

HARVEY MURPHY
Reminiscences 1918 - 1943

Interviewed 1976-1977
by Rolf Knight
Foreword by daughter Mary Murphy

Rolf Knight
October 2014

Compiler's Note

The following reminiscences of Harvey Murphy stem from taped interviews done in November and December of 1976, with some brief additions in the spring of 1977. Mary Murphy's foreword to the transcripts was also taped in early 1977.

In general, the interviews proceeded between myself and Harvey Murphy but at times Isobel Murphy (his wife) and Mary Murphy (his daughter) were also present and interjected questions and comments. My own questions and their comments have usually not been reproduced here.

While I had initially intended to attempt a life history of Harvey Murphy, relying heavily on interview material, it soon became evident that this was no longer feasible. By then he was suffering an impairment which may have been the consequence of a series of minor strokes. His sense of chronology was impaired and his discussions of particular topics were extremely fragmentary. A fifteen minute account of almost any event might wander off to include reminiscences of two or more disparate events and themes. Nevertheless, scattered through this flow were vignettes and brief vistas which were, to me, compelling and thought provoking--but which usually could not be followed up in any systematic way.

Compounding the difficulty was Murphy's 'stump speech' speaking style, which could be biting and funny when heard. It was a form of communication depending heavily upon cadence, voice, gestures and a whole body of oratorical stances for emphasis and meaning. Readers may discover some of the wry humor entailed even in the dry pages of this transcript. But much of it is lost in transcription.

Having roughly transcribed about 100 pages of the interviews by early 1977, I became convinced that doing a life history was simply not possible. We met one last time the day before I returned to Vancouver. Harvey Murphy died about ten days later, in late April 1977.

The verbatim transcripts of the interviews are so rambling as to defy practical use. I had originally given up any idea of editing them but have here tried to arrange them in some kind of readable form. Editing Harvey Murphy's reminiscences entailed breaking up the original transcripts and collating/collecting the coherent units into chronological and topical sections (i.e. references to the Blairmore coal mine strike, wherever they appeared, being to 'Blairmore', and so on). This produced a more coherent account than appeared evident in the unedited transcripts.

There are some usages here which may strike the readers as strange. Harvey only once referred to the 'Workers Party of Canada', never mentioned the 'Labor Progressive Party' and consistently discussed them as the 'Communist Party', or 'we'. More problematic, and surprising, was his almost random designation of the varied national labor congresses in Canada which once existed. I have let these stand as they came from the tapes, changing only the 'the Canadian Labor Congress (formed 1956)' to the title of the earlier labor body seemingly referred to. It is not something which anyone should rely on.

Apart from some occasional phrases which compress discussion which attempted to determine dates, nothing has been added here. But numerous passages which were too fragmentary and rambling to be comprehensible in the original have been deleted. This is not an editorial approach I normally find acceptable. It is employed here because it was necessary.

What this account conveys is not primarily the chain of events or the specifics of events that Harvey Murphy participated in. It conveys rather something of the meaning that events had and the views which Murphy, and others like him, had of themselves and their times. Although one can debate their correct understandings, all the confrontations mentioned in these reminiscences occurred--and a great many more.

While Harvey Murphy was, in a sense, speaking for the record here there are some intriguing aspects to these reminiscences. I will not highlight them and readers can come to their own understandings of them. Quite contradictory views are juxtaposed in a number of places. One striking feature of Murphy's account, for me, was the disparity between the official positions of the Communist party and their pragmatic reinterpretation by union organizers in the field. Murphy seems to have been recurrently recast by the contexts in which he worked and the men he worked with. By the various kinds of working class culture he encountered.

Admittedly, this may be reading more into these reminiscences than they warrant.

At one point during the interviews dealing with the Blairmore mine strike in the early 1930s, Harvey recalled, in a mock-aggrieved tone, that he was pilloried as being a 'Red agitator'. After a second or two of dramatic silence he burst into a smile and said, 'I was' and 'it was my strength'.

In the broadest sense, that is what these reminiscences are about--his reminiscences about what his life involved.

This account covers the twenty-five years before Harvey Murphy became the leading figure in the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union in Canada--the main mine workers union here between the mid-1940s and the late 1950s. In that capacity he developed rather different qualities and responses than those reflected here. His leadership of a major union must have blended capacities for administration, for complex contract negotiations and for inter/intra union politicking. He would then have been directing organizing rather than doing it himself.

This later part of his life is not dealt with here at all. Nor is the long, stuttering erosion and ultimate dissolution of Mine and Mill.

Rolf Knight
Vancouver, October 2014

Foreword

by Mary Murphy

Harvey's father came to Canada first, I don't know when. Sometime in the first years of the century. The story is that he came with the understanding he'd send money back to his wife so she could come over later. I think his wife, my grandmother, had just one child then. But instead, he made trips back to Poland himself. Three times over the years. And each time he went back his wife got pregnant. She had three children by the time she came to Canada.

Harvey's mother was a cook and a domestic back in Poland. She had had three children by then--there was Harvey, Rose and John. Another one died as a young child. Finally it came to her that her husband was never going to send the money to come to Canada. I think she thought that he had an arrangement with another women here in Canada. If he did or not I don't know.

So this woman, who was more or less illiterate, with three children, living in this little town in Poland, somehow got enough money together and somehow got them to where they could get a ship to Canada.

Harvey was the oldest of nine children his parents had; six of them born here in Canada. My aunt Rose was telling me that she remembers a little about Poland and the trip over here. And Rose is younger than Harvey. So I don't know why he doesn't have some memories of this childhood. He was eight years old when he came over. It must have been in 1914--sometime before the war broke out in August.

I don't know how my grandmother did it. She just arrived in Montreal and came out to Kitchener, looking for her husband. He later wound up with a little kosher butcher shop after they settled down in Toronto. I don't know if he had been a butcher in Poland but he had a lot of different jobs here, in Canada.

RK: They must have been a religious family then, if Harvey's father was running a kosher butcher shop. How did Harvey relate to that religiousness?

Well, he broke with it. I think it's important in knowing something about the kind of man he was. Someone with a mind of his own--but he was pretty callous about it, I think. He went out of his way to make fun of it. Or he just didn't care. Like years later, when Rae was born he didn't bother to have him circumcised. My mother brought this baby, the first grandson of the family, back to Toronto when my mother first went to visit and stay with Harvey's family here. My mother not knowing anything about what was expected--it created quite a crisis.

Anyway, his father was working in Kitchener, Ontario. That's where Harvey grew up and first went to work.

Becky Buhay, she's one of the grand old ladies of the workers' movement in Canada, she remembers speaking in Kitchener and being heckled by this kid in 1919 or so. That's the first anybody noticed of my father.

The family moved to Toronto soon after, moved to around the Kensington area. Down around Spadina, King and Dundas--that would be the center, that was where all those street meetings and speeches were held. So Harvey must have run across the sorts of people he used to see in Kitchener. He had no other friends.

Becky Buhay says that Tim Buck almost 'raised' Harvey. Meaning that my father was over at Tim's house, sitting in their kitchen, all the time during his early years in Toronto. That would have been a bit later, when he was about fifteen or sixteen. He didn't want to go home. So the party satisfied his emotional needs as well as others.

Tim and Alice Buck had a house down there, across from the Central Vocational school, near Harbord and Brunswick streets. Harvey used to drop in for supper and sit around. I don't know if he ever lived in their house or not but his father kicked him out about that time. Kicked him out for hanging around with the communists, but probably more because of Harvey's anti-religious behavior.

What kind of anti-religious behavior? Well, Harvey and the others from his background who he got to know in the movement, they were very offensive in what they did and said. Free love, atheism, any vehicle to incense traditional Jewish views. They would have picnics on Sabbath or parties where there'd be a big thing about eating pork. Or they would hold dances or parties on the High Holidays, when everyone was supposed to be in mourning or whatever. Rebelling not only against the capitalist system but also against the kind of traditions they came from.

I get this image of him, from people who knew Harvey then, of this young kid just out of school, working only part of the time, and in a new city where he didn't know anybody, and not very close to his family. A bright and quick kid hanging around meetings. Tim Buck and other people around the party must have seen that here was somebody that could be of use.

Harvey's parents and his brothers and sisters continued living in that downtown Toronto area. Poor Jews they were and remained, at least before the second world war. His father had a kosher butcher shop in Kensington a couple of side streets over from what was the center of the market. That was then mainly a Jewish market. I don't

think he was too successful. They bought a house down there, just off that little park. How they managed that I don't know. I have the impression that it was my grandmother that kept things together. I think she bootlegged from that house during the worst years. Although nobody would admit it now.

Harvey more or less broke with his family during those first years in Toronto and after that he was always on the go, travelling around the country. Out west a long time. By the time he was married he was on some sort of terms with his family again. But even then I don't think he ever saw much of them or was very concerned about them. He was closer to Rose than to most of the others.

Still, Harvey was the first born and very precocious so he was always the apple of his mother's eye. Rose remembers their mother always waiting for letters from Harvey, which, of course, never came.

When my mother came to Toronto from Blairmore (1935) they welcomed her into the family. One of my mother's stories is that the family arranged a big party to welcome her. They invited all the relatives and friends. But Harvey forgot all about it and didn't tell my mother about it either. So all the relatives and friends turned up to welcome the bride but neither Harvey or my mother was there. It must have been quite a humiliation when Harvey didn't turn up at that party thrown for them, which he'd forgotten about. Which was typical of him.

My grandmother, my father's mother, died in 1958 or so. I knew her quite well. Her husband had died much earlier. I don't know if she ever worked after she came to Canada but she was a cook and that was her pride and joy. I don't know how they managed with that big family. All the kids had to go to work as soon as possible and contribute. But they were very poor anyway.

My aunts all worked around Spadina, in the clothing industry. Some of the younger brothers went into the army during the second war. There were Harvey, Rose, Johnny, Louie, Mike, Helen, Sarah, Bessie, Blackie, and Charlie. Four girls and five boys.

They all grew up in the Spadina area. Hustling in the needle trades industry. The women worked in the clothing industry and I think some of the men did, too, for a while. They were all hustlers, the men. Part of the Spadina culture of that time--always with some sort of petty deal going, buying or selling something or some service. Little deals in everything, no specific line or trade. They weren't part of the left, not any of them, in any way.

A couple of the brothers have been in the restaurant business, after the war. Sometimes quite successfully. They were all very personable, colorful, Runyonesque

types. None of them were at all involved in politics. But they had a lot of respect for my father. Harvey may have been the black sheep of the family when he was first kicked out of the house but his brothers and sisters never felt that way about him when they had grown up themselves.

Of course, they never really understood what was in that kind of life for him. But he was their brother and he made the headlines. He was sort of famous. But it's only in the last few years that my father had all that much to do with them.

RK: What about your mother's side of the family?

My mother's mother's family were from a long line of miners, who had lived in Springhill, Nova Scotia, and the surrounding coal mines, probably from the inception of mining there. My mother's father came over from Ireland, came to Springhill as a miner and married my grandmother there. According to my mother she was the seventh generation of a miner's family. They were Canadians for several generations before that, farmers of some sort I suppose, before going down into the mine at Springhill.

My grandmother died a couple of years ago (1975) in Blairmore, when she was 93 years of age. So she must have been born in, let's see, in 1882 or '83.

What I know of that is mainly from my grandmother, who used to tell me stories when I lived with them in Blairmore. One of her stories about her girlhood in Springhill was that the mine was on strike. That would be in the late 1880s or early 1890s. Her mother, my grandmother's mother, took her down to see the scabs, who lived in tents on the outskirts of the town. They and others from the miners' families who lived in Springhill threw stones at the scabs. The women and children did that. But most of my grandmother's stories were mainly personal accounts, of fights with neighbors or small triumphs over her sisters, domestic squabbles. That kind of thing.

They were very strict Presbyterians. Very religious, in a sense. There was that contradiction--they were strongly for the miners' union but they were also extremely strict and narrow Presbyterians. My granny always was strong for the union. To her, the worst thing that you could be was a scab. She always supported her husband, no matter what, in the strikes they went through.

I think that the whole, or most, of Springhill must have been that way when she was growing up. Mainly Presbyterian. Women would spend Saturday cooking the big meal for Sunday because no one was supposed to work, or even cook, on Sunday. That was the accepted practice.

There was a church tithing on all the families living there. The company would dock money from the paychecks for the church. My grandfather, some time after he arrived from Ireland, refused to be tithed. He refused to allow that. He was one of the first to refuse that in Springhill. It was quite a humiliation for my grandmother. You know, little communities like that can be very petty. There'd be a Christmas party with everybody invited, the whole community, including them. But their children were the only ones who didn't get a Christmas present at the party, because her husband refused to be tithed. So the church was very strong.

My grandfather wasn't a miner in Ireland; he came from one of those small farms that couldn't support the children. So he came to America. He had been working at various jobs in America before he came to Springhill.

He had been brought up as a Protestant but always claimed that he had been dispossessed by the church and he wouldn't have anything to do with churches. He not only hated the Catholic church but the Protestant churches, too.

That anti-Catholic feeling must have really been strong amongst those people at Springhill. To my grandmother, Catholics--in the abstract--were just devils! Immoral, heathenish, sneaky--all that. But in her personal dealing it was quite different. A lot of her best friends in Blairmore were Italian ladies who were good union people--and who were Catholic. It's just another one of those contradictions you always find. People say and believe one thing in the abstract but in the actual case they do quite the opposite. People don't resolve those contradictions.

In Blairmore, my mother's family was one of only a half dozen or so 'Anglo-Saxon' families that supported the Blairmore strike that Harvey was involved in. When I knew her, my grandmother's best friends were Mrs. Jaquerussi, who lived on one side, and Mrs. Slepjak, who lived across the back and down the way. They were both Catholics.

My grandfather was about ten years older than my grandmother, so he would have been born around the middle of the 1870s. My mother, Isobel, was their first child. She was born in 1909, so he was in his middle thirties by then.

My grandfather first landed in New York and worked there for some time. He worked on building the subway there. So I guess that would give him some experience in underground work. Then he drifted around in various other jobs before he got to Springhill.

He got hooked up with my grandfather there. She was already a young widow. According to her version, she had gotten married to a miner in Springhill secretly and

was pregnant when her husband was killed in a mine accident. She had never been accepted by his family and after he died they rejected her, wouldn't have anything to do with her.

Anyway, she was living with her own family again, with a young son. When my grandfather got to Springhill she married him. I guess he was sort of taking her off her parents' hands.

They lived in Springhill for a number of years after they were married. But he couldn't take that town, or her family, and all that Presbyterianism. How they worked it out between themselves I don't know. He hated the church and hated royalty--and hated all government, I suppose. He as an anarchist really, and she was very loyal to the king and queen.

My mother was about two or three when they left Springhill, partly over that matter of her father refusing to pay tithes, I think. And because of the pressure that was put on them from the community. Well, he was really an Irish anarchist. Very rebellious but not disciplined enough in most things to be politically effective.

They moved to B.C. and lived in New Westminster for a short while just before the first world war. But he couldn't seem to make a living there. My grandfather got back into mining because he was a good miner and that was where he could make the best money. He worked in all those mining towns of the Alberta coal district at one time or another. They lived in Hillcrest, Alberta for a while. My mother began school there. But by the time she was seven or eight they had settled down in Blairmore. He was always looking for a better company, better working conditions, a better place to live.

He never wanted to live in a company town--that's why he finally chose Blairmore. Most of the other coal towns around there were company towns and Blairmore wasn't. It is something I always remember him saying, that he would never bring his family to live in a company town.

He was an I.W.W. member. There were a lot of supporters of it around even if the I.W.W. didn't have any functioning organization in the mines of that particular area. It had lots of supporters. He knew their songs and read their literature. I remember him talking about that. That's what he considered himself to be.

My grandparents lived in Blairmore for the rest of their lives. They bought a house here and eventually had seven children. He lived to be 83, still healthy and active. And he would have lived longer yet if it had been for that inflamed appendix that killed him. He didn't trust doctors either.

During his working years he was always a top-flight miner, according to what my mother and grandmother say. That's probably why he could get away with some of the things he did without the company blacklisting him completely. And he earned pretty good money for those times doing contract mining. They got paid by the amount they mined. In the 1920s he earned a \$250 bonus. Of course, those are the sorts of exceptions that people always remember.

But he was a militant in the continual strikes they had in those mines. My grandmother said he was always being blackballed. The company would hire him back but they would make him wait till the last man was rehired. So he would be out of work for longer than most of the others. Or as punishment, the company would hire him for the Bellevue pit, which was about four miles from Blairmore. That would mean an extra eight-mile walk to work, back and forth, each day. None of the miners had cars then. Or they'd give him suspensions because of some argument or another.

He really didn't want to be a miner. He tried to get out of mining many times when he was younger, until he finally accepted it and tried to make the best of it in Blairmore. Even then he was a militant. But I guess he gradually gave up the idea of doing something else when he was around forty or so. It's hard to break into something new. No jobs in other lines when you're a certain age. Lower pay than what he was used to. So he'd drift back into mining. You know how it happens.

He definitely didn't want any of his sons to be miners. But they all worked down in the mine, all started down in the mine as soon as they left school. During the 1930s, when most of my uncles started mining, there were no alternatives as far as jobs went. One of them was injured and crippled in the mine. But sooner or later all of them did get out of mining.

Miners generally don't want their sons to go underground, to become miners, however proud they might be about it. Still, he taught all his sons how to mine. They all worked with him. He took them all underground and taught them. It's quite a skill, to mine safely. And they all became involved in the union battles in the thirties. One of them was among the group of miners blacklisted by the company that ran the mine at Blairmore, that brought on that lone strike in 1932 that Harvey became involved in.

My grandfather was always quite impressed by Harvey. When my father started to go out with my mother in Blairmore he mentioned that he wasn't Irish but Jewish. That he'd just picked up the name 'Murphy'. My grandfather is supposed to have said to my mother, 'Well, maybe he's not Irish even if his name is Murphy. Still, he's got the spirit.' Or something like that.

Nevertheless, there was also an oppressive, small townish atmosphere in Blairmore. One of my mother's sisters, aunt Violet, was very talented musically. Tim Buck was in love with her, I've heard said. But she wound up giving music lessons to kids in Blairmore. Any kind of talent like that was stifled in those small places. They were all, all of them, stifled living in that place.

My grandfather retired sooner than he wanted to. He didn't like mining but he was very unhappy being retired. He'd go and stay with one of his sons who at the time ran a butcher shop in Anacortes, Washington. He missed having work to do. Although he was still living in Blairmore he used to come down to Vancouver and stay with us quite often. There was another old miner who didn't live too far away who he knew from Drumheller--John Lesire. A Frenchman originally. He was in the party. I knew him quite well myself.

They would come over and fix things around the house, put up shelves and repair things. They modernized our house. They even shored up the whole basement and reinforced the beams in our place--these two old men in their seventies. Because my father was either away or too busy to do it. Besides, he was quite incompetent at those sorts of things.

When my grandfather used to visit us he was always ready to talk about his experiences and the strikes he'd been through and everything. But at that time Harvey was never interested. He didn't want to talk about the past, either his own or anyone else's. So he would never listen to what my grandfather had to say. He had contempt for people who would dwell on the past. It's only recently that he's willing to talk about it.

Harvey Murphy

Reminiscences: 1918-1943

Kid's Stuff

My first actual job was during the summer holidays when I was still in school. When I was twelve I went to work where my father was employed--the Rushman Button factory. He ground shells into mother-of-pearl buttons. My job was drilling holes in the buttons. That wasn't so unusual. Rushman's was a big well-established plant in Waterloo, Ontario.

I quit school when I was about thirteen and took work in one of the rubber plants. Merchant's Rubber, which was in Kitchener. It employed boys and girls in various sorts of light work. I was only there a few months before getting a job at the James Holden company, which was another big plant making rubber footwear and things. I wasn't intending to stay in that plant and my father was anxious that I learn a trade of some sort. But I had to wait for an opportunity to get into an 'apprenticeship'. That was what got me to take another job with the William Nell company.

They had two shifts a day, from six a.m. to six p.m. and from six p.m. to six a.m. I was working in their mill room, waiting an opportunity to get into a trade. I worked under a calendar; that's a machine that squeezes hot rubber on to cloth, the fabric backing of the rubber goods. It came off in hot rolls. I worked underneath that machine. The trouble with apprenticeships at the time was that there were no real apprenticeship agreements in many of these factories. The companies would just use us as cheap labor. I was at William Nell's for about a year.

I was still at the William Nell company when various agitations developed in Kitchener, toward the end of the war. The friends I chummed around with, some worked in that rubber plant but my closest friend was working for McBride's, a company making suitcases. That was when a movement by returning soldiers swept over Kitchener.

The people who had originally settled in the Kitchener area were Pennsylvania Dutch, people of German background who came up from the States in the previous century. To give you some idea of the times, to prove their patriotic nature, they changed the name of the city to Kitchener--after the British general, the great hero of the war (i.e. the Boer war). The city had been called Berlin before the war. So there was a lot of pressure in Kitchener of people trying to prove that they were loyal Canadian subjects.

Well, you can imagine it. Toward the end of the war a lot of hatred built up against the Germans. Kaiser Wilhelm Park became Queen Victoria Park. But that hatred spread to include all foreigners, all sorts of people who weren't British.

The 118 Battalion got a big welcome when they came back from overseas. They came back, in our minds, as heroes of the war. But there were riots in town when the soldiers came back. They took on an anti-foreigner complexion. The mobs went and smashed up some Greek restaurants and whatever were called 'foreign businesses'. There were other things like that, too. I remember accompanying some of the mobs. They wanted jobs. Anybody that held jobs they wanted was a target.

Once they raided the newspaper that had been called the *Berliner Tageblatt* but had become the *Kitchener Record*. I was peddling that paper at the time. That was when I was supposed to be learning a trade at the William Nell company. But they paid so little that I had to make some money after work by peddling this newspaper.

We had a few old socialists in town. I used to pass a shoemaker's shop owned by one of these socialists, down close to the center of town on Queen Street. He'd have cartoons in his window, pictures of the evils of capitalism and such.

Shortly after the war, the O.B.U. (One Big Union) came in and made quite an impression on our town. They'd hold speeches and mass meetings in front of the city hall. I used to attend them as much as I could. I learned quite a bit from those speeches that I could relate to working in the rubber plants. There used to be a regular turnout, Saturday nights, in front of City Hall. I remember hearing Becky Buhay, that famous communist speaker, there. That always got a log of coverage in the paper.

The O.B.U. came into Kitchener and enlivened it and dealt with the question of industrial unionism, and with other things. What was happening in other parts of Canada? You've got to take into account that there was a Russian revolution which was still in progress at that time.

The O.B.U. made a big impression on a lot of young fellows, like myself. There were certain gains from some of the strikes. Kitchener was very poorly organized although it was then quite an industrial center, what with Dominion Rubber making tires and with the other rubber plants. But those strikes were--we just got together spontaneously and went out. The O.B.U. wasn't able to establish organization that would hold together in places like Kitchener.

I learned more about socialism after my family moved to Toronto. I had left all my boyhood friends in Kitchener and was still living with my family. My father had friends in Toronto but I didn't want to be bothered with them. Out of my whole family

I was the only one affected that way. I was the only one who got interested in socialism. It's still that way. Mainly that was from my experiences of working in industry and my association with people there that influenced me.

By that time I had gotten interested in socialism and went to these little street corner meetings around downtown Toronto.

RK: You mentioned that Becky Buhay first remembered you as a heckler at some of the talks she gave at Kitchener. How was that?

Hmm. Well. I didn't just jump right into it. I had my doubts about these new ideas. My father went to Temple and was a supporter of the Liberal Party and he didn't like the idea of me attending these meetings by radicals. He would talk to me about it. I first went there to heckle and later on got interested.

Oh, I remember her well. When I got into the Communist party, the Workers Party, as it was first called, Becky Buhay was one of the leaders. I used to go to street corner meetings. There used to be some great orators in the socialist movement then, at least they seemed that way to me. Becky Buhay would have been in her late twenties when she came to Kitchener. She was one of the speakers that came almost every Saturday under the sponsorship of the O.B.U. I didn't learn anything about socialism from them but I did learn about trade unions. The O.B.U. kind of brought all of that into a new light.

RK: Most people today can't quite imagine what those street corner meetings felt like or what effects they have had.

It's hard to explain exactly the effect it all had. In Kitchener it was tied up with the soldiers coming back and with the end of the war and with the news that the Russian Revolution had gotten rid of the Czar. The speeches would deal with all that. Remember there was censorship in Canada--you'd hear ideas and information that you'd hardly ever see expressed in the newspapers.

In the Twenties

My family moved to Toronto in 1932. My father had gotten a small butcher shop on Dennison and Grange Streets. I was going around looking for work. I had worked with a chap called George Hainsworth. He was a steamfitter for the William Nell company in Kitchener. I had worked as his helper, for a while. I learned something about trade unionism from him.

Getting a job in one of those plumbing shops in Toronto, none of them union. Even if you got a job there'd be long periods of unemployment when you'd be doing nothing but looking for work. A few days work in one shop and then nothing. The only thing that I had any experience in, that I could show a company that might hire me, was in plumbing. Steam fitting and plumbing weren't separate trades then.

Well, I applied to these plumbing shops in Toronto for about a year. Then this chap I had met at one of the street corner meetings in Toronto, Prayer was his name, I chummed around with him. He was a steamfitter and he took me on as his helper. I would get a job when the company he worked for had a job. When that finished I'd look around for some other kind of work till there was a job in plumbing again. Any kind of work. That was part of the game then.

It was in Toronto that I got into 'the movement', as they called it. I'd listen to all the socialist speakers coming into town. They'd have weekly meetings at Yonge and Albert. I had no other associations or things to do so I'd go to hear these speakers. There was a Russian relief campaign at the time, people trying anything to raise money to aide the starvation victims in Russia. I'd attend the talks given by people like Russell, one of the O.B.U. leaders. All the people I'd meet, old socialists and what not.

The Communist (i.e. 'Workers') party had come up from underground. So I finally signed a card and began to attend the regular club meetings of the party. The leadership of the Communist party included many various kinds of socialists along with trade unionists who had been associated with the O.B.U. and others. I attended meetings and learned about the Russian Revolution.

A group of us young members were organized as the Young Workers' League, so that the Communist Party of Canada could qualify to join the Communist International. They had to have a youth movement. I was fifteen, sixteen then but I became associated with Tim Buck and some of the other leaders of the party.

The O.B.U. and the Socialist Party of Canada had broken with the Communists by then. There had been a joint delegation of them that went over to Russia to talk to the C.I (i.e. the 'Communist International'). The O.B.U. believed in the priority of the union movement. They had entered into the fight of hundreds of thousands of workers who had gone out on strike, almost spontaneously, in the mass industries, which were almost totally unorganized. The O.B.U. had left the A.F.L. because the A.F.L. didn't want to bother with most workers in the mass industries.

It became our goal, in the party, to get the O.B.U. back into the trade union movement. To get the workers who had been part of the O.B.U. back into the union movement,

because the O.B.U. was isolated and smashed after a few years. Their effect wore off but the craft unions remained.

The 1920s saw the development of a whole wave of new, mass industries, of really big plants, of new types of industry. Before, if these plants were organized at all it would be just the small groups of skilled workers in them. The steamfitters and plumbers, the tinsmiths, electricians, machinists--they were in craft unions which didn't touch the other men in the plant.

The Trade Union Educational League spoke about these workers not being in the trade movement. To try to get the more militant workers back into the Trades and Labor Congress, which itself didn't actually care about organizing the big industrial shops. It was trying to get the Trades and Labor Congress to organize.

Don't forget, during those years there was political oppression here in Canada. You weren't allowed to organize a left wing party; even the mildest socialist parties were banned, in effect. Publications of the left of all sorts were banned. You weren't going to be allowed to organize mass unions. That was one of the lessons of the Winnipeg General Strike. So we were running educationals, bringing in speakers.

Along with all this, you have to imagine the effect of the Russian Revolution and the struggle in Ireland for independence from British domination. That was really the first successful anti-colonial struggle of our times. What we most talked about revolved around the Russian Revolution. But most of Europe was in turmoil after the war. We had a lot of immigrants who wanted to hear about what was happening in their own countries.

Many of the original supporters of our movement were immigrants. They were organized into their own social organizations; the Workers' Party was a federation of foreign-born people to a large extent.

There were scores of thousands of people who had left Europe to come to North America, to what was known as the New World. There was oppression and hunger in the countries they came from. They were bound together in these social organizations, of the left in our case. There were some Polish clubs and a Bulgarian club I remember. There was a large Finnish Organization. There was the Jewish Peoples' Order. Much of the membership and life of these federations was more for the social life in the clubs. Their meeting halls were owned by these federations. They were an outgrowth of the Finnish and Ukrainian and Russian and other immigrant groups. The left wing ones came together and originally formed the Workers' Party. The English speaking clubs we set up were quite small compared to the others, to start with. It was only in 1927 that the fight started for the Communist party to become a centralist party.

And I was part of this great movement. I didn't know much about it at first but I was learning.

Oh, it was a pretty mixed up situation. The Communist party didn't really develop until the deep crisis of the capitalist system. Before that we were a sect. I can say that today. But the party actually developed only with the breakdown of capitalism, after about 1930.

Our heroes at that time? Well, we only had a few 'agitators' as yet. That's what they called them. Some of the important people in the party during the twenties? Well, Tim Buck was one of them. And Jack McDonald--the capitalists called him 'Red Jack'. Also Big Jim McLachlan, the leader of the Nova Scotia miners. Also Malcolm Bruce and Tom McEwen. They all came into this little sectarian group of super reds.

Tim Buck had a great influence on my life, when I was young. Probably greater than anyone else.

I was also very influenced by old Maurice, a guy called Maurice Spector. At first we never appreciated the importance of trade unions as a basic form of working class organization. Seeing the kind of unions that existed then and their leadership. Intellectuals hated unions. They'd sell out the workers for their own 'recognition'. That was a prominent view of the party when I joined, and largely so through the twenties.

The Socialist Party of Canada would have nothing to do with the trade unions. They held that unions were capitalist institutions--which they are, of course. But for me, unions were very attractive.

Well, the Socialist Party was composed of workers; they had working people in their ranks but also a lot of intellectuals.

RK: How did the party expect to gain strength during the 1920s?

We had big discussions in the movement about the role of the trade unions in this. William Z. Foster was one of our big heroes. He had led the steel strike in the States. But it was smashed. The movement had been trying to organize industrial unions or to take those that existed, to capture and expand them. But by the time I became a member of the party there had been an expulsion of socialists and communists from the labor movement.

The Communist party became more of a sect after our expulsion from the unions. We could play no role in them. 'Unions are capitalist institutions.' 'They'll sell themselves and their members for wages', we'd say. And that was my attitude, too, in the beginning. We could hardly deal with real things in Canada. The Russian Revolution was the big thing. There were classes in propaganda. There were classes in Marxism. Not very effective, I'd have to say now.

There was a syndicalist component in the movement but an equally strong sentiment, in that period, to keep out of the trade unions.

We didn't believe that the revolution would come right away but when it did it would sweep the country. We expected that when it did start it would spread through the working class like it did over in Russia. Strikes would develop spontaneously and then we communists would come into it. 'There'd be waves of revolutionary activity', we said. I can't explain it today, the attitude we had then.

The working class here, and especially in the party, was made up to a large extent of people who had come from Europe. Immigrants had friends and relatives with ties back in the old country. As a young fellah, it was quite a thing for me to be part of.

But much of the time we couldn't deal seriously with things happening in Canada. We were more interested in what was happening in Europe. One of the first books I read that came from the Soviet Union was Lenin's *Left Wing Communism. An Infantile Disorder*. From that many of us came to understand that trade unions were one of the primary organs of working class organization.

By the way--publishing and distributing any socialist or communist literature was illegal in Canada throughout most of those years.

Sitting around in 1927 or so we got jobs in the auto industry in Windsor or over in Detroit. New manufacturing industries had been coming up in the States, like Auto, that attracted coal miners and others displaced from industries that were already then declining. The war industries had shut down and the people who had worked in them came to the new industries that were developing. They were mass production industries that were so organized that they didn't need many skilled workers. They hired mainly unskilled labor and trained them on the job.

The automobile industry came up in both countries. Henry Ford offered wages of five dollars a day, no matter what kind of job you did. He didn't ask for skilled men. The assembly line replaced most of the skilled work.

I went down to Windsor and Detroit. You didn't need any work permit to cross the border if you were a Canadian. A tradesman would get a travelling card and that would be valid most places that a union existed. I started working first in Detroit and then got in with the Automobile Workers Union in Canada. 'The Automobile Workers Union of the Border Cities' became a leading instrument in the organizing drives of the thirties. I worked in the Dodge Brothers plant in Detroit and at Ford in Windsor.

I didn't organize them. Went and got a job at Ford of Canada, in Windsor. We learned a lot about how industrial capitalism was developing. Ford paid the highest wages then but he didn't bother with skills. It didn't take great skills to run a punch press or most of the production machinery as it was organized. I was on a punch press there. You learn that on the job in a day or so. You punched out casings and drilled them. The people working there were off the farms, or immigrants, or people previously employed in some other industry. No real skills needed.

That Ford plant--the conditions, the speed up. You couldn't leave the production line for any reason without permission. They'd have a safetyman come around and the bosses would come around to see that everyone kept up production. So many units per hour. If you wanted to go to the toilet you had to get permission from the foreman to leave your station. And the toilets--there were only walls to the stalls so the foreman could see in. If you gave the foreman any back talk you'd be fired right away.

Sill, the line-ups in front of the plants of men looking for jobs was always pretty big. Any job that paid regular wages was much in demand. But somehow I managed to get on in the auto plants. The party club in Windsor maintained me.

The party always tried to bring workers our way when we organized them. But going in to different fields of industry to organize, that was left up to us. There was no real opposition from other parties. If you could get a group of workers together, and brought them out on a strike, well that brought them to a more anti-capitalist stand--we felt.

We didn't make much real headway in Auto until the big organizational strikes in the thirties. You see, the workers would join a labor union only after they got into a plant. The unions had to be secret. Most of the union organization in the plant was secret. Our job was to build up the membership and not be found out for being a union organizer.

We could always tell a sucker. A suck hole or a spy for the boss. Stool pigeons were the common things. They'd be the ones getting the easiest jobs with better wages and fast promotions in the plant. Company men. I remember a little song that we had,

The company's good to me,
I vote for the company union.
The boss cuts the pay, I agree.
I vote for the company union.

But regardless of whether there were unions or not there'd be spontaneous strikes and stoppages. There'd be grievances. Somebody got fired for something or the conditions got so bad that workers in the plant wouldn't stand for it any more, and they'd all go out. Maybe a shift or a section of the plant, and a strike would develop on the spot. And out of those wild cats, if you could hold out long enough, a union might be formed.

There were a lot of spontaneous strikes. People went out on strike because they had to. Most of the strikes weren't legal strikes and the unions and organizers that led them weren't recognized. If you can beat the boss at it you could get a union recognized.

During our first attempts to organize the auto plants, during that time I was a delegate to the All Canadian Congress of Labor. 1927. I remember that quite well.

(Gap in account)

How I first got involved with miners was that I was sent down to help out in the coal fields of Southern Illinois.

This would be in about...? (c. 1928) I went there after Farrington, who was the president of District 12, was ousted. John L. Lewis had decided to take back the district. This U.M.W.A. (United Mine Workers of America) district then had almost a hundred thousand coal miners. Every local there had the district president's picture turned to the wall because Lewis claimed to have 'found out' that he was in the pay of Peabody Coal Company. That might or might not have been on the up and up. Because this Farrington was at odds with Lewis; Lewis had long been mixed up with the politicians, to see what he could get out of it.

It's true that company agents got inside the union apparatus and got pretty high up. A lot of the anti-communist actions stemmed from these birds who had gotten up in the unions. How many trials have I been at where part of the evidence was provided by a stool pigeon in a union? How do you know? You never know for sure. You just take it into account.

RK: What were you doing among U.S. coal miners?

The left wing miners' organization there had asked for some help. I was sent down by the Young Communist League here. I met some people there, got a job and worked for a while. It didn't last long. The company got my name pretty fast.

You were always on the lookout. You never used the telephone for any message. And that was supposed to be an organized district, unionized. You always had to watch out. This was after the United Mine Workers had been well organized for about forty years in Illinois.

We were trying to organize a left wing union among the miners in Illinois. I knew a lot of fellas in the various locals, a few in each of the locals. This was in Southern Illinois, the mining district between East St. Louis and Springfield, Lincoln's home town. There was a lot of lawlessness in Southern Illinois. I'll give a little illustration.

I was doing some quiet organizing among some miners when the police came along and just grabbed me and bundled me out of town. This was at Taylorton, Illinois.* No trial or anything. The police pulled me in and beat me up and then they took me and dropped me out of town.

The Ku Klux Klan was quite active there. The Klan element there was more or less kept by the coal companies. That was how they kept hold of Franklin County, which was the main coal mining county. The Klan weren't only against the black man; they were hard against the 'Bolsheviks', as they called us. Most of the businessmen and the sheriffs were tied in with the Klan in some way or another it seemed. In Illinois the Klan spread out into the mine officials and in some places even into the officials of the United Mine Workers Union. That was how they'd be elected. They would have the Klan backing for an anti-communist and anti-foreigner stance. Which were more or less the same in their minds.

I was in Illinois for about six months and then I went east to Ohio. I was an organizer of the Young Communist League in Cleveland and in Akron and then in the Ohio mining districts, on the West Virginia border. I think that was the last union local that the miners had in the region. Everything else had been smashed.

Oh, you had to move, once you got to be known as an 'agitator'. There is a whole series of books that deal with that period--'Labor in Auto', 'Labor in Textiles', etc. (Robert Laker, Ed. in 1940s) I was always on the move during those years.

* See account of Farrington and Taylorton and the labor wars in the region in Bernstein *The lean Years - History of the American Worker*, 1966.

There were two unions involved in that struggle, and the two union halls were both on Bay Street, in Port Arthur. The I.W.W. hall and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union Workers hall. They were only two houses apart and we didn't talk to each other. There was a strict division between us. The I.W.W. membership was mainly Finnish but so were we.

Odemack (?) was the leader of the lumber workers union there, and the Rosval and Vuotalainen came out as organizers to help him. We would go from one camp to another camp, maybe ten miles a day. The companies would try to send scabs in from Winnipeg. They'd come in on the freights and hop off at the camps all along the C.P.R. line. See, the strike had already started and had closed the camps down. So the battle was to keep the camps shutdown.

There was a mix of all sorts of nationalities in that area, but mainly Finns in the lumber camps at the time. We had the support of the Finnish Organization; that was their cultural organization, affiliated with the party. That's what it's still called. They had their headquarters at Sudbury and *Vapaus*, their cultural paper, was printed there. There was a sort of anarchist tendency in that. Like when the editor of *Vapaus* got sent to jail for refusing to call King George 'King'. They called him 'By George' or something worse than that. That was considered insulting the Royal family; you can't treat royalty that way in Canada. It was against the law. So the editor of *Vapaus* was convicted for that and later got deported.

(*Mary Murphy*: That must have been quite a constant threat to immigrant workers-- that they could always be deported if they became active or were picked up. They were always aware that they could be deported. I don't think most people realize that. It should be said. How many people did you lose through deportations?)

Oh yeah. We lost a lot of people due to deportations. During the miners strike in northern Alberta. There was another guy out in Alberta also called Murphy and he was deported because of union activity among the miners at that time. We lost a lot of English and Scotch people who had immigrated to Canada from Britain. The law was that a British person could be deported without any hearing or trial. The immigration authorities could just pick them up and hustle them off for deportation. Immigrants from elsewhere, Ukrainians for instance, had to be given a trial or hearing--although a lot of them were just deported. We had the Labor Defense League that could fight a deportation case if it came up for trial. They had to have a trial before they were deported.

We didn't keep track of how many were deported. That fellow who led the strike at Anyox, he was deported. And he wasn't a communist.

1930

RK: What was the background to your going out to Blairmore?

I was first sent out west to work in Edmonton and concentrated on what I was most familiar with. That was coal mines. I lived in Edmonton in a place called the Astor House, a rooming house.

I was attracted to the Mine Workers Union of Canada. That had been organized from some locals that had split from the United Mine Workers of America (in c. 1925).

We were concerned with two questions; one was fast spreading unemployment and the other was the conditions in the Alberta mines. Most mines by then were working part time. I'd go northwest out to Edmonton to Mercoal, also known as Five Mile, where we had a strike. I was busy organizing miners in Cadomin, which was a company town, and I'd also go to Luscar, Alberta. They were a Mine Workers of Canada local. We would also go into Mountain Park, another little coal camp way up the mountain from Cadomin. There were lots of problems up there; difficulties in getting water, terrible conditions, but they had a good seam of coal there. My job was to try to get these locals all together in that sub district.

We became engaged in a strike at Mercoal. It was a company town and when the men went out on strike the company just closed up everything and forced all the miners out of town. Most of the housing, the company store, the social hall and all the land belonged to the company. There were a few old men who had their own shacks off the company property who couldn't be moved. I remember the date now; it was 1930, because the Federal election was on.

The Mine Workers Union of Canada was essentially outlawed by the company. The Mine Workers helped to organize the Workers' Unity League but at the time the W.U.L. didn't exist yet in practice.

Mercoal was a steam coal mine. Great production. They'd just open up the wall and the coal would come out in the chutes to be cleaned. This strike at Mercoal was to be our comeback into that area.

The company had brought in scabs and all our men were thrown out. So our job there was to try to get the men back in. We had support from not only of the miners at Mercoal but at Luscar, Cadomin and Mountain Park. Also from the workers in the mine camps along the railway that connected that mining area.

We wanted to get as many men into Mercoal as possible to fight the scabs they had brought in from Edmonton. To do that we used a provision in the union agreement that said that men elected as delegates to attend union conventions would be given leave of absence. But there was no stipulation about the number of men that could be elected as delegates. So we called a convention of the Mine Workers Union of Canada at Mercoal and elected the whole union membership as delegates to that convention. We were about to bring in a crowd of about five hundred or so as delegates to go to Mercoal.

With that number we were able to picket and stop the mine from working. The scabs had to leave because we took the town over. It's still fresh in my mind.

The company couldn't throw us out so they arranged for the R.C.M.P. to come in; a whole trainload of R.C.M.P. officers and specials they'd deputized in Edmonton. We knew they were coming. We knew when they reached Coalspur because the railway men wired ahead to tell us.

There was no use of us fighting the R.C.M.P. They had a big gang, with clubs and guns. So we sent the miners out into the woods; took off and hid away from the camp. There were only a few old men and women and children in Mercoal when the train arrived with the police. I went down to the station. The police emptied out of the cars and lined up on the platform. I remember walking over to Inspector Bruce, who was in charge of this force, and saying 'You sure have a lot of people here.' Kind of laughing at him. They were coming into a town that was empty. Nobody for them to fight.

Well, they looked ridiculous. The operation had first class publicity in Edmonton--they had brought newspaper reporters and photographers up with them to write up how the R.C.M.P. had rushed in to stop a riot and save the day. But the town was empty.

The newspapers called it a 'Soviet', that we had established there. The papers at the time were very big on claiming that Soviets were being established any time workers took action in any of those mining camps.

We stayed out in the woods for about a week or so. The R.C.M.P. knew that they'd have to load up the troops and take them back to Edmonton without accomplishing anything. They had to have action and publicity to sustain their presence there. They couldn't keep all those policemen and deputies there for long without anything happening.

There were maybe two hundred. Most were just specials they had recruited from the streets of Edmonton. They came in with clubs and pickax handles, lined up and took the salute and got into the Edmonton newspapers.

But we never settled the strike. The company wouldn't negotiate with the Mine Workers Union. Actually, the company had locked out the union before I got there. The men had already been forced to leave town. How could they stay in a company town if there were on strike? Our job was to keep the mine covered with pickets so they couldn't bring in new men in to start up again.

The Alberta Attorney-General ordered the arrest of a number of our people who were later deported. It was a wonderful weapon. They could deport people if they were foreign born. If they were a British subject they could be deported without a trial--there'd just be a deportation order from a magistrate or the Attorney-General and the Immigration Department would go into action. And most of those working in the mines at that time were immigrants. Very few had been born in Canada.

They'd come to Canada, from Hungary or Ukraine or where ever, to make a living. Taking out citizenship papers is not something that people thought much about.

I remember the case that went up to the Supreme Court of Alberta. It involved Jimmy Sloan, who was the president of the Mine Workers Union of Canada. I was at his trial in Edmonton and when the judge convicted Jimmy he said to the police, 'Why didn't you bring Murphy in, too?' So I thought I better get out of that courthouse and out of Edmonton before they spotted me. I thought that the one place they wouldn't look was in the ladies john. So that's where I hid for a few hours and then went to the station and took the next train, the C.N.R., out of Alberta. I went east from there. I was already scheduled to go to the Soviet Union later in 1930.

In the Soviet Union

I had been selected by the party in Canada to go to the Lenin school in the Soviet Union. There were all nationalities there. All the European nationalities, Americans, South Americans, at the Lenin school. Then in back of us was the Far Eastern University. There we'd meet and have discussions and go back and forth--a lot of Chinese and others from the Far East.

But it was sort of crazy, too. Because the Lenin school was located on a street where there were a lot of foreign embassies. It made it easy for these embassies to get information on the foreign students in Moscow. There were a lot of students who could get picked up and arrested and possibly killed when they got back home. Some of the embassies sent their names to the various police agencies in their home countries. There were already then a number of fascist regimes around.

I used to chum around with one of the men that was honored for his role in the Black Sea Mutiny. His name was Springhall. That mutiny took place mainly among the French sailors in the Black Sea when France was supporting the last White Guard armies during the Russian Revolution. It was mainly a French naval operation. But there were some British ships involved, too. He was a good deal older than me. He later died in China. I used to pal around with him.

There were quite a few students at the Lenin Institute from the United States, a fair number of Negroes. The Americans and Canadians and the British, we had arguments amongst ourselves. There was a big discussion with the American party on the question of American exceptionalism.

The idea was to mix together the different people and acquaint them with each other. I could have told you quite a bit about Moscow at that time. But the last trip I took over there it was all changed from what I remembered. It wasn't the same city that I remember. It isn't there anymore. They built big apartment buildings, rebuilt the whole city. Well, Russia was practically destroyed during the last war so they had to rebuild everything new.

At the time we sat out in the parks quite a bit during the long summer evenings. Talking to people and enjoying everything. And then there was the feeling of just being in the country itself--just imagine the dictatorship of the proletariat. I can't really describe the feeling we all had.

By 1930 we thought we saw the complete collapse of capitalism. That there'd be no more normal times, that there'd be no capitalist revival as it had happened in the past. I thought that myself; thought that capitalism had broken down and that there was no way it had of recovering.

We communists had ... that song, you know. And it was coming true. That this was the final struggle.

'Tis the final battle, Let each man stand in his place
The International

The feeling prevailed among a lot of people that capitalism had broken down and would not survive. That's not saying that everyone had that idea. The Russians knew better.

I remember that spring--Moscow was the center of the Communist International. I listened to Thaelman give a talk to the Plenum and Bosovsky (?) talked about the Red International Labor Unions. Moscow was quite a place for internationalism then.

I was in Moscow when we celebrated the overthrow of the dictatorship in Spain. That was about five years before the Spanish civil war. The hotel that we stayed in was partly occupied by communists from Spain. The Moscow city soviet sent a big load of wine over in congratulations and there was a big celebration among the Spanish comrades because they could go home again now. You can't imagine the feelings.

But there was very little consideration of the role of the peoples of the colonial world. There were not much considered in the scheme of how capitalism would be destroyed. Certainly the old socialist parties, not the Social Democrats of Europe, hadn't been much interested in that. Lenin did, of course. But not even all the members of the party saw the importance of the struggles of the then colonial peoples.

RK: What sort of vision did you have of a communist society? The Soviet Union didn't claim to be a Communist society.

Oh, there were all kinds of things that we thought of. But the main struggle in Russia was the struggle with the Kulaks. The land was still mainly divided up between the peasants and a few cooperatives--no real collective farms. See, the big slogan of the Russian Revolution had been 'Peace, Bread, Land'. They weren't communist slogans. Nationalization, collectivization of the land was the main issue.

When I went to Russia, in 1930, the Soviet Union was just getting into the first five-year plan. Russia itself was developing its industries. People were coming into the cities. The class conflict was still going on, the struggle with the Kulaks who were still a force in many areas. I was in Moscow mainly but I was also at a training center in Georgia for a while. In Georgia, the number of people in the Communist party was very small at the time. This one guy who came in to give us a talk one day, they found him not long after, lynched by some secret group of Kulaks in that area. That was in Batumi; it's a port. That was the class struggle you could see, for the consolidation of Soviet power. The rich peasants wanted to use the land for profits. For vineyards and such things. The Soviet Union had to import wheat where they should have been exporting food.

RK: Did you work in Russia?

Well, yes. You always did the practicum, work connected with a factory. Most Russian education was based on that. They were a bug on that. Two days a week we put in at a factory. But they weren't all that organized themselves. Everything was in a great flux. It was really the beginning of industrialization of the country. Everything was one perpetual discussion.

Sure, I expected within my lifetime to see at least the beginning a communist society in North America. That capitalism saved itself, that I think can be accounted for by the new industries that developed. The mass production and mass consumer industries that were coming up. They had just begun to take hold before the depression got started. Modern techniques and highly rationalized production were still exceptional in most industries until that time. We could produce, unbelievably. Henry Ford, in the twenties, used to say 'Capitalist efficiency equals socialism'. That's baloney, of course.

There was also that Lovestone 'American exceptionalist' line that had currency, that the working class in America could gradually acquire power and ownership of industries. That they could move into control without a break with the capitalist system. Quite a few American comrades believed that.

The breakdown of capitalism showed how horribly inefficient and unreliable this much touted system really was during the thirties. Then these silly slogans didn't cut any ice anymore. To the millions of unemployed those slogans weren't even a joke anymore.

RK: How did you get to the Soviet Union? How was it arranged?

Well, I was appointed by the party in Canada to go. There were quite a number of us that went over to the U.S.S.R. Lenin had been dead just six years. There had been struggles within the Russian party too--with Trotsky and Bukarin and others. Stalin was coming up in the Communist party. It's hard for me to explain now what the hell it was like.

The Russians were a very proud people. They had made the revolution, what nobody else had been able to do. I remember walking down the streets of Moscow one day with a pal of mine from the Lenin school. As we are going past this one construction site where they were completing an apartment house we see this one guy working there smash a window that had already been put in place with some planks he was carrying. He didn't realize that there was glass already in. Both of us had worked in construction in North America. So we talked to the men on that construction crew. It's very simple to avoid breaking windows when you're building. When the windows go in you put soap on the glass until everything is finished. Then you can see that the glass is in. Otherwise you can break a lot of panes.

Well, the soviet in charge of that construction job very much resented our advice. That we, outsiders, would try to tell them that. That they didn't think of it themselves. They considered it interfering.

RK: What had you expected to find in the Soviet Union before you got there?

A New Wonderland. Ha. Everything Russian we marveled at. Some tremendous plants and big mines. There were some tremendous changes taking place. People came over to Russia to see new things, the new way of doing things.

In Canada itself, you could see the breakdown of the system by 1930. You saw the crisis on the farms of Canada and in the plants and in the cities. I used to tell coal miners in Canada, 'We will never get regular work again, there will be no full employment under this system again.' We were producing more than people could afford to buy under the capitalist wage system. Yes, certainly I believed that.

In comparison, the Russians were starting out on the first of their five-year plans. Building and industrial development going forward. Starting on the collectivization of the farms. The Russians had gone through a revolution and it had overthrown the Czar. And they were going to start something new...We worshiped them. And they could see for themselves the superiority of the socialist system of planned economy. Who had ever seen that before?

In any case, I had to give that all up pretty fast. I came back to Canada in a hurry because of the situation here. I was only in the Soviet Union for about eleven months or so when the Bennett government raided all the Communist party offices in Canada and made its section 98 arrests. That was when all of the top leadership of the party was arrested and later sent to Kingston Penitentiary, after a trial. A period of reaction was setting in, it seemed, and everybody was needed back home to fight that.

We had come in through France and over Berlin and we came out by way of Germany. Coming out I hit Berlin just during the big strike of streetcar men and transport workers. There were massive strikes on all the time. But the Communist party there never believed that Hitler would ever succeed in getting himself set up.

I only stayed in Berlin until the German party fixed up my papers so I could get back to Canada. Germany was on the verge of a revolution, it seemed to me then. The Communist party there was quite an affair, linked to workers in the plants and in a lot of different ways. I went to a party discussion on what was going to come next in that strike. It was held in the Wedding district, I think.

I went from Berlin to Hamburg and then over to Liverpool and from there back to Canada. I landed in Canada dead broke. We really didn't have much of an idea of what was happening to the party here. In the Soviet Union they thought, we thought, that it was the beginning of a counter-revolution in Canada. They expected it in America.

Back Home and Out West

When I got back to Toronto I found that the Communist party was 'underground'. At that time the party lost a lot of its records and files. They were seized before the party could do anything about it. Very extensive files. Well, that was a funny way to go underground, I thought.

By the time I got back the communists were up on section 98. We didn't really know how to go underground. That was a brand new experience for us.

The first thing I did when I got back to Toronto was to get in touch with the comrades here. I knew most everybody in the movement there. We'd take different names and move around to different houses. I remember to get to a Central Committee meeting I went to three different houses, getting the address of the next house, till I finally got to the meeting. All around College and Brunswick. That was our center. The trials of the party leadership took place in Toronto. We had no experience in the underground.

We thought we'd be able to survive and work during that period of trouble. That was when I went out west, to Edmonton as party organizer. For a short while I was the secretary of the Workers' Unity League when Tom McEwen was jailed. Sam Carr's wife was secretary and we had an office on Lombard street. We were trying to organize new trade unions right across the board, lumber workers, fishermen, plant workers, whatever. I helped edit the paper and spoke at trade union meetings.

RK: It must have been a pretty decentralized sort of organization.

Yeah. We didn't rely too much on a central organization. We had a number of people that came together. Some of the organizers came from Nova Scotia, some from Montreal, some from the west. It was a short time after that that I went west myself. We had a fight within the party with this so-called right wing. That's how I came to replace John Lakeman as party organizer in Edmonton.

We held meetings and gave speeches. It's a funny thing, when you think of it today, but the mass meetings practically financed the movement out there. There was a theatre and a square in downtown Edmonton, a couple of blocks from city hall, where we used to speak. That square got to be known as 'Red square'.

I'd go speak at miners' meetings throughout the whole region. They were accustomed to having public discussions and bringing in speakers, maybe once a month. We'd arrange with some of the locals to invite me to speak. At the end of the meeting they

might give you a check for twenty or twenty-five bucks. That would keep you going, pay for transportation. That's how I got around to all those places there.

As we got involved in the daily struggle we aligned allies and opponents. The veterans already had a mass organization. Yes, they were a reactionary organization in America. So was our Canadian Legion, too. But at that time it was composed of workers who had been soldiers in the previous war. We had lots of veterans in the Mine Workers Union.

It's amazing, the transformation that took place in the struggles of the thirties, among the unemployed and others. Although I was more involved with the mine workers and with party organization you did a bit of everything then. There was no dividing line between union work, unemployed work, party work, stopping evictions. It was all tied together, all going on at the same time.

Take the Canadian Legion in Calgary--it joined with the Unemployed association there. The Unemployed association was openly communist led. Who else would devote their energy and experience to that?

So many of the Legion veterans were unemployed, desperate, that their first concern was work. A few of them at the top would run the Legion halls and the halls had the liquor business sewed up in many places. The income from the sale of beer financed the organization. Nevertheless, in some of the big demonstrations of the unemployed some of our biggest contingents were veterans--unemployed.

The Provincial government began to float some of these make work projects. One was in a place called Mission Hill, just outside Calgary. We intended to break up this project at Mission Hill, stop them using the unemployed to do useless work at humiliating wages. It was almost like one group digging holes and another bunch filling them up.

We'd call a meeting and some of the workers in that project would speak and then some of us would speak. We'd send some of our people to get on the project and then they would come out and denounce it. Finally we had a riot there, the police came and some of us were arrested.

Pat Lonihan (?), who later became a councilman in Calgary, got arrested there. I got picked up and hauled before the court. It was our policy not to hire lawyers. The Canadian Labor Defense League would teach us how to conduct our own cases. It was a national organization led by a former minister, A.E. Smith. I would normally defend myself when I was arrested.

Were we acquitted? Well, no, we were convicted of unlawful assembly. But the government released us afterward. That was a common charge then. It allowed them to put us away or tie us up for a while.

Estevan, 1931

I was sent into Estevan by the Mine Workers Union to get the minders there to call off their strike. This was after the Estevan massacre. They were getting smashed to hell.

Estevan and the mining communities like Bienfait are in the coalfields in the south of Saskatchewan. The miners there had gone out because the company had ousted their checkweighman off the scales. That had been an unorganized mine area before. But there was no way that the company there would recognize the Mine Workers Union of Canada.

Estevan was not a mining town but it was in a mining district. Bienfair was the mine town most involved. We, the Canadian Mine Workers Union, were just declared an unlawful organization by this local judge. The R.C.M.P. would just pick up anybody they thought were officials of the Canadian Mine Workers. There were a whole series of trials and sentences passed out against the miners, their leaders and all the people that went in there to help them.

I landed there at the time of the trial of Anne Buller, A.E. Smith of the Labor Defense League, Sam Scarlett, Joe Forkin. They all got convicted. They all served time handed out by this judge. Charged with? Charged with whatever charges they wanted to bring up against them.

I came in using the trials to get into the town, because the town was blocked off by the police. We couldn't get any union organizer in without them arresting us. So I came in dressed up as a lawyer, with a fancy suit and a briefcase. The police there didn't know me. I'd made a reservation at the best hotel by telephone and when I got off at the station I took a cab. The hotel I had registered at was just down the street from the railway station so the taxi driver drove me around a bit and then took me back almost to where we'd started. I was supposed to arrive like a swell; I was supposed to be a lawyer.

The next day I went into the court and tried to act like a lawyer. I sat at the legal table in court. Then, when I could manage it, at night, I went around the district, trying to get the miners to go back. We wanted to save enough to rebuild in the future.

The manager of this one mine threw the men's checkweighman off the scale, that's what started the strike. That was totally illegal, it was against the Saskatchewan Mines Act. It stipulated that an independent checkweighman, someone not employed by the company, had to be at the tippie (i.e. weigh scale for the mined coal). That strike was unnecessary. We could have used their own laws to get the checkweighman back.

RK: Why couldn't you get into town just by walking in?

That's how the men were shot in the first place. That is one of the supreme cover-ups in Canadian history. See, the strike was already going on when the Estevan town council adopted that famous law that they would be neutral. Neither the mine owners nor the miners could hold any demonstrations or parades in the town. The R.C.M.P. was there to enforce that bylaw.

The mines were around Estevan--Estevan itself wasn't a mining town but you had to go through Estevan to get from one mine to another, to get to the big mine near Bienfait. Well, the miners had organized a protest and were on trucks and wanted to go through Estevan to get to the mine that was on strike. As they were going through the town some of the boys got a bit confused and jumped off the trucks and started to yell.

The R.C.M.P. who were there got scared and started to shoot. Just shot into this bunch of unarmed miners. They killed--it's never been satisfactorily determined how many died--three or four, and wounded a bunch more. It was after that that A.E. Smith and Annie Buller and the Canadian Labor Defense League came in to protest what the R.C.M.P. had done. And then all of them got arrested, for 'unlawful assembly'. That was the most vicious and contemptible judge I think I ever saw.

Annie Buller spent six months or so in jail, just for going there to protest the massacre. There was eventually some inquiry into the R.C.M.P. but it came out as just a whitewash.

See, Sam Scarlett had been a prominent man in the I.W.W. in the States back before the first world war. He had originally come from Britain and during the Palmer raids, or maybe before, when the American government rounded up all the left wingers, he was arrested along with Big Bill Haywood and most of the I.W.W. leadership. After some time in jail he was deported by to Scotland. But Scarlett came back to Canada in...I don't know when. He was a well-known veteran of the labor battles by the time I first came west.

The O.B.U. (One Big Union) still had some support in Western Canada when I first got out there. The O.B.U. was our idea of industrial unionism. It wasn't a communist idea

at all. But they saw parliament as just a gas house. They were against involving themselves and workers in political action, 'intrigues', as they would put it.

Anyways, Sam Scarlett was involved in the Workers Unity League. He was already a pretty old man when he came down to Estevan to speak in defense of the miners facing the police and courts. He was arrested, I don't remember on what charge. That same judge later gave him a year in prison.

The First Trek to Ottawa, Summer 1932

Early in the thirties, R.B. Bennett (Tory prime minister) tried to hang on to the British Empire for some help and arranged to have the Imperial Economic Conference convene in Ottawa. So we organized a Workers Economic Conference in Ottawa to coincide with that. We thought to have a big demonstration in Ottawa when the diplomats came in.

Bennett directed the police to bar men coming into Ottawa for this Workers Conference we had organized. I remember, the police wouldn't let me off the train in Ottawa. Most of the others coming in were stopped, too. A big bunch of them were stopped just east of Kingston. So a bunch of us came in through Quebec, up to Hull and crossed over to form up there (in Ottawa). For some reason, the Quebec government wasn't going along with Bennett on this.

We dribbled into Ottawa in ones and twos and got together there. We decided to rally on the Parliament grounds and send in a delegation to meet with Bennett. That lawn where we met must have been the safest place in Canada--because we were completely surrounded by the R.C.M.P.

All of a sudden our delegates came in over different roads. We had several thousand there in no time. This demonstration took place as all the diplomats and politicians from various parts of the British Empire were there. Where the police had been picking us up and stopping us before, now, with all the politicians in town, they let us along. They didn't want to have a battle with all the diplomats there. All of a sudden Ottawa became free.

There was a delegation we sent in to meet with Bennett, but I wasn't part of it.

In the Crowsnest Pass

It was around that time that I first came into Blairmore. My headquarters were supposed to be in Edmonton but I hardly ever saw it. I travelled through the Crowsnest Pass to address miners there. At first Coleman was one of our strong points

there. I came to Coleman and miners there would maintain me. They'd provide me room and board. That was something they did personally, the Mine Workers Union couldn't arrange that. I first stayed with a guy by the name of Sudworth (?) in his shack, a man who had been noted as a great football player when he played for the Rossland team. So Coleman was where I first stayed.

I'd go into places and get the men together and sometimes we'd decide to take action right away, if we could. Other times we were a secret organization. Some places you had to organize secretly for months and only when you were strong enough attempt to get an agreement from the boss.

You got a job and went to work. But you couldn't organize openly. As a union organizer you were never known. If you got to be known as a union leader the company would fire you. They'd hound you, they wouldn't let you stay in camp, they wouldn't let you get off the boat on their property. You'd give the boss a different name all the time. You'd be known by one name and then change it, going on to other camps.

Well, the tactic that I was trained in was to come into a town or camp and get together as many workers as we could in the mine and try to force the employer to pay higher wages. Or to go for whatever it was the men wanted. It might be that they wanted somebody they trusted as checkweighman. That might be the issue you'd seize on. I'd organize a body of men and say, 'we should get a dollar more. Who's in favor of telling the boss to go to hell? Are you going to be with us or against us?' You sign up a bunch of guys into the union and then go after what they wanted. 'Whatever you want, we'll try to get it.'

I got into Coleman and made contacts with the miners. The conditions in Western Canada were different from those that existed in Illinois and the American coal communities. The working conditions and the wages weren't much different but we weren't faced with the unified attacks of the big coal companies and all their allies, as existed in the States. The settlements that the miners lived in in Western Canada were different too--there was often good fishing and hunting. But the Crowsnest Pass wasn't a good place to grow things, although quite a few people had gardens.

You should remember that 1931 and 1932 were in the very depth of the crisis. Our fight was against wage cuts and to keep conditions from going backward. The whole question of company unionism became the main basis of the employers' counter attack on unions. They were determined to break the Mine Workers Union. The local at Mercoal was broken and at Estevan. Coleman later became a home local, and that was a big mine.

Actually, the Crowsnest Pass and the interior of British Columbia was where MacKenzie King first made his reputation. He came in there for the Department of Labor to suggest the establishment of company unions by the companies--that far back. The mines and the C.P.R. were together behind that. That's when the United Mine Workers of America took over the locals of the Western Federation of Miners there. They were given the right to organize coal miners if they would stay out of the metal mines and smelters.

Anyway. When I got there the miners were fighting a wage cut. The employers everywhere attempted to use the depression as an excuse to cut wages. They wanted to break the working conditions that had been established by the union. Later on there was a show down within the miners local in Coleman and the company union element won by a narrow margin.

I came over to Blairmore from Coleman. There was a meeting of the miners' local in Blairmore but I couldn't get past the doorman. You see, the mine workers would have passwords to get into a union meeting. Every month or so we would have another password, like 'back on shift' or something. They would use that to identify themselves. They didn't know who I was.

The union meeting hall in Blairmore was the back of a pool hall where Bill Knight was the manager. That was in the center of town. The guys would play cards there and all that. So, I scouted around and found a window and jumped through it and landed right in front of the meeting in progress. I can't do those things now but then I could.

I started to speak as soon as I hit the floor. They were sort of surprised but sympathetic. The main thing was that I could point out what had happened at Drumheller in the fight for organization.

Well, that's how I first landed in Blairmore. I knew certain miners but I had no friends there. Once I got connected with the men they got to recognize that I was experienced in strikes--I'd been in a lot of strikes. The strike at Blairmore hadn't started yet when I first got there but it was about to start. We set up a relief organization to provide and arrange for rations and so on.

The miners were facing some awful conditions, I can tell you. They might get a hundred and fifty shifts in a year if they were lucky. Isobel's father was a highly skilled miner and timber man and he was lucky to get in three shifts a week.

The main trouble was the collapse of the coal industry during the depression--closed plants didn't need it and other people couldn't afford it. We had a plan for a division of the work available; where some would work full shifts and others part time. It was

geared to the number of persons a man had to support. It seemed like a good idea at the time but it was foolish.

You see, a coal mine had different sections, some that have proven deposits and some that play out. So this division of work was very hard to arrange. There were schemes for dividing up the work in many industries during the depression but it always wound up that the companies would give the work to certain guys and the rest would just work a few shifts here and there.

RK: How did the officials of the Miners union local at Blairmore feel about you coming in there to organize?

Oh, some of them didn't like it. They went along with the boss; they wanted to preserve their places in the mine. We changed some of them on the executive of the union later on.

The company was called the West Canadian Collieries, with head offices in Lille, France. Most of the head management was sent over from France. This same company that owned the mines around Blairmore also ran another mine in northern Viet Nam, just on the outskirts of Hanoi. It's really amazing, but when my son Rae and Tim Buck were touring Viet Nam thirty years later they visited this coal mine and the miners there presented him with a water buffalo carved from coal.

This company had made its money from coal deposits around Lille before they got involved in the Crowsnest Pass. They brought in their methods and imported labor from Europe to work their mines here. They imported mine workers from throughout Europe. There were whole communities--Czech, Italians, Ukrainians and 'Anglo Saxons' as they were known. They came as the result of the promise of jobs in the mines. In Blairmore there was a very big Italian population and a much smaller number of Anglo Saxon miners.

The strike started because of the blacklisting of men, the whole leadership of the union at Blairmore. Dominic Campo was blacklisted, so was Isobel's brother. The company picked a means of getting the men on strike. It was a provocation. They wanted the men out because they figured they could break the union in a long strike. The Mine Workers Union of Canada maintained a policy throughout the depression of not taking wage cuts. The company wanted to cut wages and get rid of the union.

I was there when the actual strike started. We attempted to get the strike settled and to get the men reinstated. None of the locals in the district was ready at that time to carry out a prolonged strike. But the company was determined to provoke that strike.

So the first thing in the strike was to hold the men together and to raise strike relief, as much as we could. We raised something like sixty thousand dollars from other locals of the Mine Workers Union, which was quite something to have contributed under the conditions. We raised relief from the Farmer Unity League, which was kind of a union movement among farmers. We got food from the Doukhobor farms in the Pass--they gave us a tremendous amount of food. No, they weren't part of the Farmers Unity League. It's strange to say, but that lone mine strike continued with the help of the farmers' organizations. We got meat and chickens and wheat and flour.

A big part of my activities during the strike was to go around getting food and relief for the miners on strike at Blairmore. To round up support. Strikers got only the most basic necessities of life. We distributed the food we had collected and had gotten from the farmers and other sources. We never gave cash relief. Mostly food. The amount would be determined by the needs of the family, the size, how many adults, children, and so on.

We did as much as we could. Some miners had a little reserve. Nobody paid any taxes. They lived in their own shacks and houses in Blairmore. The company only owned the west side of town, where the managers and company bosses lived and where the offices were. We even got the town council of Blairmore to contribute relief for the miners on strike. Blairmore wasn't a company town. The mine company just owned on end of it.

Hillcrest was completely a company town. They never elected a town council there, it was appointed by the company. The same thing with Coleman, it was a company town, too. There were so many of these company towns throughout B.C. then, especially in the mining industry. But Blairmore wasn't. So we could do some of the things we did there.

(Isobel Murphy: You should tell how you worked up the morale of the workers there. How there was more fun and more things going on during the strike than ever before. The miners' hall was busy all the time. There were dances. There were speeches and lectures almost every day.)

In going into a place I never thought of organizing just the workers there. I always tried to organize the whole community behind the strike. Because a strike had to be considered in its effects on the whole community. That was especially important in communities like Blairmore, in mining camps and towns. But I did that wherever it had some possibility of working.

Well, we did have meetings almost every day, open air rallies and what have you. Dances and benefits, too. They broke the strike at Coleman and it became Blairmore and Bellevue that carried on the strike.

The Coleman miners finally accepted the company demands; they accepted the wage cuts and went back to work. But we still had a so-called militant section in Coleman. Those miners marched. There had been marches between Bellevue and Blairmore and Coleman. But we were defeated in Coleman and the company got what they wanted--a home local. A local unaffiliated with any broader union.

Home locals were company unions, despite what anybody said and despite the fact that many of the men in those locals didn't want that. It meant that the Coleman local broke apart and left the Mine Workers Union and remained a home local till about 1940. The company was successful in building up a fear in Coleman, of communists and successful in playing an anti-foreign card.

There was a large Welsh crew that worked at the Greenhill mine (??) who had been recruited in Britain by the company after the British General Strike. Wales had a very militant miners' tradition but the miners there, when that strike was broken and they couldn't get a job, were shipped to Canada. History is repeating itself now in what's developing in Britain--almost fifty years later. It's the miners' union in Wales and Scotland that's taken the brunt of the fight against wage cuts.

All through the Crowsnest Pass and the other coal districts the companies, often foreign-owned and managed companies, had brought in the basic populations from different parts of Europe. There weren't many Canadian-born miners there. So it was quite easy for them to play one group off against the other. Immigrants coming in to the country would tend to go where their relatives had got established and that was also how some of these communities were built up. They could be pretty close knit.

On the other hand, the whole Crowsnest Pass area is a mining district. There was a fraternity between miners; you have that in every country, especially if they are in one district like that. Blairmore, Hillcrest, Bellevue--all on the Alberta side. And if you go into B.C., Fernie, Michel and Natal.

There were a few radical English miners at Blairmore. For instance, Bill Knight. He was the picket captain during the long strike we had and later elected him a mayor of Blairmore.

The company tried to break out strike at Blairmore by opening the mine in Bellevue. The same company owned it. They arranged with the fire bosses and the shifters (shift

bosses) to bring the Bellevue mine into operation as we were on strike in Blairmore. It was about four miles away.

A 'fire boss'? He is the guy who looks after safety and sees that the operations underground are up to government regulations. See, a mine is a damn dangerous place. It is the air pressure in the passages that holds back the methane gas in the old workings. Methane gas is lighter than air and you control it by pumping so much air into the mine. But the methane begins to build up from the old workings and if it gets loose in the current workings it can explode. The fire bosses and shift bosses weren't unionized then.

So we picketed Bellevue, too. That's the time that we had to put up mass pickets during the Blairmore strike. The company called in the police. We kept the police busy. I got arrested when I was on that picket line.

(Isobel Murphy: Tell him about the incident when the women were on the picket line at Bellevue and threw pepper on the noses of the Cossacks' horses. How they were singing when they threw them in the police wagon.)

The company managed to get some scab miners to work at Bellevue mine, but we would keep the picket line hopping all night at times, marching around that camp. We'd keep the scabs awake with our marching and chanting. They always thought that something might happen at night so they didn't get much sleep. In the morning they were in pretty poor shape to go to work.

The miners' wives would be picketing and parading during the day. It was all interrelated; they were part and parcel of the strike. That was the greatest...those families were the greatest. Lots of women participated in the strike and we relied on them.

(Mary Murphy: Weren't the police brought into Blairmore, too?)

Oh yes, there were up to three hundred there for a while. But they didn't accomplish anything. The company couldn't put a whole mine into operation just with scabs. You see, Alberta already then had a law which stipulated that miners had to pass an exam and be qualified before they could work underground. They couldn't just pick up a man from the street and send him to work in the mine. The law didn't allow that. So they couldn't get so many scabs that easily. At Mercoal, they broke their own law to smash the Mine Workers Union there. They did bring in men who didn't have miners' tickets as scabs. But in Blairmore they couldn't get away with it.

(Isobel Murphy: I want you to tell about those women that were put in the police van in Bellevue. And they were fighting with the police in the van and you rescued them. There's a funny end to that story.)

Well, I was charged with 'unlawful assembly' for my part on the picket line. And I later served my time in Lethbridge jail, but that was after the strike was over. The law was so ridiculous. It said that 'unlawful assembly' meant any assembly, even if it were only three people, no matter what they were doing. 'If it would cause a reasonable to fear for a breach of peace' *that* was unlawful assembly. Well, how can you defend yourself against a law like that?

The strike was over by the time we went to trial. About 85 women had been arrested during the strike, a whole bunch of them. They took us all to Fort McLeod where our trial was held. The Attorney-General of Alberta promised to release the women without any sentences, if they pleaded guilty of unlawful assembly. So they all pleaded guilty.

Yes, there were that many arrested. They were to come up for trial at the Fall Assizes. But the Attorney-General thought they could dispense with those trials and sentences if they would plead guilty.

But I demanded a jury trial. What the hell was the use of my getting a suspended sentence and having that hanging over my head? So I went for a jury trial and defended myself--and that's where I learned a big lesson.

I was convicted but I asked the judge to give me a stay of a couple of days to get my business wound up before he sentenced me. That same afternoon I'm having a drink in the local beer parlor with some of the boys and here, just a few tables away is the foreman of the jury. After I'd had a few beers in me I went over to him and asked 'What was wrong with my defense?'

Well, the foreman of the jury told me that he was from Pincher Creek, was a small rancher there. And he says, 'What are you guys kicking about, to go on strike in times like these, with a job and money coming in?' And he starts to get into the troubles he's having to keep his head above water. 'Well', I says, 'Do you know how much the miner gets for a ton of coal?' and it had to be a long ton. 'We get 48 cents to mine a ton of coal.' But when that rancher bought the same coal he'd pay over nine bucks a ton, right in our district. So this farmer says to me, 'If you'd have brought that out in the trial you sure would have got acquitted.' 'Well', I say, 'I wasn't charged with the price of coal. I was charged with unlawful assembly.'

Anyways, I got sentenced to three months in jail and served the whole three months. There wasn't much to it. I remember coming back to Blairmore after I got out of jail. There was a big celebration.

The strike was settled some time in September; it had been going on for about ten months. The company backed off and we had won that strike; in the sense that our union was still intact and we had stopped the company from instituting any more wage cuts, as they wanted. The company agreed that they wouldn't hire any new men after the strike until every man that had been there before was taken back, without discrimination. It was quite a victory, considering what was happening in other mine regions.

RK: How is it that Blairmore could hold out and win the strike, when the local at Coleman couldn't?

(Isobel Murphy: Well, they didn't have the ... unity? There was a part of Coleman they called 'bush town', where the non-Anglo-Saxon population lived. The way they acted towards each other ... That's what I think anyway; that's what my dad said about Coleman. Actually, it wasn't a company town either.)

RK: But why did one develop greater unity than the other town? You had that mix of ethnic groups in both of them, didn't you?

(Isobel Murphy: I don't really know why those two towns were so different. My dad had worked at Coleman, too, and it was a good union town before.)

Harvey Murphy: After the strike was over there was a municipal election coming up (1933). We decided to contest that election and take over the municipal government. We lined up everybody and saw to it that they went to vote for our slate. I remember this old woman, who must have been close to eighty, who could hardly speak English, came down to vote. She had a piece of coal in her hand. That coal was to say that she was going to vote for the coal miners.

See, what had gotten the people divided, in Blairmore but especially in Coleman, was the issue of 'this is a white man's camp', meaning it had an Anglo-Saxon population, that is the phrase that was used. In Blairmore most of the miners were Ukrainian and Croatians and Slovaks, a few Finns. Probably Italians were the single biggest bunch in town.

I remember the description of me by the chairman of a support meeting when the strike was on. This would be in ... I've forgotten now ...one of the mines in the Crow. He said, 'Murphy is a good man. He even looks like Mussolini.' That was their conception

of Mussolini, a 'good Italian socialist'. Of course there were Italians who understood what was going on in Italy but many in these communities had come over before Mussolini took power. Some of these communities were kind of backward on politics, but they were good strikers.

That became part of the struggle when we were on strike the previous summer. There was an undercover Ku Klux Klan element among some of the Anglo-Saxon miners. They never came out in the open but they did burn a cross up on the hillside, just above where we would hold outdoor rallies. Just opposite the bandstand where I spoke. We used to have outdoor meetings in the park.

In the 'white man's camp' there were a few native Canadians, some Scotchmen and Englishmen. They didn't have much of a crowd. But there were only six Anglo-Saxon families in Blairmore, including Isobel's family, that supported the strike completely.

That issue was floated, to 'make it a white man's camp'. So we ran a slate that had Italians, foreign-born workers and Canadians. And we won; we elected the mayor and most of the union slate as town councilors. One of our picket captains, Bill Knight, he became mayor. I never ran in the election myself because I wasn't a resident. But I was an unofficial advisor for the slate.

We took over the fire hall and we installed a new police chief for the town. We made various improvements at the school. Most of the miners' houses didn't have bathtubs so we built public baths for the people in town.

(Isobel Murphy: The union town council brought in a basic dental care program for school children. It was one of the first in Canada. They hired a full time nurse, which the town didn't have before that. I worked as the town nurse myself for a short while years later. There was also a nurse for maternity and childcare.)

Harvey Murphy: Not long after we were elected we renamed the main street in Blairmore Tim Buck Boulevard. It was part of the inter-provincial highway actually. That's the center of the town. We planted some trees along it in town and made it into a boulevard. At the time Tim Buck was still in Kingston penitentiary on the section 98 provisions.

This was in 1934, when the union slate came in at Blairmore. Isobel and I were married that year.

(Isobel Murphy: Tim Buck got out of Kingston in 1934 and not long after that he made a trip across the country with a stop scheduled in Blairmore. His train was supposed to get in at about eight in the evening. But there was a storm and the train was delayed

so he got in at four o'clock in the morning. And there were still people down at the hall waiting to greet him. As soon as he came in they began to blow the fire whistle to let everyone know he had come.

Harvey Murphy: When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, the Blairmore town council sent a telegram to the Federal government protesting it. Ha, ha. Oh we did things like that. They called us 'The Red Crows'.

There was one thing that may seem sort of peculiar. The miners at Blairmore had a check off agreement with the mine. The mine would check off union dues from their pay. But we refused to sign that arrangement. We didn't want to depend upon the company checking it off their wages; we wanted our members to come around the union hall and pay. Besides, the company could hold back on the check off and use that as a weapon against the union. We threw that one out of the window.

The Mine Workers Union of Canada organized against the boss. We didn't sign for a check off agreement. We'd collect the dues ourselves. I proposed short strikes, hit and run strikes. Today, with labor relations as they have developed, you sign an agreement with the company to settle disputes and grievances on the job through negotiations. But I wasn't really interested in agreements. All the time I was at Blairmore I never once went on a negotiating committee. The system we have today with grievance committees and arbitration and all that. That's all new.

It was pretty primitive. Our pit committee went down to the company office and tried to settle the grievance or some dispute that arose at the time. If they didn't succeed they'd come out to the miners outside, they'd be waiting at the mine entrance, and tell them what the result had been. The methods we used were very primitive. It's a whole different ball game today.

We'd make agreements with the company--but they'd break them and we'd break them. It was a hit and run affair on both sides. It was a man-to-man business. If we felt strong we'd call a strike. We had general agreements but they didn't commit either side to any hard and fast grievance procedures. Some of those agreements used to be only two or three pages long. It recognized the wage scales. It used to be a straight argument with the threat of work stoppage standing in the doorway.

You know, for a company to get the mine ready and then nobody turns out to work, that's quite a pressure on the company to settle a grievance. The mine would first be inspected for gas before any shift could go down. The miners would be waiting outside to go down in the mine cars. They'd stay out until the mine committee had settled the grievance with the company, right there and then.

We'd put pressure on them if we knew they had new orders for coal. You see, that's one thing about coal--you can't stock pile it for any length of time. It deteriorates in the open air. The main thing we mined was steam coal, Lignite's even worse.

Unions weren't really certified then. Union certification only came during the second war. Now they rely on certification and the 'sanctity of the agreement'. But we wouldn't and couldn't. But what we maintained in the Crowsnest Pass was that if we felt we were in a good position we'd shut'm down for better wages. If the company felt there was enough unemployment in the place they'd try to impose their own conditions. The class struggle wasn't some far away term. It was straight out. I always had the view that 'If he's stronger the boss will bugger us. And if we're stronger we'll bugger him.'

The communists were in disagreement with the I.W.W. They didn't believe in the type of labor relations that the I.W.W. involved. The communists preferred regular trade unions and elected officers and regular bargaining methods--not the hit and run methods. But the I.W.W. was able to organize transitory workers who moved from camp to camp. That was a lot of my early experience. They were successful in organizing lumber workers and miners early on. You could only organize the lumber camps and the mining camps by that tactic. Notice I use the word 'camp'.

It's hard to visualize what labor organization was based on then. The Trades and Labor Congress was mainly for skilled workers who were established in the cities. But lumber workers and many miners were more like seamen.

Unions were very primitive. We had no treasuries. Trade unions weren't legal bodies anyway. Not really. It was the Labor Relations Act that gave legality to trade unions. The whole system of labor-management relations wasn't really covered under the laws.

To start with, unions were secret organizations. They had no legal status. The Western Federation of Miners--hell, they had no legal status either. They'd just shut her down. That was our only weapon.

It's the same rights as the management has. When he doesn't want your work or thinks you're getting too much, why, he'll shut the operations down too and try to hire other guys. A man doesn't have a right to a job. Not under our system.

I tell you, I've seen whole working agreements that weren't more than two or three pages long. Just the wage scale and the hours of work. Nobody used (labor negotiating?) procedures. The pit committee would go in to the management and meet in the morning and the guys would be up at the mine ready to go to work. They

waited there at the mine entrance till the pit committee came out of the meeting with the company. If we couldn't come to an agreement we'd just shut her down.

I never met with the management myself; that was always done by a committee of the miners themselves. I might be sitting down in the square at six o'clock in the morning.

But as primitive as we were, we were still able to establish a standard for the miners. It's tough to explain the situation. But we had the instant strike. The whole thing was wild cats, all the time.

I became known in Coleman and in those little towns of the Crowsnest Pass as a 'Red agitator', which I was. That was the advantage I had. That was my strength.

We could only defend our members from reprisals by shutting them down. Get enough behind you so you could shut the place down if the company discriminated against your members.

RK: But most miners knew what the score was, who were for a union, but had a family and kids they had a responsibility for? What do you say to somebody who's willing to fight but who also has commitments to his family?

Well, you've got to change those conditions. If we could keep them organized we'd have a local meeting and decide what to do. And then do it. Decide at four o'clock that you're not going in at six. Put the picket line out. Any guy that would walk through a picket line, he'd be known as a scab. In those small communities, it would be a terrible mark against him, and his family. He'd have a hell of a time even moving to another camp in the Pass if his name got to be known among the miners as a scab. We had solidarity.

Oh Christ, when you're in a little town--we knew our anti-union people. We wouldn't allow them in the meeting and we wouldn't associate with them. Only the anti-union birds went to the Legion to drink beer while we would be at the Cos, the Cosmopolitan beer parlor. We knew a guy wasn't with us when he went into the Legion to drink and associate with the birds that hung around there. There were just a handful of them anyway.

All during those years I rarely knew what I had to live on. If you were going around organizing you would depend on your supporters to put you up and sustain you. Sometimes I was supposed to get a salary but I never knew if it would be paid. I never knew what money we had to live on--it wasn't steady. Ask Isobel, did she ever know me to have a steady salary until Mine and Mill got going. We'd always fight against the trade union bureaucrats; those high paid officials who lived like bosses.

In B.C.

But there's one thing that I remember about the struggles around B.C.--our communist movement was composed of men on the tramp to a large extent; transient workers. Men from the camps, down on Cordova there. I was attracted to them.

The headquarters of the Workers' Unity League there was on skid road, it was in the old Travellers Hotel. That's a beer parlor. We had an office upstairs but most of the meeting was downstairs. And there was another hotel, just across from Victory Square, the Commercial hotel on Cambie, where we used to have meetings. We had rooms upstairs, rooms we'd use as flops and offices and meeting rooms--everything in those little hotel rooms. That's where we planned the strategy for some of those big marches in Vancouver.

The owner of the hotel was part of our movement. His daughter was married to Tom Uphill's son. When I first came to the coast from the Crowsnest Pass I stayed there, at the Commercial hotel.

Tom Uphill was from the coal mining town of Fernie, just across the B.C. border from us. He was always being sent to Victoria to represent the people from his region of the East Kootenays. He was the Independent Labor Party. They kept reelecting him from Fernie so that when he retired he'd been in the legislature for over forty years.

I remember when I was once over in Victoria on a delegation of some sort. We were up in Uphill's room, he was attending some Royal Commission hearings and Mrs. Uphill wasn't with him. The Liquor Control Board had had a meeting the night before where it seems they had been 'testing the whiskey'.

I remember now. That was my first trip to Victoria and I was with a delegation coming down from Anyox. There had been a strike at the big copper smelter in Anyox, way up on the north coast, in which the company had commandeered the police and they came in and deported all the strikers. We were mainly holed up in Prince Rupert, trying to carry on picketing of supplies being sent to Anyox from there.

The provincial government wanted to appoint a governmental inquiry to investigate conditions at Anyox; they thought they could get around the demands for an independent investigation by appointing a commission filled with their picked men. Anyox was the kind of mine where they 'tied up' the boulders in the tunnel rather than bringing them down and cleaning up. All sorts of stuff like that. It was very dangerous for the miners. We brought down these affidavits to Victoria; of how the mine

inspector was supposed to go in there but never did inspect the dangerous places but only where the operators wanted him to go.

The government proposed a departmental inquiry. Well, that meant that the mine inspectors would be investigating themselves. What we wanted was labor representation on the inquiry. Uphill and a few left wingers in the opposition brought forward a demand for a full inquiry. The C.C.F. members should have done that but we didn't associate with them.

When was that? Oh Christ, my dates are all buggered up now. It would have been in the early thirties. I wasn't married yet so it was probably late 1933 or so. It was at the end of the legislative session and the government was waiting for the Lieutenant Governor to send official approval to end the session. It was late at night.

Near the end of the term the government had brought forward a bill for the sterilization of the mentally unfit, that would allow people in mental hospitals to be sterilized. I think it passed, too. Uphill was there and he led a chorus of opposition members in singing, 'Here we come gathering nuts in May.' That caused quite an uproar. You can't be disrespectful of the legislature that way.

Uphill was able to beat the government from setting up that Board of Inquiry by the Department of Mines. We wanted to be assured of some labor representation on it. That's when Tom told this account about what a Royal Commission is, how it works. 'A man goes into the toilet and locks the door for privacy. It's quiet for a while, and after a while you hear a loud report. Then the matter is dropped.' That's a Royal Commission.

I wasn't on the coast when the strike started at Anyox. The Mine Workers Union had sent up a guy from Vancouver... Jeez, I can't think of his name now. And he did succeed in organizing some of the crew. There were some terrible conditions, both in the way they ran their mine and in the living conditions in the camp. It was a big camp, the smelter at one end and the cookhouse and bunkhouses and where some local people lived at the other end of the place.

Anyway, this organizer of ours got the crew in the smelter together and issued a strike threat unless their demands were met. The company managers asked for three days to communicate the demands to their head offices in New York. It was one of the biggest mining and smelting companies in North America, Granby Consolidated (Mining and Smelting). After the three days were up our organizer pulled out the crew in the mill.

That got the company riled because he called out the mill when the magma was going through the 'calendars'. This is after the ore had been crushed. It's hot metal and it

would consolidate in the calendars. It would tie them up for months if you didn't give a mill notice beforehand. I always made it a practice of giving advance notices to the company in situations like that. But this guy didn't. He pulled out the crew at the end of the three days.

It didn't take too long for the officers of Granby Consolidated to get on the phone to Ottawa and the Federal government sent up a Navy boat to support the provincial police that were brought into Anyox. They swept all our men up and shipped them out of Anyox. It was a very isolated place. Half of the crew wound up in Prince Rupert and the other half in Vancouver. We tried to conduct the strike from there. That's when I came out from Blairmore. I'm not sure now when, maybe 1934 or so.

I worked out of Vancouver, staying in these hotels, worked with the pickets in Prince Rupert for a while. Then I'd be back in Blairmore. I was involved in a number of strikes and organizing efforts. I didn't just stay put at Blairmore.

How could they deport us from Anyox. Well, they used the Obstruction of Peace and Public Order law, or something like that. If they had no authority to do that they did it anyway. Everyone was shipped out. Our members picketed the docks that handled cargo to Anyox in Vancouver and Prince Rupert.

We lived in Rupert and drew whatever relief the union could round up. The police would come down and pick us up once in a while. You can't resist that you know, questioning. They don't have to lay any charges. They'd take us down to the police station and bring out some pictures of men wanted for robbery or something. They'd have a picture of some guy with curly hair, and I had hardly any hair at the time. It obviously wasn't me and they would find the error the next day, after I'd spent a night in jail. That was common at the time. You could expect that. That was 'the law' as we saw it operating then.

There were six or seven of us young guys in this one house. They had managed to get on relief. When we weren't on the picket line we managed to pick up some dames. It was the nicest strike I ever was on.

We later helped elect Tim Walsh as an alderman in Prince Rupert. I was at his funeral in Vancouver some years ago and he was an old man even then. He used to be a miner in Rossland, a great guy.

The company would try to get supplies and scabs up to Anyox past our pickets. We could get a couple hundred men on the picket line in Rupert if we had to. But they brought in the scabs from Vancouver, where they could hire them easily and where

they could get past our pickets. Vancouver has such a big dock area, so much going on that they could get by us.

Some of that early organizing in the thirties was the most anarchistic organizing I ever seen. An organizer would get together some of the crew, decide on some demands and then call a strike. Then they'd bugger out of camp. Who wants to stick around a camp on strike? In many cases you couldn't anyway, it was only company bunkhouses to live in.

We didn't have homes, we didn't have families. We had nothing to hold us--one place was about like another. That was the thing about transient workers. There was nothing to hold me in Toronto or Calgary or any place at all.

RK: I guess that was both a strength and a weakness. People would pull the pin and pack up, but also not much holding them to a long strike.

We were transients. Vancouver was a town that fluctuated by the times of year, by the time the loggers and miners and fishermen came in. That's when the stores and businesses in their part of town would do most of their business. During the summer fire season, during the winter snow, during the times the camps shut down. Many of the hard rock mines were dependent on the transient miner. Not coal towns like Blairmore, but the mining camps all throughout B.C. The small mines would just work the richest veins, run out of development capital and then shut down. Even some of the mines in the Bridge River district.

B.C. was a tremendous place--it was mostly Vancouver. Vancouver would be filled with loggers and fishermen and miners who'd come in or would be on the tramp. Vancouver itself didn't have that much industry then. Mostly it was these transient single men that we had in the unemployed associations. I don't think we had so many Vancouver citizens.

We'd get meal tickets. You'd be able to get a meal in a restaurant for twenty-five cents. The *Only* was one place, and that cafeteria where you collect your own dishes, the *White Lunch*. That was a real hang out for the unemployed. That wasn't on the 'Don't Patronize' list in the thirties. Afterwards it was--terrible working conditions they had.

The Mine and Mill union had a little office in the Holden building, just a few doors down from the *Only*. The first night I spent in Vancouver, the party put me up in the West Hotel. That's just down the street and around the corner. Oh Christ ... I fitted in perfectly.

(Mary Murphy: But dad, you came from Kitchener and Toronto. How did you get used to these small towns and camps. Didn't you miss Toronto?)

Harvey Murphy: No, I didn't care too much. I was engaged in this Workers' Unity League and with the Communist party in Alberta. And we, in the west, had different ideas about things.

(Mary Murphy: But you weren't from the west. You were from the east!)

Harvey Murphy: Most of the people in the west came from the east at that time. Either from the east or immigrants from Europe or from somewhere else. Those were the people who mainly were in the camps.

I was single. What the hell did it matter? What did it matter in those days to travel? I had no home. I came into a place to organize it. People were on the move everywhere. They rode the freights. You'd get arrested for vagrancy in those days and you'd come in front of the magistrate who'd find you guilty and give you twenty-four hours to get out of town. That happened everywhere, including Toronto and Hamilton. That was a very common thing. Keep men moving when they are not wanted.

RK: Did you ever hear the term 'home guard'?

Yeah, of course. We kind of looked on them with contempt. The guys that pay the local taxes and vote for the local mayor. Actually, the movement in B.C. was largely made up of transients in the thirties. The party in British Columbia was largely made up of camp workers. Many of our people would be centered around Powell street and Cordova, coming and going.

In Vancouver, the core of the unemployed organization was the single men. I don't think we were very much involved with the more established citizens of Vancouver. The married and those with families. We were centered around Cordova and concerned mainly with the single unemployed. There were thousands of them. They just flocked in from all around Canada. They started out from there on that Trek to Ottawa (in 1935), riding the freights. It was our unemployed association there that organized that. Arthur Evens, who I mentioned earlier, led that. The On To Ottawa Trek--a part of Canadian history that's hardly known to people today.

What happened after Blairmore was the Corbin strike. See, the real government of British Columbia, in the mining regions of the interior, was then the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company. Right from Trail down to the border. They had established a sweep of company unions right from Grand Forks almost to the Alberta border. We had organized Michel into our union and we were in the process of re-

affiliating with the United Mine Workers of America--as all our locals finally did. Corbin was coal, a coal mining town on the B.C. side of the border.

Hard rock mining in B.C. and in the rest of Canada was still mainly unorganized until the war years. Hard rock mining was part of the steel and metal mining and smelting industries. It was tied to the great industrial centers and was under the complete control of the biggest corporations. Coal mining wasn't, to the same extent; it was more local.

Consolidated Mining and Smelting was large scale smelting as well as mining. They were a heavy industry. Take International Nickel back east. Anaconda, Kennicott Copper, Phelps-Dodge, they are all in B.C., too. The Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union, that I later became a part of, was tied to organizing and fighting that big industry.

Oh, there were a lot of small gold mines around but they weren't the dominant feature in hard rock mining.

The Western Federation of Miners had had some success in organizing the hard rock mines of the interior in the early years. Bill Haywood had been through some of the same towns I knew twenty, twenty-five years earlier, making speeches and doing organizational tours. But all that organization was smashed during or after the first world war in the interior of B.C. Even in the States, Mine and Mill, local 1 at Butte, was almost knocked out of existence after world war one. But it came back.

Haywood was originally a miner and the leading officer of the Western Federation of Miners. It's a funny thing--when I was at the Lenin school in Moscow I occupied a room that had some of Haywood's books in it. He fled to the Soviet Union to escape getting sent up for life on one trial the American trumped up against him. He lived his last years in the Soviet Union.

Anyways, in this book* he talks about being in Trail on an organizing tour. He made a speech in Rossland. That whole area of the Kootenays was an extension of the western American mining area at the time. Spokane was the real capital of that district. All the capital came from there.

* *The Autobiography of William D. Haywood, 1928*

Later on (i.e. in the 1904s) we got back that same hall in Rossland where he spoke. If you ever get the chance to get into that Rossland Miners Hall, go see it. The top floor was a floor of heavy lumber, just a big hall. That's where they drilled the miners.

After Mine and Mill (United Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union) got smashed, Cominco organized company unions that got known as the 'Maple Leafs'. The Workman's Cooperative Committee is what they called them in Trail and Kimberly. They worked with the company and the company would treat them specially. They would give them a Christmas party and special bonuses and take note of the Maple Leaf supporters and so forth. This Workman's Cooperative Committee was completely dependent on the company because it had no income of its own; it collected no dues and got grants from the company for its functions. It never established itself as a real union, in other words. But it continued to exist as an arm of the company until a reborn Mine and Mill was able to take Cominco on.

Cominco had worked out a very complex system of paying miners wages. The weekly paycheck was dependent on all sorts of things--like the mineral content of the ore they mined, the yardage and time they put in. Nobody could figure out what they had coming and were less likely to kick about the pay they got.

There was still a local of Mine and Mill at Trail when I first got there (1943). A small one. It met almost in secret. More like a club, with no bargaining rights.

The whole southern interior of British Columbia, everywhere in the mining district; it's almost unimaginable today the power Cominco had.

We never had those gun battles, almost wars, that they did in the States. Ludlow, Butte, Coure de Laine. Not here. Oh, but Corbin was very close to it. Imagine, people coming to this demonstration when the miners at Corbin were on strike and the company just closed off the town, like it was their private property ... Set their private guards to drive people off the roadway.

Cominco could even control entry into their part of B.C., to an extent. We tried to get to Corbin from Alberta. Inspector McDonald of the B.C. Provincial Police set up a watch for me at the Alberta border, in the Crowsnest Pass. And they did stop me and turn me back. That was completely illegal, but they did it anyway.

That was forty years ago. So much happened in between. It's hard to remember what happened exactly. Because I was all over, involved in all kinds of things. It's not like there were only three or four things I was involved in; there were hundreds. Sometimes I can only sort of sketch things out.

We tried to organize the hard rock mines and the metal miners in B.C. during those years. But we didn't succeed. That is maybe the greatest oligarchy that there is in the States. The economic and political power they can bring to bear against government.

Slim Evans was one of the veteran organizers in the Workers Unity League. He went back to the battles that the I.W.W. had in the early years. Well, he was involved in trying to organize some of the hard rock mines during the thirties. He was kicked out of Trail, trying to organize there. His car was all smashed to hell, he was beaten up by some goons and arrested and hustled out of town.

He also tried to organize that big mine at Princeton. The police would just raid your room or any place we stayed to search for Communist literature and propaganda. That was a method of harassment. So, one time he fixed something up for them.

At that time there was a well advertised breakfast food called 'Force'. A cereal. He had this little slip of paper in his pocket before the police raided his room. That was in a hotel in Princeton. When the police came in he slipped this note out of his pocket and crumpled it up and dropped it into a spittoon. Of course, everyone had spit into that spittoon and peed in it. The police made a drive for the spittoon and when they got this piece of paper out and dried it the note said, 'Eat Force for breakfast and have a violent shit at night.' 'Well, you're looking for Force and Violence. There it is,' Evans told them.

But he was driven out of Princeton, too. We didn't make any real headway in organizing metal mining until well into the second world war. Then the demands of the war industries forced the government, even these industrial oligarchies, to allow union organization to take place. And we just swept through many of these mines in months, where we hadn't made any headway in years.

Riding Hell Bent for Election

There was a provincial election coming up in Alberta in the summer of 1935. The United Farmers of Alberta had been the provincial government since some time in the early twenties. They had been a fairly progressive organization in their time, for farmers. But over the years they lost all direction and the depression, by then five years of depression, had just about paralyzed the government of Alberta.

The Communist party had just begun to get involved in parliamentary elections and they wanted to put forward candidates wherever they could show some support. I was chosen to run for the party in Kootenay riding. That riding included the

Crowsnest Pass, Canmore to Pincher Creek and north--the mountain area. A large part of it was in the federal Rocky Mountain riding today.

I didn't actually treat it that seriously. Parliament was a gas house, I felt. I never thought that much of Parliament. I should have. I can only talk of my own backwardness in that regard. What I believed in was the industrial might of the working class. I believed that if we could stop production we would get things done. I think that would be the general thing I would be talking about in the campaign.

The election was essentially a fight between (William) Aberhart, who was the Social Credit party, and the United Farmers government. The U.F.A. had become corrupt over the years.

The Alberta Elections Act provided for four industrial constituencies which the government left for trade union candidates to represent. That was something which had been brought in by the U.F.A. originally. They didn't challenge labor candidates in those four ridings. The law didn't say that nobody else could run, they were just recognized by the government as labor seats. The rest of the province was United Farmer; the Conservatives and Liberals only made a little headway in the two cities.

There was a labor riding in Calgary, one in Edmonton, and Lethbridge-Drumheller. The riding where I was going to run was represented by a fellow called Christopher. He was a miner. Drumheller had a U.M.W.A. man representing it, I forget his name now. He was the secretary of the United Mine Workers of America, District 18. They and the other two were the extent of the labor representation in Alberta.

The Communist party ran people but we didn't manage to elect anyone. We did elect members in a few places, but one time or another in North Winnipeg, Montreal, and Toronto. What I would point out in my campaign was that 'Well, if I get elected I could do that much more for the miners. I'd fight in the legislature to get you fellas better labor legislation, stronger safety legislation in the mines.'

Aberhard was a tremendous speaker. I think he had been a school principal but mainly he was a preacher of a church in Calgary and talked on the radio on Sunday. When his radio talk was on, the streets of many of these small towns would be empty because people were home listening to him. His talks would include little stories about the personal disasters of the depression. 'What are you gonna do about it?' he would say in his campaign speeches. No one ever managed to pin him down on what Social Credit stood for.

Nobody really believed the United Farmers would be licked because they had a massive organization that they had built up over the years, in every place. Brownlee

was then the Premier of Alberta but there had a been a scandal over this woman in his office. He got her pregnant. Anyway, during the election campaign there was a mass meeting in Pinoka. It was known for being the home of the Alberta lunatic asylum. Brownlee had a delegation of women U.F.A. supporters on the platform and one of their spokeswomen stood up and said, 'I want to assure you, Mr. Premier, that the women of this riding are going to vote for you. We're going to back you up all the way.'

Aberhart got up and said, 'That's alright if you want to back him up. Just make sure you don't bend in front of him.' He said that from the platform. He got a tremendous laugh.

Well, Aberhart did it to me in Bellevue, in my own riding. I asked him to explain Social Credit and how he was going to install it. He says, 'you don't know about it and I don't know much about it. But we don't know much about electricity either. But we use it. And when you decide to use it you call on an expert. If you want to put electricity in your house you call an electrician. Well, when we get elected we are going to get an expert to install Social Credit. We'll hire Major Douglas from Britain. He'll install Social Credit for us.'

The audience laughed like hell. I was the candidate in that riding and I sure felt silly. They fell for it. Hell, he was promising twenty-five bucks a month, that had to be spent, as each person's share of the 'social dividend. At that time it was enough to get people to give him a try. People were desperate; they were willing to try anything that might get them out of what they were in. That's the only way to explain it.

The difficulties people had in making a living in those days. The mines only worked two, three, days on average. The distress of the farmers--Christ. And the small towns. Farmers were selling meat for as low as a cent a pound. You didn't know how it even paid for them to raise wheat.

God, how people lived? The price of grease used by farmers in their machines was twice the price of butter. The oil companies kept their price up well enough. I said to one farmer, 'Why don't you use your butter instead of grease to grease up?' and he says 'I put too much salt in it.'

Aberhart offered twenty-five bucks a month to all adult citizens of Alberta if he got elected. That was to come from something called the 'social dividend' or everything produced in the province. Nobody could explain it. But he swept the province against the United Farmers. There were only a handful of U.F.A. members re-elected.

I used to call them Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, Aberhart and the U.F.A. One is in, one is out; that's the only difference. Aberhart didn't have any platform or policies.

They didn't have any organization. He just picked up candidates anywhere and relied on his promise of twenty-five dollars a month. The Social Credit candidate in my riding was named Duke, he got elected. Charlie Drane, he went with Social Credit. He was a friend of mine. I remember another friend of mine, a guy by the name of Poole. He was unemployed and ran for Social Credit and got elected to the Federal house. I met him later in Ottawa when I was petitioning the government on the matter of the unemployed.

Aberhart wasn't any more anti-labor than the others. All he said was 'twenty-five dollars a month.' The outcome of the provincial election in Alberta? Social Credit swept in everywhere. They were elected in Drumheller, Calgary, Edmonton. They won the Kootenay riding where I ran.

The Workers Unity League Dissolves

(*Note: RK: Whatever the debates and reasons behind dissolving the Workers Unity League unions actually were, Harvey Murphy's personal chronology here was as follows: the debate about merging the Mine Workers Union of Canada locals with the United Mine Workers of America seems to have taken place while Murphy was still in Alberta. He then goes to Toronto briefly in early 1935, returns to run in the Alberta provincial election later that same year, and finally moves back to Toronto to do organizational work throughout the later 1930s.*)

A big question arose as to get re-affiliation with the United Mine Workers of America. The idea was to get into one union and unite the whole district.

RK: Wasn't that sort of disastrous with John L. Lewis in the driver's seat?

Oh yes. But we finally accepted that. Because Lewis, while he ran the U.M.W.A. as a dictatorship--there weren't any elections of district officers in Alberta till a few years ago, the district was under the administration of the International Headquarters all that time. It was something like the Steelworkers of America. It was one of the most democratic unions down at the local level, but once you got to the district and international levels it was strictly run by Lewis.

The main thing was to get everyone, all the coal mines, together in one district. By this time we had organized in B.C., at Fernie and at Michel as well as in the Crow. And there were locals out on the coast, locals at Cumberland and Nanaimo.

So we decided that if Lewis would give us the terms, that he wouldn't interfere in the affairs of the locals, we could bring them in. He appointed the district officers but the

locals we would control. In the Mine Workers Union of Canada the local was the real basis of power.

So we went back into the U.M.W.A. with a guarantee of local autonomy. Lewis didn't basically give a damn about the locals; it was the district executive he wanted. Because they were represented on the Board of the United Mine Workers.

Nobody would run against Lewis. Why we re-affiliated was that we wanted to unite District 18, to have it represented by one union. It was the only way we could do that. District 18 was chartered (i.e. by the U.M.W.A.) to include all of the coal miners in Western Canada, from Bienfait in Saskatchewan to the west coast. We couldn't beat the United Mine Workers; we couldn't take back Drumheller and their other locals. And also, we wanted to develop some strength inside the 'Canadian Labor Congresses' (?)

At about this same time the Workers Unity League dissolved itself and its organizations merged with the unions in the Canadian Labor Congress (Canadian Congress of Labor?). It went out of business. There was no more Workers Unity League and we got back into the Congress. That was one of the reasons why the Mine Workers Union of Canada gave up and went back into the established Canadian labor movement.

I didn't have much to do with the affiliation of the Mine Workers Union with the U.M.W.A. I never joined the United Mine Workers. The locals did. I don't know. I began a new chapter altogether from my work with the Mine Workers of Canada union.

I had my doubts about dissolving the Mine Workers of Canada to amalgamate with the U.M.W.A. We had originally been formed as a split-off of the U.M.W.A. because the International had refused to give support to a strike that was smashed in Drumheller in the twenties.

I was opposed to the merger at the time. I thought that we should continue with the Workers Unity League, which it had helped found. I was in favor of keeping on the Workers Unity League and with what it had built up. But then, I had no perspective as to the changes that the second world war would bring about. I had no idea that we would be able to gain so much ground as part of the wider labor movement.

We were able to organize in the industries that sprang up with the war. We became an important element in the Canadian Congress of Labor. And we remained, were militant. We entered into industry and finally we had bargaining rights, which we hardly ever had before. We could tackle questions, not only of wages but of working conditions. Like limiting the intensity and speed up on the assembly lines of the plants

that started to expand in eastern Canada, especially in Ontario and especially in the auto plants.

In Auto there would be those re-tooling periods each year when many of the men would be laid off. With no unemployment insurance they'd have to try to get relief to carry them over. We used that to carry out our fight for unemployment insurance.

The Workers Unity League disbanded under the slogan of uniting the working class in the Canadian Congress of Labor, with the industrial unions that were coming up but also to include the craft unions as well.

The Workers Unity League wasn't established in the Trades and Labor Congress or in the Canadian Congress of Labor. Our idea was to try to merge them. The merging of the trades and the mass labor unions came from developments in industry itself. They were taking away the skills of the skilled workers with these new machines and industrial processes. What role would these crafts play in that? None.

We had no idea of separating different parts of the labor movement, in the longer run. The Workers Unity League was established as a necessity because when it was formed the labor movement in Canada was stagnant, almost inactive. It was in the hands of the old craft union that had changed tremendously during the depression.

Besides, the officers of the Workers Unity League were getting elected to local positions in the new unions being organized, in the mass unions. Textile, auto, everywhere--even in the strikes of tobacco workers in southern Ontario.

The Workers Unity League unions weren't really disbanded, they were merged with other unions in their sector, many of which we had mainly organized. Of course many of the leadership were squeezed out, until the rise of opposition to fascism and during the war.

It was part of this United Front strategy that was emerging. It was a time when a major concern was with the advance of fascism around the world. The rise of fascism in Germany and elsewhere. Our purpose was to organize labor on an anti-fascist basis. So we could overcome the differences between the Communists and others, which became less pronounced. This anti-communist doctrine that you have today only became dominant after the war, with the McCarthy era. See, Time buck and the other Communist leaders had gotten out of jail in 1934. And after the 1935 election McKenzie King repealed Section 98 of the criminal code which had been used to arrest Communists.

I came back to Blairmore to run in the Alberta elections and after that we moved to Toronto and I began working with the Unemployed Associations. We left Blairmore.

The Unemployed and Ontario in the Later '30s

There were just so many young people who had no homes, no homes anywhere. They'd travel the freights, back and forth to nowhere. Every city had its Unemployed Association. In Vancouver they were almost all single men, without homes, with no work. They'd just jungle up, shack up wherever they could.

The first relief was church relief or soup lines organized by private charities, with maybe some help from the municipalities. Well, they were soon overwhelmed. All of the governments, federal and provincial, first thought that the unemployed could be handled without any government bother. Even the Unemployed Associations tried their hand at soup lines, because often there was just nobody else offering anything. And there was outright hunger amongst many people.

There wasn't *any* relief system for most of the transients at first. None at all. It was a breakdown of the whole structure. Many of us believed that we would never see full employment again. Not under capitalism. That capitalism was grinding to a halt.

Well, capitalism survived alright but it still hasn't been able to solve any of the old problems, like depression and unemployment that is developing again today. The fact is that the gains made are always under attack and are always being whittled away unless you can defend them.

I can't understand many of these senior citizens I meet in their organizations today. They're so anti-labor. But I ask where they think their benefits came from, who was behind pushing them through. Not the big companies and their representatives, not politicians on their own. Many of the social benefits and social legislation that we have today, like pensions, came from our struggles, union struggles. Of course, many of the spokesmen of these senior citizen groups weren't ever part of and were never sympathetic to labor.

The Unemployed associations didn't grow up spontaneously. No, we organized them. It was political, a basis for political power. There they were. So many men with a powerful common interest. Unemployed with no chance of getting a job. It meant they'd lost everything. Use the term 'a common interest' but *I mean they were hungry*.

We formed relief organizations to combat the charity attitudes of the civic governments and to get higher relief. To get away from the pogy idea of charity and

to get cash relief. Ultimately to get a system of unemployment insurance but firstly to get guarantees that the unemployed would get food and shelter. We had to deal with Mitch Hepburn when he was Premier of Ontario and with David Croll, who is now in the senate. Christ.

I used to represent the unemployed associations in many of the meetings with the government. Our slogan was 'work and wages' but they couldn't give them work. David Cross* was then (i.e. mid 1930s) the minister in charge of welfare in Ontario, in the Hepburn government. He had been the mayor of Windsor and had got a high reputation for arranging some systematic relief and for getting the provincial government to provide money for rent for those on relief. That'll give you an idea of what Windsor was like.

These relief camps that the government gradually established were hopeless. The single unemployed were supposed to work and stay in these isolated camps in return for a bed and three meals a day. And for the young married who were unemployed-- there were evictions, continually, in every city.

The Departments of Labor in every province, in conjunction with the Department of Defense, got these relief camps going during the early years of the crisis. We were opposed to them. 'Slave camps' we called them. Hopeless. They created a terrible hopelessness and just stored the unemployed men out of sight. No wages. Nothing. Maybe just enough to buy a package of smokes a day. Finally we mobilized demonstrations against them across the country. We must have brought two hundred thousand men out in demonstrations, at different times, all across the county. March 6, 1932--that was the first big one. On that day we had 8,000 men of the unemployed association come out in Calgary alone. A lot of them veterans.

Well, they had something in common, being veterans and the fact that they had fought for their country and couldn't get a job of any kind.

Who else was going to organize and defend the unemployed? The union movement wasn't interested. It was mainly still craft unions and they were being very cautious. Hell, people like Percy Bengough, the head of the Trades and Labor crafts in Vancouver, wouldn't even speak at unemployed meetings, let alone do anything to help organize them.

*David Croll later resigned from the Hepburn cabinet, publically rebuking the premier for his use of massive police force against the Autoworker organizational drive in Oshawa.

In industry, where there were any unions, they were likely to be home locals, management controlled employees associations. They weren't going to do anything for the unemployed. I went from organizing in industry to organizing the relief groups, and then back again. Not just me. I met a lot of people who had been active in organizing industry then active in the unemployed demonstrations.

The depths of the depression taught people some powerful lessons. The lesson that you couldn't have a permanent expectation, that you could never rely on capitalism to provide you with a job or income. It could guarantee no pensions or anything that you could rely on. That nothing would maintain you. That you had to have unions, that you had to have welfare plans and government pensions and all those things--because you couldn't rely on industry or capitalism to do it.

There were people who felt or knew that before but then tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands came to understand it. I couldn't have talked to the unemployed like I did before the depression. They had to learn that lesson for themselves; they had to come to that point of view. ... Until the second world war broke out and as industry and full employment came up. Then it all changed again.

We set about reorganizing the Unemployed associations in Ontario in 1935 and that got us into conflict with Toronto's Chief of Police Draper. He was a real ... an ex-army officer. I think I went to jail six or seven times during the time I was heading the unemployed organizations in Ontario. Arrested I don't know how many times. Once I was arrested twice in the same day. Harassing tactics, to tie you up with going to the police station and court and arranging bail and so forth.

Draper was hot on rooting out communism. The party was illegal during the Bennett regime, due to the imposition of the section 96 provisions. The party was more or less illegal until the middle of 1935. Although we were very active and pretty open about our views if anyone wanted to know.

The Strand Theatre, right at the corner of Dundas and Spadina, was a frequent meeting place of many of the workers and unemployed meetings. The Toronto police, under Chief Draper, once threw tear gas into that theatre to break up a rally on a free speech issue--over the issue of whether communists would be allowed to speak in public. That must have been a year or two before the repeal of section 98. Becky Buhay was there. God, think of it. Police throwing tear gas into a crowded theatre to defend a law against freedom of speech. That was the mentality that lurked around the corner throughout much of the thirties.

RK: The Unemployed associations had been organized before you came back to Toronto, right?

Yes, but I took hold of organizing them. I became President of the Unemployed Association Council. That doesn't mean just Toronto. I was in Windsor, Hamilton, London, and so on. There were these demonstrations that went down to Queen's Park. Almost every municipality had an unemployed association.

I got arrested for kidnapping at one of our actions. Right here in Etobicoke, at the Adam Beck high school on Lakeview street. That's where we were meeting with the Reeve of Etobicoke to get him to issue relief vouchers. Armstrong was his name. He was himself a working electrician.

We had this meeting with him and it got pretty hot because he wouldn't issue any relief. So we wouldn't let him leave that school till he signed the relief vouchers for the cases we had. Detaining him that way resulted in the police laying a kidnapping charge against me.

The unemployed in Etobicoke were completely out of food. The municipal officials didn't even have any relief vouchers they intended to issue. The anger of the unemployed there, the hunger, was such that--it was quite something. We could easily have had a riot.

I just remembered. We also held the Reeve of North York, Humphries, until he signed relief vouchers. We blockaded him in the township offices. There was such a mass of people around the office that nobody could get in or out.

What reminded me of that was that I met a lady here at a social the other night; she's eighty-four years old but she knew me from the thirties. People were out of food and out of script. The relief agencies didn't issue money; they issued vouchers that you had to turn in to the stores for food. Well, the Reeve of Etobicoke came to meet with us in that high school. But he wouldn't come across with anything, no additional relief for anyone. Well, we said we wouldn't let him leave until he signed some relief vouchers. Because of that I was arrested on the charge of kidnapping the Reeve. But we had a pretty good Attorney-General in Ontario then and he released me on bond.

All these townships to the north and west of Toronto were then known as the 'red belt'. North York, Etobicoke, York, Mimico. That's where you could get the cheapest rents at the time and people moved out there. Seems strange today. North York's become the center of the Jewish middle class. But then we had a lot of communists and supporters out here, on council even.

We'd demonstrate down in Queen's Park; march into Toronto from all these townships, form up on the outskirts and have different parades all heading down to

Queen's Park. They'd pick up people along the way. You couldn't tell an unemployed demonstration from an anti-eviction demonstration from a political demonstration or from a rally to support some strike. There were organized demonstrations at Queen's Park all the time.

In Toronto, for the big demonstration of the unemployed we'd always march in from the townships to Queen's Park. We'd celebrate the major occasions of the international working class--May Day, November 7. We celebrated some of the early victories in Spain, too. Don't forget how important Spain was during that time.

People marched in. You'd see them stretched out along Queen street as they came in from the Lakeshore. Others would march down Bathurst street as they were coming in from North York. Marching along the sidewalks or on the street, depending on the size of the parade. People joined in as they came long. We won quite a number of concessions from the government through them.

The anti-eviction actions were common as hell. That would bring us up against the Department of Welfare, because the provincial government often paid the rent for unemployed families.

We'd get a call that some unemployed family had been put out for not paying their rent. So we'd go there. We usually wouldn't try to stop the sheriff or police from evicting the family and putting their furniture out. That would have led to charges of assaulting a police officer for sure. We'd go when the police had left and move the furniture back into the house.

The landlord then had to go and get another eviction order and that would drag it out. Once the family was moved back in again we'd go up to City Hall and the provincial welfare department and see about doing something for them, getting them rent payments. Don't forget, we had some people on City council that were with us by that time. It was only families that we did that for.

That would be mainly in Toronto. We had a lot of evictions down in Cabbagetown, down in the east end of Toronto. There was a strong Unemployed Association there and they would go and move the people back in. The landlord would lock up the place but we'd just take the lock off. That was mainly in ward two and eight.

There would be hundreds of men at some of these anti-eviction actions, men from the unemployed associations and neighbors and other tenants. There'd have to have been several hundred to make an impression. Sometimes the furniture would sit out on the street for a couple of days, the evicted people staying with neighbors. We made sure that nobody else moved in. That's why we'd have a lot of people around while the

evicted family wasn't move back yet. To stop the landlord from moving other tenants in.

Of course, we could only take up certain cases, not every eviction. There'd be evictions taking place all over. In some cases the tenants had been moved out and had left before we could do anything about it. It was evicted families that we dealt with mainly. Single men evicted we didn't bother about. With families we might get the school kids of the neighborhood to participate in the protest. They could be mass affairs.

The system had broken down. That was a very pervasive feeling, it wasn't just communists who believed that. It's hard for me to picture for you what it was like forty, fifty years ago. If you had gone through it, at the same age, you'd know what the feeling was.

The unemployed. It was a fight for relief for those who needed it and against evictions. It was a fight to get the government to recognize needs. Earlier in the thirties the political fight was to get the leaders of the party released and to have section 98 repealed. That grew into quite a movement too before it was won. All those struggles were joined; we went all through this period.

The reason why it's confusing is that all of this was going on at the same time. I'd switch back and forth and be involved in aspects of all these things during the course of a month. There was the unemployed movement and the trade union organization and the various election campaigns ranging from councilman in some municipality to parliament. There were the anti-fascist meetings and the support for the International Brigades and the Spanish people. We, I was in all of that, all at more or less the same time.

I was also part of organizing General Electric at Peterborough and helped out with the Textile Workers. I was arrested once for my part in the General Electric campaign. The charge was 'Spreading False Information'. That was a law that had been used only once or twice in Canadian history. That is something which never applies to the Daily Press, of course.

See, there was a big set-to in Peterborough and many of the strikers had been beaten up or gassed by the police. I went to speak at a rally in Toronto in support of the strikers there. We found this one girl who had been on the picket line at the time and her face was swollen up something awful, really terrible. Well, I brought her up on the platform--her face was covered with a shawl, sort of bandaged. Then I told the audience how the cops had gassed and beaten up the pickets. 'And here is what they did,' I said, and she pulled off the shawl. It had quite an effect.

But it turned out that this girl had some skin condition. I didn't know that. But the police found that out. Who told them I don't know. But they arrested me afterwards on the charge of 'Spreading False Information'. But she had been on the picket line, you know, the tear gas probably did play a part in bringing out that condition.

Well, the judge that heard my case was pretty fed up with the police for bringing me in on that charge. He asked them what they thought they were doing, bringing somebody to court on a charge like that. And he released me on my own recognizance until my case actually came up for trial. Then he dismissed it.

Then there were the battles to organize steel in Hamilton. This huge industry was completely unorganized. They had company unions, employee councils in the steel plants then. I wasn't directly involved in that organizing drive but I helped out.

It would be the men from the unemployed association who would form a basis for new unions, as industry started up again and they got back to work. It was all linked together. You can't separate the unemployed and the workers who went back into industry when they opened up again. They were the same guys. The main drive in Peterborough was to organize General Electric there. Many of those newly hired in the plant had experience with the unemployed associations.

I went a few times to Montreal as a representative of the Ontario unemployed. I couldn't speak French but while I was there there was a strike at the Tetro (?) shoe factory. I spoke at their demonstration. There were some priests involved in that. There was a priest on the platform with me and he didn't seem to object to being associated with a communist. He was translating some of my remarks to the crowd there and he put his arm around me. I didn't know what he was translating but the people there seemed to like it.

Then there were the big organizational strikes in Cornwall, Ontario, to organize the textile mills there.

We created our leaders and the situation would bring them out. They were usually workers off the shop floor. Not necessarily party people. They would take the leadership in these strikes. Oh Christ, they were everything politically, from party members to C.C.F.ers to Conservatives--but active strike leaders. You had that then. Communist party members were only a very small part of that whole movement. Everything was in motion.

The rise of fascism in Europe. That drew thousands of the best men from the unemployed, who went to fight in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, or some went

down to the States to join the Lincoln Brigade, to fight in the Spanish civil war against fascism.

That was all part of the outlook of the times. People just had no confidence that the capitalist system would ever be able to rebuild itself. There was a feeling, at first, that the Spanish Civil War was the beginning of other class struggles and wars throughout the world; that the fight between communism and fascism was starting.

All these movements--you can't separate them. Like the organization of the Mackenzie-Papineaus. They were formed mainly from men who had experienced the relief camps or had been in the associations of the unemployed. They were mobilized by the political struggles. Trade union struggles, municipal elections, the unemployed and anti-eviction actions, the anti-fascist struggle. Communists would be in all of them. I can't separate my life; I was in all of them.

The communist party began to focus more on elections. They became more of a political party. The party had always been wary of what they considered to be 'syndicalism'. In my early days we considered legislatures, government, as an adjunct of capitalism. The communist party changed its views on these positions.

We communists never believed that the capitalists would allow themselves to be ousted by elections. We had the lessons of Spain. But when the workers started to get back into industry and the anti-fascist struggle brought forward an alliance with the other anti-fascist forces--well, the communist party shifted to place greater emphasis on parliamentary action.

The Social Democrats had come up in the thirties; the C.C.F. really mushroomed. Before that, the communist party was the sole working class party in Canada. The earlier Socialist parties had pretty well disappeared. But by the late 1930s the political struggle was immense. The oppositions to fascism, the defeat of the Spanish people, the role that the Soviet Union had played in support of the Loyalists.

This United Front--it wasn't just an idea of Stalin. It had come out of the communist party of Germany, the communist party of Italy, the communist party of France--they were all mass parties that had run up against the growth of fascism.

We elected party members to the provincial legislatures over the years. We elected J.B. Salsberg and A.M. McLeod to the Ontario legislature. Stuart Smith was elected to the Toronto Board of Control. We elected councilmen to the city council from wards four and five. In the district where I campaigned, from Bathurst to Spadina and Queen street out to the waterfront we had a tremendous turnout.

We had a man elected to Winnipeg city council. Fred Rose was later (1945?) elected from Montreal, to sit in Ottawa, elected as a communist. Well, his district was Jewish and Polish and made up of all sorts of immigrants. In Vancouver we almost elected Effie Jones as mayor. That was in the forties.

We were coming out of the depression and into political action and the anti-fascist struggle. As our political organizations developed we became a force in almost every city. I left my work with the Unemployed Associations and became party organizer in Hamilton in 1938 and stayed there until the outbreak of the war. The east end of Hamilton was one big industrial center. Probably the biggest concentration of heavy industry in Canada. We were quite strong there; we had about four hundred members in Hamilton alone. Part of my work was to expand our membership and coordinate the activities of the party, to some extent. Four hundred members is a lot.

Our party got to the point where it moved me into Hamilton as party organizer. Hamilton was an industrial center still mainly under the control of factory councils, various sorts of company unions. 'Factory councils'--employees' councils in place of trade unions. That was the case in most of the factories in East Hamilton, that's all they had.

What was my work as party organizer in Hamilton? I'd be helping to get guys nominated for the city council. Municipal elections took on quite a part of the party's work. And there was the work with the trade unions. Rubber workers, I knew the guy that organized those plants, Bill Walsh. I was there for the national steel strike. I worked with Harry Hunter and various guys involved in organizing the steel plants in Hamilton. We later helped elect Harry Hunter to the city council.

Hamilton was basically an unorganized town. The unions there had either been smashed or they had never gotten a foothold in the big industries. We tried to organize plants. There were craft unions in some of the industries. We had a slogan, 'Amalgamation of Annihilation.' We were out to amalgamate the different crafts along with the unskilled workers in unions we were organizing.

We tried to organize a plant that hasn't been organized yet. Dominion Bridge and Foundry. It's *still* a company union in the heart of Steel Worker territory. They pay almost the same wages that the Steel Workers union wins, just to keep the union out. But how they can keep it that way today, a huge plant operating without a trade union, is hard to understand. They don't even claim to have an independent or company union. Just no union. Right in East Hamilton.

From Subversives to Patriots

At the start of the war the communist party took a traditional position against the war as an Imperialist war. Support for the communist party dropped off over the Stalin-Hitler non-aggression pact. It was ... that's when I started to be leery of the thing.

Well, I had great confidence in Stalin. We had some idea of what the pact really was. Don't forget, Britain was the traditional enemy of socialists everywhere, the great colonial power in the world still. When they talked of 'The British Empire' it was real. Some of us had the idea that Hitler and Churchill would change the face of the war in the west and march east. Churchill was the most noted anti-communist that there was. But that estimation wasn't born out, as things developed.

You see, what I had learned from Lenin was that in an Imperialist war you fight your own bourgeoisie. And I'd learned that pretty well. But he *didn't* say that you should support the bourgeoisie of the other country in a war. In no place, not in Marx or Lenin or none of the thinkers of communism, was there anywhere any discussion of a national war under socialism. A 'people's war' is not a term that I ever heard--that came after the attack on the Soviet Union.

Who the hell could ever have imagined Great Britain and the United States going together, being allied with the Soviet Union? That the United States would supply arms and war material to the Soviet Union. I don't think anybody had an appreciation that such a thing could happen. Churchill--who would trust him? He was the spokesman of the most reactionary forces and very anti-communist. But with Hitler holding a gun to his head, what else could he do but go along in support of the Soviet Union.

It was reasonable to expect that if Churchill came to power in Britain it was much more likely that he'd join Germany in a war against the Soviet Union. In any case, the period of the phony war looked very suspicious. There Germans weren't attacking the French and the British weren't counterattacking--but the Germans were moving down through the Balkans. Moving east. Oh it was a pretty mixed up period.

RK: Well, what was the feeling among party members? There must have been a tremendous shock about not opposing fascism.

The communist party of Canada just went underground at the declaration of war. We knew that we were likely to be picked up but I don't recall anybody being arrested at that time, in late 1939.

We left Hamilton. Isobel took Rae and went back to Blairmore to live. I went up north to Kirkland Lake, where there was a pretty bitter strike in progress, revolving around trying to organize the mines there. Hepburn was still the premier of Ontario. He was big on calling out the police and troops whenever he thought he could make some hay amongst his supporters. Like at Timmins. We called them 'Hepburn Hussars'. The Kirkland Lake strike was smashed.

In the spring of that year (1940) Misha (?) was picked up. Isobel came back to Toronto from Blairmore and we moved out to the Junction district of Toronto. But before that we lived on McDonnell and O'Hara and on Landsdown. All that time we were living underground. By that time the party had some experience at that.

We closed up the party offices and we held no public meetings. The party leaders sought cover where you're not well known. Party leaders still met and the party still issued literature. There wasn't much danger of arrest of rank and file members of the party if they weren't openly active--just the leadership. The well known people went underground. The secretary of the party here in Toronto and people like Tim Buck and some others, went underground down in the States for a while. Others went to Mexico. The police figured that I was hiding out in Mexico all the time I was in Ontario.

There was still work going on underground. We still continued to meet, privately, secretly. Party meetings. But you never went out on the street, never travelled by streetcar. We established a leadership and ran the party underground in Toronto.

(Isobel Murphy: Police surveillance in our case seems to have been not very effective. I used to get letters from my mother in Blairmore. And if they had been really serious to track us down they could have traced those letters from Blairmore to us. Although we had a mail pickup system, under anonymous names. But they thought that Harvey was out of the country. They didn't suspect that he was still in Toronto. I don't know what purpose that served.)

Harvey Murphy: But there were quite a few people who were arrested and interned as communists during that time, especially from the western part of Canada. For a while they were sent to Petawawa, there was a huge internment camp. The mayor of Montreal was interned there. Camille Houde. They had the fascists and communists in the same camp. And some French Canadians who were just opposed to Canada's participation in a 'foreign war'. They were separated out later on and the communists were sent to a camp near Hull.

I don't know now, if I ever did, how many people in total were interned there. There were a number from Winnipeg, quite a number of Ukrainians who'd been picked up.

Ukrainian communists. Tom McEwen was interned. Melvin Fried, C.S. Jackson of the United Electrical Workers were interned. Quite a lot from Montreal.

The Canadian Labor Congress was holding its convention in Hamilton at the time the Soviet Union was invaded. Mosher and them were opposed to strikes or any other effective class actions during the war. And here were the communists (i.e. communist union activists) debating on whether to support Mosher on a no strike policy or not. I remember Radio Moscow broadcasting its support for 'no strike' pledges.

We were having meetings before the official statements were issued by the Soviet Union and the British governments. When this happened the Canadian press made a complete turn about and came out in praise of the Soviet Union.

So we had these divisions in our party. Our main leadership, Tim Buck, Sam Carr and them, were in New York and we were operating with a committee in Toronto. I remember afterward having a discussion about why the hell we came out in the open then.

That was the first time I rode in a street car during all the time I was underground. I rode down to the C.C.L. office and met George Harris. I could see that I was being followed going up Bay street. So I went into a movie house. It was showing a recently released picture about Hearst, *Citizen Kane*. That's what happened to be playing there. I knew I was being followed by the Mounties so I stayed for a second showing but finally I had to come out. They picked me up as soon as I came out.

Actually, I had the idea that they wouldn't pick us up by then. The Soviet Union was already on our side. You see, I was the last man of the party leadership in Toronto that was picked up. I was the last communist interned. Sam Carr and Jimmy Buckham (?) had come back to Toronto. They were in harmony with ... the party in supporting this 'People's war' and had come out against strikes. I was picked up at the end of October 1941 and instead of publicly attending a celebration of the Russian Revolution on November 7, I found myself in the Don jail.

I sat in jail for a couple of months until January and then I had one of these hearings under the wartime measures controls. I wasn't allowed to hear what the charges were, what the evidence was or what the prosecutors had to say against me. There was a hearing by two judges. The evidence that was presented was all mixed up. The R.C.M.P. still thought that I had been in Mexico during the time I was underground in Ontario.

Anyways, they took me off to the internment camp at Hull. Two Mounties escorted me there on the train. When Phyllis (?) looked through the MacKenzie King papers that had just been opened after thirty years she ran across this letter. There was a letter

from MacKenzie King to the head of the Mounties asking them why they were still picking up communists.

There were about a hundred communists still in the internment camp. Imagine the stupid bastards running it. They wouldn't allow us to read a newspaper. But we had other ways of getting our information. We smuggled in a radio and we could listen to what we wanted, secretly. But this damn Husaluk (?), he must have been soft in the head--this bugger went and hung his sheets to dry out on the aerial. The guards saw that there was a wire there and that was the end of our radio.

We had our own committee in that internment camp. The guards at Hull were Quebecers; they were soldiers who were in the army under the clause that the government wouldn't send them overseas unless they volunteered. They were pretty casual as guards. I was working in the kitchen for while with Pat Sullivan, a leader of the Canadian Seamen's Union--he was in there, too. We made home brew while we were working in the kitchen. We were given the standard military rations; you'd get a week's ration at a time.

(Isobel Murphy: I finally got to see Louis St. Laurent when Harvey was in Hull, to petition for Harvey's release. St. Laurent was the federal minister of justice at that time. I can't say they were rude or anything. They just said that they were going to release the men in Hull and had already started to release them. But that Harvey had just started serving his term so they couldn't release him yet.

I was up in Ottawa on my way back to Blairmore from Toronto. March of 1942. I was always going back to my parents, it seemed to me. My father was still working in the mines; they all were working pretty steady during the war. Two of my brothers joined up but they were released from the army and sent back to the mines. Because they needed all the miners they could get.)

Harvey Murphy: I was one of the last communists picked up and one of the last released. I was in Hull for about seven months, not knowing how long I'd be in for. I was picked up in late October of 1941, held in the Don jail until my hearing in January of 1942 and then sent to Hull until--I got out at the end of September. When they told me I was to be released I had to get out the next day. I was released conditionally, on condition that I report every month to the police. I had to report to the Mounties every month. I still have those papers here.

We communists were in support of the war by this time. We would all have volunteered for the Canadian army. When I got back to Blairmore, the selective service had designated me as a mine laborer. That's the lowest job there is in a mine.

But the company wouldn't give me a job. So the boys loaned me enough money to get to Vancouver where I got a job in the shipyards.

It was the height of shipbuilding in B.C. The shipyards were growing at an incredible rate and men and women were streaming in in their thousands. Shipbuilding became the biggest industry in Vancouver during the war years, starting from virtually nothing.

I first stayed at Malcolm Bruce's place down on Wall Street, not far from the Princeton Hotel. Yeah, Malcolm had his differences with the communist party but I didn't go into that too much. I was more interested in the trade movement in B.C. Malcolm was a carpenter with the amalgamated building trades.

I got a job in the shipyards and that gave me an opportunity to get around among the trade unionists that I knew. We were a great labor movement in B.C. at the time. Workers were becoming organized en mass.

The internment of the Japanese--that had taken place just before I got to Vancouver. I arrived in Vancouver in November 1942. I was in Hull myself at the time that the Japanese were being interned out there.

Oh, the party didn't take any official position on that. Don't forget that the attitude toward the war, to win the war, determined all things. They quite likely did support the internment of the Japanese. I know that afterwards ... But I don't think there was any opposition to that government policy at the time. I didn't have much feeling about it. It was war time. It was that whole feeling about the Japs--what they would do if they invaded here.

(Isobel Murphy: Well, Harvey you were interned yourself when the Japanese were being interned. They were already gone by the time you got out there. Well, I thought afterward that it shouldn't have happened. But I never really knew too much about it. Besides, I never took an active role in the party. I never was a member of the party. When I got to Vancouver everything was to support the war effort.)

Harvey Murphy: I was working in the shipyards in North Vancouver. You know that dock area. I'd take the No. 20 street car down to the ferry and take the ferry over to North Vancouver. At the time there was an adjustment inside the Canadian Labor Congress. The Boilermakers Union hadn't been organized yet; it was still a chartered local of the Congress. But the yards were growing at a hell of a rate.

The Boilermakers union was established as an independent local, not just a chartered local of the Canadian Labor Congress. A chartered local has no elected officers or

treasury. It can't make its own decisions and it's under the direction of officers appointed by the Congress. The Boilermakers became the single biggest local on the West Coast.

The tradesmen in all the different trades, the painters and plumbers and steamfitters, that I belonged to, and the electricians, they all had separate locals in the shipyards. The Boilermakers Union represented all those men, and women, who swept into shipyard work and weren't covered by any of the other unions--semi-skilled workers. They represented the shipyard laborers, the welders and riveters. I think the rigging crews were in it, too. Like in all the mass industries. Only the Boilermakers never managed to pull everyone together into a unified industrial union. All the crafts continued to have their separate unions in the shipyards.

When I started work there was a Marine Fitters local of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Union there. We did all the work with the high pressure pipes. The ships were all oil fired. There's a lot of pipe work. There was a lot of welding; there's no question of coupling or valves for those high pressure lines. You had to weld to make them seam worthy.

There were all these different craft unions represented in the shipyards. We tried to organize a shipyard production council but it was a long time coming. You don't break down those barriers that we ourselves built up over the years, so easily. There was very little shipbuilding before the war. Most of the men that came into the shipyards were trained there from scratch. We became trained workers very fast.

The Boilermakers had an agreement with the (Vancouver) Labor Council; they would include everyone in the shipyards other than the skilled trades, like electricians and steamfitters and so forth. It included everyone other than the crafts. We made that agreement with those other unions.

First of all they got rid of the appointed executive of the Canadian Labor Congress, they kicked out McCosland. The first president of the Boilermakers was Bill White.*

My work in the shipyards ended very soon. I didn't have much to do with organizing the Boilermakers Union in the shipyards. I was mainly involved with the steamfitters and some of their disputes. You have to understand the upheaval and confusion of this organizing in almost every industry within a few short years, starting from almost nothing. We didn't know how long those organizing conditions would last. We'd built up a labor movement in B.C. it seems.

See his autobiography, *A Hard Man to Beat*, Harbour Publishing, 1977.

Men flooded out of the peacetime industries that were going slow. The building trades slowed right down and even logging, to an extent. Those men that didn't go into the armed forces flooded into the wartime industries. There were pretty strict regulations about where and what you could work at under the selective service regulations. But everyone could get hired in the shipyards. *For the first time in my experience there was no unemployment.* The Canadian labor movement grew overnight. Those were the conditions in which I came back into the movement in B.C.

The war created a big change in outlook. The trade unions accepted the government controls but we finally won trade union rights. That whole set of labor relations acts which made labor unions effective, they all developed during the war and shortly after. Certification. Although at first the wartime Labor Relations Act wouldn't certify unions as such, they'd certify bargaining agents of workers in different plants. It was a time of mass organization. We developed a different approach--*trade union organization developed without class consciousness.* That wouldn't have been possible before.

Under the wartime regulations our wages were set by a Wage and Prices Control Board from Ottawa, which we would be constantly negotiating with. We were involved in a policy of cooperation with the government.

RK: How were those wages set by the government board?

Something like what we have today.* Whatever the company wanted to pay. Except at that time the prices were fixed and rents were pretty low in Vancouver.

Still, there were negotiations about wages all the time and they made a few concessions here and there. But we had a 'no strike' pledge during the war. So the main thing that we were after was to become solidly organized and to get the working conditions that we wanted. Union recognition and conditions were the two main things we were after.

We spared no effort to mobilize for the war effort. But the war, the fact that the Soviet Union became a highly regarded ally, that didn't change the situation one bit as far as the companies were concerned. All the old tactics of companies toward unions went right on. The employers fought union organization, war or no war. That was especially so in the industries outside the new wartime plants.

This was taped in December 1976, when the Trudeau government retained a price but mainly wage control board to 'wrestle inflation to the ground.'

Employers didn't give a rap for union rights. We still had the same class relationship within our country. They were out to fight unions and we were trying to organize despite their opposition. Well, that 'no strike' policy did strengthen the hand of the employers. But workers still walked off the job anyway. Although we tried to stop them. There was a walkout at Copper Mountain, near Princeton, that brought me into the Mine and Mill union.

To Mine and Mill

There were still some semi-secret members of Mine and Mill in a few of the biggest mine operations, like a Trail. The union had a small, one room office that it maintained in the Holden Building down on Hastings street near Carrall. The office was run by a guy by the name of George Price. The I.W.A., the Lumber Workers, also had an office in the Holden building. Price was kind of an old man by this time and he couldn't have gotten out into the camps to organize.

When I was engaged by Mine and Mill--Chas Powers of (M.M.&S.W.U.) district 7, with headquarters in Spokane, phoned Harold Prichett, head of the Lumber Workers here in B.C. to ask if he knew of anyone reliable who had experience organizing miners. And Harold mentioned me. So Chas Powers phoned me and asked if I would be willing to get the men back at Copper Mountain and try to set up a local of Mine and Mill. After I accepted he sent me a telegram, which was to be my authority to go in--but it had no real authority at all. It was a Friday and I quit the same day, and left for Princeton the next morning.

Not only the companies but government officials still maintained that old class attitude, even though we were at war. See, the spark that caused the strike at Copper Mountain was very simple. It was a mining camp but there were a lot of families living there too and the families wanted electric power in their houses and cabins. They were still using kerosene lamps. The offices and the mine and some of the bunkhouses had electricity but the houses didn't. This was now in 1943.

Some government control board wouldn't allocate the copper cable and wire needed to electrify the camp. Here the mine was turning out tons of copper and they couldn't get the scraps of copper wire they needed to string a few wires to the houses. So the mine goes out on strike and stops producing copper.

Oh, there were lots of reasons why they went out. There always are in these company camps. Wages, the way the mine was being run. It was a wild cat. Not providing electricity was just what made it boil over.

The mine was on top of a mountain and a tramway ran down to Allenby. They had a very rich ore body up there. The copper ore went down the mountain to Allenby where the concentrator was and then trains took it down to the States, Spokane I think, which was the nearest smelter. We don't have one in B.C. yet.

The only background to the strike was that the Mine and Mill, both in the States and in Canada, had been pretty well destroyed in the previous year. The Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union was hardly existing during the thirties. It fought a few battles in Sudbury and Timmins at the beginning of the war. But its officers were jailed, that's what broke the Kirkland Lake strike, I had been there and at Red Lake, too. There was one local in the Yukon that had its headquarters in Dawson. That was one of the few Mine and Mill locals that hadn't been smashed.

I wanted to get a crack at Granby (Consolidated) because of Anyox. The same company that owned Anyox also ran Copper Mountain. It was pretty old for a mining camp; it had been shut down for about ten years and was opened up again after the war broke out. They needed copper; there was an assured market for all they could produce. Britannia mines also went through a pretty big extension at the same time.

When I came to Copper Mountain the miners had dumped the employees representative council and had walked out. But they hadn't replaced it with any other union organization. I went to Princeton and had to sneak into Copper Mountain because it was a company town. The mine and the town and the road leading into it were all privately owned and guarded by company police. This guy, Moffat, who got killed in the mine afterwards, met me in Princeton with a car to bring me to where I was going to stay. He became secretary of the local when it was organized.

There was a big sign on the main road going into Copper Mountain, 'You are entering Copper Mountain. Private Property. Visitors report to the police.' So we sneaked in over a back road and stayed at his friend's house overnight, Saturday night.

Most of the crew was still on the property, although they might go down to Princeton for a beer, that was about all. So I announced a meeting for the next day, didn't say what we were going to do but I wanted all the workers to be there.

About six hundred people turned up. Yeah, there were over six hundred working there, a big camp. There was no question about us getting a majority in bringing them into Mine and Mill, everybody was ready to sign up. So I signed them up all the same day. I signed them up and sent in the application for certification--just like that.

I used to be able to speak pretty well then, right on the spot. I'd tell them, 'We're from the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union. We came in here to organize. We're going

to organize the mines in B.C. and right across the country. In the United States the workers are doing the same thing.' That we were out to organize Granby.

George Anderson was a shift boss and the head of the company union. But we brought him over to us. It didn't take very much to sign people up at the time. Christ, we were just flooded with applications.

We first set out to get certification from the government to act as their bargaining agents within the company. Certification didn't take very long. Certification was a mechanical thing, the government didn't challenge it, they didn't hold it up. Authority over labor relations was mixed up between the federal and provincial governments under the war time controls but they would put through quick what they wanted to.

At the same time that I sent in the application for certification, I started negotiations with the company. Once we set up a bargaining date we got all the boys back to work at Copper Mountain. We got a small wage increase, what you could get within the guidelines of the wage controls. But the important thing was to establish work and safety conditions. The agreement that we signed with Granby Consolidated at Copper Mountain was about the first new agreement Mine and Mill signed in Canada. The telegram I had from Chas Powers of Mine and Mill in the U.S. didn't really give me any authority to do that but ...what the hell.

The main thing was to have a strong union presence on the pit and safety committee so that we could be sure that the mining regulations were being observed. The trouble at the time was that a lot of the supervisors had been brought in from different kinds of mines and had no real experience of what was required here. The shift bosses and the miners weren't acquainted with each other--they couldn't rely on each other. It wasn't like Blairmore where, whatever else, whatever the differences, everybody knew what had to be done. The mining industry had expanded so fast during the first years of the war that every sort of character was in it.

As I was coming out of Copper Mountain--I'd already gotten the crew back--I met a bunch of guys from the Hedley-Mascot mine in the beer parlor in Princeton. Why the government had all these miners and gold mines working full blast during the war is beyond me, when they were short of men in all the other mining operations. Anyway, these guys wanted to get organized. They had come out that same morning to see what would happen at Copper Mountain.

I said, 'If you want to get organized you all go back to work and we'll hold an organizational meeting in Hedley tomorrow evening. You bring along everybody you can get there. Every one.'

Well, we had that meeting. And there were more people there than were employed at Hedley-Mascot. 'Christ, where the hell did you all come from?', I said. Some were from Hedley-Mascot mine, others from Nickel Plate, others from a mine just outside Chute Creek. We organized locals of Mine and Mill in those three mines that day. I signed up enough members to apply for certification, just at that one meeting.

It wasn't me so much. When I think of everything we had gone through earlier, and still hadn't gotten anywhere. It was the condition of the times. You just couldn't lose. The men were ripe for it. That was how we got Mine and Mill started again in B.C.

Well, I sent the applications for certification to Victoria and came down to Vancouver. All that happened in about a week. Then, almost immediately, I set out for Trail.

I was always tied to the proposition that as long as we didn't organize Cominco we didn't have anything. Because they ran the whole mining interior of B.C. They would be able to knock us out at any time. We wouldn't be established until we organized Trail, Kimberly and all of Cominco's operations.

RK: Can you tell me anything about that sit down strike they had underground in Pioneer Mines back in 1940 or so. That mine was a Mine and Mill local as I remember, well into the 1950s.

Well, see that was a desperate tactic. The sit down strikes that developed all over the place in the thirties were inspired by the sit downs in organizing the Auto industry. It was used by autoworkers in Canada, too, at Oshawa. Strike, shut them up and sit down in the plant so they can't bring in scabs. It was quite effective in the auto industry.

I was back east when that sit down strike developed at Pioneer--so I didn't know anything about it until later when we got involved in bringing Pioneer and Bralorne into Mine and Mill. But I met quite a few of the men who had been involved in that. Everybody in the union movement in B.C. who were around the mining industry knew about Pioneer.

As far as I remember, it started over the issue of union recognition. It was the local miners who lived and worked there who organized it themselves. They called themselves the Canadian Mine Workers Union. We had nothing to do with it; it was unrelated to Mine and Mill. They'd picked that name themselves for this union. Over in Bralorne, the main mine on that hill, they just had an employees' cooperative council.

Their strike was going on when this one bunch of miners went underground and staged a sit down in the mine, for about a week or ten days or so. It was led by this guy with a creaky voice--what was his name, Miller. 'Gravel Gertie' we used to call him.

There was another bunch of miners at Pioneer who opposed those who had gone underground to stage that sit down strike. Then they were called scabs.

Now look, here's this non-union camp--Pioneer. You had some of the guys trying to organize a union. It wasn't a mass action. Some of them got together a crew, went underground and stayed there. That's easy enough to do; you just stop the transportation in the mine, the elevator. They form themselves into a committee and call themselves a union. It was just some of the crew, not even the entire work shift. Then the ones on the surface were called 'scabs' by those who sat down underground. The miners at Bralorne voted not to support the strike at Pioneer. Then everybody underground was fired by the company.

You can't maintain a sit down strike in company camps like that, not under those conditions. It's ridiculous to try a sit down, going underground with a few sandwiches and what not. I would never have adopted a sit down in a camp like Pioneer. A lot of the miners who lived there were also against that tactic. Finally, the company brought in a whole load of B.C. provincial police and they ejected all those men that the company had fired. A few of the families moved down the valley off company property, some of the guys involved in the sit down hung on for awhile down the road. But it was totally smashed. It remained a company camp until Mine and Mill came along and organized it.*

I had the job of getting those who remained into Mine and Mill; the ones who had opposed the sit down and were called scabs. I had to clear all those who'd opposed that underground tactic--because we had to have them if we were going to have a union. And we couldn't take scabs into the union, could we?

Everybody in the union movement in B.C. that was involved with the mining industry knew about the sit down at Pioneer. We also had a sit down later at Wells, in Cariboo Gold Quarts, too. They sat in for a few days anyway. But you couldn't maintain a sit down strike in company camps like that.

End of Interviews. Spring 1977.

'Bridge River Gold' (1976) chronology states that the strike called in Pioneer started on October 7, 1939 and continued to November of the same year. The Bralorne Cooperative Committee miners voted against supporting the Pioneer strike by 316 to 131. The strike was effectively broken shortly after but the remnants of the sit down strikers did not call off the strike until March 11, 1940. It was still basically a company camp ten years later.