 1914 was snapped up because for the first time, war was no longer a simple matter of troops on horses. It had evolved into a deadlier test of arsenal and technical ability. Most soldiers were students, farmers or clerks, men off the street, with none of the mechanical know-how that was required to run the machines of war. As a result many engineers went to war and built a legacy of Canadian courage and sacrifice. Eventually 50 engineers -- 26 percent of the membership -- went overseas.

Meanwhile, the Union was enjoying a popularity never realized before the war. A period of calm in 1914-15 was followed by a steady flow of non-union men into the Union, partly due to the Local's success in strike action at the Vancouver Government Wharf in 1915. In that dispute, the contractor dispensed with the eight-hour day and began working men ten hours a day without overtime. The federal government's fair wage officer upheld the Engineers' contract. This represented the first strike victory for the Local. By 1917, there were over 300 engineers in 620 and nearly 1,000 engineers in IUOE locals throughout the province.

Ginger Goodwin shot by Dominion police

Anti-war sentiment was demonstrated by the case of Ginger Goodwin, Vice-President of the B. C. Federation of Labour, who was evading the draft in the hills around Cumberland on Vancouver Island. Goodwin had a good reason to avoid military service - he suffered from tuberculosis. In 1917, a conscription board found him unfit for military service. Later that year, Goodwin, as secretary of the Trail Smelters Union, led a strike at the smelter. During the strike he was recalled before the conscription board and assigned to active military duty. Goodwin fled to the Island. Six months later he was dead, shot in the neck by a Dominion police constable. He became a

martyr to the B.C. labour movement.

In 1918, as the war in Europe tapered off, labour unrest increased in B.C. Returning soldiers could not find jobs and a drought on the prairies drove many unemployed veterans to the West Coast. Over 17,000 veterans decided to make B.C. their new home and they flooded the labour market.

The One Big Union

When armistice was signed in late 1918, after what had seemed to be an endless war, most Canadians expected a hasty return to normal. Unfortunately that was not to be the case. An epidemic of the Spanish flu spread throughout the world that year, killing more Canadians than the war that preceded it.

There were other problems as well. The return of Canadian troops was carried out too quickly, and the government was forced to set up relief camps throughout the country. It was not a hero's welcome that Bill Blackwood and three other veteran IUSOE members received when they hopped off the train in Vancouver.

We were supposed to be paid-up members throughout the war, until we were discharged. But when we got back, the Labour Temple janitor had become the business agent for the Engineers. He was a pacifist, and when we walked into the Engineer's local with a uniform on, it was like a red rag to a bull. He didn't know us at all.

'We're members,' I said.

'No, you're not members here.'

I said we'd rejoin, but oh no, they didn't want us. So I said, 'Well get this through your head mister, I'm going out there to go to work.'

'Oh, well, you can't do that.'

'Well you watch my smoke,' I said. But I only got halfway



Operator Harry Lovell, craneman Brother Clark and fireman Yorky Evans (background) operate a Marion 35 steam shovel on a sewer and water main job at Cambie and 16th in Vancouver in 1919, as other workers and neighbourhood boys sit in for the photograph.

down Granville Street when there were three or four voices behind me. They had been sitting in the snake room listening to what was going on.

'C'mon back, Bill. We won't let that guy get away with that.' 'Nothing doing,' I said, 'so long as he's business agent, I won't belong to the Local.'

So I went out and I did go to work. I joined the OBU, the Winnipeg outfit. Had to belong to something.

BILL BLACKWOOD

The One Big Union (OBU) or the “white card” as it came to be known among union ranks (international unions were considered “red”), was the Canadian arm of a worldwide movement aimed at making organized labour into one powerful and united force. The organizers were socialist labour leaders who felt the international unions and labour councils had failed in their struggle against the capitalists, who were often blamed for abetting the tragic war situation. At the Western Canadian Labour Conference in March 1919, trade union delegates decided to split from the Canadian Trades and

Labour Congress and the American Federation of Labour. The general strike was to become the greatest weapon of the workers; lobbying politicians had been a waste of time.

The following month, on April 2, 1919, Local 620 members decided in a general referendum to abandon the IUSOE and join the OBU. Local 620, Steam and Operating Engineers, relinquished its charter in the AFL and the membership had formed what was to be known as the Engineers, Firemen and Oilers’ Section of the OBU. The Local had a membership of over 600.

Before the OBU was able to consolidate its union of Western Canadian labour, a general strike was called in Winnipeg. Thirty thousand workers walked off their jobs in late May to protest unfair wages and high consumer prices. The VTLC called for a series of sympathy strikes throughout B.C., and these received general but intermittent support. The Winnipeg protest remained peaceful until June 21, when troops of Mounties and ex-soldiers used force to disperse a large rally. The police fired into the crowd, killing one man and wounding others while another group was beaten to the ground and trampled by horses. Ninety-one persons were arrested, including

labour leaders, and the day became known as Bloody Saturday. The trials of those blamed for the strike went on for months afterwards. The OBU was the scapegoat.

Although the OBU was not directly involved with the general strike, Bloody Saturday earned it the scorn of politicians. Internal problems, combined with competition from international unions and an economic postwar recession, brought about the decline of the OBU in 1920. Many OBU members wanted to retain membership in both the OBU and their craft unions, but had to quit the OBU when their union privileges were threatened. The members of Local 620 had no second chance. With fewer than the necessary seven members required to hold the charter, the IUSOE closed down its Vancouver local in 1919.

The IUSOE was the second largest union in Vancouver to lend its support to the OBU. However, in 1920, as the OBU showed obvious signs of weakening, steam and operating engineers in B.C. faced the prospect of having no one to defend their interests against employers who held the upper hand.

A crew of men investigate an old dredgerman's boiler on a barge, a little worse for wear, tied up in the weeds off a remote lake at the turn of the century.



CHAPTER 2

Gathering Steam

The year 1920 was a turning point for both the IUSOE and the OBU in British Columbia. The IUSOE vanished without a trace from the labour press and local labour council meetings in Vancouver, although loyal members still considered themselves active trade unionists. The OBU, doomed as an organization, continued to haunt the labour movement with its call for regional unionism. However, in the face of employer and government adverseness, the movement had lost its zeal. In the void left by the OBU in the construction industry, the Canadian Society of Certified Steam Engineers emerged as the Principal Engineers' Organization. The Society later became an adversary of the IUSOE during several years of dual union organization for the engineers.

Coastal Expansion

For British Columbia the decade was a period of rapid industrial expansion and population growth along the

coast. Coastal centres such as Vancouver, Nanaimo, Victoria, Powell River and Prince Rupert were bolstered by a thriving forest industry and grew at an unprecedented rate. Several major construction projects, most of them in or around Vancouver, highlighted the decade for hoisting and portable engineers: the University of British Columbia, the Stave Lake Dam, the Burrard Street Bridge, the original Second Narrows Railway Bridge and numerous port and drydock developments on the coast. Union steamships and other coastal traffic plied B.C. waters with a frequency that has not been equaled since. Everywhere, large steam-driven dredges and floating derricks were in demand, and they required an engineer's know-how to operate. Ernie McCallum was rehired by Northern Construction after it took over Northwestern Dredging, simply because he, Dick Disney and Bill Blackwood were the only engineers who were familiar with the equipment.

Among the most lucrative projects during the early 1920s was the development of False Creek and Granville Island. Pacific Construction won both contracts, and by using dredged material from False Creek to fill in Granville Island, managed to make a fat profit.

One small independent outfit, Barr's Derricks, operated a thriving business on the lower Fraser River and in Vancouver Harbour during the 1920s. Golden Barr and his father operated two derricks and a tug, dredging everything from a pond for the Vancouver Rowing Club to log storage areas along the Fraser River. Dredge opera-

tors in Vancouver Harbour were busy widening the First Narrows, deepening the harbour and using the fill as foundation for shipping piers; all projects that supported the young city's claim of being "the gateway to the orient."

Although the west coast shipbuilding industry declined in the 1920s, the growth of the Canadian Merchant Marine and the Canadian Navy provided a steady source of employment for many steam and operating engineers in Victoria. The construction of the Esquimalt shipyards in the early 1920s set the wheel in motion, although to the dismay of engineers it was soon halted. Early in 1923, one of the coffer dams broke at the new shipyards and construction, along with men's wages, ceased for five months. When work was ready to resume in June, eight engineers, hoisting, portable and small locomotive operators, refused to commence work unless the company agreed to pay them an advance of \$1 per day over the wage they had received before the delay. Their demand was flatly refused and an immediate work stoppage prevented most of the 150 other men at the site from carrying on with their jobs. After ten days of intermittent discussion between Local 446 in Victoria and the contractors, work was resumed when the engineers accepted a pay advance of 80 cents a day. As was often the case, though, the Local's business agent was not permitted to enter the site for some time afterwards.

Over on the Mainland, things had picked up for Local 844 in the summer of 1922. The Local's executive appointed a press committee to spread the word about reorganization and their efforts were reaffirmed in August by a visit from IUSOE General President Stitt. Stitt promised his full support, and within a year of re-establishment, the Local could report to The



Three operators with their clamshell dredge bucket operating on the Fraser River around 1925.

A dredge sits at anchor at Northwestern's yard in Burrard Inlet off Vancouver in the 1920s.

Federationist that "the meetings are beginning to look like old times with so many of the old-timers coming back." "Engineers Make Members" reported a front page story in The Federationist, which, after the fall of the OBU, had resumed its support of the internationals.

Hands at the Levers

Quite apart from the downward trend in organized labour, there was a revolution conceived during the 1920s that would gradually transform the industrial makeup of the IUSOE and build its strength to levels that were undreamed of at the time. It was the internal combustion engine, and it was revolution that employers embraced as it revolutionized construction technology.

To the steam engineer, the new mode of power must have had all the appeal of a funeral dirge. Steam was the engineer's daily sustenance and it was his knowledge of

the principles and workings of steam that kept his skills in demand. Fortunately, the changeover to internal combustion engines occurred slowly enough that the engineers were able to adapt, recognizing for the most part that the noisy little engines would some day reign supreme. In 1924, IUSOE General President Arthur Huddell warned of the changes in store for the trade.

There is coming into this field [construction] every day improved machinery upon all classes of work and instead of the old methods of building roads with large numbers of men and horses and teams, it is now being done by steam shovels and large concrete mixers, in conjunction with the road rollers, so that the work in its entirety is now being done by skilled mechanics and our members are not in touch with this work in the manner they ought to be.

The gasoline machinery is coming in on construction work in leaps and bounds and many of our old-time steam engineers are standing off and looking at this machinery, hoping that it will not be a success, but it has already proven that it is here to stay and is coming in large numbers every day.

Eventually, the internal combustion engine would enable dramatic developments to occur in the construction industry. Engine horsepower was doubled, then

Colin Campbell works his steam engine on the Ruskin Dam in the late 1920s.



tripled and quadrupled as the years passed.

The most striking change during the twenties was from the horse-drawn dumpwagon to a small but durable version of the dumptruck. The steam shovel, previously confined to tracks or hampered by awkward iron wheels, was improved by the addition of crawler treads.

In British Columbia, highway construction beyond city limits remained at a virtual standstill and rural travel by automobile was still something of an adventure. It was front page news in the Vancouver Sun when, in 1922, the provincial government put up for tender three miles of the Pacific Highway to be built of "concrete, bitulithic, tarmac macadam and one or two other types." The provincial government of the day was too small and poor to be able to finance large-scale projects. Construction of the Barnet Road, for example, had to be staggered because the government could not afford to finance the project in one year. Hence, for the proud British Columbians who could afford the \$500 to purchase a brand new automobile, there were bound to be curses muttered when they went touring. The road system, where it existed, consisted of narrow, winding dirt roads riddled with washboard and potholes, and missing a bridge here and there.





Steam engineers operate a caisson pump on the Skeena River around 1928.

Roadwork was usually done by horse-drawn Bagley or Fresno scrapers. In the latter years of the decade, agricultural machinery was adapted for construction purposes and this led to the little crawler or gas tractors, which were often used to pull grader blades. Much of the work on the water was still done by hand.

On heavy construction sites, Federal trucks with solid rubber tires began to appear. The swinging gasoline shovel became quite common during this period, too. Major U.S. manufacturers sent out demonstration models accompanied by sales representatives who trained men to use the new equipment. The operators of the machines became known as shovel runners. Despite growing use in other applications, a gasoline machine seldom replaced older, more dependable steam equipment. Steam still dominated and was preferred for its smoothness of operation and durability. Some steam dredges and derricks built during the 1920s would last another five decades. They were well-built machines, often fitted with Scottish marine engines that, day after day, year after year, kept on chugging, as long as the engineer knew his job.

From Bust to Boom and Back Again

From the mid-1920s until 1929, there was a startling economic boom in Canada. Large government construction projects got underway and the province's forest industry was further consolidated. The long-awaited day

of modernization seemed to be dawning.

In 1927, the General Executive Board of the IUSOE introduced a resolution at the American Federation of Labour convention that the word "steam" be eliminated from the union's name. The IUSOE became the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) and that same year it absorbed the International Brotherhood of Steam Shovel and Dredgemen (IBSSD). Before the merger, steam shovel and dredgemen in B.C. had usually joined the IUOE anyway, since the nearest local of the IBSSD was in Seattle. But to the IUOE as a whole, the amalgamation was a major step in the transition from a union of stationary engineers to a union of construction and building trades engineers. The former districts of the IBSSD were chartered as Locals 42 to 47. All IBSSD members in Canada west of Port Simpson, Ontario, became members of the IUOE Local 46A. This dual arrangement created jurisdictional conflicts that further hampered the progress in organizing. Members of 844, the larger of the two, began pressing International Representative Frank Healy for a merger. In 1928, after many failed efforts to achieve this, they wrote to International Headquarters and requested that all members of 46A be taken off the job. To encourage a

A Cat is seen pulling an Athey Trailer as a car comes up behind it on a rough gravel road in 1927.

merger the International brought more pressure to bear on Local 46A but resistance from within both Locals prevented an early solution.

In Vancouver another even greater construction boom had arrived. This one put the city ahead of Winnipeg as Canada's third largest city. As well, the CPR was double-tracking, which involved extensive bridge work. The University of B.C. was being completed and skyscrapers like the Marine Building and the new Hotel Vancouver suddenly dominated the city's skyline.

Union members reported to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council that conditions were better than they had been in years; most engineers were working a shorter day as a result of the provincial Eight-Hour Day Act of 1925. Consumer prices had dropped as well, as Canadian agriculture blossomed with a record harvest in 1928. Vancouver had become the major grain terminus on the West Coast and many engineers were employed in the construction of grain elevators. Not a single member of 844 was unemployed, and the prospects for a new wage settlement seemed good.



Growing cities need hydro-electric power, which means dams

The Lower Mainland, with its new-found wealth, was hungry for power. The B.C. Electric Company began hunting around for a potential hydroelectric site. In 1926 they found one above Mission at Stave Lake. The Stave Falls Dam turned out to be the biggest project for operating engineers in the 1920s.

The union sent me up as a fireman. You'd go to the office of the timekeeper and he'd write down all the particulars. The office man said: 'Well, I hope you behave yourself better than the man before you.'

'What happened?' I said.

'Well, this man came down, found this chap in bed with his wife and he went out to the back of the woodshed, got an axe and split the man's head open. So you'd better behave yourself.' Now that may or may not have been true, but I felt that was calling a spade a spade.

ANDY LIVINGSTONE

Just one month into the new decade, the number of unemployed in the city had risen 300 percent. Most engineers were able to hang on to their jobs for a while. As late as May 1930, the executive decided not to establish a reserve fund "in anticipation of slack times ahead." Two major Vancouver construction projects, the Burrard Street Bridge and later on, the CPR Dunsmuir Tunnel, helped to soften the crunch.

This was state-of-the-art road-grading equipment in 1928.

A Linn tractor hauls a Dodge truck with a 2.5-ton load up a 10 per cent grade in 1927. Not much horsepower in the trucks in those years!



When construction of the Burrard Street Bridge got underway in 1929, the project captured the attention of all Vancouverites. The bridge, largest and most impressive in the city, would be the material rendering of the new amalgamation of Point Grey, South Vancouver and Vancouver Proper. The city could now boast of a population approaching 250,000, which constituted a major metropolis.

Out of disunity came Local 115

For the engineers the bridge became a symbol of the disunity that plagued the labour movement throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Jobs on the south side of the bridge were organized by the white card movement, while jobs on the north side of the bridge were held by IUOE men. Though the two sides were destined to meet, there was to be no merging of the two unions. Instead, Local 844 had to fight to maintain its share of the jobs. In January 1931, the Local joined hands with the Piledrivers Local 2404 to protest the hiring of non-union men.

The plummeting membership of both Local 844 and Local 46A served to renew the pressure from certain members of 844 to have the two locals amalgamated into one. Relations had grown even more bitter between the two sister locals. After two years of frustrated attempts to unite the two, the executive of Local 844 ordered Business Agent George Pettipiece to organize the shovel men in Vancouver and wrest control of the work from Local 46A. The Union once again called upon International Representative Frank Healy. Healy visited the city regularly and was able to make progress "calming the stormy waters between Local 844 and 46A."

At a meeting of the Dominion Contractors' Association held in Toronto, the assertion was made that the biggest boom in the building trades in the history of Canada will take place in the next five years, starting almost at once. The boom never came. There was little to celebrate when, on February 19, 1931, Locals 46A and 844 were joined under one charter: Local 115. Born into a stricken economy, Local 115 would face challenges during the 1930s that would make even the troubled twenties seem like the best of times.



CHAPTER 3

Local 115 is Born

I didn't touch a lever from '31 to '36.
COLIN CAMPBELL

What seemed to be little more than a temporary slowdown in the construction industry was not worrying the Local 115 executive in the spring of 1931. They had seen cloudy days before. True, almost 40,000 men were out of work in a province with a population of less than 700,000 people. Yet few among the jobless were union engineers. Most unemployed men had arrived in B.C. by riding the rails from Eastern Canada and the prairies. The Union had its share of unemployed men, as always, but most of them hung on to their memberships and paid their dues. It was their best bet for landing a job, somewhere.

After the amalgamation with IUOE Local 46, Local 115 was still faced with the problem of dual unions. Many members were working on the same jobs as engineers in all-Canadian unions and competition grew more fierce with the continuing shortage of work. The National Union of Operating Engineers (NUOE), Locals 2 and 3, were constant contenders for whatever was available. As well, many of the NUOE men were drifting into the province from the east, and it seemed for a while that hard times were encouraging a resurgence of the white card movement. International General President John Possehl and Canadian IUOE Organizer Frank Healy visited a Local 115 meeting in October 1931, where Healy spoke at length about the dual union movement.

"From facts given him," concluded R. Hunter, the recording secretary, "it appears the dual union movement is a boogey that is frightening us unnecessarily." Healy was always a positive thinker. Another optimist was George Pettipiece, Financial Secretary for Local 115. At the outset of the worst depression in living memory, Pettipiece's report in the Labour Statesman was surpris-

ingly bright.

Now that Old Man Winter has shed his fur coat, the engineers are again preparing for a normal season. We have come through the winter without losing any members and although the outlook is not as good as it has been, we are confident that we will be able to maintain our organization at fighting strength and keep the wolf from the door.
George Pettipiece

The merging of Locals 46A and 844 into 115 had cured more than a few headaches for job stewards throughout the province. South of the border, amalgamation did not go over so smoothly. When one IBSSD crew in Cleveland was replaced by an IUOE crew, the steam shovel involved was blown up. The contractor, threatened with further violence, rehired IBSSD men. In another incident, a Bricklayers' business agent (the bricklayers had sided with the IUOE), out for a drive with his family, stopped to have his oil checked and discovered two sticks of dynamite wired to his engine.

As unemployment, poverty and hunger grew more severe after 1929, men grew desperate and criminal activities became more prevalent in eastern trade union locals. In 1931, Dave Evans, Former General Secretary-Treasurer of the IUOE, was convicted of embezzling \$200,000 of union funds.

Assassination Attempts in the Union Movement

The IUOE leadership suffered several assassination attempts too. On May 22, 1931, General President Arthur Huddell went to lunch with then Secretary-General Possehl and Frank Langdon who, as part of the amalgamation with the IBSSD, had been appointed assistant



Here's an operator standing beside his 8-yard Musabe bucket in use on the Lions Gate Bridge in 1936.



Operating engineer uses a Cat RD7 tractor to clear land for the first Vancouver Island Highway near Campbell River in 1936.

Photo courtesy of Finning

secretary of the International. The three were sitting in a cafeteria across the street from the Union's Washington, D.C. headquarters. A man in overalls entered the room and seated himself at a nearby table. A few seconds later the man stood up, pulled two pistols from his pockets and began shooting. The first bullet hit Langdon in the head, not killing him but causing the loss of one eye. The second bullet hit Huddell, but a leatherbound notebook prevented it from entering his body. Possehl escaped injury, and 30 years later a U.S. congressional committee investigating union crime suggested he might have been behind the attempted assassination and was missed on purpose.

Bankruptcies halt work

As projects halted because of company bankruptcies, jobs became more and more difficult to track down. After 1929, the greatest concern of the Local was not to fight for increased wages, shorter hours or better working conditions, but simply to maintain wages. The new Hotel Vancouver stood as an ominous skeleton after the contractors went broke. The Second Narrows Bridge, partially destroyed by a shipping accident, was left in a state of disrepair. Other projects stopped, only to start again several weeks later when the financiers managed to find more money.

Engineers working on the CPR Dunsmuir Tunnel were stung with a wage cutback by Northern Construction. The project, which would allow CPR freight to pass under the city of Vancouver, employed more engineers than any other at the time. The Union felt it had to stand up against the company's action or be faced with a landslide of wage cuts on other jobs. On July 10, 1931, a ballot was cast and 58 members of the Union voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action. Picketing began the following week and "unemployed workers offered their services [to join picketers, for the promise of a meal] almost before the papers were cold off the presses." As well, the Local entered into an agreement with the All-Canadian Shovel Runners Union, a partnership of necessity, and the combined pressure resulted in a settlement the following day. Wages were restored to previous levels.

We had no trouble for the simple reason that all the strikers were sitting around on the grass armed with pick handles. I don't think anyone was going to take a job from a group of people who were prepared to fight for their jobs. You could call it militancy, but in those days the police were definitely on the side of the employers. The provincial government had a police force who we referred to as the 'provincials'." The Vancouver City Police had a man named Scanlon, and there was many a worker who was clubbed by people such as him.

ANDY LIVINGSTONE

Police brutality became part of the worker's nightmare

during the 1930s. Widespread dissatisfaction, with the government's policy towards the unemployed and the economy, often led to rallies, marches and long treks out of the relief camps. The provincial government, plagued with financial difficulties, wanted the lid kept closed. Strong-arm anti-labour tactics that were popular at the turn of the century were suddenly back in fashion. The members of Local 115 protested.

Be it resolved that we as a body of citizens in the City of Vancouver, protest emphatically against the actions of the police force, in their actions of dispersing the citizens of Vancouver at the corner of Hastings and Carroll Streets in today's [June 5, 1931] unemployed demonstration. Especially Sergeant Scanlon for riding his horse on the sidewalk and using his whip against innocent travelers.

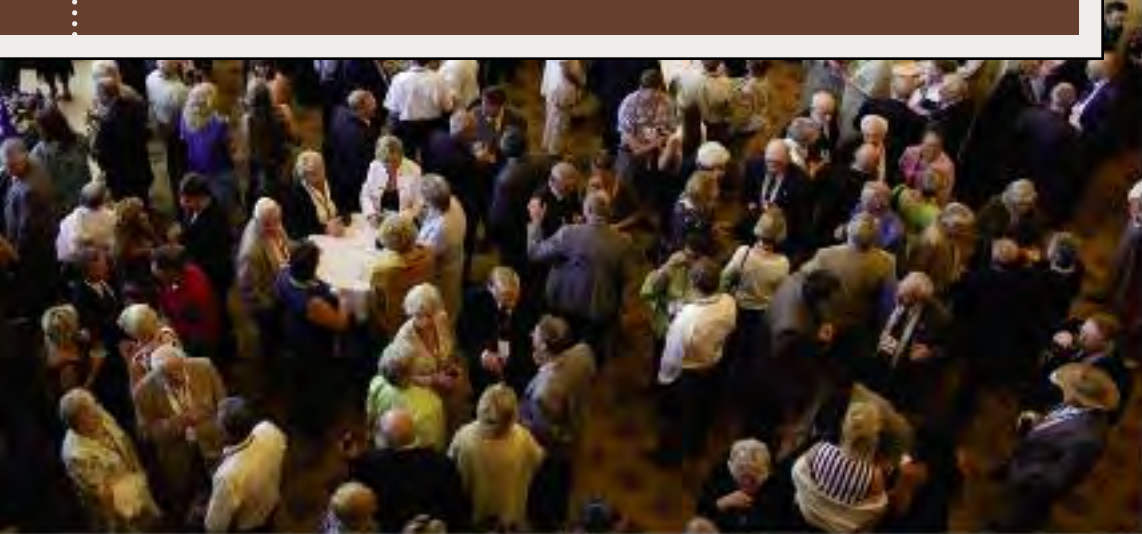
HOMELESS AND HUNGRY

At the height of the provincial government's relief program, there were 237 camps containing 11,000 men in B.C. Camp life was the last vestige of survival for many unemployed men. The entire system was mismanaged and rife with corruption. Within a year of commencement, the program had to be cut in half and most men started drifting back to the cities in search of handouts. For married residents of the province, relief provided \$9



08.26.06

DIAMOND JUBILEE GALA BANQUET





As B.C. was coming out of the depression in 1939, twin Cat D8 tractors went to work around the clock in earth-moving operations at the Sullivan Mine in Kimberley.

Photo courtesy of Finning



per month for food, plus \$3.50 for the second adult and \$2.50 each for every dependent child under the age of 21. The payments provided enough for survival, but could hardly begin to meet loan or mortgage payments. More than one engineer and his family lost their home. When that was gone he moved his family in with friends or relatives, or simply packed up the car and left the city. Some families resisted eviction, with tragic results.

The loss of jobs, the absence of an adequate welfare system, and the collapse of the entire economy gradually led to a sense of social chaos. Four fifths of Canadians held on to their jobs, but for the remaining one-fifth, the bottom dropped out. Unions had more than their share of the latter. To the socialist fringe, the Soviet Union's apparent immunity to the whole mess was a guiding light. At a special meeting of the Vancouver and New Westminster District Labour Council in July 1931, local labour representatives, including those of the IUOE, gave support to a resolution calling for the abandonment of the capitalist system.

Whereas unemployment is on the increase throughout the Dominion of Canada, bringing in its trail greater and more intensified misery to rapidly increasing numbers, be it resolved that [we] demand of Prime Minister Bennett and his Conservative Government to enact immediate legislation to remedy this condition by changing entirely the whole economic system now in existence, preventing profiteering by the financial interests and make a more equitable distribution of this country's wealth so as to provide sufficient and adequate continuous employment to provide every human being in the whole country an abundance of wholesome food, clothing and shelter, also recreation and entertainment."

By 1932 there were 70,000 unemployed men in the

province. Almost ten percent of the population was on relief with thousands being shipped to make-work projects that were often ridiculous. Other projects, such as construction of the Big Bend Highway through the Rocky Mountains, were well planned but poorly executed. It was not so much the condition of the camps that was hard to take, it was the humiliation of a skilled man doing menial or "boondoggle" work; of a proud, family man begging for handouts; of a quality of life that seemed to have slipped from grasp forever.

No Jobs, No Union

Despite the hardships suffered by the unemployed during the depression, those with steady employment generally fared well. Deflated prices on many consumer goods gave increased buying power to those in middle and upper income brackets. Operating engineers, closely tied to seasonal and economic trends in the construction industry, followed a pattern of employment quite different from other workers. Most Canadians found the hardest years were from 1931 to 1933, but large construction projects planned or started before the depression gave engineers sporadic employment during these years. Major jobs included the Dunsmuir Tunnel, the First Narrows Water Tunnel, the Burrard Street Bridge, Fraser River bridge projects, the new, ultramodern Vancouver City Hall, reconstruction of CPR bridges from Vancouver to Ashcroft, grain elevator construction and the extension

of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway to Lillooet. As well, the cream of the engineer's jobs, operation of the dipper dredges, was maintained through a close relationship between Bill Grant, Northwestern Dredging's boss, and the Department of Public Works. Patronage was a fixture of the civil service at the time and it bore rewards: extensive dredging of the First Narrows.

Bill Grant was the Northwestern Dredging Company. He was a good man to work for. Even when you knew he was trying to cheat you, you couldn't help but like him, and you knew he enjoyed doing it. I worked for Bill Grant for years. I believe he had a federal government cabinet minister as a partner because Northwest Dredging Company certainly got lots of government contracts.

ERNIE McCALLUM

But the dipper dredge jobs were dominated by the "big four": Ernie McCallum, Bill Blackwood, Dick Disney and Harry Blanshard. For most of the other men, the oasis that was Vancouver's construction trade dried up after 1933. Membership in Local 115 reached its lowest point that year, with as few as seven members paying dues and holding the charter.

We used to meet at Labour Council headquarters down on Beatty Street. I would go to every single meeting, but there would only be two or three people there and not enough to form a quorum. It's sad. You couldn't get anybody out. Streetcar fares were only about five cents, but nobody seemed to bother with the union. They tried to keep the union together, but there were so few people, it was pathetic.

GEORGE JONES



Early mechanization of the roadbuilding industry shows the variety of vehicles at work on a highway project east of Vernon between 1930 and 1935.



During the 1930s, Frank Hunt was the key man in the union. Hunt was the first president of Local 115, and with Jack Flynn, he kept the coals burning for seven straight years. With only a trickle of dues coming in, it was all the executive could do to scrape enough money together to purchase writing paper and keep in touch with the headquarters in Washington.

Frank was one of the people who made things tick. He was something like Dave Hodges [one-time recording secretary]; a very refined look to him. You'd think he was a professor from UBC because he'd spent a lot of time in the higher learning schools.

ANDY LIVINGSTONE

I give Frank Hunt credit for keeping things going through the depression.

BILL BLACKWOOD

George Pettipiece served as a business agent and financial secretary until August 1932, when an audit was done of the Local's books. Like his brother, Vancouver labour

pioneer and federal socialist candidate Parm Pettipiece, George Pettipiece was a good union worker, but both men had their weak side. Parm was forced to resign from the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council in 1917, when it was discovered that he embezzled \$500 from Council funds donated for May Day. George had staked an even larger claim for himself by altering the IUOE dues books for his own gain. A membership vote was held to decide what punitive measures should be taken.

The vote being taken, it was carried unanimously and George Pettipiece was thereby expelled and forever barred from membership in the International Union of Operating Engineers.

There was no lasting contempt for Pettipiece, though, for the times were hard on everyone. That same summer, the Local's one automobile, a Model A Ford, was repossessed by the finance company. It was a sure sign that conditions were worsening. By July of the following year, paid offices in the Local had to be eliminated until condi-

tions improved. With a total cash balance of \$46.08 and a handful of faithful members, Pro Tem Recording Secretary Ernie McCallum closed the first minute book of Local 115. Six of the seven remaining members were unemployed, with the one working member hoisting on the Patullo Bridge. Seven was the minimum number of members required to maintain the charter, but there was no money to pay the dues. To keep the Local going, they began cashing in bonds held in the Beatty Street Labour Headquarters.

Local 115 was carried by the wind for the next few years, having no offices and only a shadow of a membership. There were still advantages to union membership. Large construction projects would start up once every so often and as long as an engineer paid his dues - \$2.50 a month for engineers and \$1.25 for firemen - he might some day receive the long-awaited call for work. One such union job, the Nipawin Bridge, was built across the North Saskatchewan River in 1933-34. Andy McGuire and Ernie McCallum were among the members of Local 115 who traveled east to work on the bridge, which spanned one mile and 47 feet as the longest cantilever bridge in the world at that time. Other men, Charlie Wren, Harry Blanshard and Dave Hodges among them, found work at the B.C. Nickel Mine at Hedley. A few, who could find no employment at all, yet who refused to fall into the relief camp trap, headed off into the mountains in search of gold. George Jones, one-time recording secretary, bought an old truck for \$75 and hauled wood



That's Vin MacDonald operating a D7 on the Banff-Windermere Highway job in the 40s.

“Finding a job meant hustling, or using whatever means possible, honest or dishonest, to get on the payroll.”

-Andy Livingstone

A Cat 75 tractor and a Hyster HiTen Arch are a unique combination in a skidding operation near Errington on Vancouver Island.

Photo courtesy of Finning



in Vancouver. Part-time work was occasionally found in the mills and shipyards around Vancouver; part-time meaning two or three hours a week.

I went down to the shipyards here every morning for a long time and there would be three or four hundred men in the yard. The foreman would come out and pick men, saying, 'You and you and you. We'll take four or five. That's all we want today, the rest of you can go.'

JACK McCLOSKEY

Finding a job meant hustling, or using whatever means possible, honest or dishonest, to get on the payroll.

I was desperately looking for a job. There was a plywood plant being built in New Westminster. They'd brought in a skid driver, and on a skid driver you would be forever connecting water lines because the machine would be moving from spot to spot and doing work. I knew there were two bosses on this job: Dan King and Levi King, but I didn't approach either for a job. Charlie Wren was on the piledriver, so I went over there one morning with my work clothes on and I went to the toolbox and got a couple of wrenches. I started hooking up hoses because I'd done that sort of work before and I knew all about it. Before long,

Dan King came along.

'Who hired you?' he asked, and I said Levi.

Later in the day, Levi came up to me and said: 'Who hired you?'

Dan King, I said.

I knew if they ever got talking to one another, I'd be down the road, but I made it stick till the end of the job. Charlie knew and he got a great kick out of it.

ANDY LIVINGSTONE

With chronic unemployment continuing year after year, workers were at the mercy of their employers. Apart

from the Hours of Work Act of 1934 which set a maximum of one and one half hours overtime for engineers and firemen, there was little in the way of labour legislation at a time when organized labour lay paralyzed. The situation was aggravated by the close relationship that prevailed between business and government. Picketing remained an illegal act until 1939. Unemployment insurance was only a vision in the minds of a few Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) members of parliament. In the provincial election of 1937, the government promised two positive steps towards adequate labour legislation with a bill guaranteeing the right to organize and another establishing medical insurance. However, after the Liberals were re-elected, support for labour diminished and medical insurance fell by the wayside. Eventually, the provincial legislature passed the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (ICA), but this did more to end strikes as a bargaining weapon than it did to guarantee the right to organize.

The government found it expedient to blame organized labour for the economic woes of the province. The ICA restricted collective bargaining to committees of employees, thereby robbing the unions of their power. There was an 80 percent decrease in strike action after the ICA was passed by the legislature. Company unions sprung up across the province. These were open to influence, though. With or without the company unions, wages were slashed and employment terminated at the employer's discretion.

We worked on a shoestring. If you worked overtime you had to take it off afterwards. If you didn't like it there would be plenty of men out there ready to take your place. There were easily 250 men outside the big doors in front of the Vulcan Engineering Works all the time. I happened to get in there

Construction of the Pattullo Bridge in 1937 employed the only working member of the local in that year.

once. I went around and sneaked in the back to see if I could connect with a job. I knew one fellow who worked in there.

The foreman, Jim Murray, saw me and he said, 'You get outside with the rest of them! If I want you, I'll come and get you.'

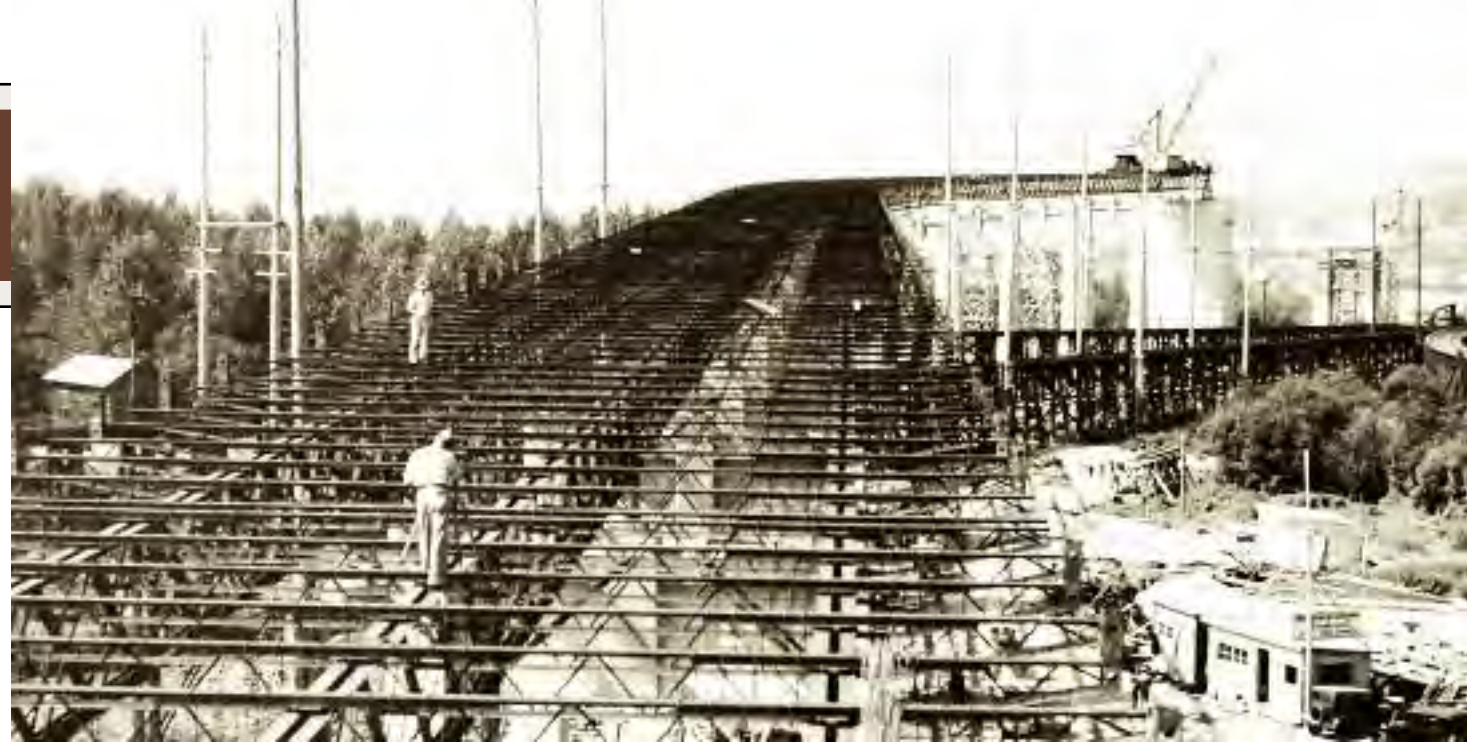
So he came out and asked me if I could run a regular drill and I said yes. 'Well,' he says, 'I'll give you an hour on it.' I got on the drill and since I was used to it, I stayed there even when the rest were laid off. I worked on all the pipes that went on the penstock at Stillwater.

But if you stopped to talk to a person there, if you asked him anything, then the foreman would fire the two of you. There was nothing the union could do about it. If you happened to put up a row or something, they'd put you on a blacklist and you may as well leave the bloody country.

JACK McCLOSKEY

A Brief Respite

By 1936 the worst years of the depression had passed and job opportunities began to appear. The hallmark project between 1936 and 1938 was the construction of the Lions Gate Bridge. Lions Gate was financed by the British-owned Guinness Corporation, which had bought up a large chunk of property on the North Shore mountains around Vancouver. Dozens of engineers were hired for the immense task of preparing the First Narrows and constructing huge pylons for what was to be the longest single-span bridge in the British Empire. Work was carried on day and night at a frantic pace. The John A. Lee, with Ernie McCallum in the leverhouse, set a dredging record: 6,000 cubic yards of gravel moved in one eight-hour shift.



The bridge project stimulated construction in the rest of the city as well. The new Hotel Vancouver was finally completed. In New Westminster the Pattullo Bridge was nearing completion. Building permit revenue almost doubled in one year.

Elsewhere in the province the mining industry was gaining momentum and small logging and sawmilling operations began filling a rising timber demand from the U.S. However, the province was still inundated with unemployed men from all parts of Canada, and the closing down of the relief system in 1936-37 led to the bloodiest confrontation between police and demonstrators in the history of Vancouver. Men were promised free transportation out of B.C., but they wanted jobs, not free rides. On May 11, 1937, about 1,600 of the unemployed marched through downtown Vancouver and took over the Hotel Georgia, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the main post office. The siege lasted six weeks while the city and the province, both deeply in debt and unable to promise the men anything more, waited for the federal government to make a deal with the men. When assistance did not arrive police squads moved in with tear gas

and riot sticks, and the ensuing battle shocked the entire city.

By 1938 Local 115 had still barely recovered from the decline of the early 1930s. The Local could count no more than 85 men within its ranks.

Ironically, it was Canada's entry into the Second World War less than a year later that brought about a new era for Local 115. The sluggishness of the 1930s and all the troubles that had hampered the Local's progress in previous years were about to be left far behind. Ahead lay jobs, growth and prosperity, which in a few short years would transform Local 115 from a small frontier local into a large and powerful labour organization.

CHAPTER 4

A Job To Do

If you were standing around in the street and somebody saw you, you could be arrested for not being at work. There was no unemployment. Not that you had to go and look for a job; they came looking for you.

MIKE POPOFF

For most operating engineers in B.C. the first months of the Second World War were no different from the drawn-out slump of the 1930s. Yet as the province's main industries regained some strength in 1938-39, most of the 150 members of Local 115 were able to find jobs in the woods or around Vancouver. Defence contracts on Vancouver Island were already underway in the late 1930s, as was the construction of Pier D in Vancouver, and the conversion of William Head Immigration Centre into a penitentiary. The job situation was described as "quiet," but future prospects appeared good.

Canada's initial role in the war, one mainly involving materiel support for Britain, placed an almost immediate demand on raw materials and manufactured goods. Sitka spruce, available only on Canada's West Coast and a prime wood for the construction of light, Mosquito fighter planes, was suddenly as valuable as diamonds. Many operators connected with a Vancouver "mancatcher" by the name of Jack Barrett. Barrett, who later became business agent for the National Union of Operating Engineers, was a woods organizer for engineers. For a small "fee" he could place a jobless engineer in any camp on the coast. Other operators found work in the mining industry. Gold dredging appealed to many as a possible get-rich-quick scheme, and the war placed new demands on zinc, nickel, copper and coal. Ships, built in the relatively safe ports of Canada's West Coast, were suddenly in demand as well. Jack Flynn, in his late sixties and still active as the Local's business agent, reported to

the General Meeting of December 1, 1939, that "a large shipbuilding program is expected to start in the near future" and outlined the scale of wages to apply on the work. The wages were not up to IUOE scale; 90 cents an hour, compared to \$1 an hour earned by the operators outside the yards. Prior to the war, the Local had little interest in the shipyards. The fact was that in 1939, not a single ship was under construction in any of sixteen Canadian shipyards. Yet in the six succeeding years, the country produced almost 800 ships, some of them in 48-hour periods with three shifts working around the clock. At peak production 30,000 workers were employed in the yards of Vancouver and Victoria. Burrard Shipyards employed 150 cranemen in its North Vancouver yard, and soon opened a second yard on the south shore of Burrard Inlet.

It was a new kind of war this time, as dependent upon factory production and well-tuned engines as it was on line-of-fire courage. As U.S. Admiral William Halsey later put it, "the four machines that won the war on the Pacific were the submarine, the radar, the airplane and the tractor bulldozer." The same could be said for the European War. At Orlando, Nijmegen, Normandy and Cologne, the "dozers" helped chip away at the army of the Third Reich. In the siren-filled, blood-soaked summer of 1940, Private Wally Hubert, former prairie cat skinner, found himself at the controls of an International bulldozer amidst the rubble of bombed-out London.

I belonged to a division of the Canadian Army known as the Operating Engineers. There were four companies in the division. The Americans got the Caterpillars, which were the number one machine in those days, and we were equipped with the Internationals. All we did was operate heavy equipment. They were armored on four sides but there was nothing on top, which was bad in a way because the enemy could run up from behind and drop a grenade in. But on the other hand, if you hit a mine, you could be blown out and you might survive that way. Some of my buddies got it. Scotty was ordered to knock down this building which they figured was dangerous and might collapse. He got into this big building and knocked down a couple of pillars, but there was something hanging up there and it came straight down and knocked him out. The rest of the building came down on top of him.

Another guy in our outfit picked up a pen that the Germans had dropped. The pens looked like souvenirs but were loaded with bombs. Mines were a constant worry as well, and every grader had two men so that if one was hurt or killed, the other could operate the machine.

WALLY HUBERT

On the home front it was a busy time for everyone. By 1942 membership in Local 115 had almost doubled to 300 members. With the rapid German offensive in Europe and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the war had taken a turn for the worse. Yet for the majority of Canadians, the conflict was still foreign. The upturn in

A crew of scraper operators pauses for a smoke and a snapshot during road construction near the Bridge River Dam near Lillooet in 1946. That's Tony Tennessey Sr. third from the right.



the economy was a small blessing, and it made a great deal of difference in the spirit of the country. The number of unemployed in B.C. went from 31,000 in 1941, to 15,500 less than a year later. Wages in the building contracting industry had risen by over 15 percent in two years; a remarkable increase after the stagnation of the 1930s. Yet with the grave situation overseas and thousands of families agonizing over the fate of loved ones, any celebration was quiet and restrained. Encouraging this sentiment were the country's leaders, and foremost among them was Prime Minister Mackenzie King whose Labour Day speech crackled out of countless home radio sets on September 1, 1940.

A New Acceptance

While Mackenzie King had never been overly sympathetic to the labour movement, the war had spawned a new relationship between government and labour. The federal government was determined to avoid the runaway inflation encountered during the First World War and in order to do so was prepared to play a greater role in controlling the economy. The general economic policy during the war held that wages could not rise unless prices rose. This effectively held down the standard of living for most workers. With quiet reluctance most unions went along with the policy for the war effort and their attitude won them a certain respectability from the general public. Social attitudes were changing as well;

Operators are unloading rock fill near the top of the Bridge River Dam in 1946. It was the first large post-war construction project in BC.

The Kemano Project employed thousands of men who lived in Quonset huts such as those at left in the photo. It's a nice summer day as the men head for dinner in the mess hall.



John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, a story of migrant farmworkers, was the best-selling novel in 1939.

The push for compulsory recognition of unions was at the forefront of labour's concerns throughout the war years. Without union recognition, a business agent or shop steward still had to rely on secretive tactics, which did not contribute to good union organization or to an honest image. Yet, enemy espionage during the war had placed on everyone's mind the golden rule that unions

had long practiced out of necessity: loose lips sink ships. This was how George Jones, former recording secretary with the Local, organized operators in the bustle of Prince Rupert in 1942. Designated as a supply centre for American bases in Alaska, the little fishing port had doubled its population in a few short months.

I got a telephone call from Al Ramm in Prince Rupert and he told me to get on a boat and get up there as quickly as I could to go to work on a wartime job. They were driving



A crew pauses for a photo amid their road-building machinery in 1946, as the post-war boom began to take hold.



135-foot piles and having a hell of a time getting somebody to handle it. E. J. Ryan had the contract. They were big-shots in the construction industry at the time. I started driving pile and working ten hours a day. We had to pay two dollars a day for room and board, and we used to have to line up in restaurants in Rupert at three o'clock in the morning so that we could get something to eat.

E. J. Ryan Company was non-union, and that was one reason why I got called up. When I left Vancouver Jack Flynn said, 'You're the fellow we want up there. We've got to get these people organized.' So, I went as shop steward and ran around getting these guys signed up in 115. I kept in the dark, though, I had to keep in the dark or I'd have been roofed out of Prince Rupert.

I also was approached by the Piledriver's business agent, a man named Page, in Vancouver. So I was to organize both the Bridgemen and the Engineers up there. E. J. Ryan later lost the contract, and B.C. Bridge and Dredging took over. From then on there was no more union trouble. You had to belong to the union or else.

GEORGE JONES

Wartime conditions in the shipyards left a lot to be desired. The demand for labour had unskilled workers doing skilled and often dangerous jobs. The accident toll was high; over 9,200 accidents in one 10-month period. Most of the strikes that occurred during the war took place in the yards and involved electricians and boiler-makers. Generally though, the yards proved to be compli-

ant employers, so that few of the strikes lasted more than a day. As a shop steward for Local 115, Curtis Ponsford had plenty of arguments but few serious grievances.

They used to send the guys home on a wet day. The boss would come down there waving his hands in the morning. I was shop steward then and I went up to him and said, 'Jack, do you get paid when it rains?'

'Why certainly,' he said.

'Well how would you like to be in my shoes?' I said. 'I've come all the way from Dunbar. I get on the streetcar, travel on the ferry, it takes me an hour and a half to get here and an hour and a half to get home. How would you like to do that everyday for nothing, whenever it rains?'

'Oh, I never thought about that,' he said. 'You guys go back to work.'

And from then on we never missed a day.

CURTIS PONSFORD

New Equipment

The boom continued. Applications for membership in the Local increased from one or two per meeting in 1939 to twenty or thirty per meeting in 1943. Much of the growth was the result of the organization of the shipyards, but an equivalent amount of growth was spurred by the advances in heavy equipment technology during the 1930s. Few could afford the new equipment when it first rolled off assembly lines, but with numerous defense

contracts pouring in during the war, contractors were suddenly discovering the advantages of the new machinery. The shift from gas to diesel power, which began with the first Caterpillar diesel tractor in 1931, cut fuel costs by as much as 80 percent. Whenever they could, contractors latched onto truck-cranes, the versatile motor graders, Turnapuls and diesel Caterpillars.

The growth of Finning, Caterpillar's B.C. distributor, was indicative of the equipment revolution that took place between 1925 and 1945. In 1925, C. L. Best Traction Company, Caterpillar's predecessor, had sold only two of its tractors in B.C. When Finning was established in 1933, the Vancouver office was located in a bank building and one machine was kept on display in a storage company's warehouse. In 1937, with Caterpillar devoting more engineering and production to the needs of heavy construction, Finning began opening branch offices and offering equipment maintenance services. During the war the company sold almost 200 tractors in the province.

Most of the new equipment was well-built and durable, but not without problems. The buckets on earth-moving machinery were cable-operated and to work the levers with an oil clutch required at least 125 pounds of pull-force. Turnapuls, the first heavy prime-movers, made their debut in the early 1940s. Their efficiency, with bigger buckets and speeds four or five times greater than most crawler tractors, made them an instant success. But the Turnapuls had three faults: a weak gooseneck, a

clutch system that operated in a manner exactly opposite to that of the tractor, and a poor braking system. When the goosenecks broke, the bucket would thrust forward, killing the driver. The addition of steel cables prevented this, but not before several operators lost their lives. The braking and steering systems proved to be a nightmare for any catskinner caught off guard.

We were working along a mountain road by Kananaskis Lake, near Banff. This buddy of mine, he pulled the wrong steering clutch one day and headed right over the bank. He was lucky because the lake was fairly shallow for quite a ways out. After cutting across the road, going over the bank and over a bunch of stumps for 150 feet – he was so excited he never dropped the bucket – by the time he came to a stop he was in water that was fifteen feet deep. All that was showing was the back end of the bucket, and he was on the front end up to his neck in water. He was hollering, ‘How the hell am I going to get out of here, I can’t swim!’ But they got him out of there.

After years of running a Cat, where you pull your steering

A hoist operator at the levers running a high line on a dam project.



clutch and when you’re finished steering you just let go, now you’re on one of these machines, so you let go, disengaging one of the wheels.

WALLY HUBERT

The Road to Tokyo

In 1942-43, the Japanese offensive in the Pacific suddenly brought war a lot closer to home for British Columbians. Within a few months the war seemed to have grown to the point where it threatened to engulf a poorly-defended North America. Thousands of Canadians of Japanese descent were shipped off to remote prison camps and concerned citizens appealed to the Local to protest with all unions the treatment of “interned Canadians.” Few in the labour movement, or in the public as a whole, registered any strong protest. Fear had uncovered prejudices that for several years seemed

to have been forgotten.

At the same time, millions of dollars of federal funds were made available for the construction of an adequate defense system along the B.C. coast. It was a system based primarily on transportation, and with a shortage of roads in the province, roadbuilders were in heavy demand. A road was pushed through to the west coast of Vancouver Island and another through to Prince Rupert. Airports appeared where weeks earlier there had been only impenetrable bush.

Only a handful of companies were in a position to handle these contracts. Stewart Cameron, Campbell and Bennett, Dawson and Wade, Holmes and Wilson, General Construction and Standard General made up most of the roadbuilding business in B.C. They grew larger by the day, mostly unorganized and unwilling to accept organization. Standard General remained steadfast in its policy of paying wages below scale. But acting Business Agent Charlie Wren put a stop to that, wildcat style.

Wartime work helped pull Local 115 out of a 10-year slump. Here our members load munitions aboard destroyer escorts in Vancouver Harbour.



“Port Hardy was the first place in the province that construction workers ever received time and a half for overtime. I pulled the whole works off.”

-Al Fowler

We were working on the first Turnapuls over at the Olympic Naval Base in North Vancouver. General was the contractor. Charlie Wren shut the whole goddamned thing down and that was how we got General into the union, even though the war was on. One day, at lunch, Charlie walks in to the lunchroom and says, ‘We’re not going back to work after lunch.’

So we asked, ‘Well, what’s the procedure now?’

Charlie says, ‘Well, as soon as the boss of this outfit goes over to the office and gets a cheque from General Construction for every operator that’s here, then you go back to work.’

The builders, the contractors, the electricians, everybody stopped work. In two hours we had the cheques from the main office and away we went.

GEORGE McCLEOD

Port Hardy was the first place in the province that construction workers ever received time and a half for overtime. I pulled the whole works off. We were working on an airfield in 1942. Of course, the conditions were really bad because the rain never stopped in winter. The Labourers had a hard, tough life, working with a pick and shovel for ten hours a day. I held a meeting. What burned me were the guys working around the shipyards. I went down there to work for a while. I could see what was going on there. They were sitting down all night playing poker. They worked graveyard shift and didn’t do a thing. So I got the boys together and I said, ‘Goddamnit, they get time and a half working downtown and we’re working ten hours a day under worse conditions.’

So I said, ‘All right. Tomorrow I’ll give the call. I’ll jump off my Cat as soon as I’ve put the eight hours in.’

So we did. And the boss let them know in Vancouver. The next day we did the same thing. Jack Boyd from General Construction came up. The police came up. And everybody was all upset. But Jack Boyd was making money on it. He was working on a cost-plus basis. He made three-quarters of


a million dollars on that job.

Anyway, they could have arrested us because of the Defense of the Realm Act. We were interfering with the war effort. However, I knew they weren’t going to throw me in jail for the thing. As long as I got the boys back to work.

AL FOWLER



A Koring Dumptor’s box held six yards, according to Brother Leo Plamondon, who operated it on the Trans-Canada Highway Project in 1941. You dumped it by slamming on the brakes, and set it back by slamming on the brakes while in reverse!



Ingenuity is sometimes required to get the job done. This shovel is adapted as a Piledriver on the Bridge River Dam in 1946.

Building the Alaska Highway: biggest project since the Panama Canal

If a man could operate a machine, a company would hire him. If a man had never touched a machine in his life, well, then they would take him, too. “Crash projects” they were called, and headlining the newspapers was the greatest of them all, the largest construction project since the Panama Canal: the Alaska Highway.

The project demanded lots of men. They asked for skilled workers if possible but failing that, anyone would do.

Originally conceived before the war, the northern highway became an urgent priority as Japanese forces conquered the Pacific. By late 1942, the Japanese occupied the outer Aleutian Islands, seen as stepping stones to mainland Alaska. If Alaska was invaded, the Japanese Imperial forces would have a foothold on North America and the long-cherished security of the continent would be in jeopardy. A highway connecting the industrialized south to the wide-open north was the only solution. Canadian workers who could do a better job than most American workers, because of their familiarity with the terrain and climate, were being paid less than U.S. workers on Canadian soil.

We worked with American civilians. I got a dollar and forty cents for operating the machine and my oiler was an American. He got \$2.50 for watching me. He was useless, but they wouldn't fire him. The only way I got rid of him was to scare him to death. I used to swing the bucket around and snap it shut right beside his ear. He went and told his superintendent that I was going crazy, so the superintendent came over. He was a southerner. 'I hear y'all goin' crazy,' he said. 'Ya, I'm goin' crazy all right.'
SLIM FALLIS

All the same, it was an epic construction project, made possible only through close American-Canadian cooperation, new construction technology, 10,000 American troops and 17,000 Canadian and American civilian construction workers. In a little over eight months the “army” had built 2,500 kilometres of highway from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks, Alaska using 11,000 pieces of roadbuilding equipment. Had there not been a war on, the task and its toll in human life would have been unacceptable.

Despite the steady growth during the war years, the Local's financial troubles continued to place the organization in jeopardy. In May 1944, the Local was helped out of a deficit by a \$200 loan from IUOE Stationary Local 882. It was not until the postwar construction boom of the late 1940s that finances grew secure. In the meantime, executive members continued to keep the Local buoyant with voluntary effort and commitment. The Local's executive still had a difficult time attracting members to meetings and had to rule that new members attend for initiation or be suspended. It was inevitable that a rift would develop between the old-timers, who had struggled so long to achieve what progress had been made, and the newcomers who seemed to indulge themselves in the benefits without lending any effort.

Canada was a changed country after the war. Factories, mines and mills ran day and night, with men and women often working side by side. British Columbia, with a population pushing the one million mark, had the highest per capita income in the country. A construction boom reinforced this new growth and jobs abounded for operating engineers.

The war marked the final passing of the steam engine.



Clearing work being done in the post-war era with dozers using cable controlled blades.

This meant much more than a simple increase in efficiency and productivity with the new motive power. New equipment opened the door for a new kind of operator. Old-timers lamented the obsolescence of the old steam rigs and of the teamwork between the fireman and the engineer and the smooth operation that steam provided. No longer was the steam certificate the only ticket to the trade. No longer was the operator his own man, engineer, maintenance man and heavy duty mechanic all rolled into one. Nevertheless, the man at the levers of a 1945 6-cylinder D-8 didn't get very far unless he knew his machine.

When the gas and diesel came in, you didn't need to have a certificate anymore. When a guy came in, all you could do was interview him, find out where he had worked before and then ship him out. If he got fired, then you knew he was lying. If he didn't get fired, you knew he was all right. There was a high turnover.

AL SCOTT

Good Years Ahead

Who could have foreseen, ten years earlier, what sort of problems the Union would be encountering in the late 1940s? The situation was no longer a case of struggling

against all odds; it was now a matter of coping with a ballooning membership and a shortage of able and experienced candidates for the executive. Stability was important, and the Local, with one business agent busily covering the entire province, did not have it. As well, the peaceful prairie province of Alberta exploded with activity upon the opening of the Leduc Oil Field in 1947.

Relations between Local 115 and its neighbouring local in Seattle had never been better. Increased cooperation during the war, on the Alaska Highway Job and during the first attempts to remove Ripple Rock, and after the war, on the Ross Dam Project, enabled B.C. operators to work south of the border and U.S. workers to take advantage of the construction boom in B.C.

The larger jobs in the late 1940s included the expansion of the coastal pulp and plywood mills, the extension of the Island Highway, construction of the Bridge River Dam and the redevelopment of the business district in downtown Vancouver. While the mining industry slowed down, plenty of operators found work in the province's first great housing boom. When disaster struck the Fraser Valley in the spring of 1948, with record floods that left thousands of people homeless, operators were called in to help construct emergency dykes and clear debris. In the aftermath, governments set about rectifying the problem with an extensive dyking system.

As the threat of rampant inflation subsided in the postwar era, governments began replacing wartime controls with new labour legislation. Medicare and family allowance programs were established. The 40-hour work week became a common addition to all contracts signed after 1945. The first peacetime labour relations boards were set up, company unions were outlawed and trade unions became legal entities. Unions were not completely satisfied with this new cooperation from government, but it signified a beginning. The Local had taken its own steps in the name of progress by moving into larger offices in the Ford Building at Main and Hastings, and by introducing its own death benefit fund, the first Local benefit for union members. All these developments constituted the machinery which, when firmly in place, would help drive the Local through the good years of growth that had finally arrived.

CHAPTER 5

Build it big

Enter the freeway, big cars, bigger bridges, high rises, supermarkets, shopping centres, causeways, industrial parks, industrial towns; just a few of the giant symbols of progress that heralded the arrival of the 1950s. Local 115 was swept up in an economic boom and carried to heights that the late Jack Flynn might never have imagined. He would certainly have been surprised, when a jubilant Herb Flesher announced in August of 1951 that “Local 115 is the fastest growing union in British Columbia.”

Flesher had returned in 1950, after a venture into gold mining, to help manage Local 115 through the flurry of its most spectacular period of growth. A go-getter, Flesher joined Allan Scott as the Local’s second full-time business agent. A year later he was elected president of the Local. His success was a result of his style; it matched the pace of the day. The two agents embarked on a pioneering organization effort, taking on both the road construction and mining industries, that sent the Local’s membership soaring.

“Their efforts,” reported the Labour Statesman in 1951, “are keeping the office staff up to their necks in work.” Clara Jones and three other newly-hired clerks were kept hopping at the office on East Hastings,

Never before had Canadians greeted a new decade with as much promise and optimism as they did in 1950. British Columbia, with its developing transportation systems and untapped resources, was at the forefront of this new affluence. Within B.C.’s borders, and operators across the country knew it, the construction industry could only thrive.

In the previous ten years, from 1940 to 1950, the Local had grown from 100 members to 700. In the ensuing five years, the membership grew to over 4,000. A union that had lost all hope of success five years earlier, now had 20 agreements signed with almost 50 companies, including general contractors, excavating companies, road contractors, piledriving companies, shipyards, steel fabricators, dredging contractors and sand and gravel companies. Week after week, the handshakes came as fast as the jobs they represented.

Most of the cat skimmers had a very good time in the 1950s. It changed for the better right after the Union came in. Nothing but better after 1952. Your hours improved, the machinery improved, camps improved, your working relations improved with fellow workers, even the supervisors improved because they had a happy family. You were kind of

knitted together. It wasn't every man for himself anymore.
WALLY HUBERT


Despite the boom, all union bargaining in the 1950s was complicated by the steep inflationary trends which followed the sudden release in to the market of forced wartime savings. This unleashed spending on the part of consumers, government and business. Coupled with the removal of price controls, it caused a rapid rise in the cost of living. Unions were obliged to fight for catch-up wages after the war and for regular increments throughout the 1950s.

More than 500 operators working under the Construction Agreement received a trendsetting increase of 40 cents in March 1950. This raised the coastal rate to \$1.88 per hour (\$1.57 for oilers) while men in the Interior, earning \$1.67 per hour, were relatively worse off than before. Work in the Interior remained poorly organized until well into the decade. On the Coast, operators working under the Dredging Agreement won 20 cents in 1950 and 57 cents in 1952. Workers felt they deserved wage increases as their share in the tremendous productivity gains of the period, and for the most part their employers were amenable. Government recognition of labour was displayed in 1951, when a major contract for the Capilano Dam was awarded to B.C. Bridge and Dredging, a union firm. The lowest bidder was a non-union company. Before the war, such a choice would not have been made.

Although wages leveled off quickly by the middle of the decade, workers were satisfied with their take-home pay, which remained high enough to beat inflation. On average, real wages rose 16 percent from 1950 to 1960, and for those most keen about padding their bank accounts, there was plenty of out-of-town work with



A cable-controlled shovel and loader hard at work at the Utah Mine at Port Hardy. The mine opened in 1969 and closed in 1996, leaving a hole which is the biggest excavation below sea level on earth.



Local 115 members hoist a bridge girder in place on the spillway of the Cleveland Dam in the Capilano watershed in 1953.

MIKE PARR

Project British Columbia

Nowhere else were the consequences of sudden growth felt as profoundly as they were 100 kilometers up Douglas Channel at the site of the Alcan Smelter Project. No one had ever seen or heard of a peacetime project that big. No single construction firm could possibly handle the contract and it took a consortium of eight firms; Dawson Wade and Company, Marwell Construction Ltd., Bennett and White Construction Company, General Construction Company Ltd., Campbell-Bennett Ltd., Emil Anderson Construction Company, B.C. Bridge and Dredging Company Ltd., and Dawson and Hall Ltd., together made up the Kitimat Constructors, or KC for short. The undertaking was dubbed “Project British Columbia.”

An employment drive, the likes of which Western Canada had never seen, was launched for the project in May 1951. Thousands of Labourers, Operators, Carpenters, Teamsters, and Tunnel and Rock Workers were needed in short order, and small, Vancouver-based locals were hard-pressed to come up with the numbers. Fortunately, the labour market was brimming with veterans, ex-loggers and easterners who had come west seeking opportunities such as this. Local 115 filled the order by attracting new members and shipping them off on the boat to Kitimat almost before the ink had dried on their membership forms. So intense was the demand for men that the Local sought only two prerequisites: boot size and work experience, for which dad’s Massey Ferguson would suffice.

hefty overtime benefits to be had. Relations between labour and management were cordial in these circumstances.

Benefits, more than wage increases, proved to be the most difficult union objective during the 1950s. Union men had never enjoyed benefits before, and few could comprehend their full value in times of inflation. Some contracts included room and board and travel provisions, but most workers would rather have the cash equivalents in their pockets.

One of the greatest obstacles to effective management by the Local was overcome in October of 1952, upon the signing of the first union-shop (all operators had to join the Union within 30 days of being hired), province-wide agreement with the B.C. Roadbuilders and the Heavy Construction Association. No longer did operators have to put up with the pay difference between the coastal rate and the interior rate. Now, with construction of the Trans-Canada and the Trans-Provincial Highways getting

underway, Lower Mainland operators could hit the road assured of decent wages. Earlier that spring, another landmark development occurred: the giant Alcan Smelter Project at Kitimat in Northern B.C. Almost overnight, Local 115 was transformed from a Vancouver-centered union into a province-wide operation.

What happened was that the industrial work such as B.C. Electric projects and the Cominco Power development, in conjunction with Kitimat, made it necessary for contractors outside of Kitimat to recognize that they ‘would have to pay equivalent wages in order to get the men. It resulted in a sort of spiraling effect, and if allowed the Union an opportunity to organize on a scale far greater than ever before. There wasn’t quite the adversary attitude in those days. The money was there to spend, there were job opportunities developing all around and the feeling was well, let’s negotiate, get the agreement out of the way and get on with the work.

“They didn’t want any trouble, or strikes, so they let guys like that hang on just to keep the machinery going.”

-Al Fowler

By 1952, there were 4,500 men at Kemano alone, the site of the powerhouse and dam for the future smelter. Construction progressed at breakneck speeds, and the feeling of enthusiasm it generated among management and staff was conveyed in a letter written by Alcan President R. E. Powell to the newborn Northern Kitimat Sentinel in April 1954.

Our Kitimat Project is taking shape as an integrated operation at a steadily increasing pace. In 1952, the Kenney Dam was completed. In 1953, the water tunnel through Dubose Mountain was holed in world-record time. The Kemano Powerhouse is almost ready for service. The transmission line stands waiting to unite Kemano and Kitimat. Our smelter is fast nearing completion, while our wharves at Kitimat are ready for business. Further planning will fall into place this year. One particular landmark is a matter of special pride to me – the purchase of the first home at Kitimat by an employee.

Back at the office of the Local in Vancouver, the business agent was rejoicing and cursing at the same time.

I only wish it had happened a little slower. We could hardly keep track of the men we were sending up to Kitimat. Morrison-Knudsen [another chief contractor] would just as soon have 1,000 men working at half speed as 500 really good men working full speed. They needed lots of hands, and they had lots of money to spend. So sure, there were some pretty unskilled workers going up there.

AL SCOTT

When Al Fowler joined the Kitimat Project, he found himself among a motley crew.

It was a place where money could be made, because we were working a ten-hour day. But at the same time, most of the good operators around Vancouver preferred not to go there.

They’d rather stay in town with their families. So, in a way, it was a place where unskilled operators went and tried to get by without any knowledge of what they were doing. When I got up there, I found a man who’d been fired three times in one month.

You see they had a certain amount of work to get done and a tough deadline. They didn’t want any trouble, or strikes, so they let guys like that hang on just to keep the machinery going. And as far as the Union went, they had signed this agreement that they could get the work done and it was really tough getting the manpower to do it.

AL FOWLER

Life among the city of tents in each of the five camps was a bum’s paradise. Home was often a cramped and putrid hut, sometimes buried under four meters of snow in the winter. At the Kitimat campsite, the Kitimat Constructors built a makeshift settlement of bunkhouses and tents, with a few trailers off to one side for those lucky enough to have their families with them. The ‘Delta King,’ a retired riverboat from the Sacramento River, offered her musty staterooms to the newly-initiated, and her heat supplied the central buildings ashore. However, none of this was good enough for Joe Whiteford, a driver with the Building Truck Drivers’ Union, who triggered a major investigation into Kitimat camp conditions in 1954.

“There is no place to hang clothes, no spare tables and absolutely no recreational facilities. I found conditions we have not had in this province for many years,” he told the Labour Statesman.

Further talk of rain running through tents and under beds, and of 12 showers and one washing machine for 400 men, angered the unions involved with the project. The Vancouver Building Trades Council, headed by Local

Slings a section of water pipe into position near the Chlorination Plant in the North Shore mountains in 1953.

Photo courtesy of Finning



“Still the massive machine kept slipping back down the nearly vertical path he had just bulldozed. It gained momentum quickly and in a few seconds it seemed to be moving as fast as a bobsled.”

-True Magazine, 1954

115 President Herb Fleisher, immediately protested to Premier W. A. C. Bennett the “deplorable” camp conditions at the Kitimat campsite. Typical of the era, the response from the contractors was good, and 200 houses were built to help alleviate the situation.

There were some shortages, however, that neither the press nor the Premier could do anything about. The most severe of these was the shortage of women. Kay Kendrick was the first woman in Kemano when she began as a

switchboard operator for Morrison-Knudsen in 1951. On her first day on the job, she sat down before the board, put on the headphones and asked her first caller for the number he wanted.

‘A . . . a . . . a woman!’ cried the startled voice at the other end of the line.

At the best of times, the ratio of men to women at Kitimat was never less than 100 to one. Fortunately, there were ways of keeping the mind away from muddy

despair; bootlegged liquor, high-stake poker games, pin-up girls and the humour of Al Beaton.

Beaton, a member of the Alcan office staff, had a way with a sketch pad and managed to cheer things up considerably with his contributions to Casey, the regular newsletter published by the staff of Kitimat Constructors. Beaton went on to become an editorial cartoonist with the Vancouver Province and the Toronto Telegram. For several years he brightened the bleak surroundings of Kitimat with his irreverent “Joey.” On the other hand, most construction workers rarely made it through a single winter before they pocketed their wages and headed home. That is, if they hadn’t dropped the whole wad in an overnight poker game.

You had to do something for relaxation, so there were a lot of card games. But whenever you have that going on you’re going to get shysters coming up from Vancouver. They’d come in as Labourers, but they didn’t do any work, of course. They’d take a shovel and stand in the ditch all day, and wait till night time, then play all night. And they’d take a lot of money with them. There was a lot of cheating, though eventually they put one guy in charge of overseeing the games in the poker tents. He’d go around changing the cards all the time so nobody would be able to fool around with them. Of course, they continued to switch cards under the table and whatnot. These guys always found a way.

I remember I was coming down for Christmas with this guy who’d been up there for six months. He just had enough for his fare to town. He didn’t even have enough to get from the boat to the hotel. He’d lost \$500 to \$600 in a poker game. They’d been playing all the way down in the boat. It was easy come, easy go.

AL FOWLER

The story of the giant Alcan Project was told and

An extension of the Trans-Mountain Pipeline is laid in a trench near Chilliwack in 1956.

Photo courtesy of Finning



Local 115 member Chuck McRae drives a cat off a barge at Kitimat in 1951, at the beginning of the Kemano Project. Chuck was our first operator on the project, and our first job steward.

retold in countless newsreels, newspapers and magazines. More often than not, the heroes of the stories were not the industrialists or the bosses, but the workers. The Kitimat-Kemano story reached its climax in May 1952, and it caught the imaginations of thousands.

The objective of this part of the project was the ascent of the steep Kildala Pass that separated the Kemano Powerplant and the Kitimat Smelter. The pass had to be traversed before the spring thaw, when soft snow and ice would make the ascent impossible and delay the project another year. Albert Charron accepted the job of climbing the pass in his International TD-24, so that equipment could be hauled up to begin work on the transmission line. With helper Bill Henry poking for soft spots ahead of the tractor, the team set out on May 14. Warren Malone and Gordon Abel stood by at the foot of the pass to spell them off, and Blackie Desmeules also attempted the climb. On one of Charron's ascents, barely halfway up, the tractor ran into trouble.

...At that moment, as Charron set the brakes, he felt his tractor begin to drift backward in frightening slow motion. He braced himself against the seat canopy supports, switched off the ignition and engaged the gears in one swift movement.

Still the massive machine kept slipping back down the nearly vertical path he had just bulldozed. It gained momentum quickly and in a few seconds it seemed to be moving as fast as a bobsled. It smashed into the snowbank thrown up around his last hairpin turn. As it teetered there, the words of road boss Bill Richards flashed through his mind: 'If she lets go up there, Albert, by the golly, you jump!' He did not jump. The snowbank gave way and his tractor dropped sideways as if a trapdoor had opened. The glittering world of snow, sun and rock turned on its axis as Charron was thrown against the cab bracing. He heard Bill Henry



screaming to jump, but it was too late. The machine was skidding down the mountain at runaway speed. It slid 400 feet as later measurements showed. Then, miraculously, it came to a cushioned stop because of a patch of soft snow piled up broadside. Charron was only bruised when he crawled from the cab, but he cursed as he looked upward. The whole day's climb in which he and Henry had battled every inch, had been wiped out in ten seconds.

TRUE MAGAZINE, 1954

Finally, on May 21 at eight o'clock in the evening, Charron reached the summit. It had taken him one week to guide his big red machine over the pass, one mile above the valley floor. Sunburn and snow blindness had earned him a ticket to the infirmary, but his courage had won him the status of a hero.

Walter Havard saw tremendous progress at Kitimat during the six years he worked there, first as a crane operator and shop steward, then as a business representative for the Local. His wife and three children moved up

to the camp in 1952 and settled into a comfortable way of life. Havard praised the Kitimat Constructors for making an enjoyable family life possible in such a setting. His wife worked at the Hudson's Bay store and the family regularly enjoyed Sunday night turkey dinners at the KC cafeteria; a four-course meal for a dollar. When the company town of Kitimat was officially declared a municipality in 1953, Havard proudly cast one of the first ballots for the reeve and six councillors.

The opportunity to organize new territory for the Union arrived for Havard in 1954 when, due to a lull in outdoor construction work at Kitimat, he signed up for a job inside the plant. Although conditions and wages were not as favourable as they were on the outside, the new placement proved valuable in gaining certification with the Allied Aluminum Council. However, the membership drive was a complete failure at first.

It was very slow going in the plant. Somehow we couldn't make any progress organizing. Then one of the fellows in the

A new generation of road-building equipment helped ease the construction boom in the 1950s. Local 115 member Harry Hansen is busy repairing a new shovel on the road to Garibaldi in 1955.



Allied Aluminum Council tipped us off. 'It's no wonder you're not getting anywhere,' he said. 'You've got opposition right in your midst.' So there was an investigation, and sure enough we discovered this fellow, Wally Ross, was posing as a 115 member but was really working for the United Steelworkers to keep us from making headway. Once we got him out of the way, things really started catching on, and within the year we had the majority signed up.

WALTER HAVARD

Manpower reached its peak at Kitimat in 1955, when Saguenay-Kitimat took over the operation from KC and work went full-steam ahead on the plant, townsite and roads. The roads alone required close to 500 operators. Although construction directly related to Alcan slowed down drastically by 1956, some work opportunities remained in the area on the Alcan Highway to Terrace, on the railway and on mining jobs in more northerly regions. Walter Havard's territory was extended to Terrace, Prince Rupert and Prince George, where a variety of opportunities were opening up for frontier-minded operators.

Highway Fever

As the Kitimat Project unfolded, the Local was moving into another boom industry: roadwork. The completion in 1950 of the John Hart Highway from Prince George to the Peace River Valley represented the beginning of a legacy in B.C. highway construction. Although the Hart Highway was a modest, low-standard, gravel road, the countless miles of highway construction that followed it probably employed more operating engineers in the

1950s than any other form of construction. The primary reason for this sudden explosion was obvious. In a few short years, the automobile had gone from being a neighbourhood novelty to become a personal commodity. The number of automobiles in B.C. doubled in the 1950s to over half a million, and kept right on growing. An average of 90 miles of paved provincial highway was completed every year throughout the decade, with engineers pitting workers against some of the roughest terrain on earth.

In addition to the John Hart Highway, the Hope-Princeton Highway to Vancouver, the first paved highway from the Interior to the Pacific, was completed in 1950. Improvement work continued on the Alaska Highway and work on the Island Highway, along the Malahat Drive and parts north, was also progressing. Unfortunately, Local 115 had not moved fast enough in organizing men on Vancouver Island. The situation was an eye-opener for Cliff Parker, who in 1952 had been hired as a business agent for the Island.

I recall walking up the grade on some work that Campbell-Bennett had outside of Duncan. The first man I came to was non-union, the next man I came to had a card for Barrett's White Card union and the next fellow was an operating engineer with Local 115. This was the way it went. It took a long, long time before we had roadwork construction fully organized.

CLIFF PARKER

In 1953, the second highway route to the Pacific, the Terrace-Kitimat Highway, was opened. Later that year, a third route to the coast, the Bella Coola Highway, was ceremoniously completed.

At this site on September 26, 1953, two bulldozers operated

by Alf Bracewell and George Dalsbaug, touched blades to symbolize the opening of a road through the mountain barrier of the coast range marked out by Elijah Gurr. Two years of strenuous local effort thus established a third highway route across this province to the Pacific Ocean, through an area originally explored by Lieut. H. Spencer Palmer, R. E., 1862.

PLAQUE ON BELLA COOLA HIGHWAY

In the past the only people to bask in glory upon the completion of a large public project were the politicians who held the purse strings. Yet with labour's heightened profile in the 1950s, the ritual of symbolic snipping was suddenly being handed over to the worker. In 1954, Charlie Geisser, a member of Local 115, had his name pulled from a hat somewhere within the bowels of Vancouver City Hall, and subsequently he snipped the ribbon for the opening of the new Granville Street Bridge. The project had seen its share of labour difficulties, but these were overcome through the initiative of the Marwell Construction Company.

Men and machines are hard at work building the Trans-Canada Highway through Yoho National Park in 1955.



Granville Street Bridge was the most important Vancouver civic project of the decade. When completed, it was the widest bridge in the Commonwealth, and it vastly improved traffic flows through the growing metropolis. It also signified the end of the interurban streetcar in what B.C. Electric hailed as the switch “from rails to rubber.”

The massive migration of veterans after the war had Vancouver bursting at the seams. Veterans occupied the old Hotel Vancouver until it was demolished in the late 1940s to make way for Eaton’s downtown store. It was not until 1950, with the completion of the large Fraserview Housing Development in South Vancouver, that the housing shortage began to subside. The construction boom, however, continued throughout the decade, and transformed whole sections of the city. Operators who remained in the Lower Mainland had no difficulty finding work.

With the return of happier times and a stronger economy, larger families had become popular again. For the

operator with a family, work around Vancouver had its advantages, despite the attraction of unlimited overtime on out-of-town work. At the outset of the boom, there was great temptation to travel and cash in on the volume of work, there being very little heavy construction around Vancouver. Jim Dobson made the rounds: Duncan Bay, Waneta, Crofton, Powell River; dredging operations up and down the coast.

But it wasn't for me. I used to come home and my kids wouldn't know me. So I got a job in town at the shipyards, even though you could make much better money if you traveled. I think a lot of guys eventually came around to see it that way, though the ones who were really interested in the money just kept right on moving around.

JIM DOBSON

In the mid-1950s, the West End area of Vancouver was still nothing more than a neighborhood of aging Victorian mansions. In 1957, a change in the zoning regulations triggered an architectural revolution. Developers moved in to produce a high-rise jungle. The city gained other new features as well, like modern shopping centres and sprawling suburbs. The Park Royal Mall in West Vancouver opened its doors in 1950. The Empire Stadium was completed in 1954, in preparation for the British Empire Games held in the city that year. The value of city building permits almost doubled between 1952 and 1954. Construction of the Burrard Building was completed in 1956, as was that of the B.C. Electric

Albert Charron and Bill Henry at Kemano's Camp #5 in 1952.

Building in 1957. That same year, \$35 million was set aside for the construction of a freeway into the downtown area, although the project was later scrapped. In 1958, the new Vancouver Post Office was finished and the nearby Queen Elizabeth Theatre was opened a year later.

Tragedy struck the city in the summer of 1958 as a giant crashing sound reverberated up and down Burrard Inlet. Seventeen construction workers fell to their deaths when sections of the new Second Narrows Bridge collapsed in a heap of machinery and twisted metal.

I was right across from it, right at Windemere Pool. We were all just sitting there, talking about the bridge, because I was working on it at the time. All I can remember was that one crane over at the very end was either picking up something or swinging around and you could hear this noise. You didn't see it move to begin with, but you heard this noise. It sounded like a steam train, when it releases the air. Then you could see it coming; the bridge was giving way. It started to buckle in slow motion. As the first section pulled away, the columns at the back buckled so that the second





The year was 1958, and the scene is the new Second Narrows Bridge which collapsed killing a total of 17 workers including one member of Local 115. Rescue workers frantically search through the rubble to save survivors from the turbulent waters below.

column that started to fall hit the ground first. The other one was still collapsing because the pylons were still buckling. But the second one just dropped and you could see men and equipment and boards and all kinds of junk just flying all over the place. When it hit the water, I ran up to my car, a '54 Chev., turned the news on, and it was already being flashed on 'NW'. That was how fast the thing happened.

TED HEATH

One member of the Local, Gord MacLean, was killed in the mishap, and brothers in the Local were asked to attend the memorial services at Empire Stadium. An inquest later determined the cause of the disaster to be a structural miscalculation.

Some of the steadiest work available in Vancouver during the 1950s was on the waterfront; dredging, piledriving, shipyard work and loading jobs at the busy wharves and terminals. Shipbuilding slowed to a steady pace after the war, but dock work increased as the decade

progressed, boosted by the construction of the Pacific Coast Bulk Terminals and the Vancouver Wharves. Another key port development was the construction of the National Harbours Board's Centennial Pier, a general cargo terminal at the old Hastings Mill Site. Although work was begun on extensive land fill during the 1930s, it had to be postponed during the Depression and was not resumed until 1956. Some of the most powerful machinery on the Pacific Coast was installed at Centennial Pier, including a 300-ton heavy-lift crane.

The engines that drove the province through its greatest era of industrialization were of a new technological generation driven by oil and electricity, both of which were not available in surplus at the beginning of the decade. Hundreds of operators were engaged in the construction of the 718-mile crude oil pipeline from Edmonton to Burnaby. Opened in 1953, the \$70 million Trans-Mountain Pipeline led in turn to a \$17 million

modernization between 1952 and 1956 at the Ioco Plant of Imperial Oil. The area was industrialized further by the construction of Gulf's refinery in nearby Port Moody. By 1958, the province's annual growth in electrical needs was measured at 11.9 percent. B.C. Electric also turned to the Ioco area for the construction of a much-needed thermal-electric plant. Apart from these projects, the main thrust of power development was toward hydro-electric power and the potential of the province's high-mountain rivers. At least one dam was completed for each year of the decade; Buntzen Expansion, Whatsan, Clowholm Falls, Waleach, Bridge River, Ladore Falls, Strathcona, Cheakamus and John Hart. The latter project marked the arrival, in 1955, of the Local's first major confrontation. It was the end of over 20 years of relative labour peace since the Dunsmuir Tunnel Strike of 1931.

Bigger and Better

None of the giant projects that grew out of the 1950s would have been possible without the many advances in heavy construction equipment. The new machines born in the austere 1930s were put to the test during a feverish war effort in the 1940s, proved themselves, and went on to become the construction workhorses of the 1950s. For the most part, Local 115 was no longer a steam engineers' union; it was a heavy, mobile equipment operators' union. Everything had changed in those twenty years; the world, the country, the industry, the Union, the machinery, and, of course, the man.

A Cat DW21 scraper prepares a roadbed for the PGE Railway north of Prince George in 1956.



To build a pulp mill it used to take from 1,300 to 1,500 men. Today that's been cut down to 550 to 650 men. With two-shift operations, you need about 30 or 40 operators today, but back then there simply wasn't the machinery to operate. The biggest increase in demand for operators was when the crawlers or Caterpillar tractors came in. Then came the front-end loaders, and then the backhoes. Now that was a day; when we got the backhoes. Before that, all the machines were more or less like shovels, and it was really a task trying to get a shovel operator to learn to go backwards instead of forwards.

HENRY AYLING

According to calculations made in the mid-1950s, one man with a modern diesel crawler could do 150 times more work for 20 percent less cost per day than the man with a typical two-horse Bagley scraper could do in 1900.

Among the more important advances in equipment design during the decade was the application of hydraulics to tractors and bulldozers. Lever operation no

longer required the arms and legs of a strongman. The first U-blade, a simple but somehow overlooked improvement, was also introduced. In 1954, a catalogue of new Caterpillar features became standard, including tandem drive, electric starts and tubeless tires. In 1955, the first D-9 pipelayers and track loaders were introduced. That same year came hydraulic boosted steering clutches, oil-cooled brakes and a torque convertor for the indomitable D-8. Over the course of the decade, the D-8 received numerous increases in horsepower, going from 144 in 1953 to 270 in 1959.

Increased mechanization was a two-faced creature for operators because it meant fewer workers in addition to increased efficiency. Yet without the large capacity of modern equipment which held down the cost of construction in inflationary times, the highways, dams and pipelines of the postwar era would have exacted a greater toll for the taxpayer. Indirectly, the advances in technology gave operators higher incomes and better

working conditions without pricing them out of the market.

To keep pace with the many changes, the Local followed suit with a training program. The junior section of the Local, 115A, was established in 1952 as an apprenticeship arm. Throughout the decade, requirements for promotion into 115 became more and more demanding. In 1956, the Union held, for backhoe and rubber-tired scraper operators in Nanaimo, its first training program. Members were encouraged to attend courses to upgrade their skills, and those who could not afford the time away from work were offered financial assistance.

Training and apprenticeship reflected the beginnings of a fundamental change in the Local's leadership during the 1950s; a change more conducive to change itself. The membership boom; along with such added concerns as the increasing complexity of labour law, the expansion of social legislation and the introduction of fringe benefits in negotiations, created the need for a more sophisticated union leadership. Besides these challenges, there were important practical decisions to make about branch offices, financial management, hiring of administrative staff, and the formalization of policy.

A Recession in Lotusland

The slowdown started in earnest for Local 115 in the winter and spring of 1958, when the Teamsters went on strike, immobilizing large crews of operators as well. There remained a spirit of optimism through the early stages of the recession; a feeling that it was just a passing phase. Mike Parr put it this way in his business report of October 1958.

“It used to be that if you were making a speech and were stuck for a subject you could always come out against Sin or Arthritis. This season it seems another topic has been added – Labour.”

-Barry Mather

Perhaps the days of excessive overtime and a shortage of skilled labour are past, but I do believe we can be optimistic as to what the future holds for us, and it is quite likely we will be able to look back at 1958 and remember it as being one of our worst years.

Unfortunately, things did not turn out that way. The Local's per capita reports showed a steady drop in the membership from 1958 to the early 1960s, from a solid 4,700 to 2,800. Adding insult to injury, during those latter years of the 1950s, was a growing anti-union backlash in the private sector. The trend started south of the border, where from 1956 to 1959, a U.S. Senate Committee released a series of scathing reports on the IUOE and other major U.S. unions. Union-bashing became a popular subject in the media. Outspoken business leaders claimed that labour was pricing them out of business. On Labour Day, 1958, Vancouver Sun Columnist Barry

Mather summed up the problem.

It used to be that if you were making a speech and were stuck for a subject you could always come out against Sin or Arthritis. This season it seems another topic has been added – Labour.

The general public believed anti-labour flak because of a common misunderstanding of the working of labour, explained George Parkinson in his bulletin editorial.

Unfortunately, the people very seldom hear or see anything of the other side of the story, such as the high cost of dividends, high interest rates, etc . . . The time to act is now, as it may be later than we think.

To help define and assert their common interests, IUOE locals across Canada joined together in forming the Canadian Conference of Operating Engineers in 1958.

As the Operating Engineers moved towards a new decade, their common goals lay clearly before them. A better public relations and communications program was needed to promote understanding of union goals. An aggressive defense of bargaining principles had to be expressed in reaction to the antagonism of the Social Credit Government and big business. The Local also had to cooperate in a stronger move towards labour unity to promote new and far-reaching employment opportunities, so that the workers of the province could once again benefit from a revitalized economy. Most important of all, Local 115 had to develop a more flexible system of management to meet the demands for change that were growing from within.

The Skins Lake Spillway, part of the Kemano Project, is located 50 miles west of the Kenny Dam on the Nechako River. To get a sense of the size of this project, check out the vehicles at right.



CHAPTER 6

Rough Roads of Change

For all the growth and excess of the 1950s, Local 115 had very little to gloat over as a British Columbia blanketed in snow and economic stagnation greeted the dawn of a new decade in January 1960. A dearth of government projects had eroded the Local's membership and, together with the off-season, left out of work almost one quarter of the remaining 4,000 men. "Slow and very spotty," was the phrase Vancouver Dispatcher Pat Smith chose to describe it. Business Agents Jack Fulford in Prince George and Bill Wocknitz on Vancouver Island were both laid off because of the decline in activity.

The Local was having its first period of recession; an economic lull in an era of affluence. There were no breadlines, no mass marches, and with unemployment insurance, workers were not faced with the desperation so well remembered by the old-timers. In fact, in some sections of the industry, there were job vacancies. Highway contracts had increased despite the economy, and paving contractors clamored for workers.

"That is one trade that our members seem to forget about as soon as they learn to do something else in construction," said Business Representative Bill Yule. The abundance of highway projects was the surest sign of an upcoming provincial election.

In the Lower Mainland, construction of the Squamish Highway, always recalled as one of the most dangerous construction jobs ever undertaken in the province, had begun in various sections from North Vancouver to Squamish. The steep and unstable coast of Howe Sound was taking its toll in workers' lives, especially between Brunswick Beach and Porteau Camp.

That was a pain. Look at the bloody grade there just above Porteau Camp. They had to keep filling it in, filling it in, and it kept sinking. But once we got Paton down there from the Workmen's Compensation Board, he got things straightened out. I was walking up the grade one day and he asked me where my hardhat was. So I said, 'Anytime a rock comes down on me when I'm inside that shovel, that damned hardhat's not going to help me.'

He said, 'Ya, Bill, but you're not in the shovel now, are you?' He got me, just like that.

BILL HEATH

One of the jobs that came up during my Marwell days was the first seven miles out of Horseshoe Bay, on the railway. We were about halfway along that deal when the government let the contract for the highway, right up the side of the mountain, on top of us. We could see the rock coming down from our friendly competitor onto the railway. We had no

other recourse but to bid the highway, at price, and got it. There's one of the best examples I can give you of the cooperation of the Operating Engineers. We had a problem; they worked with it everyday, and the cooperation we got from their people was something to behold. When there was blasting to be done on the Upper Levels, we had a foreman and a superintendent, but we also had that Union and its grapevine. It speaks well of them.

GEORGE WILKINSON

On the other side of Vancouver, the western tail of the TransCanada Highway and the Vancouver-Blaine Freeway were both under construction. Three key links in these routes were: Second Narrows Bridge, with its construction dragging on because of a work stoppage by the Ironworkers, who continued to question the bridge's safety; the Deas Island Tunnel (later renamed the Massey Tunnel), and, the Port Mann Bridge. The latter two were outstanding examples of modern engineering and construction. The Port Mann, when completed, was the world's longest high-level, stiffened, tied-arch bridge and the longest in the world with an orthotropic (vertically supported) deck. The Deas Island Tunnel was the first of its kind in North America; a prefabricated, sectional tunnel passing beneath the mighty Fraser River. Concrete sections were built at a nearby drydock facility, floated into position, sunk in a prepared trench and then joined together by divers. Because of the river's tricky flows, and for safety reasons, the Local joined other building trades locals in a no-strike agreement with the contractor, Peter Kiewit Ltd.

The grandest highway project of them all, approaching completion in 1961-62, was the portion of the TransCanada being blasted through the Rogers Pass of the Rocky Mountains. The ninety-two miles of highway



A couple of Euclids get snowed in at Bitter Creek near Stewart, BC in April, 1962.



This is Skolseg is the operator clearing the right of way at Dome Creek in the '60s.

between Revelstoke and Golden cost taxpayers dearly, but the new route opened up some of the most spectacular mountain country in the world and cut travel time between B.C. and Alberta by one day. To the south, along the same route, the Salmo-Creston cut-off was being threaded through rugged mountain territory to shorten the route taken around Kootenay Lake. When finished, the 42-mile highway attained the highest elevation of any in Canada. In the north, the John Hart Highway between Prince George and Dawson Creek was gradually being upgraded at various sections.

All these projects were the sustenance of the Local during the lean years between 1958 and 1962, but they were not enough to employ the surplus numbers of operators who had entered the trade during the Kitimat-Kemano era. The construction industry outside of the Lower Mainland was steadily developing, but this was a mixed blessing because it left large numbers of operators unemployed when the shorter construction season ended.

Yet there was hope, and it shone brightly for the Social Credit Government as B.C. went to the polls in the provincial election of 1960. Premier Bennett promised giant transportation and energy projects as though carrots on a stick. There was the great Wenner Gren Monorail System that was to open up the vast resources

of the north, a new 700-mile extension on the already ailing Pacific Great Eastern Railway, a \$450 million Westcoast Transmission gas pipeline from the Peace River gas fields to Vancouver, an offer to annex the Yukon Territory in exchange for maintenance of the Alaska Highway, a billion-dollar ten-year highway construction program, and last but by no means least, the harnessing of the Peace River for hydroelectric power production.

The Premier pulled the last scheme from his sleeve and presented it as an alternative to yet another massive scheme, the proposed power development of the Columbia River in Southeastern B.C. That project had stalled at the negotiating table because of transboundary disputes between the U.S. and Canada. If it went ahead, the Local would have a share in the construction of three separate dams along the river, the Arrow, the Duncan and the Mica, with various other possibilities lurking in the background. Given these temptations, it was predictable that the executive's decision to join the rest of the labour movement in active support of the CCF opposition would not be widely appreciated among the membership. The B.C. Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress had already lent their weight to the CCF cause of 1960, when Local 115 joined in the labour-capitalist pie fight. Local President Harvey Nixon first encouraged members to get on the voters' list and then set about

persuading them to vote CCF.

We make no apology for this participation. We make no apology for working for the defeat of an administration which has attempted to hobble and cripple unions at the behest of vested interests. Further, we make no apologies for opposing corruption and bribery in government. No trade unionist is forced to vote for any particular political party, but their intelligence and reason have led them to give their support to the CCF.

*HARVEY NIXON, OPERATING ENGINEERS
NEWS, 1960*

Metro Leonty, a trustee of the Local, together with men like Jim Harris and Ron and Jim Malange, represented the new radical influence in Local affairs. Their Political Action Committee was casting every stone it could find. On the election's eve, three of four pages of the Local's newsletter were entirely devoted to defeating the Social Credit Government.

"Why practice trade unionism all year, then scab at the ballot box?" they asked.

True enough, the government, with repeated legislative blows to the labour movement, had forever ended the labour-management bliss of the early 1950s. To many workers, Bill 43 was the final insult. Introduced in late 1959, it prohibited sympathy strikes, banned picketing during illegal strikes and weakened the bargaining power of unions. Remarks made in the press by Highways Minister Phil Gaglardi reflected the government's attitude.

'Labour leaders are keeping up a constant agitation,' the Highways Minister said. 'They are using the labouring man

The crane shown here working on the Kinnaird Bridge in the Kootenays was fitted with the longest boom available in 1964.

as a stepping stone . . . we don't need any Hoffas or gangsterism in this province.'

VANCOUVER SUN

Labour's anger gave way to action. Ron Green, a Local 115 member in Kamloops, ran for office on the CCF ticket. The Local contributed \$200 to Green's campaign fund. Most operators, however, were not socialists, and though they resented certain Social Credit policies, they equally resented the political course their Union had taken.

In the end, socialist rhetoric could not match the gilded promises of the Premier. Through it all, as the prime antagonist of B.C. labour, Premier Bennett emerged as the victor of the 1960 election. He did it with speeches like this one, which came at the close of 1959, at that time the worst year for labour strife in the province's history.

"The 1960s belong to B.C.," said the Premier in a New Year's forecast from his Kelowna home.

"Payrolls will be larger and there will be more of them," continued the Premier in his Happy Days are Here Again theme.

Reasons for his optimism are the new Trades Union Act (Bill 43) and his contention that B.C. is now debt-free.

'We now have the best labour legislation in the British Commonwealth,' he said. 'It will greatly improve the economy and especially help the working man.'

VANCOUVER SUN

One of the first acts of legislation to be introduced in the spring sitting of the legislature was Bill 42, which prohibited unions from contributing to political parties.

The Fight for District Form

Politics within Local 115 were no less Machiavellian in the early 1960s. The Union had expanded in the 1950s, while leadership and administration had lagged behind. Like a gangling youth, the Local's administration was clumsy and inclined to misbehave. Symptoms of the weakness first arose in 1959, with bitter infighting at general meetings. President Nixon was charged by Danny O'Shea, a rank and file member, on three counts: creating dissension within the ranks, violating union rules and disobeying authority. A membership vote found him not guilty. Next, Business Representative Allan Scott charged O'Shea with slander. O'Shea was found guilty, fined \$50 and barred from union meetings for two years.

Feelings of misrepresentation and abuse of power were not confined to the executive, as evident from the anger vented during meetings throughout the province. At one in particular, a porcelain dish went sailing past Nixon's head and embedded itself in the wall. It took several men to remove the disgruntled member who had launched the missile. On another occasion, a delegation of Vancouver Island operators arrived at the Fraser Street headquarters of 115 in 1962. They wanted out. They were fed up with the mismanagement of their Union, mainly because of the numbers of mainlanders working on the Island. With an estimated 1,600 members in their district, they felt they had the numbers but not the relative power that should have been accorded them in a democratic organization. There was even talk of applying for another charter, although the grievances eased before this was done.

The solution to all the dissatisfaction was simple: drop



Ace Ginter is operating the D8 Cat pulling a scraper in McBride, B.C. in 1958.



the local form of administration and adopt district form to give all members a better opportunity to participate in the affairs of the Local. The local form had been satisfactory during the Local's first quarter century, when a large majority of members resided and worked in the Vancouver area, but all that was changing. Unfortunately, it had not changed enough for most of the Local's executive members. Over half the membership still worked in the Lower Mainland in the early 1960s, and those in control feared a break-up of the Local if it was decentralized.

Internal dissension led to a number of battles and fiery meetings, including one instance when various officers of Local 115 were voted out of office. At one point the International had to intervene and removed jurisdiction from Local 115 for the Peace Power Project, and gave it to a small local in Prince George.

This action was a slap in the face of 115 administration. Despite their repeated protests, the International upheld its original decision. For a full year after the construction began, operators were funneled through Local 858 in Prince George as they went to work on access roads and clearing at the Portage Mountain Site. In the meantime, A1 Scott worked feverishly to win the jurisdiction for 115.

The loss of the Peace Power Project, more than anything else, convinced the executive that it was time for a change. At a regular meeting in late 1962, it was moved and accepted that as soon as possible a referendum ballot would be mailed out to all members, to either accept or reject the district form of administration. A whole new set of bylaws, prepared by a referendum committee, had to be drafted and approved. Once this was done, several members got busy and churned out 4,000 copies of the proposed bylaws on a Gestetner

machine, working steadily through the weekend.

In January 1963, the results of the ballot were in: 798 in favour and 103 against district form. The bylaws were forwarded to newly-elected General President Hunter Wharton, who gave them immediate approval. Along with that approval came a special bonus: jurisdiction, shared with Local 858, for the Peace Power Project.

By introducing district form of administration to the Union, it served to stabilize the membership politically and recognized the need for representation at district meetings throughout the organization. Union politics of the day were such that some would have preferred to govern the Local from meeting to meeting. It offered the conducting of meetings in different districts; it allowed for the meetings to have authority to make recommendations to the executive board; it allowed for the election of an officer to represent the district at the executive board level; it gave the business manager authority to administer on behalf of the executive. He was empowered to employ staff and there would be a secretary, a chairman and a guard elected within each district.

MIKE PARR

Machinery Rolls Again

Spirits were noticeably higher among members in the offices and in the field as the Local headed into an election of new officers that spring. During the course of the

previous six months, the labour market had turned from bust to boom. Membership was climbing again for the first time in five years. The seasonal warming meant that many an operator would soon be working again.

District form and the huge Peace River Project had opened the door on a new era of growth that paralleled that of the provincial economy. In 1964, the Columbia River Treaty was ratified, giving the green light to three major hydroelectric projects in Southeastern B.C. By 1965, more than 5,000 men were engaged in dam construction in the province. That year, Local 115 reached full employment as B.C. construction expenditures reached a record \$1.1 Billion. Negotiators proudly achieved, with the Heavy Construction Association, a province wide agreement that provided "benefits in the way of wage increases and conditions unequalled in our history." As well, more than \$200 million was committed by the forest industry to major pulp mill construction in centres throughout the province. But the real success story was in the North. With the Peace River Dam, power line, pipeline and the Yellowhead Highway Projects underway, District Four, the area north of Prince George, had more men at work than any other district in the province. At peak construction, the Peace Project alone employed nearly 1,000 members of the Local.

Remarkably few problems had arisen with the union security agreement in effect on the Peace River Dam. Under the agreement, Hydro contractors agreed to maintain a closed-shop policy, providing the project was not

“Union politics of the day were such that some would have preferred to govern the Local from meeting to meeting.”

-Mike Parr

hampered by work stoppages. Southerners were not overly anxious to work on the project and many of the operators' jobs were filled by Alberta operators who entered the province and the Local by way of the “northern portal.” Nonunion residents of the region publicized their protests against the union agreement, since it gave hiring priority to union men, but the clause was upheld. The government, at all costs, wanted to avoid grievances so that the project would be completed in line with both electrical and political power needs. Operators worked around the clock, six days a week. In one record-setting day, 300,000 cubic yards of moraine were placed, proof of the awesome potential of the world's largest earthmoving equipment. The most impressive feature of the dam's construction was not its size, although it was one of the world's largest dams, but rather the speed with which it was built.

The production and placing of embankment materials reached some remarkably high rates, and the fact that such high rates were sustained over a total of 20 months in four seasons . . . is a tribute to the equipment which the contractor used, the men who operated it and the contractor's organization and management.

B.C. HYDRO

By the time all was completed in September 1967, when Premier W. A. C. Bennett dumped the final load of fill from a 100-ton truck onto the dam which had come to bear his name, 40,000 men and women (a figure incorporating worker turnover and leave) had worked on the project over an unusually brief period of four years.

Farther north, activity in the Yukon was gradually increasing. The Local had won jurisdiction for the Yukon in 1954, but organizing did not begin in earnest until 1960, when construction began on the DEW (Distant

Early Warning) Line Radar Defense Stations. A portion of the \$35 million contract was to be constructed in Northern B.C., and with this in their favour, a few staunch members of the Local joined forces with the negotiating committee and achieved an agreement that won B.C. rates for the Yukon.

The jobs and the Union had become so large that teamwork was a forgotten craft. “I'm just a number,” became a household phrase. Apathy and independence were becoming more acceptable. These were general social trends, products of postwar affluence, better education and increased social awareness and anxiety. Union benefits and services, on the other hand, would not have been possible without the development of a large union organization.

Operator training was the first of these services to be stepped up in the 1960s. A committee made up of Mike Parr, Ron Mélangé, and Bill Yule set about negotiating with the Heavy Construction Association in May 1964 to form a training program for machine operators, mechanics and welders. Funded by a half-a-cent employer contribution, the Apprenticeship Plan was the first of its kind in the construction industry in Western Canada. It was a modest effort at first, but in time, under the guidance of its successive administrators, the Plan expanded to provide training and upgrading of skills on almost all types of heavy equipment.

Improving skills was seen as one of the most obvious means of supplying industry with skilled operators and reducing the accident rate in the province. There were more than 87,000 work accidents and 215 job-related deaths in B.C. in 1964. “Stay Alive in '65” reminded the motto underlining the front page of the Local's newsletter. With the assistance of the Workmen's Compensation



A D9 undergoing some repairs in Minto, B.C. in 1959.

A shovel operator takes a break while working on the smelter site in Kitimat in August of 1952.



Board, Lloyd Cook, also known as “Mr. Safety,” helped put together the trade’s first safety manual in 1965. The manual became so popular that it was requested throughout North America and used as a model for other operator manuals prepared in countries around the world.

There was also growing discussion of a Local health and welfare plan. In this field, however, the Union was a latecomer. Most other building trades had already moved into private medical plans or had joined the Construction Industry Plan, established in 1965. As word got around about the advantages of medical coverage, members began to consider the possibility of joining the Industry Plan. Its attractions were obvious enough; it freed the unions from administrative burdens while offering coverage for considerably less than any union plan in existence. The proposed Local 115 Health and Welfare Plan offered coverage for ten cents an hour, which employers would pay into the fund on top of the union wage. The Industry Plan offered the same services for a deduction of only seven cents an hour. Yet there were holes in the Industry Plan, and the Local fortunately recognized them before it was too late.

We spotted quite early what was happening. Here they were paying only seven cents an hour and their benefits were fantastic. It didn’t make sense. We tried to figure out how they did it. It became clearer when you took a close look. For instance, the Labourers’ Union, which even at that time had eight or nine thousand members, had many European immigrants as members. Most of them didn’t even know they were in the plan; they were not taking any benefits, but the industry was paying on their behalf. So there was a pool of money growing with very few recipients.

I remember going to negotiations and Roli Gerbin [the employers’ representative] was there questioning our own plan. He said, ‘What the hell do you want that for? Look at the Industry Plan. Look at the benefits we get and it’s only seven cents an hour.’

I said, ‘Ya Roli, and that bubble is going to burst very quickly.’ And by God, before too long it burst and the whole thing blew up. [The Plan folded during the construction industry lockout of 1970, when funds were depleted.] Many Locals lost literally hundreds of thousands of dollars. The members were buggered and they had to wind up scrambling to set up their own plans.

We never got into that. The Operating Engineers never lost one penny on that whole caper. We set up our own Plan. We set up our own trust documents. One thing about it: it took us a year longer to get it, but we were in far better shape than any of the other trades and have been in better shape ever since.

JIM MALANGE

There was little resistance to the Plan from employers, since the construction industry was in prime shape in 1966, but support from members was by no means unanimous. Despite the opposition, a membership vote revealed support from a slim majority and the Local edged cautiously ahead with its Plan by first covering the piledriving section in March 1966, followed by coverage of the heavy construction section that summer.


Organizing in the mines and equipment dealerships

The advent of district form and the upswing in employment in 1964 encouraged the Local to seek new

grounds of jurisdiction through organizing the unorganized. The two areas of key concern were the strip mining industry, in which considerable progress had been made with the Texada, Craigmont and Argonaut Mines, and the heavy equipment dealerships, where hundreds of mechanics worked at wages lower than mechanics in the construction industry.

Mining was rapidly coming of age in British Columbia in the 1960s. It had always been a prime income earner, but new transportation links, technology and an ever-increasing export demand for raw minerals encouraged hasty development. Strip mining, the removal of overburden to expose mineral deposits, developed as a result of economics and the capacity of modern earthmoving equipment. It was this equipment which brought Local 115 into the industry.

In recognition of the differences between mining operators and construction operators, the Union chartered Local 115C in 1960. The purpose of the sister Local, as with 115A, the apprenticeship branch, and 115B, an earlier organizing chapter, was to set a different rate of dues and improve representation. Still, the competition



*Work on the Seven-Mile Dam
on the Pend d'Oreille River in
1969 as it nears completion.*

from other unions for control of the mining industry made raiding a fact of life.

The Three-Way Pact

A collective agreement first negotiated in the late 1950s at Texada Iron Mines, between the Tunnel and Rock Workers, the Teamsters and the Operating Engineers, resulted in the Three-Way Pact and gave the Local the bargaining strength it needed to displace competing unions. The Pact pioneered the collective mining agreement in B.C. by being the first to obtain a regular five-day week, double time for overtime, free medical coverage and the highest wages of any mining agreement in the country. Conditions under the agreement were so good that, in an attempt to raid the Local's territory in 1964, two organizers from the Canadian Mine-Mill Workers' Union were laughed out of the Vananda Camp.

But organizing seldom went as smoothly as it did on Texada. At Brynnor Mines on Kennedy Lake, operators waited three years for an inferior Mine-Mill Agreement to run out, only to have the company, Noranda, turn down a proposed agreement with Local 115. What was odd about the resulting eight month strike was the company's token effort to negotiate and the total absence of any media coverage, despite the issuing of several

media statements by Pact members. Only after a strike that lasted several months was the Local able to bring Noranda to the table, and in 1965 the two negotiated a top agreement for Brynnor workers.

A worse situation arose out of a dispute at Zeballos Mines, where operators requested representation by the Local. The Provincial Labour Board ordered a vote on the matter of which union should represent the men, but during the vote, the Mine-Mill Union rushed through a new agreement with the company. Since this contravened labour laws, the Labour Board ordered the agreement destroyed and granted certification to the Three-Way Pact. Mine-Mill appealed this decision to the Appeals Court of B.C. and their certification was upheld. The Labour Board then appealed this decision to the Supreme Court of B.C., which reversed the Appeals Court decision. Mine-Mill then appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada, and lost. Despite this final blow, the Mine-Mill Union continued to seek certification and to agitate the bargaining process. Fortunately, Local 115 Mining Organizer Ralph Johnston was a determined man. "No amount of bully boys are going to make us back off until we are satisfied that this is what the majority of employees want," he wrote in the Operating Engineers News.

Similar problems occurred at Boss Mountain Mine in the Cariboo, where the Three-Way Pact fought some of

the underhanded tactics - free liquor and hate literature - of the United Steelworkers and the Mine-Mill Union.

Union backbiting combined with the traditionally poor working conditions in the mining industry to give the whole organizing effort an ugly face. Yet, as operators moved into mining from construction, they brought with them a knowledge of proper living and working standards. New blood in the mining industry had a positive effect for all the workers involved.

I went back to Granduc to do a repair job in 1969. It came under the Interprovincial Pipe Agreement, done by an outfit that did that kind of work. When we got up there, the meals and everything were so bad and rotten that it was almost impossible to sit there and eat. They were giving us just the offals of the bloody beef; livers and kidneys. The miners were quite satisfied. Of course, they work on a bonus system so that the bonus can be worked into a big profit, and then they get out. But these mines were different. They came under the Operating Engineers; we had it organized. We weren't going to stand for that kind of food; the beef was awful. I put more pressure on them by going to talk to the miners. I told them they should be getting the best.

'We're not working hard and you are. An operating engineer is sitting on his ass in a crane; he doesn't need that much. He could get by with a loaf of bread and a bologna. But a miner needs good food because every time he goes in that mine, he's

“So I came over to this side of the street and met the owner and negotiated a price of \$50,000 for two-and-a-half acres running out to Canada Way”

-Fred Randall

risking his life.’

It’s the dandiest, hardest work there is. So I got them to support it, and they all booked off sick. That created a little difficulty, but we got what we wanted.

AL FOWLER

By the end of the decade the number of 115 men working under mining agreements had skyrocketed from a few dozen to almost 1,000 operators, representing ten mining operations in B.C. The Three-Way Pact was finally able to eliminate the Mine-Mill Union in 1966, after raiding several of its properties. The Mine-Mill Union then joined the United Steelworkers, and the Pact members entered into a no-raiding agreement with the Steelworkers.

Men in the Shops

Organization of the heavy equipment dealerships began in a small way in 1964. It was partially the result of

a drive to expand jurisdiction, but also answered the request of unorganized heavy duty mechanics who were underpaid. Mechanics in the construction industry received 50 to 60 cents more per hour than those in the shops, along with all the benefits and regular wage increases inherent in union membership. Although several shops were organized by the Machinists Association, there was a greater tendency to apply for certification with the IUOE, since heavy equipment was the common denominator, just as it was in strip mining. The main organizing thrust began in 1965, when Business Representative Fred Randall began making regular trips to Vancouver dealerships. Deitrich-Collins and B.C. Equipment were the first of the larger shops to be organized. The greatest problem, however, was with the smaller equipment shops where only one or two mechanics were employed. Here there was almost no competition from other unions because there were too few men to bother with. Local 115 decided to adopt a different strategy.

They may be small today but they’ll be big tomorrow. I’ll never forget one guy. He wanted union representation in his shop but he was all by himself. So Fred had to tell him, ‘If there were two employees here who were both in the Union, I could apply for certification, but right now, I can’t.’ I was dispatching and this guy phoned in by the name of Frank Mead, and at the time, I didn’t know what was going on with this one shop. He said he wanted another

mechanic down there, and as soon as I sent someone down I was to tell Fred Randall to get a hold of Frank Mead. It just so happened that a guy walked in that day who had been up with Wesfrob in Tasu and I told him, ‘Jeez, there is a shop downtown here where they’re looking for a mechanic right now.’ Of course Frank had been bugging his employer for another guy to help in the shop.

The long and the short of it was that Fred got an application for certification in the Union. The outfit just about had a fit. They now had two employees and all of a sudden they get an application for certification with the Union. But it made a difference of about a dollar and a half in what they were paying Frank at the time. He could get that negotiated as well as the benefits. So you put as much effort into organizing two people as you gave to organizing 40.

BERT BROOKER

In February 1967, the Local succeeded in bringing a majority of B.C. equipment dealers into a collective agreement. There was a price, though. In most of the shops at least one union man lost his job, and in some, as many as four or five were fired. Predictably, the ones who were laid off were the strongest, most vociferous supporters of the Union. When their efforts succeeded, many won their jobs back.

Meanwhile, construction of both the Peace and the Duncan Dams was approaching completion in 1967. Work continued on the transmission lines, highway routes and pipeline in the Peace Region, but layoffs were inevitable. Work on the Mica Dam, high in the Selkirk Mountains, would not get underway for another two years, leaving a considerable gap for the unemployed to fill. On the Coast, pulp mill construction at Gold River and expansion at other mills were also drawing to a



Equipment repairs were a necessary part of working with heavy equipment. This welding truck was a vital part of keeping things moving at Stewart, BC in 1961.

Finish grading of the earth fill portion of the Keenlyside Dam near Castlegar is taking place before the dam went online in 1968.



close. Fortunately, Vancouver building construction entered another boom era in the late 1960s, and along with big jobs like the Roberts Bank Superport at the mouth of the Fraser, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Centennial Pier, the new Vancouver International Airport and the Pacific Coliseum, helped to employ many operators.

The gap between jobs and union members widened considerably in 1968, when over a period of several weeks, 1,100 men were laid off from the completed Peace Project. The Local's dispatcher in Vancouver was inundated with job calls. It was also a frustrating year for union negotiators as they attempted to forge agreements with the Amalgamated Construction Association and the B.C. Roadbuilders' Association, both established just two years previously. The task was accomplished only after exhaustive negotiations. Not long after, a collective agreement for piledriving and clamshell dredging was added to the lot.

Together, these represented the largest gains ever made in the Local's history. They also were the first to include an employer contribution of seven cents an hour to the Local's planned pension fund. Established the following year, the Pension Plan was the first IUOE plan in Canada. Despite the Plan's value and the fact that the Local had already proven its management ability with the Health and Welfare Plan, the pension proposal was not widely accepted by the membership. A membership vote won 53 percent support only after keen persuasion by all those involved with the development of the Plan.

Another straightforward initiative that encountered more than its share of stumbling blocks that year was the purchase of land for a new headquarters building. The old Union office on Fraser Street was overcrowded, short of parking space and could not fill the Local's growing

needs. A building committee set out to find possible sites for construction of the "U" Building.

I had been active in politics in Burnaby for some time and knew the Reeve, Allan Emmott. So I went to see Allan and he sent me to see the land agent, who just pointed out the window of the Municipal Hall and said, 'You see all those greenhouses over there? There's a place where we could rezone for office buildings.' So I came over to this side of the street and met the owner and negotiated a price of \$50,000 for two-and-a-half acres running out to Canada Way.

FRED RANDALL

But the problems had only begun. The project was not a popular one because it involved a major expenditure of over \$500,000. Several members of the executive opposed the purchase, especially the choice of the Burnaby site, at that time considered to be too far out in the country. To win support, the building committee set out across the province to hold a series of meetings to convince members of the project's merits. Initial reaction in some districts was negative, but the majority of the executive remained firm in its opinion. Finally, the overall result of the meetings was a mild endorsement of the project. Grimwood Construction began building the four-storey structure in 1970. Because of finances, the adjoining auditorium was not constructed until 1974.

The large Burnaby headquarters was to stand as the symbol of the Local's final rise to lasting stability and

strength, an ascent that took place in ten short but turbulent years. Local 115 emerged from lawsuits, jurisdictional battles, recession, political strife and rapid membership and administrative expansion as one of Canada's largest trade union locals. By 1969, there were well over 7,000 members in B.C. and the Yukon Territory.

As always, though, rapid change brought uncertainty about the future. Technological developments in the 1960s were just one example. A man might take up a trade with a lifetime occupation in mind, only to find five years later that his job had become redundant. Suddenly, new and revolutionary machines would appear on a job; machines like the Boneto, the excavator used on the Port Mann Bridge; the Peace River Project's conveyor belt, longest in the world; the remarkable climbing cranes which enabled speedier and more efficient construction of skyscrapers; the use of helicopters for hoisting, which the Local sought jurisdiction for in 1968; bulldozers, scrapers and front-end loaders which replaced shovels and trucks on so many jobs. Fred King summed up the situation in his Apprenticeship Report.

What was current is now obsolete, and unless you, the Operating Engineers, are prepared to change with the times, you too may become obsolete. The world is changing at a rapid pace - so much so that you must go like hell just to be able to stand still - and we all know that we cannot stand still.

FRED KING

CHAPTER 7

New Foundations

It is basically the task of union and management in the construction industry to put their houses in order. If they fail to do so, government will likely be forced to take matters into its own hands to protect the public interest.

Those, the closing words of an exhaustive 670-page study of construction labour relations in Canada, had a profound effect on Local 115 and other B.C. building trade locals in the 1970s. The study, Construction Labour Relations, led to the formation in 1969 of the Construction Labour Relations Association (CLRA). A province-wide bargaining amalgamation of 60 companies in the industry, the CLRA triggered a chain reaction that reshaped construction industry relations in B.C.

“The aim,” explained CLRA Director Bob Morrison, “was to centralize bargaining so unions could no longer whipsaw and leapfrog each other. A lot of unions did not want to see CLRA get off the ground.”

But it did, and it soared. The rise of the CLRA came at a critical period in union-management bargaining. Inflation in the Canadian economy was approaching double-digit levels and diminishing the buying power of every wage earner. Unions were singled out as the leading contributor to inflation, although there was little evidence to support this belief. Nevertheless, companies were determined to take a united stand under the umbrella of a single contractors’ association. Within a year of its founding, CLRA had mushroomed to become the representative of over 600 B.C. construction companies, representing 70 to 80 percent of construction work in the province. What set this association apart from the others the Local had dealt with were its methods: tough and sophisticated. Years of negotiating with the B.C. Roadbuilders’ Association had produced for the Local an unbroken track record, free of any work stoppages. This

was not going to be possible with the CLRA.

In the majority of cases, the people that we’re dealing with in the CLRA are what I call briefcase contractors. They’re engineers or architects who don’t own any equipment; they get their tenders and build these projects. They can take us on and shut down without any great economic hardship for themselves, if they happen to have all their jobs tidied up at the time. I think the basic reason we’ve been successful with the Roadbuilders is that, in the main, we’re dealing with the guy that owns the iron. You’re dealing with a guy that has the bucks on it. He understands the industry. He’s sitting across the table, but he knows the dollars he’s got invested. He knows the expertise our members have to produce for him.

JACK WHITTAKER

The decisive factor in the CLRA’s strength was its ability to achieve a single expiry date for all agreements. With agreements for nearly 100 companies neatly arranged in the spring of 1970, a shutdown was inevitable.

The Operating Engineers and the Teamsters first met with the CLRA in April and presented their contract demands, demands not out of line with other settlements achieved that year. Without forewarning, the CLRA announced a 72-hour province wide lockout and called the unions’ demands “totally unreasonable to absurd.” It was a bargaining tactic, a strategic test by the new association, and it began the longest and most frustrating negotiations in the history of Local 115.

Many of the building trades were locked out before they got past page two of the proposals. If the Operating Engineers had been prepared to accept a one-cent-per-hour raise, we would still have been in the situation we are in today.

FRED RANDALL

By the end of the dispute’s first week 6,000 construction workers were out of work. When added to unemployment lists, this figure brought the total number of unemployed B.C. construction workers to 20,000. Yet many of the operators affected by the lockout were able to find work elsewhere, severely limiting the effectiveness of the CLRA action. In addition, the no-strike agreement on B.C. Hydro projects and a no-picket policy adopted by all the trades, minimized the loss of work. Diversification into mining and equipment maintenance kept the Local in relatively healthy shape. The number of Local 115 members who received strike and lockout pay during the ensuing three-and-a-half month dispute numbered no more than 100. As a result the Local was able to greet the CLRA action with a measure of confidence.

To date it would appear that because of the policy of the trades not to picket projects, that the effect of the announced lockout is headed for complete failure, and so it should be. Which direction the process of collective bargaining will go is anyone’s guess. However, when CLRA allows common sense to prevail and to set the mechanics of collective bargaining in motion, undoubtedly a collective agreement will be concluded.

BERT BROOKER, OPERATING ENGINEER NEWS

For the first two months of the dispute, a convoluted series of negotiating meetings proved futile. The CLRA refused to budge, even when requested by Labour Minister Leslie Peterson to end the lockout. With all proposals unheeded, the provincial government stepped into the muddle in mid-July with its widely criticized, but untested, Mediation Services Act. In effect, the Act gave the government the power to halt free collective bargaining by outlawing strikes and bringing the dispute before



The new Union building and auditorium on Ledger was fully paid off in the space of 20 years.

a cabinet-appointed mediation commission. Known as compulsory arbitration, this robbed the unions of their most powerful economic lever, the strike, and put them at the mercy of a government that favoured employers over organized labour. The building trades defied the Act, and it did nothing to bring the two sides closer together.

As days turned to weeks and months of deadlock, the lockout created havoc in the construction industry, affecting projects worth a total of more than \$200 million and costing the B.C. economy \$1 million a week in lost wages. Occurring amid an onslaught of strikes, the lockout helped to push the percentage of unemployed workers in B.C. above eight percent, compared to 4.5 percent the previous year. The interdependent nature of construction trades eventually caused the number of unemployed construction workers to swell to 35,000.

There remained a difference of 25 cents between the unions' hourly wage demands and the increase considered acceptable by the CLRA. So steadfast was the Association's position that some unions' strike funds were threatening to scrape bottom. Grudgingly, Local 115 edged back from its original demands. Finally, eight months after the dispute had begun, the CLRA-Local 115

Heavy Construction Agreement was signed. Settlements were less than satisfactory, with wage increases for the two-year contract period ranging from 54 cents to \$1.12, to be added to an average hourly wage of \$5.50 an hour. While the haggling was over for at least another contract period, the 1970 breakdown encouraged a reappraisal of labour relations in B.C.

The Union moves to Burnaby

In the spring of 1971, the Local's centre of operations made its first move in 15 years, this time to the shiny new headquarters in Burnaby. The timing was fortunate, not simply because the Local had just finished celebrating its fortieth anniversary, but also because the old Fraser Street headquarters burned down shortly afterward. International President Hunter Wharton dedicated the office building on July 11, 1971.

Almost half a million operating engineers join me today in congratulating Local Union 115 and its branches on the dedication of this fine building as Local 115 celebrates its fortieth year.

In 1931, application was made for a Hoisting and Portable Charter. The application was made and the charter to Local Union No. 115 was granted. Forty years later, the dedication of this structure comes at a time when Local Union 115 has more members than ever before; from 178 to 8,000 members at a time when the wages and conditions of your contracts are better than ever before in the history of the Local Union. Let me pause and congratulate the Province of B.C. on its own one hundredth anniversary.

OPERATING ENGINEERS NEWS

The building did represent the better side of the Local's affairs, but there also were matters troubling the minds of members who attended the opening ceremony that day. The accelerated growth of the 1960s was quickly losing momentum in the early 1970s, braked by unemployment and inflation. Not since the 1930s had there been such a high proportion of unemployed Canadians. The "pulp explosion" that had been one of the great construction mainstays during the 1960s had ended with a depressed world pulp market. The following year, the province's mining industry was hit by a world decline in the prices of key minerals. Local 115 was now into the industry in a big way, with eleven mines organized throughout the province, and the slump inevitably affected jobs at these mines.

Another setback in the mining section originated within the Union in 1971. The B.C. coal industry, diminished since an earlier heyday, was gearing up to supply the Japanese export market. The 600 employees at the Kootenay Mine of Kaiser Coal were organized by the United Mine Workers (UMW), but several had invited Local 115 to the property in the hope that it might replace the UMW. An intensive raid began, with as many as ten Local 115 business agents at the site of the Giant



A sideboom lays pipe on the Westcoast Transmission Line from the Peace River gas fields in 1971.

Coal Mine, trying to sign up enough employees to get certification from the Labour Relations Board. After several months of organizing, 500 Kaiser men were ready to make the changeover, but there was one serious oversight.

In the United States, the Mine Workers are big. They've got all the big mines in the States. Well, there was an agreement, between the Mine Workers and the building trades, that all new construction work at the mines would be done by building trades unions. The Mine Workers said they would support the building trades during mine expansions or new construction in the mines. That was guaranteeing new work for the building trade unions. So, when you were, in effect, raiding the Mine Workers, the Mine Workers went to the Engineers head office and said, 'Here we've got an agreement with you to assure you all the work in these mines in the United States - all the new construction -and you're raiding us up in Canada.' That was when the meeting was arranged between Mike Parr, Jim Malange, Newell Carmen, and Hunter Wharton, who said we'd appreciate it if you could back off.
FRED RANDALL

Fortunately, the International agreed to reimburse the Local for the money spent on the organizing effort. Still,

the Kaiser debacle was a severe disappointment for the Local's executive, coming as it did at a time when the entire B.C. mining industry was running into difficulty. As the market slowed down and jobs thinned out, inter-union competition for jurisdiction increased, cutting further into the Local's share of the pie.

A New Century, A New Government

With its dismal record of handling labour disputes, the Social Credit Government had now earned itself the permanent wrath of the building trades and of organized labour as a whole. On one occasion during the construction shutdown, angry workers roughed up the provincial cabinet during a New Westminster reception. The government, shortsighted and still promoting the success of its resource strategy during the booming fifties and sixties, was falling behind the times.

One may well ask what the solution is to this problem. I do not pretend to know all the answers, but to me at least, I'm convinced that the present provincial government with its past and present labour policies, has to be changed. Obviously, this can only be done at the ballot box. The most frightening fact of all is that labour put the present government into power and has maintained them ever since.
JIM MALANGE, OPERATING ENGINEERS NEWS

As British Columbia began its second century, a new government was elected: the New Democratic Party (NDP), an old ally of labour causes, was in power for the first time in B.C. Although not expecting any miracles with the new government, labour representatives repeated to each other in relieved tones that "things just have to get better." Yet the narrow electoral success of

Premier Dave Barrett's government was not so much the result of its labour alliance as it was the result of its ability to play down that alliance and thereby placate other interest groups, not the least of which was big business. The labour-New Democrat romance eventually ran aground on a new and long overdue piece of legislation, a provincial labour code.

The accession to power of the NDP also had a marked effect on the roadbuilding industry, with a decline in the number of highway contracts let. Hardest hit were operators in the Interior, where highway construction and paving had almost become a way of life during the expansive years. As Mike Parr, Business Manager, stated in the Operating Engineers News, "to keep our membership employed, we must have public development and the highway and hydro programs are important to us." Unfortunately, government restraint in inflationary times was already having a telltale effect. It cut right to the core of the Local's organization, to the dredging and piledriving industry which formed the cornerstone of the Local when it was first chartered. The number of outfits had increased remarkably during the 1960s, but was pared down by attrition during the 1970s. The water trades were losing their reputation for steady work, and many members sought work in other areas. The mining industry was not particularly enamored of the NDP's mineral royalties legislation either, and this inhibited the break-neck pace of exploration and development that the former government had readily encouraged. By the mid-1970s, the Local's tally of mining sites had dropped from eleven to three.

Large scale hydroelectric construction did continue in the 1970s, though at a less awesome pace. One of the world's largest earth fill dams and a boon to the Local,

Work crews are hard at work widening and improving the approach to the ferry terminals at Horseshoe Bay in the early 70s.



the Mica Dam, was gradually rising to completion at the headwaters of the Columbia. Further downstream the Kootenay Shipping Canal, a bypass system to move lake traffic around the Duncan Dam, was underway. On the Pend-d'Oreille River, a tributary of the Columbia, the Seven-Mile Dam was also approaching completion and exploratory holes were being drilled west of Revelstoke for yet another hydroelectric project. In the far north the pipeline industry was thriving too, with a number of possible multi-million dollar projects promised. As well, the troubled tracks of B.C. Rail were being extended to Dease Lake, though this project would later hit a financial brick wall. Before a commission of inquiry into the railway in the late 1970s, one engineer remarked that "the BCR is one of the greatest railroading fiascos of our time." B.C. Rail's management of the extension was nothing short of scandalous, and the inquiry recommended the crown corporation be sold.

One of the commoner entries on the dispatcher's list during the early 1970s involved building construction in

the Lower Mainland. Vancouver, where it seemed that everyone in Canada wanted to live, was undergoing another boom. As many as 70,000 new residents flocked to the city every year. The once out-of-the-way mill town was literally rising to prominence as a leading international port.

Georgia Street is busy as hell; the new 23-storey Crown Life Building is going up; the IBM Tower is nearing completion; Dominion Construction is getting into full swing now; iron is being hung on the old Birks Site with 36 stories to go. There is a \$15 million job starting up at UBC with two new cranes going up. There are a few holes just about to be dug; Jack Cewe is getting underway at Vanterm on the surfacing of 88 acres. Canron has just about ironed out the bugs of their 300-ton ringer crane and should be starting to put together two container cranes for the Harbours Board. Grimwood is starting a new job with two cranes going up on Kingsway.

GORD PATTERSON

The Future in Mind

Management of the Local's new Health and Welfare Plan had not gone smoothly, and its first administrator, Ron Malange, was discharged in 1971 by the board of trustees. He was replaced by Ross Montgomery, who had acquired valuable experience as an assistant manager with CU & C Health Services Society. But President Jim Malange could not forgive the board of trustees for the dismissal of his brother, Ron. From 1971 to 1974 Malange refused to sit on the Local's negotiating committee. He continued to work as a business agent for the Local, though, until the aftermath of the 1974 election of officers. The previous election, in 1971, had gone well, with a record setting number of votes returning all the incumbent officers. But in 1974, Malange challenged Parr for the business manager's chair. It was the culmination of the rift that began in 1971, and it presented an awkward set of circumstances, a business agent challenging his boss for his boss's job. Although this was perfectly acceptable under the constitution, Parr felt that Malange should have resigned as business agent before announcing his candidacy. As it happened, Malange lost the election by a wide margin, and his job was on the line. Parr fired him the next morning. Malange considered it unjust; his job and his political motivations were separate. Parr considered it a matter of principle; he could not work closely with an employee who had tried to take away his job.

Replacing Jim Malange as president that year was Jack Whittaker, who brought to the office his experience in every district in the Local's jurisdiction, plus a knowledge of the dispatcher's side of the game. Former Dredging Representative Bob Almgren was elected to the office of

Crew works to carefully position a turbine in the power house at Mica Dam in Northern B.C.

vice-president; Bert Brooker was elected financial secretary; Fred Randall and Jim Biddle were both returned, as recording secretary and treasurer.

In 1975, Randall replaced Joe Morrison as training plan coordinator and was able to gear up the Local's efforts in that direction. The existing training site comprised a leased acreage near Kamloops, but the area was too small and the soil too dry to properly serve training needs. After some heated debate, the operation was moved to Haney. The 400-acre Haney Site was leased from the provincial government. An adjoining 20-acre site was purchased as an investment through the Pension Fund, to serve as a backup area and to provide a training opportunity for land clearing and piledriving. Both the NDP and the succeeding Social Credit Governments were approached for equipment contributions, and full-time instructors, culled from union ranks, were introduced to the Plan. The Local also led the way in achieving trainee coverage through the Workers' Compensation Board. The renewed training effort paid off, for in the following five years there evolved a union training program generally recognized as the best in the country.

The Local's ventures into benefits and services were also proving very successful. Since 1970, pensioners had been collecting benefits from the Pension Fund. In 1973, the Operating Engineers' Pension Trust Fund, now under the administration of Bert Brooker, reached the \$5 million mark after only four years of contributions. By 1977, the fund had grown to \$17 million with more than 300 retired members, disabled members and beneficiaries receiving pensions. The Plans were an organizational success as well as a financial success. They gave the membership a vested interest and created a bond of greater importance than the year-to-year contract - one

based on the unforeseeable future.

The lack of affordable housing for pensioners and others on low incomes encouraged another fresh initiative by the Local. Several members of the executive began to explore the idea of providing cooperative housing for retired members. With approval and limited funds from the Local, Fred Randall began to see some exciting possibilities.

We had felt for some time that we should be involved with housing, mainly because in Europe, the labour unions are.

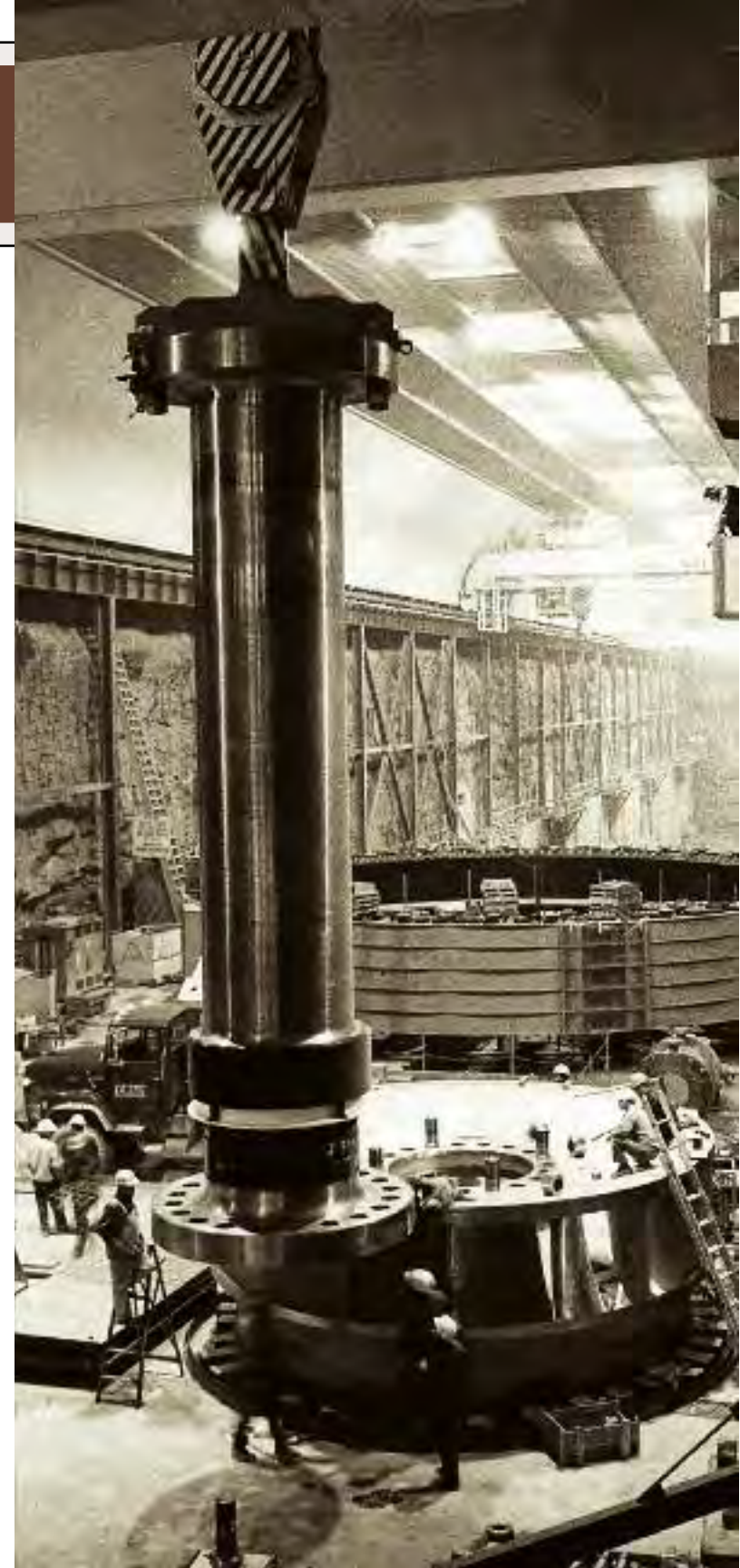
We originally formed the Operating Engineers' Housing Society, which was incorporated. The idea in mind was to build senior citizens' housing for retiring operating engineers. But we found out that all senior citizens' housing at that time (to qualify for grants) was not allowed to provide bedrooms; you could only have bachelor units. We felt that everybody should have a bedroom, so we didn't get into the housing as far as senior citizens go,

What gave me the idea for the housing co-op was that Vancouver was leasing land for housing co-ops on False Creek. I'd heard about a co-op started by a group of professionals from UBC. I thought, if the city can lease the land for co-ops, then why can't the Operating Engineers?

FRED RANDALL

Given the go-ahead from the rest of the executive, Randall began to look for potential sites. His efforts would eventually yield the largest housing cooperative in Western Canada.

Against a background of rising inflation, the Local's financial successes were all the more commendable. The times had not been so kind to negotiators at the bargaining table, where bickering with the CLRA and the Amalgamated Construction Association continued to be a headache. In general, contract demands moderated





The Insley Shovel was placed on display in front of the IUOE building on Ledger in 1996 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the IUOE as an international union.

throughout the 1970s, but the battle for catch-up wages continued. In the 1972 round of negotiations, efforts were assisted by the formation of the voluntary Six-Way Pact, which helped to pioneer the joint bargaining concept. Members of the Pact included the Engineers, Carpenters, Bricklayers, Teamsters, Labourers and Sheet Metal Workers. Later, in 1974, a bargaining council called the Ten-Pact moved further in this direction. Employer unity, in the form of bargaining associations, was encouraging renewed unity among the trade unions, yet there remained fundamental differences between most of the trades that prevented truly effective joint bargaining from getting off the ground. With each round of negotiations came more crippling work stoppages.

The force behind the early initiatives was the B.C. and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council (BCYT-BCTC), an amalgamation of the older local building trades councils. Although it was estab-

lished in the mid-1960s, BCYT-BCTC did not get off the ground until 1972, when Jim Kinnaird of the Electrical Workers and Cy Stairs of the Sheet Metal Workers joined the Council's executive. Mike Parr also became active with the Council. Along with the others, he saw it as a possible avenue by which the trades could meet the increasing unity and sophistication of the industry's employers.

It became a vastly different Council from (1972) on. All kinds of things started to percolate. The policy of joint bargaining, for better or for worse, was put forward as a viable Council policy because we were faced with a united employers' association, the CLRA. As much as people liked to pretend that they were not there, they were growing, and for that matter, still are growing in influence and in the number of contractors covered. Really, in many respects, the Council, that is the new BCYT-BCTC, was almost an answer to the CLRA. CLRA gave the push to organize in a new way; to up the ante and do things in a better way.
CY STAIRS, SECRETARY-TREASURER, BCYT-BCTC

Finally, in 1975, NDP Minister of Labour, Bill King, established the Special Commission of Inquiry into British Columbia Construction, with Jim Kinnaird as commissioner. Kinnaird strongly recommended that the 17 B.C. construction unions begin a collective bargaining system through the BCYT-BCTC.

The inquiry was but one initiative among a number of progressive steps the NDP Government took in the field of labour relations. Of even greater significance was the B.C. Labour Code, introduced in 1973. It was badly needed. Always a province with a propensity for strikes and lockouts, B.C. had earned itself the embarrassing reputation as home of the most turbulent industrial relations in the world. With a 1972 workforce of about one

million, there were 2.5 million days of work lost due to labour disputes. The new legislation replaced the outmoded labour laws of the old Social Credit Government and helped to straighten out the rights of workers and employers. Neither group was overly pleased and each had its own objections, but the legislation was there to be tested and amended if necessary. When the NDP was voted out of office in the 1975 election, it left behind what many labour representatives and employers considered the best labour legislation in North America. Unions had only to see whether the new Social Credit Government would leave the Code intact.

The Anti-Inflation Blues

A government bogey, long feared by organized labour, came out of the closet in 1975: wage and price controls, or more properly, wage controls. It was the fact that the federal government's anti-inflation legislation came down on wages more than prices that upset those in organized labour, and Local 115 was no exception.

It was true that wage increases during the 1970s were substantial. For operating engineers, wages more than doubled during the course of the decade. Federal Minister of Labour Bryce MacKasey blamed organized labour for what he termed its excessive demands. But at the same time, economists pointed out that wage increases seemed to have little influence on the rate of inflation and, in fact, inflation always remained one step ahead. Between 1973 and 1975, industrial wages rose 22.3 percent while consumer prices rose 22.7 percent. In that same two-year period, food prices rose 37 percent, housing prices rose 33 percent, and mortgage interest

“I believe the intentions of the controls are honourable, however, they must be applied to profits as well as wages and prices. It is our job to point out these inequities.”

-Jack Whittaker

rates rose 28 percent. Whatever the cause, whatever the effect, it was this disturbing trend that led the government to stage a national attack on inflation.

Controls seemed to hit the construction industry hardest of all. Ordinarily, all firms with fewer than 500 employees were exempt, but in construction, any firm with more than 20 employees was faced with strict wage guidelines. This, of course, affected almost everyone. Wage increases were severely limited, in the face of ceaseless inflation, to eight percent the first year, six percent the second year and four percent the third year. Some leeway was permitted in wage negotiations in order to maintain existing benefits. Collective bargaining, affecting 10,000 local unions and 2.5 million Canadians, was practically stifled by the complexity and pace of the settlements. Many labour leaders, among them Joe Morris of the Canadian Labour Congress, threatened open defiance of the controls. Local 115, acknowledging the dilemma of creeping inflation, agreed to cautious compliance.

Controls! I don't know whether they will work or not, but I do know that we must do something to try to curb inflation. We hear the labour leaders saying controls won't work and

they are recommending their members defy them. I think this course of action is ridiculous. When they do this before analyzing the legislation, they give the general public the impression that labour doesn't want to curb inflation, which just isn't the case. Instead of fighting our legislators, I think that we should give them some degree of cooperation. I believe the intentions of the controls are honourable, however, they must be applied to profits as well as wages and prices. It is our job to point out these inequities.

JACK WHITTAKER,

OPERATING ENGINEERS NEWS

Controls brought chaos to contract negotiations. The Local's administrators settled back for a long and difficult bout with the “anti-inflation blues.” Despite government insistence to the contrary, the program seemed to be impotent as inflation rose to over ten percent annually in the late 1970s, with unemployment figures not far behind. The effect on wages, however, was all too obvious. Average wage increases dropped from 11.9 to 7.4 percent between 1976 and 1977. It was not until April of 1978 that the program was ended, which was bad timing for the Local, since a major agreement with Utah Mines had expired two days before. Controls continued to affect all such agreements for a year after the program was terminated.

As if controls were not enough, the provincial

government proceeded to tamper with the Labour Code. The day after the Labour Day holiday of 1977, Labour Minister Allan Williams introduced Bill 89, the Labour Code of B.C. Amendment Act. It had the effect of kicking labour while labour was already down. It raised from 51 to 55 percent the required portion of employees signed with a union before the Labour Relations Board (LRB) would grant certification and raised from 35 to 45 percent the portion of members a union had to have signed up before it could apply to the LRB for a representation vote. Both the BCYT-BCTC and the B.C. Federation of Labour attacked the bill. The latter group marched into Williams' office and demanded that he remove the 55 percent requirement, which he did after claiming it to be a typographical error.

Although the revisions to the Code were not as great as expected, the action renewed the fear of right-to-work legislation; the outlawing of the closed shop. Such legislation would do as much as slit the throats of most unions. Right-to-work lobby groups in the province had supporters in the Social Credit Party. One group in particular, the Vancouver Island Right-to-Work Association, changed its name in 1975 to the Independent Contractors' and Businessmen's Association and heightened its public relations activities. Fortunately, neither the Premier nor his labour minister found it politically wise to support right-to-work legislation.

The latter 1970s witnessed the successful beginning of joint bargaining in the B.C. construction industry. Joint or collective bargaining had always been the practical way to approach negotiations in an industry in which labour is so fragmented. Without it, the deadlocks encountered by individual unions would continue to shut down the entire industry. The 1976 CLRA negotiations



Instructor Orville Neil carefully observes the work of a student operating a scraper at the local's Haney Training Centre, one of the most successful training plans in the country.



A giant whirley crane is fitted together in this aerial view of the Revelstoke Dam under construction (left) in 1979. Six years later the cement dam rose 175 metres high (right) to provide the capacity to generate electric power and also to control the Columbia River to present flooding.



had collapsed before effective collective bargaining could get going. The 1977 negotiations, being governed by federal wage controls, were free of any work stoppages. Then, in 1978, the BCYT-BCTC, working in cooperation with the LRB, set up the Bargaining Council of B.C. Trade Unions. The fact that no work stoppage plagued the 1978 negotiations was ample evidence that joint bargaining deserved further trial. Prolonged work stoppages occurred that year in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where no joint bargaining took place.

It must be said that if we had not conducted the bargaining on a joint basis, the building trades, once again, would have been faced with a needless employer lockout. This does not suggest that there is not a need for improvement in the bargaining procedures, however, given proper time and a desire by those few trades who are still resisting change. . . we could have a valuable approach.

MIKE PARR, OPERATING ENGINEERS NEWS

Another byproduct of the increased cohesion among the building trades was the Jurisdictional Assignment Plan, which also made its debut in 1978. Jurisdictional disputes were becoming increasingly common in the construction industry because of its organization along craft lines. The disputes involving Local 115 were previously handled on an ad-hoc basis or were put before the Impartial Jurisdictional Disputes Board in Washington, D.C. Under this system, settlements were often slow and

ponderous. A job was usually completed before the settlement was reached. In the case of operating engineers, the strategic nature of the operator's job often caused jurisdictional disputes to snowball and shut down an entire project. With the new office of the Jurisdictional Assignment Umpire of the B.C. construction industry, it became possible to obtain settlements for jobs of even brief duration.

At the close of the 1970s, with a membership soaring past the 10,000 mark, the Local began to direct more of its attention to the mining sector. Under the management of Mining Representative Herb Robinson, a new organizing approach was adopted. The Local was determined to win back territory lost during the slump and the raiding wars earlier in the decade. To do this, Robinson gave his utmost in negotiating settlements free of work stoppages. Mining councils were set up throughout the province, one at each mine, to look after the affairs of the Local and to establish a permanent presence.

As a result of our new philosophy, we were able to negotiate top agreements. You could go as far as to say that the Local is very popular right now in British Columbia. As far as the Mining Division goes, we're very popular with companies and with workers.

HERB ROBINSON

Whether this new move would affect the Local's future stability was open to question in view of the mining

industry's boom-and-bust history. Yet the new initiative certainly encouraged growth as the number of mines under the mining agreement climbed back to eleven.

Still, the construction industry retained top rank as the largest employer of union members, numbering over 6,000, and a busy year in 1979 was the best insurance of job stability for many of these members. As well, the 1970s had been good years in the equipment repair business, with the Local gaining almost complete representation in the province's equipment shops. From 1974 to 1977, negotiators were able to hammer out agreements that included for these members a special tool allowance. The owner-operators also moved a step ahead when they won employer contributions to health and welfare and pension funds in 1977.

Looking back on a hectic ten years, the Local's executive was thankful that wage controls had come and gone, and that effective labour legislation had endured the initial tests of an unsettled economy. The Local had proven to itself and to other trade unionists just how successful a progressive union could be without straying from traditional union philosophy. With its full participation in so many developments, the Local had faced the trial of change and won.



09.04.06

LABOUR DAY PICNIC





TRAINING PLAN ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE AND
HEAVY EQUIPMENT RODEO

.....06.17.06



CHAPTER 8

The Winds of Change

The Winds of Change

Surprisingly, the work picture improved in 1980 and again in early 1981. In fact 1980 was one of the best years on record for the Local, with all seven districts enjoying high employment. Larger construction projects included the Revelstoke Dam, the Coquihalla Highway, coal development in Northeastern B.C., expansion of the Roberts Bank Coal Terminals, copper mining at Highland Valley, molybdenum mining at Kitsault and building construction in Vancouver. As always there were weak spots, particularly in the winter off-season, but these remain a fact of life in the construction industry.

Coal for Japan created many jobs

Of particular note was the Local's growth in the mining industry, mostly hinging on Japan's insatiable appetite for coal. It was this need for coal which opened up Tumbler Ridge's huge reserves which could be mined as open pit. The initial demand was for 6.7 million tons of coal a year, which needed to be dug out of the ground by our members at Tumbler Ridge then transported across Northern B.C. on rail lines whose roadbeds, tunnels and trestles were built by our members. It was then loaded onto ships bound for Japan at Prince Rupert's new Ridley Terminals, which was constructed by our members. There were also plenty of highways, municipal roadwork and infrastructure construction in the area of Tumbler Ridge to accommodate the town which suddenly sprung up to support the coal business. The entire development created 9,000 direct jobs and an additional 20,000 indirect jobs in the service and supply fields.

During the build-out phase of Tumbler Ridge there was plenty of work for our members but predictably, when the plants were all built, the railway tunnels driven, track roadbed laid and highways paved, the work reduced significantly. By 1983 the District 5 representative reported: 'We have at the present time 400 plus working in the area, plus 460 booked in. The work picture looks nothing but bleak for the foreseeable future, unless there is a drastic turn in the economy there probably won't be all that much until 1985.'

J. R. PATTON

In the southeast corner of the province Local 115 was active in a number of open pit coal mines including Greenhills, Granduc, Westfrob, Crows Nest, and several more. There were also mining sites throughout Southern B.C., in the Kamloops area and near Hope, all providing good wages to Local 115 members. But our incursions into the mining area was not without incident, as the Local had to fight off raids from other unions.

We have CAIMAW and the United Mineworkers both attacking our mining agreement and application for certification at Crows Nest Resource Ltd. CAIMAW has never even seen the site and the Mineworkers think they have the exclusive right to every mine in the country. If both of these unions would spend their time and efforts organizing the non-union mines instead of always trying to raid another organized unit, the working man would be a lot better off.

FRED RANDALL

With Northeast Coal providing work building coal terminals in Prince Rupert, the coal operations in the Sparwood area required expanded facilities in the Lower Mainland.

The Roberts Bank Superport was originally dredged out in the early 60s and went through a \$70 million

expansion from 1981 to 1983. More than 13 million cubic meters of material were placed, to create additional space and docking facilities for the coal operation.

Progress continues at Local 115

A few notes of union history here. On January 14, 1981, our members in the Yukon held their first official meeting as the new District 7 of Local 115. At that time the Local had an office in Whitehorse shared with the Tunnel and Rock Workers Union. And at the beginning of the year a dues increase was approved. Members working under shop or industrial agreements would pay two hours pay a month effective June 1, 1981. In 1982, representatives from Local 115 met in Winnipeg to negotiate a reciprocal agreement with other operating engineer locals making the pension plan portable anywhere in Canada.

JA Plan intended to settle disputes

Job shortages elsewhere contributed to a rash of jurisdictional problems in the construction industry. A serious inter-union dispute occurred at Duke Point in Nanaimo in 1979-80. The project involved construction of major shipping and storage facilities for the growing city. Members of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) were working on the construction site, a practice which violated the territory recognized by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) as the jurisdiction of the building trades. The Labour Relations Board ruled that the building trades locals were within their rights to picket the site. As a result of the conflict, the project was



This project at Duke Point on Vancouver Island was the subject of a major jurisdictional dispute in 1980.

shut down for six months with 100 operators out of work. It cost the Local over \$100,000 in strike funds, most of which was eventually reimbursed through assessments on all building trades affiliates.

Competition for jurisdiction also increased between the building trades as some craft unions began introducing industrial units. The purpose of the industrial unit, like the industrial union, is to sweep all the jobs on a construction site into the pan of one union. The Jurisdictional Assignment Plan, intended to smooth out these problems, has not worked well for the Operating Engineers because of the service nature of the operating trade. In the case where a contractor only requires a machine for only a few hours, some will try to do the operating themselves. Referred to as intermittent use, this practice erodes the craft of the operator.

Contributing to this erosion is the rise of project management by the general contractor. Gone are the days of the general agreement under which the project owner would call up a trade union whenever its particular craft was required. The vast majority of construction is now subcontracted by the main contractor, enabling the contractor to play off the individual unions by splitting up the work.

The seeds of dissent lead to the Canadian Federation of Labour

While the relationships between the trades were in a state of flux, so too was the relationship between the craft and industrial unions. Political unity had been the price paid for a falling out with the CLC, from which the IUOE

and twelve other construction unions were suspended in 1981. The building trades unions had never felt fairly treated in the CLC because of a voting structure that discriminates against the organization of the trades. Each union local in the Congress is permitted a fixed number of delegates at each convention. A union with several locals, but with fewer than 100 members, could have as much or more voting power as Local 115 with 12,000 members.

Added to this longstanding problem was the failure by the Congress to prevent the movement of its industrial members into construction work, including the Woodworkers at Duke Point and the Steelworkers at Cominco. Increasingly, the building trades are having their rightful jurisdiction threatened by industrial unions. The CLC has done nothing. The final outrage arose in Quebec, where Louis Laberge of the Quebec Federation of Labour attempted to organize all construction workers in an industrial organization of one big union. This would wipe out the building trade unions, but again, the CLC did nothing. The rift with the CLC culminated with the founding of the Canadian Federation of Labour in March 1982.

We did not like to see a split from the CLC, but certainly the CLC had not been listening to building trades problems. All the people I talk to would prefer that there be one central labour body in Canada, but not at any price. I can see the possibility of merger talks, but I don't think they're going to stop it [the new federation] now. It's a fact of life. They've had their founding convention, they have financing, they've elected a president and they're in business. Other unions have indicated interest, and they're going to grow.

FRED RANDALL

Local 115 gets into cooperatives

In 1980, one industrious operator, Owen Carr, thought of an ideal way to help fellow members of the Local defeat the high cost of consumer items: a purchasing cooperative. Carr approached Business Manager Fred Randall with the idea of founding a cooperative and from there the concept took flight. First operating on a voluntary basis with an office, a telephone and a filing cabinet in the Local's headquarters, Carr soon had to acquire separate premises to support the booming venture.

When it started, the co-op was strictly for Local 115 members. But we soon had other building trades calling us up and saying, in essence, 'What are you bastards doing now?'

OWEN CARR

The purchasing cooperative was open to all union workers and had a membership of over 100,000. Wholesale purchasing enabled discounts of up to 50 percent off regular retail prices, encouraging a monthly turnover of inventory worth \$300,000.

At the same time, the Local's board of trustees began investing the \$70 million banked in the Pension Fund, reflecting a policy of diversification of the Fund's finances. Among the major investments were office buildings in Prince George, Vancouver, and Kamloops, and a large dairy farm near Chilliwack. In 1981-82, the first product of the Operating Engineers Co-operative Association, two twin apartment towers in Burnaby, were opened for occupancy. Operating engineers and their families have the opportunity of first chance at cooperative membership. This enabled them to enter into coop-



The twin towers of the Alex Fraser Bridge which spans the Fraser River from New Westminster to Delta, are shown supporting four cranes which are carefully filling in the gaps. The Alex Fraser was the longest cable stay bridge in the world when it was built in 1985.

erative home ownership at a cost well below the inflated market prices.

Construction Industry Rehabilitation Fund

In line with changing social attitudes, the Local gave its support to another pioneering idea in 1980, a construction industry rehabilitation trust fund for trade members with alcohol and drug dependency problems. Allowances for the Fund have been written into all union contracts since then. In the Fund's first year, 68 building trade unionists were able to use it to help rebuild their lives and defeat an affliction not uncommon to the transitory construction worker's life.

Another social development gradually affecting the trade is the entry of women into the construction industry. Through the use of the Local's training program and vocational training schools, more and more women are climbing into the operator's seat or joining other sectors of the industry. Bert Thring, an operator on Northern Vancouver Island, has three good arguments to support the value of women in the trade; his three daughters are all operators and have all operated the giant 170-ton shovels at Utah Mines near Port Hardy.

Mike Parr moves to WCB

Management of the Local has moved onward as well. In March 1980, after 28 years working for the Union and more than 17 years of holding the Local's highest elected office, Business Manager Mike Parr resigned to accept a position as a commissioner of the Workers' Compensation Board. The Local had grown and matured under Parr's guidance. It had emerged as a widely respected, progressive organization as a result of hard work by many players, but it was Parr's management skill that focused all of that energy. The longevity of his term was due to a large base of steady supporters within the Union, a major accomplishment in an era when leaders are constantly challenged by bitterness and indifference.

To honour Parr's work for the Union, a student bursary for sons and daughters of union members was established in his name. A pre-existing international bursary, named in honour of late International President Joseph Delaney, is open to union members' sons and daughters throughout Canada. A second bursary, the Cal Callahan Memorial Bursary, is available to any child of a member working in pipeline construction. Names of bursary

winners are listed at the end of this book.

Recording Secretary Fred Randall was temporarily appointed by the executive board to fill the business manager's chair until the upcoming 1980 elections. Randall surrendered his aldermanic seat with the Municipality of Burnaby to devote his full attention to the Local and was elected that summer by a majority of the membership. Jack Whittaker was re-elected president; Jim Biddle became vice president; and Tony Tennessy became recording secretary. In 1982, Biddle resigned from his elected position after 17 years with the Local to replace Cliff Parker as international representative. Parker retired after serving the Operating Engineers as local and international representative since 1952.

Steady Growth with Mining Operators

Acceptance of mining operators into the Local was initially contested, but in the end they were permitted to join. Mining operators contributed to nearly doubling the Local's membership in the 1980s. Those who still believe that mining has less to offer than construction should look to the mining industry for the very latest in technology; to the world's largest tractor, a Cat 522Kw D10, featuring 700 horsepower and weighing 90 tons, recently introduced at several B.C. mines in the early '80s. And those who think that equipment technology has reached a plateau should remember the lessons of the past.

The equipment is going to get bigger and faster. The biggest rig I have is a Grove. My material is three years old and the

Canada Place is really four buildings in one, with a cruise ship terminal, a convention centre, a hotel and an office building all carefully integrated into one plan. The complex opened to the world in 1986 when the convention centre was the Canada Pavilion at Expo 86. To the right of the cruise ships you can see the piles in the water where Local 115 members are busy building the convention centre expansion.



Grove is a 140-ton machine; that's a hydraulic. A fellow I ran into was at an equipment expo down in Texas. He said there was a crane there that was 272 tons and I said 'That's impossible. It can't be. You've got to be mistaken.' I just didn't believe him. But that's within a two or three-year period. So where is it going to go from here? It's got to get bigger and longer, with more booms and more capacity. What they're doing is assembling more material onsite. It's unbelievable.

BILL WRIGHT

Bill Bennett changes the tone with labour

The '80s also brought about the most dramatic shift in the fortunes of B.C.'s construction trades since the boom following the Second World War. The new, fairer Labour Code introduced by Dave Barrett's NDP Government still stood, but Bill Bennett's Social Credit Government was slowly whittling away at labour's rights. Everything was on the table to be changed. Commentators attacked the size of government, the budget, the funding on education, health and social assistance. There were demands being made to dismantle programs which labour considered fundamental to a just society.

The building trade unions were a particular target of both the government and conservative commentators in the press. The 'right to work' philosophy was making inroads in the construction sector like never before. Following the 1983 election Bennett introduced the

Restraint Program which produced major cuts to public services and threatened teachers and other public service workers.

Operation Solidarity, a coalition of labour unions and community and advocacy groups, was formed in July 1983 to fight the Austerity Program introduced by Bill Bennett's Social Credit Government. It organized one of the largest political demonstrations in B.C. history. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in rallies and marches to oppose government policies they believed undermined workers' rights and gutted social services. The government responded by holding all-night legislative sessions to force through its program.

All I can say is that some people may believe that Bennett is sincere but I have no cause to believe anything he may utter due to his profound mutterings in the past.

Frank Slyman.

By November of 1983 teachers and public employees

were on strike and Solidarity was planning a general strike. But a split developed between factions of the movement after Bennett agreed to back off somewhat and make minor changes to his restraint program. The general strike was called off and Operation Solidarity faded into history. But the tension remained high between labour, management, government and the rising non-union sector.

Pennyfarthing – The beginning of the Downward Spiral

Then Pennyfarthing came along and changed the style of construction labour more profoundly than anything in the previous 40 years. Pennyfarthing was a high-rise project in Vancouver's False Creek which began as a union job. But the second phase was awarded to Kerkhoff Construction, one of the province's more aggressive and high-profile emerging non-union construction compa-

“Poor Jimmy Pattison, the chairman of Expo. Every time he has negotiated an agreement with the building trades unions for labour peace during construction of the fair, his own directors have shot him down.”

-Vancouver Sun

nies. The decision to switch to non-union labour was like a red flag in the face of the building trades. They realized right away that this decision was a defining moment for union construction in the province. The project was quickly halted by building trades pickets, including members from Local 115; the demonstration lasted for three weeks. In the end the courts intervened to end the impasse and supported the change in contractor. It was a bitter defeat for labour, and it foreshadowed more bad news to come.

Expo 86— a union battleground

On top of the defeat at Pennyfarthing, the building trades received another shock on the Expo 86 site where B.C. was getting ready to greet the world. Expo was slated to be all union work. The building trades had cut a deal with Expo czar Jimmy Pattison to have the entire fair site built by union forces. But the Social Credit Government scuttled that agreement, leading Pattison to recommend that the fair be canceled to avoid a catastrophic labour impasse.

The foolhardiness of the Expo 86 board of directors is something wonderful to behold. It is almost as though the board wanted the fair to fail.

Poor Jimmy Pattison, the chairman of Expo. Every time he has negotiated an agreement with the building trades unions for labour peace during construction of the fair, his own directors have shot him down. Every time he kicks the ball at the middle of the goal, the board moves the goalposts.

Poor Roy Gautier, President of the Building Trades Council. Every time he makes a concession to cut a deal on Expo's use of non-union contractors, the Expo directors throw it back in his face. Are they mad, or are they just following orders from someone who is?

EDITORIAL, VANCOUVER SUN, JULY 14, 1984

Instead, the government introduced Bill 28, the Labour Code Amendment Act, which took dead aim at construction unions. One of its provisions allowed the government to unilaterally declare a work site an Economic Development Project, which would mean the unions' non-affiliation clauses could not be used. The Bennett Government activated that clause for the Expo Site. The result was that some of the major buildings on the site were built union, but most of the smaller jobs were done

non-union. The non-union side gained valuable experience from this work, which provided them with the foothold of experience they needed to bid into larger projects in the years that followed.

These are the steps to right-to-work as I see it. Time will only tell if this happens. I hope not.

GARY KROEKER, ASSISTANT BUSINESS
MANAGER

Business Manager Fred Randall reported that for those members who worked in construction during 1984, the average hours worked were 877 for each member, a clear measure of the tough times which were the reality in the construction industry.

The Vander Zalm government was antagonistic to unions

Bill Bennett retired and Bill Vander Zalm took over the helm of government, leading a large contingent of anti-union Socred candidates to victory in the election of 1987. The Vander Zalm Government quickly introduced Bill 19 which attacked labour, particularly the building trades. In the face of massive opposition from labour including strong leadership from Local 115, the government finally backed off on some of the more onerous provisions of Bill 19, particularly provisions which would destroy the union hiring hall system.

But the rest of Bill 19, along with the Industrial



In 1978, BC Hydro bought four large turbines from Russia for the generating station at the Peace Glen Dam near Hudson's Hope, B.C. The turbines were transferred from ship to barge, then to the trailer shown, which traveled over specially built roads and provincial highways to the dam site. The special trailer took four cats hauling and a truck pushing to make way. A special crew of operating engineers was formed to move the turbines.



Big trucks move big loads on the Garcia Lake Project of the Coquihalla Connector in 2006.

Relations Council which it created, was still anti-building trades. During the last few years of the '80s Bill 19 had fostered the growth of the non-union sector in construction. It also placed serious roadblocks in the path of union organizing drives, making it even more difficult for unions to fight back.

The Rise of the Rats

Among the roadblocks challenging unions in construction was the rise of the Rat Unions, most notably Canadian Iron and Steel established by Frank Nolan, a former official of Ironworkers Local 712, and the General

Workers Union led by Rocco Salituro.

A third and more pervasive member of the Rat Union group is the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), a wall-to-wall union which has wide operations in B.C. and across the western provinces. A number of years ago CLAC managed to achieve recognition as a union by the B.C. Labour Relations Board, though they are denied that status in Alberta, Ontario and several other provinces. These organizations were not welcome within the house of labour because they did not appear to serve the interests of their members. Other unions considered them management-oriented organizations designed to subvert legislation.

For instance, employment standards legislation is bind-

ing on all workers unless they are represented by a union, in which case a collective agreement can vary some of the Act's provisions. This allows a union on a remote site, for instance, to work a 10-hour day at straight time in exchange for a three-day weekend to return home. Rat Unions used this loophole to avoid paying overtime, to vary the hours of work, to set aside minimum standards and to freeze wages. They rarely have union meetings, there are no functional committees dealing with grievances, safety issues or bargaining, and their wage packages are lower than union-negotiated rates. Their members are often uncertified.

The Rat Unions fit nicely into the operational objectives of the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA), which was the major apologist and lobbyist for the 'open shop' non-union side of the construction industry. It made powerful alliances with business organizations and the free enterprise political parties in B.C., and has been successful at establishing itself as a media spokesperson for the construction industry.

These forces — governments hostile to labour, the Rat Unions, the ICBA and the growing number of construction firms dedicated to the principle of 'right to work' — came together in the '80s. Their purpose was to compete in construction by keeping wages as low as possible, thereby driving union contractors out of business.

In 1990, Merit Shop proponents held a conference in Banff, Alberta and more than 800 building trades members from every province in Canada attended the

one-day protest in a national show of force not seen before or since.

But their movement continued to grow. The relentless pressure on unions from governments, the mass media, and corporations left the labour movement reeling in the late 80s. Downsizing and layoffs brought a significant decline in union membership. In the United States, a similar pattern of events reduced union membership as low as 11 per cent of all wage earners. Declines in Canada were not as steep, primarily because of a more effectively organized public-service sector. However, the declines were sharp enough for media “experts” to predict the total collapse of the labour movement.

Tough times for Local 115

And our Local Union was equally vulnerable to these forces. With the exception of a few bright spots, employment declined during this period and in February 1984 5,000 of our members booked in. In May of that year the trustees of our Welfare Plan had to introduce a Mini-Plan, allowing members to self-pay their coverage for the Medical Plan, Extended Health Benefits and Group Life Insurance, with the option that they could re-join the Full Plan when they returned to steady employment. The Plan lost more than \$1 million two years in a row, forcing the Plan to increase rates and decrease coverage, particularly in the Dental Plan. On the bright side, the Pension Plan announced a pension increase of 4.5 per cent in May, 1984, reflecting the increase in the consumer price index. The following year the Plan was able to announce improvements for members taking early retirement.

To help make ends meet at the Union Office, all business representatives including the business manager and officers in the Training, Welfare and Pension Plan Offices took a pay cut of four hours a week.

In June, 1985 Business Manager Fred Randall was elected as a trustee of the IUOE in Washington, DC. In 1986 former business manager Mike Parr helped estab-

lish a retirees club, and attracted considerable initial attention from retired 115 members and their wives.

The LRB's PACCAR Decision

In 1986, the B.C. Labour Relations Board handed down a ruling that became known as PACCAR, which had the effect of allowing unionized contractors to pretty well set their own working conditions and wages when a collective agreement expires and there is no strike vote. As a consequence all construction unions were sure to take strike votes before their collective agreements expired on May 1, 1986. Later that year the building trades managed to sign a collective agreement with CLRA which contained little in the way of improvements to wages and benefits, and minor concessions to contract language.

International Unionism fights back with Union Yes

In 1988, in response to continuing high unemployment particularly in the construction sector, Local 115 participated fully in the Union Yes Advertising and Publicity Campaign initially launched by the AFL-CIO. The campaign featured the words Union Yes with a big check mark and the Union's logo, distributed as stickers and signs all over the province. The objective was to convince everyone of the wisdom of creating and maintaining good union jobs and wages as a means of contributing to a vibrant economy.

Organizing in Waste Management

The Union continued to sign collective agreements in the waste management industry. Companies like Laidlaw, Tricil, Fibre-Can, Johnny-on-the-Spot, Big John Rentals, Wastech, BFI, Kedon and several others. As well, the Local signed first collective agreements with several ready-mix companies in conjunction with the Teamsters.

That's a 165-ton American placing a prefab concrete slab on a truck bound for the Broadmead Water Reservoir in Victoria in April of 1982.



Ridley Terminals in Prince Rupert was built by operating engineers in the '80s. North-east Coal provided a lot of jobs for Local 115 members during the 20 years it was active.



We burn the mortgage

And a momentous event occurred March 16, 1991 at the General Membership Meeting when the officers of Local 115 formally burned the mortgage on their Burnaby headquarters building. The building, which opened in July, 1971 was now owned by the members free and clear.

In June of 1991, the Training Plan concluded negotiations with the provincial government to have them pay all the costs for the Mobile Crane Operator Apprenticeship Course. The three-year apprenticeship included eight weeks of technical training at the Haney Training Facilities in the first year, and four additional weeks in years two and three. By 1993 Mobile Crane Operator achieved recognition as a Red Seal trade.

Major projects we built in the 80s

The first leg of the SkyTrain System began construction in 1983, providing many jobs for our members in raising the guideway and working underground in the

tunnel section going under the city core to the waterfront. The SkyTrain System was a showcase piece of rapid transit infrastructure which was rushed to completion in time for Expo 86, which provided many thousands of hours of work for our members.

The huge Canada Place Development was completed, with the steel in the hotel portion finished two months ahead of schedule. Another group of our members had several good years of work on CP Rail's Tunnel Project near the Rogers Pass. The work involved two tunnels costing more than \$600 million between July 1982 until they were put in service in September, 1987. The tunnel work used a tunnel boring machine to drill through the rock.

In 1985, serious highway construction was under way on the Coquihalla Project between Hope and Merritt. Contractors signatory to collective agreements with Local 115 won many of the bids, which put our members to work on this project leading up to its opening in 1986. But across the province road construction was going

more and more to the non-union sector who brought low-wage workers in from Alberta, a practice abetted by the provincial government's policies.

One of the Union's major achievements in 1985 was the completion of the Bastion Hotel in Nanaimo, which was jointly owned by pension plans of the Operating Engineers, Woodworkers, Labourers and Electrical Workers. The project created badly needed construction jobs in Nanaimo, in addition to the 130 permanent jobs after completion.

One of the more dramatic jobs undertaken by Local 115 members in 1990 was the laying of a gas line to Vancouver Island. The pipe was welded ashore then pulled onto a large reel aboard the *Stena Apache*, a ship specially designed for laying pipe on the ocean bottom.

In 1990, the Cassiar Connector Project was completed by building trades union contractors after the original bidders – a non-union group – ran into trouble and fell badly behind schedule.

CHAPTER 9

A Decade of Confrontation

Labour put new energy into electoral politics and was rewarded with virtually annihilating the Social Credit Government of Rita Johnson, who took over from the scandal-plagued Bill Vander Zalm. The new labour-friendly NDP Government of Mike Harcourt came to power in October, 1991 and quickly brought in a new labour code to do away with the worst excesses of the Bennett era.

Among the MLAs elected with Harcourt was our business manager Fred Randall, who retired from his union post to devote his full efforts to his role as MLA. Assistant Business Manager Gary Kroeker was elected by the table officers to take over as business manager.

After an initial period in which they savoured their landslide victory over the Liberals, The NDP Government began to struggle for public support under the onslaught of a very committed business coalition ranged against them, and some serious fiscal and economic challenges. The new government developed a Fair Wage Act for government-funded projects such as the Island Highway, and increased vigilance under the Employment Standards Act. These and other measures brought some semblance of fairness and balance to labour legislation in

B.C., representing significant movement toward a more level playing field for the building trades in their battle for fairness and justice in the workplace. Even though the fair wage policy was up to 20 per cent lower than our union collective agreements, we were confident that our more efficient and productive members could be competitive in bidding against non-union contractors.

But the non-union sector continued to break new ground. TNL, sometimes in joint venture with Ledcor, were grabbing up industrial work in the North. They began with a West Coast Energy Plant at Taylor in the early 90s. They followed that with a Louisiana Pacific Mill in Chetwynd and other projects in the Cariboo. Construction of these large industrial plants, often in remote parts of the province, had once been the cornerstone of the industrial sector work picture for many of the building trades, including the operating engineers. These industrial sector jobs were covered by separate collective agreements which called for richer pay rates and conditions of work which took into consideration the unique characteristics of working in remote sites. Now, with non-union companies successfully bidding on these projects, the building trades' iron grip on industrial work

was gone.

In the winter of '93 TNL was awarded another West Coast Energy Project, the Pine River Gas Plant. Ledcor had a piece of that project as well, and both companies had agreements with CISIWU and GWU. Local 115 and most of the building trades saw this project as a significant one, and launched a major organizing drive to unseat the Rat Unions and win certification of the more than 600 men working on the project.

Their challenge was to unseat another 'union' in a certification vote, knowing full well that the Rat Unions and the companies would use every legal trick in the book to fight them. The Rat Unions organized on a wall-to-wall basis representing all trades, so the building trades had to coordinate their activities to sign up members from all the trade groups in order to force a certification vote. Though the building trades signed a lot of workers, in the end they lost the vote.

Nexgen in Port Alberni turns its back on the building trades

But a bigger battle was looming. For generations MacMillan Bloedel had used with building trades contractors for all their construction and expansion work in mills and other plants on the Island and up the Coast. They had a Nexgen Paper Plant being built in Port Alberni and a number of experienced building trades contractors bid the project. To everyone's surprise, the administration building of their Nexgen Plant was awarded to TNL, even though a contractor signed with the building trades submitted a lower bid. When they were challenged on this decision to award the work to a



Difficult highway construction alongside very unstable cliffs between Oyama and Winfield, B.C.

Dawson Construction moved in a new asphalt plant for its roadbuilding contract near Falkland.



non-union firm MB announced a new policy favouring open shop contractors and low-bid policies.

The building trades, with substantial leadership from Local 115, responded with waves of members traveling from the Lower Mainland and elsewhere to picket and protest the loss of this important work. Arrests, court appearances and significant fines were levied in the battle, but the unions stood firm.

It must be said that our members ... have dug the original foundations for many of MacMillan Bloedel's facilities, erected the steel and maintained much of their equipment with members employed by the equipment dealers. We have kept them running. Now, because of a downturn in employment, they take the position that whoever can get workers to work for low pay and no benefits or security will get the job.

GARY KROEKER, BUSINESS MANAGER

Through the last months of '94 and into '95 Local 115

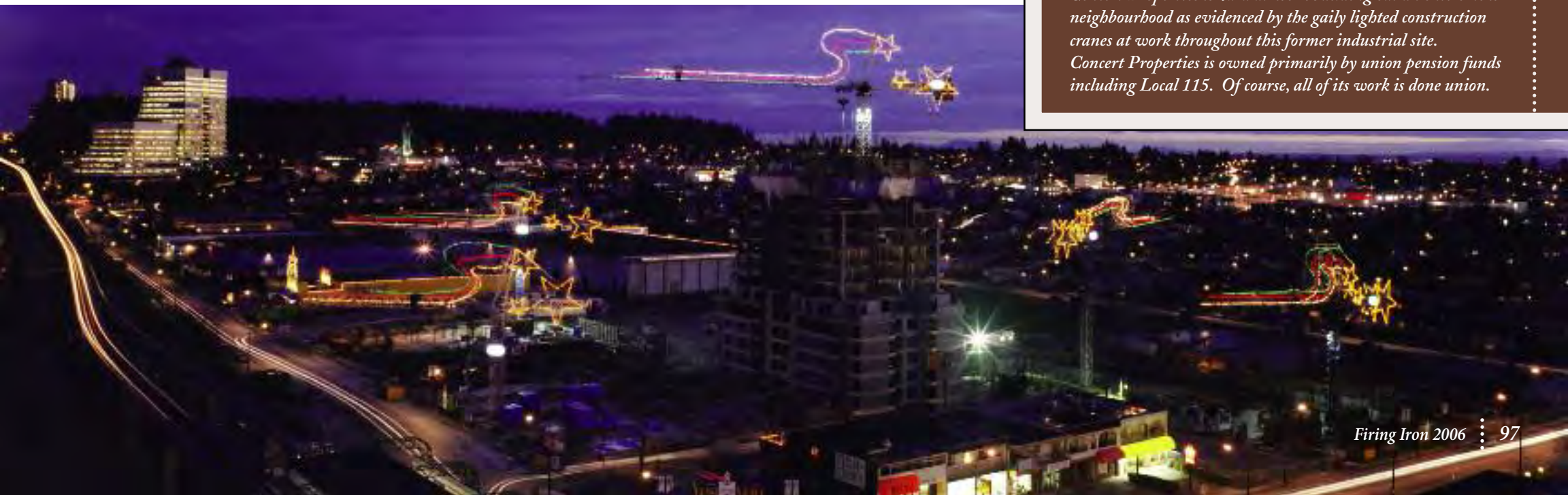
and other members of the building trades picketed and demonstrated to draw the public's attention to the injustice of the situation. In the end the building trades prevailed, and secured an agreement with MacMillan Bloedel for a portion of the work on this project. However, the incident served to remind the building trades that from now on in, no work could be taken for granted in its battle with the non-union forces.

The long road back

Since 1986 when the Pennyfarthing and Expo 86 controversies swirled around the construction industry, there was a slow but steady move by purchasers of

construction to go with the low bid. Non-union contractors took advantage of a full bag of tricks to use obvious weaknesses in the bidding process. They cut their labour costs to the bone by bid-shopping, by hiring unqualified workers, by short-changing on wages, overtime and benefits, and by sky-high charges for 'extras' which resulted from rigid interpretations of the initial contract. Vancouver City Council, under the leadership of then-Mayor Gordon Campbell, swept aside its Fair Wage Policy in favour of a strict low-bid philosophy. The building trades protested in the strongest terms and appeared with pickets before city council on several occasions, to

It's Christmas at Collingwood Village around 1995, and Concert Properties is hard at work building out an entire new neighbourhood as evidenced by the gaily lighted construction cranes at work throughout this former industrial site. Concert Properties is owned primarily by union pension funds including Local 115. Of course, all of its work is done union.





Serious snow calls for a serious piece of machinery, such as this snowblower attached to a front end loader clearing the way high up on the Coquihalla Highway.

no avail.

Enabling and Market Recovery programs

In an attempt to stop the slide of work to the non-union sector many building trades unions began to 'enable' jobs — cut a special labour rate with a bidder to enable him to under-bid non-union contractors. But other building trades did not participate in enabling, in the belief that a worker was worth his full rate.

Building trades who had enabled jobs to get the work often found themselves disarmed at the bargaining table by employers who pointed out that enabling demonstrated that their wage rates were artificially high. Over the previous 20 years wages in the construction sector had not kept pace with other sectors of the economy.

Instead, other building trades developed several styles of market recovery program where the union would selectively subsidize wages on a given project out of a special fund, which would then allow the union contractor to under-bid non-union shops. The strategy causes chaos in the bidding process, because the non-union shops could no longer predict the bid of a union contractor.

In 1992, the Local established a Market Recovery Program funded by member assessments, which had good success on smaller jobs. But the breakthrough on large jobs required much more effort and in many cases it required working in concert with other trades.

The Treachery at Hanlon

In 1995, Local 115 received a rude shock. The Piledrivers Union, an affiliate of the Provincial Council of Carpenters, signed a collective agreement with the employees of Agra Marine (Hanlon) on a wall-to-wall basis, meaning they represented all trades. The company has previously resisted efforts by Local 115 and the Piledrivers to organize. The two unions had met with employees in the industry to lay out a special market recovery plan, which would lead to that sector being unionized with both locals. But when the Piledrivers Union moved to certify the workers at Hanlon on their own, Local 115 considered this a treacherous move. This was the start of a long period of animosity between the Operating Engineers and the Carpenters Union in B.C.

As a result of their certification at Hanlon, in retrospect we should never have trusted them. However we did. We make no apology for this. Beware, Mr. Carpenter.

GARY KROEKER

Local 115 went through tough times over the last 15 years, they fared much better than most of the building trades unions. For one thing, a significant portion of our members work in industrial settings with solid, long-term employment including mechanics, waste management jobs, mining and many others. And the Union has changed with the times. We now have a much more active organizing program, and are targeting workers in jobs far distant from the traditional work of operating engineers. We have also refined our working relationship with our contractors, in the realization that it is in our

mutual interest to collaborate to get more work.

Controversy swirls around Local 115

During the 90s Local 115 was never far from controversy. In 1997, Local 115 held an organizing meeting for the 15 employees at McRae Waste Disposal at a restaurant near McRae's headquarters in Coquitlam. One of the union organizers became aware that there was a listening device in a flower pot in the room. They called RCMP who investigated, and the Union also filed an unfair labour practice complaint with the Labour Relations Board. A restaurant employee later testified that she spotted McRae Disposal's sales manager planting the bug prior to the meeting. The Union alleged this action was part of a larger scheme of threats and intimidation of employees as the organizing drive was under way. Later that year, when this controversy was starting to die down, McRae was hauled back before the Board to face charges they invited the General Workers Union, a so-called Rat Union, to raid Local 115. The Union charged that the company wanted to displace Local 115 in favour of a 'union' with a softer collective agreement.

The following year Assistant Business Manager Brian

Cochrane was in the news because he applied to attend a business summit organized to discuss the declining B.C. economy. B.C. Business Council President Jerry Lampert refused admission to Cochrane, saying the meeting was for business people only. Cochrane pointed out his Local's pension fund had millions invested in a number of businesses, but that argument failed to impress the business community. Cochrane was turned away, along with such prominent interested parties as then-Premier Glen Clark, then-Finance Minister Joy MacPhail, and then-Opposition Leader Gordon Campbell.

And the Local was raided in Whitehorse by the Public Service Alliance of Canada, in contravention of agree-

ments between the CLC and the Canadian Federation of Labour, of which Local 115 was a member. The raid occurred at the Whitehorse Transit Department, where Local 115 represented 25 employees. Of course, the Union protested in the loudest terms to the CLC and forced PSAC to back off.

A Centennial Celebration

Less controversial but more noteworthy were the celebrations of the IUOE's 100th anniversary in 1996. The Local Union commemorated the occasion by refurbishing and installing the Insley cable-controlled shovel outside the main entrance of the Local on Ledger in Burnaby. The IUOE was formed as the National Union of Steam Engineers on December 7, 1896. Local 115 was formed in 1931 with the amalgamation of IUOE 884 and Local 46A of the International Brotherhood of Steamshovel and Dredgemen.

Projects during the 90s

Operating engineers always did a lot of the pipeline



The Millennium SkyTrain tracks were cleverly tucked beside the train track in the Grandview Cut as it traversed the city of Vancouver from 12th and Nanaimo to Great Northern Way and Clark Drive.



The log barge Rivtow Hercules towed by the ocean-going tug Captain Bob loads logs off the water along B.C.'s rugged coastline. Operating engineers have been manning log barges for 50 years.

work through B.C., and in 1993 more than 150 members were working in the Cranbrook-Fernie area where the grades sometimes reached an unprecedented 17 per cent.

Our Local Union lobbied hard for a project agreement for construction of the Island Highway, and we were successful. The agreement provided wages and benefits which exceeded the Fair Wage Policy, though they were lower than our regular collective agreements.

Roberts Bank, which was originally dredged and developed in the 60s to transport coal to Japan, was expanded to accommodate more coal ships. In 1997, the spit of land jutting into The Strait of Georgia near the Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal was expanded again to add container loading capabilities to the facility.

And at the turn of the century, Local 115 members benefited from work on the new Millennium SkyTrain Line, a major project in the Lower Mainland which ran from Commercial Drive to New Westminster via Lougheed Highway.

Construction Industry Review Panel

Toward the end of its mandate the NDP Government appointed a Construction Industry Review Panel co-chaired by two respected labour mediators, Stan Lanyon and Steven Kelleher. In 1998, the panel made a number of recommendations for amendments to the Labour Relations Code designed to address some of the unique needs of the construction industry.

The panel's recommendations included:

Newly organized crafts in the ICI sector would inherit the standard collective agreement; the standard raiding period would be July and August, when the largest number of workers are typically on the job; ratification votes for voluntary recognition agreements; and a larger role for the Industry Training Commission related to trades training and certification.

The government followed up by introducing reforms to bring bargaining in the ICI sector in line with the rest of Canada. The amendments minimized craft jurisdictional disputes in the construction industry and streamlined the collective bargaining process for newly certified craft bargaining units. Under the legislation, new craft bargaining units will be covered automatically by negotiated standard agreements in the ICI sector. But within a few years these improvements were largely neutralized by changes brought in by the new Liberal Government of Gordon Campbell.

Agra Foundations working in Vernon on an industrial site installing wic drains using the vibro-mandrel system. (2006)



CHAPTER 10

A Promising New Century

In May of 2001, the NDP was wracked by the Fast Ferries Scandal and was unable to recover from the demise of their leader Glen Clark after he became entangled in a legal proceeding related to allegations he accepted a bribe of free construction work on his home. They went into a disastrous election with Ujjal Dosanjh as their leader. They lost all but two seats in the legislature, and Premier Gordon Campbell lost no time at all in dismantling anything which had an NDP stamp on it, stopping short only at the Agricultural Land Reserve and the Insurance Corporation of B.C.

He instituted a referendum on Indian Land Claims; he ripped up a contract negotiated by the Hospital Employees Union; he gutted government programs and reduced services; he sold off half of BC Hydro; he instituted some changes to the Labour Code to make it tougher to organize in the construction industry, and he cut corporate taxes and taxes paid by the top income bracket; he gutted apprenticeship programs, discontinued union representation on thousands of government agen-

cies and committees, and served notice that business forces were now in charge in B.C. Under the Liberals, the low-wage philosophy gained a death grip on construction.

Too many multi-million dollar project have been lost to union contractors by a fraction of a per cent. Only a few thousand dollars separated the union bid from the non-union. Non-union contractors pick up bids knowing they have unfettered freedom to cut wage rates of their crews and rely on a few key hands (often high skilled union trained workers) to get the job done. This attitude has to change.

GARY KROEKER

There has been a change, but not in the direction of fair wages and open cost accounting on public projects. The Liberal Government has now adopted the newest darling of the free enterprise set, the P3 Project. P3s deepen the mystery of construction costs for public enterprises by removing all reporting requirements and audit trails. Business secrets now trump public accountability.

Cut taxes then cut services to pay for them

In the spring of 2002, after the new government cut taxes for the rich and corporations, they began to cut services and add fees to pay for them. Emotions boiled over after the government added increases to the Medical Service Plan, hitting hard at working people. Unions organized rallies in Vancouver and Victoria which

included building trades, teachers, hospital workers, public sector unions, seniors groups, university students, forestry workers, anti-poverty groups and others. Local 115 members participated in large numbers to send the government a message.

Though the government will not change its course, it will have to listen to the people. It looks as if they may be backing off on some issues already. Hopefully they are getting the message that we do not want B.C. to be a low wage/high unemployment province.

BRIAN COCHRANE

History will judge the total impact of the Liberal Government on the building trades sector with a perspective of history. It is clear, however, that the core strength of this Union is what has caused it to prevail through extremely tough times. It is clear that the Union is able to withstand the toughest attacks imaginable.


As the Liberal Government works its way through its second mandate buoyed by an economy which is producing an embarrassment of riches for new Finance Minister Carole Taylor, the work situation is the best it has ever been; in spite of the continuing strength of the non-union sector, our members are once again fully employed and we're busy training and upgrading anyone we can to provide crews to our contractors.

Our work during the 2000s

The project of the decade in terms of public impact



Operators hoist a new section of decking into the Lions Gate Bridge. This project won awards for totally replacing the roadway of a suspension bridge while still in daily service, the first time this feat had been achieved.



Pipe pilings are being set in the Fraser River in September 2006 in preparation for building the kilometer-long cable stayed Golden Ears Bridge which will link Langley with Maple Ridge.

was the refit of the deck of the Lions Gate Bridge, which was completed without serious incident and while maintaining traffic flows during the daylight hours. The project was an engineering and logistical miracle, requiring the most exacting skills. The crew needed to detach, remove and drop the old section and collect, raise and install a new section of bridge deck overnight, without a hitch, and without holding up traffic in the early morning.

Another major project which has occupied our members includes the expansion to the Trade and Convention Centre which will add 1.2 million square feet of space to the city's convention meeting and exhibit space, including a new exhibit hall containing 225,000 of clear-span space. Much of the centre is being built on piles driven into Burrard Inlet, which has provided many hours of work for Local 115 members. Total cost of the project, to be completed by 2008, is \$565 million. Its first role will be to act as the media centre during the

2010 Olympics.

Both Vanterm and Centerm in the port on Vancouver's Burrard Inlet are being expanded to make use of new technology including rubber tire gantry cranes, to enable the more efficient use of the space surrounding container crane facilities. This work will continue into 2010, and will be integrated with expansion work at Roberts Bank to expand container traffic.

The work at Roberts Bank will increase capacity from the current 900,000 20-foot containers (TEU) to 2.2 million TEUs by adding a third ship berth, then adding three additional ship berths as part of the Terminal 2 Expansion. Local 115 members will have ample dredging, piledriving and crane work in this port expansion.

Though parts of the RAV Line Rapid Transit Project were initially contracted to firms represented by unions of convenience, operating engineers will get their share of the work on this ambitious tunneling and excavation project.

As well, initial contracts have been let on the Golden Ears Bridge, which will put many Local 115 members to work. Additionally, the federal and provincial governments have just announced construction of the portion of the Gateway Project involving the South Perimeter Road linking Highway 1 to DeltaPort and the US border. This project will produce years of work in bridge and highway construction. Additional phases of this ambitious project include twinning the Port Mann Bridge and widening Highway 1 to Vancouver.

The Southern Pipeline Project saw over 500 operating engineers at work in 2002 laying a pipe 303 kilometers from Yahk to Oliver. The project is budgeted at \$376 million.

In 2001, the airport was in the midst of expanding the terminal facility, and re-paving taxiways and runways in the largest repair program since the airport was paved 30 years ago.

The Brilliant Dam Upgrade Project at Castlegar requires the removal of 450,000 cubic meters of rock to create an access road and excavate for a power house. And 420 meters of tunnels will be dug for vehicle access and control of water flow through a newly constructed power house in this \$167 million project.

The equipment we use

Best epitomizing the progress of the Local Union down through the years is the equipment which the members operate, maintain and repair. Few trades have been so drastically altered by technology as that of the operating engineer. Within one man's lifetime, the basic motive power in construction has been transformed from four hooves and a harness to hydraulics and pushbuttons. With characteristic foresight, early steam engineers,

The artist's rendering of the Golden Ears Bridge shows a spectacular ribbon crossing the Fraser River between Langley and Maple Ridge. The kilometer-long cable stayed bridge and its approach roadways will provide many hours of work for many operating engineers.



despite misgivings, permitted gas and diesel operators to join the Union. If they had not done so, the International Union of Operating Engineers would have certainly died long ago. Next, it was the cat skimmers who swelled the ranks of Local 115 in the 1940s and 1950s. It has been the subsequent development of equipment with greater capacity and mobility that has allowed surface mining to develop.

Organizing work continues

The Union's organizing efforts continued through the first decade of the New Millennium, with some remarkable successes. Local 115 successfully raided CLAC at Bilfinger Berger's work site on the North Shore where they are driving tunnels for the water system upgrade between the Capilano and Seymour Dams. Those workers are now represented by the OEs, the Electrical Workers and the Labourers. When the \$600 million project is finished water from Capilano will be pumped 7.5 kilometers through a four-meter tunnel to a water filtration plant at Seymour. It will then flow back to Capilano through a second tunnel to be distributed to the city. The tunnels were cut by two tunnel boring machines which worked for roughly 18 months to complete the job.

2006 – our 75th year

The year 2006 will go down in this Local Union's memory as one of the greatest in its illustrious history. That was the year Local 115 celebrated its 75th birthday, a significant accomplishment for a great organization.

The big event of the diamond jubilee year was the inspiring Gala Jubilee Ball at the Westin Hotel in Downtown Vancouver. The ball was attended by 1,100 of our members, contractor representatives, IUOE delegates

from across Canada & the U.S. who were here attending the Canada Conference, and from Washington, D.C., our General President, Vincent J. Giblin. General President Giblin noted how inspired he was by the celebration, and told the crowd that Local 115 was one of the star locals in the IUOE family.

The Local also drew great crowds out for its other major public event, the Annual Open House Heavy Equipment Rodeo in June at the Training Centre out in Maple Ridge. More than 1,000 people attended that day. Many members took advantage of the opportunity to explain the operation of heavy equipment to their children and grandchildren.

On Labour Day, a large number of members and their families helped celebrate the Diamond Jubilee by attending the Labour Day Picnic in Confederation Park in Burnaby. It was a great way for the entire Local 115 family to celebrate the Local's anniversary.

Aside from the anniversary, there were a number of other accomplishments as the Local rounded out its 75th year. The Local ratified a series of collective agreements covering all aspects of our work. Those new agreements secured the wage and benefits packages into the year 2010 and beyond, giving members the comfort of knowing that they and their families have a secure future.

Through those years Local 115 members made a major contribution to building this province. Our stamp is on every bridge, hospital, university, dock, industrial plant, dam, shopping centre, officer tower, hotel and any other project of significance built in B.C. over the past 75 years and more. We have every right to be proud of that legacy.

And we looked farther afield to new sectors of industry to organize. As one example, we now have a significant number of workers engaged in the waste management business, an industry which has seen considerable growth and consolidation in recent years.



The Gateway Project – the plan to improve roadways from the Fraser Valley to the Lower Mainland – involves twinning the Port Mann Bridge (above) which was originally built in 1963, and construction of a South Perimeter Road (below) to route traffic from the Valley through to Roberts Bank and Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal. The two artist's renderings demonstrate the concept. In October 2006, the federal and provincial governments jointly announced funding for the South Fraser Perimeter Road.





Roberts Bank Superport was originally built in the 60s with an extensive dredging program. It has been expanded a number of times since, and now serves as a coal port and a container terminal. Several generations of operating engineers have contributed to building this project.

Similarly, we stepped up our organizing efforts in the mining industry, particularly the open pit mines in the east and the north of the province. Organizing initiatives into new fields of endeavour such as these have helped us retain our share of the work, and helped keep our members employed during the tough times.

Crane regulations Tightened by WorkSafe BC

Local 115 also scored a major victory for crane safety by convincing WorkSafeBC to establish a regulation which will provide for standardized training and certification in the crane hoisting sector of the industry. Only a couple of years ago WorkSafeBC and the provincial government were attempting to relax safety standards, so this change is a major victory. Local 115 made representations to WorkSafeBC on this issue along with the president of GWIL Crane, who chairs the Mobile Crane Owners' Association of B.C. Those representations have borne fruit for the safety and security of our members.

This issue has consumed a lot of our time and energy over the last while but it has been worth it. Without exception, everyone who learns that the WCB was considering dropping the requirement for certified crane operators simply can't believe it.

BRLAN COCHRANE

At last – A building boom

Through a variety of strategies and a lot of dedication and hard work by our officers and our members, we have survived to now reap the benefit of a building boom in our province. As the boom warms up, we finally were able to sign collective agreements which had expired two years ago. And in the spirit of fair play, all building trades agreed to sign agreements which take us past the Olympics in 2010, to put aside any notion that the building trades would hold the province to ransom with work stoppages before that world event.

The building boom promises to extend well beyond the Olympics and will provide a much-needed infusion of work which will employ our members. It will also provide the motivation to train a whole new generation of operating engineers. It also raises many excellent reasons why workers in B.C.'s construction industry should join – or re-join – a union like the operating engineers, despite all of the impediments put in our way by the government of the day and their cronies in the ICBA and the Rat Unions.

One of the outcomes of the Liberals' anti-union agenda has been to bring greater unity between private and public

sector unions. We will continue to work together to protect the rights of working people in this province.

GARY KROEKER

Our members are already hard at work on the first phase of the Gateway Project at the Golden Ears Bridge. Gateway promises to provide plenty of work in the road-building and bridge construction area. The airport is planning \$1 billion worth of expansion, as is the Port of Vancouver and other sectors of the transportation industry. New roadways, including bridges and tunnels, are planned along several highways in the Interior of B.C. and those projects promise to provide many years of work for our members.

In the midst of the current boom we have already seen the penny drop on some fronts. One commentator noted that, with the building trades signed to collective agreements through 2010, the non-union sector is now the part of the industry which cannot provide certainty regarding labour costs leading up to the Olympics. And the wage gap is narrowing or disappearing between union and non-union, making the deeper advantages to being a union member — pensions, health and welfare plans, union protection on the job – more attractive than ever before.

There are many dips and turns in the road ahead. Some we can see, others we can only guess at. But we will prevail because of a rich and telling phrase which comes from deep in the past of the North American union movement and is as true today as it was then – The Union Makes us Strong.

UNION EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS 1931-2006

1931

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Ed Stewart
Recording Secretary: J. Henderson
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: George Pettipiece
Treasurer: P. Bradley

1932

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Brother Sibley
Recording Secretary: R. Hunter
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: George Pettipiece
Treasurer: P. Bradley

1933

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: E.O. St. Denis
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Roy Findlay
Treasurer: Ernie McCallum

1934

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Jack Flynn
Recording Secretary: George Parkinson
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Roy Findlay
Treasurer: Jas Kinnaird

1935

President: Jack Flynn
Vice-President: Dick Disney
Recording Secretary: E.O. St. Denis
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: George Parkinson
Treasurer: J. McIver

1936

President: George Parkinson

Vice-President: P. E. Stewart
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Jack Flynn
Treasurer: J. McIver

1937

President: George Parkinson
Vice-President: Brother Chapman
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Jack Flynn
Treasurer: Herb Flesher

1938

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: E.O. St. Denis
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Roy Findlay
Treasurer: R. L. Smith

1939

President: Dave Hodges
Vice-president: Herb Flesher
Recording Secretary: H. Griswold
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Jack Flynn
Treasurer: Brother McIver

1940

President: Brother McIver
Vice-President: Cliff Boucharde
Recording Secretary: H. Griswold
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Jack Flynn
Treasurer: Brother Sharecross

1941

President: George Parkinson
Vice-President: Brother McIver
Recording Secretary: Andy Maguire

Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Jack Flynn
Treasurer: Charlie Wren

1942

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Bill Blackwood
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Jack Flynn
Treasurer: Herb Flesher

1943

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Bill Blackwood
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Herb Flesher
Treasurer: R. L. Smith

1944

President: Dave Hodges
Vice-President: L. Mackie
Recording Secretary: George Jones
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: George Parkinson
Treasurer: R. L. Smith

1945

President: Dave Hodges
Vice-President: Ernie McCallum
Recording Secretary: Allan Scott
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Charlie Wren
Treasurer: R. L. Smith

1946

President: Dave Hodges
Vice-President: Brother Kirby
Recording Secretary: George Jones
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Brother McIver

1947

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-president: Graydon Blackley
Recording Secretary: George Jones
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Brother McIver

1948

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Graydon Blackley
Recording Secretary: Dave Hodges
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Brother Johnston

1949

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Dave Hodges
Recording Secretary: W. Reid
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1950

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Frank Hanna
Recording Secretary: Graydon Blackley
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Herb Flesher
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1951

President: Frank Hunt
Vice-President: Frank Hanna
Recording Secretary: Graydon Blackley
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1952

President: Herb Flesher
Vice-President: Brother Smith
Recording Secretary: Graydon Blackley
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1953

President: George Parkinson
Vice-President: Pat Smith
Recording Secretary: Graydon Blackley
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1954

President: George Parkinson
Vice-President: Pat Smith
Recording Secretary: Pat Smith
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1955

President: Charlie Wren
Vice-President: D. Smith
Recording Secretary: Harvey Nixon
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1956

President: Charlie Wren
Vice-President: Dave Smith
Recording Secretary: Brother MacLean
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1957

President: Harvey Nixon
Vice-President: Dave Smith
Recording Secretary: Pat Smith
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1958

President: Harvey Nixon
Vice-President: Mike Parr
Recording Secretary: Pat Smith
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1959

President: Harve Nixon
Vice-President: Al Fowler
Recording Secretary: Pat Smith
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1960

President: Harvey Nixon
Vice-President: Mike Parr
Recording Secretary: Pat Smith
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1961

President: Mike Parr
Vice-President: Harry Woodman
Recording Secretary: Ross Scott
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Colin Campbell

1962

President Mike Parr
Vice-President: Sam Kozak
Recording Secretary: D. Stewart
Financial Secretary and Business Agent: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Lloyd Lambert

With the advent of district form in 1963, elections were held every three years rather than annually.

1963

President: Mike Parr
Vice-President: Jim Malange
Recording Secretary: Jimmy Dobson
Financial Secretary and Business Manager: Allan Scott
Treasurer: Lloyd Lambert

1965

Business Manager: Mike Parr
President: Jimmy Malange

Vice-President: Bill Yule
Recording Secretary: Fred Randall
Financial Secretary: Derek Jorgensen
Treasurer: Ron Malange

1968

Business Manager: Mike Parr
President: Jimmy Malange
Vice-President: Willie Folland
Recording Secretary: Fred Randall
Financial Secretary: George Robertson
Treasurer: Jim Biddle

1971

Business Manager: Mike Parr
President: Jimmy Malange
Vice-President: Jack Whittaker
Recording Secretary: Fred Randall
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Jim Biddle

1974

Business Manager: Mike Parr
President: Jack Whittaker
Vice-President: Bob Almgren
Recording Secretary: Fred Randall
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Jim Biddle

1977

Business Manager: Mike Parr
President: Jack Whittaker
Vice-President: Bob Almgren
Recording Secretary: Fred Randall
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Jim Biddle

1980

Business Manager: Fred Randall
President: Jack Whittaker

Vice-President: Jim Biddle
Recording Secretary: Tony Tennessy Jr.
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Gary Kroeker

1983

Business Manager: Fred Randall
President: Jack Whittaker
Vice President: Tony Tennessy
Recording Corresponding Secretary: Gary W. Kroeker
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Bill Neil

1987

Business Manager: Fred Randall
President: Jack Whittaker
Vice President: Tony Tennessy
Recording Corresponding Secretary: Gary W. Kroeker
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Bill Neil

1991

Business Manager: Fred Randall
President: Tony Tennessy
Vice President: Tony Tennessy
Recording Corresponding Secretary: Gary W. Kroeker
Financial Secretary: Bert Brooker
Treasurer: Brad MacKenzie

1995

Business Manager: Gary W. Kroeker
President: Tony Tennessy
Vice President: Frank Harmon
Recording Corresponding Secretary: Allan Bruce
Financial Secretary: Brian Cochrane
Treasurer: Brad MacKenzie

1999

Business Manager: Gary W. Kroeker
President: Tony Tennessy

Vice President: Frank Harmon
Recording Corresponding Secretary: Allan Bruce
Financial Secretary: Brian Cochrane
Treasurer: Brad MacKenzie

2003

Business Manager: Gary W. Kroeker
President: Brad MacKenzie
Vice President: Brad Randall
Recording Corresponding Secretary: Lionel Railton
Financial Secretary: Brian Cochrane
Treasurer: Wm. (Bill) Baron

EXECUTIVE BOARD 2005

Business Manager	Gary Kroeker
President	Brad MacKenzie
Vice-President	Brad Randall
Financial Secretary	Brian Cochrane
Recording Secretary	Lionel Railton
Treasurer	Bill Baron
Conductor	Matt Cameron
Guard	Frank Carr
Trustees	Reese Evans
	Brian Moore
	Curtis Wright
Auditors	Ken Thomson
	Patrick Watson
	Craig McIntosh
District Executive	Frank Carr
Board Members	Tim Cullen
	Gary Kinnear
	Wayne Mills
	Mike Spiruda
	Brian Lefebvre

M.L. (MIKE) PARR BURSARY

Starting in 1981 the Local Union established an annual bursary in the name of Brother Mike Parr, in recognition of his many years of service and leadership to Local 115. The bursary or bursaries are to be awarded to the son, daughter or ward of any member of Local 115 who has enrolled for post-secondary education. Following are names of recipients to date.

1981	Carolyn Laing Doris Champagne	1991	Heather Anderson Angela Morrison	1999	Karrine Lantz Andrea Lantz Tara Lantz
1982	Diedre Herbert Richard Darby	1992	Lori Trelenberg	2000	Maria Pires Lori Nilsson
1983	Elizabeth Hiebert	1993	Serena Crum Broni Ostrowski	2001	Derek Wakita James Grant
1984	Diane Browning Glynis Halbert	1994	Brenda Doi	2002	Robert Kehoe Nicole Korsvoll
1985	Janet Marconato	1995	Jodi Pawluski Petra Rempel Marisa Pontillo	2003	Joshua Boudreau Ashtyn Korsvoll
1986	Tanya Payne	1996	Kelli Kalb Jagdeep Kuhn-Kuhn Lana Alexander	2004	Jeffrey Ovens Antonio Papalia
1987	Kathryn Dishaw Rhonda Roberts	1997	Ana Ortiz Heinrich Sarah Macri Ashley Nanson	2005	Benjamin Hystad Bryn Nyeste
1988	James Skwarok	1998	William Aldridge Kevin Low	2006	Michelle Corbett Denise Cymbalist Christian Bocksey
1989	Karen Matthias Robert Michalopoulos				
1990	Christine Blyth Erwin Goingo				

DONALD SMITH SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Brother Donald (Blondie) Smith, a longtime member of IUOE Local 115, left a bequest in his will for the establishment of a scholarship through the union. The scholarship pays up to \$2,000, giving preference to members of IUOE Local 115, their spouses, sons, daughters and wards. Brother Smith wished the scholarship to be awarded to a student or students pursuing studies in engineering, industrial relations or law at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Following are names of recipients to date.

1993	Neil Gruending	1999	Violet Allard John Hatchard	2004	Nicole Korsvoll
1994	Andrew Sorensen		Erica Hyams Kevin Low	2005	Erica Hyams Nicole Korsvoll
1995	Jeannette Young Daniel Russell		Jay Ratzlaff		
		2000	Beatrice Gill		
1996	Violet Allard Daniel Russell	2001	Michelle Richier		
1997	Violet Allard Daniel Russell	2002	Blair Tennessy		
1998	Daniel Toews	2003	Nicole Korsvoll		