

Elmer's Philosophy on Employee – Employer Collective Bargaining

I spent my Summers (1956 – 1962), in the Kootenays, working with my brothers Lawrence and Russel starting from grade ten (10) through four (4) years of university. This established my understanding that an employee provides a skill and effort, and the reward was payment in wages prevalent in that region. Everyone cooperated and provided quality workmanship for a reasonable and competitive product price so that all involved were satisfied. Family and Workers became a team for success, and all earned client respect.

My two (2) brothers were Journeymen Carpenters and they employed Journeymen, so I was in an environment of men who excelled in their Trade and performed work to the highest quality. I was accustomed and believed that this was standard expectations. Everyone worked at an acceptable pace including those that were unionized as there was no discrimination.

Although I was an undergraduate in Chemical Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, I could not obtain summer employment (1961), in my Field of Study, and so returned to work with my family. Serious discussions about our mutual future resulted in a consensus, that I should complete my education as a Civil Engineer which would be beneficial for a Building Construction Contractor future that we should establish. This would require a need for an additional year at university and further requirement, after graduation, to be employed with a “team” of several Professional Engineers for at least two (2) years.

The result was that I completed my courses and after several interviews in the Fall of 1962, I accepted the offer for position with Columbia Cellulose Co. Ltd., in Prince Rupert (1963), a Pulp Mill that produced both Acetate and Sulfite Pulp. This positioned me to use both my Chemical and Civil Engineering education where I became the Company Representative to serve with the Project Engineer from H.A. Simons Engineering that was responsible for additions and renovations to various sections of the Pulp Mill. This placed me in a position where I became exposed to Construction Unions while I was able to try and understand the “shop unions” that operated the Pulp Mill.



What I learned was that a basic misunderstanding existed between Company and unionized employees. In my view, most of the issues came from frustrations in both “camps”, that was partially resolved by threats of ‘walkouts’ and ‘shutdowns’ that caused financial stress on both sides but rarely resolved the underlying issues.

A. Some examples in the Pulp Mill, I witnessed:

- a. An Operator at a station was required to activate a switch that would drain a tank when the Level Indicator reached a designated point. I walked through the Bleach Plant; I noticed foam everywhere. Upon questioning the Bleach Plant Superintendent, I was informed that the Operator fell asleep on his shift and the tank overflowed. The Operator's responsibility was to activate this Pump about four (4) times a shift. The Company position as a result, was to layoff the Operator for a week as a reprimand. Union position was that the job was too boring and a flashing light on his control panel was not sufficient to keep him alert. Another probe was installed higher in the tank, that would activate a siren after the flashing light. The tank overflowed again. This was followed by a higher probe that would activate a bell. The tank overflowed again. The Union then agreed that the Operator was incompetent and allowed Engineering to install an automatic instrumentation control, on the Level Indicator, that would start the Pump and shut it down when the tank emptied. The result was positive for the Company, but the Union accused the Company for an excuse to reducing jobs.
- b. Acetate Pulp was extremely pure for obvious reasons as its end products included photographic films. Mill operation were continuous and many employees became complacent with their steady employment. One Christmas Eve, black spots appeared on the Jumbo Roll that collected all the finished pulp into a 10 Ton roll which was then tested for purity before packaging into smaller square bundles or into smaller rolls for shipping.

The Laboratory was unable to analyze the impurity, An Assistant Pipe-Fitter Superintendent commented from his Ukrainian Saskatchewan Farm roots, "that looks like 'Mock' (Poppy Seeds)".

Several days had elapsed and the storage area for Jumbo Rolls was full so the Mill had to make an involuntary shut down. Yes, the Lab confessed that it was poppy seeds after all. An investigation revealed that an employee had dumped poppy seeds into the Washer which



was in line with the Finishing Drier. The preparator could not be positively apprehended but the suspect was defended by the union. There are many suggestions for prevention of a such an action but this was an act of sabotage.

- c. When construction was not taking place, I was directed to walk around and meet workers and supervisors as well as observe operations, The pond where logs were held, prior to being directed up a giant Jack Ladder into the Wood Room that processed wood chips for pulp. I noticed a 4-foot diameter log in the pond that was obviously driftwood as it still had roots on it. I asked the workers as to why that log with roots was still in the pond, in a casual conversation. “That log may come in handy” was the reply and I did not pursue the conversation further. Later, a miserable day in December with sleet and temperatures below freezing that we received bad news, throughout the mill that a log had jammed into the building, within the Jack Ladder, causing a break in the chain. Curious, I walked to the pond and noticed that the log with roots was missing. I realized that it had been directed up the Jack Ladder intentionally by the workers as they knew it would jam causing the wood room to shut down. I walked into the Lunchroom and observed the crew playing cards with smiles on their faces. My comment to them was ‘I understand the purpose of the rooted log, now!’ The answer as I expected was “there is a purpose for everything. Who wants to work in that pond in weather like this.” Another example of willful sabotage.
- d. These actions were not reprimanded by the Company for the large part and acts such as these eventually contributed to shutting down the Mill as it just could not be profitable to operate. The saying was ‘that’s bugger all on a big outfit’ and unfortunately Columbia Cellulose Co. Ltd., only turned a profit for one year since it started operation in 1949 through the time I left in 1965. The work ethic was sadly lacking in some employees and perhaps both sides of the equation are at fault.
- e. But, at no time did I notice a lack of professionalism from the Tradesmen.
- B. I soon discovered that there was no love lost between the Industrial Unions and Construction Unions. I was able to meet all Trades, Boilermakers, Pipefitters, Steelworkers, Electricians, Machinists, Welders in Pipefitting and Structural Steel, and other Trades. There was never a distinct line that could be drawn between what was Industrial and Construction responsibility. Depending on the crews, too often one or the other union would declare some work “hot” and dispute the tie-in when necessary.



Construction unions negotiated regulations that eventually became costly and inefficient as all projects were not large enough for a full complement of Trades and; therefore, inefficient to have all on one site as I will attempt to illustrate:

- a. The need to call Trades directly from the Union Hall on the Lower Mainland may work well in that location but everywhere else usually requires:
 - i. Travelling time and plane fare to and from the project
 - ii. Living Out costs for two nights irrespective when the actual job requirement is a half day or less
 - iii. The Tradesman must be on the list at the Union Hall and dispatched according to the list. A Contractor cannot hire the best Worker that he has used in the past. The consequence is common that a dispatched Worker is not desirable and sent back with another ordered which adds to total cost.
 - iv. An example is a few footings requiring a carpenter and a Rebar Installer. Each job could require less than a day, but the pay slip would be two days, and 2 nights stay in a hotel and of course plane fare return from Vancouver to Prince Rupert. Taxi fare in both places as well as from the hotel to jobsite and return.
 - v. Small renovation projects would obviously be very expensive.
 - vi. There were usually Union members available locally, but they were not necessarily, be on the dispatch list in the Union Hall.
 - vii. Most projects were more expensive to construct at the Watson Island Pulp Mill.
- b. One of the larger renovation projects undertaken, took longer than six (6) months. It was decided to set up a construction camp at the backside of Watson Island which would be partially shielded from the operating pulp mill and limit operating noise. Setting up and being responsible for the camp operation fell under my jurisdiction. It was a standard camp that was regularly used on unionized projects. Various Trades where housed successfully until the Pipefitters and Machinists came on site.
 - i. One morning, I entered the Mill guard shack as usual and was surprised to see taxis leaving the site. The Guards were quick to explain that the Union Workers were all leaving the camp because apparently, the water lines had frozen.



- ii. As I approached my Construction Trailer, I was greeted by representatives from all the Unions on site (about a half dozen).
- iii. They wanted a meeting with me as they had serious grievances.
- iv. We set up a table and chairs as they handed me several lists of inadequacies in the construction camp such as:
 - 1. Beds were two (2) inches shorter than their union regulations
 - 2. The Dining Room tables were too short and not wide enough for the same reason
 - 3. The meals were far from “first class”
 - 4. Freezing of the water line to the washroom was also on the list but followed the sixteen (16) or more other grievances.
- v. I countered with an agreement that the beds would be extended as the tables and deal with the rest of the list immediately.
- vi. They could pick me up at the Construction Trailer at any night to ensure that I would not alert the Cook. Here is what ensued:
 - 1. It was Steak Night with T-Bone Steaks served on a serving plate. There were nine (9) steaks although each table seated only six (6) Workers but there were usually three or four.
 - 2. Apart from the Union Representatives (URs), non one else knew who I was.
 - 3. I watched as some Workers slid 3 steaks on their plates and cut out the Filet Minon portion while pushing the rest unto the table.
 - 4. There was a coffee pot on each table. One Worker looked like he was very “hung over”, grabbed the pot as he muttered ‘this shit is dish water”, and proceeded to carry it to the Emergency Door to heave it outside.
 - 5. I spoke with URs and suggest we meet first thing in the morning.
- vii. At the morning meeting, I spoke first and noted:
 - 1. “I have now attended to all the items on your lists completely
 - 2. The man that wasted the T-Bone Steaks and threw the Coffee Pot out, must be on the first plane out of here today, as I will not tolerate that type of attitude.
 - 3. Now tell me what your real complaints are?”
 - 4. They looked at each other and then explained that they were concerned about the Guard Shack, and that they could not bring Liquor into their Camp. Construction Men entertain themselves with Booze and Cards and this was not possible in this Camp.

5. "I said obviously we need to organize a busing system that would pick up those that desire to go into Prince Rupert at 6:30 PM and return at 8:00 PM. It would then pick up those that wish to go later and return at 1000 PM. Does that sound fair?"
 6. They all agreed and expressed surprise. They created the Camp Complaints to see if I would move everyone into hotels in Prince Rupert. They were now satisfied with the camp and the busing arrangement would work well.
 - viii. The problem was resolved without a walk out and the project was completed satisfactorily.
 - c. My overall assessment of the Union Workers was that they are all very capable Tradesmen but are not always able to make their individual assessment as to what is right or wrong but are obligated to support the "union code." Having said that I recognize the need for construction unions on large projects.
 - d. At no times did I notice a lack of Trades professionalism from the Union Tradespeople.
- C. The time had come when I was able to complete the requirements to receive my Professional status with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APESG) following the recommendation of six (6) of the Engineers that I was working with at the Pulp Mill. I gave my notice to CCCL. They made it difficult to leave as they offered Marilyn and I a new house, a position as Assistant Project Manager for the new Sulfate Pulp Mill that had already started construction as well as a substantial increase in Salary. This was after I had already refused offers of employment with four (4) other companies that included a Pulp mill. My senior fellow professionals cautioned me about an undertaking in a new industry with family.

A commitment with family, especially to my beloved brothers was not to be ignored. Marilyn and I packed up our two daughters and belongings and travelled to Trail, BC, in order to undertake a mammoth task of organizing a fledgling House Building company into a Building Contractor that would economically withstand family needs and meet the competition:

- a. My personal philosophy was ambitious and somewhat naive, for those times:
 - i. I believed in the "Supreme Dignity of Mankind". Every person possesses Reason and a belief to perform the best work that he is able without conditions.
 - ii. Everyone has the basic right to submit their application for jobs available and capable to perform without any restrictions.

- iii. Payment for services is set by the market, and no one should be denied a market wage or salary.
- iv. No discrimination due to race, color, or politics.
- v. Fairness with employees, customers and competitors
- vi. As Manager of my company. I wanted the opportunity to talk to every employee rather than a representative of the employees. I wanted to be able to deal with their issues directly.

D. In May of 1965, the three brothers began the process of organizing a family business in Building Construction. This photo was taken in 1958 and has Left to Right: brother Russel, Construction Superintendent, Phil Sherstobitoff, Finishing Carpenter and site Superintendent, Elmer, Engineer and General Manager, Lawrence,



Millwork Superintendent with his daughter Patti who was visiting the house under construction. Notice that all Carpenters wore overalls that supported hammers, Tri square, tape and assortment of nails and protected the personal wear. Later years the overalls were substituted to aprons as enabled better agility and were cooler.

E. Operations were conducted as Verigin Industries. We had an immediate opportunity to purchase a Sash & Door business that we had constructed following the Owners total fire destruction. He was aging and offered the business to us for purchase. We did not have the assets for payment, but our credit was good and we financed the purchase. We now had a place for an office and showroom. I had many requests to do design work and draw plans. This made my position profitable in that I could fill my spare time, drawing plans and consulting. Now VIL offered:

- a. Building Construction (mostly Residential)
- b. Sash & Door with Millwork
- c. Design
- d. Drafting
- e. Design / Build.

F. Contractors that were tendering Schools, Hospitals and Commercial work, were requesting that we tender the Millwork section of their Contracts as Supply and Install. They were mostly Unionized Contractors and so it would be necessary to use unionized labor to install our Millwork on their projects. I called the Carpenters Union Business Agent (UBA) and suggested that VIL organize a Union Company to meet the industry regulations. An agreement was reached and so Obal Glass Ltd., signed an agreement with the Carpenters Union. All went well for a few projects until the UBA came in and advised that the Union would not allow a Unionized Company to operate alongside an

Open Shop Company. I countered that we had an agreement that I would use the union Company only when entering a Union Project as VIL was a family operation that employed brothers, sons and cousins but VIL would use Union Carpenters for Millwork Installation. VIL already had employees on staff that were in the Carpenters Union and VIL had added brother Russel to join the Carpenters Union as well. The meeting was not positive, and all our products were declared “hot” as per union designation by the UBA. He would not allow Union Workers to install nor work with these goods. This became the initial direct action that precipitated all the ensuing actions that continued over the years.

G. I will describe the incidents with Unions in order:

a. **Carpenters Union organized a campaign** against Verigin Industries Ltd (VIL), with the purpose of encouraging the public to stop business transactions that would then cause financial harm to VIL.

- i. The Carpenters Union contacted all the local unions and organized them to jointly object to VIL coming on sites controlled by their employers.
- ii. I contacted the local Open Shop Contractors, and a local Kootenay Contractors Association was informally created to assist each other when required.
- iii. The Unions extended their campaign to these companies as well.

b. Elkford Square, Elford, B.C.

- i. The photo is a renovated Market in the original 22, 000 square foot shopping center that was constructed in 1974 with an existing 22 room hotel.
- ii. The original Design / Build / Develop project was initiated by Vil in 1973.
- iii. Construction Labor was initially sent from VIL forces in Trail, B.C.; however, it soon was obvious that more Carpenters were required for the short building season in Elkford. A call went to Canada Manpower in Trail for skilled Tradesmen:
 1. Canada Manpower response was that they had unemployed Union Carpenters, but VIL was advised that the Carpenters Union had informed them “no Union Carpenters could be sent to VIL under any circumstances.”



- a. I protested in that I believed that it was illegal for Canada Manpower (CM) to participate in Unemployment Insurance benefits to an unemployed worker that was offered a job. I did not follow up on this because I was just too busy at that time.
- b. I had two (2) Workers from the Kootenays that called me to inquire about work (likely advised by CM) as to the actual job and working conditions
 - i. After a phone interview, both confessed that they would rather gain employment on the Kootenay Canal Project within their 'back yard' but couldn't as they could not get into the union which was a project requirement.
 - ii. I countered with that I was loathe to bring them to Elkford if they were reluctant to go there.
 - iii. I decided (as a joke) to suggest to them that they go to the High Arrow Pub in Castlegar and get a table next to a red-haired person who seemed to conduct his office as Carpenters Union Business Agent CUBA) from that location. They should talk loudly as to their consideration of job offerings from VIL in Elkford, B.C.
 - iv. I received follow up phone calls from both in that each had followed my advice with the CUBA approaching their table and signing them up into the Union with both getting jobs at the Kootenay Canal.
- c. I placed an ad in the Lethbridge, Ab newspaper advertising for carpenters:
 - i. I had about ten (10) respond and they agreed to accept the addition of \$20 a day Room & Board to their pay (which was the accommodation charge at the Construction Camp operated by Fording Coal Ltd) but they would still carpool each day from Lethbridge.
 - ii. They were excellent Tradesmen and facilitated completion of the Elkford project which now had

an addition to construction of a thirty (30) suite Apartment Building.

- iv. This was a labour issue that was successfully mitigated

c. Grand Forks Dental Building, Grand Forks, B.C.

In 1973 a Dentist from Grand Forks approached Vil to design and build a new Dental Building in Grand Forks. The design was approved and a contract in place with construction soon after.

Grand Forks Redi mix Concrete supplied the concrete for the footings. My Superintendent called the morning of the concrete for the walls and was advised that concrete would not be delivered as Grand Forks Redi-mix was informed by the Carpenters Union that a picket line would be placed at the Dental Building construction site and their Drivers would not be able to cross because of their union affiliation.

I called Grand Forks Redi-mix Concrete with this discussion:

- i. "Will you deliver concrete to the Dental Building site?"
- ii. "I cannot as there is a threat of a picket line"
- iii. "I ask again, will you deliver concrete to the site?"
- iv. "I want to, but I cannot because of the threat"
- v. There is no picket line there and so I interpret that you will not deliver concrete. I will need to make other arrangements."

I then followed with the following phone actions:

- i. Trowelex in Castlegar as to their availability of a mobile one-yard concrete mixer. "Affirmative, and we will move onto the Dental Building Site today to mix concrete tomorrow."
- ii. I called Sandner Bros Building Supply. They agreed to deliver bagged cement and aggregate today.
- iii. I advised my Site Superintendent of the arrangements so he would prepare for a concrete pour the next day.

I had a call from Grand Forks Redi-mix after a few days as to when we would need concrete delivered for the floor. My response was that "Trowelex concrete mixer was staying on site until the next pours are completed. so 'No thanks'".

This was just union intimidation successfully resolved.

d. Glenmerry Village, Trail, B.C. 1976

This 98- unit Condo project was a Design / Build / Develop Project on a former Sawmill site that was destroyed by fire.

Concrete delivery was negotiated with McGauley Redi-mix Concrete and construction well underway when I had a visit from an individual who wanted to warn me that there 'could be an Information Picket Line at the Jobsite Gate'.



The discussion went like this:

1. "If the picketers arrive, they would be advertising this project and so because it is unlikely they will be accept payment from me, I will make sure that they have coffee delivered in the morning and afternoon as my appreciation."
2. "Aren't you afraid of any action that may take place?"
3. "Well, if they stand around, that will not bother VIL as McGauley has already told me he will not be deterred."
4. "What if they take a violent action?"
5. "You mean like shoot me or something like that? That may be a problem if I die, I will be a Martar but if they miss and hit an innocent guy like you, that would be a travesty."

Even though the Carpenters Union had organized a joint union "don't buy from Verigin", there was no problems during the two-year construction period.

I had 'in house' staff marketing the units and when the President of local Industrial Union signed a Purchase Agreement, I encouraged my salespeople ensure that nothing should get in the way.

I called him eventually to ask him that despite the union Campaign; he had decided to buy a unit. His cute response was "it is the best price going!",

e. 37 Unit Housing Marantha Court in Castlegar, developed by the Pentecostal Church, Castlegar, B.C. 1982

- i. This project was brought to my attention by the Manager of the regional office of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).



- 1. “CMHC had awarded a construction grant of some \$1.6 million but there seemed to be a communication issues between the church and their Architect.”
 - 2. VIL had a long and successful relationship with CMHC and the Manager recommended that I meet with the church to see if I could resolve the outstanding issues and get the Project built.
- ii. I met with the Church and subsequently with the Architect and was able to get tender documents prepared for public tender to suppliers and Subtrades.
- iii. The budget was found to be adequate and VIL was awarded the Construction Management Contract.
- iv. A surprise challenge came from one of the Castlegar City Councillors who happened to be the local Carpenters’ Union Business Agent. He ‘demanded’ that the project be constructed with Union forces. None of the successful Tenderers were unionized and so this was a potential problem. This further expanded to the Redi-Mix Concrete Supplier in Trail who was unionized. He had received a letter from the union that he was obligated to follow the terms of his union agreement and not deliver concrete to the Marantha construction site. I was able to get a copy.
- v. I contacted Rempel Redi mix Concrete in Abbotsford and they sent out a cement silo and a new Redi mix Truck. I had a local contractor supply the loader and gravel with bulk cement supplied by Ocean Cement from the Lower Mainland.
- vi. An Information Picket Line was set up with different Construction Unions sending Picketers to picket with changes every 2 hours,
 - 1. ICBA advised that section 264(2) of the Criminal Code of Canada states:

“...Section 264(2) of the Criminal Code of Canada addresses criminal harassment. It sta

tes that conduct that causes another person to reasonably fear for their safety is considered harassment. The conduct includes:

Repeatedly following the other person from place to place.

Repeatedly communicating with the other person, either directly or indirectly.

Besetting or watching the other person's residence or workplace.

Engaging in threatening conduct directed at the other person or any member of their family.

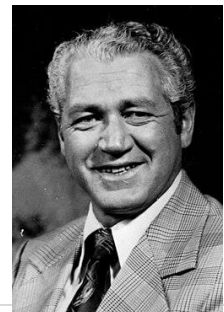
Violating this section can lead to serious legal consequences, including imprisonment or up to ten years.

2. I took the following actions:
 - a. With a witness, approached several sets of picketers with the following questions:
 - i. "Name?" (would not provide names)
 - ii. "Where do you live?" (would not provide location)
 - iii. "Who do you represent?" (would not identify)
 - iv. "What is your purpose?" (would not state their purpose).
 - b. Meanwhile the Redi mix truck arrived, silo was being erected and filled with cement while aggregate delivered to the site.
 - c. I went to the local RCMP detachment in Castlegar:
 - i. I reported that I have unidentified people watching and besetting my project. "I believe that is not permissible as per the Criminal Code of Canada"
 - ii. "This is a labor dispute and not part of our jurisdiction"
 - iii. "They are not my crews as my crews are all working at the site"
 - iv. "Sorry we do not get involved with labor disputes"
 - d. I called the regional RCMP Office in Nelson and made my complaint
 - i. "Don't quote the Criminal Code of Canada to me" said the Officer in charge in strong language
 - ii. "Go to the Castlegar detachment"
 - iii. "I have been there"
 - iv. "Go now"
 - e. I went back to the Castlegar Detachment. The Staff Sargent took me into a private Office to explain that his secretary was in the union, and he did not want this to be public
 - i. "I cannot do anything for you"

3. The matter was raised at the Labour Relations Board in Vancouver
 - a. The Picketers were advised to leave that site
 - i. They continued observing from a block away
 - ii. Occupied Pickups then followed a crane that was leaving the site for about 15 km
 - iii. The Crane Driver started extending the boom toward the following pickup
 - iv. The Driver was frightened and curtailed the tailing
 - b. The Picketers attendance at site ceased thereafter
- vii. This incident ended peacefully.

f. BC Public Works Fair Employment Act April 18, 1973

- i. *"...2. (1) The Crown in right of the province shall not, and no agency or person on behalf of the Crown in right of the province shall, enter into a contract respecting a public work unless the person with whom the contract is entered into has entered into a collective agreement with those employees of his who are employed to do the public work.
(2) No person shall enter into a contract respecting work unless (a) the person who is to do the work or receive the public moneys enters into a contract with the Crown in right of the Province respecting the terms and conditions upon which the public moneys are to be paid; and (b) the person with whom the contract is entered into has entered into a collective agreement with those employees of his who are employed to do the work...."*
- ii. This legislation shocked the Open Shop Section of the construction industry in British Columbia and Canada
 1. At the time of passage of this Act, this was the approximate status of Construction Tradesmen in B.C.
 - a. Approximately 100,000 were approved Red Seal Tradesmen by the BC Apprenticeship Board
 - b. Approximately 33,000 or 33% were members of a Trade Union
 - c. This meant that only 33,000 taxpayers were eligible to gain the benefit of BC taxpayers' taxes for public works projects.
 2. Open Shop Contractors were called for a meeting to Trail from the Kootenays, Creston and Cranbrook for a meeting.
 3. It was decided that a delegation should be sent to Victoria to meet with Labor Minister King.
 4. The representatives, democratically selected were:
 - a. Joe Pagurut, a General Contractor from Cranbrook, B.C.



- b. Norm Husband, a Mechanical Contractor from Creston, B.C.
 - c. Nick Plotnikoff, a General Contractor from Creston, B.C.
 - d. Gordon Laarz, an Electrical Contractor from Trail, B.C.
 - e. Elmer Verigin, a General Contractor from Trail, B.C.
5. The 'Committee' realized as we got on the Ferry, that some of us had never been to Victoria, least of all the Legislative Buildings
6. We decided to visit with representatives of the existing Right to Work Association (RTWABC) of Victoria prior to our scheduled meeting with Bill King.
- a. They were already promoting and following the principles of the Right to Work Association in the United States which was:
 - i. Article reference like: *'...No Worker can be denied work because of Union membership nor lack of...'*
 - b. As a group, they did not feel confident that we would have any success with the Labor Minister.
 - c. We agreed to meet with them again after we met with Bill King to discuss his position.
7. We traveled to the Offices of the Labor Minister and were welcomed in:
- a. We asked Bill King if we could tape record the meeting as we did not have secretary. Bill agreed
 - b. We outlined our reasons for asking him for a meeting
 - c. We reviewed the construction trades statistics in the province and that only 33,000 Workers were eligible to provide services on all Public Building Construction.
 - d. All our Workers were part of the 67,000 that could not meet the legislated requirements of the Act that he had navigated through the Legislature.
 - e. His response surprised us when he gave his reason as a complaint from the BC Road Builders Association, that Alberta Contractors were unfairly underbidding them with their non-union work force. The Act was a remedy to that situation.
 - f. We countered with 'the Act was a serious negative action on most construction people within B.C.'

- g. He recommended that we form an Association to represent the Open Shop Sector in B.C. so that our position was better understood.
 - i. We later nicknamed Bill King as “the Father of the Independent Builders Association of British Columbia (ICBA)”
 - h. Our meeting continued for 2 ½ hours, and he promised to investigate this complaint carefully.
 - i. We came out of the meeting to face a disgruntled two (2) CBC TV reporters who had been waiting for us for two (2) hours as they assumed we would be sent away within a ½ hour or less.
 - 8. We met with the RTWABC members after and provided a synopsis of our meeting with Bill King:
 - a. They were surprised that he had allocated 2 ½ hours of his time for us
 - b. They were not optimistic of any changes
 - iii. Bill King provided the impetus for amendments to the Public Works Fair Employment Act if Workers were paid a posted Fair Wage.
 - 1. A substantial improvement to the original Act
- The effort was successful.

g. Formation of ICBA in British Columbia

Following the meeting with Bill King and his recommendation,, the Open Shop Movement started the process to organize the Open Shop Movement as in the posting from ICBA:

“.....Born in the fight for fairness.

ICBA was founded in 1975 by 169 open shop contractors who were shut out of bidding on public projects – not because of the quality of their work, but because they weren't part of a building trade union.



They met at the Terra Nova Motor Inn in Trail, B.C., and launched a movement rooted in one simple belief: every contractor and every worker deserves a fair shot. No special deals. No closed doors. Just open competition and equal opportunity.

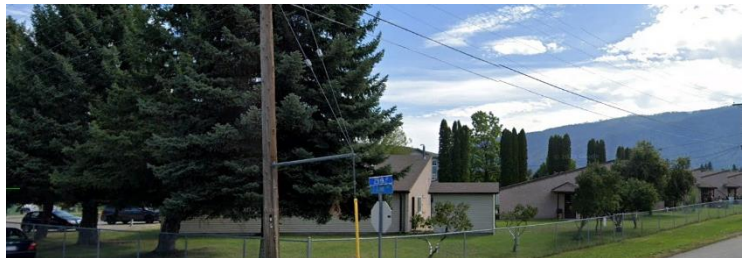
Since then, we've grown into Canada's largest construction association. We've helped thousands of companies grow their businesses. We've stood up against closed-shop policies like the B.C. NDP Government's so-called "Community Benefits Agreements." And we've invested in the next generation by becoming the province's #1 sponsor of trades apprentices.

- i. *Founded in Trail, B.C. – April 26, 1975*
- ii. *Fought to end union-only bidding rules*
- iii. *Built B.C.'s largest construction training and apprenticeship platform*
- iv. *50 years of defending open shop principles...."*

h. Parkside Villa, Grand Forks, Doukhobor Benevolent Society 25 Unit Seniors Project 1982

I was providing Project Management services for the Society that had a grant from BC Housing to construct this project.

One of the Directors was a retired Carpenters Union Pensioner and recommended that the takeout financing be undertaken by the Union.



The Project was tendered with results as follows:

1. Open Shop Tender \$1.3 million
2. Union competitor Tender \$1.8 million
3. Budget \$1.25 million

The Union declared that financing cannot be completed unless the union Tenderer was selected.

I recommended that the Society pursue alternative financing and award to the Owner of the Open Shop Tender who would act as the Construction Manager.

BC Housing and the Society agreed,

The project was successfully completed.

i. Expo '86, Vancouver, B.C.

This World Exposition to be celebrated in Vancouver, B.C. required careful consideration by the government of British Columbia. A budget was set and the decision was to control that budget. The BC / Yukon Trades Council were promoting a “Union only” site but the ICBA negotiated on an “Open Shop” policy to assist in controlling project budget.



It became an “Open Shop” designation. This was new development to the BC Construction Industry and everyone knew that the Union would make it difficult for any Open Shop Contractor that would tender.

I received a call from Rempel Brothers, who invited me to a meeting in Vancouver to discuss forming a company that would become at least another Tenderer to whosoever may be tendering. The result was formation of Marbella Construction Ltd (MPL).

The project being tendered at that time was the erection 29 International Pavilions from off-site modular manufactured components. MPL was the successful Tenderer. I was staying at a hotel during the construction initiation, and I received a surprise visit from a local TV Station with a request for an interview. This was new to me as I did not expect any notoriety. I was careful in my response to questions which seemed to center on how I was about to get the construction started. They asked me to provide them with a day's notice before I came on site to which I did not commit.

My instructions from Expo '86 contacts to mobilize at 3:00 PM on this designated day which we did. I met a TV Reporter about 4:00 PM, who immediately accused me of breaking my promise that I would provide him with notice. My response was simply that “I did not make such a promise”.

The Unionized Contractors on site were notified by Expo '86 that if they stopped work, that their contracts would be called in and bonds exercised.

Everyone was on site the next day, but we knew that it would be an 'interesting project!

1. Some of the modular panels included steel trusses and roof panels that were oversized to transport by truck, would require closing of streets and pilot cars and so we decided to contact Rivtow to move them by barge to the site from Richmond. The unionised employees of Rivtow were advised by their Union that they were not to move these panels as they were designated as 'HOT". The Owner of Rivtow decided to operate the Tugboat that would tow the barge at midnight so as not to interfere with marine traffic.

The Union organized boats to stop the Tugboat at the point near the University of BC. The Captain of the Tugboat blew his foghorn three (3) times and kept coming with all the boats scattering. That was the first challenge that was overcome, successfully, and the first 'floating picket line.'

2. I only received one tender for roofing prior to tender close, which was to seal the joints on all the roof panels. That tender was from a Union Trade which I entered on my subtrades list. It was always my policy that I would use the Supplier or Trade that had tendered prior to tender close and I advised this Roofer that I had used his price.
 - a. The ten (10) acres of roofs were ready to seal and I advised the roofer early in the week that he needed to mobilize for the next Monday. He was glad to be awarded the Contract as he knew I had some Open Shop Tenders after tenders closed that were substantially lower than his tender.
 - b. On Wednesday, the Roofer came into my office very upset and advised that the Union would not dispatch the five (5) Roofers and five (5) Sheetmetal Workers from the Union Hall. The reason being that they would not work beside non-union workers.
 - c. The Roofer came to my office and then offered to bring in his bid bond for non performance. He understood that would financially fail his Roofing Company.
 - d. I suggested he go into my office with a cup of coffee and try and relax while I researched a solution to this complication.

- e. In the Kootenays we had a club where Judges, Union Agents and many others that had sons playing hockey on the same team from Castlegar. We would go for steam baths. We got along well and agreed not to discuss controversial subjects like unions, religion, politics and only fantasize about sex. I decided to call one of these men who I knew served on the BC / Yukon Trades Council to call the Vancouver Office and confirm that Union Tradesmen were not allowed to work as requested by their Employer at Expo '86.
- f. He called back quickly and commented that he had never heard of anything so ridiculous in his union career but that the facts were true. His parting words were to do what I needed to do..
- g. I then met with the Roofer:
 - i. "Are you able to find the qualified Roofers and Sheetmetal Workers necessary to complete the work successfully", I asked him
 - ii. "Affirmative"
 - iii. "They must be on the roofs this Monday for sure"
 - iv. "No problem"
 - v. "I will take the contract away from you and the change will be:
 - 1. I will place the Workers under my payroll
 - 2. I will pay for all the materials and equipment
 - 3. You are now my Roofing Consultant, and I will pay you the difference between your tender price and all costs after the roofing is complete"
 - vi. His response was "I can't believe it."
- h. On Monday I had messages in my office from Expo '86 staff. I did not get to them until the afternoon and the Caller advised:
 - i. "I was given a letter to deliver to your offices from the Chief Project Manager of Expo '86 that directed MPL to deliver their Labour and Material and Performance Bonds to the Expo'86 Offices
 - ii. I decided to drive through the Expo construction site and noticed activity on the roofs of at least (2) Pavilions
 - iii. I went up the ladders and asked the Workers who they were to which they responded "Roofers"
 - iv. I returned to the Expo '86 Offices and returned the letter to the Sender"

- v. His parting conversation was “carry on my friend”.
- 3. One of the MPL framing subtrades on our second contract for ten (10) restaurants was guilty of not paying the Fair Wage as required as raised by a Union.
 - a. MPL was able to meet with these Workers and fulfill obligations.

The experience at Expo '86 was otherwise enjoyable. The Contracts were completed successfully and ended financially rewarding.

j. **Save-on-Foods Warehouse in Langley, B.C.**

This five (5) acre Warehouse was a Tilt-up concrete wall and steel roof standard design that was publicly tendered by Overweightea Foods as they were named at that time. We were successful and contract awarded with Open Shop Trades.



All went well until a 250-ton crane was required to erect the concrete panels cast on site. Farmer Construction had a crane available and was mobilized unto the site.

The BC / Yukon Trades Council claimed that the site was owned by a Contractor signatory to all agreements with the BC / Yukon Trades Council and leased to Save-on Foods but any construction on site would have to be with Union Contractors. Secondly the Farmer Crane and Union Operator could not be employed on an Open Shop site.

A massive Information Picket Line was organized and successfully preventing the crane to operate.

My partner, Edward Rempel drove his pickup onto site and was being prevented from leaving by the Picketers. They then orchestrated a scene where they alleged that Ed ran over a Picketers foot. The matter was reported to the RCMP and Ed was arrested and locked in a cell at the Langley RCMP Station.

Ed's brother Ewald protested the action taken by the RCMP to his brother Ed who was innocent of any wrongdoing and contacted the Justice Department with Federal Government to intervene. Which they did.

Meanwhile a 250 Ton Crane was ordered from Edmonton (which was not signatory to any union agreements) and was being transported to the site.

A Cease-and-Desist order for the Picket Line was prepared by a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and delivered by Courier to the Picket line. A Picketer took the Order, dropped it on the ground and urinated on it. The Courier was able to photograph this action and return same to our lawyer. This was shown to the Chief Justice. He was not too pleased and ordered a hearing in Court for the next day.

Meanwhile the RCMP became alarmed at the deterioration on site with the increasingly aggressive activity of the Picket Line and mobilized a Mob Squad to assemble near the job site.

1. I got a phone call from the Commanding Officer who asked, “are you going to work today?”
2. I responded “I am waiting for my lawyer to advise the results of the Court Case this morning that my resolve the issue”
3. His response, “what time do expect his call?”
4. “1000 A.M., this morning.”
5. “I will call you at 1000, then.”
6. He called at 1000, but I could not provide any further information. “I will call you in fifteen minutes and check”.
7. Meanwhile our lawyer called and advised that the Court ruled that the Picket Line was illegal and needed to be removed immediately.
8. That is what I passed on to the Commanding Officer when he called
9. “Thank you!”

I was not on site, but a reliable Observer passed on the events that took place as follows:

1. The Mob Squad marched directly to the Picket Line with the Commanding Officer ordering “break the line”.
2. The nearest Picketer responded with “We do not have to.”
3. One Officer grabbed the Picket’s arm and forced it over a stamp pad and then over a document.
4. The Picketer protested “but I am not a felon!”
5. The quick response was “you are now! Next.”
6. The Picket line quickly dispersed and ended



The four (4) trucks carrying the 250 Crane from Edmonton came on site and crews began assembly while Farmer's crews disassembled his crane and removed it.

No other Union incident took place, and everything settled down to a regular construction project

k. Talarico Care Home, Castlegar, B.C.

This a 60-bed Care Facility built Verigin built in 1990. The successful subtrades included an Electrical unionized subcontractor. The Electrical Union was requesting a meeting with me using the subcontractor as his communicator. I said I had no reason to meet with him and recommended that any action that would require calling the bid bond and removing the subcontractor.



I did not hear anything further on this and the project went well.

l. Whatshan Lake Retreat Apprenticeship with ICBA and Trail J. Lloyd Crowe High School

I was President of the Doukhobor Heritage Retreat Society #1999 in 2003 when the Society decided to continue with construction of the overall development plan to construct ten (10) cabins, a Pine Center and an Acoustic Stage together with installation of Electric, Water and Road infrastructure.



It seemed logical that the Society should use Youth in its construction labor as their constitution was explicit that the purpose of the Society included Peace, Education and development of Youth.

Why not organize an environment where Carpenter Apprentices could be engaged in the process?

I contacted ICBA requesting that they indenture any apprentices that I could find. The response was an enthusiastic agreement.



I then approached J. Lloyd Crowe High School in Trail, B.C. as I heard that their Shop Instructor was a Journeyman Carpenter. My discussion with him resulted in his agreement to have this become part of the plan to teach a course in Carpentry as part of a grade 12 curriculum. This followed with a meeting with the principal who promoted the idea to the School Board. The final agreement was the School District funding of \$30,000 made available to this Carpentry Course for desiring grade 12 students.



The Instructor and I decided that we should prefabricate a cabin in the School Shop and so I had materials delivered to the school along with shop drawings. Fifteen (15) students graduated in June of 2003 and were ready to continue on-site education. The students had homes in Fruitvale, Montrose, Rossland, Castlegar and Nakusp, B.C. home towns.



Some additional organization was necessary:

- i. The students were all indentured to the ICBA as Carpentry Apprentices
- ii. The parents provided use of their Recreation Vehicles for the son's accommodation at Whatshan Lake Retreat. Some even brought live-in girlfriends and others stayed together.
- iii. I was able to find two (2) superintendents that were willing to supervise these apprentices. They were both retired Journeyman Carpenters as well as experienced Construction Superintendents. Both had been in the Carpenters Union with one was still on Union Pension.
- iv. I developed a program on Excel that could calculate the pay slips for each Apprentice automatically. I made arrangements with Kootenay Savings Credit Union in Rossland, Trail, Fruitvale, Castlegar and Nakusp to receive individual paychecks for resident Apprentice by transfers from the Society main account in Castlegar.
- v. The Apprentices would have immediate access to their bank accounts.

The program worked well, After four (4) weeks at Whatshan Lake. I invited representatives of ICBA to speak to the Apprentices at Whatshan. I also invited General Contractors to interview candidates for permanent employment. Many were hired and others had decided on different futures. There was a visit by the J. Lloyd Crowe Principal as well.

The Whatshan experience ended after eight (8) weeks on site.

This Program was repeated in 2004 but discontinued after the Skills Center in Trail convinced the School Board that this was a program that they needed to administer.

I was surprised later in 2004 when I received a phone call from CKNW in Vancouver that a Representative of a Union had made a statement similar to this: *"....that Elmer Verigin was using unpaid youth at Whatshan to conduct construction. That no instruction was provide nor direction as well." The Reporter then asked me "what is your response to that?" I did not hesitate with my response 'I don't know who you are and we do not get CKNM in the Kootenays. I do not know the person you are quoting. In the Kootenays we usually talk directly to each other and I have not had any such direct communication..."*

A short time later I received a phone call from ICBA who were following up this broadcast and had taped it as well. They asked me what I was going to do about it and my response suggested that I knew the truth and I did not have time to pursue an allegation otherwise nor the funds to do so. ICBA requested my permission to follow up as they were not going to accept public statements that were untrue about their Founding President. I agreed.

It took some time, but I eventually got a call that a settlement with the Carpenters Union was being proposed as to what I would suggest as a damage payment. I responded that it would not be my intent to cause anyone a financial burden and do the best that would be recommended. I received a personal cheque for \$5,000 from the Carpenters Union. I instructed the Society to issue a charitable tax receipt to the Union and deposit the funds in the Society General Account.

Again, a non-violent conclusion.

m.A positive Example of a Success Story where Union and Management Were Able to Work Together to Save a Major Industry

One of the World's largest Lead Zinc Smelter was established in Trail, B.C. at the turn of the last century. The Zinc line was earlier modernized with the Lead Line, later in 1990.



I wrote a complete article **The Winding Trails From Trail Lead Back to Trail** which documented the negative events that took place that precipitated a threat from the Banking Institution that would have closed that operation with a tremendous loss of jobs.

The article posted in my blog “Elmer Verigin Blog” details the actions that was coordinated by a Metallurgical Engineer, Roger Watson, to bring the following organizations together, for a positive action:

1. Steel United Steel Workers of America
2. Cominco Ltd
3. Municipalities of:
 - a. Trail
 - b. Warfield
 - c. Rossland
 - d. Montrose
 - e. Fruitvale and
 - f. Regional District of Kootenay Boundary
4. Government of British Columbia
5. Federal Government of Canada

This article is a perfect example what cooperation and trust can achieve in Governments, Industry and Organized Labour.

I will close this article on that note.

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All good from an ICBA reference point of view. Jordan Bateman, August 24, 2026

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