

JOHN SMITH
(b. 1914 - d. early 1980s)

Life History Fragment

**Recorded on South Pender Island
August 1975, and early 1980**

Interviewer
Rolf Knight

Rolf Knight
October 2014

Compiler's note on recording and transcribing John Smith's reminiscences:

John Smith's following account was the most tightly presented and the most flowing interview which I ever obtained from any respondent I ever worked with.. I was very taken by it and I do not now know why I did not pursue collecting it until its conclusion. Nevertheless, I had a great deal of trouble editing it. It requires some fuller elaboration of certain points made and needs greater clarification of the positions taken. However, it seems to be an example of the radical strain which once flowed through the C.C.F., a component which has since been totally eliminated from that party. Although Smith became opposed to the Communist party during the post war years it did not strike me that his actual hopes and rank and file activities were so fundamentally different than it. What was possibly most amazing was his account of how utopian writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were still quite influential in the depression era in BC. There seems to be nothing comparable in our current depression.

John Smith's account:

The Tyneside in the 20s

I was born on the twenty-first of March of 1914 in the town of South Shields, at the mouth of the river Tyne, which had some of the biggest shipbuilding yards in the world. Coal mining, iron foundries. Densely populated and heavily industrialized it was. Nevertheless in those days there was a very personal countryside surrounding the town. A ten or eleven year old could walk from the core of the city to the countryside then, and we did precisely that. That and walk down to the mile-long beach along the sea.

We played in wild land at the edge of the city as children and one of my first vivid experiences was when they broke up the wild land where we played to build Council Houses. All of that and Shields was only ten miles from the major city of that part of England--Newcastle. Many years later, when I was back in England during the war years, I was appalled to see that that process had gone on so that all the land adjacent to the town of Shields had gone under these projects.

Now picture the mouth of the river Tyne, which had a very wide estuary--it took a ferry half an hour to cross it at times--and right nearby where we lived were the Tyne Docks, once the biggest dockyards in England at the time. That was where the coal was loaded, with special overhead rail facilities where the coal would be dumped out of rail cars right into the holds of ships. It was pretty spectacular. It was a highly industrialized region with a network of railroads running through it. Yet, just a quarter mile away from that it opened up into a beautiful countryside of small farms and that would go on for ten miles till you got to Newcastle, which was a very big city, coal and heavy industry and offices. It was the major city in that part of England.

The depression in the north of England set in right after the First World War was over. The shipyards practically closed down; the coal mining business was also in dire distress. Unemployment became endemic. So it was in that sort of atmosphere that I grew up and went to school. I lived among talk of economic depression and ruin. In my own family, their business was going to the dogs.

I was the fifth of seven children--nine in our family including my parents. We were a kind of intimate family, it being my mother's idea that we didn't need to play with other children when we were young. A rather optimistic sort of view.

My father was then running a store selling poultry, vegetables and fruit--it was a kind of expensive trade, carriage trade, but he had done fairly well. But his business was

more and more affected by the depression, which in the north of England started just after the First World War was over.

In America, in some circles, the 1920s were sort of golden years. But that certainly didn't happen elsewhere, especially not in the north of England. Coal miners and others existed, barely existed, in dire poverty, on the dole, all through that decade. All kinds of people were emigrating from England then, in desperation. Those who had the energy and money. "Overpopulation", that was said to be the basic problem, which sounded reasonable to my childish mind.

In Tyneside there were a lot of industries tied in with companies which were part of the world armaments races. Armstrong-Vickers and others building battleships and such. So the region was hit hard by peace, as this system works. I don't remember too much political agitation going on as a child or young man but there was a deep, deep depression, in all senses of the word, throughout the area.

There was a place called Jarrow in the region where almost one hundred percent of the men were unemployed. It seemed to typify the area and it became famous for a protest march, a march of unemployed which started there and went to London. The Jarrow Hunger March. Conditions in the coal fields in Wales and in the Tyneside were much the same. But it was all very quiet and polite, even these mass demonstrations. You couldn't compare it with the anti-war demonstrations in America about Viet Nam, nothing of that spirit. People were repressed and depressed.

I went to the government-run school that taught students all the way from seven years of age to the university entrance exams, if any ever got that far. But I missed an awful lot of my school days. My father came from a farming family of the north of England who had "bettered himself" as they used to say. He wasn't any too enthusiastic about schools. I myself didn't want to go to school and so I was often kept out of school for most of a whole term at a time. I don't know what had happened to him in his school years but he used to say that there were two types of people you should stay away from as much as you could--teachers and policemen. Ministers of the cloth? He didn't like them much either but they weren't in that category of types that you should never trust.

(Q: Do you remember anything about the British General Strike as a boy?)

The 1926 general strike--I was only twelve then. But my older brother took me around to where demonstrations were going on and he tried to explain what was happening. Newcastle, Jarrow, everywhere--big demonstrations of miners gathered and were being addressed. I didn't truly understand what was being said in these speeches but I was undoubtedly affected by these gatherings. And several times, not

just once, I saw the police riding into these gatherings, reaching down with their truncheons and slashing at people. And I saw people lying on the ground clubbed unconscious. In view of all that it's really surprising how terribly peaceful these demonstrations were. The attitude of the workers was to run, as if they didn't want any trouble. I became awakened to a certain political consciousness through that I'm sure.

Still, most of the people my family knew waited for the *British Gazette* (the British government's anti-strike paper) to come out each day and read Stanley Baldwin's pronouncements--who they considered as a sane, sensible man who was going to pull Britain out of its difficulties and saw Winston Churchill as a dangerous fanatic. Churchill once demanded that a parade of tanks be held down the Strand in London to intimidate the strikers and show the workers who was the boss in this country, that was Churchill, the one I remember.

Baldwin took the tack or the cloak, that "We're all Englishmen together and whatever the troubles are we'll solve them in the spirit of English fair play" and so on and so forth. Churchill was considered a wild man and something of a dangerous buffoon, both because of his role in the disasters of Gallipoli and in regards to his antics towards working people in England, especially during the General Strike.

The national General Strike only went on for a few weeks but in the mining regions it lasted for almost six months after that. The miners were deserted by the rest of the working class movement and at the end the miners were existing in conditions of actual starvation. Still, even there, some people would talk about the Prince of Wales, who was going around to some of the mine villages, and called him a "friend of the coal miners." What I knew of that mostly came to me later, especially when I chummed around with a bunch of men in the Vancouver Island coal fields who had left the mines of England after that strike. The only solution possible seemed to be to get out of the area. And people were leaving in droves, going to London and to the Black Belt industrial cities or going overseas.

In any case, while I was still a school boy and during the periods I didn't go to school I was either reading or going for walks or working in our big garden. It gave me a tremendous interest in gardening which lasted my entire life and that was why I originally decided to come to Canada. I was intending to take up a government-assisted passage to Canada to apprentice with a farmer in Guelph, Ontario, with the view of ultimately taking up a farm myself. That's what I thought in my young ignorance.

I already had my passage booked but at the last moment my entire family had a conference and decided that we would all move to Canada. They cancelled my passage

without informing me and made plans to sell and dispose of all they possessed and made ready to leave. It took some time. I was fourteen and a half years old then and got a job with a ship's chandler at Tyne dock. It was quite an experience, delivering stores to ships tying up at the docks, and being out on the roads at all hours of the day and night.

A lot of these ships were small colliers running from South Shields to London. There was a tough competition between the representatives of the various ships' chandlers but I think that because I looked so young a lot of the ship captains took pity on me and gave me the order. At a shilling a pound commission I was richer then, at fourteen, than I was at almost any other time of my life. I might have run away to sea, which was a usual dream, but after a year our whole family emigrated to Canada.

There was a big advertising program going on, mounted by the C.P.R. railroad at the time, fostering immigration to Canada. It took the form of huge billboards. A lot of them had the most beautiful pictures of yellow wheat fields, wide open blue skies and that sort of thing. They were just trying to sell transportation to Canada.

But we arrived in Canada in the fall of 1929 and soon experienced a great deal of poverty and desperation that existed here in Canada as well so I began to question the whole economic basis of affairs, which had produced exactly the same state of affairs in Canada, with all its resources, as we had just left in England. I began to read books on why there were these economic problems.

I'm not sure that the depression was that much of a change from my parents lives. My parents were prepared to change. I experienced no opposition from them to any of our political activities within the C.C.F. throughout the thirties. Our family was all involved in that--my older brother and myself, most of us did get involved, and our house in Langford became a sort of place where visiting people in the C.C.F. stayed over. So, in that way, I met most of the figures in the C.C.F.; people like J.S. Woodsworth who stayed at our house from time to time. I'm not saying that my parents were involved politically. They certainly didn't read any Marxian or socialist literature. But basically they went along with us. They were prepared to build a new society in the shell of the old one. I would put that down to the near collapse of the old social order, both here in Canada and previously in England.

It seemed logical that social ownership should take the place of private property in the overall economy--we all regarded that it would only be a matter of time before that came about. I don't think that many of us thought in terms of violent revolution. It just seemed it was common sense and we were just impatient to get on with the job. The need to make that change just seemed so obvious.

But the Second World War pulled the curtain down over all these developments. As far as I'm concerned civilization has just gone backwards ever since.

Gap

There were so many of us children that we were like a little colony all by ourselves. There wasn't any formal prohibition against playing with other children but it was just that we weren't encouraged to go out and mix with others. I think that my mother had ideas that we might meet up with bad influences. That might have been part of it.

We did a lot of reading aloud to each other in the evening. That was fairly common in those days. There was no radio in the house. We did have a piano and my father would sing on various occasions, but none of us was really very gifted musically.

When I was older, from eleven to thirteen or so, I became interested in long distance running. It was the kind of thing you could do on your own. I'd run five or more miles most days. I was the best in my school in races of a mile or over. I also began to develop an interest in cycling. I would cycle within a sixty mile radius of South Shields when I was a little older, which would take in Berrick-on-Tweed in the north and towns like Durham. That was about 120 miles in a day, 60 miles each way. But we had good roads and we had good bicycles and we didn't have the traffic like you have today.

I was allowed to stay out of school when I wanted to and stayed away for quite long periods of time. But I got along in school well enough. I didn't find any difficulties in not having school chums and friendships with people not part of the family. We would amble throughout the city and its environs. South Shields had excellent parks and we spent much of our time down on the beach or in a park. But we generally went as a family group.

One should remember that the influence of the mass media, mass communications, spectator sports and other forms of centrally directed mass influences were comparatively small, even in the 1920s, as compared to today. There were the newspapers, of course. But they were a matter of choice as to which one to read and whether one believed them or not. You weren't surrounded with this barrage of information and mass influences, from radio, television, advertising in every form, that people are today. People participated in sports, when they were younger, rather than simply being spectators. Which I think symbolizes the changes which have taken place in our society. Most people are now mainly an audience rather than participants. In that sense it was almost a completely different world.

I was in and out of school because I was allowed to stay away from it. I don't know if that was a good or a bad thing for me because I came to look upon school as a sort of interesting place, more so than I might have otherwise. I was in a kind of strange position because the headmaster didn't know what class to put me in, since I was away so much of time. But I'd done a lot of reading on my own. I suppose I was considered a character by the school, although I didn't realize it at the time.

It was a pretty good school. It had a fairly small enrollment; there wouldn't have been more than ten or twelve in a class. It enrolled student from the age of seven all the way to university entrance. It was a Council-run school but they charged some fees as well. It wasn't a "public school", meaning an upper class boarding school, but it was considered to be a bit above the average government school.

My brother Don had been there before me and he had done very well. He was considered one of their star pupils--which I had thrown in my face almost every day at school. My younger sister went to a school where boys and girls mixed. Mine was an all boys school.

He had sat the Cambridge entrance exam, which he passed all right, but then went out to teach school. After a short while he just walked out of the classroom and never went back teaching again. By that time he was doing some freelance reporting and writing. In fact, he was getting paid for writing while he was still a student in school. He wrote a horse racing column when he was fourteen years old for a London newspaper who thought they were dealing with a grown man in the north of England. It was all done by mail and they never saw who they were dealing with. And he sold one of the first radio plays done by the B.B.C., which had just opened its Northern Network.

The funny thing was that he never gambled on the horses though. So I often wondered why he wasted his time on it, which he took so seriously; but it seemed to me to be inconsequential. Later in life, when he worked for the C.B.C., he would take his holidays when the Santa Anita (U.S.) racing season was on, so he could go down to the States. One of the things that Don did for two or three years was to produce the *Green Sheet* here in Vancouver (i.e. the horse race tipster sheet). He *was* the *Green Sheet* for a few years. He did a lot of different kinds of freelance writing while working for the C.B.C. He had articles in *McLeans* and had his name on the cover. And he used to write fairly regularly for a magazine in the States called *Sports Digest*. "W. Donaldson Smith" he called himself for the papers in those days.

Anyway, I eventually left school in preparation to going to Canada. But when my parents cancelled my passage I refused to go back to school--having said farewell to

all my school chums I would have felt too embarrassed to then go back and take up being a school boy again.

I then looked around for a job on the Tyne Docks and got a job with a ship's chandler. It was very interesting. Because I was so young and small, I think a lot of the ships' captains took pity on me and gave me the orders instead of giving them to any of the tough "runners" that came aboard as soon as a ship docked to try to get orders.

We sold a lot of tobacco and whiskey as well as groceries. Since I was getting a shilling a pound commission, it soon mounted up and I was making what then was a lot of money. To me it was like one long holiday.

Everyone who had had that job previously had ultimately gone to sea on one of those ships or another. They would be offered a job--"Well, we're sailing tomorrow and we need somebody for such and such a job. Do you want to come along?" But I didn't do that because my family was preparing to take all of us to Canada. That runners job lasted approximately a year.

(Gap)

People might not understand the effect that such a thing (having his own trip to Canada cancelled) could have on a person of my age. Having gotten all enthusiastic about the prospect of going to Canada on my own, being removed from a big family with whom I'd live all my life, enthused with the sense of adventure and everything else--and then, suddenly, without consultation with me, to have my passage cancelled. I was supposed to resume my life with the family in England during the year it took for them to get ready to leave. It affected my outlook on life. It destroyed a certain amount of ambition, the determination to go out on my own. I don't think that I ever fully recovered from that.

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In any case, my job with the ship's chandler during that last year was rather exciting. It wasn't a nine to five job at all. Sometimes at eleven o'clock at night I'd be delivering groceries and tobacco and booze to a ship, climbing up a steep ladder, clambering up through a cloud of coal dust sometimes if that was what they were loading. I'd often come home looking like I'd just come up from a coal mine, just completely black.

It was interesting but it was pretty tough, too. I could easily have had an accident, slipped off any of those ladders or on a wet slippery deck. They were mostly colliers, going to London from the Tyne, with the odd one bound for Europe. A lot of them were from the Poole Line and occasionally one of these boats came through the Panama Canal and up to Vancouver.

I still remember the sort of excitement of that first job of mine, going down to the docks every day. I think I became a sort of figure on the Tyne Docks; it kind of amused the skippers of some of those boats, because I was so young and small. I even took to drinking a little bit. There was a glass case at the back of the store (i.e. the ship chandler's), near the doorway. That was for the neighbourhood policeman; as he marched around his beat, he'd march through the store from time to time and take a quick drink before he marched out. There were one or two policemen who had that privilege. Oh yes, Scotch whiskey.

I got into the habit of sneaking a little drink myself, but since I was a little scared of drink I don't think I ever got drunk. Nobody ever seemed to notice it on my breath and nobody at home mentioned it. I gave up drinking and smoking when I left that job. So I can say that I gave up drinking when I was fifteen and I didn't start again until I was in my twenties.

(Q: Did you have a sense of liberation with that first job, a sense of leaping from being a boy to becoming a man?)

Oh, very much so. I felt very good about the situation. I'd never in my life had any real spending money, because we were a pretty frugal family. Most of the clothes and things I got were handed down from my older brother. And we never got much pocket money. So, for the first time I could buy something new for myself, even after giving most of my earnings to my parents to contribute to the family income.

My father had visited Canada twice as a young man, the last time in 1911 or so and he told us glowing stories about the prairies, of the richness and depth of the prairie soil and so on. He thought it was a wonderful country. That was partly what gave him the idea of emigrating.

(Q: You said once that your mother once said that you were the most unambitious child she'd ever known.)

That was because she wanted me to return to school and "make something of myself", as the phrase went. And she objected to me wearing "working clothes". She wouldn't have cared what I did as long as I went to work with a white collar on. I asked her once, quite sardonically, if she'd want to see me spend my life selling life insurance. "Oh, that was alright," as long as her son didn't go around in work clothes. She couldn't help it; that was just the background she came from.

(Q: Maybe we should get you to Canada. Can you recapture any of your first impressions and feelings after you landed in Canada?)

I remember eating an ice cream cone in Montreal and thinking it was the most wonderful country on earth. Because in England the ice cream cones were thin little things with watery ice cream, while here, for five cents I got this large cone with a large scoop of rich ice cream in it. Everything was exciting--the new money, the huge locomotives. The English trains seemed like toy trains in comparison. We went across Canada in an emigrant train; there were mostly Ukrainians on it. Each coach had a cook stove at one end for families to cook their meals on and wooden seats that folded down flat at night to sleep on. It must have been tough on my parents, that transition, but I was young enough that it was all an adventure to me. I remember that as long as it was daylight I had my eyes glued to the window, watching what was going by. I almost felt cheated that the train didn't stop at night and that I was missing whatever countryside we were travelling through in the dark.

It was on the basis of going homesteading in northern Alberta that we came to Canada--on what was called "assisted passage". It cost us next to nothing. The C.P.R. was making its money out of the British government which paid the transport fees. We were allowed a lot of household goods as freight, so we brought over all our furniture with us. However, it was so badly packed that the railroad refused to take it any further than Montreal. After a long spate of letters back and forth, over a year, it was finally delivered just before we left Edmonton. A lot of it was badly broken up. The strange thing was that while it was old, it had been good furniture at one time and there was a market in Edmonton for it as antiques. Even in the depression there were some people who had enough money to buy that kind of thing. So we sold most of that furniture in Edmonton and made a nice piece of money from it--which very much came in handy when we settled in Victoria.

We spent most of that first year in Edmonton. But when we first arrived in Alberta we went up to a place called Faust, about 200 miles north of Edmonton, where a whole block of homestead land had recently been opened. We spent about three weeks there, wandering around as far as we could walk and trying to talk to people there. That was far enough to see how people had started up, cleared some land, built a cabin and then given up. A lot of them were then on the verge of starvation and others had developed obvious mental conditions. They might run away when they saw a stranger coming. Really, the situation looked so bad that we thought that the best thing to do would be to go back to Edmonton.

By the time we returned to Edmonton we had almost completely run out of money and had to take whatever job was available at whatever the employer wanted to pay. In fact, we wouldn't have been away to get away from Alberta if my grandmother hadn't died that year and her estate settled up and the money sent to my father. That allowed us to pick up and move to Langford, and shortly after to buy an old house there.

When we arrived in Canada in the fall of 1929 we soon experienced a great deal of poverty and desperation that existed here in Canada as well. I began to question the whole economic basis of affairs, which had produced exactly the same state of affairs in Canada, with all its resources, as we had just left in England. I began to read books on why there were these economic problems.

I'm not sure that the depression was that much of a change from my parents lives. My parents were prepared to change. I experienced no opposition from them to any of our political activities within the C.C.F. throughout the thirties. Our family was all involved in that--my older brother and myself, most of us did get involved, and our house in Langford became a sort of place where visiting people in the C.C.F. stayed over. So, in that way, I met most of the figures in the C.C.F.; people like J.S. Woodsworth who stayed at our house from time to time. I'm not saying that my parents were involved politically. They certainly didn't read any Marxian or socialist literature. But basically they went along with us. They were prepared to build a new society in the shell of the old one. I would put that down to the near collapse of the old social order, both here in Canada and previously in England.

It seemed logical that social ownership should take the place of private property in the overall economy--we all regarded that it would only be a matter of time before that came about. I don't think that many of us thought in terms of violent revolution. It just seemed it was common sense and we were just impatient to get on with the job. The need to make that change just seemed so obvious.

But the Second World War pulled the curtain down over all these developments. As far as I'm concerned civilization has just gone backwards ever since.

In Canada and B.C during the 1930s

We got to Canada in the fall of 1929 and didn't realize that one of the great depressions of the century had already broken out. In point of fact, after we came to live in Langford it was not noticeably worse for us than it had been living in South Shields all during the 1920s. We first took one of those old emigrant trains across country to Edmonton. Our train was mainly filled with Ukrainians and Russians so there was hardly anyone we could talk to in English. But I was young enough to be not much worried by anything.

We moved to northern Alberta first because my parents had some weird idea that the climate there would be good for my other brother's asthma. Where that conception

came from I don't know. But we wound up in the town of Faust which is on Lesser Slave Lake. Their intention was to take up land to homestead but when we got there we saw failed homesteads everywhere and people leaving. We were told by local people that it would be foolish to try to homestead where so many others, people more experienced than us, were failing. And fortunately my father took that advice and moved us back to Edmonton. Alberta at that time had the reputation of having more people per thousand in mental institutions than any other province in Canada and the main cause was said to be people becoming bushed, going mad, while working on these isolated homesteads.

We settled in Edmonton where my younger brother and sister went to school and the rest of us tried to find work. Somehow, although the depression had begun, all of us managed to find some kind of work around Edmonton sooner or later. My sister took a job as a live-in house help to a middle class family in a nearby suburb. My brother had the opportunity of contributing items to an Edmonton newspaper. My father also found something to do that brought in some money. The money we had gotten together in England by selling all our possessions was just about gone. I got a job as a painter's apprentice for a year at the salary of \$7.50 per week. I probably worked harder at that job than I ever did since because the man who ran the shop was a real slave driver and I was young and stupid enough to do anything I was told to do. I'd work an hour before the crew came on the job and another hour afterward putting everything away. Oh, these little contractors are always the same. It was like scenes from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. But seven dollars a week did make a big difference for the family.

I'd give my older brother credit for much of what I learned during my youth, him and books. My brother was ten years older than me and he had a big part in shaping what I read and what my tastes were. He steered me on to Lincoln Steffens' autobiography, which was a sort of revelation to me. I don't give school much credit for anything I learned.

After about a year in Edmonton my father decided that we should all go to Victoria and so we moved into Langford, about ten miles from the center of Victoria, in 1932. We managed to pick up a nice old house on a couple of acres of land with what little money we had been able to save. I can't remember the price now but it couldn't have been much over a thousand dollars, maybe less. Some years later I myself bought five acres of land in Langford for one hundred and seventy-five dollars, which I'd saved from a track-laying job I managed to get. Langford started to become a sprawl of tract housing during and just after the Second World War but I sold my land off before the boom started because I didn't want to be tied down or get involved in land speculation.

Langford was a rural area of self-built cottages and little subsistence farmsteads. We had no cash anymore but we had a base of operations for the family; a big garden, a few chickens and later a cow.

When we moved there I was seventeen, had no worries and thought I could always make a living. For the income we needed, I'd get by on the odd job, casual labour and painting the occasional house. I always liked occasional labour. I wasn't suited temperamentally for a steady job. The closest I came to steady work was working on the C.P.R. section gang near Langford, tamping ties and driving spikes. I was small but I was in excellent condition then. I did long distance running--a ten mile run was nothing to me.

However, I don't want to paint too idyllic a picture. During the last year, especially during the last few months of the Tolmie government (1933) a lot of people in Langford village were on the edge of starvation. They had just run out of cash and everything else. The local storekeeper there gave people food on credit as long as he had food in the store. It's amazing that he didn't go under.

There was no relief or dole, absolutely nothing for a while. The provincial government under Tolmie just ground to a halt. It wasn't capable of administering even what few resources it had. People were helping each other where they could, in places like Langford anyway. It was either that or there was nothing. It was an indication to me that in a dire situation people will help each other. People were forming into committees in the village to contact everyone, to reach people who might be starving but were too proud to say anything about it. That was during the period of the provincial election which brought the Patullo Liberals into power.

With the election of the Liberal government the first trickle of government relief seeped through. It was pitifully small but it was enough to make the difference so that the most desperate situations were eased. Of course, around Langford most families had big gardens and chickens and were more self sufficient than would have been possible in a big city like Vancouver. That was so even before the depression.

But you need small amounts of cash to sustain those subsistence efforts and they had completely dried up. Selling eggs or vegetables or what not had almost ceased because no one had the money to buy. So there may have been less food production from these little garden farms during the worst of the depression than before, contradictory as that sounds, because you couldn't afford to raise a surplus unless you could sell some of it.

There were a lot of families around Langford who were engaged in these small gypo logging operations, over in Sooke or along the Malahat or further up the island. They'd

have a son or a father and son working off in the woods somewhere. That brought in the necessary cash. There was a small sawmill in Langford that would start up and run for three or four weeks or so and then shut down while they tried to sell the lumber to pay the men. Maybe it would start up later with a different crew. I worked there once on the greenchain, which is murderous work, and I never did get paid. That taught me to keep away from those kinds of places.

I did quite a bit of work with a drag saw--a reciprocating crosscut saw used to buck up firewood. But mainly I worked with a one man, six foot hand saw; it was incredible how much you could cut by hand during the course of a day. I learned how to keep the teeth razor sharp and set them myself and in time made some money as a sawfiler. I got to be pretty good at it and for a while I was filing most of the saws used in Langford village. I would give them a custom set to their saws, set best for the kind of logs they were cutting.

(Q: This sounds more idyllic than desperate, like something out of *The Waltons*. Wasn't there also mounting confrontation with government and hunger marches in Victoria?)

That was in Victoria and we were in Langford, it's not the same. And those demonstrations were separate from the everyday life of people living in Victoria too, mainly. But yes, there were continual demonstrations going on, long before the fall of the Tolmie government. Whatever the specific issues were they all revolved around unemployment and getting some relief to those unemployed. Probably three times a week there'd be some group petitioning and standing in front of the Legislative Buildings in Victoria.

There was a lot of half-joking talk about tearing up the paving stones and erecting barricades, which not many took seriously. But you could walk into any coffee shop or bus corner or anywhere where there were people and get into political discussions with strangers. That excitement and stimulus was maybe at its height during 1933, 1934 to 1936. There were huge meetings all the time in Victoria packing in five hundred or even over a thousand people in a town of only fifty thousand people. And it wasn't just young, unemployed working people at those meetings. They were from all walks of life and almost all ages. Not just left wing meetings either but from all sorts of sects and ridiculous panaceas which sprang up. There was Technocracy, from three different factions; there were meetings of the original Social Credit movements, even an outburst of the Moral Rearmament movement and of other schemes that hadn't been heard of before or since. The depression brought people out and brought them together to search for some solution, however idiotic, more so than anything I've ever seen since.

(Q: Yes. But what about the unemployed?)

There was a very big split between the employed and the unemployed--even among working class people. At that time some unemployed called the unions, those that were still there, "the job trust" and the unions often regarded the employed as among their worst enemy. That may be sad to relate but it was true. Both the unemployed and the men that were still working regarded each other as--at least as competitors if not enemies. Not all but many. It was then almost all craft unions anyway. Everything else had been broken until the C.I.O. came along and the mass organization drives began--which was only in the later thirties or even during the war years. Many of us who went through those early depression years retained that feeling of unions as job trusts, as business unions. Unions can be a menace to or they can be the mainsprings of working class solidarity--it all depends on what kind of unions they are. Some, like the printers, are almost aristocratic; you almost have to be the first son of a printer to get in.

While I distrust the Communist party I fully admit that they got down to business and were the first to start organizing people to help themselves; the unemployed, the organizing drives to establish broad industrial unions, involving themselves in anti-eviction actions, although there weren't so many evictions in Victoria. But I don't know--you think you know what's going on but often you don't. It is possible to live through something and miss a lot of what's going on around you. Then later you're surprised when you read about all that was involved. It accounts for a lot of what happened in Germany under Hitler.

The gradual evolution and acceptance of socialism--but not too gradual, certainly before we were old men of fifty--seemed to be a logical goal to work toward. Nobody then seriously believed that the world was going to explode into a Second World War. We recognized it as a possibility of course but in reality it was too shocking to contemplate. Just as today atomic annihilation is too shocking to contemplate as a real possibility and most people refuse to think it can happen. Although some of us do.

But in the thirties we thought we saw indications that progress was underway. Today we look back and see Roosevelt as just another in a long line of miserable American presidents who carried on the same old tradition in a slightly different form. But at the time it didn't seem like that, at first. That voice of his and the hopes he captured seemed like a prophecy for a better future for mankind. Technology and the industries which capitalism had built promised to be able to fulfill all the fundamental material needs of humanity if only the problems of distribution could be overcome, the blockages of capitalism. And it seemed reasonable to suppose that sooner or later everyone would come to see that this could only be done through some form of socialism. It seemed utterly logical that through persuasion and argument, this problem would be solved.

(Q: What sort of vision of a socialist society did you have then? How did you see the transition to socialism coming about in your own lifetime?)

Oh, I was optimistic. I saw everything going in that direction, it had to I thought. But it's very hard for me now to decide whether that was a reflection of actual conditions of the early thirties or the optimism of my own youth. Probably there are young people even today who feel the same general sense of optimism, although rather few I'd guess. But given the objective world situation of the time, I really do think it was more rational to be optimistic then than today. And there was a great feeling of class solidarity, too.

For one thing, there was an enormous amount of reading being done. People were educating themselves en masse, reading Marxian and related literature, orthodox and revisionist. Marx, Lenin, some G.D. Cole and Lyton Strachey. They were all topics for conversation. Nothing like that exists today. It seems like a caricature of the times even to say it. I'd expect people I knew or strangers I'd talk to to have some opinions and something to say about topics that were being mulled over.

All that came to an end overnight with the outbreak of the war, almost as if a curtain had been drawn over all intellectual discussion. It seemed as if almost a new generation of people had come up, just a few years younger than us but with a completely different outlook on life. Maybe it was simply that they had the opportunity to go to work and make money, which most of us had never seen, or go to war. School boys, some of them.

(Q: You mentioned reading William Morris and that having had considerable effect on you. How do you mean that? Presumably no one seriously considered Morris' schemes as actually workable.)

Visions of William Morris--yes, I meant it much more seriously than you'd probably think. We used to seriously say that "Yes, we are moving into an age of leisure. Obviously people don't have to work eight hours a day, all week long. Technology will do away with most of the drudgery, the necessary hard work of the world. So how are people going to fill their time?"

Now this was in the worst of the depression mind you and we were all working people, although only casually employed at best. But we did have food and shelter and few of the most basic worries. Others, like the transient unemployed in Vancouver or riding the freight trains across Canada, probably had less leisurely conceptions of the future. But in the worst years of the depression we were hopeful because we were positive it would usher in changes which we felt *had* to take place.

We thought we quite clearly saw the steps for the transformation of an economy of scarcity to an economy of abundance. But at that point our imaginations failed. Some of us thought it rather pathetic that we would, almost unconsciously, hark back to the bucolic, romantic ideals of the middle ages. Of a stereotyped romantic village existence, of the English village green, *Merrie England*, and that kind of thing. (laughs)

Reading--the acquisition of and expanding the limits of culture--we saw as both a necessary and rewarding feature in preparing the way to socialism by working people. Around the early C.C.F. there were evening meetings of young people in which the poetry of Baudelaire or Auden or Yeats would be discussed. Sometimes mangled but often not. We didn't find that was contradictory to collecting donations for some strike or political campaign. But then too, many of the leading writers and artists then were expressing a class war approach, in various forms. An expression of the contemporary world in artistic forms. They were!

All things which were seen as breaking the limits of social outlook, all leading in various ways to this transformation which was going to take place. You'd expect other people to be able to talk about some of these things, however they might express it, just like you'd expect people to be able to talk about the latest popular T.V. show today.

(Q: That's some comment! But how typical was that of the general cultural scene? I know it wasn't unusual in some working class traditions but they were a pretty small minority--or not. Did this sort of thing you were describing mainly involve a sort of left C.C.F. intellectual wing?)

Well, that's difficult for me to say but it applied to most of the people I associated with in Victoria and Langford--which were quite a few.

And there was a different attitude to strangers in those days. I wouldn't think anything about, if I was waiting at a streetcar stop, to start talking to somebody next to me about what they thought about a certain topic. That was accepted. The sheer common fate of the unemployed seemed to bring us together more than I've ever seen again.

Maybe I'm wrong in trying to describe our society then from my own experiences. Certainly after the war started--even as it was about to start--the mental climate changed so that it became almost as if I were in a strange land. The social situation altered almost overnight. If you'd have tried to talk to strangers in the street, just a few months later, they'd have thought you were some kind of nut. Like today.

(Q: But maybe you could flesh out this vision of a new society that would arise with the transformation to socialism a bit more.)

Well, I for one found that my own imagination of what a better society would be like failed badly and I didn't do better than anyone else. We did return in a way to the Morris view of art and craft work as a way we were going to occupy ourselves. Which now sounds suspiciously like, on a higher plane, what we were already doing to some extent in order to survive. (laughs) Working in your garden, raising animals, repairing and building houses for your own use and that of your neighbours.

We realized that sex was only going to occupy one small facet of man's day to day life. Although everybody was for sexual liberation, but it was very demure by today's standards. None of us saw the good life as one of Bacchanalian orgy, of riotous sex and drink. (laughs) We had a high-spirited view of mankind. So the generalization was about "fulfilling the human potential". We went around saying that "capitalism was inhibiting man's full expression of his potential." Which is of course true. But I don't think anybody has ever solved the question of what is mankind's potential. In the Marxian or materialist sense it's doubtful whether your mind or imagination can go very much beyond what you've experienced to some extent anyway.

(Q: I suppose that Edward Bellamy was out of it, that sort of utopian writing wasn't taken seriously anymore.)

Bellamy out of it? No, nothing of the sort. We were reading Bellamy's *News from Nowhere* in great numbers, and in a very naive way. We were building our own sort of utopia in our own C.C.F. clubs and among our friends. Serious? We were very serious. These endless study groups and discussion papers were fairly intensive.

It was during the election campaign that threw out the Tolmie government that I started to become active in politics. The Langford C.C.F. club, along with hundreds of others, sprang into life. It had been a little study group organized earlier by one Captain T. Guy Shepherd and had been called the People's Party. He was an organizer of sorts and a very good speaker of the old school, an orator who was capable of working the listeners up to a high pitch of excitement. At the height of his political talks he'd stride up and down the platform shouting, "What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it?"

"Poverty amid Plenty" was the theme. That was sometime shortly before 1933. He always left you with the feeling that he knew the answers to the important questions but somehow he never quite answered them. Captain Shepherd became a candidate for the C.C.F. when it was first formed but got involved in some factional dispute and then quit.

We had about a hundred members in the C.C.F. club around Langford Lake; somebody from just about every family seemed to be involved. We swept the rural areas solidly during the election but Esquimalt with its big naval base was solidly Conservative, so we missed winning the riding. But we carried on with meetings every week; we didn't operate just at election time. The C.C.F. was a movement you see, not just an electoral party.

Study groups were meeting everywhere, speakers were going around, there was continual activity. I started going around speaking at the time myself. People would hear you and maybe ask their group to invite you to speak on one topic or another to their group. We'd speak all over the Island and all through the Fraser Valley. You'd go out by the interurban trams that ran out of Vancouver. I've forgotten the names of all those stations that used to be along the interurban line but almost every one of them used to have a C.C.F. club.

Oh I used to talk about anything. I was twenty, twenty-two, and so I knew everything in those days. I talked about the dilemma in which society found itself, the contradictions. "Poverty amid Plenty" was the theme of most of my talks in one way or the other. But I also ventured into "Education". Never having been educated myself I knew plenty about education. (laughs) We talked about the nature of education, the various philosophies and the results and how it should be.

But then I read and studied frantically. It's true, that under the impetus, in the enthusiasm of those times, we did educate ourselves to a very considerable degree. I'd read masses of books on a topic before I'd give a speech and work out my own position between them all. It was a good education for me anyway. I still find that a good way of learning. We have a stream of ex-university students and teachers now who come through our place here on Pender Island and I can see that we didn't miss too much, forty years ago, by learning through those study groups.

I can't say that much original thinking was done. But that's always the case. We agreed with the basic planks of the Regina Manifesto. There were very few restraints that were put upon you as a member of the C.C.F. Those educationals all arose out of our own debates and were intended to enrich and broaden the text of the Regina platform. It was a very broad line that we operated within; it represented a wide range of thought.

We'd be reading all kinds of writers, like Bernard Shaw, who I've since come to think of as an opinionated ass, and others like him. Absorbing and spewing some of it out in the form of speeches. It amuses me now--our vanity. They talk about women's liberation today as if it were a completely new idea. But we were discussing about the

same thing, as others had done twenty-five years before us. But it's all new and fresh for each generation.

However, we did know something about history. I once conducted a series of study classes on the history of the British Labour Party--its rise and development from about 1900 till the Ramsey McDonald government. I was giving talks to "young people" although they were just a few years younger than me.

The C.C.F. had a youth organization but I couldn't see any need for it to exist because its members were mainly people who were working and meeting their responsibilities or others who were unemployed. I objected to the concept that treated these younger members as somehow ancillary. In any case this youth organization provided a pretty active social life for its members.

(Q: What sort of knowledge did you and the people around you have of the already forty year history of socialist organization and labour militancy here in B.C., especially around the Vancouver Island coal fields? Was there any carry over?)

I would say that we knew very little about that and that it played a secondary role in our considerations then. Because we were thinking in world terms and not regional ones. Partly as a result of the First World War we recognized that world-wide trends were taking place that would reach into and affect the remotest corner of the earth. Of course we were centrally involved with provincial politics but we knew we weren't going to supervent the international forces that were at work just by provincial action. That's why the history of the British Labour Party was as important to us as the formation of the C.C.F. in Canada.

We were very concerned to study developments in and the history of the British Empire, which was then still the dominant imperial power on the earth. About the British in Egypt or about that dipsomaniac and religious maniac, Chinese Gordon. We studied developments in India and its history, and world political developments like the rise of the Kuomintang in China and the Communist party there. But you're right, there wasn't much study about what had been B.C.'s history, of the union movement history in our own backyard, the Oriental question here and so on. I did later, but that was later.

(Q: It sounds like the study and discussion of many of these groups dealt mainly with conditions outside B.C., conditions that you couldn't effect, and could be somewhat escapist. How true was that?)

No, that's not true. Because we did have a world picture which wasn't limited to our own society. We might have talked cynically, but I don't think that people were cynical then, as they later became.

And we saw progress taking place, despite and inside the seeming collapse of capitalism. We really had faith that technology had finally given man the actual chance, for the first time in the history of humanity, to free himself from want. A belief that it was only a relatively minor--we thought--effort needed to install the kind of social organization which would allow that possibility to come to fruition. All that was needed was to take the factories and resources out of the hands of the capitalists and make them community owned or state owned. From then on we would see how happy we would be in our little communities.

War--the consequences of modern war, its mere possibility, underlay our feelings about the absolute need to change the kind of society we were living in. Somehow, I think the lessons of World War One took a dozen years to sink in. The depression, for all of its day-to-day hardships was less of a demonstration that this system had to end than the threat of another world war. It was for me anyway. But in those days, before the consolidation of fascism, before that was apparent, we thought that all but the most die-hard reactionaries and fools had learned their lesson from the First World War.

If you look back at the more influential books printed in the late twenties and early thirties you'd find an enormous number of anti-militarist books. Books like Norman Angell's, and Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and many others. That was on everybody's mind. War was a touchstone--if we could avoid war then mankind had no other way to go but up. Because obviously we were now in a position to resolve the economic problems which temporarily beset us with a better form of social organization. All we had to do was to bring a socialist system of distribution into effect.

In our finer moments we'd have visions not of a workaday world but a world in which we were all artists and craftsmen of one sort or another, as well as being workers. The human soul was going to flower. We were high spirited; the work of the world was put behind us in our wilder flights of imagination and we soared to where our visions might take us.

No, don't laugh. (laughs) William Morris or his influence was in great vogue. We didn't resurrect folk dancing on the lawns or raise any May Poles in Langford but the sentiment was there.

But in the meantime, usually, we could see the immediate job at hand, which seemed to be a very practical task. Today it may seem ludicrous but in those days it wasn't. The job at hand was to get the factories going and to distribute the goods and put people working again. To take this blockage--capitalism--which created on the one hand people out of work and in dire poverty and on the other hand closed down factories. Obviously the tools and resources were there; obviously the skills and capabilities were there. All you needed was a catalyst to bring them together and to see to it that capitalism and its consequences were cleared away for good. Public social ownership of the means of production, that was the answer. And that was what we were going to bring about through the C.C.F. No doubt about it.

(Q: What were the means which you saw available to bring this about? Through elections and legislative action, through mass actions and seizures of production facilities or what?)

Yes, all of that. We weren't afraid of the word "expropriation", or even of the factory sit-ins that later developed, which we felt might be used to acquire the production facilities if, after winning legislative control, the owners and their courts blocked us. We weren't even so scared of going it alone in one province. Because, first of all, we didn't think we'd be alone very long. The bravest elements in the movement used to say, "Yes, when we do take control here in B.C. we will take over all forestry and major industries, we'll take the commanding heights of the economy and make it all part of a big cooperative. We would trade as a block with the rest of the world. Legislated expropriations, that's right.

(Q: What sort of view did you have about the ultimate resistance of the capitalists, of all the reams of lackeys and thugs they had at their disposal? After all, fascism had already been installed in Italy and Germany and elsewhere by then.)

No, I don't think we really fully considered that as a possibility. Not in a parliamentary democracy, not in a long established parliamentary system like in Canada or Britain. It was the Spanish Civil War that drove home the limitations of our view--of what might happen if we achieved our goal of taking power legislatively and actually doing something with it.

It was that idyllic period before 1936 I was talking about, before that lesson sunk in. Till that time we saw no cloud on the horizon which we couldn't overcome. We didn't think that a small class of capitalists could mount any effective opposition to a great mass of people that we were going to convince for socialism. That there could be no real opposition to that mass for a change from a handful of reactionaries.

We saw the Soviet Union as battling bravely ahead, closing the technological gap with the capitalist world, growing stronger. The main problem we saw with Soviet Russia, the fundament of all its other major problems, was its lack of industrial development. And while we thought it unfortunate that the first workers' revolution had succeeded there but was distorted by having taken place in a less industrialized society, we saw none of the problems that distorted socialism in Russia as ones we'd have to face. We didn't have to struggle through the phase of primitive capital accumulation and struggle with a mass of entrenched peasantry and the remnants of feudalism.

I didn't glorify Stalin but the crimes and terror of his regime only started to come to our attention with the purge trials during the last years of the thirties.

(Gap)

My point of view was from somebody who was rarely part of the unions themselves. That was then the case for the majority of working people in Canada. Mostly I was around the unemployed, a casual laborer at best. Yes, sure we supported strikes and defended union members in some of the most outrageous cases of government and company collusion, like the Blubber Bay strike.* But it was sort of removed for me and the people I hung around with. The closest I got to unions was a number of people I knew formed a local of the International Woodworkers of America during its early organizational years with a view to bringing in other workers in the Victoria area. This group was in a store making wooden blinds. A pretty flimsy connection. Nigel Morgan was one of our group. He'd grown up on Saltspring Island and had run a store in Ganges until some time before that. That wooden blind factory became a Communist centre in Victoria for organizing the I.W.A.

There was a certain animosity among many of us in the C.C.F. movement toward the trade union leadership as it then existed. Many unions seemed to be more concerned with having a closed shop and preventing the unemployed from entering their job market than anything else.

(Q: What about the mass organization of industrial unions that was then going on in the States and in Canada under the Workers Unity League and the earlier goals of socialists, trying to work with both the unions and the unemployed?)

Well, I knew that was going on but I wasn't involved in that aspect of things so I can't tell you what was going on in that. I mainly worked around Langford, painting houses,

*The Blubber Bay strike on Texada Island during the mid 1930s was one of the most bitter strikes of that entire period and it seems strange that no one yet has written a revealing book about it.

cutting firewood and filing saws. I did a lot of gardening and a little landscaping and any number of casual jobs. I picked up skills that are obsolete today but which came in handy then because not everybody knew them. A bit of work here and a bit there pretty well throughout the thirties. That and the occasional "regular" job I had, all of it amounting really to only casual labour. That not only supported me but part of my family, which I lived with then.

I did a stint of track-laying on the C.P.R. line out of Victoria running up to Courtney, a job I got mainly by accident. This was in the middle thirties; not the worst years but jobs were still very very scarce. I was walking up the track with my head down thinking about some intellectual problem completely unrelated to a job and there was this track-laying gang working on the rails down the way. Well, as it was in those days, whenever you saw a bunch of men working you might go up and ask the foreman if they needed any more men. I was thinking whether I should ask him when the guy in charge yells out to me, "Okay, you don't have to look so sad. We saw you coming down the track a mile off with your head down. If you can handle the work I'll put you on. Two of our men just quit."

I guess that funny lope I used to have made him think that I was coming over to ask for a job but was sure that there wouldn't be any. Actually I was hardly thinking about it. But I took the job and stayed for five months or so. It was hard work, tamping down ties and moving rails and tacking them down with a spike maul, but it was in the open. I was never strong or big but I was wiry and in top condition. It didn't bother me at all. The job paid forty or forty-five cents an hour and was the biggest money I'd made till that time. Even after looking after my responsibilities at home I could save quite a bit-- which was an added incentive to quit. "Let's see, I've got a hundred and twenty dollars saved up. That should last me three, four months." I even bought five acres of land in Langford from what I saved on that job. But finally the repetition became too much for me; it cut me off from all my real life, so I quit.

In 1937 I got a job building bunkhouses in Zeballos, which for a while was a gold rush centre on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I'd met a building subcontractor at the previous C.C.F. convention and he offered me a job, doing rough carpentry, up at Zeballos. It was hard work but it was sort of interesting.

The *Maquinna*, that was the boat that ran up the west coast of the Island. At Zeballos each boat arrived loaded down with passengers who either were looking for work or who were going prospecting. By that time any possible claims had long been staked and the chance of finding a job was even less than around Vancouver. Most of them came off the boat with almost no money in their pockets and were stuck there. They'd get hold of a few rolls of tar paper and string them up to trees and scrap lumber to protect them from the rain. It never seemed to stop raining there. The odd one got a

job but most had to scrounge around to find some way of getting out of there. Some almost starved to death.

Actually, the contractor I worked for was instrumental in saving the day for a lot of guys stuck there. He commandeered food from the mine and distributed it to a lot of men camped out and with no job who were near starving. He was a pretty tough guy, some found him awfully hard to work under, but in his way he was quite generous. There are a lot of suckholers around contractors like that, people trying to get on the good side of the boss. Well, if he thought somebody was doing that he'd likely fire them as untrustworthy.

The Zeballos (i.e. gold fields) strike was constantly played up in the Vancouver and Victoria papers as a great job opportunity they said, so that a job rush developed. I managed to get a couple of articles printed in the *Victoria Times* about the history of the finds and the conditions at Zeballos and said that it was not a place to come to look for work unless you had strong financial reserves.

There were a lot of claims they were working around Zeballos but only two mines which were in production, the Man of War and the Privateer mines. For those who did happen to have a job it was a boom, I guess.

Even before they got the new bunkhouses built the biggest and fanciest structure in town was the house of prostitution. It was fitted out with the latest styles and gadgets then in vogue. It had washing facilities in each room, something you didn't have in most hotels yet, and there was a lounge with a piano where they served drinks. No gambling allowed though. It was all fair and square and was regarded as a model house of prostitution.

Every week, a half day a week, the women working in that brothel would be allowed to go "downtown" --half a block away. So the respectable ladies of Zeballos wouldn't have to meet them in the stores. Yes, absolutely true. A last gasp of the moral sensibilities of the old west.

Maybe ten or so women were working there. I went in one night when I was very drunk and tried to talk with one woman there but she wasn't interested in talking. If I was ready to do what I'd come for okay, if not leave. But I was too drunk for any of that so I paid her the five bucks, or whatever it was, and left. Afterward I was very depressed by the whole transaction but now it strikes me mainly as humorous.

It was a kind of boom atmosphere for those of us who had a job. We'd work seven days a week--board was very little and there was nothing to spend your money on. So there was more money in circulation around Zeballos than I'd seen in all the

depression years. Even with the drinking and whoring and gambling, most guys did save up most of what they earned. We all remembered, not very long before, when a couple of dollars was a lot of money.

We all talked the general C.C.F. line or left of that. Anyone that had more conservative ideas pretty well kept them to himself. There were a lot of kids, young workers, there. But the miners were older men, pretty well set in their convictions, and it would have been pretty patronizing of me going to talk politics with these miners. I was sort of in a state of limbo at the time anyway, when I came out of Zeballos in mid-1938.

(Gap)

As time wore on the Stalin purges came home to us and what looked like was going to be a victory of fascism in Spain, by 1938 or so. I began to enter a state--not so much of disillusionment, that too--but of shock.

(Q: Did that have mainly to do with the purge trials in the Soviet Union? Seems to me that was also the period when the United Front as at its height, wasn't it?)

Yes, that was about the same time. I know that most of us were pretty disillusioned about the intrigues and the opportunism in the Communist party here in Canada itself, even before we knew much about the show trials in Russia. The United Front policy seemed to abandon the militancy for which, till then, we had respected them for. Then there was the viciousness of the interparty fights on the left in Spain, which seemed to express the break-up of the revolutionary movement. Hitler seemed to have become consolidated in Germany and there were the approaching clouds of another world war.

There was a growing cynicism and sometimes overnight turnabout by figures we had greatly admired just before. Cynical turnabouts by people like Stephen Spender in England and those others who appear in that book *The God That Failed*. Vital figures in the movement becoming traitors overnight, sometimes turning from being revolutionaries to reactionaries overnight. It made you wonder if you'd understood people at all.

I had an on-again, off-again friendship with Colin Cameron during all those years. We'd quarrel over some issue and would be at odds and then we'd find ourselves on the same side of an argument at a C.C.F. convention and our previous differences would be forgotten. He veered around quite a bit at the time but of the leading figures in the C.C.F. he is the one I had and have the greatest respect for. On fundamental positions he always remained sound.

For a while Colin seemed to throw in his lot with the Communist party, which I was coming to distrust. At the C.C.F. conventions some of the most bitter fights inside the C.C.F. were between Angus McInnis and Colin Cameron. They'd be spitting and snarling at one another so that sometimes you'd think that one or the other was going to throw a chair at the other. The *Sun* managed to get a picture of Angus McInnis at the convention just as he was saying, "I'll tell you right now, Colin Cameron, keep your slimy fingers out of the C.C.F." They used to be speechless with rage at each other. Almost every one of the early C.C.F. conventions would devolve into a fight about some issue so that you'd almost expect a split in the party. But it never quite got that far.

Gap)

In the 1930s Victoria was a beautiful place. You wouldn't recognize it today, the contrast. The country between Victoria and Langford, which itself was a stretched-out village, was unspoiled. There was about a mile of open fields between Langford village and Langford Lake, which today is all a jumble of houses and shopping plazas.

Until the depression really took hold people there were still working in little logging operations on the Malahat or eking out their subsistence farms with little savings. But as things got worse and worse, actual starvation began to set in. That was at the end of the Tolmie government (1933) when the provincial government virtually collapses. Most of the cabinet had resigned so at the end there was only Premier Tolmie, the Attorney-General and the Minister of Education left in the cabinet.

As soon as the Patullo Liberal government came to power a little money began to flow into government (works) projects. Not much but a little so that they did a little hiring. I myself worked on the roads alongside people from virtually every occupation and profession. There might be a hundred men stretched along the road, all with shovels; everything done by hand, of course. I became acquainted with every inch of the road between Langford and Victoria and later I worked off the land taxes on our property by working on the roads.

Our first year in Langford we still had a bit of cash left and we weren't starving. We had an acre around the house; my father expanded the garden and got a lot of chickens and eventually we got a milk cow.

Don got quite a good job, paying real wages, in the Public Works office. But after he wrote a letter to the *Victoria Times* supporting the C.C.F., the very next day after it was published he was fired. He didn't realize he was expected to play politics, Liberal party politics. They said, "After all that we've done for you, given you this secure job--and

you go and do a thing like that to us." Public Works was treated as a pool of patronage at the time.

Still, we had the house and the acre around it, which were paid off. It gave us a sense of security. It wasn't a very big house we had but it was comfortable, although somewhat crowded with all of us at home. At one point I started to build myself a log cabin away from the main house and because I didn't know what I was doing wound up making a poor job of it. But it served the purpose well enough and either I or someone else in the family used it for years afterwards.

My father continued working around the house and in our garden. My younger brother and sister were still going to school and my older sister also returned to finish high school which eventually enabled her to take nurse's training and become a nurse.

No. There was very little looking back to England, not really at all. We were just glad we had escaped. I'm sure the whole family felt like that. Years afterward, when I was in England during the war, I didn't even get in touch with any of the relatives we still had living there. I didn't feel I owed my allegiance to England. I was pretty bitter about the doings of the British Empire. I'm not one of those English people who's "proud of their English heritage." But America is turning out to be no better. I used to have a certain respect for America when I was young, despite all of its flaws. But not anymore.

(Q: Did you see an American Empire consolidating?)

By the end of the war it was apparent to me, especially after they dropped those two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki--that put the final touch on any respect I had for America. It was absolutely unnecessary. It was simply an experiment in mass destruction and mass murder.

Well, to finish up about the 1930s... For the 1935 federal election Grant McNeill was the C.C.F. candidate for North Vancouver riding, which then stretched quite a long way outside of North Vancouver. I was living in Vancouver myself then and was on the speakers list; for the C.C.F. clubs and went wherever they asked me to go--into all the small communities then scattered around the outskirts of Vancouver and into the Fraser Valley along the interurban line.

The meetings were usually held in small local halls or school houses. But they all run together in my mind now. Mainly I'd only see them in the evenings. It was mainly all C.C.F. people at the meetings so it was like one big family. The C.C.F. still had that fervor to it--"we were all comrades together". Which I am sure doesn't exist at all anymore. But it did in those days; we were doing very well, growing politically, too.

Mainly I'd be talking about the necessity of a planned economy and the concept of "surplus value" and its ramifications, although, naturally, I wouldn't use that phrase from the platform. I still get mad as hell when I think of all the useless things that get produced and then break down and can't be repaired. Purely artificial obsolescence, all boosting the cost of living for the consumer.

I'd talk about ordinary, every day things, very practical things that had to be done in our economy. There was so much to say that I was never stuck in the time I had available. And then, the audiences were all basically sympathetic with that outlook. The bigger the audience the better I liked it; the easier it was to speak to. I'd try to avoid talks where you were in a room with a dozen or so people. When you had a big audience--you make a statement and you can almost feel the responses coming back to you in waves.

I never had a good speaking voice. I never had a strong voice. I once almost lost a surveying job because I couldn't shout loud enough. But I found I could speak to the back of a hall and be heard. I always got their attention.

I'd be desperately nervous before I started to speak--sometimes sick with nervousness. But most times once I got on the platform and actually started to speak it would disappear in a surge of showmanship. I was rarely the main speaker in these election campaigns. I'd be the curtain raiser. I'd hold the audience while the candidate was still at a previous meeting or hadn't arrived at the hall yet. Those were tough situations to deal with, too. You might just speak for twenty minutes but you also might have to hold the audience for an hour.

I had an experience in Pemberton Meadows during the 1935 federal election. I was by myself on behalf of Grant McNeill, who was the candidate. When I arrived we tried to get the use of the one hall in the community and found that it had been booked by H.H. Stevens' Reconstruction Party (a very short lived right wing split off of the Tory party). So I approached their speaker about having a debate. But no, he didn't want that. Then one of us asked if we could have the use of the hall after he was through. He couldn't really say no to that, but by the time he was through it would be pretty late.

I still remember our meeting. Even before it started it was maybe ten o'clock at night. I looked out of the entrance and I saw all these lanterns approaching. In that valley you could see from miles away. People were coming down the valley, coming to our meeting. They stayed till early in the morning, till the meeting was over. It seemed that almost everyone in Pemberton Meadows was there. I stayed for three or four days and gave talks in little places around there, at Anderson Lake and at Birken and in two or three other hamlets, in one room schools to ten or so people. It must have

been winter because I remember almost passing out from the heat in some of those school houses, with the heater going full blast and all the people packed in. My friends and I were taken into the homes of some of our supporters, who fed and housed us, and we borrowed an old Ford car that bumped and bounced over those one lane, rock roads, from place to place.

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In those days we had the idea of the planned economy fixed firmly in our minds. The running of a society was going to be treated in the same way as other important things are carried out--rationally. We were concerned with "production for use and not for profit". In other words, we were going to produce things because they were needed and not because a market might be created for them or simply because they might be sold and make a profit for someone. The economy was to be run in a rather cold blooded manner of sitting down and planning for what was needed by society.

That might seem rather hard to grasp these days but if you stop to think *why* many things are produced today, it is what is going on today that is fantastic, not what we had in mind then. Today we are stuck with masses of waste goods and products for which there is no reasonable use and that soon overflow the dumping grounds. Why were those products ever made in the first place?

We were not far-out dreamers, people with fantastic ideas. As a matter of fact, it was a plain common sense attitude toward production and distribution that we had. The question was often put to us on the platform, "what will you do if tomorrow we elect a C.C.F. government?" Now remember, this was in the depths of the depression and the economic and social order was in a shambles--had ceased to operate to a large extent in many areas. Just think what you would do in a desperate situation. The first question would be, "How are we going to get enough for everyone to eat? How is everyone going to get housing and shelter? How do we prevent people from being evicted?"

We would not be thinking of export industries. So it was in that context that we would answer the question of what a C.C.F. government would do. First of all, we would make an evaluation of all the basic needs of the people of B.C.--which first of all would be food, shelter, clothing and medical care. Any intelligent socialist government would cast a cold eye on exporting goods from the province unless we knew exactly why it was being shipped out and who was going to profit. We were first of all concerned with what we needed here ourselves. So it was with that down to earth approach *that we fooled ourselves*. It turned out that we were foolish in believing that there was a chance of making a drastic change in the social conditions provincially. But we did

then believe that perhaps the C.C.F. would be elected more broadly and we would have to plan the economy. So serious consideration was being given to that.

The contrast between that and what is going on today is that economic processes and decisions are now treated as if they were in the hands of God. Economic processes are viewed as a magical process. You listen to the president of the United States talk-- these people are "waiting for better winds to blow", Hoover used to say, "prosperity is just around the corner". That is mystical in essence. Science and technology have made vast strides but in the basic questions of meeting people's basic needs we seem to be returning to the dark ages. Everything is left up to the vagaries of the market.

What we were doing was to put forward the fundamental issues of socialism, which deal directly with the method and purpose of production, as opposed to the concepts of marketplace decisions. The socialist outlook was simply to decide, in a fairly cold blooded way, what was needed and to plan for the production of that. After society had solved its immediate needs for food, shelter, clothing, etc. etc. then we could begin thinking about the provision of luxury goods, which would certainly follow. But we would do so on a democratic basis and not through a class ordered society, which is the end product of the system that prevails today.

Dr. Lyle Telford was one of the first in the C.C.F. to realize the possibilities of radio. He launched a regular radio program on one of the major Vancouver radio stations where, each week, he would address the issues of the day and offer his solutions to them. At the end of each broadcast he would appeal for donations to help pay for this air time, which was surprisingly inexpensive, and soon he launched the "Dr. Lyle Telford Challenge Fund", which was to be used to promote various social programs.

Along with that I think he was the prime mover in this short-lived experiment in marketing various products which could be sold to C.C.F. supporters and help fill the C.C.F. campaign coffers. "Abundance for all" was the name they came out with.

They sold tobacco and a baking powder to start with. We loyally bought this "Abundance for all" tobacco for a time but it was pretty poor stuff. The real trouble was that not long after they started up, a bad batch of baking powder was distributed and a number of people got quite ill. So the C.C.F. rapidly dumped that whole marketing idea.

Dr. Telford was then elected mayor of Vancouver but after some fight inside the C.C.F. he walked out in a huff and made the mistake of mistaking the support for the party as personal support for himself. When he ran as an independent candidate in Vancouver East a few years later he got a few hundred votes but was just buried by the C.C.F. candidate.

(Gap)

(Q: There is no mention of sex or sexual attraction anywhere here, either as a topic of discussion or as a factor in anyone's lives. Was it really that much in the closet then?)

Well, of course it has always been a matter of some moment even when it is not discussed publicly. But I once gave a talk to a C.C.F. woman's group in North Vancouver during the Grant McNeill campaign and, although I hadn't intended to, got into a discussion of a woman's right to medical abortion, which I defended strongly. During the 1930s the issue of the right to birth control was an issue that was settled and accepted among intelligent people in general. Birth control information was being disseminated widely, although it was still technically illegal to do so. Yes it was, if you can believe that.

As for myself, I was deeply attached to a young woman who lived in Victoria who already had an advanced case of tuberculosis and whose family was very resistant to allowing her to have anything to do with me or anyone. Although I wasn't particularly interested in or sexually attracted to anyone else myself I knew of various affairs and attractions that existed among some of the leading figures of the C.C.F. People were still very moralistic in those days. A kind of Victorian hypocrisy still held sway over the officially accepted attitudes. There was never the sexual openness in the thirties that you saw emerge in the sixties. An open defense of sexual liberation in the thirties was still something which people on the left steered clear of.

To show you how far it went, there was a motion to expel me from the Young C.C.F. club in Victoria because I had been seen reading Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and that became a topic of hot disapproval, if you can imagine that such a thing was possible. It shows you the moralistic attitude which prevailed among sections of the left. They thought it was pornography. When the movers of that motion to expel me spoke to the motion, the grounds were that by having this book I was promoting pornography inside the C.C.F.

The Communist party made nasty insinuations about the sexual behavior of anyone who fell afoul of them. Indeed, it was still considered a pretty bad business to be sleeping with someone you weren't married to. The Communist party used that in a whispering campaign against me when I was politically active in Victoria. That was typical of them, righteously puritanical. It was circulated that I had been sleeping with a young woman school teacher when we weren't married. That was intended to warn "young people" that this John Smith was a bad character, watch out for him.

There was also the question of drinking--temperance. That was almost as moralistic an issue as sex. But it was only at the end of the thirties, when I had reached a point of

despair, that I began to do any drinking. At the time I wasn't around loggers or mining camps myself. When I was at Zeballos we worked seven days a week and most people were too tired or too broke to do much drinking. After maybe six months of work some of them did but usually not so much of a binge, it usually didn't amount to much.

By that time I had a brother-in-law who had a small painting business in Vancouver and I worked for him off and on. But we worked almost for nothing and finally he swore he'd never paint another house again. And he never did. I remember us repainting cafes and small stores along Granville street, and once a large funeral parlour up on Kingsway. Finally he managed to get a job with the Public Works department on Vancouver Island and stayed with that till he retired.

Don [John's older brother] was a pretty good journalist and writer . He had written some of the platform speeches and political statements of leading C.C.F. politicians in B.C. during the 1935 federal election. He wrote four or five public political statements for people like Arnold Webster--which appeared under their names.

One of them with Arnold Webster's signature on it was about peace, and it started out with "If war should be declared tomorrow, I, along with my comrades, would be in jail because we would refuse to support Canada's involvement in another imperialist war." (laughs) That was for the 1935 federal election campaign and Arnold Webster came very close to defeating Gerry McGeer in it.

But this same guy, the moment war was declared in 1939, was fully in support of Canada entering the war. When Webster spoke in support of the C.C.F. M.P.s' decision to support the war a final debate took place inside the C.C.F. A meeting held in the Chamber of Commerce building in Victoria was packed with people. Colin Cameron was there attacking the position taken by Arnold Webster. It would have been in the early fall of 1939, just after war had been declared.

I myself spoke at that meeting. I've forgotten now how I managed it but I made a deal of some kind with the organizers of the meeting for five minutes speaking time on the platform before Webster spoke. As I got up to speak I brought out of my pocket this pamphlet on peace and said, "This is what Arnold Webster had to say about war and what his and the C.C.F. position was just four years ago." And I read from it. Webster was sitting right behind me on the platform; he knew that pamphlet was out there but he didn't expect that anyone would bring it up then. He and I were the only ones at that meeting that knew that he never had written that statement, but he couldn't stand on a platform now and say "I didn't write it." It was a cruel thing to do but I felt he well deserved it.

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I had had a job as a night clerk in the Ritz hotel in downtown Victoria. It was a pretty seedy place and I got some ridiculous salary, like fifteen or twenty dollars a month plus a room to sleep in. It was a terrible, deadening life and after about six months of it I realized that I was beginning to look like I had jaundice.

So a friend of mine and I decided to go to the Okanagan to pick fruit. That was in the summer of '39. We arrived in Penticton without any money at all and for the first while we lived on cherries and whatever other fruit were in season. Gradually we got to know people around there, on little farms and orchards around Penticton. One fruit grower invited us to put up our tent in his orchard and we camped there. We were both doing quite a bit of speaking to C.C.F. groups around the Okanagan then. We earned enough money to sustain ourselves by picking fruit--don't ask me how.

We knew the war was coming. We got invited to C.C.F. clubs that existed in all the little towns around there. Penticton, Summerland, Oliver and many others. My chum was Harvey Ladd (?) who later became a well known organizer for the I.W.A. He eventually went back to Newfoundland. When that big Newfoundland lumber workers' strike took place in the 1960s, that Joey Smallwood broke up by force, Harvey was the leader of that strike.

We were quite sure war was coming, and more than that we warned of the consequences here of Canada's participation--that a deepening authoritarianism was bound to come along with the war. And we predicted what people like M.J. Coldwell would do. How they would come down on the other side of the issue.

Oh, there was the patriotic Conservative element in the Okanagan all right. But even the majority of orchard owners were right up against it during the depression. There's no doubt that the depression was still in full force, regardless of what you may have read, or were being told even then. Some of the people who would turn up at these meetings would be orchard owners. There were still a lot of small orchards. There were forestry workers and people from just about every walk of life in the Okanagan. There might be between twenty and fifty people at each meeting--the summer of 1939.

There was a very strong anti-Hitler, anti-fascist feeling, which certainly included us, but also a lot of pro-war feeling springing up. There was a lot of anti-war feeling left, reflecting to some extent the anti-war propaganda that the C.C.F. had done over the years. Some C.C.F. members were quite shocked and unbelieving when we told them what the C.C.F. leadership would do when war was declared.

I must have been fairly naive because I only then began to realize that many factional and personal squabbles in the C.C.F. and in the Communist party were not necessarily revolving about any issues of principle but about contests for personal influence and power. I had imagined that everybody was in these movements for the highest altruistic reasons and was utterly devastated to find that some people, people we had looked up to and supported, would for the sake of getting a nomination engage in petty slander and outright lies. They would smear fellow members. It came as a shock because there's no doubt that I entered political activity with a kind of religious fervor.

My response to all this was to partially drop out of much political activity rather than change my concept of how one should act. I'm certainly not going to support the Conservatives or the Liberals because of the opportunistic failings of the left.

A Zombie in the War

By late 1938 and 1939 we in the left wing of the C.C.F. were convinced that a general war was about to begin and we went around warning people that it was passing a point of no return. Regardless of what we thought we could accomplish, we didn't have too many illusions about that, we felt we had to do everything we could within our limited powers to combat this approaching war. It's surprising how many people wouldn't listen to us, partly because they couldn't accept what that would mean.

I spoke all through the small towns in the Okanagan, at Penticton, in Vernon and Oliver, Kelowna, Summerland--speaking at meetings about every second or third night. So much so that my voice gave out. We made speeches throughout the province, sent letters and petitions and delegations to the National Council of the C.C.F. demanding that they stand fast on the party's anti-war platform.

We turned out to be quite correct. We went around saying to the C.C.F. clubs that there was going to be a general European war and that M.J. Coldwell and David Lewis and Tommy Douglas were going to demand that we support the war in the face of everything that the party had stood for and had printed in its statements and had accepted in its conventions. All the years of anti-war propaganda that we had carried out were going to be just dismissed by the National Council of the party. Well, nobody would have expected anything other than that from David Lewis because he was just the slimiest of opportunists. His main purpose seemed to be to purge the left from the ranks of the C.C.F.

And as you know, we were almost exactly right. We had pinpointed what all of the well known leaders in B.C. and Canada would say. It was no surprise to us that J.S.

Woodsworth was the only one of the Federal M.P.s who opposed Canada's entry into the war. The majority of the rank and file members of the C.C.F. were against support for another war but they were soon bludgeoned by the National Council into supporting the Liberal government on the issue of entering the war. The party members were presented with the accomplished fact when all the C.C.F. M.P.s except J.S. Woodsworth himself voted for Canada's entry into the war (in September of 1939).

I remember his writing to us on the subject and he sounded totally disheartened. He said in his letter to us that he felt that "the C.C.F. had failed and in the end had become an opportunistic political party." That's one of the reasons I had such a high regard for Colin Cameron, he was one of the few leaders who didn't change his position against the war.

(Q: Well, what was your rationale for supporting the Loyalists fighting in Spain against fascism yet not a war which was said to be against fascism, like the Second World War is always presented?)

Well, for one thing the Spanish people were fighting to defend their own government in their own country. If we'd have been facing a civil (class?) war in Canada we wouldn't have been pacifists. Our contention was that if fascism was going to be defeated in Germany it would have to be done by the German people overthrowing Hitler themselves. Although I'll admit there was a certain contradiction in our stand.

(Q: Did you really think that fascism once consolidated could be overthrown by its own people internally?)

Mainly, our view was that the coming war would be just another, an unbelievably murderous, imperialist war between Germany and Britain and their various allies. And on that I still think we were on fairly solid ground. We never believed it was a war to stop fascism. That, we felt, was just a propaganda excuse used by the Allied powers which connived elsewhere at precisely the same thing that Hitler was doing. If you looked at what the then recent history of the British Empire was, if you considered what they had done to acquire and hold on to their colonial territories and exploit them. The civilian prisoners in prison camps during the Boer war and the mass deaths there, just as one instance--some of these things were roughly comparable to what the fascists were doing. And the French empire too. Of course none of that was supposed to count.

I'll admit our position was a very difficult one to hold during wartime, despite the fact that the majority of the C.C.F. members had known all these things during the thirties. We were certainly all very anti-fascist. The question was if, in this war against the

fascist powers, our own countries were going to devolve into the same sort of quasi-fascist mentality, which we feared would happen. That the war would have exactly the opposite result than what those who said it was a war to destroy fascism were claiming. And to a considerable extent we were right about that, too. Because the parliamentary democracies sunk to a new level of barbarity during the war and the end product was a far greater state repression, far greater organized conservatism bordering on a kind of fascism in America, even though they won the war against Germany. We had feared something like that.

In many cases we had been on a friendly personal basis with many individuals in the Communist party. But the party had changed its line so many times in the preceding years that we saw it as untrustworthy. And I myself could never accept submission to a party line, being told what conclusions to come to.

For a while it might have seemed that we were taking the Communist position on the war but the day after Hitler marched into the Soviet Union the Communist party changed its line literally overnight. They became the most rabid of war patriots and conscriptionists around. Whatever it had done in the past, it became clear that the Communist party was merely the proponent of the policies of the Russian government.

(Q: What about the argument that the Soviet Union was the only bastion of socialist power in the world and that its defense was paramount? It seems to me that was a position taken--that if the Soviet Union were conquered all would be lost.)

Well yes, I wouldn't have disagreed with that. Going back to say the early thirties, I and most people I knew would have supported the validity of that. Although we wouldn't have allowed it to cripple our efforts against the war here in Canada.

The Russian revolution had been the first successful workers' revolution in history. But quite early on we had begun to see indications that some quite reactionary and anti-socialist developments were taking place there. One of the writers that sticks in my mind is Max Eastman. In one of his books he analyzed draconian restrictions put in place by the modifications of Russian divorce law under Stalin, and followed through on how this reflected changes in the trend of Russian society since the revolution. If you wanted to know, there were persuasive indications that a Thermidor period had emerged in the Soviet Union. A tightening up of marriage regulations being just part of the rise of authoritarianism there.

Without being Trotskyites we increasingly came to follow some of Trotsky's broad arguments about developments in Russia. I didn't have any allegiance to Trotsky or his faction as many anti-Stalinists did. In fact, Trotsky's role in the Red army during

the Russian revolution struck me as callous and vicious as that of any other general-- whatever else he had to say.

Basically I was first and foremost against war in general and against these imperialist wars in particular, of which the Second World War was one.

We said that a general war would spread fascist attitudes as an end product rather than defeat them, whoever won. And I think that was indeed the general direction that most of the countries which went into the war against Hitler took themselves. I can't think of much that was more devastating and immoral than the mass air raids, mainly on civilians, carried out by the Allies in Europe. It's hard to say if the atomic bombings or those firestorm raids were greater acts of mass murder. And that mass murder was all highly praised in Canada by the leading lights of the day.

A few years earlier when Mussolini, during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, talked about "how the bombs dropped from aircraft looked like beautiful roses budding out"; that outraged the world by its brutality. But during the war quite similar statements were made every day in Canada and were accepted as the height of patriotism. Sure, Hitler started with the bombings of Antwerp and Rotterdam but the Allies sure went to work and expanded them afterward. That is just what we expected.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, with the way our own party had reacted, I just about lost my faith in the inevitability or even the probability of human progress. I saw that we could just as easily slide backwards. And sure enough, it was happening. People who have been born or come of age since then don't realize the extent to which our society and that of the world has become authoritarian and militarized as consequences of the Second World War--even compared to what normal capitalist society was like previously.

(Q: It must have been a tremendous shock, regardless how prepared you were for the event intellectually?)

It was a shock. In the year, the two years, after the war began I had become so alienated by what had happened that I threw myself into working to earn some money, which I had never done before. Although I didn't go around holding my head I was in a state of despair. I was earning money and I was spending it, drinking some. I even spent a fair amount of time sport fishing, which had always seemed too frivolous a thing to do previously.

In the years between 1939 and when I was drafted in 1942 I worked mainly for the biggest junk company in Victoria. I hoped to get an industrial deferment but they weren't giving any for that line of work.

I thought that conscription was going to get me and felt that I would probably allow them to sign me up, rather than go to jail on a principle or running away and hiding somewhere. I was ambivalent. I still can't disentangle what my motivations were. Why I allowed myself to be inducted. Whether it was fear of going to prison or whether there was some sneaking interest to see what it was like in the army. Anyway, I was registered in the Home Defense Force in 1942.

I was still very much against the war and many of my friends had gone to Quebec, where they were hiding out to avoid conscription. But I didn't. Partly it had to do with my parents, who were still alive and who I'd been helping to support. At least that was the rationale I gave myself for allowing them to conscript me into the army.

Army life turned out to be quite different than I expected. I expected the military to be a nest of devils, of slaves and slave masters, and that if you were half way intelligent it would go so much worse for you. I thought I'd be up against crass ignorance and brutality at its worst. But instead of that I found that some rather intelligent people directed the military. There were nincompoops in considerable numbers too, of course, but generally the officers had a paternal attitude--it was like being back in the nursery. It showed me that the terrible things done in wartime could be accomplished through just ordinary people and everyday arrangements. The war was every bit as brutal as I had expected it would be but I didn't experience any of the brutal army life that I had read about and had talked about myself earlier.

(Q: That was about the time the Japanese-Canadians were being rounded up and sent to internment camps. What sort of opposition on the part of the left was there to that?)

Well, the more intelligent people thought it was a disgraceful thing but the country was gripped by war propaganda and there didn't seem to be anything we could do about it. In my own case it is one of those things which you live through but are only vaguely aware of its importance at the time. You only learn about what all was involved, later on.

My estimation of Angus McInnis went up considerably on that issue. I'd had a violent quarrel with him on the question of conscription--which he backed to the hilt. He was a liberal really--but within his lights he was honest and stood up for the Japanese-Canadians as best he could. He had some character. Harold Winch on the other hand had no character whatsoever. Whatever was popular he'd try to get behind. Harold seemed to turn up wherever and whenever there was a possibility of getting headlines. Of course he was so drunk most of the time that he barely knew what he was doing.

There was a world of difference between Harold and his father. Ernie Winch was a politician himself, but a man of some capability and there was reason for the respect he had among many working people. Ernie went through the motions of being against the war but he too could be petty at times. In his earlier days, he probably was quite fine.

At twenty-seven I was a few years older than most of the ordinary soldiers in 1942 so that was partly how I got into a position of responsibility during the sit down strike that later developed on our base. I'd been in the habit of talking quite a bit so I just sort of slipped into the role of representing the men of our unit.

We were N.R.M.A. soldiers, the National Resource Mobilization Act personnel. The government had passed an act which mobilized us as a labour force for natural resources. We were to take training as soldiers and act as a home militia. Not a militia actually because we were conscripted for the duration to live and work on army bases. But at first there was a stipulation that we wouldn't be sent overseas unless we volunteered.

There is no denying the fact that, considering it was war time, we were well treated. We did some basic training and I didn't even go through all of that because I acted as a clerk in administration at battalion headquarters. We went through the motions of training, which was mainly to keep us out of sight. We were sent up to Terrace and over to Nanaimo but most of us were stationed around Vernon. That's where I was involved in the sit down strike.

(Q: Were you called "Zombies" at the time?)

I can tell you quickly what happened to the Zombie movement. McNaughton, the minister in charge of the armed forces, had given a commitment to Mackenzie King at the beginning of the war that he could raise all the troops needed for overseas duty in a voluntary way. But that turned out to be completely impossible. After the first years volunteers dropped right off and those who had been conscripted into the Home Army just turned a cold shoulder when they sent recruiting teams around the bases to raise volunteers to go overseas.

It was in early or mid-1944 that Mackenzie King arranged the plebiscite which would empower the federal government to send all conscripts overseas. That plebiscite gave him the political backing from everywhere except Quebec. The generals were screaming for more men. We were suddenly faced with the proposition of having to go to Europe to fight, which we had resisted and figured we'd avoided.

We were stationed in Vernon. General Pearkes was then the head of the Pacific Command. He came around making moronic speeches urging us to fight for the Empire, to fight for our country, like we were idiotic school children. People just laughed at him. Then he went to Vancouver and called in all the commanding officers of the army camps and told them that the Home Defense troops really wanted to go overseas and that they had to implement the orders transferring us into the regular army. The newspapers were called in and their stories were headlined "Zombies Really Want to be Told to go Overseas". Absolutely ridiculous.

There was a spontaneous sit down strike the very next day. A battalion refused to report for duty. I was working as company clerk and when I realized what was happening I raced over to my old company and said, "What the hell are you doing? Don't you know there's a strike on?" And during the course of the morning we more or less shut down the battalion headquarters. During lunch hour we raced around to the road company, the rifle company, and lined them up with the strike. We sat down and refused to work on anything.

They got out the Army Act and read us the passage dealing with "Refusal of duty on active service." You can be shot out of hand in that case. "Refusal of duty on non-active service" can be up to life imprisonment. Since we were in a training base this was considered to be an active area in the General War. First they read us these passages as a group and then they took each one of us aside and read it again and said, "Now, I order you to report for duty." I saw some guys shaking, white faced, but they all stood fast.

The residents of Vernon were even more scared than the other people were of those same developments in Terrace. Because there were more of us involved in Vernon than in the so-called mutiny in Terrace. We ourselves shut down our canteen and policed access to see that no liquor would get into our camp. Some of the officers got roaring drunk though. But the newspapers had it that the troops had gone on a big drunk in Vernon; that was all there was behind it according to the press.

I expected to be arrested at any moment. I and a number of us who'd been doing a lot of talking decided that "Never mind about speaking. Just stay sitting still. That's the basis of our strength."

We were split because the married men among us would suffer due to their dependents being cut off from their army allowance almost immediately. Not only that, their families were being vilified by their neighbours--their families were the ones most immediately effected by all this propaganda launched against us. So we decided that married men should go back to work. But, as it was, they managed not to get anything done at work at all.

The upshot was that we continued to sit down and present our demands, that the original conditions of our conscription be honoured. I and another man were picked to present the demands of the entire brigade at Vernon to the National Defense Headquarters. The Brigadier at Vernon attached a note to our statement of demands which said that it represented the views of over ninety percent of the men there. Some of the older officers handled the situation well--they let us talk about our demands which cooled the situation down. Our demands were that we not be sent overseas and we stated that if we went it was only because we had been forced to go.

There was nobody more despised by us than Harold Winch. The last straw was him going around telling everyone that we wanted to go and fight and should be sent overseas. After we'd resisted signing the papers to volunteer being sent overseas, after we'd resisted the strongest pressure for years. Sure I felt proud of that. Like the more politically conscious draft resisters in the United States do today about not allowing themselves to be sent to fight in Indo China. That's why I have such a feeling of allegiance with many of them.

It was all pretty well covered up during the time, apart from a few totally dishonest, lying newspaper articles. You can go back to the files and probably find some newspaper accounts. But I'm telling you, if you think you're reading anything vaguely like an account of what happened--you're not. You're only reading the press releases from General Pearkes and stories by idiots like Harold Winch.

The upshot was that we remained bound by the decision of the federal government to send us overseas and we were given a time table when we would leave. After that they gave us all a month's leave and a hundred dollars and ordered us to report to Halifax to be shipped overseas at the end of the month. That was a face saving show for the government but they must have thought that we would be very unreliable soldiers. They just about told us, "If you are willing to go overseas turn up at Halifax. If you're not then just disappear." Mainly they wanted to break us up and get us out of the camp and that was a good tactic. They used that tactic at Terrace, too.

For some reason that I couldn't explain then or now I did report at Halifax. I could have gone into hiding, like a lot of my friends did. But seeing I'd gone that far I felt a sort of commitment to the other men in the battalion. I reported at Halifax but only about a third of the brigade did. They made one battalion out of the three that had been in Vernon a month before.

Harold Winch was going around saying that we in the N.R.M.A. forces were just itching to go overseas and join the war. I had about as much respect for Harold Winch as I did for Mackenzie King. In fact, Mackenzie King was straight forward by comparison. The

majority of people in Canada were very warlike by then and overwhelmingly for conscription. It was only in Quebec that people were resisting the war en masse and that's why I've still got more respect for Quebec than any other part of Canada.

Actually, I strongly suspected that when I reported for active duty at Halifax and sent overseas that I would not survive the war. That the army would find some way to get me into the front lines in such a way that I'd be killed. I was still very much attuned to what I'd read and heard about the First World War. I had said to the Brigadier at Vernon when I was a spokesman for our deputation, "I've no doubt that you will get your own back." He guaranteed that nothing of the sort would happen but I dismissed that promise. But he actually did make good on it because when I got to Britain I was separated from the rest of the battalion and put to work in the orderly room in camp. That would have been in January 1945.

I asked the adjutant there, "What's going on?" He told me that a letter had arrived from the Brigadier in B.C. saying that when you presented the demands of the troops you expected to be discriminated against later so he was requesting that you not be sent to the front unless you volunteered. Well I wasn't going to do that.

Our battalion was sent into action within two weeks from the time we landed in Britain. And, as it turned out, they proved to be among the better soldiers at the time among the Canadian forces--to the extent, if any, that you can say any soldiers are "good". Because those who had been in action till then were worn out. A number of my friends in the battalion were wounded and some were killed within a few days of going into action. I felt bad about it but that's what happens in war--to soldiers and civilians alike. Why had we warned and talked and fought against the war so hard? To stop that! My being at the front wouldn't change that so I was glad to be in England.

May 1945, early in the month was V.E. Day. The Allied victory in Europe. The policy was to get as many of the troops remaining in England over to Europe as fast as possible and the battalion I was then with was sent to Holland. I was attached to the administrative section of the Seaforth Highlanders, one of the early volunteer regiments, and we were repatriated back to Canada soon after. I came back to Vancouver with them and marched down the streets in the middle of this unit being cheered by the local citizens--I, one of the hated and despised Zombies. It was quite ironic, especially since we Zombies had shrunk to a small number and felt we were an elite group ourselves.

(Gap)

I had left the C.C.F. because of their support of the war in 1939. A very long time before it seemed. But I didn't make a dramatic departure from the party, excoriating

everybody that I wanted to. I had just stopped paying dues and participating. But my club at Langford, where I was known, had kept my membership in the C.C.F. up to date. So in the fall of 1946 I was surprised to hear that they nominated me to be their delegate to the provincial C.C.F. convention in Vancouver.

That was where the C.C.F. voted to oppose Canadian participation in any organization like N.A.T.O. David Lewis had come to the convention to tell us all how to vote. He was the most hated figure in the C.C.F. here in B.C., like the very worst of the German Social Democrats during the First World War, worse even than Ramsey McDonald. He (Lewis) was booed off the platform. There was still some life in the C.C.F. in those days. The delegates were certainly not going to let somebody like Lewis tell them how to vote. They just laughed at him. But he managed it, he pulled it off in other provinces and federally.

That resolution (opposing Canada joining N.A.T.O.) was put forward by Dorothy Steeves, one of the better people in the C.C.F. It was considered a victory for the left. But the very next day the National Council of the C.C.F. threatened to expel Steeves and anyone else in the party who opposed Canadian membership in N.A.T.O. The National Council repudiated the stand taken by the majority of the delegates of the B.C. C.C.F. convention and Steeves backed down and withdrew her resolution.

It was about that time (early 1946) that Colin Cameron was instrumental in organizing the Socialist Fellowship. It was within the C.C.F. and was an attempt to get back to the original principles of the Regina Manifesto. The C.C.F. executive had grabbed most of the decision making power in the party and the clubs were regarded largely as implements useful in electioneering. The conventions were being rigged by the executive; contentious resolutions were sidelined and put off. The executive had the control of the floor and microphones down to a fine art. We struggled for a while but the C.C.F. had become just another opportunist party in my estimation--as Woodsworth had predicted a half dozen years before, just before his death.

The Socialist Fellowship was then dissolved by the edict of the National Council. Colin Cameron and some of the left wingers struggled on in the party for a dozen years or more but they had no influence by then. The National Executive expelled and threatened to expel anybody who continued with a socialist organization. I had proposed that we continue with the Socialist Fellowship regardless of the actions of the party Executive but most of the membership didn't want to risk being expelled from the C.C.F. This would be around 1949 or so. So I just left the party and let it be known that I didn't want to have anything more to do with the C.C.F.

For a year or two afterward I also attended Socialist Party of Canada meetings. It had been the original socialist organization in B.C. before the First World War and had

been resurrected by a few old stalwarts. But I never took it very seriously. Sectarian? Oh, they were laughable. They were not only the only true Socialist party in Canada they were the only true Socialist party in the whole world according to their lights. They didn't like me not taking them seriously, but they also didn't want to expel me.

During those years after the war, when I lived in Vancouver, I worked as a construction labourer around the city. But I've never been one to work steadily. I got by with many different jobs, casual labour, and by spending very little. I always managed to have a large amount of leisure time compared to other people.

There didn't seem to be any effective vehicle for socialist organization. I couldn't support the Communist party with all of its past and the C.C.F. had become a mainly opportunist group in my estimation. The left had been dissolved in effect. But the atomic and radiation hazards issues--that seemed a very critical concern and it came to absorb all of my free time. We were the activists of that time, like the demonstrations of the unemployed had been earlier in my life. So it seemed to me.

Campaign for the Radiation Hazards Committee

Atomic weapons and the possibility of an atomic war were the greatest concern that people as a whole had then. It was the concern where people most diverged from the scenarios which our rulers prepared for us. I often stayed up late at night studying every scrap of information that was then available about developments taking place in the atomic weapons race and their effects. I conferred with anybody who could explain things to me and read some of the first declassified material about it. I became much more interested in the Radiation Hazards Committee, which had just sprung up, than in the discussion of old diehards about the meaning of Marx and Engels and the nature of the true socialist society. That began to strike me as merely intellectual entertainment unrelated to the world that people had to live in.

There were marches and mobilizations that developed in the depths of the 1950s around the issue of nuclear war. It showed me again how "revolutionary" activity can spring up overnight from places you'd never expect. Little groups sprang up everywhere.

We, the Radiation Hazards Committee, acted mainly as a clearing house for contacts between these different little groups. But over the years even this spontaneous outpouring became bureaucratized. Yet they were very specific issues which had direct bearing on people's lives. That is, whether they or their children would continue or would be obliterated. That mobilized people.

The reaction of the Canadian government and the newspapers in attacking these little groupings was so despicable that it became one of the most educational experiences for those involved. Because people saw the big lie used against themselves. That was often more educational than formally trying to educate people about the nature of the government and its allies in general. For instance, newspaper stories about how all those opposed to nuclear war weapons were Communist dupes of some sort and that all such matters were being treated by our democratically elected government and by serious professional scientists.

The early struggle against nuclear armament was also about the last public activity that I was engaged in. It became senescent in the late 1950s and that was when I moved to South Pender Island. My friends said, "Oh you're copping out. You should stay in Vancouver, where the people are, and carry on the cause." They told me that "I should be ashamed of myself." But I never took myself that seriously, I never thought that I or any one person could make that much difference. Eve (his later wife) joined me here some time after.

My brother' broke with the C.C.F. shortly after the end of the war. He *didn't* do that as an opportunist but Instead he turned the opposite way. He turned completely reactionary, turned against the C.C.F. and socialism in all its forms. That was shortly after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Within two years or less, he turned into a completely different person, after having been what I considered a pretty principled socialist. By the end of the 1940s he was in favor of dropping an atomic bomb on Moscow. He became, I thought, mentally deranged actually.

He was then running the C.B.C. newsroom in Vancouver, the head of the radio news department, which extended from the coast here to Winnipeg. And he was doing very well. He was a good reporter and kept his prejudices largely out of it. He was responsible for getting out the ten o'clock evening news program.

His switch-over came in the course of a few months, within less than a year. He was then married to Eve (Eve Smith) and it became impossible for her to live with him. She had already left him emotionally. They lived two separate lives even though they still lived in the same house, before she took up with me. She was and still is a principled socialist and later became deeply enmeshed with the conservationist movement around here.

Some people thought that there had been some kind of rivalry, that I had taken Don's wife from him. But it wasn't like that. It was impossible for Eve to live in the same house with him. Personally, he continued to be a kindly and friendly individual. It was the ideas he had developed which were just impossible. He became hostile toward anybody who was connected with the left in any way. The best he would say about

them was that they were idiots, but that often they were really dangerous people. He became a strong supporter of the government of the day. I can't account for it. I still can't, rationally

I came here [Pender island] in my late forties and I've never regretted it. Until about three years ago I worked at casual jobs throughout the year around the island-- building houses, construction, and what not. But my arthritis started to bother me something terrible so that I often couldn't work. Recently the N.D.P. government brought in Mincome supplements. It fills the gap between when you are sixty and sixty-five. You couldn't survive on Mincome in the city but here, with the garden, where we grow most of what we need, and that house that I built and the firewood that I cut on the beach, we can get by. At least we can get by on the level I was always used to, which I suppose some would consider a poverty-stricken existence but which we feel fills our basic needs.

My own view of life, which will sound almost trite today, is that I'm absolutely sick of this respect for money and the servility toward the wealthy I see all around me. I could point to a woman on this island who has cheated and connived all her life but who has now become a millionaire through huckstering off property here; cutting the island into tiny parcels. And there are thousands like her throughout the province. But people in general regard her as some kind of great lady because she's made a lot of money. It's that basic attitude to life that is the most serious problem.

I don't evaluate people any more on their political positions--I used to but now I don't. I'm inclined to evaluate them on their actions toward other people. On how they treat other people. I don't mean in a "Goody Two Shoe" response because some individuals don't deserve anything but contempt. But I'm inclined to rate people on how they treat others as they deserve to be treated.