

Disability History Association Podcast

Interview with Ravi Malhotra

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Caroline Lieffers: Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Disability History of Association Podcast. My name is Caroline Lieffers and it's my pleasure today to be speaking with Dr. Ravi Malhotra. Ravi and his co-author Ben Isitt recently released a new book entitled *Able to Lead: Disablement, Radicalism, and the Political Life of E.T. Kingsley*, which was published by the University of British Columbia Press. Ravi, thank you so much for joining me today.

Ravi Malhotra: Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

Caroline: We want to start actually by giving you an opportunity to read a passage from your book to set the scene. So I'll give you the, the floor.

Ravi: Thanks so much. So this is actually the epigraph of our book and it comes from one of Kingsley's comrades, fellow political activist W.A. Pritchard. So he says, "E.T. Kingsley was a master on the platform – simple, direct phrases – master of repartee. This one instance that comes to mind – out of many, and one will be enough. Whenever an election took place at that time, in Vancouver, the Vancouver local of the party ... organized a debate or meeting between candidates. Almost always the other parties agreed to this. The boys organized the meeting, ushered it, did everything, took a collection, and thus got some funds to carry on their work.

This particular year I have in mind, there was a Conservative, was named Cowan, I think the Liberal was Joe Martin, and there was an independent running, besides E.T. Kingsley for the Socialist party. This independent was a young lawyer with a good shock of curly hair and as they drew lots as to the order of speech, this fellow drew the first one and Kingsley was number two. Well the meeting opened and this boy took it upon himself to tell the crowd that he would not attempt to deal with questions of history and economics and these deep matters. "I leave that," he said, "to my bald-headed friend."

Well the old man, and he got up, he had artificial legs, they'd been cut off on the railroad on this side of the line, and he would stand holding onto a chair, and he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I've addressed hundreds of meetings on this side of the line and the other side of the line, and I've never found it necessary to refer to the physical characteristics of any of my opponents." But he says, "This young squirt has taken it upon himself to make reference to my baldness, which is very obvious. I want to tell him that there are two kinds of baldness. Bald on the outside," and he points to his head ... Then he pointed to the fella and said, "and bald on the inside. You can see my kind of baldness every time I take off my hat. His kind of baldness is evident every time he opens his mouth."

That was old Kingsley. And I could tell you all kinds of stories about him."

Caroline: Thank you so much for starting us off with that, Ravi. I think that does a beautiful job of setting the scene, and I can absolutely see why you used it as the epigraph to your book.

One of the things that I found most interesting about this book was the wide variety of background knowledge and training that both you and, of course, your co-author Ben Isitt brought to this project. There's labour history, legal history, disability studies, Canadian history, etc., etc. So evidently your diverse expertise and interests really shaped this project, made it possible, arguably. And I wanted to start by just asking if you could talk a little bit about your background.

Ravi: Sure, so I am a legal scholar, and because I'm a legal scholar, I have not the same archival skills, necessarily. When I got into this project, and the story is quite simple, I was reading Ian McKay's very famous work *Reasoning Otherwise* about Canadian labour history. I'm always on the lookout, because I was born with a disability, I'm a disability rights advocate, I'm on the lookout for disability, and I also have an interest in labour history. And so I saw this reference to Kingsley, I said wait a minute, I've never heard of this guy. He led the Socialist Party of Canada, what's that? You know, and people today are not very familiar with this largely pre-World War I phenomenon, and so I wanted to do more. And so I started asking around and lots of people said Ben Isitt, he's the guy you want to work with, he is, the one who's informed on this. And, of course, he is close to the place where Kingsley lived a huge part of this political life, it's British Columbia. And so Ben—who couldn't be with us today—is a city councillor in Victoria and, of course, is a historian, the man has two PhDs. And so we started collaborating, got the SSHRC grant--Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council—grant, and then it just snowballed from there. We had an army of researchers that scoured across North America, because Kingsley was a political activist in California, but he was also someone who was active in British Columbia. He ran for office in both places. Leaving aside his disability, I tried to find this out, I don't know that there are many people in history who ran for office for both the House of Representatives and the House of Commons. I tried to find this out, but I would have to say that there are very, very few such people, even including able-bodied people. So, I mean, he led a remarkable life. But Ben brought all these historical skills, archival skills and together we set out on this 10-year journey to write this book and ultimately led to *Able to Lead*.

Caroline: That's wonderful. Thank you so much for that. So, can you tell us a little bit more about who E.T. Kingsley actually was? What's his backstory? What is the story of his disablement?

Ravi: That's such a good question. I mean, he is a man who became a double amputee in 1890. And so at the beginning, I had mentioned I'm a legal scholar, one of the things that I started this project was a hunch. I got a SSHRC grant on a hunch that wait a minute, maybe he sued someone. That's a pretty enormous hunch. But while we never found the outcome of the litigation, we didn't get to go as far as we would have liked, he did sue the Northern Pacific Railroad for \$85,000, which you might think, as the lay person that's obscure, but he did this in the 1890s. \$85,000, and we actually worked this out, is millions in 2021 dollars, or maybe more than that. It's a huge amount of money. But it doesn't seem as if he was actually successful. We were never able to find this. He seems to have lived his life in poverty.

But he had been a farmer. He grew up in New York and in the Midwest in the Minnesota-Wisconsin area, so we traced his records there. But at some point he decides to become a brakeman, and we have records of this, because his brother-in-law was a publisher and then a member of the State legislature, his name was Wheaton Fuller. And we think that maybe Kingsley got the idea of politics because his brother-in-law, not a radical, but still, had been elected member of the legislature.

He becomes disabled in this accident and returns to the Midwest. We found his divorce records. He actually goes to divorce court, which again, is complicated in the 1890s. It's not, you know, it's not so simple; this isn't the era of no fault divorce. He abandons his family in that era. And his, his kids, we've traced his descendants, and he joins the largest radical formation in the United States, which is the Socialist Labor Party.

So he, he joins them, led by Daniel De Leon, and he becomes a noted soapbox speaker. And so he, he starts just speaking, you know, despite being a double amputee, and he is a state organizer, and he starts running first for local municipal office. But by the mid-1890s he had run twice for the House of Representatives. Now this is someone who's never elected. I don't want to misrepresent. He never got a huge share of the vote, but I don't think most Canadians or Americans realize the extent to which, in both California and British Columbia, in this period, there were thousands of socialists. The Socialist Labor Party had members that had branches operating in French, in German, in Yiddish, and Kingsley was right up there. He was an American, but he, he was a leading member. And many historians associate the free speech fights with the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World. But one of the things that we discovered is that he seems to have led free speech fights that nobody else, except in the archives, had documented. We found virtually no historians, with rare, rare exceptions, just fleeting references, who referred to the fact that the De Leonists had actually had free speech fights, and so they had silence protests. Kingsley had been arrested in the 1890s, you know I don't think he was convicted, but they had jury trials.

And so, if you actually get the book, which is available for sale now as a very cheap Kindle, *Able to Lead: Disablement, Radicalism, and the Political Life of E.T. Kingsley*, and I have to credit my colleague, co-author Ben, who has much more of an aesthetic sense than I do. Our book is replete with illustrations so we have some of the Socialist Labor Party posters that Kingsley did.

But De Leon was a difficult man to work with. He had a very narrow conception of Marxism, was very rigid. And so, in a short period of time Kingsley is on the outs. He leaves. First he goes, starts his own organization called the Revolutionary Socialist League in Washington State. I like to say that his life follows the trajectory of American theories of westward expansion, because is born in New York, gets married in the Midwest, you know, gets divorced in Minneapolis, but then decides to become a radical, lives in pre-earthquake San Francisco. It's a very dynamic city in the 1890s. And then he decides he's gonna go to Washington State and ultimately is invited to go to Nanaimo in British Columbia, and spends time there. He's a fish peddler in Nanaimo, and then he eventually becomes a leading member and forms, as a leader, the Socialist Party of Canada in Vancouver, where he spends the rest of his life as editor of their journal, the *Western Clarion*. So that that's an overview.

Caroline: It's a difficult life to give an overview of, right, because he's been involved in so many things. It's fascinating. We have a lot there to unpack. But I actually want to start with the thing that you mentioned first, which was the lawsuit. And one of the things that you guys talk about in your book is how the American legal system, for want of a better word, was very prejudiced against victims of workplace accidents in this period. And you gave some examples in the book that were just deeply unfair, at least from my perspective. But you also talk about how they emerged out of a very specific context of free labor and an understanding of what that meant. So I was wondering if you could just explain more about what an injured worker like Kingsley would have been up against in the legal system.

Ravi: Well that's a great question. I'm not gonna bore your audience to death with in-depth discussion of the doctrine, you know they had various legal doctrines, like the fellow servant rule, contributory negligence. But in layperson's terms the, the basic idea here would work to make it extremely difficult for a person to collect against the employer. These legal doctrines, the *res gestae* rule, all these doctrines worked in a manner that made it extremely difficult to show liability. And so, unfortunately, we were never able to find the outcome of the litigation, it seems it, it went nowhere, as far as we can tell. But what's also interesting, that I think your question touches on, is this whole notion of masculinity, that, you know, a lot of the unions at the time were very hostile to the interests of injured workers because it gave voice to the idea that they did not have appropriate skill, even though that's very unfair on the ground, you know they're working under very challenging conditions.

So in Kingsley's case, from the newspaper accounts, it seems that he had an accident on a freight train, we think, while trying to uncouple two cars, and there was a defective drawbar which connects the two cars. So in the book, we have this sojourn into the history of technology, you know, automatic couplers didn't exist until much later. So Kingsley would have to go in and do it manually. But interestingly enough, the unions, or some of them anyway, were not sensitive to the interests of injured workers, and they did very little. They sometimes would fund homes for them to live in and so, you know, that is something that is unfortunate but I think reflects the conceptions of compulsory able-bodiedness, which is a term we use, you know, but is also, you know, the work of masculinity. And it is interesting that Kingsley's impossible socialism, that capitalism cannot be reformed, his impossibilism, it is connected, I would argue, we can't prove it, but we can use disablement, that he didn't get a lot out of unions. So when he sees trade unions as a sop to the capitalist masters, you can sort of, and, you know, his slogan is no compromise no political trading. This is not your, you know, this is not your Jack Layton view of the world, this is, this is really, really radical socialism, not reformism. You can sort of see a link there, and we got the archival documents from the Socialist Labor Party. You see the leaders there, when they're unhappy with Kingsley, he splits with them, they say, Oh well, you know, Kingsley, he's, how brilliant and eloquent he is, but he's corrupting the younger members that are just sitting around drinking in the tavern. You know, they see that as a threat. And he had conflict with other leaders in the San Francisco branch that wanted to work more with unions, and eventually there's a falling out, so I do think these things are, are connected in a way.

And it's also connected, I think to gender politics, but you know, we can talk about that later. He doesn't, he has a very masculinist view of the world. It's not really - and even at the time, there were other socialists that had a more progressive view of gender equality, but his view was very narrow, that was really, you know that feminism of its time was a distraction from working-class politics, which is the man's role as a breadwinner, you know.

Caroline: That's really, really interesting. His sort of quote unquote conversion experience to socialism actually happens while he's recovering in the hospital, right? So, you know, was he reading socialist books? And is that what really led him to develop, I think you call it single-plank Marxism, right -- this idea that capitalism cannot be reformed, there is no compromise, right, the single plank. I'd love for you to say more about the process of him becoming a socialist and then maybe helping us, yeah, define the single plank Marxism a little bit more.

Ravi: Sure, so as far as we know -- the problem with Kingsley is he's not a man that left a diary, the way, say, so my friend Jeffrey B. Perry recently wrote a book about Hubert Harrison. That's a magisterial book, much longer than, he wrote a two-volume biography.

Hubert Harrison was an extremely important African American figure and his life overlaps with Kingsley. They're not connected, but my point is that Harrison left voluminous documents; Kingsley was a man who left nothing, with rare exceptions. He didn't talk about his own disablement. The parallel in his case is really Franklin Roosevelt so, because he was an amputee, while Kingsley wasn't as famous, and certainly, I know that there are very distinguished amputee scholars out there. We're not amputee scholars, but he is someone who seemed to be able to pass, if I can use that term, you know. But in terms of your question about his socialism, it seems as if while he recovered at the railway hospital, and in those days railways operated their own hospitals which speaks volumes to the level of injuries they faced, so there was a railway hospital in Missoula. And I think we have a photograph of that in the book. You know, so, you know, he seemed to start reading Marxism and certainly his, you know, his writings are not about himself, but about politics, are at extremely high level of political acumen. So he's an extremely learned man. But seems to be self-taught, you know, which I think was not uncommon in that era, you know, so he was just self-taught, radicalized. And then, and how he ends up in California we're not sure, but San Francisco in that era, it was the preeminent city on the west coast. There's no Hollywood. This is 1890s, you know, San Francisco was the place. It's a very cosmopolitan city, and I think he just falls in with these socialists and was admired for his intelligence. People who were his enemies all know how brilliant he was. And you could see that from the passage I read. He had this, you know, wit about him. He had this very sharp speaking style, and if you read his writings, you'd see the same thing in his writings, but, but I think he self-radicalized. And from there, it just became a story of activism, day in, day out.

He's, we have no record after his divorce of any personal relationships, you know, romances, nothing. We don't see, you know, he seems to have been single minded. And that, that's connected with this single-plank Marxism. It's all class politics, all the time. It's about one thing, which is the working class taking over, and for them, I think, running in elections was more about education. I don't think he seriously anticipated winning. But in British Columbia, other members of his party, like Hawthornthwaite and others, a couple of people are actually elected to the British Columbia legislature later on.

Caroline: That's really interesting actually, thank you for making that connection to Canada because that's where I wanted to take us next. Kingsley comes to Canada in 1902. He starts on Vancouver Island and then moves to the mainland a few years later. And you alluded to this earlier but I'd love to hear you say more about it. Did you feel the part of your project was just to restore Kingsley, the figure, in the history of leftist politics and leftist publishing in Canada--he seems to have been largely forgotten--or did you also think of Kingsley as like a means to an end, right? A way to help you draw more attention to this earlier pre-CCF period in Canadian leftist politics? Or maybe both?

Ravi: Well that's a great question. So other interviewers have essentially asked us, are we Kingsley-ites, you know, in a more, you know, and so speaking for myself, although here I think I'm fairly confident quite honestly speaking for Ben as well, the idea is not to say that in 2021 we can directly apply the ideas of Kingsley, that impossibilism is something that, you know, matches to the world of the Internet and Covid-19. That's not the intention. Although funnily enough, he did live through the era of the Spanish flu, which is, you know, they didn't have any compunctions about naming diseases with countries in those days. And so, for sure Kingsley lived through that, but no, no, honestly, the idea here is more that I thought it was fascinating and Ben Isitt has written many books on labour history, it seemed like he had so many things, Kingsley did, that connected with my interests and with Ben's interests.

And then we were just over the moon when the RA found the litigation; it all came together. It validated the project, because I was able to bring my legal background into it, and so it all fit together. The Socialist Party of Canada in general is not known even among people that work on the left. You know it's, most of their members, not all, but most of them are ended up in the Communist Party in the 1920s. And so Kingsley never joined, and I know you didn't ask this, but some people have asked me why is Kingsley not known today? What happened to him? And the answer I give is that social democratic historians find Kingsley embarrassing because he's so so radical, right, he doesn't fit in. You'll see this later on: people that outlived him, like W.W. Lefaux and others, you know, I think they sort of downplayed the radicalism, because they had careers to worry about in the CCF. And people think the CCF was radical but, I mean, the CCF has moderate factions, they had radical factions.

Communists didn't like Kingsley because Kingsley did not accept Lenin's 22 conditions or whatever, you know, Kingsley did not join the Communist Party. He was also very old, he was more the generation of Kautsky and Bebel, than you know, he was not a young person at that point. But I think that's the reason why Kingsley would have been forgotten.

But the reason for us doing the book is just, it brings so many things together. I, I didn't think it would be possible, quite frankly. Many times, I thought okay we're doing this, we have this grant, how are we going to get the stuff? But we had this army of RAs in multiple cities all over Canada, the United States, and eventually we found enough material.

Caroline: Well, this is what a good biography should do in my opinion, and I think this is a really good biography, is it uses Kingsley as a sort of centering structure. But from there, you can jump off into so many other interesting, important histories. I mean, I was learning so much about how fractious Canadian and American socialists were, I was learning about immigration law, which we'll talk about shortly. I mean it was just a really incredibly structured book that you're able to bring all these different stories together. It occurred to me that our American audience is not going to know what the CCF is, so, Ravi, can you give us just a quick precis on what the CCF is?

Ravi: Oh sure, so this is Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. It's a social democratic party that's a precursor to the modern New Democratic Party. So, I mean, the CCF and the NDP are analogous in some ways, not entirely, to the Democratic Socialists of America. But the CCF and even its predecessors had seats in at least provincial legislatures. And, to some degree in the House of Commons. The Socialist Party of Canada, though, largely existed in British Columbia and Alberta. It did not have a whole lot of members outside of those areas.

But we saw the connections when J.S. Woodsworth, a leading member of the CCF, lived in Vancouver. I think he was working on the docks. Kingsley was much older than Woodsworth, but there was a connection there. It's not surprising because Kingsley interacted with the people of the day, in whatever forum. But the CCF is essentially social democratic reformism.

Caroline: Why do you think that these more quote unquote radical parties, particularly the socialists, were present in the West, right? In BC and Alberta? Is there some sort of connection there between geography and radical politics?

Ravi: Oh that's a fantastic question. You know I wish I could give you an expert historian answer. I'll do my best to give you my answer, which is, I think that part of it has to do with the nature of industries there. I mean, I think that mining, forestry, I think, in part,

leads to radicals. People have built their careers on answering this question in a more sophisticated way. So I can tell you, for the earlier period, and I think that your question also would apply to, *mutatis mutandis*, to the American context. And so the Socialist Labor Party, and this is, I'm more familiar with this, the Socialist Labor Party in California was very different from its comrades in the east. Part of it is, many of the rank and file members didn't even speak English. They were trying to promote struggle and the people in the Debsian Socialist Party would say to them what, what are you talking about? You, you're trying to build a party, you know, you're going to the beer hall--everybody is German, and, but you want the American workers to join the revolution? This is not going to work. And they and they decided to build the moderate Debsian socialism.

I think that the same patterns applied in Canada. I think, you know, so you've got, the Finnish, for example. They had entire branches that operated in Finnish. And that history has been lost. I mean, if you're working in Finnish--I've been to Finland, not connected with this, although I actually used my contacts in Finland to get some of the translations. There was one part of the book where we had to get something translated from a Finnish Canadian newspaper. But Finnish is completely unrelated to English, even as a language family. Languages in India, for example, are more closely connected to English than Finnish is. So imagine being a Finnish Canadian or Finnish American, and you have a theory of Marxist revolution, but you only speak Finnish. I mean, you know, it's not exactly an auspicious way to begin. And so I think these ethnic enclave parties have difficulty in the Eastern Canada and Eastern United States. Now obviously some of them did learn English, but even the ones that did, they were more comfortable, you know. And so in the San Francisco case and that's on the west coast, they still had German and Yiddish language branches and from what I can tell, I think those branches were pretty hermetic. I think they ran their branches, they operated in their linguistic community. They recruited people from that community, but there wasn't necessarily a lot of interaction outside. And that, that's going to pose a problem in terms of interacting. You're not going to build socialism, if you know, the only people you're talking to speak Yiddish. I mean, that's, you know, that's going to be a problem.

And so Kingsley I think was probably pressed, I think as a native English speaker it's not surprising that he was selected to be a state organizer. And places like Vancouver where he ended up, I think were more fruitful because he didn't have the same degree--you know, I think a lot of people are not aware of the extent to which the people that are radical in places like Ontario, a pretty high percentage of them, I think, were people that were Finnish or Yiddish speakers, not everyone, but a whole lot of them were. And so, if you wanted to interact with them, you had to, you had to do that in their own language. They had their own language newspapers, they had their own linguistic branches. Other historians have written entire books about the Finnish Canadian radicals, the Yiddish Canadian radicals, and I think that was one stumbling block.

Caroline: You've already alluded to this as well, but I would love to hear you say more about it. Kingsley seems like quite the guy, if I can just say that. And he had strengths, but also shortcomings, as both a politician and just a political activist. I think dogmatic and irascible are some of his qualities, but also compelling, witty, charming, and I'm curious--I mean, you've, you've lived with Kingsley for effectively 10 years now, and I'd just love to hear you reflect on how you feel about him at this point.

Ravi: That's such a good question. I think in the book we make the point that Kingsley, to the extent that he is discussed a little bit here and there, has been sort of straightjacketed, put in a straitjacket, in this narrow view that he's an impossibilist, he's not sensitive to gender questions which is definitely true. That he's, you know, this very dogmatic, rigid

person. And the point we make in one chapter is that because this is an era before even radio or podcasts, let alone television or the Internet is that Kingsley had a lot of humor and that that humor wasn't, it doesn't carry over well in print. And that actually a lot of this was sarcasm, which you saw in the passage with which I opened the book, so he denounces his opponents in this very colorful terminology. A lot of times he's denouncing the workers for being so stupid. And when I say that I don't mean that in metaphorical ways. I mean, I think he's literally calling them stupid for being wage slaves and, you know, continuing to work under these conditions. And you know so he's--but, but I think there's something of the print world that hasn't been fully carried over, because you know, I would love to have a recording of Kingsley on radio but he's just too early for the radio era. It seems like Kingsley, just sort of at the very end of his life, radio was just starting. Had he lived another 20 years we'd have radio recordings but he's already in his 70s by the 1920s.

Caroline: Yeah, that's really interesting. You, you also talk in your book about how, if I can quote you, "Disablement manifests itself on every page of Kingsley's story like a hazy mist. It is not quite there at each and every moment, but one can always palpably sense it lurking in the background." I loved this because it encapsulated so much of how I think disability historians often feel when they're doing their work. And I'm curious about Kingsley. Did he talk much about his disability? Did commentators often refer to his disability? What do you think his relationship was toward his own disability, and how did that factor into his political career?

Ravi: Well that's a great question. I'm a little reticent, you know, I'm speaking with an amputee scholar so, you know this whole, I sort of dabble in disability studies, but ultimately I'm legally trained. I got that passage, you know, I think I refer to this great novel by M.G. Vassanji, *The Book of Secrets*, because if anybody's read *The Book of Secrets*, my experience of reading *The Book of Secrets* is similar to my research work on Kingsley, just in the sense that you feel you don't quite get everything. And so anybody's who's actually read this novel, I'm not going to go in depth about that, but it's one of those novels where the answers are never really told all the way through. It's about this colonial setting, but even after reading the whole novel you're not quite sure. The bottom line answer is that Kingsley virtually never discussed his disability, never left a diary, and so not only were we not sure about the litigation, which we eventually got documented, at some point, years into the research, we were also wondering, are these accounts all wrong? Did Kingsley have a disability? Eventually, we were able to find the accident, we were able to document it. And it seemed as if he had very basic prostheses at the beginning, which, that suggests, indirect evidence that he was not successful in his lawsuit. It seems pretty clear that he struggled this whole life. And the meager correspondence we do have are actually financial correspondence--Kingsley saying his newspaper is going to go bankrupt, he doesn't have enough money. He is someone who lived in poverty his whole life. But we do have accounts from his comrades in the Socialist Party of Canada saying around 1908 or so, he had been able to purchase more advanced prostheses.

So, I mean you know, so again, I'm not an expert, but we make use of Slavishak, you know, amputee scholars about, you know, mechanical transcendence and this sort of thing, because in a way, he has an accident, so you'd think he would have an adverse relationship to technology at one level, but he seems to blame capitalism, rather than the technology and he embraces technology. You know, so it's interesting, like many other working-class men, and you, of all people, you know this, that amputees, you know, they were sold artificial limbs as a way to restore their masculinity and productivity, although in Kingsley's case, you know, he doesn't go back and work on the rails, but he's able to do these incredible things. Had he not been injured, I don't think he'd be radicalized, I don't think he

would have become a leader of the Socialist Party of Canada. So in that sense, they're connected. So he's not, he's not a disability advocate, and so you know, in the book, we talk a little bit about other people, like what is the connection, you know, and I don't think there's a direct parallel with any one person that we can see.

But you know, one of the most famous radicals is of course Helen Keller, and we talk, so she's someone that was a socialist, although I think she becomes more moderate. She lives a very long time and downplays it later in her life. But because Kingsley's disability is invisible, unlike Helen Keller's, and so we have this anecdote which I think is really interesting, just in passing about Keller. But because Kingsley's disability is invisible a lot of his colleagues didn't know. Keller doesn't have that privilege. She's also, she's also a woman, and so, you know, there's a story that we recount where Andrew Carnegie, very, very famous philanthropist, his name is all over the United States, and you know, it's like Keller almost lived this double life, you know. She had these radical socialist politics. Mr. Carnegie is meeting with her, he found out about politics and he was so upset and so shocked that--he's meeting her as an adult, I think she's probably the same age as you, Caroline, when he had this meeting--but he threatens to pick her up, take her across his knees, and give her a spanking, you know which reflects the sort of ableism and gendered politics, you know because she is a young woman, very much an adult. Kingsley had none of that, but I think a lot of that is because a) he is a man and b) you know, his disabilities are invisible.

So when we get to the immigration part, you know I don't know if that's of interest to you, in Vancouver Island, it seems as a white man whose disabilities are not visible he crosses to Nanaimo and just starts being a radical, whereas you probably know people with disabilities historically, we talk about this, have always faced barriers. I don't think there's a whole lot of immigration control going on in 1902 in Nanaimo. I think part of it is nobody's there, a little bit. I mean obviously people live there, but I don't think the regulatory Foucauldian state is doing a whole lot of regulation in Nanaimo in 1902. And Kingsley's disabilities are pretty much, I think, invisible to a casual observer. So he starts being a radical, and it's not until the crisis in World War I, at the end of World War I with the Winnipeg General Strike that the state's really clamping down that we're able to find documents, where security officials are inquiring, has Mr. Kingsley been naturalized? I mean, if you find that in a document, I think that's from Colonel Chambers, who's at the very top of the security apparatus, when you read a document like that, that means somebody is thinking about deporting him. But you know, but he had already been naturalized at that point. So you know, but in the early days, he just crossed, and I think the fact that he was a white man whose impairments are not visible unless you actually look closely, he was able to just show up and start doing socialism. He was recruited to do radical socialist work. I don't think you could immigrate for that reason, today, even if you were able-bodied. You know, it's a very unusual context.

Caroline: It's really, really interesting and, yeah, I mean immigration is a theme that comes up in your book. And immigration laws in Canada at the time, at least ostensibly, discriminated against people with disabilities, as well as political radicals and, of course non-white or even non-Western European immigrants, in some cases. And it's fascinating that Kingsley's able to just sort of slip under that. Some of it might have been timing, right? If he'd arrived even a year or two later he might have been subjected to a full medical examination. But I think you're probably right that the privileges that he was able to have as a white man who could quote pass, right, as non-disabled helped facilitate that. I mean, did you want to say more about immigration and Kingsley's story?

Ravi: Well, I think it's exactly what you said. It's a matter of happenstance. I think that had he done this a few years later, when the immigration mechanisms were more structured I think it'd be a big problem. Had he tried to move to Toronto, I think, it would be a different story. But it's interesting to me, that he went to Nanaimo. Now I don't think that was related to the security state; I think that's because there were a radical group of activists in Nanaimo. But he starts becoming a fish peddler to support himself. He's only there for a couple of years. But you know, I'm being a little bit flippant, but I mean, we found his phone number in Vancouver, not Nanaimo, and his phone number is three digits in Vancouver. I mean if you, you can go, anybody can do a check the population levels. I don't know for Nanaimo, but in Vancouver in 1904, you're talking about a very small town. I mean this is not, you know, it's not and you know, Victoria is the leading city for quite some time. Vancouver from my understanding picks up its growth during the First World War, but prior to that it's a small place. And Winnipeg is the leading centre in many ways in western Canada. Before railways declined Winnipeg was a leading place. So I think that some of it just has to do with luck. The fact that, you know, his disability is invisible, he starts off in Nanaimo, and I don't think the security state, a) I don't think existed in the same way in 1902, and I don't think it was worried about people in the same way in British Columbia till later. It's only much later after World War I breaks out, you know and, you know, there's issues around that, you know, that they start, they start suppressing people, the national security state starts suppressing people that were opposed to the War, and so the *Clarion* has to take this careful line, you know, not to be too radical. But Kingsley is much less politically active after about 1912, as, you know. So I think that partly explains this, but even Kingsley you know was caught up in all this, but not until much later on.

Caroline: Well, you said he becomes less politically active effort after about 1912. Is that because the environment makes it more dangerous or difficult for him to be politically active, or is it just that he's getting older?

Ravi: I think that will never know for sure, but I think it's more that he was getting older. He had some political disputes with the Socialist Party of Canada leadership. And he has this long history of falling out with everyone that he works with, you know, and so, eventually, he has these disagreements with the Socialist Party of Canada. He's not in the party at some point, you know, and so eventually he's just doing stuff on his own. So his final run for office is not as a Socialist Party of Canada member. He runs one last time and we barely talk about it because there's not much to say about it. He runs 1926 right before maybe, about three years before his death as an independent radical. But, but I think a) he had disagreements and b) his, his health, I think, becomes more and more of an issue over time, because at some point, you know he's in his 60s and 70s, towards the end of his life.

Caroline: Yeah yeah, I think you sort of alluded to this earlier, but I wanted to push at it a little bit more, because I found this really interesting. At one point in your book you're talking about how Kingsley, when he arrives in BC is doing more desk-based work, or working even in a shop, right? So he's a fishmonger for a while, then he becomes an editor and publisher. And that might have actually been a problem for his, sort of, working class bona fides, right? He's not out there on the shop floor with other folks who might have been in the socialist movement. And I'm curious about this. I mean, do you see it as a matter of masculinity? Was this a problem for his ability to network and connect with the local socialist world? I'd love to hear you just reflect more on this.

Ravi: Oh, that's a fascinating question, and so, other historians in the brief references that they have had to Kingsley, people have referred to him in graduate theses, and in other places, published work, there has been some, some people have speculated on exactly

what you're saying; it's as if you've read the work. They actually have commented that Kingsley was not kind or generous in his print shop that he was actually an entrepreneur, like literally you know, in his class location, he was the boss, and he wasn't very generous. So I think there's something to it, but at the same time he's someone who's devoting all this energy constantly speaking, you know. We have enough work, I don't know if it'll actually happen, but you know Ben and I talked about maybe someday doing work on a collection of his speeches. You know, there's enough content for another work, so I think you have to weigh that in mind. He was constantly giving talks, and in the passage I read out he talks, he refers to the border as a line, so he says, hundreds of talks in Canada, hundreds of talks in the United States. He was constantly doing this. Nobody's getting rich, you know, and I think you have to weigh that, I think he, yeah, he had employees and you know, but I think he was subsidizing the publication of the *Western Clarion*, his socialist journal, through his company, you know, so.

We did find correspondence where he's writing to Hawthornthwaite, the MLA, saying you know, like, let's go invest in timber rights, make our way in the world, you know. I think he had an entrepreneurial side, but we never found that he ever had success in it. I think he went in these different directions, but the touchstone of his life was no compromise, no political trading. That was his life. That's who he was.

Caroline: I want to ask you about your trip to Spring Gulch, which was the site of Kingsley's accident in 1890 in Montana. So what motivated you to actually go to that site? What was it like to be there at the site of the origin story for this, right?

Ravi: So I thought, and Ben thought, that it would be worthwhile to go and actually see what's there. I had no expectation that we'd actually find the right location. This has a long backstory but, but really quickly a) there are multiple Spring Gulches, believe it or not, in Montana, so we had to determine using the historical record that we were going to the right one. I haven't said this explicitly--so I've said I'm an activist, I'm also somebody who lives with a mobility impairment. I don't have a driver's license, so I actually, you know, had to go--my sister-in-law drove me out from Spokane. We went there, so it's a few hours you know from Spokane. And I thought you know, maybe we would never find anything. But sure enough, we found what seems to have been off the Interstate, or what's now an Interstate, that there's an abandoned railway station, but all that's there is, really, the sign that says Spring Gulch. So that's where Kingsley was injured or, in that vicinity, he had an accident, and we were able to get a sense of how he was taken to the railway hospital in Missoula, you know. But in terms of anything dramatic you know it's a bit anticlimactic because we go there and what's left is the side that says Spring Gulch. It's not, you know as if Kingsley is known. I mean basically we're trying to do an excavation you could say of his life now. And because he leaves in 1902 and abandons his family he's, the historical archive in the American context is particularly patchy, you know, and so we don't have a lot of documents, but we thought it would be useful to have this photograph.

Caroline: Oh yeah, well and just realizing sort of how remote it was, and then, as a consequence, how unlikely his survival would have been. I mean, a double amputation really just, in Spring Gulch which, as you said, it's not exactly a metropolis, and he would have had to make it all the way to the hospital in Missoula, I mean, yeah that would have been remarkable just to take all that in, I guess.

Ravi: These are early days for medical technology, so it's no surprise that he gets an upgrade. People do that today. And again I'm not a, I'm not a prosthesis historian, you know, but, but you know he gets the upgrade. But I think the original newspaper reports, the very earliest ones, speculate on whether or not he would survive. I would have to go

check that. I'm not sure about that. But I think if you go back into the record, you know, he had very serious injuries, and so obviously it's a real transformation of his life. His marriage falls apart. You know, he has this litigation, you know, and becomes this radical, it really-- so I do think we're on solid footing, no pun intended, in that he has a direct connection between his disablement and his radicalism. I think that is pretty clear. But he just never talks about it directly. The *Clarion* has a lot of stories about workplace injuries because that's what's going on in British Columbia at the time. And I mean your listeners may not be fully aware, I mean, workplace injury is a problem today but it's nothing like the early 20th century. It's 1902, in British Columbia being a brakeman or a miner was a really, really dangerous job. I mean people talk about workplace injury. It's pretty infrequent, you know and yeah I mean it should be more infrequent, but in those days, you know you're really risking your life. It wasn't uncommon to lose a finger, and you just keep working because that's just the way it goes.

Caroline: Oh yeah, certainly in my work on the history of artificial limbs, brakeman is a job that comes up over and over and over again, so when I read that that was Kingsley's position it all just fell into place for me. I want to talk a little bit more about all the different parts of this project that are not in the book, but are still really important, right? You organized a conference, you've built a website. Can you tell us a little bit more about all these kind of ancillary surrounding elements of the project, and I'd love to know if you're also planning to continue working on different prongs of this going forward.

Ravi: That's a wonderful question because I shamelessly have a book launch to advertise. So June 15, 7 o'clock Eastern time, 4 PM Pacific. We have a book launch. It requires registration, so all you have to do is go to the University of British Columbia Press website, UBC Press has a website. Just Google *Able to Lead* and you'll get the link immediately. I think that's the easiest way to communicate that to your listeners. And then we also have a website abletolead.ca. We gratefully acknowledge SSHRC that you know, that Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, that funded it. And anybody can go learn more about the story--you don't want to, you know, spend the money, very cheap only 18 bucks as a Kindle, but if you don't want to buy the book, you can get some information on our website, which is abletolead.ca. All one word. And so you'll find more information about Kingsley there. But it's UBC Press, has a link to our book launch on June 15. So Brian Palmer and Geoffrey Reaume, some of you listeners may know them because they're, they're both quick distinguished in the field. Geoffrey Reaume is very famous for disability history, and Brian Palmer is a distinguished labour historian. They're both going to be commenting briefly about the book, and so that's June 15, 4 pm Pacific, 7 Eastern.

But in terms of our conference, SSHRC funded us to have this conference, and we actually did an earlier book *Disabling Barriers* that Ben and I edited. It's an anthology that collected various papers. I'm quite proud of it. You can find that also with our publisher UBC Press. And it has people from different backgrounds that, you know, that have done work, whether it's in disability studies or in history. You know, most of the chapters contribute something to disability. So you know, Odelia Bay, a graduate of my law school, she has a chapter that I think is very interesting in that, that you can go check out. And you know, so I think the two works, they complement each other.

Caroline: That's wonderful and we'll get links to some of those in the biography that'll go along with the podcast if that's okay. Well, I don't really have any more questions planned for you, Ravi, but I just wanted to ask, if there's a message that you're hoping that this book will communicate to the world, what would that message be?

Ravi: I think it's really that disabled people, people with disabilities have the ability to transform the world. You may not take away Kingsley's impossibilist message. You might actually say, you know, what's going on here with impossibilism in 2021. But I don't think that's the point. The point is more that E.T. Kingsley is sort of this person that was able to change the world. Would he have liked our book? Nobody's asked me that, but I suspect the answer to that is maybe not, because, you know, I'm not sure that he'd want all this emphasis on disability. But that's, that's a topic for another day about the philosophy of biographers. And biographers come--we control the narrative because we're talking about concerns of our day. And so I think had somebody had chosen to write this biography and discovered Kingsley in 1960, I think they would have written a very different book than what we're doing 60 years later. So, I'm glad that we were able to do it our way, but you know, others may prefer to have an emphasis on something else. So there's, there's something for everyone. So there's, there's a little bit of labour history, a little bit of legal history, a little bit of disability history, and hopefully we'll make somebody happy in doing it that way.

Caroline: Well, you certainly made me happy. I found it actually deeply interesting, so thank you so much, Ravi, for sharing it with me, and for sharing your time here today on the podcast. I'm so grateful that you were able to join me, so thank you.

Ravi: Thank you for having me.

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Caroline: Thanks to everyone out there for listening or reading the transcript. Please join us again next time. Bye bye!