

MORDECAI BRIEMBERG
A Life history fragment
(1930s to 2000)

Interviewer Rolf Knight

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Compiler's note

Throughout most of his life Mort Briemberg was a radical intellectual as well as a teacher. He was also an organizer as well which presumably entails keeping disparate individuals together while focused on certain extra personal goals. His task entailed advancing views which were in some ways antithetical to the understandings of many Canadians going about their everyday lives. Mort has always been a Canadian in the deepest sense, rather than being primarily a Jew, or an intellectual, a leftist or even a male. (Assorted claimants to special insights and morality due to their ethnicity, education, gender, and other special status may stridently disagree. Fine!)

A single lifetime is not much in the historical span of things, although it is all that each of us is given. It is all which each of us can claim to know personally, and normally just a narrow spectrum of that. Life histories and memoirs are often dismissed as meaningless or as unreliable by many "great intellects" -- but this applies just as fully to their own accounts which sometimes are just hopelessly misdirected and miscued. While this story is certainly ideological it is nothing like those typically assailed by certain fashionable commentators, whose own accounts are often quite shabby.

There is a certain quality to many individuals on the left in North America. A childhood and youth in which knowledge of or reading about conditions which prevail elsewhere in the world are often more important than they are to others. Part of it this outlook may be due to a certain feeling of hopelessness about conditions which exist in one's own nation, the recurrent and ever fresh descents of so many into political reaction, the ever renewed ignorance about the world in which we find ourselves. Looking abroad may sometimes entail a degree of hope in what we feel about what other peoples elsewhere have done or are doing. This was probably one reason I myself went into anthropology in the first place.

With age there usually comes a degree of forgetting, especially in a life which has entailed so many relationships, undertakings and changes. Yet memory can still be rich and many faceted, especially when relating what one has oneself experienced. It often remains lurking in the corners of human minds, untapped so to speak but it can burst forth under the right conditions for both the teller and the listener. It is one of the few remaining pleasures which older people can partake in, reliving past experiences, sights, sounds, and feelings with sometimes extraordinary power. It is seeded away in the memory of those whose brains have not yet been seriously damaged and can sometimes be retrieved with pleasure and sometimes pain.

This is not an attempt to inculcate any particular lessons; too many accounts feel impelled to do just that. Rather take this as a complex but still partial story from which you can take away what you want. That's what readers normally do anyway (sometimes to the bitter frustration of the writer). Writers don't normally know who are going to read their books and what lessons they will take from them, if any. One might suggest an old maxim passed down by my own mother who once told me "Enjoy whatever you can whenever you can, because if you wait you're often too late." This will seem simple minded nonsense to many but people often scabble away much of their lives at doing things which seem necessary at the time but often are not.

What is the point of providing the reminiscences of a single individual; many historians dismiss them as totally unreliable, inaccurate

and often self-serving. One might say the same about their own accounts as well -- often doubtful, often largely undocumented and with citations which don't really validate what is claimed.

This is an account of a political intellectual who happens to be a Canadian and who has long been involved in unfashionable political pursuits. He is also someone who I have often found to be quietly inspiring even at times when I did not agree with him. This account was gathered near the end of a rather full life and while Mort was seriously ill. Had we both been somewhat younger it might have contained more of a joie de vie although not necessarily more veracity. It is an account of 70 years of life lived mainly in Canada during the 20th century but does not contain the usual roster of reminiscences one typically finds in some peoples memoirs. So much the better, it seems to me.

The story ranges over a fairly wide array of topics, events in Canada, those in Palestine and Israel, developments in China and America. However they are as much a part of the Canadian scene as are the childish vaporings of our prime minister and the other neo conservatives who currently dominate the government and the mass media

Initially Mort was rather hesitant about doing his own life history for reasons which are still not clear to me. Was it because he felt that his memory was failing him and that he wouldn't be able to do justice to his past understandings? Did he feel that individual lives generally just do not amount to much and are best left fallow? Or did he feel that his views had changed too much over the course of a lifetime to make much sense to or have any relevance to a current reader? I don't know.

A few of Mordecai's talks and lectures have been preserved in video format which can be found under his name on your own computer net and may be valuable additions which can serve to flesh out the present text. You are invited to view them on YouTube and on other formats. Possibly they will convey the generally quiet yet powerful quality of the speaker as well as present how he looks.

That's enough by way of an editorial introduction. Let's get on to

Mort Briemberg's account

Kinsmen, Friends and School

My father didn't talk a lot about his life in Poland. He didn't have much of an education but he learned a good deal on his own over his lifetime, I guess he must have quit any kind of formal school when he was about the ten or twelve or so, and went to work in what sounded like a lumber yard. He used to tell me about two things; one was the politics that shaped his outlook and the other was the grievances that made him hate rabbis. He used to dwell on the fact that during World War I his family left the house that they had in this small town and fled into the countryside. He didn't talk about how they survived in the countryside but he said that at the end of the war when they came back to claim their house it had been taken over by a rabbi who'd occupied it and who refused to let them return. They became homeless as a result. That coincided with my father going out to work, he was ten or eleven so that was one aspect of his formation.

I guess the people he worked with were inclined to leftist beliefs and so he took up those beliefs as his own. When he came to Canada and settled down in Edmonton he considered himself a communist or a leftist and he went to live in a Ukrainian town, village actually, in Alberta, where there were other Ukrainian leftists. He fitted in there. But he never joined any party. He never became a public advocate for those beliefs he had accepted. But he would read Yiddish newspapers that reflected those left wing politics. The *Volksblatt* was one of the newspapers that he used to subscribe to; I think the paper came from the United States at that time. But what he communicated to me, what he carried with him that was central, was that he had a lifelong hatred of rabbis. He would swear up and down that they were all frauds, thieves and things of that kind. It was ironic in a sense because one of his brothers was a rabbi and he idolized that brother, an older brother. That brother had stayed behind in Europe and didn't survive Nazism. I don't know to what extent my father's

response was his sense of loyalty to his brother or what it was but it seemed rather odd to me that he would curse up and down about rabbis but that his brother was one and whom he idolized, idealized I guess.

I remember a few limited things he told me about his early years in Poland. He spoke about the loss of the family home, he spoke about his early labour. He seemed quite happy talking about the work he did, it was largely unskilled work. He obviously wanted to leave Pinsk and emigrate, which he soon did when he was nineteen. He didn't seem reluctant to leave yet whenever he spoke about his life as a young man it was always in a very positive way. It wasn't like "I had this hard life;" it was rather "we had good conversations, we talked politics"; he seemed joyful about that. But in any case he didn't talk much about his past. It's interesting, that in his later life he wanted to go back and survey what he'd known but that was the only time that he said to me that he wanted to go back to visit his home country and see what had happened to the people that he had known. That would have been when he was in his seventies.

He talked about this often and so finally I said to him "okay let's go back, Let's go." My mother was incapacitated by then, she'd had this major stroke so she couldn't come along. We started off our voyage with a visit to the Soviet Union and travelled from the east to the west, through Belarus. And in every town or city he asked 'can he get permission to visit Pinsk,' and people in charge of travel and tourism would say to him "don't ask here, wait until you get further" so we had this journey during which we were constantly trying to get permission to go to Pinsk. Finally he met this guy who was in a tourist agency who was an older man who asked my father "why do you want to go back?" He answered "I want to see who survived, I want to see what the place looks like now." And this guy felt very sympathetic because he'd gone through the war and was one of the people who'd survived himself. So he tried to get permission for my dad to go to Pinsk, it was a promise that he would try get us permission to go there. But then he just disappeared. We finally hunted him down and asked "what happened?" He said he was sorry that he couldn't get permission for my father to go. He understood why he wanted to and he sympathized with that but that Pinsk was now a military area and

foreigners were not allowed to enter. So my dad was very disappointed, but we continued through Poland until we left to go back home.

We never did get into Pinsk then but my dad, a couple of years later, hooked up with a Ukrainian tourist group and someone who was taking them there. He was going to try again. In Minsk he asked for permission and they said to him, "yes, you can go now. but you can go only for twenty-four hours" or some limited amount of time. "You can go in a taxi and look around and come back in the time you have". So he got a cab and they drove to Pinsk and when he got there he looked around and saw some familiar places. But then he clearly panicked and got hold of the taxi driver and said "I want to get out of here, take me out, take me back." So the taxi driver did and my father then continued with the tour group. I said 'I guess you don't want to face the place, its just too full of memories.' But he said, "no, I want to go again". But he never did get there again; he died before that.

Pinsk was in the Soviet Union at that time. Pinsk is in one of those border territories; it was first in Russia and then in Poland and later in Belarus, and I don't know what it's part of now. For many years, for most of his life that I shared with him, he never talked much about his earlier life there. It was like "it's over and done with so why do we want to go back and talk about that." It seemed that for him Canada was a place where he had been welcomed, being an immigrant here, and he had lived in several communities that were agreeable to him' He worked in one store in a village outside of Edmonton. I think Myrnom was the name of the place. My dad had learned Ukrainian, he was very fluent in Ukrainian and he was very much at home with the Ukrainian people in that village. They were largely left wingers. Tim Buck used to come to give talks in the village. He was very much at ease there.

I never heard him say a resentful word about the people who lived in that village in Alberta. I think the fact that he learned the language...he always was proud of his skill with Ukrainian--made a big difference. He worked in a store in Myrnom. As I remember his life, he himself had a store , he was a shoe store salesman for a while and his store was all in Edmonton, not in rural Alberta

He didn't talk much to me at all about his earlier life. He was somebody who wanted to put behind him the war and all those tragedies so he didn't share much about what happened. There were just glimpses of it that came to me.

My mother was born in Canada and she became a school teacher. Of course in those days you didn't need all the credentials you do today. But she did have the education that was necessary for being a school teacher in a one-room school in Alberta. For me she was a very kind person, a very caring person. I was the only child. I used to have dreams that I had brothers and sisters but I was an only child. But I did want brothers and sisters. She worked very hard to keep the store going, keep it successful. My dad was a compulsive gambler. He would often be up most of the night gambling and then get up in the morning and take care of the business, but there was always fighting in the family over his gambling. My mother gave up teaching when I was born so she had a short teaching career, just a few years. She was born in 1912 so she was about two years younger than my dad

There was a complete antagonism between my father and my mother's family. I don't know what it was based upon but my father came to Alberta with the man who later became my uncle and they were put up in this boarding house, which was for Jewish immigrants who lived in Edmonton. I don't know why they became so antagonistic. My uncle also came from Pinsk and he and my father had travelled together across the country, and then they parted ways. My father got a job and my uncle later became a farmer and settled in in central Alberta near a town called Sedgewick. But there seemed to be bad blood between them from the earliest time. For example, I would go out to my uncle's farm during the summer holidays and I would work on the farm. But my father would just bad mouth this guy.

My father was not somebody who reminisced very much about his youth in Poland. Until very late in his life = he regarded Poland as a place he left and Canada as the place he oriented himself to. He didn't reminisce about the past very much at all. He may have with other people that he

socialized with, I don't know, but I wasn't party to that. He was born in 1910.

My mother was born in Edmonton in 1912 and her mother was a very strange person, I only knew her as somebody who didn't talk at all. I used to go over for a Sabbath meal; she would cook it and then would sit in her rocking chair while we ate and that was it. She lived in Edmonton and ran a boarding house where my father first lived and began to look for work. My mother's mother was abandoned by her husband when she was a young woman. I found this out quite recently. The guy that was her husband ended up murdering a man in the States and was imprisoned for murder there. She, his wife, had two young children so she was trying to get somebody to sustain the family and help look after the kids. She wrote many letters and these letters have now come to light, pleading with the governor of the penitentiary to release him. I don't think she wrote any of these letters herself; they must have been written for her because they're written in English and she spoke only Yiddish. Finally, and it wasn't too long later, he got a pardon for the murder. He claimed it was an accident, that he hadn't intended it and wasn't really responsible for killing this man. So he was released from prison with the understanding that he would go back to Canada and help my grandmother raise the kids and so on. But he never came back.

She wrote the prison warden a letter finally where she said "you should put this guy back in jail, he's a rotter and I don't want to have anything to do with him." He hadn't looked after the kids, which she expected him to do. He continued to live completely apart from his family and he worked with his older step-brother who had a horse trading business. He didn't want to have anything to do with his family and the family didn't want to have anything do with him. My mother and her sister never even went to his funeral. He was buried in Edmonton and became just a non-entity. I don't know whether she (the grandmother) had retreated into this silence in that period of life or later but she remarried a man after the war (W.W.II).

This guy who married my grandmother was a survivor of the concentration camps, he claimed. I would go over for supper at their house and he was garrulous and alive in conversing about things. He

spoke Yiddish so the little that I knew of him was spoken through Yiddish. A few years later when I was a young adult, my grandmother died. I was at Berkeley then. I remember going home to attend the funeral.

My mother had trained as a teacher and taught in a one-room schoolhouse in the countryside. She only taught for a short while and then with my birth she stopped teaching, and took up caring for me and helping my father in the store. I was born in '38.

She had a stroke when she was in her mid-forties and wasn't expected to survive. The doctors wrote her off, but in fact she did revive after a long hospitalization but when she came out of the hospital she had lost most of her ability to speak and most of her ability to work. She was quite an amazing person in terms of positive energy which she conveyed to others even with the handicap of her loss of speech. She would put parcels together and she was always mailing me things to eat when I was in Berkeley. She mobilized her energy to be as constructive as her limited abilities left her.

After she had this stroke her life changed dramatically. She had been a very active Zionist in the Jewish community and would speak at public meetings; she was quite influential in terms of my early beliefs about what Palestine and Israel were. There just weren't Palestinians as such in her repertoire. But when she had this quite catastrophic stroke she cut herself off from the Jewish community. I never knew why she did that but she felt that she had been abandoned by all those people she had worked with on Zionist projects so she didn't want to have anything to do with them any more. This would be in the 1950s. She isolated herself from them or they isolated themselves from her. In any case, she became totally concerned with me and later became concerned with my children and their upbringing

My father was never an activist but he always read left wing papers and conveyed those ideas to others. He wasn't a Zionist. My dad was a talker but he wasn't an activist. His main passions were gambling and speaking about a world view that was quite progressive. Card gambling was his main passion, which wasn't unusual for that sort of milieu. There were many people who gambled a great deal.

He arrived in Canada in 1929 and married my mother in the mid 1930s. We lived in the back of a grocery store and I had a pretty happy childhood. One of the first things I remember was the horse that used to deliver the milk and I remember my first days of schooling which were always pleasurable. I didn't feel wanting. We weren't rich but my life was quite untroubled.

My mother was keen for me to have a Jewish exposure in school, but actually I mainly resented that. It was because I was taken away from those I knew from school...we lived in a largely mixed ethnic neighborhood. The Jews had largely moved away from where we lived in the east end of the city. They'd moved upscale to the west side of Edmonton.

For me (Hebrew) schooling meant I couldn't play hockey and such, because those things were curtailed by going to Hebrew school, going across town to the Talmud Torah. The teachers there were incompetent so I didn't have the satisfaction of learning anything there. I had a basically secular schooling which I wanted to have more of, and being part of this Jewish community meant travelling across town to where I was something of an outsider among the Jewish kids that I met in that school. So I kept rebelling in a rather undirected way. I would be kicked out of class; I became the bad boy in the class. For example, I would fight with other kids. The teachers in that school were incompetent, they were not trained to be teachers. They were just task masters. They would throw chalk at us and we'd throw chalk at them. Those kinds of quarrels and fights and being kicked out of class were quite normal.

They taught in Yiddish mainly and in Hebrew, they taught mindless memorization of religion...it was a religious school so you learned Hebrew but you learned it more by rote and it was mainly biblical prayers and things of that kind. It was not at all interesting. These were classes after school and they were given in a school across town. I would travel there as a kid on my own and then come back to the east side of Edmonton. That trip was, for me quite enjoyable. Not just the travelling but also the schooling. I liked learning in my secular school, even though it wasn't

known as an academic school, but I enjoyed learning and that was my pleasure.

My parents spoke to each other in Yiddish when they didn't want me to understand what they were talking about. Otherwise, they would speak in English. My dad learned English from my mother. He had a facility with languages, he learned several languages. My mother loved teaching actually and she, I guess, transmitted to me an enthusiasm for reading, writing, and the basic skills. In my regular school most of the kids didn't go on to any learning. They quit (public) school and went to work. If they were talented and lucky; they became hockey players, some of whom became professionals. It was two different worlds that I lived in -- the Jewish world of rote learning and the public school of fresh air. I remember the kids weren't academically oriented in the regular school at all. Some of them used to take razor blades and carve their initials on the back of their hands and stuff like that. The Yiddish school seemed far less interesting and was claustrophobic. The one thing that they had was they could speak Hebrew, they could speak Yiddish and that was it. The classroom was chaotic. I remember the teacher constantly throwing chalk at the kids. He was trying to get control of the class by throwing chalk at the students.

I was kicked out of the class to sort of cool off, and then come back in again and start all over. Of course I'd then start rebelling in the same way all over again. It was mainly my mother who wanted me to go to this Hebrew school but I don't remember exactly why she wanted me to go there. She wanted me to get a Jewish education, I guess, of some kind. My family wasn't so full of rituals but they wanted me to be exposed to Jewish culture, I think. My mother had this aspiration to have me exposed to some Hebrew because she was a Zionist. My father didn't really object to that as I recollect. So I continued traipsing across town until my bar mitzvah when I was thirteen and after that I didn't want to be involved Hebrew schooling anymore so I began to retreat from all that.

I didn't have any best friend or best friends; my memory is that I lived in two worlds. After school I would go to the Jewish school; I had people there who I knew of course but I can't qualify them as friends

because I wasn't with them that much. They would go to other schools during the day and most of their relationships would have been established with those other school kids. In the regular school with the non-Jewish kids I had friends but I didn't have best friends there because I didn't really socialize with them or hang out with them enough to allow me to have more intimate experiences with them. So I lived a kind of split life. In between the two schools I did errands for my dad and mom in the store and that pretty well filled my time. On a Saturday I would go to the Jewish school for part of the day and then my treat was to buy an éclair or something like that and go to a movie downtown. But I usually didn't go to the movies with other kids, I went alone. I'd come back to the east side of the town and go to the cinema that was there. I just went to the cinema and that was my friend.

I didn't think about the world of course. My world was just the very narrow space between school and the Talmud Torah, the Saturday movie and that was it. They were cowboy movies mainly, as I remember. Roy Rogers and Gene Autry.

I began to have what one might call political ideas when I was thirteen, the bar mitzvah period, when I began to think more critically about the world. I would read things that my mother had given me, books, aside from the school texts, Zionist propaganda largely. I can't remember the names of them, but I was romantically attached to Zionism. It was only a few years later that I began to question the stories she gave me. She then faded away into her illness, her stroke made her become quite passive in relation to her previous commitments. At the beginning she lost all speech and she never fully regained it and after that had a very limited vocabulary. She became house bound and no longer the dynamic person she had been in my earlier remembrance. She was kindly toward me but she was often angry with her husband.

On the positive side I enjoyed school, I was eager to get to school, I was enthusiastic about it. I probably enjoyed the fact that I did well and I was recognized in the school where a lot of the kids didn't do well and didn't expect to do well. I stood out and I found that rewarding. Which

was different from the Hebrew school which I attended but resented and purposely caused trouble in or acted in ways that I didn't at public school.

Hebrew was taught as a language that was for purposes of prayer; you would memorize phrases and words but I never learned to speak it. In contrast Yiddish, which my mother and father spoke, was a live language but I didn't learn it either, I didn't become fluent in any way.

I enjoyed the fact that I was not a good athlete. I'd be on a baseball team, and they'd say to me "just lob it to us and we'll try and break the window of the school." I don't know if they ever did that but that was a role I enjoyed fulfilling. Instead of just winding up and pitching the ball in the way you'd try and get a strike-out I'd just lob it, float it by somebody who was a good batter who would try and drive it as far as he could and through the window of the school. They never succeeded; the school was just too far away.

Kids would treat me like, "okay he's a useless batter but he can maybe do this one thing that would allow us to succeed in breaking a window." They humored me but they didn't make fun of me about my weaknesses in sports. Sport was the main thing for most of the kids, that was their sense of accomplishment, maybe to be able to get on a professional hockey team or something of that kind. There were two or three who did; I remember Johnny Busak who became successful as a professional athlete.

Not in the day school, not in the regular classes, but I used to get into fights with kids in the Jewish school over whatever, it didn't matter what. I remember banging kids heads against the wall. That was my way to get out of class or just vent my resentment. I don't know if there was a class difference between us. I guess there was. These were wealthier kids from the better neighborhoods in the Hebrew school. All my acting out, my resentment, was in the Hebrew school. I was resentful about having to go to that school instead of being able to play sports with kids in my public school.

Anyway, how I broke from that religious school was like this. I remember an occasion of being at a religious service where the ritual is that everyone stands up at the end of the prayer when the rabbi blows the

ram's horn. This guy stood up with the rest of us and then he fell down on the ground. He was carried out of the service, which still had a few minutes to go before the end, but they continued with the praying. When I left the synagogue I saw the guy on the ground, he was dead; he'd had a stroke or heart attack or something. I don't know if this was something that I imagined later or it actually happened at that time, I said to myself "this is serious business, it's a life and death matter, so you're either in it and accept it or you get out of it." And I got out of it. You either take the religion seriously, take the prayers seriously, or get the hell out of it and have nothing to do with it. I chose to get the hell out. So I didn't continue going to synagogue and saying prayers. Again, I don't know whether it was something I constructed in my mind later or it was something that actually happened but I had this flash of insight at this guy's death, the two have sort of merged together in my mind. I said to myself "stop this bullshit; it's nonsense and don't have anything to do with it; just go on and live your life."

It would have been shortly after my bar mitzvah when I was thirteen. That's how I recollect it and I stopped going to synagogue. That was sort of my cutting my links with the Jewish community. I still had some contacts but they weren't really meaningful ones for me.

Strangely my parents really didn't care much by then. It's surprising. My mother shortly after that had her stroke. My dad was resentful towards rabbis as frauds and charlatans, so they didn't make any serious objection to my leaving that I can recall.

People used to speak to me, not while I was well behaved in Hebrew school. They recognized me as somebody that they should try and convince to be a loyal member of the synagogue. They would sometimes speak to me saying "you know, you could be a better student, you've got all this ability, blah blah blah." They'd engage me in discussion and argument and then they moved from pleading to getting angry about where my thinking was going and then treated me as a traitor to the religion.

I began to question Zionism, to question religion was easier to reject. I had gone from going through the motions of believing to no

longer playing that game or seeing it as worth faking, which a lot of people do in religion. They fake conviction.

In the high school years I was no longer going to Hebrew school. In school I was focused on success in exams, success in getting into university. Many Jewish kids came from separate schools, they'd entered high school and were studious. I remember having a friendship with the one person that I do remember, Ron Berkov. I had a friendship with him which continued through my undergraduate years but he may have been the only person.

I enjoyed high school, I attended regularly and I guess I got my taste for public speaking in some of those classes. When I got free of the Hebrew school I really enjoyed attending classes. They didn't seem vacuous to me. I enjoyed drama, I enjoyed poetry. I didn't enjoy studying languages. I wasn't terribly good at them so I tried to get out of going to those classes, but mainly I was enthusiastic and wanted to succeed.

God to me was...I don't think I ever thought of it. I saw religion as a series of rituals that you could learn or not learn. That's where I made that decision to get out of this religion. It wasn't a very difficult decision to make, it wasn't something that I felt at any point ambivalent about. Religion just was not meaningful at all. My dad always made fun of people who came to convert him because he thought "why do I need this?" Seventh Day Adventists would sometimes come to the grocery store trying to convince my dad to go to one of their services because their doctrine was close to being Jewish, they said. I found it odd but they were pitching it that way, 'that it's a continuation of Judaism'. He used to just joke with them. He liked a good discussion or argument, but he never took them seriously. He didn't throw people out of the store but there was one experience I remember as a child. There were very few blacks in Edmonton at that time; mainly the odd person who worked on the railroad. A guy came into the grocery store who was black and I'd not seen a black guy before. I said to my mother "why is his face so dirty?" and my mother smacked me in the face and told me to shut up. She explained to me afterward, she was dealing with her embarrassment, she said this guy's face was black and that's his color, and he's as good as you

and anybody else. I must have been about eight years old and that was her lesson for me. She was trying to teach me to treat the person as any other ordinary human being.

I had very little contact with anything that could be termed "anti-Semitic". I remember when I was in college I had a job shoveling dirt, and this Ukrainian guy, a truck driver, who was delivering a load started using anti-Semitic language. I said to him I'm not going to take that and if you're going to continue with this racism, we'll just have a fight and settle it. He was shocked and he said ' I don't hate you or anybody'...he just seemed taken aback by my accusation that he was being racist. About two weeks later he came by again with some more dirt and he said to me, "I'm getting married and I want you to be my best man at the wedding." I was flabbergasted, he was someone I didn't know and I said "no, I can't do that." I made up some excuse but I've felt guilt right up to this time that I'd missed a chance to reach out to him since he had reached out to me and find some way to celebrate his wedding with him. Those are things that happen, you only have it once to get it right and I didn't get it right and I regretted that.

There were a lot of people who treated Ukrainians in a bigoted or racist way. I guess I'd learned from my father, because he'd worked in this Ukrainian community and learned to speak Ukrainian and seemed to be very positive about Ukrainians. These were progressive Ukrainians, communists of some kind or other and I felt guilty because here were people who were persecuted or demeaned as Ukrainians. I know they come in all flavors...there are some who are progressive and some who are fascist but it was before I had that sense of the variety of it. My father had always loved speaking Ukrainian, loved being friendly with people who were Ukrainians.

I remember my mother wanted me to be a lawyer, and my dad just wanted me to do well in school. I didn't have any goals other than to get good marks and to graduate and to go on to some kind of profession, but which one I had no idea.

I was never too good at chemistry or the pure sciences or mathematics. Liz studied nuclear physics, and our grandson, (our

daughter) Hannah's son, is studying physics and is following in the scientific vein. He's at McGill now. But my concentration was on social matters.

I didn't see much of my father because he was preoccupied with his grocery store or when he wasn't he was gambling. That was usually an all night affair, or at least until the middle of the night. So I went to school and came home. I would deliver groceries as part of my contribution to the family. My dad would have a quick lunch and that would be it, he'd be off to work.

As I remember he sold his grocery store when I was starting high school, he only had it for a short period. It was in the same area of the city where we lived. He went broke in a shoe business so he went back to a grocery store. We moved into a house in the neighborhood, which he bought. My father continued his occupations which were buying and selling produce for the store and gambling. He spent a lot of time gambling which was a source of conflict with my mother and the basis of many quarrels.

In the Broader World

I was eighteen when I went to the University of Alberta and I really enjoyed it. I didn't undertake any responsibilities in the store and I just concentrated on school. I took some courses in economics but mainly was interested in political science. Not that it was very scientific but I had a favorite teacher in political science, although I can't recall his name now.

I never went into the sciences, I recognized that I wasn't very adept at solving either mathematical problems or drafting or skills that were necessary parts of a science training. So from the beginning I had gone into courses which were based on social or philosophical subjects. There was this one teacher who I was very close to and who encouraged me. I was also very challenged because as you go on in university you find people who have a variety of backgrounds and skills that they have honed, more than I had. I remember having a teacher who I admired in the sense of his rigor and demands and in terms of his depth of learning. I

found his courses in political science very challenging, not just smooth sailing. So I enjoyed that even though I didn't share of his background; he was quite a conservative person in his outlook. But I enjoyed the demands he placed on me and the exposure that gave me a bit more depth and sophistication of learning. The other activity that I got into and enjoyed was debating. We were usually debating issues that were current political questions or just general philosophic questions. I enjoyed that kind of learning. The people who were on the debating team were people like Joe Clark, Lou Hyndman who also became a political activist and became a lawyer and government official after he graduated. I didn't pay much attention to the kind of outlook that these people represented, but I enjoyed trying to play with the ideas. I enjoyed that and I enjoyed history and those topics and did well. That's how I got to go to Oxford. I competed and was successful as well. I excelled at it.

As a character Clark was a rather pompous person and I didn't take him very seriously, but that was neither here nor there in terms of learning the skills of debating. I couldn't now for the life of me remember any details or the kind of stance he took on different questions.

To the extent that I was serious about questions, they were less with provincial politics than they were with international politics, which I was interested in and took more seriously. Provincial politics rarely came up in the debating contests that we had anyway.

University in general? I felt that there was a new world that was opening up. The questions that came up for discussion were stimulating to me, they were new and I was really engaged in them. But I can't say that I now remember what those subjects were and what they focused on.

I was attracted to someone who I guess you could call a girlfriend, except that she was married so there was always a hidden relationship there. She was at the university as well but she was about ten years older than I was.

I don't think I formulated a sense of loyalty or identity with any particular viewpoint, though I would have generally considered myself on the progressive side of questions but not in a firm way. I had not self consciously committed myself to one or another philosophy or outlook.

My father was very proud of me being at university. He and my mother felt I would be a lawyer like Clarence Darrow. That would have been their dream come true. I didn't find myself attracted to the law profession or wanting to be a prominent lawyer, whether a peoples' lawyer or in that kind of role. But my parents thought that would be a great career, a great accomplishment to be a Clarence Darrow.

When I graduated I had a Rhodes Scholarship and that took me to England where I had a whole other group of people that I became friends with. I never returned to Alberta so I just treated that as part of my past and not something that I tried to sustain. I occasionally saw some of them when I came back to Edmonton on holidays but those weren't really close friends.

The Rhodes scholarship is a scholarship that was given one in each province, that's how it is allocated. I was encouraged by a teacher, I was encouraged by people in the school to apply for that so I took a shot at it. There were three or four people that in the end were being considered for that scholarship and I was the winner of that award. I took it feeling a bit nervous, a little bit inadequate because I was leaving the country for the first time, I was going abroad, I was going to a place that I didn't know very much about, to be with students that were selected for scholarships, so I felt a certain inadequacy.

You're not competing with all other university students, it's just with the people in Alberta, and others are competing with people from their own province. I felt rather proud that I was successful in getting that. Before I got that scholarship, I went abroad on a scholarship for the World University Service. They selected students from across Canada, and I went to Yugoslavia. For me it was a very exciting opportunity because I got to have a sense of what was happening in a country that seemed to be building socialism and that attracted me. This was, I think, about 1959. Tito was still alive and active at that time. We travelled through various parts of the then-unified Yugoslavia. I was there about a month. It was very exciting; I didn't have the language so I couldn't speak any of the spectrum of languages in that part of the world but we had people who acted as translators. I felt very excited about the places that we visited. It

was all new for me and a new experience. I remember a number of places but not one that stands out. It was a chance to meet students and workers and various areas of the country. We flew across to England and then on to Yugoslavia. It was an all- Canadian-based group made up of university students from across the country.

Looking back it was as though I'd broken the ice in my mind to be able to travel to a foreign country and to enjoy it and to appreciate the variety of people one met. It gave me a boost in terms of self-confidence relationship to a Rhodes scholarship.

In the Rhodes scholarship you get accepted in one or another college at Oxford, so I didn't choose a college to go to, I just got assigned to one or another. I guess they see all their colleges as equal in the sense of training and education.

Oxford itself is a little island within the city of Oxford. It has fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth century buildings and you live in that world. The city of Oxford is a different world, the world of the colleges in the university is quite separate from the town. We would have people who were our servants, literally servants, to help you. They didn't help you orient yourself to the college but they would polish your shoes, they would do all kinds of demeaning things like that. They would take care of lighting the fire in your room. It was something that seemed ridiculous to me at the time and I tried to minimize my relationship with this servant as much as I could; they were a "batman" that was the term used, the same as a servant in the British military.

They have a tutorial system of teaching at Oxford so you have a one-on-one contact with a teacher. I had one Isaiah Berlin as my tutor. The other part is you can study when you want, you prepare yourself for your final exam. You can neglect your courses and do different things when you want, belong to different clubs and then cram for your final exams at the end of three years. Because I already had a degree I studied for a postgraduate degree. But I didn't complete it, I had changed my sense of direction and I became involved with the courses relating to sociology.

I felt very strange. There were a whole series of other people that I didn't know at all, other students. They came from an elite education

system with a high level of learning, certainly much higher than I got at the University of Alberta, and they seemed to me to be very accomplished, sophisticated in terms of what they knew and how they expressed themselves. I felt really quite out of it. Intimidated. sort of I made some friends that were very helpful in overcoming that sense that I was an ignoramus or not capable of the work there. Most of them had gone through what was called public school, which means a private elite education, and they reassured me of my capacities and so on. That was a transition which I had to make. There were people like Liz and others, but mainly men, that were at the college. At that time men were in separate colleges from women, which is not the case anymore. It took them quite some time to overcome that.

Now, when I've gone back to Oxford I've seen that women are in the same college as men, but at that time women were in separate colleges. There were all these rules about getting to bed at given times; you had gatekeepers, you had rooms which you had to be in by a certain time otherwise you were trying to climb over a fence which was quite tricky actually, because they were steel bars with steel spear tips. But gradually I gained confidence in this strange world which was totally unlike any campus in Canada, which wouldn't have been segregated by sex, you wouldn't have had rules about being in by a certain time and you wouldn't have to find ways around all the barriers to where you stayed, and so on.

The first year in the college I would eat the terrible food they served, food that was served at a certain time. It was a bit like the army food, just tossed at you. If you were part of the favored elite, which I wasn't, you could sometimes eat at the head table, which had different food. This was where the teachers would have their meals. They would eat their meals at the same time you would but you would be on the lower table, they would be on the high table. That sort of petty hierarchy.

Usually the first year we would eat in the college. We would eat the stuff that was prepared by the cooks in the college. In the second year you more often ate outside the college and you could live in digs in places that you could rent from some old lady who prepared meals for you. It was a

little bit different fare and you were a little bit more independent, but in the first year everybody pretty well ate in the college. The name of my college was Corpus Christi, Body of Christ. The people studying there were mainly studying classics but you could study any subject.

Oxford really didn't have normal courses. You were tutored on a one-on-one basis but sometimes there were larger classes. I know Liz was in a class where she was studying atomic physics and you had lectures by an instructor. She said the class dwindled in size, starting with about two hundred to about ten or twenty people. The skills of teaching weren't always there among our instructors. People were brilliant but not always brilliant teachers. So students dwindled away and if that class wasn't compulsory in preparation for final exams students just said "to hell with this, I'm not going to stick it out." But most students had tutorials. I had a tutorial with Sir Isaiah Berlin, who was a very prestigious professor then. He would have considered himself a small-l liberal.

Usually the teachers were from what I would consider an upper class background although sometimes they were people who had gone to college, done very well at Oxford and stayed on as teachers. They had a variety of political views. It was a system, I guess, of training people who were very bright but not necessarily of one political outlook, who the administration hoped to wean them from radical ideas. This was during the late 1950s, it was a time of great upheaval in colleges and in everything else that existed in Britain. You had socialists and communists in student groups. The country was embroiled in mass marches, the protest movement was very strong. People weren't all of one view by any means.

Mort was active in the movement against nuclear weapons. He was involved in a sit-down in Trafalgar Square, London in 1961 following that year's march from Aldermaston, a weapons base in England. That spring Mort went with other peace activists to Poland for a Peace conference with the eastern European nations.

Getting back to Oxford, I told Isaiah Berlin, my tutor, about a year before I completed my time there that I had changed my interest and that I was going to study sociology. He tried to dissuade me, saying it was a

very murky discipline, it's not very rigorous, there's a lot of gobbledygook in it...all of which he was right about, of course.

Political science which I'd been studying at least had a longer history as an academic discipline. Nonetheless he said if I wanted to shift then I'll give you a reference so go ahead. He didn't think it was worth while, he didn't think it was a wise decision, but he quite accepted it. He shared his ideas but he didn't try to impose them. So I decided I would go ahead and change my discipline. I got a scholarship to Berkeley and I followed that path.

My social life at Oxford? I have friends that I've kept from those times. And I fell in love with Liz. I'm sure she wanted to stay in England and continue her work...she had changed her field of study from nuclear physics to social work, which was quite a change. She didn't get her social work degree at Oxford, she got it at the London School of Economics. So she stayed there, and I went off to Berkeley. It was in 1961 or 62, when I went off to Berkeley, which some would say was in turmoil but which I thought was great. It wasn't in turmoil, at least it didn't seem so to me. It was true classes were sometimes disrupted, the Viet Nam war was central to peoples' protests around Berkeley. I had as teachers people like Reinhart Bendix and Franz Schurman. He was a scholar in the Chinese language and social structure. So I came together with people who were accomplished scholars but some of whom were also very active in the anti-war movement and they became quite influential on the way I thought of the world.

I was there as a postgraduate student, not as a lecturer though I worked as a teaching assistant and taught students in sociology, which was my main field. People like Bendix were too conservative to be part of the anti-war movement but others like Sherman were active in it and in the teach-ins.

Liz came over and she lived with me for a year and then she went back to England. She came back together with me just before I finished my time at Berkeley and lived with me until we got married just before the time I was going to teach at SFU. For me Berkeley was tremendously influential because it was a time of the teach-ins and the spirit of trying to

stop a murderous, imperialist war and the different kinds of initiatives that we took. It was a little bit like the Aldermaston march period. It was a time of great optimism, it was a time of enthusiasm, it was a time when the world seemed able to be reshaped a bit.

It was the attitude of the faculty and students around us, about American adventures abroad and in the immediate backyard of the university. It was a time of fragmentation of the campus, where some people kept pushing for the study of traditional scholarship while others began to commit themselves to the idea of a new world with new tasks. People divided up. I remember a friend of mine when we surrounded a cop car that had arrested some of the people protesting against the war. He jumped up onto the roof of the car and one professor named Seymour Lipset, shouted out "you'll break the roof of the car," and this friend of mine shouted back at him, "you're a fucking genius, Lipset" in a sarcastic voice. I remember that very vividly. People like Lipset took one side of the debate and others took the other.

It was a turning point, I think people saw themselves as crossing a river, so to speak, of a decision of which side are you on. There's a song, 'Harlan County', which asks "which side are you on, boys, which side are you on." I saw and felt a new series of choices would open up to people, which to me was very welcome.

I really don't know how much these things drew in university students. It seemed to me that there were the same things happening at Columbia university, at Berkeley and in other places so it wasn't that any single place became the magnet that drew peoples' loyalties.

There were people like Malcolm X who came on to campus and explained their experience, their views, their demands. They weren't enrolled on campus but they saw it as a fruitful venue for spreading their views, their grievances and so forth.

Did the Black civil rights struggle blend with the anti Viet Nam war movement? Well some students had gone to the south from Berkeley and were active in the civil rights movement there, who came back to the campus, and actually that was the basis for the first sit ins, the first protest in Berkeley. When I first came to Berkeley the main thrust was to

proselytize the students on the necessity of aiding and assisting the civil rights movement. That issue sort of got lost in the later sit ins, why there was this protest to demand democratic rights; the civil rights movement. But that was the first issue that really ignited on the campus.

Sproul Hall was the administrative building at Berkeley and as the protests grew, that building was occupied by protesters. Then the police came in and threw people down the stone steps. It was ignited by the passion for ending the racism of that society and the people who were really central in carrying that struggle forward were fighting racism and supporting the black students of the southern United States.

In Berkeley I took courses in sociology but I also got very interested in Chinese studies and Chinese language so I studied the language and the history of China as well. However, what I learned of the Chinese language I've since lost, it was very difficult for me to retain. I did get a reading knowledge of it but that's disappeared now.

Did I have any feelings that America was about to change in any substantial way at that time? Well I thought we might be able to stop the Viet Nam war, that war went on much longer than I or anyone thought it would. But I was optimistic about things, simply because the energy and activism of the popular forces was really very intense and created a lot of optimism in everybody who was part of those activities. You had the Black power movement, you had the anti-war movement, you had the emergence of the women's movement; all those things were very dynamic, very important, and they took the forefront of what people did once they were energized. So I felt quite optimistic. The university changed from being a center of learning to a becoming, at least partly, a center of political agitation. It all had a political dynamic. It was heartening I would say. It was one of the most optimistic periods in the nation's history.

The working class wasn't mobilized, that's for sure. There were demonstrations where we actually had pro war actions by workers. Young people were taking leadership roles, the whole civil rights movement was really a youth-driven rebellion. It was a dynamic force. I was teaching as a teaching assistant, one who didn't have responsibility to

shape courses or shape the subject matter except in a minor way. The structure of the university didn't change in that regard but you got new people who became a new class of leaders.

The central experience was mainly around the anti-war movement. The teach-ins, we felt, set a new pattern of possibilities of what learning was about. The curriculum took on a new direction. In the teach-ins it almost seemed that we were shaping our curriculum ourselves. The main thrust was directed toward ending a war and so our teachings didn't follow the trajectory of traditional courses.

During that time I was mainly involved with university students at California. There were older and middle aged people involved in the marches and demonstrations but I think the dynamic, the speakers at them, the results of them were evaluated largely from the vantage point of young people. I can only say that it seemed to me, in retrospect, that age was a key factor, if there were older people involved they were welcomed but they did not play a leading role in what was happening.

When did I begin to take a left wing view of the world? My orientation was already left wing before I was in Britain. I didn't initially join any particular political party, I didn't commit myself to a particular political discipline. As a dissenter one would take one's leadership from an organized group that had discussed the issues and set down some direction, or line or something of that kind. But I wasn't involved in any political organization until sometime after I was fired from SFU. I joined an organization that had been started by people around Charles Gagnon and the FLQ (Federation of Quebec Liberation). It was an effort to create a political movement here in Canada and was organized around rigorous agitation and struggle. In Struggle was the organization which emerged around trying to develop a disciplined outlook and a debate to create a party that was a workers' party. As for the Communist Party in the US or in Canada, we considered it as an organization that had exhausted its revolutionary outlook and was very tame and would never really develop a revolutionary potential. We saw it always stopped far short of an effort to transform the society. I didn't find that the Communist party was in any way really out to change the world and that was true in its actions in

Canada and in its leadership globally. It usually tried to curtail and limit the struggle of people. I still feel that is very much the case.

The Storm Center on Top of Burnaby Mountain

How I came back to Canada was that I was recruited for a teaching job at Simon Fraser University. At that point the department was organized very much top down and I was recruited by Tom Bottomore, the chairman of the Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology department. I think there was a mutual misunderstanding of who he was and who we were. I think he recruited specifically young people who had more dynamic theoretical ideas about the field of sociology. He saw that sociology as taught in American universities was rather sterile. And we thought he was like us, very much like our outlook towards sociology as a discipline and of our place in the world. We were more conventional than he was and he was far more status quo than we were. He didn't want to do anything to shake up the university and we did.

That kind of misreading of who he was and what we were took a little while to become clear. By "we" I mean the people in the PSA department at SFU. I think that's why he left the university here and returned to England, because he found himself squeezed between the competing objectives, the different visions of how to teach and what to teach. I remember speaking with him about why he was interested in Marx. It was a total accident on his part. He'd gone to France to continue his postgraduate studies and by accident he became interested in Marx. He became not a Marxist in that it was to him not a vision of a different way to see the world but was simply a different way to talk about the world. His voyage to explore Marxism was simply an academic curiosity. I heard someone describe him as a Marxiologist. So we came into a collision over that.

I'm not sure how he knew of me at the University of California. I think that he was simply looking for people who were traditional sociologists but with a little bit more of a critical edge. He was looking for people to stock his department who were unconventional in that they were exploring different viewpoints. But he didn't see us as people who

really took Marxism seriously. SFU at that time was being staffed in a rapid process of getting things going but wanting them to proceed in a fairly traditional way.

I didn't know Vancouver at all. I knew Berkeley much better but I thought that if I stuck with the university in California I would end up imprisoned, I would go beyond the pale of the acceptable. I didn't want that or to be deported. So I decided to move up here and do my political work in Canada and take my lumps here as they developed. Spread the good word to the north.

The time seemed to pass so quickly. I lived a little bit in the world of Berkeley even though I was here. I tried to consider what was happening in the States and see it as something that would help shape my ideas of how to teach.

I adopted the idea that I wanted students to be independent in terms of their thinking. I remember choosing a textbook for them to use as a basic text. It was a book that I didn't agree with by Ralf Dahrendorf, I can't remember the title now. He was a British academic in sociology. My style in teaching was to say "okay, you use this text". I thought it was something that would be appealing to many students, and my role would be as a critic and we would engage in discussions of the ideas put forward. I would largely be a critic and students would learn to reconsider something that they had initially been attracted to. It wasn't a textbook that I was trying to lead them to accept. It was a text that they had to approach more critically than they had first thought. I wanted to debate that text and I wanted my students to debate it. This was an introductory course in sociology.

A fair number of my students had been in the work force, had been out of the university and had come back. That was something that SFU specifically encouraged. These students had finished their pre-university work and were or had been out in the work force but were given a chance now to come back to university. They were in some ways more mature than many students of their age group. That made it a lot more exciting because they had ideas of their own, they could begin to formulate some interpretations of the world without being completely blind, they could

be more independent in the formulation of their thoughts than other students. That was for me an exciting dynamic.

The first president of the university was a meteorologist. I can't recollect his name. Oh yeah, Patrick McTaggart-Cowan. He stayed only one year or so and became a casualty of the conflict between different factions in the university and resigned. Then Ken Strand became the president. He became president after I came here.

There was a group of people in PSA who had come with Bottomore who were British trained and bright. That was one grouping of people. Then there were the people, some who were from Berkeley at that time-- John Leggett and a couple of others who were wanting to carry forward the style of debate and so forth that was characterized by those struggles that had gone on at Berkeley.

Louis Feldhammer and Jerry Sperling were part of that grouping of people who had been trained in Canada and who were fairly independent minded and wanted a curriculum for their students that was quite radical in a general way. I worked with people but I felt that they were not too serious about their world view. I had a kind of uneven friendship with them. Depending on who he was talking to, Louis Feldhammer could be extremely radical but I had trouble taking him seriously.

Kathleen Aberle, I think, was different from all us in the sense that she was very serious about her scholarship and research. She got dragged along by us, the younger people but she had an amazing determination to stick with what she had found in our outlook even though she may have had some hesitancy about it. She was the one person in our department who was known and respected in the world and she was the one person that the administration, in the end, tried to draw away and to defect from us. But she flatly refused. I think this was the third time she'd been fired in the United States, so for her it was a bigger sacrifice than it was for us.

When Bottomore left the PSA chairmanship it became something of an open field. There was also a group of people like Somjee who was a former colonial official in Africa who was a very conservative person from India. They hated our guts but they didn't have the conviction to try and reform or tame our outlook. I soon became head of the department, an

unusual situation because I didn't have the credentials to be the head. I was voted into that position by the people who were the more active in the department and I accepted that role and enjoyed it. That was only my third year at SFU.

With a few exceptions, most faculty of the university didn't carry on a fight to defend us. They didn't actually do things to screw us, but they became passive in terms of the struggles against Strand. That was one part. We had student support and largely carried on the effort to remain at SFU and keep alive our vision. While our firing was taken up by many other people in the universities across Canada, they weren't any more successful than we were with the SFU administration.

The mass firings at SFU took a period of time. Strand thought that he could get rid of us in a way that looked as though it was a fair process, but he wasn't able to play that masquerade. In the end, of course, they simply fired us all, although they went through a process of having hearings. The ironic thing that very few people grasped was that Strand was defeated in all his efforts to say we didn't carry out our teaching jobs, etc. and therefore they should fire us all. Unanimously a board of three people, one appointed by us, one appointed by the administration and one agreed upon by a so-called independent third party, said we shouldn't be fired. The administration then had the choice of what they would do--would they defy that decision and take a longer, slower process of getting rid of us, or would they just say "screw it you're fired." That was what they chose to do and in a sense it was a defeat and an embarrassment for the administration. They got what they wanted in the sense that they got rid of us but they didn't get what they wanted in terms of getting a decision which would look legitimate but really wasn't. We were fired in a way that meant we had to leave and were now faced with - are we going to look for jobs elsewhere or are we going to stay and build an alternative vision. I stayed, and everyone else went off.

I think Bottomore left on his own before we went on strike. He decided that the kind of chaos, as he saw it, and the environment in this new university was just going to continue to create chaos. He had another job available to him in England. I don't think it was a difficult choice for

him although I think he felt that he was giving up a chance to shape a university more to his liking. But the real choice was to go rather than to hope for it happening here. I've never chosen to investigate Strand's career but he was a hatchet man for the established order. He stuck with the job. He welcomed it and he served several years as president until the administration felt that the university had re-established a pattern that was part of an established order. He stayed around although I think he was certainly disappointed that it was in a way in which he lost face at the university. He held the position but it didn't lead to further advances. Advances could have been to the provincial government in BC, could have been to another university.

I enjoyed teaching a great deal. I think I was a good teacher in the sense that students were eager to come to class, and to read literature that I suggested. I certainly wanted to continue in a teaching role, not so much to be a chair of a department, but really to be a teacher. But that period was very short, probably about a year and a half in all.

I think most of my students enjoyed their classes with me. Martin Loney and Chris Huxley. They both went on to become university professors. They would have been here a year or two before I arrived in '67, I guess.

I was head of the department for a very short period of time, about two years. Then the whole department was put into "receivership" and was closed down. I don't think anything was settled enough that one could say "here's a stable period and in that period we tried to do x, y, and z" because no sooner than we set a course then it was all shut down. We didn't have time to shape new courses or anything of that kind. I was elected head of the department but that lasted next to no time, probably not more than a year.

I'd have to look back to see if we had any time to really pay attention to what we would do with our department now that we had the chance to provide some new direction; I don't think there was much time at all to consider that. One after the other we were all let go.

Bettison was an anthropologist who was quite conservative and he would have unending critiques to make on everything. He left and went

to Lethbridge I think and continued to teach there. Somjee stayed at SFU for a short while then he left, too. I guess it took about seven months and then I was formally fired by the administration.

As for our graduate students, Chris Huxley went to Ontario, finished up his education there and got a position at the University of Trent. I kept in contact with him for a number of years but he completely settled into the life of Trent University. I guess he must be retired now.

Huxley and Loney both had been quite active in mobilizing high school students in Vancouver. That was before the beginning of the struggle around the university. That finished and they went on to other things, it didn't go on too long. Bottomore defended them against persecution by the board of governors at SFU, who couldn't stand loose canons going around and encouraging students to speak their mind and write their poems or in some way learn to fly for themselves. It was the last progressive stand he took in defense of students. Mike, he was a Brit, and he went back to England and got a job teaching at one of the universities there. Michael, I can't remember his name, he wasn't particularly prominent but he was a serious student.

I don't have much to say on my years at SFU. I should have lots to say but I've just lost whole periods of my memory. I keep thinking it's going to come back but it hasn't.

SFU entailed a few very lively years that were full of challenges and losses. I came to SFU under a complete mutual misunderstanding, between my own and Bottomore's view of what was expected. Bottomore was the chair of the department of political science, sociology, and anthropology. He'd been recruited from Great Britain, and I looked forward to working with him. But I realized fairly soon that his understanding and mine didn't mesh. I understood him as somebody who had a genuine interest in Marxism and a Marxist analysis of the world and he understood me as being simply someone who was rejecting the kind of Talcott Parsons and other establishment sociologists' views of the world. He didn't understand that my commitment was toward a more activist-oriented approach which flowed from the dissent of my time at Berkeley. I understood him as being interested in Marxism but he was very far from

that. He told me later that he'd gone to study Durkheim as a student but somehow was directed into a study of Marx, but that wasn't really his passion or focus. He was somebody who simply made a career of being a specialist on the writings of Marx and he misunderstood me as being just an ordinary academic and that I wouldn't be involved in activism. He soon realized that there was a mismatch between my interests and his. He felt he neither had a place at SFU and that activism was something that transgressed his elementary dedication to teaching -- that students should be involved in the traditional kinds of research.

In the end it cost people who supported us their jobs. SFU was soon cleansing itself of activism and President Strand who took over less than one year after I was chairman, was an arch conservative. He wanted to suppress us and Bottomore felt he was in a squeeze between us and these neo-cons, I guess you'd call them. Strand played the role of the man who was going to clean out all the radicalism that was there and in the end he succeeded in getting us all fired. He tried to do it in a way that it would look academically legitimate; holding that we had transgressed fundamental guidelines, but in the end he found that having gone through the process of the university hearings--it was a quite lengthy--and the three-person board of arbitrators all recommended that we *not* be fired. That was a real blow to him and I think a blow to his reputation. But he decided that he'd fire us all anyway, even though that was against the decision of the board. He had the authority to do that.

Those who were 'on the left', which is a very loose way of describing those of us who went out on strike, were quite diverse, and after we were fired everyone dispersed and went their different ways. But I decided to stay here in B.C. because I had put down roots, so to speak, and I had connections with unions and other progressive people outside the university. I decided the best thing for me was to stay and work with those people. I decided that rather than pursuing an academic career I would live here in Vancouver and not be a wandering academic. I saw that as the kind of alternative for me. It's very common for academics to work a few years at one university and then move on to another university. I didn't want to do that. I thought that what I could accomplish required me to remain in the same location, and that I'd find other activities to pursue.

So I remained here and became involved with putting out a newspaper -- *the Grape* and then the *Western Voice*.

At that time we had two kids growing up, Liz had gotten work as a social worker here; I didn't have any income any longer so I was dependent on Liz for financial support. But altogether it seemed to me 'why go somewhere else where I'd have to start all over again'. I didn't really want to be in a university again so it made sense to remain here. It was a place that I knew a lot of people inside and outside the university, so that was an easy decision to stay put. It was a locale where I'd put down roots and I had things that I could do. I had the newspaper to work on. A few years after that I had the radio program to help produce. After a few years I did incorporate them as part of my activities.

I'm not resistant to talking about the PSA department and SFU. It was a collaborative sort thing with some students and some faculty to redefine the kind of direction we wanted our department to take. In the short interim I had as the chair of the department it was possible to imagine that we could build a department on the principles that we had developed. But that was cut short very soon by the fact that we were forced into a strike situation to defend our jobs and then fired for not teaching our classes. The university fired us all one by one. That was what triggered the strike. Those facts overtook our effort to redefine what a department could do or be.

Bottomore had left by that time, he'd thrown in the towel and returned to Britain. I and others in the department were a quite diverse grouping of people, and the students played a large part in what developed. We did develop a program that we were going to use to guide our academic activities. It was a program that grew out of the whole sixties dissent from traditional academic orientation. I know it very well but I can't just call it to mind right away.

There were the faculty on strike, the overwhelming majority of the original faculty and then there were students who had participated in the development of this program. Our departmental meetings were such that they included students having a voice along with the faculty and the staff. When that was formally adopted everyone agreed to that program. As for

the faculty itself, Hari Sharma went away on sabbatical but he supported us, Prudence Wheeldon remained and so did Kathleen Aberle. So did Jerry Sperling, Louis Feldhammer, Tom Brose and myself. David Potter also joined us and there were a few others as well. I was closer to somebody like Jerry Sperling and I socialized more with him.

Chris Huxley was one of the more active student speakers in the department. There also was Martin Loney, who changed quite dramatically later, but that was later. There was also quite a left wing student from Edmonton. Dave Driscoll, I think that was his name. He left SFU afterward and actually he was elected mayor of Port Moody. John Cleveland was also a spokesperson. He was the only one from the student crowd who joined In Struggle in B.C. I don't know whether he's retired now or not. He finally got a teaching job in a community college in the Interior. Jim Harding was one of the people from Saskatchewan. He also became the mayor of some small town outside of Regina. There was another graduate student who played an influential role in forming the student government. He translated the *Grundrisse* of Marx. I visited with him down in Berkeley two years ago but I've now lost his name. Oh yes, it was Martin Nicolaus. He remained at SFU for only another year and then went back to California. He completed his work on the translation and then became active in various left wing groups in California. He subsequently developed a new program for the treatment of alcoholism. He was himself an addict but overcame that, in the sense that people say they've overcome alcoholism.

How did the PSA faculty work together with student leaders? Well again, it all took place over a very short period of time between the formation of our program and the time that we were fired.

Strand wasn't initially the president of SFU but became so fairly soon thereafter when the initial president of the university gave up his position. Patrick MacTaggart Cowan was a weather man (laughs). A meteorologist. But he didn't know which way the wind was blowing, that's for sure.

There were a lot people who had come to SFU from American universities where the faculty had a considerable amount of influence on

university decisions, whereas the British tradition was one where the head of the department was far more influential in setting the agenda.

SFU was clearly a university of the Social Credit party, for sure, but it had some innovative aspects that were, in my view, quite welcome to students. One was that students could come to the university, not just part of a continuous career to be trained in the professions. They could come after being out in the work place being away from school and, with greater confidence, come back to school. We certainly experienced in the PSA department they were more mature, more self confident, more capable of challenging teachers than was normally the case in a university. They also were a little bit more flexible in continuing their work or supporting themselves or taking terms off. There was more flexibility with the courses with the three terms available to take them. So I felt that that made the classroom a little more independent. Students had more opportunity to explain their own views and they had more maturity in challenging the faculty.

There would be some in their mid-twenties, some older; it was a mix but there was at least a bit of self confidence that seemed present in their involvement. Students in your classroom had a certain freedom of speaking out and took advantage of that very often. It made the classroom a real live place instead of simply a kind of quiet acceptance of what a teacher thought they should learn. They could challenge you, there was more chance to do that. That was one of the pleasures of teaching there.

We still assigned a textbook which would be prescribed ... here's a textbook where students should learn something from. They were different from my own viewpoint but I thought I could give the students a textbook, one that they could become familiar with but I would take a critical approach to. They would have that textbook as something that they could fall back on in terms of their own learning, but I would challenge the analysis that was presented in that textbook.

One was a new book by Ralph Dahrendorf. It was stimulating in some ways but in the end it was something that didn't challenge the ideas of how society works, they would be missing that. So I would challenge them on the basis of what they may have taken from the book. They

thought that was useful and then I would present an alternate voice that said "well, I don't really agree with this approach" but they'd have something structured that made them figure out what they really did believe and what they wanted to integrate into their own viewpoint.

Students had a choice between my critique and alternative ideas from an existing textbook. I think by and large that did begin to give the student an obligation and the satisfaction of trying to think through their own convictions not just rely upon a textbook. Dahrendorf's book was used as a reading in major universities. So students were positively encouraged to think for themselves. At the same time they could, if need be, fall back on the text, and get through the course if they wanted by just repeating the ideas in it. Or they could try and wrestle with developing some independent thoughts.

Someone said I made quite an impact on many of my students. But I think the phenomena was not me individually but the department as a whole. It increasingly attracted more and more students, people switched what their major had been in light of their new interests. I think that was one of the resentments that faculty had toward us because there was this migration of students increasingly into PSA courses and not just mine but in general. Because the allocation of university money has got to have some relation to the number of students enrolled in courses people felt that these students are switching their interests as a result of the faculty curriculum" and that made some of them feel "am I going to have fewer and fewer students". There was a kind of fear I think, a real fear.

That phenomenon of freeing up of the intellectual world, of what's important to learn about, what's important to unravel, was shifting at the time because of the interest in imperialism, interest in dissenting viewpoints of how problems could be addressed and possibly solved in the longer run. At the same time some academics saw their expertise crumbling away, their inherited views of what is the appropriate curriculum for a subject, where one should cut off discussion and where to remain open to new ideas. For me that was one of the exciting features of teaching, whereas for others it may have been a terrifying kind of threat.

Some faculty were more attached to a set viewpoint which had been methodically worked through so they weren't hit with surprises about things that somebody might be interested in and felt should be examined.

There was a lot of upheaval almost from the beginning in the faculty and in the university as a whole, very often we were travelling in uncharted territory about how the university would be run, decisions would be made etc. That meant you often met faculty crossing disciplines in meetings or assemblies addressing some "non-academic" issues. So I began to know these faculty members a bit more in how they approached issues and problems because of how they were responding, from welcoming or trying to stifle different approaches to the university. It seemed to me out of necessity not out of willfulness, many of them were having to be political in the sense of arguing positions, proposing ideas based on politics. The kinds of debates that we had in Berkeley were a good preparation for Simon Fraser in that sense. Others in the university who had a more fixed set of ideas of what should be covered in courses were a little less adept with and were a little less at ease with a free flow of discussion that quickly overtook Simon Fraser University as a whole.

My relationships with faculty at the university as a whole and in the PSA department were largely a sense of friendship but not entirely in agreement. I got referred to by things that I didn't really welcome, like I was known as the rabbi, and 'the rabbi' meant somebody who was very serious but strict and who didn't like immoral behavior. Some took the PSA department as an opportunity for a free-for-all, do what you want, "do your own thing". It was petty in a way. People weren't making millions of dollars but some were misusing their privileges. They were people who would use the phone to make bets or gamble on the phone. The phone was paid for by the university, and I would object to people utilizing that resource for their own private interests. Some would say to me, "well what the fuck does it matter? It's better to just leave things go by. If somebody wants to do something like that, let them do that." That kind of attitude was also mixed up with the view that you should maintain your own integrity. That was a small but real kind of argument that I felt divided from some faculty in the department.

I knew people like Jerry Sperling, Louis Feldhammer, Kathleen Aberle who were already there when I first came to SFU. Tom Brose. He always struck me as a strange person to have at SFU, although he was always outgoing, very warm, very open, very supportive of all kinds of things. He was jovial, convivial, outgoing, relaxed about himself and other people, but I had less intimacy with his academic work.

I don't quite know why I got elected as chairman (laughs). John Leggett was certainly more experienced. There were people like Kathleen Aberle who was far more experienced and had far more stature in terms of publications and so on, things that I respected. There were a lot of faculty who simply stood aside, I guess, so I became chair of the department. There were a number of people who had capacities to be chair of the department but they simply stood aside.

The two archaeologists, Roy Carlson and Philip Hobler were in the traditional mold of "here's the curriculum, here are the things a student has to learn and that's it." It was well known to them and prescribed so it was orderly. It wasn't full of surprises. Carlson was considerably older than I was and he didn't appreciate open-ended situations (laughs). I can't say that I knew either of them at all well. What they studied I didn't know well; their concentrations of energies I didn't feel I had any capacity to evaluate or to contest. In many ways Hobler and Carlson were part of the department but not really part of the department.

Liz and Our Family

Liz came up to Oxford studying nuclear physics. She became a little disenchanted with that subject but she did complete her degree. She then decided not to do anything further with her physics, not so much that she didn't enjoy mathematics and the physics, but she had, as she saw it, two choices: one was to work in that field which had very few job opportunities and would bring her into complete contradiction with her wishes about the development of nuclear weapon. The other alternative for her was to become a teacher. She absolutely was not at all interested in being a teacher of that subject, or any subject. Both her parents were teachers and that was more than enough for her.

So she took a different direction and that was to go into social work. She took some training with people at the London School of Economics and then with other people doing some experimental work in the field of social work. She enjoyed that a great deal. When she came to Canada several years later she became a social worker as a profession here in BC. She spent a fairly long period of her career working in the Supreme Court on custody of children. The kind of work she did was to try and reach agreement between the husband and wife or whatever their relationship was. If she could get to an agreement between the two of them that was the ideal, and if she couldn't she prepared reports for the judge in the Supreme Court to make his own decision, although she seemed to be quite influential. She was quite successful in getting agreements between the contesting man and woman in the case.

Liz grew up in the south of England in a small village, actually. It clustered around an experimental school, I guess, which had a lot of music programs. They were fairly non-conventional and fairly progressive. Her father taught in the school. It wasn't denominational, as I understand it and both her parents were teachers there but her mother had to leave that profession until the post-war period when she was able to resume it. Teachers were forcibly retired when they had children, the women that is. I don't know whether there were any rules like that in BC.

I know my mother had given up teaching to take care of me. Once teachers were married and had children they were assigned the task of child care.

One reason Liz didn't wish to pursue physics was that she had invested so much time on politics that she put aside time she would have been needed for a decent degree. She completed her degree but it wasn't a high grade that she got. This would be in the late fifties and very early sixties.

I left for Berkeley in the early 1960s but she didn't come over until a bit later. We had a relationship that we kept alive, but she was interested in pursuing her own career in social work so she spent a lot of time on that. Only when she finished her degree that she came to join me in Berkeley.

Hannah, my daughter, was born in the United States in Berkeley, California and lived there to the age of six months. Having my first child was delightful. Delightful means that I got a lot of joy from her birth and from her existence.

I had friends who didn't have children when I did. I guess what enthused me was the sense of your child being born and being the promise of a new life, of affirming the hopefulness of children, of a promise of life being affirmed. I just got a lot of pleasure from her.

Liz wasn't working when she had Hannah nor when she had Joshua who was born three years after Hannah. Josh was born here in Vancouver and shortly after that Liz returned to work. The caring of the children is quite demanding. Liz did a lot of that work. I got a lot of pleasure but she did a lot of the work. About that time she became very active in the women's movement which was just developing at that time, around '65. It was a very vibrant women's movement. She's just now been writing a history of that movement; not just the women's movement but of the very explosive political environment of which she was a part. If I try to think back at the social events that people had, they were very segregated between men and women.

Academic subjects were very much men's business, certainly for a lot of the faculty. Not all by any means, because there was this explosion of women's emancipation and the women's rights and the emergence of women's independence, that was one wing of the reality but the other was male control. The areas where men dominated. Men determined the dialogue, men were the 'experts' on the subjects, so the two things conflicted. I won't dismiss my own chauvinism but it was much diluted by my support for women's struggles.

The women's movement wasn't divided by on-campus off-campus divisions because it crossed that line between the students and people who were otherwise active in struggling for women's rights. Not that all women were supportive, but there was the women's movement which had its own meetings and had its own dynamic. They weren't necessarily all students on the campus but they were active in developing women's

own activities and meetings. They were involved in trying to develop expressions of women's emancipation.

What were some of the specific issues where they were involved in? Certainly the struggle over the right to abortion was one of the major battles that took place. There were struggles for women's right to participate as equals with men in the issues of the day, which may not have been of interest exclusively to women. They were involved to bring women into participating in all aspects of social events.

How did my kids relate to this? I can remember Hannah as a child being shivering cold on marches and the protest demonstrations she went to. They could have been a little older then. I was involved in support for Quebec rights to determine their own destiny and she would be out on those demonstrations we had. She was happy to come along. She had met some of the people in the Quebec independence movement, Charles Gagnon for one, who stayed in our house for a while. I remember making a story book for her that would explain the nature of that issue and she liked it very much. I think she's still kept it, somewhere. She would have been six.

I think she was resentful about some things, for sure, but I think overall she enjoyed the friendships of adults that we had around the house...people from different countries who had come here...she seemed to enjoy those things. Maybe she was a bit resentful that we were sort of odd balls in terms of our political involvement and in terms of our activism. She had fairly conventional friends whose parents didn't go around with placards and posters. That would have been especially so when she became a teenager. But she wasn't resentful to the extent that she didn't want to participate in these events. She seemed happy to participate. She was really a great kid.

Josh as well. Josh was fairly close to our outlook, certainly later when he went to university. But he wanted to be his own person and he wanted to be independent of us, although never in a way that challenged our views. He decided to go to university in Montreal and later lived in Nicaragua on his own. He was quite independent in completing his engineering degree but not really all that interested in professional

engineering. He really wanted to make a difference in the lives of peasants and poor people in Nicaragua, and seems quite comfortable in that area.

My kids were still in grade school after we were fired from SFU. Hannah would have been ten and Joshua three years younger. How did I attempt to direct my kids' understandings of the world? I think "direct their views of the world" is too authoritarian a way to phrase it (laughs). I remember having one set-to with Hannah's teacher...the teacher had given them an exercise in which she had, I guess, basically copied a question and answer sort of passage in which she represented the native people in the country in a cowboys and Indians kind of confrontation. I spoke with Hannah about how this was a distortion and a romance of the history of the native people and I went to see the teacher in our local elementary school, and then I went to the principal of the school, taking the complaint further because I didn't get any satisfaction from the teacher. It was the classic story of the native people surrounding the wagon train of peaceful settlers. The teacher didn't see anything untoward in that, and she had clearly copied her lesson from some story book. I was trying to get across to her that this was not a way to teach history and it just leads to racial prejudice on the part of the kids. I don't think it was her intent, I think she just thought it was an innocent kind of filler. Because she didn't respond positively at all to my comments, she didn't try to rethink anything, I went up the ladder and made my complaint to the principal, who was not that much older than her, he would have been fortyish. It was not too satisfactory either although he acknowledged "Oh, we won't do that exercise again".

I don't recollect if Joshua had the same experience...Joshua followed three years later in Hannah's footsteps and had some of the same teachers. That's one reason why, when he got through high school, he didn't want to stick around here and follow Hannah's into UBC. "Oh, you're Hannah's brother, right", so instead he went to McGill in Montreal.

I think Hannah was probably embarrassed by my intervention, but didn't say anything about it. She used to go on demonstrations with Liz and me when she was about six. In pictures of her I see her usually in the rain it seems. In a demonstration she was always huddled, with her rain

slicker on, and a glum look on her face. Still her presence there had to be spontaneous because you can't force a kid to go on demonstrations just like that. Maybe she has a certain ambivalence about it at times. Yes, I think she had a certain ambivalence about being in those demonstrations but at the same time a certain identification with them. I remember making a picture book for Hannah of the people who were struggling for justice in different parts of the world, and she liked that book very much and felt good about knowing of other people who were involved these struggles in the same way.

I don't think she had other people, friends in school who felt the same way. Not among people she was very friendly with. She was taken with dressing up and things like this that she felt good about, when she was twelve or fourteen. On the other hand even at that age she wanted to study medicine. We encouraged her. But she had a school counselor who said to her "oh, no, you don't want to be a doctor, why don't you become a veterinarian." It was that kind of counseling she got, and it had an impact on her and she was very disappointed. I tried to convince her to go into medicine, "you can do it" but she felt intimidated by it, by this notion that as a girl she was wrong to have an ambition to be a doctor. It was straight chauvinism by the counselor.

She was always a very bright young woman. Anyway she went into rehabilitation medicine. It was a long training period, a five year course and in the end you come out with not having a lot of responsibility and limited possibilities of what you can do with your training. It's not an MD by any means.

Her ambition in regards to medicine was, I think, her response to my mother's stroke. Hannah wanted to be in medicine as some way to be able to treat people who have suffered something like that. She practiced rehab medicine for a couple of years here in BC and then she met her husband who is a doctor and she said to herself "I'm as bright as he is, I can do what he does", and she decided to go and get real medical training. She'd dropped that feeling that you're a woman and you have a certain limits that are possible for you and it doesn't include medicine. It took her quite a while to overcome that sentiment. I tried to introduce her to some

people from Quebec who were living here, a married couple who were a part of the movement. I said to her why don't you talk with this woman, she's a doctor, and reconsider your choice of career path. It was totally unsuccessful. It was only when she later met her husband. I never did get what role he played in saying to her that she could be a doctor if she wanted to. She put it to me that she came to her own conclusion that "I'm as smart as he is and I can have the ambition and be a doctor". And so she did train as a doctor at McMaster University in Hamilton and then did her residence requirements in Boston, Massachusetts at Harvard University. Now she and her husband and her kids are back living and working in Vancouver and she's getting on very well in her profession. She's a neurologist now.

Josh's path was a little different. He went to McGill and got into engineering. He finished high school here in Vancouver and I guess he wanted to escape this world here and go some other place and McGill was the place he chose. I hadn't realized how much he'd studied for a minor degree in political science; that was something that was quite surprising to me. He never made anything of it, I don't know if he used it because he didn't work in any related field. But it helped make him politically conscious and aware.

He told me later, what I hadn't realized until then, that he had just one more course and he'd have gotten a double degree in engineering and in political philosophy. Before he completed another degree he got involved with helping build a school in Nicaragua. It was a strange kind of a project, it was a bit of a con job I guess, because to be able to join this group one had to raise money and go door to door in Boston and say he was going to go and build a school in Nicaragua and would they like to contribute some money to do this. Anyway he raised the money and went down to Nicaragua where he worked for a number of months -- he built a school with other people who were volunteers on this project. He didn't speak any Spanish at that time but somehow used to mediate. The supervisor of the project was an ex-Contra and the Mayor of the town was Sandinista and there were frequent conflicts between them. This was after the civil war, but people's loyalties from the past were still strong. Josh said "I was told that my job was to get the school built and to solve

these problems and conflicts between Contras and Sandinistas." He said "I probably was able to do this a bit better because I didn't try to be a boss but just sort of negotiated something without words." Josh is very good at making people comfortable without pushing them or dictating to them. Anyway, the project was successful, they built the school. He's been back there many times and has lived there for almost twenty years

Then he came back to McGill, finished his one course or whatever was left to get his degree. He returned to Nicaragua after that and learned to speak Spanish. I remember meeting guys who were very frustrated with him because he'd never spoke English. They would try and improve their English and he would refuse to speak English. The way he learned to speak Spanish was by ear and not by a book. It was by listen and listen and listen and then try and say some words or a passage himself. He'd go through another period where he'd be just listening, listening and then try a second time. He gradually learned the language simply by ear. That's how he learned Miskita as well.

Later on he was working with an NGO (non-governmental organization) and he was quite happy with the work, doing water work, getting domestic water projects going. An engineer from California, an older man, and he wanted to expand the work to the indigenous areas in the north of the country. The other guy said to him, no, I'm not going to do that, we're not ready for that, to make projects in this area. And so he said, goodbye, thanks, but I'm going to try it. So he went on his own and learned both the Miskita language the same way that he learned his Spanish and he worked in the area. He still has a lot of his projects in that area.

He went to Nicaragua and he originally worked for a company in Canada, on water projects, delivering clean water to villages. He worked with this firm, I think, for two years and he decided he wasn't interested anymore in the sort of projects they wanted. So he went to an NGO where he would not have to do any fancy kind of work. He said that from what he saw people needed skills at a very low tech engineering. They would use gravity flow with a water supply reservoir for accumulating the water, all of which were done on the basis of very low level technology.

What the people needed was not so much skills but to develop the confidence that they could in fact do these projects themselves. They could develop the skills to do them themselves and that it would be worthwhile from a health point of view, they would have to learn some things about health and other basic information.

It's mainly work where you find springs of water, pure water, and you find a way to bring that to a village so that the gravity flow would bring it into a reservoir that they could build and use to get a sustainable water source.

These were villages where people never had clean water, they never had spring water transported in a way that maintained its purity. So they were constantly plagued by illness. So he moved out of high tech engineering; he said engineering was a profession for cowboys because you worked on a high tech project for a short while and then you moved to another country or another place and you're constantly moving and making money and moving and making money, and he wasn't interested in that. So he carved out a career for himself in the low tech field. He's constantly scrounging money, in America and in Canada to finance these projects. He's been doing that for twenty years now. And he seems to be very happy with it and to find it rewarding.

My children have always had some interest in my view of the world but they don't talk to me much about politics. I mean, Josh is quite politically conscious, in a country like Nicaragua where people have taken sides and bitter struggles have been fought and so on. I can talk to him about the dynamics involved. He was there just after the civil war. He's strange because he is, I think, very politically conscious. You can talk to him about what's going on in the country and who is advocating this or that or some way to approach ... he easily engages in that kind of discussion. But he keeps his options open. He knows what he wants to do in terms of his projects and he feels that his contribution is in terms of helping the health of people through getting clean water. He'll talk for hours about the projects he's on but in terms of the bigger picture of the country, he talks about it but he's not openly partisan about it. Josh can be in a room and he'll tell me or Liz of some guy's history: which side he

was on, is he reliable, can you trust him or not trust him. Would he be honest with you or would he try and exploit you in one way or another, or would he deal with you as an honest person. You can get a lot of that information from Josh. He's very well respected, I think, in the country. People know him. I guess he's decided that the best way is to let people themselves make the decisions. Other than in his work where he advocates quite a bit in getting funding, for completing projects and so on, but other than that he doesn't intrude himself into an advocacy role for one thing or another.

In terms of carrying out his projects he's very demanding of other people that he works with. They've got to work hard and work in an honest way and see that their project is successful. He's very demanding on that. If people are just trying to get by and not put out an effort, he'll say "you're fired, that's it." He's a tough boss in that way. But if you're actually working on the project and trying make it successful then he'll work with you as a companero.

I think I was lucky in having a woman like Liz as a companion. Liz didn't agree with some of my political activity but she supported me even though she had a disagreement with the effort to build a new communist party and so on. I think she took that same attitude towards the kids in that sense that what I was doing wasn't her cup of tea, but it was my choice and she supported that.

I don't really know how it affected my kids. You'd probably have to ask Liz rather than me. I can say that I've always had positive responses from my kids, and I think that probably a lot of that was due to the fact that even though Liz had disagreements with the politics I was involved with she didn't argue about it. There were periods where the strain was more intense than others but...

She'd had experience with a Communist group in college and she was close to being involved with them. She said "I went once to a conference that they held and they must have passed forty or fifty motions unanimously. It was just ridiculous. There was no discussion, as she reported it, there was no real debate. It was simply the head table said

"you agree with this, don't you" and you had to vote for it or walk out. So she walked out.

So now I'm a double grandfather through my daughter and through my son. Hannah has two children, one aged twenty and one of fifteen years while Joshua's kids are younger; they're twelve and ten. He's three years younger than his sister and he became a parent later.

What's it like being a grandparent? I guess I was a bit more judgmental with Hannah's kids, especially with her oldest child. I've enjoyed Hannah's son's company a great deal as he got older. When he became about sixteen and seventeen I really enjoyed his company. He's more curious about the world than I expected him to be and I enjoy that. He's following Liz's path in physics at McGill. Initially he was thinking of being an engineer or something of that kind, but he decided to take a general course in physics rather than specialize in engineering and as he got into his second and third year he became very interested in abstract physics.

Palestine and the Palestinian People

I mentioned before that I was initially influenced as a teenager by my mother's dedication to the Zionist project which she presented in an idealistic way. That it was going to create a society based on justice, a society based on the restoration of a real Jewish working class, in a vital area. When I went to Palestine for the first time, in 1958 I got a quite different view of things. I'd never met any Palestinians and I still didn't know much about Palestinian life, but there were a couple of things which sort of shattered for me that ideal view of Israel. I remember being on a kibbutz that I went to visit and I had a conversation which stuck with me. This Jewish settler said to me something that seemed odd. "You should come to Israel, you're the kind of person we need." He said that because I'd spoken of an egalitarian society, I'd spoken of working people having control of their world, and so when he replied he said to me "you're the kind of person who should come to Israel and help us build this society", it was a socialist kibbutz. And I said to him, "why do you want me to come here. You have children who have grown up here, and you're on the road

to a new society." And he said, "our children, they're a dead loss." And I was shocked they didn't have socialist values, "they weren't what I expected them to be" he said. He was of the first generation that had sowed the seeds of this new society, and I said to him "my work is the kind of vision I'm trying to realize, and is in Canada. That's my country, that's where my struggles are." I was troubled for a long time about how this new society that this old settler now felt was a failure. That really started me on the path of understanding, or searching for an understanding, where I had taken Israel to be something to be a success, but was, by somebody who had lived there, a failure. He wasn't a particularly well known figure; he was just a member of his kibbutz where he had put in his sweat and labour in hoping to create something that would be solid and yet he was now saying it's a failure. So I began with that experience to take to studying and learning about the history of Palestine and these kibbutzniks. It was my eye opener to learn the reality of this Zionist project. It was not emancipation for Jews; it was not anything but a prison for Palestinians. This was in '58; I would have been about twenty or so.

I was at college and I had friends who weren't Jewish who went to Israel who saw it as a wonderful progressive state. They had worked on kibbutzim and they loved that. They'd never worked before in their lives. I would say to them "you're misreading what's going on in this place."

I came to my views mainly through reading and by seeing the history of colonization for what it was. I went to Israel later with Liz, but by then my views were what they are to this day. It was during the first intifada. It was very obvious when you looked at it what the situation was. Liz got it clear right from the beginning. She didn't see Israel in any romantic light. My father had gone there when his nephew's son was killed in a tank unit on the Egyptian front. He went to express his sorrow at the death of this relative's son, and the father said to him, "You're just a sentimental old guy." This relative was a right winger, and he said "My son was killed and somebody else's son will be killed and that's the way it is here, so stop being a sentimental old fool." My father could not understand that someone could be so callous and as hard-hearted at the death of his own son. This nephew was one of the few family members

who had survived the second world war by moving to the eastern front before the Nazi armies had conquered Poland and had survived by getting inside the Soviet Union. At the end of the war he smuggled himself back west and went to Palestine. He'd had a family and it was one of his own sons who had been killed in an Israeli Arab war of 1967. He said, "If you're going to cry over this then there's no sense in you coming or being here." My father took him at his word, left Israel and had no desire to go back again.

He never had any Zionist loyalties, it was rather a matter of family loyalties that motivated him. These kinds of stories became my guideline for an understanding of what this Zionist project was about and why I not only didn't want to have any part of it but wanted to oppose it. I was in my early twenties. I felt a certain special responsibility, I guess. I became alienated from any attachment to the Jewish community which was Zionist to the core in Edmonton. Even the leftist sorts of publications were basically Zionist, like *Outlook Magazine*. There was no set of ideas to draw me into Zionist sympathies.

I had been involved with Israel when I was quite young but I changed my perception of what was the reality of the situation and what an illusion. Subsequent to that I began to realize that I didn't know very much about Israel at all so I applied myself in gathering more reliable information and less propaganda, less boosterism about the progressive side to Israel. I began to change my perception and became involved in arguments with other Jews and fairly soon found myself in the position of being seen as a defector and a dissenter.

From a romantic notion of Israel, the more I read and the more I understood the more I became a public critic of Israel. It was mainly during my early university years that I consolidated my present understanding of Palestine and it's people. I didn't have contact with Palestinians and I only began to have contact with them in my post-undergraduate years.

Zionists said that I was a "traitor" in my understanding of what was going on in Palestine, so from being a welcomed member of the Jewish community I became an object of hate and resentment. That expressed

itself in ostracism and opposition to whatever I was doing, culminating with phone calls with nasty secret threats against me personally. Maybe 'threats' is an exaggeration; 'denunciations' might be a more accurate word.

Were there other Jews around Edmonton who were opposed to Zionism? Not among those I had some association with who were still part of the Jewish community, which threw up a wall of opposition to me. Even in my mother's circle of friends -- people wouldn't even come to my wedding. I was 'sent to Coventry' so to speak.

I don't think that public accounts of the oppression of the Palestinian people emerged until the 1960s when there was a crescendo in the late '60s. Prior to that if you listened to what people were saying and advocating, Israel had a free hand in terms of its behaviour. Negative comments just weren't acceptable in relation to Israeli policies and actions. Not in Canada and certainly not in the US.

There were some differences within Israel but not within the Labour Party and not within the state structure and political organization. People were quite uncritical about the actions of their party and their government. If you look at the Labour Party in Israel, with people like Golda Meir and other figures of the leadership--they are entirely unquestioning about their support of Zionism. You had Golda Meir totally denying what Israel was actually doing on the ground, what Israel meant to the Palestinians. For her the Palestinians just didn't exist, all four million of them.

I remember criticizing Israel for the six-day war, which it launched when I was in the PSA department. One Palestinian graduate student and myself tried to raise some critical comment on Israel's war but nobody else in that department, which prided itself being anti-imperialist, spoke out. They were sometimes privately cheering for Israel. It seems hard to believe because the times have changed quite a bit and people now would think it was a rather bizarre response from a social science department. But that was a widespread response.

Yasser Arafat had been the leader of the Palestinian movement for more than a decade but he gradually accommodated himself, bending

over backwards to gain an agreement with Israeli government. But they killed him afterwards anyway.

The Soviet Union had been accepting of Zionism and of the partition of Palestine and the driving out and murder of the Palestinians and accepted the egregious actions of the Israelis in relation to Palestinian rights. I had never been a loyalist of the Soviet Union and so I was not so surprised at their actions in relation to Israel, but I never welcomed them.

I went to Palestine in the 1980s in an effort to consolidate the ideas I had about the Palestinian people and the colonization project which affected them. I went with Liz as part of a larger trip to Egypt and India and spent about a month in Palestine, making contact with many Palestinians. I made a real effort to learn more about Palestinian realities first hand. It was a confirmation of the sense I had about who the major victims of the Zionist project were. I appreciated the oppression that they had experienced. I visited refugee camps in Palestine and witnessed people being brutalized; it consolidated my sense of their need for a freedom struggle and the necessity to support it.

I remember going to the home of this one Palestinian family. The home was going to be destroyed in a couple of days. At that time it had been stripped of most of its furniture. I remember sitting with the family. The mother was very communicative while the father was a totally beaten person, silent and demoralized. The mother of the family told me some of her stories. Her son had escaped the Israelis but they wanted to recapture him. The camp that the house was in was sealed off from all other places and the mother had gone to plead with a soldier who was positioned to help patrol the camp. When I had come to the camp he asked who was, what I was doing there in a quite aggressive and antagonistic way. When I said I was a Jew and my name was Briemberg, he said oh well, okay, in a grudgingly sort of way but let me pass through into the camp, which was sealed off.

The mother's story was that she went to plead with the authorities to halt their pursuit of her son. She said to me "you see my breast here, he just took his rifle butt and hit me with it." She was both passionate and angry in relating this experience. She talked with such power and anger

that it was clear that that was her reality, that those kinds of things happened. Their house was going to be leveled in one or two days because of their son's escape, and the family was going to try to build a tent or a shelter of some kind nearby. The son had escaped the Israeli military and part of the punishment was to have his parents' home destroyed.

One of the strategies used by the Israelis in relation to the Palestinians is to humiliate the adult males wherever they could. They made his children see that they were helpless and seeing their father denigrated and crushed.

I didn't see the beatings but I saw the consequence of them. The father, who would normally be a spokesperson or a representative of his family, huddling in a corner of the house, silent and broken. That was the consequence of what the Israeli military had done.

This was during the first intifada, the first uprising of the Palestinian people against the occupation. Israel had already incorporated that region into its territory de facto.

I also I remember that we went into a post office in the Jewish section of Jerusalem, and Liz had the experience where a middle aged Jewish woman purposely smashed her elbow into her breast in spite and disgust. It was provoked by the fact Liz was wearing a shawl that was popular at that time among Palestinian women. It was like letting us know that we were foreigners and outsiders and being hateful towards us.

We took a so-called tour of Jerusalem to see what the Israelis would say about Jerusalem to strangers. It omitted any reference to the Palestinian parts of Jerusalem; they didn't exist at all. This guy who was driving the bus was a tank officer in the military during his active duties. He had come from Yemen and asked us where our children were living and said they should come to live in Israel; that's where they belong. Liz said to him, "But it's so violent in this country. Why would I want to bring my children here? They're better off where they are, in Canada." At which he was just disgusted and replied, "Canada. It's so peaceful" with a great

sneer in his voice as though a country without war is worthless. I had that experience a couple of times.

He was outraged and drove off to complain to some soldiers that they'd let some kid throw a stone that had hit the bus while he was driving, that he expected the streets to be cleaned of these acts of rebellion and resistance. He chewed out one soldier who was on duty there. Like "how the hell does this kid get away with that," that it was their duty to deal with this and to smash the resistance.

I've been involved with Palestine for a long time and I don't think I'm motivated by a feeling of guilt about this phenomenon but at the same time I do feel a certain responsibility to help remedy the situation. Well there're millions of injustices in the world and they're all morally equivalent in their need for remedy. I've chosen this particular one because I've had a special attachment to it. I tell people that I have no particular responsibility for what's gone on in Israel but among the things I feel need remedying, this is one of them. So I work to try and change that reality to the small extent that I can do so.

You're surprised there wasn't a meaningful opposition to the Israeli-Palestinian war of 1967 at SFU and I was surprised at that myself. I expected something different than that. There was a graduate student in our department with whom I became friendly with and continued to have a friendship with afterward; Elia Zureik. He graduated with a doctorate in political science and he got a job in Queen's University. He remained at Queen's University and he was active in the Palestinian solidarity movement.

People felt they had to ally with Israel because that seemed to ring all the bells for them. It was defending itself, it was a heroic struggle that they'd undertaken. If you go back and read some of the framing of this war you would tend to think why shouldn't Canadians be supporters of Israel. The voices giving a more realistic depiction of this war were hard to hear. They were largely silenced. It was pretty clear by that time that Israel had become a militarist state, a nuclear armed state and an aggressive state. But to hold that view you had to fly in the face of the vast bulk of "explanation" of why all these wars with its neighbours. It's been a

laborious process to transform people's understanding of what's going on in that part of the world.

You find the Israelis are behaving indistinguishable from fascists, in the bombing of Gaza etc. and yet all the Canadian political parties--I'm not speaking about popular opinion--but these political parties of supposedly different alternatives, are all united in support of Israel. From Mulcair to Harper to even people who have recognized the evils of Israeli policies, their silence in the face of clearly fascist behaviour is indistinguishable from one another. Young people have begun to break away from that loyalty, whether Jews or non-Jews, and have witnessed things that are completely insupportable. But the majority of the political organizations are of one mind. Whether it's by intimidation or loyalty or delusion, they are silent about the horror Israel and its allies are inflicting. The mass bombing of people's homes and so on ranks with the crimes of other fascist governments in the past.

I don't think that view of Israel by members of PSA really did change. I think they may have become less explicit in their loyalties to Zionism but I don't think they really re-thought the positions that they held in '67. They were just a little more discrete. My guess is that they simply found it more comfortable to either retreat into a silence about Israel or to avoid commenting on the situation of Palestinians.

I recently tried to write a news story about the fact that Palestinians of Jaffa had uncovered thousands of skeletons in the earth beneath the city of Jaffa, which had been largely ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian population and turned into a Jewish settlement. It was a major Palestinian city prior to '48, '49.

Any way I thought I could write a story that relayed the bare bones of this discovery of thousands of skeletons found in Jaffa. They had simply been heaved into a hidden space and decomposed there. That would probably have been a radio account of about two minutes. Enough would be relayed that someone could pursue further comment of that history if they wanted or they would simply become aware that this ethnic cleansing and the brutality of the killing of Palestinians was a documented fact and should be part of their understanding of the history of the

conflict. These were probably Palestinians who had attempted to remain in the city but were killed by Israeli forces.

Jaffa was one of the largest cities in Palestine and was largely reduced to rubble before it was Judaized. People today go to Jaffa as a kind of tourist site and can be entirely unaware of what's beneath the soil and how many people have been driven out of that area and ultimately fled to other countries.

I tried to write that story, it was one of two stories I undertook to summarize and draw attention to. Our news stories hopefully illuminated peoples' understanding of different parts of the world and the reality of events in different places. But I just couldn't complete it. I felt I couldn't complete relaying the simple facts which would have been easy for me earlier.

I think in the books that I've read there's more detail. I found them more interesting to read than I feel I'm conveying in terms of my own life. I'm not too pleased by that. It's more generalities than actual reality. I mean some of it's there and some of it is just not present. It's a kind of outline as opposed to a detail. I appreciate it's not an attempt to provide a total recall but something that brings it to life is missing.

About my work in the Palestine Support Committee here: there were several different organizations that were active and outspoken on the question of Palestine. It wasn't one single organization that advocated for Palestinian rights. Probably the one person in the PSA who would have been critical but died too early in his career was Saghir Ahmed. His brother was a dedicated struggler for Palestinian rights in Pakistan and India. He was one of the leaders internationally of solidarity with the Palestinian people. It was a difficult struggle, and remains a difficult struggle, for sure.

Around the Union Scene in BC

After Mort was fired from SFU he set up a small organization called the Community Education and research centre with the intent of providing assistance to community groups and unions.

The two key people involved with us, people at the head of unions, were Jess Succamore and George Brown of the Canadian Association of Industrial and Allied Workers; CAIMAW. Then there was the other union that was supportive, the PPWC; they were a wood pulp industry union (the Pulp and Paper workers Union of Canada). They were a breakaway from the BC Fed. They were the ones that were supportive of the work we were doing and they had cleared their own path independently of the BC Fed and were trying to develop a far more independent and militant union movement.

We were quite friendly with Homer Stevens and the Allied Fishermen's and Allied Workers Union. I remember being very attracted to them because that was the time that Homer went to jail over the right to strike. We went down to the Fishermen's Hall and had a number of meetings with them but they were largely self-sustaining. The PPWC was probably close to that level of self-reliance but they were very interested in the effort to build a workers' research and education center. The other unions we didn't have any particular relations with. I don't think they were hostile but they were suspicious of us. They had their own research centers and were more self-reliant.

It was all a liberating feeling to escape from the university world. They were both very stimulating and exciting times and what we could contribute was always appreciated by the unions we worked with. Jess Succamore was friendly and he knew what we were doing.

I was very close and active with people in the Canadian labor movement, in the independent unions. There were older leftists who still clung to a vision of a more radical possibility. They were one grouping of people that I hung out with. I did research for them in a fraternal sort of way. It was mainly the independent Canadian unions. Ironically when I think of it now they were people like Peter Cameron who became an absolute dog. Right now he's trying to screw the teachers as much as he can; he works for the provincial government. He wasn't the head of a union at that time, but he was a member of the Canadian union movement. Jess Succamore came from Scotland and was very active in building this independent Canadian movement.

It entailed things like doing research for the union, we fought battles. I remember now: the Paper and Pulp Workers Union, which was an independent union. It didn't stick with the Federation of Labor. The Pulp and Paper Workers were much more democratic in how they organized their struggles. That was attractive, for sure. At that time I also got involved with the independent radical press. We did the *Western Voice* newspaper; we put that out weekly. That was after we were fired from SFU.

The *Western Voice* and Vancouver Co-op Radio

I first was involved in helping edit a weekly alternative newspaper called the *Grape* which was geared to a readership of hippies and university students, bohemians and such. But the staff were some of the same people that were later in the *Western Voice*, quite leftist. It was a counter culture expression of thoughts and ideas of the day. Stan Persky was very involved in the *Grape* and so were people like Steve Garrod and Barb Coward as well as Corky Day, who was really a strange guy, definitely a hippie. It was a mixture of different kinds of people. I got involved because it provided a vehicle for getting out some of the things I thought should be said. There was continuity between the various newspapers I was involved with. So the *Grape* and the *Western Voice* I see as an evolution.

But the *Grape* and the *Western Voice* were quite different newspapers but we had some of the same staff, the same grouping of people who were evolving in terms of what they would say and do. Some people just continued from one to the other. Actually the *Grape* emerged from the *Georgia Straight* when it became clear that the *Straight* wasn't a communal effort but was run and owned by one person. Dan McLeod ran and controlled everything.

We had a strike and the *Grape* emerged from that. The *Straight* became a quite conservative newspaper after awhile. Culturally I guess they were somewhat progressive, they had lots of cultural pieces and stuff about jazz and theatre and what not but basically it wasn't political

at all. It became quite commercial with lots of commercial advertising. That was its evolution anyway.

The *Western Voice* was far more consciously intended as a political organ in which it was hoped that working people would gradually play a larger part in its writing and so on. That was its intent and that was its success; it was successful in that we gathered up a number of working class contributors.

It was one of those occasional moments where contributors wanted to define the content of the newspaper more clearly and set some guidelines for what its content would be. Some people left, but not many that I can remember, and the rest of us changed our direction somewhat. As I recollect, the name *Western Voice* was supposed to be indicative of an attachment to a working class history and present. It was self conscious and we evolved in that way. A few people who didn't really follow that view stuck with us, like Corky Day. He had a column or a section of the paper where he specialized in culture while the rest of us would concentrate more on working class topics.

How I got to be editor of the *Western Voice*? Well, nobody else wanted to, I guess. At that time those kinds of positions weren't eagerly sought by people. We didn't provide any pay at all (laughs). It ran for a number of years, quite successfully too. We put out a wide ranging, broadly socialist weekly which covered a broad range of topics not totally unlike the *Western Clarion* which had once been put out in Vancouver. We had a fair number of subscriptions and we also sold it through street hawkers. While it was something to be proud of it was always a hand to mouth operation.

Most of the people who were working on the *Western Voice* didn't oppose turning it into the *In Struggle* newspaper. If they weren't interested in building a communist party they just left the paper. They didn't try to continue publishing the *Western Voice*.

People didn't rush to become editor or rush to become anything. If you were here and wanted to write something and it was within what we as a group had discussed, then do it, that's great. It won't earn you any money because we don't have money to pay.

I was involved a bit in writing for the *Georgia Straight* but I had a disagreement or a fight with Dan McLeod, who it turned out owned the paper. It seemed to have been a kind of a collective effort but in actual fact it wasn't. There was a sit in strike by women who'd been working on the paper trying to claim a voice in the publication. But he ignored us so we, a number of people who were involved in putting out the *Straight* said "why don't we just start another newspaper." We called it the *Grape*. It was a kind of non-political title but it became established as an independent newspaper that was collectively run. That's the story of how we abandoned the *Georgia Straight* and the start of the *Grape* which later became the *Western Voice*.

I think most of those people around the *Grape* came over to the *Western Voice*, but I can't remember the details anymore. The *Western Voice* was certainly oriented to the trade union movement, to working people, but it had no affiliation with any particular union. It supported working people and working conditions and wrote about what we thought would interest working people but no union had an interest in it.

I remember that one of the articles in the *Western Voice* was a story of the murder of a native guy who'd been heaved out of a bar and froze to death. We talked and wrote about strikes and organizing in Ontario. We had written about working people in the struggle for union rights and so on. Another thing we'd written was about people in prison. Once I'd gotten called into a situation of trying to negotiate the release of three staff who had been prisoners in the BC Penitentiary in New Westminster. Prisoners had taken people hostage in an effort to get out of prison. There were two guys who'd been part of the negotiations, but after being there a couple of sleepless nights constantly in negotiation the warden enticed us into taking a break and going out of the prison. While we were outside they orchestrated a raid on the prisoners and in the raid a young woman by the name of Mary Steinhauser was shot and killed. She worked as a nurse or social worker of some kind in the prison.

The prisoners were recaptured and all put into solitary confinement. Andy Bruce, a native guy, was probably the main activist among the prisoners. He'd served a long time in solitary confinement. The

lawyer involved actually worked for a very prestigious law firm and he took on the case of Andy Bruce because he was totally opposed to solitary confinement. I don't know what really happened...I heard different stories about what happened to Andy Bruce. He got out of prison eventually. They had asked me to be a negotiator on the prisoners' behalf because they thought I could arrange for them to get freedom by going to Algeria. Which was a fantasy in their minds, it was something they picked up from their reading the *Western Voice*. I remember one night we heard a prisoner howling like an animal. I asked the warden where did that voice come from, what's going on. "Oh" he said, "he's in solitary confinement." The prison has been torn down now except for some sort of symbolic relic of it. It gave me a sense of the torture and madness being suffered by people put into solitary confinement.

It was things like that that made Mary Steinhauser an advocate inside the prison for the rights of prisoners. She was killed by a gun from one of the guards when they retook control. I was left with the impression that she was marked for killing because of her advocacy of prisoners' rights, but I have no evidence to say that that happened. But she was the one person who was killed in the assault on the prisoners.

Beyond that, the main body of the articles that we wrote were about working people and the efforts to organize and unionize and so on. There was a theme of working class cultural writing throughout the articles; that working people did have a history and that history should be remembered and recounted and transmitted to others today. Stories preserving the history and the significance of the kind of struggles people had were an important part of the newspaper, for sure. But more of the writing was about current efforts of unionization and battles for union rights.

Stories were written from other places than just BC; we covered developments in Ontario and Quebec and so on. The paper had a loose kind structure in that people wrote about what they themselves were interested in. There wasn't so much of a directive of an editor saying "these and these are the important issues of today and you're going to write that one and he's going to write this one." It was much more what

people wanted to write about. We had discussions, of course, of what was important but there wasn't a hierarchy or an authority structure that a normal newspaper would have. Yes we had guidelines but they'd be a loose kind of guideline.

It was the era of low technology and high labour input. So an issue, after it was written and edited had to be typeset and it had to be laid out...typing was fairly easy but layout was cut and paste. All very time consuming as I recollect. I would be involved in cutting and pasting myself but I enjoyed it actually. People would volunteer to do things in the various stages of preparing the paper for printing. As I said, it was all quite laborious. Certainly I put in twenty hours a week, anyway. Often longer and it was all volunteer labour.

We got a small amount of feedback. People welcomed the items in the paper but in terms of writing letters or volunteering, there was only a certain amount of that, a limited number of people who volunteered to undertake to write things. I can't remember what our press run was, about two thousand weekly I'd guess.

I thought the *Western Voice* was good, too. I thought it was well written and readable, a combination of popular writing that a person with a basic education could read and assess and learn something from and be stimulated by it.

But we gradually turned the newspaper away from what it was and it became a question of how it should evolve. Should it support the kind of group that was being formed in Quebec? Should it continue in its original form of a working class paper for popular discussion? Gradually it moved into a debating forum of which group it should align itself with, what group it should join. That took a short period of time and then the majority of people who were active in the paper agreed that it should become a voice of a group that had already started in Quebec. We saw no need to continue it as a separate publication and so we transformed it into an instrument of In Struggle.

Our readership probably fell off in BC when we closed the *Western Voice* and shifted to *In Struggle*. We put out *Western Voice* for three or four years but *In Struggle* newspaper for four or five years. You have to

have a vehicle like a newspaper to spread your ideas, to make them known, to invite comments and so on. It's indispensable for any political organization. The question becomes one of what ideas are being put forward. Whether the *Grape*, or the *Western Voice* or in the form of *In Struggle*, they all were presenting ideas for people to react to. Nowadays there's no paper that does that, none in BC anyway. The entire newspaper world is dominated by commerce.

When we put out the *Western Voice* we chose that name on the basis of a paper like it had existed some seventy-five years ago, a paper which had been created and sustained by working people, the *Western Clarion*.

I didn't join the Vancouver Co-op radio station until after efforts to organize people around our ideas had collapsed. I joined the Co-op radio station, in the early eighties, after *In Struggle* ceased to exist. Vancouver Co-op radio had a listenership that was based on a wide breadth of interests in different kinds of music, to a certain extent a news source that would present some dissenting views of what's going on in the world. But it wasn't in any sense a homogeneous view at all. It was a little bit a radio version of the original *Georgia Straight*, but it didn't slide as far backward as the *Georgia Straight* has. There were a few people who became professional newspaper journalists or radio hosts, like Rob Mickelborough who had been very active in Vancouver Co-op radio people who were professional journalists for the *Vancouver Sun* and the CBC. They became decreasingly independent voices.

The radio station as a vehicle for independent views narrowed and narrowed in the few years after that. But at the time Co-op radio was an independent voice compared to the CBC. You had independent voices, so I could have a role in presenting a weekly news program. In the CBC you have five minutes of air time to deal with a topic, you have to be careful how you shape it. But we could shape things in a way which gave people a critical way of thinking about the news. Any critical thinking is completely gone now in the CBC, it's simply a capitalist propaganda organ now.

On Co-op radio, at the start of the new 'war on terror,' we did regular interviews getting anti-imperialist ideas heard and broadcast. We did a series of things from the perspective of opposition to the American empire. There was an independent program called the 'Voice of Palestine', which I wasn't directly involved in. It was started by Hanan Ashrawi and it remained a vehicle for discussion on what was happening in Palestine.

Liz listened to programs like America Latina al Dia. In the earlier period it was a more vigorous voice for the people Chile. It was a very good program, but it gradually exhausted itself.

We did about a hundred to a hundred and fifty interviews a year and I've worked with Vancouver Co-op radio for about twenty-five years, so that's about 2,000 to 3,000 interviews. It's a lot of interviews with a lot of people.

I'd like to think that many people who were on Red Eye had insights into how the world works. I'm trying to think of ones that stand out more than others but I think I'll just let it stand that way.

In Struggle

In the *In Struggle* group the quality of thinking and the quality of discussion was very high. I got involved in *In Struggle* because I had some experience with two of the people who were instrumental in developing its ideas. One was Charles Gagnon. Just when I came to SFU these two people had gone down to the United States to picket the United Nations on the issue of the right to independence of Quebec. They were arrested in the United States and were deported to Canada, where they were then jailed. Right! The reason given was that they were supporting an organization that the Canadian state didn't want to see flower and have people consider seriously. They were imprisoned and charged with belonging to a subversive group, and I got involved in the campaign to free these two people, Gagnon and Pierre Vallieres. They probably were in jail for just under a couple of years and then they got acquitted and released from prison. There was no legal basis for jailing them at all.

I remember bringing Charles to my house; he was on a speaking tour. A short time after he spoke at a public meeting here Trudeau introduced the War Measures Act and the police came to my house looking for his speech, because they thought that he had advocated armed struggle or violence or something of that kind that they could use to imprison him for a longer period of time. They went searching through my audiotapes. Actually, a year later I got a call from the RCMP that said you can come and get your materials that we kept. So I went down to the RCMP headquarters. Everything was there except this cassette which had no tape in it anymore and I knew that was the cassette with the recording of the speech Charles gave. So I said where's the speech, I wanted to get all my documents and this is missing. And they said "oh, we don't know anything about that" (laughs). They'd gotten a tape that didn't have anything that they wanted on it but they kept the tape anyway. So that's how I got to know Charles Gagnon, and he was a good friend of mine. He was in the foundation of In Struggle as an organization

It was about a year after the struggle at SFU was lost, around '73 or '74. Charles said to me, 'we're trying to create a Communist party, we're not declaring it a party but we're hoping it will grow into a party' I was, at that point, working on the *Western Voice* newspaper. It was a little more than six months before I decided to join this In Struggle project. About a dozen people on the newspaper joined and it effectively the core who had put out the *Western Voice* now got into *In Struggle*.

In Struggle was then largely a Quebec organization in the sense that the largest number of people who joined it was in Quebec. Probably the next largest group, but a long ways smaller, was in Ontario, there was an odd sprinkle of people in the prairies, and a dozen or twenty others located here in BC.

Trying to organize *In Struggle* in BC involved some people going to different parts of the province to work and live and to try and convince people of the value of a new Communist organization and to join in trying to build it and to expand the membership.

A lot of the discussion at the beginning was very much internal to the organization and the discussions we held were about the events of the

day. The newspaper we put out was called *In Struggle* and was published weekly. It replaced the *Western Voice* and there was also a French language edition.

I myself held that the old Communist party no longer had revolutionary objectives, that it was bureaucratic and corrupted. I'll give you an example: when I went to the Soviet Union with my father, who was a sympathizer of the Communist party but he was never active, we went on a tour around sites associated with Lenin. We were the only ones in the tour bus. We were travelling on our own but we decided to take this special tour bus. My father said to the guide he had wanted to know how the party had decided who would be a replacement for an important person who had just died. I can't remember now who had died. Anyway that was the one question he put to the woman who was guiding us on our tour. And she said, "well I'm not a party member but my husband is and he explained to me that they had decided that the man who had died had put in his will who his replacement should be, Comrade so and so." My father accepted that but I said to him later when we were talking, "what is this, a Communist party in which the person who's replacing somebody else is chosen on the basis that it's in somebody's will that designated him?" I said, "that's a process that can't be anything but corrupt. He's inheriting a job." My father got angry with me as he frequently did when we had discussions like this. So I left that discussion. But that was an example of why I was not attracted to the Communist party. It designated people for leadership on the basis of procedures which had nothing to do with democracy or trying to establish a revolutionary direction for the party.

I never had much personal connection with the Communist party here in Canada. I knew Homer Stevens and a few like him but I didn't base my considerations on that. I was far more influenced and attracted by the Chinese revolutionary movement despite the criticisms I may have held about what they were doing. I still felt that Mao Tse Tung and Chou Enlai and others were trying to keep a dynamic of revolutionary fervor going during the cultural revolution and later.

I didn't really consider the Communist party of Canada as being revolutionary. It's a fair question to ask why I wasn't attracted by them but I was rather attracted to people who were considered part of the 'new left'. Various people that I knew were either individuals who had left the Communist party or had never been involved in it. I don't think I ever took the Communist party seriously. Not having a positive sentiment toward them I didn't see them as something to expend my energy upon, I decided to bypass them.

I had great admiration for Homer Stevens and his work in the fishermen's union, and his going to prison for leading a strike, but I guess I didn't see him as typical of a Communist party that could stir my passions or that could lead a real change in this society. I don't know how Homer Stevens felt about his membership in the party. He acted more or less as a militant unionist. The party was a kind of historic thing he'd been attached to during his youth. I never found him as somebody who might say "Hey, young guy, why don't you give us a good look and why don't you put some energy into it."

One of the things involved in being in *In Struggle* was to try and recruit working people to join us, and to develop an interest in the paper. I became an organizer and travelled around western Canada, from Winnipeg to here, trying to interest people in *In Struggle* as a vehicle for discussion and debate. The newspaper was part of a bilingual publication and was published in Quebec and here in Vancouver.

First we tried to interest people in reading the paper and seeing it as something useful to them. I would be up in Terrace or in Manitoba, trying to convince people to be interested enough to read the newspaper and hopefully find something of value in it, things they could use for developing their own positions.

One thing I should clarify is that we wanted to build a communist party and wanted to establish a foothold in the working class but in doing so we first had to establish roots inside the working class. Until it did that it couldn't declare itself a communist party. It was working towards the establishment of such a party but it wasn't declaring itself to be one yet.

I liked the prospective that it was working to make itself credible to working people and that those people would be the foundation of a real party. The thing that wasn't so attractive, that I didn't fully grasp at first, was that it was a largely Quebec based organization. I wanted to think through my joining it a bit more. I wanted to have a bit further sense of its work and if it could demonstrate that it was a feasible project. That was part of my hesitation. It also meant giving up the newspaper that we published here; the *Western Voice*, a newspaper which was supportive of working peoples' struggles in this region. But it seemed that we had to make a decision... is it feasible, is it a practical way to advance, by moving from an organization which had a small but energetic circle and doing some good work regionally to a more ambitious project that was looking to influence the working class country-wide.

We produced a weekly newspaper, *In Struggle*, so why would we want to continue producing a newspaper which would be different from the organization we were joining. I didn't see a purpose why we should put out a newspaper distinct from *In Struggle*. I remember that one of the differences with other people in *In Struggle* was over the question of Palestine and I worked to convince them that Zionism was an anti-revolutionary and anti-democratic position, that it was a neocolonial position. So I worked to convince people that they should take a stand against Zionism. After I forget how long I was successful and they adjusted themselves accordingly.

We had people, Steve Garrod and Barb Coward who moved up to Prince George and were working at industrial jobs who might identify people who expressed some interest in the effort of building a new working class party. Then those people would set up meetings with others and see if their interests in our newspaper would deepen.

It was mainly in the 80s that we decided that *in Struggle* was not being successful in its effort to recruit people and build a new organization. The decision was taken to dissolve the organization and leave it to people to carry on their efforts in whatever ways they felt appropriate. But it wouldn't be a dog fight over control of an organization or the name of an organization. Its history was fairly brief; I think about

five or six years. We arranged it so that the name could not be taken up by any other organization, to possibly misuse in the future.

We did a lot of work which turned out in the end to be largely unproductive, or unsuccessful in terms of recruiting new people.

I met with people that Barbara and Steve had contacted but they weren't people who really wanted to join. We'd discuss the kinds of issues we were working on, discuss questions of the day, or whatever the government was putting forward, and try to encourage people to continue with their attachment to us. To become more serious about joining us. But most of that was not successful.

People in Quebec had a shorter distance to move before buying into the idea that we need a revolutionary approach to these things, that we need to work in a disciplined way with a clear goal in mind. National policies seemed to be more remote here in British Columbia than they were in parts of Quebec.

In Struggle was fairly short lived but I was very busy in it ; but it ended in a failure in that we didn't make the progress we had hoped for. We worked hard toward the objective of building a revolutionary party but were frank enough to acknowledge that we weren't achieving it. It started in a period of a burst of hope and energy but ended in dismal dismay.

I'm trying to respond in a way that captures the hope which I felt but I don't quite know how to put it into words. I guess I joined with enthusiasm and optimism that the times were ripe for the creation of a new communist party. It all seemed a feasible, a realistic undertaking. We said to those we approached "come join, here is a way out of this miserable trap of capitalism, here is a set of ideas which have to be developed, they're not ready-made. If we succeed it will be a great improvement for workers fighting for their rights. But it's something which I and you together with other people will have to contribute to and find our way slowly to a successful conclusion. It's not ready-made.

Look at Cuba--it's got a leadership that is very impressive and still remains committed to the aspirations for continuing the revolution. Fidel

Castro must be revolted...his nephew has decided that he can make a lot of money by selling a perfume which is named after Hugo Chavez and another which is named after Che Guevara. They must be turning in their graves. These perfumes are made by a company in Cuba. The world has changed a great deal and a lot of things just seem bizarre. There are still billions of hungry people in the world. That hasn't changed, but revolution has mainly disappeared from the agenda as a solution to the injustices of the world. I don't see why we should give up. It's still necessary, a revolution is still a necessary response to the way the world is being run right now, the greatest inequalities of wealth that people have ever seen. All those things are still in existence.

So I became a fairly senior member of *In Struggle*. My position meant going to more and more meetings. We were a young organization and had ambitious objectives. Some of our people were fairly experienced in dealing with these questions but there were also younger people, some who'd been involved in other campaigns and some who had been in prison. We'd be working through the problems set by nationalism. There were people who may have been shaped by the Quebec nationalist movement but who no longer saw it as the direction to go in. They saw *In Struggle* the beginning as something pan-Canadian. They were not nationalists in the sense that their struggle would be separate from Canada. These were people who said "let's work on a Canada-wide basis, let's approach people across the country and say we're going to work together for the same thing They still believed that Quebec had the right to independence if people wanted it but they were no longer saying, "we should separate from Canada and that would be the solution to the problems we face in our country".

But the organization failed to grow, not even in Quebec while out here we remained at the handful of members that we started with. It was deeply discouraging. Finally after a number of years we resolved to disband *In Struggle*. There was some scattered opposition to that and we feared that some rearguard group might take over the name and pursue some crazy kind of program that we wanted nothing to do with. So we made sure that the name couldn't be used again. I don't know what more I can say.

What did I feel in those years when and after *In Struggle* foundered and dissolved? I felt as you can imagine, disheartened. I'd had my hopes that this was something that could work and yet it didn't work. I wondered "what now?" So with the failure of *In Struggle* for which I'd had high hopes I came back to a situation of working piece by piece, issue by issue here in BC. I didn't become cynical, I didn't become an enthusiast of anything that just came along but I didn't want to become passive. I didn't discover Buddhism (laughs). I didn't give up on politics. So you take a less ambitious goal, such as opposing the oil pipelines for instance ...issue by issue. There's still going to be capitalism, there's still going to be disasters which result in capitalism, but you do your best to oppose it. That's about it.

China, the Cultural Revolution and Canada

My involvement with China probably began in a serious way when I studied the Chinese language in Berkeley and wanted to go to China to do my PhD research on the labour movement there. I remember earlier going to the British embassy in the UK and saying to the cultural attaché that I wanted to go to China and do research on the history of the labour movement in China. He said to me "You do know that at the moment they're having a revolution and until the revolution is over they are not accepting visitors to do research." I was bemused, I guess, about "they're having a revolution", which was the cultural revolution. And he went on and said "and so we can't issue you a visa for study in the country." I guess I was half amused by that kind of phrasing and at the same time disheartened because it meant that I couldn't do what I had wanted to do. Studying the Chinese language was very difficult for me and now was without purpose it seemed.

But I did visit China, nonetheless, after Trudeau established diplomatic relations with the Peoples' Republic of China, in the early '70s . I was part of a delegation which was invited to China based on their appreciation of the work that we had done on supporting the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Canada.

That entailed doing some educational work and some propaganda work to try and make people in Canada better aware of the legitimacy of the Chinese government and argue that we should therefore establish diplomatic relations as part of our recognition of China.

I personally didn't approach ministers of the Canadian government. I'd done that during the Viet Nam war during which we had lobbied the government to adopt a position that would recognize American draft dodgers' right to a refuge here. But in the case of China I hadn't done anything more than holding educational sessions wherever I could and some public advocacy for establishing relations with China. It was the government of China itself that invited us as people who had been working on the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and the Peoples' Republic of China.

I was very positive about the cultural revolution. The general attitude in North America, which became more prominent as time went on, saw the cultural revolution as a totalitarian project. But I saw it as a largely emancipatory effort to increase both popular participation in government and in a broadly democratic process. The Chinese businessmen and capitalists had already been mainly removed after the Communist party took power but many were still active.

Six weeks is not a very long time to get to know a country, especially if you don't speak the language well and certainly a lot of my responses were idealistic. But I don't think they are as mistaken as many people see them to be now. It seems to be true that China today has abandoned revolution and adopted the road of capitalism, national capitalism. It seems to have become a 100 percent enthusiastic advocate of private profit and accumulation of wealth. Although a lot of the wealth that's been created in the last twenty years is really the cash investment of western capitalists, who seemingly have a free hand in China today.

Deng Xiaoping, who took over the leadership after Mao's death, was the engineer of that shift and he set a wholly different path than what Mao Tse Tung or Chou Enlai were promoting.

Anyway, we travelled around to different parts of the country, both in the rural as well as in the urban areas. We saw dramatic changes in

how decisions were being made and how young people in particular were being mobilized in mass undertakings and so on.

Linda Sperling, who then lived in Saskatchewan, had a friend from China who had come to Saskatchewan and had a very different view from what I saw in the cultural revolution, what it meant and what its nature was. She said that it was a total disaster. It was dictatorial and wasn't a step forward at all. She was visiting here and we had a bit of a discussion. I said to her "Come to my house and we'll continue talking there." She came here and I took out some trinkets and I sang songs that I'd learned in China. Suddenly she became more enthusiastic about the memories that came to her and she said "I really liked the change in education where you did some practical work, some agricultural labour, and you did some studying and you practiced throwing grenades." She said rather proudly "I was pretty good at heaving grenades." When I showed her another little memento I'd had from China from an agricultural commune, it brought back other memories to her. So she started off saying everything had been a backward step, a negative thing, but ended with a flush of memories, some that were quite the opposite of that. I thought to myself both are probably quite accurate recollections in her mind. That she had this image of two realities diametrically opposed but she wanted to hold on to both of them. For me, that was an indication of a need for looking in a more balanced way at the gains and losses of the cultural revolution.

She said her father had been an air force pilot so he came probably from a fairly privileged family in the new China. He had been, as the Chinese phrase goes, "sent down", he'd been demoted and lost many of the privileges and was now doing farm labour. She said "You know, my father didn't learn to do any cooking or house hold chores before but now he was doing that." In her second view of the reality of the cultural revolution she felt that maybe it wasn't such a bad thing (laughs). All of which is just to say that I don't have a final, finished view of what the cultural revolution was but I do have the feeling that it was a hell of a lot better than the way it is understood here today.

As Mao and Chou Enlai and others said...there is always a struggle as to which way to go forward, and the cultural revolution was part of that struggle. It ended with the death of Mao and others of the leadership and the rise of people like Deng Xiaoping and others who had an alternate view of which way China should go. They ultimately succeeded in imposing their views as opposed to a revolutionary policy.

One of the things that worried me about the cultural revolution was that very often people in organizations got a very swelled head and became quite vicious straw bosses. That's one of the things that I also saw in the cultural revolution. That struck me as a backward step because China had been progressing up until that time.

How the forces of reaction succeeded after all the generations of struggle and conflict and sacrifice? I don't have an answer to that question. I don't know how it happens that some rise and others fail in the struggle for change. But in the end, regardless of how it proceeded, those who did succeed were the people who had an orientation to resuscitate capitalism in China.

Having gone through that long drawn-out, very bloody, civil war. After having established a mass party which was a pretty revolutionary party for so long, and having a leadership that was trying to drive China forward it could result in such backward steps. If you can say only one thing about the cultural revolution, you got the feeling that there were ordinary people being drawn into the decision-making processes. I had the feeling that the expansion of the party and the power being exercised by younger and newer people, that was quite a success. But it was cut short and then reversed.

The Chinese policies -- there always were arguments within the leadership, but in the end the main things I understood were land reform, changing the organization of agricultural work which the majority of the people in the country are still involved in, and increasing the power of the peasantry in the country. The process of collectivization of agriculture where peasants increasingly moved from a system of private land ownership, or largely landlord ownership, to a collective shared decision-making about how to organize their work and their life. There was a

general direction on collectivization of work and in China. I didn't follow other developments that closely. But certainly there was a growing and massive program of industrial development, which is unmatched by any country in the world to date. And that seemed to be instituted with a degree of democratic considerations.

Certainly the Soviet Union was quite at odds with the process going on in China, but I think that they made different decisions about how to proceed with individual policies. But the Soviet Union had given up on the collectivization of land. I didn't consider the Soviet Union to be a socialist state anymore. They clearly were going in different directions. I saw the Soviet Union as a bureaucratic structure governed from the top down and the Chinese having far more participation by the peasantry in the way work was organized.

Of course I didn't believe that developments in China would have an immediate impact on the way we in Canada organized our life and work. I anticipated that the changes would be far more indirect in the ways that socialism would make progress in this country. That as it moved forward the Chinese experience might indirectly have an impact on what happens in countries like Canada later. But I didn't see developments in China as something that would have a direct impact abroad.

There were all kinds of conflicts between different people whether in the military or in other parts of the leadership of the country. There was an ongoing argument between people as they had established their power of control in the country. There were ongoing differences that arose at every point in the struggle. Some disagreements led to people being displaced from positions of power and at other times they maintained their position but lost some of the authority that they had.

I would ask "was there an increasing authority being exercised by the peasantry"? Or was there foreclosure of the peasantry's participation in decision making. More constriction or greater expansion of decision making by the peasantry. I don't think the cultural revolution was one event or one decision; it's rather a trend that was promoted or restricted.

They certainly tried and succeeded in expanding the industrial working class, let's say in steel production and so on. They tried to

increase the knowledge of industrial work...steel making was one of the main industries in which there was a great deal of conflict over how to do that. For me it looked like an effort to expand the knowledge and authority of ordinary workers in these processes, so that the knowledge base was expanded. More people were participating in these small scale production efforts. In general it seemed to me that the leadership was promoting an expanded participation of industrial work not just deciding that the quickest way was through a top down expansion.

Efficiency is not the only criteria that leads to empowerment by working people. There was constantly this back and forth of struggle between making productivity the most important thing overall, and what is the quickest and most efficient way to develop that. Or on the other hand to look at how much power do people have in making decisions around these issues. I think among the leadership of Mao and Chou Enlai they took that second criteria as a very important one; to examine and determine what works best. Is it just quantity of production? Or is it some way to increase peoples' involvement in the working and the organizing of these necessities?

I'm trying to say that whether peoples' role in decision making was democratized or expanded is another criteria than just the result of production. Efficiency of production was one criteria, but it shouldn't be the sole measure of success. It was the same with agriculture and so on.

I said to myself that "here's a huge country, a huge society which is struggling to advance from a very low technological level by engagement by working people with a much greater increase of their participation." China certainly seemed to me to be making great progress towards integration of the peasantry and workers in the decision making of their society and that is a very critical element to socialism. For a lot of the time other countries that called themselves socialist or were trying to build socialism weren't doing as much in ways to integrate the mass of people of the country in their decision making.

Developments in China were inspiring; it gave you a feeling of the world going in the right direction. The one project that I was involved in was work against the isolation of China in the international arena, to

change treating it as a pariah as opposed to welcoming it into the international system. So I worked to see that Canada would establish diplomatic relations with China as it did with most other countries, as opposed to ostracizing China or trying to restrict our contact with it and to undercut its own efforts to develop. So I engaged in that effort and we were in the end, after several years, successful.

I don't think you want to characterize developments in China as the role of one individual who is leading it. I don't see it that way. Rather I would see it in terms of a struggle over which way China could go forward after the death of Mao Tse Tung. What kind of policies were agreed to, there was a struggle that led to policies by those who opposed Mao and others in the leadership. The changes were fronted by Deng Xiaoping who oversaw the establishment a different direction for China and that's where we are today.

Those advocating the policy of Mao and Chou Enlai were defeated in a way that was quite decisive. The main leader of that counter movement was Deng Xiaoping.

The development that took place was the reversal of the efforts to transform China by having more young people involved in decision making, more working people, more peasantry and so on, and to really just consolidate the power of a bureaucratic structure. I think that sense of ability to change your world and your own position in that world has gone from a sense of emancipation, a sense of ability to be creative, its gone back to a world of aggrandizement and people with individual greed.

I know a friend of mine who went to China in the post-Mao era. He'd worked as a welder and was extremely involved in the reconstruction of the Bay bridge in Oakland, the bridge that had been damaged by the big earthquake. He no longer was a welder but he'd done that for many years in the United States. He went to China to see how the steel was prepared and then put on rafts and sent by sea to Oakland and became part of the bridge. It was a huge effort to float these steel structures that were largely finished pieces with the necessary welding mainly done and assembled as part of the bridge structure in California. That would be a sign of the level of skill and sophistication of the work in China. That's on the positive side;

on the negative side is how much the Chinese workers were part of decisions in that project. On the one hand the level of technology had increased but on the other hand the empowerment of the workers may not have advanced much.

Decision making authority has become restricted, it's not at all that democratic. Corruption by common knowledge is rampant in China today. It's a culture in which the more money you have the greater the respect for you. The question of equity has disappeared from popular culture. From the vision of creating an egalitarian society as your goal, of respecting social values of caring, of improving the lives of the most diminished people within a more egalitarian structure...all those things are ridiculed in China today. The idea of egalitarianism is not discussed and not valued.

It was the most gigantic effort to create a different society in which some wonderful things were achieved but now have been pushed back into objects of ridicule. Yes that is quite true. Well there are people who argue that they accept that new outlook because it's inevitable. They say "well, it's inevitable and the devil take the hindmost. Long live greed." It will last for a certain length of time, I imagine and then collapse but not into the satisfaction of a successful society rather into real authoritarianism and possibly into a consolidated class struggle.

There's a lot of dissatisfaction in many areas in China, from the little that I'm familiar with, and there's a lot of struggle going on, but it hasn't burst out into a major challenge to the powers that have established themselves. Labour unions seem to be pretty much control mechanisms over the workers rather than an expression of the needs of the working people.

But I don't think that any society is frozen in despair. I don't think it's true in Canada, and I don't think it's true in China. It's certainly not a promising situation at present but neither are many places in the world promising. Yet people are still trying to achieve better than what they presently have. In my view working class struggles aren't over; there's always a surprise ahead on the horizon.

To my mind the American empire is gradually collapsing but it doesn't mean that its destructive capacities have lessened. It's withering, but the tentacles are still thrashing. Like an octopus that's dying but it's still got a lot of destructive power in it.

America has less economic power than it had. Inside, the United States it is increasingly like a Third World country in disintegration. If you look at its school system, its economic productivity, its cities--the only thing where it continues to exercise its leading power is in military destruction.

Teaching English as a Second Language

There was a period after I was fired from SFU and then I was active in In Struggle. But I decided I needed to earn some money and help support the family. I considered a number of things which I could maybe train for and then work in. I considered things like some area of medicine, not as a profession but some area of medical application that I could train in and become adept at, but I thought that would take too long a time. I was thirty, closer to thirty-five. So I looked at becoming a teacher of English as a Second Language teacher...train and get a certificate in that area and get a job. It required a minimal amount of training, something like a few summer courses at UBC. I finally got work at Douglas College. That teaching was then largely a women's profession and Barb Coward was one person who helped me get work at Douglas College.

Most of the teachers were women, and it was very pleasurable because of the cooperative way that they treated me and other colleagues at work. It wasn't competitive like with largely male teachers involved in teaching at the university were and I found a lot of satisfaction in this work. Partly because of that whole milieu of mutual support as well.

Well, you can compete over anything if that's the sort of attitude you approach the work with. Largely in the university I found a male competitive atmosphere, an I can leap frog over you attitude. For the most part the women in ESL were very supportive not just of the students but

supportive of their colleagues. If you had a problem and needed assistance, they'd say "well, let me help you. I'll do this or do that."

It could be in a whole range of things you could easily go to your female colleague and say "how do I handle this situation? How do I handle that problem?" They'd instinctively deal with it as a shared problem that they could give suggestions about. So that was the satisfaction of teaching there. The limitation for me was I still enjoyed talking and dealing with questions that would come up in a university setting and there weren't ESL people who were focused on that. For instance I was still interested in developments in China and looking at their agricultural policy or whatever else, and there weren't colleagues there that had a background or an interest in that kind of thing.

My classes were quite multi-cultural, I would have people from Afghanistan and some Chinese. But Chinese students weren't so prominent in the classroom. There would be Japanese students, there'd be Russian students, there'd be Romanian students, in fact students from really across the whole spectrum. I remember a few students from Turkey who were very intelligent; it was one of the pleasures for me in teaching English to people like that. That was a big satisfaction.

They were learning all the skills of the language, including composition. They'd be writing essays. Of course in the lower level beginner classes they practiced a lot of basic things in grammar, but they soon were dealing with fairly complex constructions and really trying to conquer the skills of clear expression. It wasn't just the basic skills. I tended to teach greater skills in levels three and four; there were four levels at the time I was teaching. So they already had some control of grammar and were developing greater powers of writing essays and things of that kind. I did that for twenty some years, from the mid 70s to the late 90s. I reached retirement age and I got a twenty-retirement year pin as a reward. I was always in the category of full-time teacher but I was also in the category of having my contract renewed each year. So I never accumulated any seniority. I think the last eight years I got pensionable credit for the work I'd been doing all along. I was exploited for sure because I didn't get pension contributions before that.

Most of the students were quite motivated and eager to learn the skills of expression and be able to conquer the grammar of the language. I enjoyed it a lot. I found quite a sense of satisfaction when students did apply themselves, and most did. Some of them came with a high level of other skills, there were doctors in my classes, people who had fled their country from Afghanistan or Iraq who left their country with skills in their first language. Skills which were beyond my own capacities. I really got a lot of satisfaction in assisting them to succeed in English. A lot of students were more mature than they later became. In later years they came from high schools abroad to go directly to university here and were working very hard, but they were also less worldly. There were also people with established accomplishments, who had degrees from their own universities, people in their late twenties or thirties.

I remember students from Turkey, for example, who were very skilled and rapid in learning English and were eager to finish their studies and get into their profession here. I remember a student from Turkey who wanted to get her nursing qualifications who studied diligently but was also lively in class and really a delight as an adult learner.

People would write essays. That was normal in the third and particularly in the fourth level class. Students would write a relatively lengthy essay, and use the skills that they had developed.

I retired from teaching at the age of sixty-five, compulsory retirement. I'd been at it for almost twenty-five years. I can't recount any vignettes or stories but I had a general feeling of satisfaction with the work. The students were pleasant and appreciative, and that's about the sum of my memory.

After I retired I was pleased to be able to put more of my time into other things but it wasn't with the attitude of "thank god it's over." I had enjoyed it, both from the point of view of the teachers I worked with who were very cooperative with one another, and from the students themselves who seemed by and large to be appreciative of the efforts I put in and were quite generous in their appreciation.

In Struggle had collapsed by this time but I was already deeply involved in the radio work and that became my non-work activity...the

weekly Red Eye news program with Vancouver Co-op radio. The programming for that became the center of my non-work activity. Red Eye was broadcast on Saturday mornings, 9 to 12 and had a mix of interviews, music and assorted accounts. It was delightful to do and also had a fairly wide listenership.

Interviewing was the climax of preparing a program, but we would spend time discussing what we were going to do in the following week and what would be in each program. We would plan its content and then people would volunteer to undertake to prepare an interview, or more than one, but at least one interview on a topic that we had agreed upon. People were also active in suggesting the topics that we should cover in the interview format. The show was overwhelmingly interview-based. People would volunteer but interviewing was largely allocated to people who had more experience in the show. We looked at people's skills and decided collectively who would do which interviews and what skill level did they bring to that work. The interviews sometimes took place face-to-face when people were passing through Vancouver, but many of the interviews were by phone to people in different parts of Canada, in the United States, and occasionally more far afield, sometimes in England, in Europe, and occasionally in the Middle East.

No. It wasn't too expensive. As the technology became more advanced in terms of ability of access it wasn't too expensive, although there was a certain amount of cost involved.

Occasionally we had feedback. People phoning in saying what they had thought of some of the interviews we'd done. Most often they were very positive about the interviews and we appreciated being contacted by people who often had more knowledge of an area than we did. So there was feedback in that way.

Coming in at the End

What do I take the greatest pride in having done in my life? That's a question I've never thought of actually. I guess I take pride in not giving

up hope, I take pride in fighting even lost battles; I don't want to see them conceded. It's not giving up; that's the long and short of it.

These are pretty grim days right now as to the ways the world is unraveling and yet I still have dreams that we can save ourselves from disaster. I feel you can't throw in the towel until you've fought with everything you've got to try to create a different outcome.

As for Canada, I don't think that the current government in Ottawa really represents the wishes of the Canadian people. I still think that people, whatever position they adopt in elections, it's not their final position, not their thought-through commitment. That they can rethink their positions and their commitments. There are some that won't change their opinion; the rich are not going to give up their life or their wealth, but they're a minority and I think that others can still change their outlook and can move from supporting people like Harper to abandoning him and junking him. At least I cling to that hope; I wouldn't give up on people that easily. They may be following Harper today but they won't forever follow him.

What has been important to me is maintaining my integrity, maintaining my convictions. I've seen many people who today they're advocates for working people and then tomorrow they decide "oh well, this isn't getting us very far, let's switch horses." Just recently Peter Cameron, somebody that I knew for many years, who espoused decent positions in relation to working people, apparently decided that that wasn't going anywhere, "I can go much further by opposing the interests working people" he seems to have said to himself. He came out recently on the teachers' strike for some worthwhile things, like more teachers in the classrooms so they can effectively help kids who have learning of disabilities that they haven't got the resources or personnel to do now. He became an advocate and a negotiator for the government, an advocate for squeezing the teachers as hard as he could. There are also other people who don't necessarily switch sides in that dramatic a way but who become cynical, give up the beliefs that they had at one time. I could list many people but it's not a matter of listing people who have fallen away but a pattern that people reach at a certain point in their life. They say "oh

screw this, where is it getting us." They become cynical or embittered and they just decide to give up the struggle and to capitulate to the times. They may have different rationales but that's the effect - that they've given up. That is something I find completely unacceptable. I've been in many struggles where I've lost the battle but I haven't changed my stripes because of that. I don't feel embittered; that only leads to despair and at best opting out of the struggle.

During the last little while I've sometimes been close to that; because of my illness I feel I can't do the things I used to. But it's never led me to feel we should just forget about the battle. Certainly the situation of, let's say, the Palestinian people, which I've been involved with for so long, is not an easy or rewarding struggle. But I feel those aren't reasons to just fold up the cards and surrender, to just become passive in relation to what's happening.

It's hard to think of heroes. I have very fond memories of people who have kept the struggle going; Charles Gagnon would be one of these. He had a universal vision of people not just those in Quebec. I'm trying to think of people, but they don't come to mind right now. It's not a list of heroes. I think when people ponder the question of heroes they often choose people that they may never have known, they attribute certain qualities to them and as such they become heroes or heroines. I never knew Rosa Luxemburg but certainly I could imagine her as somebody who had all the qualities of a person who one would deeply admire, she withstood prison and she faced death. She didn't seem to adjust to the times, didn't capitulate. I can imagine the qualities she must have had, but she's not intimate to me.

I mentioned Gagnon because I knew him, I worked with him, I admired his integrity, his dedication, his honesty. Those are qualities that he embodied. But somebody more famous, I don't know?

Those people I detest? The fascists for sure. There are the major names of fascists, but I won't go through that list. Margaret Thatcher might come to mind. I guess when they're alive and are carrying forward their betrayals, not necessarily betrayals for them, they're detestable. But I find that continuing to harp on them when they're no longer figures of

power or an enemy that you despise it's a waste of energy. The anger that you feel about them when they are making their reactionary gestures and implementing them no longer has the same power when they are dead. There was something about a Margaret Thatcher that was despicable, but she's not on the stage of history any longer so I don't feel any burning anger toward her.

There are some Canadian politicians who definitely are or were much better than others, and Tommy Douglas may have been one of those better individuals. But I guess on the Canadian scene I would see people who were working for a communist world as more attractive to me than Douglas. I would see Douglas as somebody who was attractive in some ways but wasn't the kind of person who touched my heart like others have.

Somebody who I never knew or had any contact with, represents for me that kind of heroic quality would be somebody like Norman Bethune. He was more solid in his commitment, an ambition to create a different world. He had all kinds of blemishes it's true but he was someone who wholeheartedly and in a sustained way fought for a new and better world. I guess there are many other people who did many good things who were heroes but whose actions have not attracted general attention or motivated me.

Well, of course there is still a left. There's always another generation, and there's always in the younger generation a constant renewal of idealism, a renewal of capacity to struggle and to achieve their dreams and those dreams can be quite transformative of society. I don't think one should look at people of my generation and ask how many of them are still struggling for their dreams. They may have given up a great deal but that doesn't mean looking at the whole spectrum of people and deciding that there's no attempt to create a new world.

A crucial task of a new generation is to rekindle the dream of a new and better world; that it is possible to transform the present dismal scene into a hope for a better tomorrow. I think that every revolutionary effort must entail an effort to find a way to go beyond the dismal present.

I'm thinking of the younger generation, ranging from about 18 to 35 years of age. I think the goal should be to re-establish a hope to live by... not necessarily a dream that solves all problems, but a hope which is based on a conviction that it's possible to save the world from suicide. Only one threat may be nuclear war. There are all kinds of ways in which people live their life filled with a genuine hope, and not a desperate hope but a realistic conviction that they can repair the damage that's being done to the world, a notion that you can save humanity from a final disaster. It's a hope that's rooted in conviction, you can see it sometimes on the faces of young people when they believe that a far better world is possible.

That's not just an airy-fairy dream, but involves a realistic approach to the world; that we can pull this mess out of the fire. An ecological disaster is the one nightmare that all of us have. If that the battle can't be won, if that the situation can't be salvaged, then tomorrow will be increasingly worse than today. That's the one thing people may feel that they can improve; whether it's an environmental issue or whether it's the potential cataclysms that face us. I guess the main thing that I would hope is that there are young people, and some old people too but mainly youth, who can be filled with the hope that the potential disasters around us are threatening and real, but that there's no need to capitulate in the face of them. That there is still the possibility that these can be solved or reconfigured in a way that we can salvage the situation.

I would say that for me, it requires a reconfiguration of our society. But the one thing that I hope for, at the end of life, is that people have the conviction that they can create a world that uses reason and confronts the horrors that we all face with the belief that there's a way to overcome them.

I would suggest the questions of class and class struggle are central to our problems. But if I'm looking at somebody other than me considering solutions to our dilemma the minimal thing I would want is for that person to have a rooted conviction that these problems are solvable, these problems are not foredoomed to overwhelm us. If you ask me what it is necessary to do it is this. I will say foremost is the belief and the

conviction that fundamental problems are solvable. How they're solvable are questions somewhat further down the road of course. But if a person doesn't have a conviction that we can overcome all these tribulations and difficulties that face us, then there's no hope. So if I want a vision I can pass on to other people, to young people, it's the conviction that the major problems that face us are capable of being overcome. How they're going to be overcome may be beyond me to prescribe but at least the conviction that, yes, there is hope that a solution can be found. I guess I think that the gift of hope is greater than any particular solution we could advocate.

What is that communist world that I've been striving for much of my adult life? I really don't know how to answer that question. One can say "well that's for those who want to establish it to decide." But that's not much of an answer.

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Epilogue

The above is the slightly edited version of material collected between September 6th and November 26, 2014. I ended my interviews after it became apparent that Mort Briemberg had no further accounts which he could readily recall. Our final discussion revolved around him saying, "I just don't remember" to more than a dozen different questions which attempted to elicit recall of given topics. Having gone through the manuscript Mort found it distressingly "thin" and said that while it initially did not seem to be his own words that on reflection it was indeed approximately what he had said. During the following session we mutually agreed that further work would be unproductive and decided to halt the undertaking there.

I entered this project with great hopes about what we could accomplish and am saddened by how it has turned out. It will now be read mainly by a handful of dust-proof researchers rather than the broader audience I had envisioned. A great many central questions remain unaddressed and unanswered here.

End.