

## **Apple Box Talks – Interview with Hermender Singh Kailley**

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Interviewee – Hermender Singh Kailley (HSK)

Interviewers – Crystal Braunwarth (CB) and Hillary Bergshoeff (HB)

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CB: IATSE 891 presents Apple Box Talks.

HB: The podcast where we get to talk to the very best in entertainment, the artists and technicians of IATSE 891.

CB: From prep to post and everything in between, we create worlds on screens of all sizes.

CB: Welcome to part one of our educational series for IATSE 891's podcast, "Apple Box Talks." I'm your Business Representative, Crystal Braunwarth.

HB: And I'm Hillary Bergshoeff. Today we are thrilled to welcome the Secretary Treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour, Hermender Singh Kailley. Welcome, Hermender.

HSK: Thank you very much for having me.

CB: Thank you for coming in. So let's just get right into it. Tell us about your pathway from IATSE to the Longshoremembers to now Secretary-Treasurer of the BC Fed.

HSK: Okay. It was about the mid-1990s. I was working for the Vancouver Fringe Festival, which at the time was on Commercial Drive, was working with about 20 other technicians. We were all freelance technicians. It was a non-unionized event. And we were having some issues with the new Executive Director, so we decided that since we weren't being listened to when we individually went in to talk to the Executive Director and management team, we decided to sign cards. We had a meeting, and we said that this was unacceptable, that if they weren't going to listen to us individually, that we needed to get a representative in. So we signed cards. It was in the mid 90%. I think maybe one or two people didn't sign the card. And then after that, we were certified under IATSE 118 and the Fringe Festival technicians are still supported and represented by IATSE now. So that's how I got into IATSE. In 2004, I had an opportunity. I had an application into the Longshore Union, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 502, decided to fill out the application and took the test. I passed and in December of 2004, I started with the Longshore Union. Until 2016, I became a full member of that union. And then I wanted to do a little bit more, so I ran for Secretary, well, I ran for executive, got that in 2018, and then November of 2019, I was elected as the Secretary Treasurer at the Union, and I did three terms until November of 2022, where I ran and was acclaimed as the Secretary Treasurer at the BC Federation of Labour at their constitutional convention.

CB: Tell us exactly what is the BC Federation of Labour. Help us demystify this for our members and folks listening.

HSK: Well, the BC Federation of Labour is a voluntary federation that's made up of 50 affiliate unions. And so these unions, we can think of it as the labour tent in British Columbia. And the BC Federation of Labour does a lot of government relations, so lobbying on behalf of not only our affiliates but all workers in BC, unionized and non-unionized. We hold events. Our

convention, we do regional conferences that are throughout BC and we try to pick different regions every year. We do training both in areas like organizing, which we have the Organizing Institute, but we also have the BC Federation of Labour Occupational Health and Safety Center where we provide training on occupational health and safety, both on the provincial regulations and the federal regulations, and we have the BC Center for Women in the Trades, which was started because women were so underrepresented in the trades and construction especially, and they do lots of leadership training, occupational health and safety training, be more than a bystander training. So education, lobbying, government relations, events, and then of course we support our affiliates. So we hold strike coordination calls if there's going to be labour disruptions. We go to as many rallies and conventions as we can to talk about the labour movement in BC and in Canada in general and we provide whatever support that we can. We have six amazing directors and we have a huge admin staff and that's where the sort of magic of the labour movement happens. But if I was going to break it down into just a simple sentence, we fight for workers in British Columbia.

HB: So what does it take from your experience as a worker on the floor? ILWU and 118 are not small locals. What was it that drew you to want to step up and run to be part of the executive?

HSK: I would say it was an almost 10 year journey for me to get to the point of wanting to run for something in the union. So anytime you join a new organization, whether it's work or your union, there's that sort of time where you're understanding what's going on, you're identifying issues. And it was just in the lunchroom, talk with fellow workers on different issues, not with anger, because sometimes in our work sites we're very angry with the employer, but looking at it pragmatically, like what could we do to change this issue that we're angry about. And then I sat on a committee called the grievance and credentials committee at Local 502 of the ILWU and that's sort of where I started to build some relationships with other people that I would say are like leadership in the in the union. And then finally after that year I decided that I wanted to run for an officer position and so it was just a lot of listening and a lot of troubleshooting what are the issues and what are some ways we could we can tackle them.

HB: So as you likely know, we have elections coming up here at IATSE Local 891 for four different positions that are vacant. What would you say to the membership listening to this podcast as they approach that, as they approach the body of candidates, the process of the election, what advice would you give?

HSK: Well, the first thing that I would say is that representation matters. So you want to elect people that give you meaning yourself, but also the collective, the best chance to move forward. And no, I'm not going to say that there's never like internal politics and unions and other organizations there always is. And it's during election times that I always say, look, sometimes you just have to put your personal grudges and your anger aside and just look at the people, what their experience is, what their education is, how are they to talk to, are they willing to listen and make your selection. The great thing about elections is that unions really lead the way in democracy where every member has a vote and they decide who's going to represent them.

HB: So voting is really important.

HSK: Voting is extremely important, extremely important because like I said representation really matters.

CB: On that I want to get into some of the work that BCFED has done and that you may have been a part of. You talked about being an organizer. So how important is it for members to know

who it is they're electing and how they feel about organizing and particularly card check and happy for you to reference the provincial election as well?

HSK: The International Longshore Warehouse Union is an organizing model Union. And it would probably be a whole other podcast to talk about the differences and styles of Union. But an organizing model Union is really about flipping the power dynamics on its head. So we talk about it as the upside down triangle where the membership is really at the top. And so you have executive boards, you have officers And issues and resolutions, they come up through the officers to executive boards. But at the end of the day, it's the membership that really gives the final okay. So when we talk about organizing, a lot of people think about organizing as just external. How do we get new bargaining units? How do we build up our membership? But organizing is also internal because one of the things that I used to say a lot when I was a rank-and-file member and not involved in the union was, what are the issues? How come it feels like we're not getting full communications of what the issues are and what we can do to help? So organizing is also internal. The membership needs to know what our key issues are right now. What are the key problems or the key wins, that's the other thing we don't do enough of in labour is celebrate the wins. It's always like, okay, this is taken care of what are the next like 15 things on the list. And so that internal organizing one, it gives transparency to the rank-and-file, really no secrets and in labour, but hearing it from the organizer usually sits in on the executive board meetings, I don't know the structure and IATSE, you basically hear the information direct without that game of telephone of one member telling another member telling another member. Also organizing is where you can run internal campaigns as well as external campaigns. And those campaigns start to show how much of the membership believes in that issue or that cause. And that's how you build solidarity we talk about all the time. And so organizing is very important. Now when we talk about external organizing, we have a model now in BC, the current government brought back in card check or single step certification. But it's not something new. We used to have single step certification. And then for a period of about 16 years, it was taken away was the BC Liberals that were in power at the time, and they added extra steps to the whole certification process, which increased the amount of time from when workers decided they wanted to join a union until their certification would happen. And the key message we said was how many times do workers have to tell you that they want to join a union? How many steps need to be in that process? And so the NDP listened. We got card check back in British Columbia. And what we've seen is an exponential increase in the amount of applications for certification and in certification. And the other piece I'll give you a piece of data I just saw last week is from 2019 to 2023 BC had the largest increase in union density in the country. I think it's about 3.1 % in that time. Now, is that enough? No. But it just shows that when the barriers are taken away, more Canadians, more British Columbians want to join unions and card check allows us to do that. And that's the time we're in. And that's only till December 31st. This year we've seen a huge increase in the number of applications for certifications. And I expect that to increase because a lot of our affiliates and other unions it also takes some time to change the trajectory of your organizing when legislation and regulations change. So I think we're just ramping up now. I think workers, especially in sectors that have traditionally not had any union density or very, very low union density. And I'll give an example right now is animation and I see it on social media all the time. That's exciting. These are workers that never thought that they could have a union in their workplace. Workers who sometimes are pushed to the brink in terms of workload and now they have someone to represent them. I mean, I really believe that card check was part of the way that this is going and the other thing is it's momentum. It's like a snowball, you get one group in the sector. And then when they tell their stories, other workers in that same sector are like having the same issues. We need to look at this. So organizing is huge. And that's why we've kept the organizing institute not only going, but you're looking to push the number of classes we take. Because my

personal feeling is that every union member should be an organizer, whether internal or external. But if you have internal organizers like that and workers are saying, you know, let's be positive, let's look at where we can be and not dwell on issues that are there for a short timeframe, that's where we build a much larger, stronger and resilient movement.

CB: Thank you for your work in that area and your advocacy, the entire BC Fed, because card check in particular affects our ability to organize in a timely fashion, because as you know, productions come in for a short time period. It's not brick and mortar. It's always kind of moving around. And so card check has been instrumental in some of the success of our organizing. So thank you for that. And I just want to kind of roll back to something that you noted, sort of the upside down triangle with members at the top. Sometimes there's sort of an elected versus rank-and-file and there's a bit of a divide and, you know, I truly believe that just benefits the employer. And so I'm curious to know what you do to sort of unite that divide. How do you, how do you build those bridges between, you know, folks who have been elected off the floor, have been doing positions of service and that communication between rank-and-file?

HSK: That's a good question, and it's not a simple answer that I can give to that. Those issues happen, I think that communication is the primary piece that causes that gap or that rift, and I believe that we need to communicate better as leaders, that comes from me as well. I need workers in BC to see that these things are being done, And the same is true in unions. The elected leadership in a union, there's so much work that goes on that is unseen and not talked about. And all you see is your officers come to meetings and tell you what the rank-and-file need to do. And they don't see all the hard work that happens in the background. The meetings with other unions, the meetings with government, the meetings with industry stakeholders, with the employer, those are not easy, and those people are advocating on your behalf. But if the rank-and-file doesn't know that that work is happening, that's when people start to say, "Well, what is our leadership doing?" And so the main way to find out, and this is a bit of putting the onus back on rank-and-file too, is show up to your union meetings. Union meetings is where we conduct our business. That's where there is a forum where every member can step up to the mic and ask a question, state their opinion, and then we vote because we are very democratic, and what the majority wants we move forward with. And those unions that internally organize and get good numbers out to their rank-and-file to show up to the union meetings, or usually the ones where that rift shortens and you start, people start to see, but it can't just be putting the meeting on, rank-and-file has to show up. If you have a membership of 2,000 workers, I'm just throwing a number out there, and 200 show up, those 200 people are going to dictate the path forward for your union. So the more people that show up, the more representative the votes and the debate are of what the larger membership wants. So that, I think, is the number one key piece. Because unions can make monthly or weekly newsletters. They can send out emails. You can do all those pieces. But really, the business of your union, of your local happens at those meetings. So show up to those meetings. That's the, I think the biggest positive way that you can make a change in your union.

HB: So as someone who identifies from a racialized background in prominent leadership in union and the labour world here in BC, that's that was for me personally really encouraging coming from a racialized background too that it hasn't always been my experience that the labour world has always been a welcoming place. This is kind of a question in two parts. First, what did it take and what would you say to the people who are from communities that have not always been well represented in labour about being involved even when it feels risky? And then in the second part, it's so complicated once we actually get there, how do we stay there?

HSK: Yes, I think another question that we could probably spend a whole podcast on.

HB: Yep.

HSK: I'll kind of answer it in phases. The first phase of working, and even when we certified with IATSE 118, it was just about the work. and we had a really good group of technicians, we were friends, so we worked together, we hung out socially together, and it was never, I never felt ever that anyone looked at me differently. And then when I got into Longshore, it has a huge demographic of the union is workers of color, and so one of the things I felt that helped me even to get into the Grievance and Credentials Committee and the executive was one of the things that I felt was weakness of mine and then became a strength which was born and raised in Canada. I speak Punjabi, I speak rudimentary Hindi and always wanted to be as un-Punjabi as possible because of the racism when I was younger, and now I was the bridge between a union membership that was very diverse. And so it became a strength. And so I was able to listen. I was able to communicate in whatever language, I mean, between English and Punjabi. And then when I got elected as the Secretary Treasure, a lot of people said, "Oh, you're the first secretary of treasure or that's a person of color," but I never really talked about it. And then it wasn't until I got a phone call, it was in, I think it was like, I used to know the exact date, September 15th, 2022, from Suzanne Skidmore, who was the Secretary Treasure at the BC Fed at the time, asking me if I had interest in running as Secretary Treasure for the BC Fed, because she was going to now run for President. And I can tell you internally how I felt at that time. And it was like imposter syndrome. It was why me how there must be 500 people better than me in this position. In the end, it became this is like almost a once in a lifetime opportunity. I have to try this. That's one thing I've never been afraid to get into that uncomfortable zone and try something. And it was at the convention as I was going from one affiliate's delegation meeting to another, seeing people of color and how excited they were. And the first one that really comes to mind was HEU, which has a huge, I think, maturity workers of color demographic. They were coming up to me and they wanted to take their picture with me. And I've never encountered that in my life. And it wasn't about Hermender in that role, but it was they were seeing themselves represented in leadership or possible at that time. Elections still hadn't happened, but this is what I was seeing. And so the day of the election, I was acclaimed, but you have to go through the process of the three nomination calls and I was up on the podium and I just remember it was like there was this like electricity I can't even describe it but as the third and final nomination was called I just remember like my eyes welling up with tears I didn't know why and so when it was announced I was acclaimed the first thing I did was I took my name back and we but we can talk about that but over I would say the next nine months what I decided was I'm not just going to go through this door into leadership and shut it behind me and I'm here. My background is my background I'm not going to hide from it as I did when I was younger and I'm going to speak up and I'm going to help people because when you're talking about representation and underrepresented groups and leadership, it's not enough to just nominate them or ask them to run. They need mentors. They need someone that's going to show them the process and understand it. Like those are all barriers that just aside from what people think that are barriers to leadership is even if I wanted to do this, how would I get there? So I try to do that as much as possible. And yeah, I will advocate for workers of color, all workers, but workers of color, just because we've seen the barriers that they face. I've seen it with my parents who are immigrants here and help to level the playing field.

CB: I want to tell you how beautiful that image is of what you I'm not going to just open this door and close it behind me because I can literally see the people that are now walking through that door that you've left open. It is the evolution of human beings and not just as workers, but as a community, as a global community. And that's the power of labour and people who are part of it. And that is what you've done. So, thank you.

HSK: Absolutely. And when we talk about labour rising and labour growing and the movement growing, we can't do it in an echo chamber. We need to connect to social groups and community groups. And workers are a community, like your neighbors are workers, you're the person working at the grocery store is a worker. And so, you talked about that fabric of community and the beauty of unions is the workers decide, rank-and-file decide what kind of community, what kind of world we want to live in because there's lots of people out there that are trying to divide us and our job is not just push back but build that safety bubble around our communities of what we want our communities to look.

HB: I don't want to embarrass you, just tell me if we want to walk it back. This last week you received the honour of the King Charles III Coronation Medal and I want to speak about it specifically in something you just said that you're not afraid of getting into an area of discomfort and I think that that's such an important message to share in the times that we live in that so much of what we do is not a zero-sum game and it's not going from one state of being to another state of being. We're almost always living in tension and I was really struck personally by the way that you spoke to that on LinkedIn when you were sharing the news about the medal. Could you speak a little bit about how you stay in that tension of trying to receive an honour, a well-deserved honour for service to working people and fighting for workers' rights and understanding the complex systems that we're in that allows that medal to be called what it is.

HSK: Yeah. Well, first I'll start with this. I have a very hard time receiving recognition because the way in my mind I frame my work and my work as part of a movement. It's not my work. I'm working with people, with the team. I mean, that's the only way we're going to get results is working together, standing shoulder to shoulder. So any sort of individual honours, it's just difficult for me to accept. And I've even had a really good friend and mentor who said like, when people say, you did a good job, you need to accept that like thank you, and I just said I don't know why it's just not in the fabric of me. So I found out a week before I had gone on a two-week vacation which is when I was supposed to be told Minister of Labour Harry Baines wanted to tell me in person that I was going to receive it. And so it was in Surrey. I believe it was like eight days before. He let me know and I was surprised surprised when he said it. And he said that he had nominated me and he went through his list of, you know, working for the labour movement and I did some Google research and that's when the discomfort sort of started to come in. My parents, I mean, I'm a proud first generation Canadian, but I'm born to immigrant parents that came from the state of the job in India and we all know that the British were in India and left in 1947. And especially, I mean, there was harm caused throughout India, but especially the state of Punjab, which is in the north, was split. And so they split Pakistan. The country currently known as Pakistan was part of Punjab. And if you look at the map and the difference, it'd be like somebody slicing BC three-quarters of it off and calling it a different country. And so even within my extended family, I had family that was on the other side, and they had to cross. And there was a lot of cross-cultural violence because it was basically, we're doing this, okay, we're out of here, good luck. There was no thought process on how to safely re-home people. And there was a lot of deaths in a lot of communities. And so that sticks with me. I mean, my parents talked about it all the time, especially my dad. And so here I am about to receive a medal that's in the name of the king of the monarchy that internally I know caused so much harm in my ancestor's land, my grandparents, my father, my mom, my aunts and uncles, they all dealt with it. They were all alive. And how do I reconcile that with receiving an award for the work I did? And so there was a moment where I was going to politely decline the medal. And I talked with my wife, I talked to a couple of really good friends and they said to look at the recognition and then the medal separately. I opened my notes app kind of write down some of

the feelings I was getting and you have to realize it was like 12 drafts to get it right. I mean, it talks about being humble in the recognition. I thank my family, my wife, my kids, my extended family, which means a lot to me. And I thank Minister of Labour Harry Baines, who you may not know this worked with my dad. They both used to be plant chairman for IWA, back in the day, so they were in the trenches together and Harry talked about that in the ceremony and the recognition that the BC Fed team and ILWU and I was, I probably should have added IATSE in there as well because that was the start of the journey. But I think in there I had a line that although we receive individual honours, it's really to the movement. It's the work of a larger group. And so that was my framing that I'm accepting this for the work that the labour movement has done that I've been a part of. And then I think I did like three paragraphs that I couldn't accept this without identifying the harm done around the world by colonialism, especially in Punjab, but even here in Canada, which really tied me in with reconciliation work because a lot of the pieces that Indigenous People tell me about colonizing happening here in Canada, they match with what happened in India. So it's tough not to separate those and say it was the monarchy that caused it. So I brought it up and I put it out there and I knew that some people might be like, "Oh, he's taking shots at the very organization that is bestowing this honour on him", but the honour for me was getting it from Minister of Labour Harry Baines to be nominated by the government for the work that we do here in BC. It just happens to have the king's name and silhouette on the medal itself. So that tension, the push, pull of do I accept this? Am I supporting colonialism by accepting this medal. And so I had to do that post exactly how it was of the humility and the respect that I felt on getting the honour, but also what the monarchy represents around the world for decades.

HB: Yeah, I was, I was so grateful to read it because I feel like with the commitments we have made with the IATSE 891 in the work that we have ongoing, the strategic plans that we have now and the plans we're looking forward to for the future to advance reconciliation, equity, diversity, inclusion as a settler myself, as someone from another country, we need to walk in that tension every day. We should be uncomfortable every day, and there's ways to do that well. And I'm grateful for the way you modeled it. And that sentence you referenced, I'd love to read it because I think it sums up everything you've said so well. "It's the nature of our movement that even though individuals may be recognized, it's our collective work that truly is being honoured." And that just sums up unionism right there, right? So I'm very grateful.

HSK: Thank you.

CB: That's the essential truth part of truth and reconciliation and I think that's woven throughout all of labour's work. You have to get down to the dirty truth of things in order to change them so without exposure, there's no healing we say right and that is exactly what this piece offered people education and a chance to heal.

HB: So I'd like to shift gears a little bit. We have the BC Fed Convention coming up at the end of November. That's another thing that we would love to demystify a little. We do have the opportunity at one of our upcoming general meetings, obviously, as a member of the Fed, IATSE will send delegates. What would you describe as the role of a delegate? If someone's interested in putting their name forward for that, what does that mean for them representing IATSE in that space?

HSK: Well, the PC Federation of Labour Convention is like a labour's parliament. Only it only happens every two years. So one point in demystifying the convention is I get asked a lot, like how do you choose the issues that you promote? How do you decide what campaigns or what you're lobbying on? And the answer is always while at our convention is resolutions that are

brought forward by affiliates and we debate them. Some are adopted, some are not adopted and the ones that are adopted kind of start to build out the map of what the next two years until the next election is going to look like. And some of it is issues that are happening at the time and some of them are longer term, like we're going to keep working on this. There's some pieces that can be fixed with legislation or regulation, and there's other pieces that is shifting culture. And so, delegates that come to that convention need to be able to express what their feelings are and the feelings of their union, because when you represent so many people, like we're almost half a million unionized workers in BC, we're not always going to agree on everything. And so convention is a good time to see what are the issues that affect the most workers? And those are the ones that go into our like legislative priorities document. We know that this is an issue that the most amount of people support. And then there's other issues that are sort of sector-based, for IATSE that's in the entertainment sector. And even those, it's not always just about your union wages and benefits and protections, but there's some resolutions that come that are about community and what kind of community we want. And part of my job is to strike that balance between some people call it union bread and butter issues, your wages and protections and benefits, and then your social justice piece. And the social justice pieces are the ones that really build out our communities. Work allows us to have time off, but community, you're always in community, whether you're working or you're playing or you're just at home sitting out on your front yard and your neighbor comes by and those communities, we want them to be welcoming and inclusive. I mean, labour has been very clear with what we've done over years and decades and we keep fighting for those. And so it's a time for everyone to come together and talk about what are the values that we all agree in and how do we move the needle on those?

CB: So speaking of those resolutions, IATSE has just recently established as of this year, artificial intelligence language in contracts in the USA and in Canada in certain parts. And we will be negotiating that same language in 2025 with the AMPTP and CMPA. And we're looking to bring a resolution and we know that AI will hit every industry if it hasn't yet, we've got the automated, you know, grocery checkouts and that sort of thing. And IATSE's sort of vision is to make it a human centered issue where the humans are leveraging the technology, not the other way around. And so can you speak to what happens once a resolution passes? What does it then empower the Fed to do?

HSK: Once the resolution, for instance, the AI one is adopted at the convention, it then moves on to the next step where like all these doors open up. We can add it to our lobbying, our legislative priorities. We can start working on campaigns, like a larger labour campaign on the issue. I mean, AI is something that's so new, but it's like exponentially growing. It's sort of when the home desktop computer kind of started to enter all the homes and you just saw every year they were like twice as fast and twice as much memory and the size was getting smaller and it was sort of, you know, in five years what a computer was was completely different. AI is the same way. It just seems like every six months some new wrinkle comes in that changes it. And sometimes we have to act even if there isn't a resolution on the books from the convention because the technology is so new. So we had the chapter three labour code review in BC. And once we've got through all the resolutions, affiliates have put forward, we sat down in a room and I said, there's nothing on AI or automation in here. And, you know, some people told me we can go for it on the next review, which is in five years. And I said, what we are seeing in automation and AI, and in some sectors, those are coupled, like it's automation with AI, it's going to be completely different. And if we don't start to build some sort of guardrails around that now, to try to go in five years and work backwards to get those guardrails in place is going to be a lot harder. So when that resolution comes to convention and when it gets adopted, we would then work with IATSE. We always work with who brought the resolution forward to see what that



would look like. But those are some of the options we would have campaigns, lobbying. And the campaigns wouldn't just be for workers, it would be for everyone. Because let's be honest, AI and automation do not pay taxes. They don't coach your kid's soccer team. They don't spend money in local small businesses, restaurants. So, if you start to see AI and automation replace workers in the long run, it's going to be bad for everyone. Who's going to make up that lost tax revenue? All the taxpayers. And it starts to rip into that social fabric of our communities. And I think that some people don't realize what a tsunami it's going to be, if we don't put those guardrails in place now, and like Crystal said, like, make it a human-centered approach to it. Automation that helps improve the safety and the ease with which workers can do their job is one thing. And automation and AI that replaces workers is a completely different thing. There's room to move on something that helps and assists workers. There's no room to talk about something that replaces workers.

CB: And our industry in particular went from black and white with no sound to sound, to color and sound, and from 35 mil film to HD. And so we're used to evolving and adapting. You know, we're some of the most adaptable sort of workers in various sectors and so we also want to approach it without fear and there's so much fear even from the people that are in AI because it changes so rapidly that that we do take that human-centered approach and we're grateful to have an organization like the Fed to actually present it to to also collaborate with us because this is not just one industry's mind that is going to solve this this new issue for workers.

HSK: I saw a video two days ago. It was someone talking about AI, and that AI isn't a tool, it's an agent. And the example they gave me should be quite scary. And so what they did was they wanted to see how far their AI model could go. So they wanted to see if it could get past those capture images that verify that you're a human logging in. And that particular model of AI they were using wasn't very good at it. But what the model did was went to the website Task Rabbit and hired someone to solve the capture. The person said, why do you need me to solve this? And the AI model's response was, 'I'm visually impaired.'

HB: Oh my goodness.

CB: Wow.

HSK: So, a small example, but look if you start to build that out of what it could be in five years, that's scary.

HB: I'm scared now.

HSK: That's very scary.

CB: Yeah.

HSK: Yeah. So, I agree, Crystal, with you saying that we cannot take this issue on with fear. Coming from Longshore union, Longshore work, we've been hearing about automation for years. In fact, goods used to be loaded into ships and out of ships on pallets with netting around them. And then when containerization was introduced and it was a very small percentage, what the ILWU at the time did was negotiate a deal. And up here in Canada, we negotiated a deal that every container that hit the port, \$10 will go into the Longshore Pension Fund. Nobody at that time from either side thought that containers were going to take over most of the cargo shipping. And that's what's done now. And because of that, Longshore's Pension Fund it's an increase every year.

CB: Wow.

HSK: And so that's just an example of instead of going into fear and saying oh my goodness, we need to protect our jobs. We can't increase our membership all of these sort of knee-jerk in fear moments. Instead they negotiate it and got a really good deal. Now granted they didn't 30 years later where we were going to be but they got a good deal and I think that's what we need to do with this technology is one put the guardrails around it and number two do the negotiations it has to be into the CBAs, that's the only way we're going to keep these employers because they just naturally will bring in any technology where they can get a larger share of the of the revenue it's profits so we can't be fearful. And instead, we need to strategize and we need to work together.

CB: That's where consultation is so critical in CBAs, right? There's constant collaboration between the worker using the technology and the employer that wants to implement it. And and so we've got that language established with, you know, like, as I mentioned, a few IATSE agreements. And so there is room for change for evolution of the technology and but that consultation piece because at the end of the day the employer is also human and I think can relate on certain levels right of not wanting something to just set up and take over so I guess I really want to know what what drives you to do what you do.

HSK: Great question. Part of it is my upbringing being born to immigrant grandparents seeing the hard work that they put in and seeing how unions not only protected them but gave them a chance. So my dad, after he had been in Canada for about three years, got a job working in a sawmill and became a proud member of the IWA. My mom was a proud member of HEU, she worked in a hospital, housekeeping. My grandfather was an IWA member as well. And they talked a lot about how fair it was working in a job that was covered by the union. And also they were defended at the time there's lots of racism, actually a lot of the same stuff that we're seeing lately. And the union was sort of made work a safe space for them. When elections came up, when there was possible strike for IWA, I'd always talk to my dad and they always talked about hard work and being there for people. And so moving from that now, having my own children who are going to be entering the workforce in a few years, working in some great work sites, working obviously as a technician in IATSE, and then working at the ports where there's each shift is 300, 400 people and talking to them and fighting for each other's rights. I mean, at the end of the day, I think that belief that workers are what create our country in our province, that yes, we need to have people investing in warehouses and production and factories and all that. But at the end of the day, without workers, nothing can run. And so the drive is both how do we, and you'll hear me say a lot like level the playing field because over a few decades now with unfettered capitalism, what we're seeing is the divide between the ruling class and the working class has grown. There's this huge gap and I hate the word middle class because it infers that there's an upper class and a lower class, and I think there's just the working class and we have the power in numbers. One of the other things I talk a lot about lately in my speech is that there's two prime ways to get into power. One is money. And employers, especially corporations, they have lots of money that we're never going to outspend them. The other way is through people power, and that's where unions and the labour movement have the upper hand and worker power. We're always talking about building worker power. That's internal organizing. That's communication to your rank-and-file. All these pieces are for our side to get organized against those that are just going to throw money at it and not only are they going to throw money at it but they want to throw money so that they can make even more money and they're just accumulating this like obscene amount of wealth while you have workers who are working some of them are working 80 hours a week and they still are like right at the poverty

line and you know is that fair is that equitable does that create better communities like what is the end goal.

HB: I think a really impactful thing I heard from another advocate was one of the ways you can also realize where you are and that continuum is the difference that three months will make in your life three really good months Yyou'll be great. You still won't be part of that ruling class. Three really bad months you could be on the street and then the impact of three months to someone in the ruling class same thing, nothing touches them that divide is getting bigger and bigger and bigger and when we frame it like that sometimes it helps kind of coalesce the reality of the need for solidarity. So looking backward over your time as the Secretary Treasurer of the BC Fed, what are some wins that you could share with our listeners to encourage us knowing that that gap is getting bigger?

HSK: Well one we've already talked about which is card check because there's no social program, no government service, that's better than getting a union job. And that's just facts. Union wages set the bar for even non-union wages. Those protections, occupational health and safety that the unions fight for. Other people reap the rewards as well. Look at the asbestos regulations. First of its kind, I think Canada making not only the people working in asbestos abatement, but those companies that are working that have to be licensed as well. Five paid sick days for all workers, union or not, we want more because nobody should have to choose between providing for their family and coming to work and getting better and not making other people sick. You've seen the largest increase in average salary in Canada here in BC. I firmly believe it's because our union density has increased so much since 2019. All these pieces are just small, like we have to keep stacking them. There's no magic bullet. We just have to keep fighting. Nothing that workers have won in this province, in this country, was just given to us. Hard work, striking, doing what's right, which is not necessarily always the right thing to do for individual workers. I mean when we talk about solidarity that's what it's about standing up standing behind someone for an issue that actually doesn't affect you but you know, it's the best thing for the greater good. And we're starting to see, you know, some of this rise of real populism nationalist rhetoric which has agitated and I referenced it earlier, the same sort of racial hate blaming immigrants coming to this country, immigrants that were brought in to fill the labour gap. Was it done right? No, I don't think so. I think we can improve greatly on how that the last four or five years has gone. But those people didn't come here to disrupt the country. And those are the same things that people that I hear them having to deal with is what I remember in elementary school growing up. So that's where labour pushes back. That's where we have equity. That's where we champion people from different equity-denied groups, being able to come into positions, into you know something as simple as translating materials into a language that they can more easily understand. All these little pieces they help in the long run and what you're seeing as a labour movement here in BC specifically is I think we're as united as we've been in decades in terms of the affiliates. Crystal will know this from the officer's table but we work together, we work really well and we listen. Everyone listens. And there are times when there might be an issue that two different groups have differing positions on. And then we sit down at a table and we talk through them, like adults. And, you know, if we did more of this like listening to each other in every part of life, I think we wouldn't have a lot of the sort of anger and fear and rage that's being stoked by some people.

CB: Thank you, Hermender. And to that point, we show up. We show up for each other. And thank you for showing up today and shining a light on labour and what the BC Fed does and what you've done.

HSK: Thank you for having me here. It's always good to be able to talk about labour and especially with IATSE.

HB: And we'll have you back any time. I wrote a list of all the things you said would make good for another podcast. So we'll have you back in another time.

HSK: Sounds good.

HB: Thank you so much for joining us.

HSK: IATSE will always have a special place in my heart.

HB: And that's a wrap for another episode of Apple Box Talks.

CB: For more episodes and to find your fit in the film and TV industry, check out [ourwork.ca](http://ourwork.ca).