

# **Three Men--Three Radical Canadian Voices, W.W.1 to c. 1980**

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## **Preface**

The accounts of the three men who are presented here were members of the left in Canada between the first decade of the twentieth century until the late 1970s. They were at various times throughout that century seamen, railway builders, placer miners, farmers, fishermen, camp workers and jacks of all trades. They originally came from Poland, Norway and Great Britain but soon integrated themselves into conditions as they then existed in Canada, which at times were very tough indeed. I knew two of them quite well personally and also knew of Harvey Murphy as a once prominent union leader in BC during my youth. All three present, to me, compelling accounts of a not so distant past, despite their sometimes conflicting outlooks. I was much moved by the fidelity they entailed. They all died about a generation ago.

Possibly much of what they discuss may seem uninteresting or incomprehensible to many readers today despite the struggles which once moved many in Canada and throughout the world. Their accounts are if anything understated.

Two of the raconteurs lived what were fairly typical lives in western Canada, retreating into old age in their late sixties or seventies. Harvey Murphy became progressively more ill and died some ten days after I had ended the interviews and had left Toronto in the spring of 1977. All three retained their fundamental views until death claimed them. It was rather inspiring; their fidelity to their fundamental outlooks and their refusal to accept currently fashionable insights, never giving in.

What did they accomplish in their lifetimes--what do most of us accomplish in our own lifetimes? It is usually not very much (despite the self adulatory claims of a few boosters.) They influenced me as I presumably did others in various ways. So long guys, we won't meet your kind again here.

**HARVEY MURPHY**  
**Reminiscences 1918 - 1943**  
Interviewer Rolf Knight  
Foreword by daughter Mary Murphy

**Compiler's Note**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Little has been changed here but numerous passages which were so fragmentary and rambling to be incomprehensible in the original have largely been deleted. This is not an editorial approach I normally find acceptable. It is employed here because it was necessary.

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

While Harvey Murphy was, in a sense, speaking for the record here there are some intriguing aspects to these reminiscences. Readers can come to their own understandings of them. Rather contradictory views are juxtaposed in a number of places. One striking feature of Murphy's account, for me, was the disparity between the official positions of the Communist party and their pragmatic reinterpretation by union organizers in the field. Murphy outlook seems to have been recurrently recast by the contexts in which he worked and the men he worked with, by the various kinds of working class culture he encountered.

At one point during the interviews dealing with the Blairmore mine strike in the early 1930s, Harvey recalled, in a mock-aggrieved tone, that he was pilloried as being a 'Red agitator'. After a second or two of dramatic silence he burst into a smile and said, 'I was' and 'it was my strength'. In the broadest sense, that is what these reminiscences are about, about what his life involved. Although the three men collated here were

quite different personalities with quite different approaches to the world they were to my mind ,members of the left in Canada., as it once existed.

This account covers the twenty-five years **before** Harvey Murphy became the leading figure in the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union in Canada--the main hard rock mine workers union between the mid-1940s and the late 1950s. In that capacity he developed different qualities and responses than those reflected here. His leadership of a major union must have blended capacities for administration, for complex contract negotiations and for inter/intra union politicking. He would then have probably overseen day to day organizing rather than doing it himself. This later part of his life is not dealt with here at all., nor is the long, stuttering erosion and ultimate dissolution of Mine and Mill.

## **Foreword**

by Mary Murphy

Harvey's father came to Canada first, I don't know when- sometime in the first years of the 20th century. The story is that he came with the understanding he'd send money back to his wife so she could come over later. I think his wife, my grandmother, had just one child then. But instead, he made trips back to Poland himself. Three times over the years. And each time he went back his wife got pregnant. She had three children by the time she came to Canada.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Becky Buhay, she's one of the grand old ladies of the workers' movement in Canada, she remembered speaking in Kitchener and being heckled by this kid in 1919 or so. That's the first anybody noticed of my father. I knew her too she was a grand, not so old, lady then.

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

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

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

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

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

Harvey's parents and his brothers and sisters continued living in that downtown Toronto area. Poor Jews they were and so they remained, at least before the second world war. His father had a kosher butcher shop in Kensington a couple of side streets over from what was the center of the market today,. That was then mainly a Jewish market but I don't think he was too successful. They bought a house down there, just off that little park down there. How they managed that I don't know. I have the impression that it was my grandmother that kept things together. I think she bootlegged from that house during the worst years. Although nobody would admit it now.

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

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

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

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

My aunts all worked around Spadina, in the clothing industry. Some of the younger brothers went into the army during the second war. There were Harvey, Rose, Johnny, Louie, Mike, Helen, Sarah, Bessie, Blackie, and Charlie. Four girls and five (?) boys. One of them died when he was quite young.

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

A couple of the brothers were in the restaurant business, after the war, sometimes quite successfully. They were all very personable, colorful, Runyonesque types. None of them were at all involved in politics. But they had a lot of respect for my father. Harvey may have been the black sheep of the family when he was first kicked out of the house but his brothers and sisters never felt that way about him when they had grown up themselves.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

That anti-Catholic feeling must have really been strong amongst those people at Springhill. To my grandmother, Catholics--in the abstract--were just devils! Immoral, heathenish, sneaky--all that. But in her personal dealing it was quite different. A lot of her best friends in Blairmore were Italian ladies who were good union people--and

who were Catholic. It's just another one of those contradictions you always find. People say and believe one thing in the abstract but in the actual case they do quite the opposite. People don't resolve those contradictions.

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

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

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

He got hooked up with my grandmother there. She was already a young widow. According to her version, she had gotten married to a miner in Springhill secretly and was pregnant when her husband was killed in a mine accident. She had never been accepted by his family and after he died they rejected her, wouldn't have anything to do with her. Anyway, she was living with her own family again, with a young son. When my grandfather got to Springhill she married him. I guess he was sort of taking her off her parents' hands.

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

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

They moved to B.C. and lived in New Westminster for a short while just before the first world war. But he couldn't seem to make a living there. My grandfather got back into mining because he was a good miner and that was where he could make the best money. He worked in all those mining towns of the Alberta coal district at one time or another. They lived in Hillcrest, Alberta for a while. My mother began school there. But

by the time she was seven or eight they had settled down in Blairmore. He was always looking for a better company, better working conditions, a better place to live.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He definitely didn't want any of his sons to be miners. But they all worked down in the mine, all started down in the mine as soon as they left school. During the 1930s, when

most of my uncles started mining, there were no alternatives as far as jobs went. One of them was injured and crippled in the mine. But sooner or later all of them did get out of mining.

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

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

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

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

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

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

for people who would dwell on the past. It's only recently that he's willing to talk about it.

## **Harvey Murphy**

### **Reminiscences: 1918-1943**

#### ***Kid's Stuff***

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

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

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

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

The people who had originally settled in the Kitchener area were 'Pennsylvania Dutch', people of German background who came up from the States in the previous century. To give you some idea of the times, to prove their patriotic nature, they changed the name of the city to Kitchener--after the British general, a great hero of the

Boer war. The city had been called Berlin before the war. So there was a lot of pressure in Kitchener of people trying to prove that they were loyal Canadian subjects.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I learned more about socialism after my family moved to Toronto. I had left all my boyhood friends in Kitchener and was still living with my family. My father had friends in Toronto but I didn't want to be bothered with them. Out of my whole family I was the only one affected that way. I was the only one who got interested in socialism. It's still that way. Mainly that was from my experiences of working in industry and my association with people there that influenced me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## *In the Twenties*

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

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

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

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

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

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

The O.B.U. and the Socialist Party of Canada had broken with the Communists by then. There had been a joint delegation of them that went over to Russia to talk to the C.I



(i.e. the 'Communist International'). The O.B.U. believed in the priority of the union movement. They had entered into the fight of hundreds of thousands of workers who had gone out on strike, almost spontaneously, in the mass industries, which were almost totally unorganized. The O.B.U. had left the A.F.L. because the A.F.L. didn't want to bother with most workers in the mass industries.

It became our goal, in the party, to get the O.B.U. back into the broader trade union movement. To get the workers who had been part of the O.B.U. back into the union movement, because the O.B.U. was isolated and smashed after a few years. Their effect wore off but the craft unions remained.

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

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

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

Along with all this, you have to imagine the effect of the Russian Revolution and the struggle in Ireland for independence from British domination. That was really the first successful anti-colonial struggle of our times. What we most talked about revolved around the Russian Revolution. But most of Europe was in turmoil after the war. We had a lot of immigrants who wanted to hear about what was happening in their own countries. Many of the original supporters of our movement were immigrants. They were organized into their own social organizations; the Workers' Party was a federation of foreign-born people to a large extent.

There were scores of thousands of people who had left Europe to come to North America, to what was then known as the New World. There was oppression and hunger in the countries they came from. They were bound together in these social organizations, of the left in our case. There were some Polish clubs and a Bulgarian club I remember. There was a large Finnish Organization. There was the Jewish

Peoples' Order. Much of the membership and life of these federations was more for the social life in the clubs. Their meeting halls were owned by these federations. They were an outgrowth of the Finnish and Ukrainian and Russian and other immigrant groups. The left wing ones came together and originally formed the Workers' Party. The English speaking clubs we set up were quite small compared to the others, to start with. It was only in 1927 that the fight started for the Communist party to become a centralist party.

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

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

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

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

I was also very influenced by old Maurice, a guy called Maurice Spector. At first we never appreciated the importance of trade unions as a basic form of working class organization. Seeing the kind of unions that existed then and their leadership. Intellectuals hated unions. They'd sell out the workers for their own 'recognition'. That was a prominent view of the party when I joined, and largely so through the twenties. The Socialist Party of Canada would have nothing to do with the trade unions. They held that unions were capitalist institutions--which they are, of course. But for me, unions were very attractive.

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

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

We had big discussions in the movement about the role of the trade unions in this. William Z. Foster was one of our big heroes. He had led the steel strike in the States. But it was smashed, almost totally. The movement had been trying to organize

industrial unions or to take over those that existed, to capture and expand them. But by the time I became a member of the party there had been an expulsion of socialists and communists from the labor movement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*(Gap in account)*

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

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

It's true that company agents got inside the union apparatus and got pretty high up in them. A lot of the anti-communist actions stemmed from these birds who had gotten up in the unions. How many trials have I been at where part of the evidence was

provided by a stool pigeon in a union? How do you know? You never know for sure. You just take it into account.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

deportation case if it came up for trial. They had to have a trial before they were deported.

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

## **1930**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stayed out in the woods for about a week or so. The R.C.M.P. knew that they'd have to load up the troops and take them back to Edmonton without accomplishing anything. They had to have action and publicity to sustain their presence there. They

couldn't keep all those policemen and deputies there for long without anything happening.

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

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

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

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

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

### ***In the Soviet Union***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RK: Did you work in Russia?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

very simple to avoid breaking windows when you're building. When the windows go in you put soap on the glass until everything is finished. Then you can see that the glass is in. Otherwise you can break a lot of panes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I only stayed in Berlin until the German party could fix up my papers so I could get back to Canada. Germany was on the verge of a revolution, it seemed to me then. The Communist party there was quite an affair, it was linked to workers in the plants and

in a lot of different ways. I went to a party discussion on what was going to come next in that strike. It was held in the Wedding district, I think.

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

### ***Back Home and Out West***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I'd go speak at miners' meetings throughout the whole region. They were accustomed to having public discussions and bringing in speakers, maybe once a month. We'd arrange with some of the locals to invite me to speak. At the end of the meeting they might give you a check for twenty or twenty-five bucks. That would keep you going, pay for transportation. That's how I got around to all those places there.

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

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

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

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

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

We'd call a meeting and some of the workers in that project would speak and then some of us would speak. We'd send some of our people to get on the project and then



they would come out and denounce it. Finally we had a riot there, the police came and some of us were arrested.

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

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

### ***Estevan, 1931***

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

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

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

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

I came in using the trials to get into the town, because the town was blocked off by the police. We couldn't get any union organizer in without them arresting us. So I came in dressed up as a lawyer, with a fancy suit and a briefcase. The police there didn't know me. I'd made a reservation at the best hotel by telephone and when I got off at the station I took a cab. The hotel I had registered at was just down the street from the

railway station so the taxi driver drove me around a bit and then took me back almost to where we'd started. I was supposed to arrive like a swell; I was supposed to be a lawyer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

See, Sam Scarlett had been a prominent man in the I.W.W. in the States back before the first world war. He had originally come from Britain and during the Palmer raids, or

maybe before, when the American government rounded up all the left wingers, he was arrested along with Big Bill Haywood and most of the I.W.W. leadership. After some time in jail he was deported by to Scotland. But Scarlett came back to Canada in...I don't know when. He was a well-known veteran of the labor battles by the time I first came west.

The O.B.U. (One Big Union) still had some support in Western Canada when I first got out there. The O.B.U. was our idea of industrial unionism. It wasn't a communist idea at all. But they saw parliament as just a gas house. They were against involving themselves and workers in political action, 'intrigues', as they would put it.

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

*The First Trek to Ottawa, Summer 1932*

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

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

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

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

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

### ***In the Crowsnest Pass***

It was around that time that I first came into Blairmore. My headquarters were supposed to be in Edmonton but I hardly ever saw it. I travelled through the Crowsnest Pass to address miners there. At first Coleman was one of our strong points there. I came to Coleman and miners there would maintain me. They'd provide me room and board. That was something they did personally, the Mine Workers Union couldn't arrange that. I first stayed with a guy by the name of Sudworth (?) in his shack, a man who had been noted as a great football player when he played for the Rossland team. So Coleman was where I first stayed.

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

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

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

I got into Coleman and made contacts with the miners. The conditions in Western Canada were different from those that existed in Illinois and the American coal communities. The working conditions and the wages weren't much different but we weren't faced with the unified attacks of the big coal companies and all their allies, as occurred in the States. The settlements that the miners lived in in Western Canada

were different too--there was often good fishing and hunting. But the Crowsnest Pass wasn't a good place to grow things, although quite a few people had gardens.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well, that's how I first landed in Blairmore. I knew certain miners but I had no friends there. Once I got connected with the men they got to recognize that I was experienced in strikes--I'd been in a lot of strikes. The strike at Blairmore hadn't started yet when I

first got there but it was about to start. We set up a relief organization to provide and arrange for rations and so on.

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

The main trouble was the collapse of the coal industry during the depression--closed plants didn't need it and other people couldn't afford it. We had a plan for a division of the work available; where some would work full shifts and others part time. It was geared to the number of persons a man had to support. It seemed like a good idea at the time but it was foolish.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*(Isobel Murphy):* You should tell how you worked up the morale of the workers there. How there was more fun and more things going on during the strike than ever before.

The miners' hall was busy all the time. There were dances. There were speeches and lectures almost every day.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, the whole Crowsnest Pass area is a mining district. There was a fraternity between miners; you have that in every country, especially if they are in one



district like that. Blairmore, Hillcrest, Bellevue--all on the Alberta side. And if you go into B.C., Fernie, Michel and Natal.

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

The company tried to break out strike at Blairmore by opening the mine in Bellevue. The same company owned it. They arranged with the fire bosses and the shifters (shift bosses) to bring the Bellevue mine into operation as we were on strike in Blairmore. It was about four miles away.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well, the foreman of the jury told me that he was from Pincher Creek, was a small rancher there. And he says, 'What are you guys kicking about, to go on strike in times

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I remember the description of me by the chairman of a support meeting when the strike was on. This would be in ... I've forgotten now ...one of the mines in the Crow. He said, 'Murphy is a good man. He even looks like Mussolini.' That was their conception of Mussolini, a 'good Italian socialist'. Of course there were Italians who understood what was going on in Italy but many in these communities had come over before Mussolini took power. Some of these communities were kind of backward on politics, but they were good union people, good strikers.

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

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

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

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

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

*Harvey Murphy: Not long after we were elected we renamed the main street in Blairmore Tim Buck Boulevard. It was part of the inter-provincial highway actually.*

That's the center of the town. We planted some trees along it in town and made it into a boulevard. At the time Tim Buck was still in Kingston penitentiary on the section 98 provisions.

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

*(Isobel Murphy: Tim Buck got out of Kingston in 1934 and not long after that he made a trip across the country with a stop scheduled in Blairmore. His train was supposed to get in at about eight in the evening. But there was a storm and the train was delayed so he got in at four o'clock in the morning. And there were still people down at the hall waiting to greet him. As soon as he came in they began to blow the fire whistle to let everyone know he had come.*

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

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

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

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

We'd make agreements with the company--but they'd break them and we'd break them. It was a hit and run affair on both sides. It was a man-to-man business. If we felt strong we'd call a strike. We had general agreements but they didn't commit either

side to any hard and fast grievance procedures. Some of those agreements used to be only two or three pages long. It recognized the wage scales. It used to be a straight argument with the threat of work stoppage standing in the doorway.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I tell you, I've seen whole working agreements that weren't more than two or three pages long. Just the wage scale and the hours of work. Nobody used (labor negotiating) procedures. The pit committee would go in to the management and meet in the morning and the guys would be up at the mine ready to go to work. They waited there at the mine entrance till the pit committee came out of the meeting with the company. If we couldn't come to an agreement we'd just shut her down.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***In B.C.***

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

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

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

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

I remember when I was once over in Victoria on a delegation of some sort. We were up in Uphill's room, he was attending some Royal Commission hearings and Mrs.



Uphill wasn't with him. The Liquor Control Board had had a meeting the night before where it seems they had been 'testing the whiskey'.

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

The provincial government wanted to appoint a governmental inquiry to investigate conditions at Anyox; they thought they could get around the demands for an independent investigation by appointing a commission filled with their picked men. Anyox was the kind of mine where they 'tied up' the boulders in the tunnel rather than bringing them down and cleaning up. All sorts of stuff like that. It was very dangerous for the miners. We brought down these affidavits to Victoria; of how the mine inspector was supposed to go in there but never did inspect the dangerous places but only where the operators wanted him to go.

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

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

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

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

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

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

That got the company riled because he called out the mill when the magma was going through the 'calendars'. This is after the ore had been crushed. It's hot metal and it would consolidate in the calendars. It would tie them up for months if you didn't give a mill notice beforehand. I always made it a practice of giving advance notices to the company in situations like that. But this guy didn't. He pulled out the crew at the end of the three days.

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

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

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

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

in jail. That was common at the time. You could expect that. That was 'the law' as we saw it operating then.

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

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

The company would try to get supplies and scabs up to Anyox past our pickets. We could get a couple hundred men on the picket line in Rupert if we had to. But they brought in the scabs from Vancouver, where they could hire them easily and where they could get past our pickets. Vancouver has such a big dock area, so much going on that they could get by us.

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

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

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

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

B.C. was a tremendous place--it was mostly Vancouver. Vancouver would be filled with loggers and fishermen and miners who'd come in or would be on the tramp. Vancouver itself didn't have that much industry then. Mostly it was these transient

single men that we had in the unemployed associations. I don't think we had so many Vancouver citizens.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What happened after Blairmore was the Corbin strike. See, the real government of British Columbia, in the mining regions of the interior, was then the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company. Right from Trail down to the border. They had established a sweep of company unions right from Grand Forks almost to the Alberta border. We had organized Michel into our union and we were in the process of re-affiliating with the United Mine Workers of America--as all our locals finally did. Corbin was coal, a coal mining town on the B.C. side of the border.

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

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

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

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

Haywood was originally a miner and the leading officer of the Western Federation of Miners. It's a funny thing--when I was at the Lenin school in Moscow I occupied a room that had some of Haywood's books in it. He fled to the Soviet Union to escape

getting sent up for life on one trial the Americans trumped up against him. He lived his last years in the Soviet Union.

Anyways, in this book\* he talks about being in Trail on an organizing tour. He made a speech in Rossland. That whole area of the Kootenays was an extension of the western

American mining area at the time. Spokane was the real capital of that district. All the capital came from there.

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

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

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

There was still a local of Mine and Mill at Trail when I first got there (1943). A small one. It met almost in secret. More like a club, with no bargaining rights. The whole southern interior of British Columbia, everywhere in the mining district; it's almost unimaginable today the power Cominco had.

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

\* *The Autobiography of William D. Haywood*, 1928 International publishers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## ***Riding Hell Bent for Election***

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

The Communist party had just begun to get involved in parliamentary elections and they wanted to put forward candidates wherever they could show some support. I was chosen to run for the party in Kootenay riding. That riding included the Crowsnest Pass, Canmore to Pincher Creek and north--the mountain area. A large part of it was in the federal Rocky Mountain riding today.

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

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

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

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

The Communist party ran people but we didn't manage to elect anyone. We did elect members in a few places, but one time or another in North Winnipeg, Montreal, and Toronto. What I would point out in my campaign was that 'Well, if I get elected I could



do that much more for the miners. I'd fight in the legislature to get you fellas better labor legislation, stronger safety legislation in the mines.'

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

Nobody really believed the United Farmers would be licked because they had a massive organization that they had built up over the years, in every place. Brownlee was then the Premier of Alberta but there had been a scandal over this woman in his office. He got her pregnant. Anyway, during the election campaign there was a mass meeting in Pinoka. It was known for being the home of the Alberta lunatic asylum. Brownlee had a delegation of women U.F.A. supporters on the platform and one of their spokeswomen stood up and said, 'I want to assure you, Mr. Premier, that the women of this riding are going to vote for you. We're going to back you up all the way.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

I used to call them Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, Aberhart and the U.F.A. One is in, one is out; that's the only difference. Aberhart didn't have any platform or policies. They didn't have any organization. He just picked up candidates anywhere and relied on his promise of twenty-five dollars a month. The Social Credit candidate in my riding was named Duke, he got elected. Charlie Drane, he went with Social Credit. He was a friend of mine. I remember another friend of mine, a guy by the name of Poole. He was unemployed and ran for Social Credit and got elected to the Federal house. I met him later in Ottawa when I was petitioning the government on the matter of the unemployed.

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

### ***The Workers Unity League Dissolves***

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

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

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

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

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

So we decided that if Lewis would give us the terms, that he wouldn't interfere in the affairs of the locals, we could bring them in. He appointed the district officers but the locals we would control. In the Mine Workers Union of Canada the local was the real basis of power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***The Unemployed and Ontario in the Later '30s***

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

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

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

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

I can't understand many of these senior citizens I meet in their organizations today. They're so anti-labor. But I ask where they think their benefits came from, who was behind pushing them through. Not the big companies and their representatives, not

politicians on their own. Many of the social benefits and social legislation that we have today, like pensions, came from our struggles, union struggles. Of course, many of the spokesmen of these senior citizen groups weren't ever part of and were never sympathetic to labor.

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

We formed relief organizations to combat the charity attitudes of the civic governments and to get higher relief. To get away from the pogy idea of charity and to get cash relief. Ultimately to get a system of unemployment insurance but firstly to get guarantees that the unemployed would get food and shelter. We had to deal with Mitch Hepburn when he was Premier of Ontario and with David Croll, who is now in the senate. Christ.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Strand Theatre, right at the corner of Dundas and Spadina, was a frequent meeting place of many of the workers and unemployed meetings. The Toronto police,

under Chief Draper, once threw tear gas into that theatre to break up a rally on a free speech issue--over the issue of whether communists would be allowed to speak in public. That must have been a year or two before the repeal of section 98. Becky Buhay was there. God, think of it. Police throwing tear gas into a crowded theatre to defend a law against freedom of speech. That was the mentality that lurked around the corner throughout much of the thirties.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

We'd demonstrate down in Queen's Park; march into Toronto from all these townships, form up on the outskirts and have different parades all heading down to Queen's Park. They'd pick up people along the way. You couldn't tell an unemployed demonstration from an anti-eviction demonstration from a political demonstration or from a rally to support some strike. There were organized demonstrations at Queen's Park all the time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

There would be hundreds of men at some of these anti-eviction actions, men from the unemployed associations and neighbors and other tenants. There'd have to have been several hundred to make an impression. Sometimes the furniture would sit out on the street for a couple of days, the evicted people staying with neighbors. We made sure that nobody else moved in. That's why we'd have a lot of people around while the evicted family wasn't move back yet. To stop the landlord from moving other tenants in.

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

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

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

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

I was also part of organizing General Electric at Peterborough and helped out with the Textile Workers. I was arrested once for my part in the General Electric campaign. The charge was 'Spreading False Information'. That was a law that had been used only

once or twice in Canadian history. That is something which never applies to the Daily Press, of course.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The rise of fascism in Europe. That drew thousands of the best men from the unemployed, who went to fight in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, or some went down to the States to join the Lincoln Brigade, to fight in the Spanish civil war against fascism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hamilton was basically an unorganized town. The unions there had either been smashed or they had never gotten a foothold in the big industries. We tried to organize plants. There were craft unions in some of the industries. We had a slogan,

'Amalgamation of Annihilation.' We were out to amalgamate the different crafts along with the unskilled workers in unions we were organizing.

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

### ***From Subversives to Patriots***

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

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

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

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

It was reasonable to expect that if Churchill came to power in Britain it was much more likely that he'd join Germany in a war against the Soviet Union. In any case, the

period of the phony war looked very suspicious. The Germans weren't attacking the French and the British weren't counterattacking--but the Germans were moving down through the Balkans. Moving east. Oh it was a pretty mixed up period.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I don't know now, if I ever did, how many people in total were interned there. There were a number from Winnipeg, quite a number of Ukrainians who'd been picked up. Ukrainian communists. Tom McEwen was interned. Melvin Fried, C.S. Jackson of the United Electrical Workers were interned. Quite a lot from Montreal.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We communists were in support of the war by this time. We would all have volunteered for the Canadian army. When I got back to Blairmore, the selective service had designated me as a mine laborer. That's the lowest job there is in a mine. But the company wouldn't give me a job. So the boys loaned me enough money to get to Vancouver where I got a job in the shipyards.

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

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

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

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

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

*(Isobel Murphy:* Well, Harvey you were interned yourself when the Japanese were being interned. They were already gone by the time you got out there. Well, I thought afterward that it shouldn't have happened. But I never really knew too much about it.

Besides, I never took an active role in the party. I never was a member of the party. When I got to Vancouver everything was to support the war effort.)

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

The Boilermakers union was established as an independent local, not just a chartered local of the Canadian Labor Congress. A chartered local has no elected officers or treasury. It can't make its own decisions and it's under the direction of officers appointed by the Congress. The Boilermakers became the single biggest local on the West Coast.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***To Mine and Mill***

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

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

Not only the companies but government officials still maintained that old class attitude, even though we were at war. See, the spark that caused the strike at Copper

Mountain was very simple. It was a mining camp but there were a lot of families living there too and the families wanted electric power in their houses and cabins. They were still using kerosene lamps. The offices and the mine and some of the bunkhouses had electricity but the houses didn't. This was now in 1943.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I used to be able to speak pretty well then, right on the spot. I'd tell them, 'We're from the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union. We came in here to organize. We're going to organize the mines in B.C. and right across the country. In the United States the workers are doing the same thing.' That we were out to organize Granby.

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

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

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

The main thing was to have a strong union presence on the pit and safety committee so that we could be sure that the mining regulations were being observed. The trouble at the time was that a lot of the supervisors had been brought in from different kinds of mines and had no real experience of what was required here. The shift bosses and the miners weren't acquainted with each other--they couldn't rely on each other. It

wasn't like Blairmore where, whatever else, whatever the differences, everybody knew what had to be done. The mining industry had expanded so fast during the first years of the war that every sort of character was in it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Everybody in the union movement in B.C. that was involved with the mining industry knew about the sit down at Pioneer. We also had a sit down later at Wells at Cariboo Gold Quarts, too. They sat in for a few days anyway. But you couldn't maintain a sit down strike in company camps like that. No, you couldn't

End

**JOHN SMITH**  
(1920 to late 1970s)  
**Life History Fragment**  
Interviewer  
Rolf Knight

**Compiler's note**

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

**The Tyneside in the 1920s**

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

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

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

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

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

My father was then running a store selling poultry, vegetables and fruit--it was a kind of expensive trade, carriage trade, but he had done fairly well. But his business was more and more affected by the depression, which in the north of England started just after the First World War was over.

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

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

There was a place called Jarrow in the region where almost one hundred percent of the men were unemployed. It seemed to typify the area and it became famous for a protest march, a march, of the unemployed which started there and went down to

London. The Jarrow Hunger March. Conditions in the coal fields in Wales and in the Tyneside were much the same. But it was all very quiet and polite, even these mass demonstrations. You couldn't compare it with the anti-war demonstrations in America about Viet Nam, nothing of that spirit. People were repressed and depressed.

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

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

The 1926 general strike--I was only twelve then. But my older brother took me around to where demonstrations were going on and he tried to explain what was happening. Newcastle, Jarrow, everywhere--big demonstrations of miners gathered and were being addressed. I didn't truly understand what was being said in these speeches but I was undoubtedly affected by these gatherings. And several times, not just once, I saw the police riding into these gatherings, reaching down with their truncheons and slashing at people. And I saw people lying on the ground clubbed unconscious. In view of all that it's really surprising how terribly peaceful these demonstrations were. The attitude of the workers was to run, as if they didn't want any trouble. I became awakened to a certain political consciousness through that I'm sure.

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

Baldwin took the tack or the cloak, that "We're all Englishmen together and whatever the troubles are we'll solve them in the spirit of English fair play" and so on and so forth. Churchill was considered a wild man and something of a dangerous buffoon,

both because of his role in the disasters of Gallipoli and in regards to his antics towards working people in England, especially during the General Strike.

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

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

I already had my passage booked but at the last moment my entire family had a conference and decided that we would all move to Canada. They cancelled my passage without informing me and made plans to sell and dispose of all they possessed and made ready to leave. It took some time. I was fourteen and a half years old then and got a job with a ship's chandler at Tyne dock. It was quite an experience, delivering stores to ships tying up at the docks, and being out on the roads at all hours of the day and night.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gap

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

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

When I was older, from eleven to thirteen or so, I became interested in long distance running. It was the kind of thing you could do on your own. I'd run five or more miles most days. I was the best in my school in races of a mile or over. I also began to develop an interest in cycling. I would cycle within a sixty mile radius of South Shields

when I was a little older, which would take in Berrick-on-Tweed in the north and towns like Durham. That was about 120 miles in a day, 60 miles each way. But we had good roads and we had good bicycles and we didn't have the traffic like you have today.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Anyway, I eventually left school in preparation to going to Canada. But when my parents cancelled my passage I refused to go back to school--having said farewell to all my school chums I would have felt too embarrassed to then go back and take up being a school boy again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh, very much so. I felt very good about the situation. I'd never in my life had any real spending money, because we were a pretty frugal family. Most of the clothes and

things I got were handed down from my older brother. And we never got much pocket money. So, for the first time I could buy something new for myself, even after giving most of my earnings to my parents to contribute to the family income.

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

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

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

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

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

It was on the basis of going homesteading in northern Alberta that we came to Canada--on what was called "assisted passage". It cost us next to nothing. The C.P.R. was making its money out of the British government which paid the transport fees. We were allowed a lot of household goods as freight, so we brought over all our furniture with us. However, it was so badly packed that the railroad refused to take it any further than Montreal. After a long spate of letters back and forth, over a year, it was finally delivered just before we left Edmonton. A lot of it was badly broken up.

The strange thing was that while it was old, it had been good furniture at one time and there was a market in Edmonton for it as antiques. Even in the depression there were some people who had enough money to buy that kind of thing. So we sold most of that furniture in Edmonton and made a nice piece of money from it--which very much came in handy when we settled in Victoria.

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

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

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

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

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## **Canada and B.C during the 1930s**

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

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

We settled in Edmonton where my younger brother and sister went to school and the rest of us tried to find work. Somehow, although the depression had begun, all of us managed to find some kind of work around Edmonton sooner or later. My sister took a job as a live-in house help to a middle class family in a nearby suburb. My brother had the opportunity of contributing items to an Edmonton newspaper. My father also found something to do that brought in some money. The money we had gotten together in England by selling all our possessions was just about gone. I got a job as a painter's apprentice for a year at the salary of \$7.50 per week. I probably worked harder at that job than I ever did since because the man who ran the shop was a real

slave driver and I was young and stupid enough to do anything I was told to do. I'd work an hour before the crew came on the job and another hour afterward putting everything away. Oh, these little contractors are always the same. It was like scenes from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. But seven dollars a week did make a big difference for the family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There were a lot of families around Langford who were engaged in these small gypo logging operations, over in Sooke or along the Malahat or further up the island. They'd have a son or a father and son working off in the woods somewhere. That brought in the necessary cash. There was a small sawmill in Langford that would start up and run for three or four weeks or so and then shut down while they tried to sell the lumber to pay the men. Maybe it would start up later with a different crew. I worked there once on the greenchain, which is murderous work, and I never did get paid. That taught me to keep away from those kinds of places.

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

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

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

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

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

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

While I distrust the Communist party I fully admit that they got down to business and were the first to start organizing people to help themselves; the unemployed, the organizing drives to establish broad industrial unions, involving themselves in anti-



eviction actions, although there weren't so many evictions in Victoria. But I don't know--you think you know what's going on but often you don't. It is possible to live through something and miss a lot of what's going on around you. Then later you're surprised when you read about all that was involved. It accounts for a lot of what happened in Germany under Hitler.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All things which were seen as breaking the limits of social outlook, all leading in various ways to this transformation which was going to take place. You'd expect other

people to be able to talk about some of these things, however they might express it, just like you'd expect people to be able to talk about the latest popular T.V. show today.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh I used to talk about anything. I was twenty, twenty-two, and so I knew everything in those days. I talked about the dilemma in which society found itself, the contradictions. "Poverty amid Plenty" was the theme of most of my talks in one way or

the other. But I also ventured into "Education". Never having been educated myself I knew plenty about education. (laughs) We talked about the nature of education, the various philosophies and the results and how it should be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

most die-hard reactionaries and fools had learned their lesson from the First World War.

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

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

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

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

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

Yes, all of that. We weren't afraid of the word "expropriation", or even of the factory sit-ins that later developed, which we felt might be used to acquire the production facilities if, after winning legislative control, the owners and their courts blocked us. We weren't even so scared of going it alone in one province. Because, first of all, we didn't think we'd be alone very long. The bravest elements in the movement used to

say, "Yes, when we do take control here in B.C. we will take over all forestry and major industries, we'll take the commanding heights of the economy and make it all part of a big cooperative. We would trade as a block with the rest of the world. Legislated expropriations, that's right.

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

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

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

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

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

(Gap)

My point of view was from someone who was rarely part of the unions themselves. That was then the case for the majority of working people in Canada. Mostly I was around the unemployed, a casual laborer at best. Yes, sure we supported strikes and defended union members in some of the most outrageous cases of government and



company collusion, like the Blubber Bay strike.\* But it was sort of removed for me and the people I hung around with. The closest I got to unions was a number of people I knew formed a local of the International Woodworkers of America during its early organizational years with a view to bringing in other workers in the Victoria area. This group was in a store making wooden blinds. A pretty flimsy connection. Nigel Morgan was one of our group. He'd grown up on Saltspring Island and had run a store in Ganges until some time before that. That factory making wooden blind became a Communist centre in Victoria and in for organizing the I.W.A.

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

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

Well, I knew that was going on but I wasn't involved in that aspect of things so I can't tell you what was going on in that. I mainly worked around Langford, painting houses, cutting firewood and filing saws. I did a lot of gardening and a little landscaping and any number of casual jobs. I picked up skills that are obsolete today but which came in handy then because not everybody knew them. A bit of work here and a bit there pretty well throughout the thirties. That and the occasional "regular" job I had, all of it amounting really to only casual labour. That not only supported me but part of my family, which I lived with then.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was a kind of boom atmosphere for those of us who had a job. We'd work seven days a week--board was very little and there was nothing to spend your money on. So there was more money in circulation around Zeballos than I'd seen in all the depression years. Even with the drinking and whoring and gambling, most guys did save up most of what they earned. We all remembered, not very long before, when a couple of dollars was a lot of money.

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

(Gap)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gap)

In the 1930s Victoria was a truly beautiful place. You wouldn't recognize it today, the contrast. The country between Victoria and Langford, which itself was a stretched-out

village, was unspoiled. There was about a mile of open fields between Langford village and Langford Lake, which today is all a jumble of houses and shopping plazas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

No. There was very little looking back to England, not really at all. We were just glad we had escaped. I'm sure the whole family felt like that. Years afterward, when I was

in England during the war, I didn't even get in touch with any of the relatives we still had living there. I didn't feel I owed my allegiance to England. I was pretty bitter about the doings of the British Empire. I'm not one of those English people who's "proud of their English heritage." But America is turning out to be no better. I used to have a certain respect for America when I was young, despite all of its flaws. But not anymore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I still remember our meeting. Even before it started it was maybe ten o'clock at night. I looked out of the entrance and I saw all these lanterns approaching. In that valley you could see from miles away. People were coming down the valley, coming to our meeting. They stayed till early in the morning, till the meeting was over. It seemed that almost everyone in Pemberton Meadows was there. I stayed for three or four days and gave talks in little places around there, at Anderson Lake and at Birken and in two or three other hamlets, in one room schools to ten or so people. It must have been winter because I remember almost passing out from the heat in some of those school houses, with the heater going full blast and all the people packed in. My friends and I were taken into the homes of some of our supporters, who fed and housed us, and we borrowed an old Ford car that bumped and bounced over those one lane, rock roads, from place to place.

.....

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

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

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

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

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

What we were doing was to put forward the fundamental issues of socialism, which deal directly with the method and purpose of production, as opposed to the concepts of marketplace decisions. The socialist outlook was simply to decide, in a fairly cold blooded way, what was needed and to plan for the production of that. After society had solved its immediate needs for food, shelter, clothing, etc. etc. then we could begin thinking about the provision of luxury goods, which would certainly follow. But we



would do so on a democratic basis and not through a class ordered society, which is the end product of the system that prevails today.

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

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

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

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

(Gap)

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

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

As for myself, I was deeply attached to a young woman who lived in Victoria who already had an advanced case of tuberculosis and whose family was very resistant to allowing her to have anything to do with me or anyone. Although I wasn't particularly

interested in or sexually attracted to anyone else myself I knew of various affairs and attractions that existed among some of the leading figures of the C.C.F. People were still very moralistic in those days. A kind of Victorian hypocrisy still held sway over the officially accepted attitudes. There was never the sexual openness in the thirties that you saw emerge in the sixties. An open defense of sexual liberation in the thirties was still something which people on the left steered clear of.

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

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

There was also the question of drinking--temperance. That was almost as moralistic an issue as sex. But it was only at the end of the thirties, when I had reached a point of despair, that I began to do any drinking. At the time I wasn't around loggers or mining camps myself. When I was at Zeballos we worked seven days a week and most people were too tired or too broke to do much drinking. After maybe six months of work some of them did but usually not so much of a binge, it usually didn't amount to much.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

took place in the 1960s, that Joey Smallwood broke up by force, Harvey was the leader of that strike.

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

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

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

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

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

## **A Zombie in the War**

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

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

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

And as you know, we were almost exactly right. We had pinpointed what all of the well known leaders in B.C. and Canada would say. It was no surprise to us that J.S. Woodsworth was the only one of the Federal M.P.s who opposed Canada's entry into the war. The majority of the rank and file members of the C.C.F. were against support for another war but they were soon bludgeoned by the National Council into supporting the Liberal government on the issue of entering the war. The party members were presented with the accomplished fact when all the C.C.F. M.P.s except J.S. Woodsworth himself voted for Canada's entry into the war (in September of 1939).

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

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

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

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

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

I'll admit our position was a very difficult one to hold during wartime, despite the fact that the majority of the C.C.F. members had known all these things during the thirties. We were certainly all very anti-fascist. The question was if, in this war against the fascist powers, our own countries were going to devolve into the same sort of quasi-fascist mentality, which we feared would happen. That the war would have exactly the opposite result than what those who said it was a war to destroy fascism were claiming. And to a considerable extent we were right about that, too. Because the parliamentary democracies sunk to a new level of barbarity during the war and the end product was a far greater state repression, far greater organized conservatism bordering on a kind of fascism in America, even though they won the war against Germany. We had feared something like that.

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

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

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

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

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

Without being Trotskyites we increasingly came to follow some of Trotsky's broad arguments about developments in Russia. I didn't have any allegiance to Trotsky or his faction as many anti-Stalinists did. In fact, Trotsky's role in the Red army during the Russian revolution struck me as callous and vicious as that of any other general--whatever else he had to say.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a spontaneous sit down strike the very next day. A battalion refused to report for duty. I was working as company clerk and when I realized what was happening I raced over to my old company and said, "What the hell are you doing?"

Don't you know there's a strike on?" And during the course of the morning we more or less shut down the battalion headquarters. During lunch hour we raced around to the road company, the rifle company, and lined them up with the strike. We sat down and refused to work on anything.

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

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

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

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

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

There was nobody more despised by us than Harold Winch. The last straw was him going around telling everyone that we wanted to go and fight and should be sent

overseas. After we'd resisted signing the papers to volunteer being sent overseas, after we'd resisted the strongest pressure for years. Sure I felt proud of that. Like the more politically conscious draft resisters in the United States do today about not allowing themselves to be sent to fight in Indo China. That's why I have such a feeling of allegiance with many of them.

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

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

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

Harold Winch was going around saying that we in the N.R.M.A. forces were just itching to go overseas and join the war. I had about as much respect for Harold Winch as I did for Mackenzie King. In fact, Mackenzie King was straight forward by comparison. The majority of people in Canada were very warlike by then and overwhelmingly for conscription. It was only in Quebec that people were resisting the war en masse and that's why I've still got more respect for Quebec than any other part of Canada.

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

separated from the rest of the battalion and put to work in the orderly room in camp. That would have been in January 1945.

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

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

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

(Gap)

I had left the C.C.F. because of their support of the war in 1939. A very long time before it seemed. But I didn't make a dramatic departure from the party, excoriating everybody that I wanted to. I had just stopped paying dues and participating. But my club at Langford, where I was known, had kept my membership in the C.C.F. up to date. So in the fall of 1946 I was surprised to hear that they nominated me to be their delegate to the provincial C.C.F. convention in Vancouver.

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

to vote. They just laughed at him. But he managed it, he pulled it off in other provinces and federally.

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

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

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

For a year or two afterward I also attended Socialist Party of Canada meetings. It had been the original socialist organization in B.C. before the First World War and had been resurrected by a few old stalwarts. But I never took it very seriously. Sectarian? Oh, they were laughable. They were not only the only true Socialist party in Canada they were the only true Socialist party in the whole world according to their lights. They didn't like me not taking them seriously, but they also didn't want to expel me.

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

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

## **Campaign for the Radiation Hazards Committee**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I came here [Pender island] in my late forties and I've never regretted it. Until about three years ago I worked at casual jobs throughout the year around the island-- building houses, construction, and what not. But my arthritis started to bother me something terrible so that I often couldn't work. Recently the N.D.P. government brought in Mincome supplements. It fills the gap between when you are sixty and



sixty-five. You couldn't survive on Mincome in the city but here, with the garden, where we grow most of what we need, and that house that I built and the firewood that I cut on the beach, we can get by. At least we can get by on the level I was always used to, which I suppose some would consider a poverty-stricken existence but which we feel fills our basic needs.

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

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

End

# ARNT ARNTZEN

1890s to 1970s

## Compiler's note

Arnt Artzen's account was collected in the mid 1970s and while already published in *Stump ranch Chronicles* has had almost no reviews and apparently few readers. Its presence here is, in part, an attempt to redress its current unavailability. Arntzen had three surviving children and various grandchildren, all now variously successful and modestly progressive. He died in the late 1970s after a long and filled life, with his hopes for a better world undiminished but unfulfilled. Although quite frail and aged he carried on fishing well into his eighties and left an impressive circle of friends behind him when he died. Harry Rankin delivered the eulogy at his funeral. This narrative is filled with irony and enthusiasm, it tells of work and neighbours, partners, hopes and defeats, it is part of the social history of western Canada told with an inherent sense of drama and is, I believe, as reliable as any.

It is strange that in the extensive literature of rural settlement in Western Canada so little had been written about stump ranching. The term originated as a quip about those blocks of logged-over timberland taken up by rural workers and aspirant farmers where the main crop was derisively said to be stumps. In B.C. the term *stump ranch* had a much more general usage, referring to any hard scrabble farming venture. Stump ranching involved a mix of subsistence farming, yielding some surpluses for sale, along with wage work off the farm in more or less distant jobs.. In many areas stump ranching was not just a transitional phase between homesteading and commercial farming but was an ongoing pattern that mixed rural living and wage work in the resource industries.

Two and three generations ago many men in the frontier areas of Western Canada combined lives as part-time farmers, and as wage workers. These activities were then not as strategically different as they became. Such lives involved an amalgam of experience which partly accounted for the evolution of wide-spread, many-hued populist and socialist views in certain areas. This chronicle narrates something of the life of one man over seventy years spent in logging camps, mining and construction camps, on prairie farms, on stump ranches, in the west coast fishing industry and in some cities of Western Canada. He talks about work and differing responses to the conditions of the

times, it comprises a set of richly personal accounts which are a part of the social history of Western Canada . This narrative is told with an inherent sense of drama, and is, I believe, as reliable as any. Arnt Arntzen came to Canada in 1912 from northern Norway, already seasoned by experiences of primary resource work. From scowling on the Fraser river during the construction of the Canadian National Railway through Saskatchewan ranching and Gulf Coast trolling; his seventy years of work and life covers much of the recent history of Canada.

Homesteaders and stump ranchers often came from widely differing national and class backgrounds. Despite these differing backgrounds they soon found themselves adapting to the physical and social demands of the homestead world. They entered and gradually adopted many of the attitudes and habits current in those frontier areas during a period when that society still had the capacity and vitality to attract and remold men. They also helped shape that society.

Many strove to create cooperative movements and a few even launched into communal experiments. Most were committed to the value of mutual, neighbourly aid, at least on a local level. Some canvassed and struggled to establish what were then radical and progressive political movements. Others contributed to the organization and support of labour unions during their many periods of wage work. In some regions they sustained a grass roots culture of reading, debate and critical thought. Even if the strength of rural populism and socialism is much reduced today, there is no reason why we should allow the Billy Sundays of free enterprise fundamentalism or the Stevey Harpers of the national tory orchestra to defraud us of this inheritance. It is difficult to disentangle some of the sentiments which pervade so many narratives of homesteading in Canada. At times participants' accounts intertwine both vision and actual realities. Part of the reality was the hope for a new world with opportunities for starting lives anew, a hope which was once prevalent among immigrant and native born alike.

The current account attempts to retain the vigor of the spoken record. Editing was mainly to provide greater chronological and thematic coherence. Questions and interjections by the interviewer have been deleted for the sake of readability. I have nowhere attempted to second guess or to 'correct' the account.

## **From Another North**

I was born in a little place called Rossnes, in Beier Fjord, about twenty miles south of Bode in northern Norway. My father ran a kind of trading post there; it was a centre for all the settlers in the fjord. Most of the people there were farmers in the summer times and fishermen in the winter. Beginning right after Christmas they all took part in the great cod fishery off the Lofoten Islands. Almost all the fishermen stopped in at my father's place to get supplies, which they got on credit. The fisheries failed when I was nine years old; the fishermen couldn't pay and my father went bankrupt. So we had to move.

That was in ninety-nine (1899) and we decided to go up to Narvik. They were building the Ofoten railway at the time to get at the rich iron ore at Kiruna. That whole stretch was a sort of Norwegian Klondike with people coming in to work there from all over the country, and from Sweden.

Narvik was quite a wild, wide open town then. The railway workers would come down the road to Narvik to spend their stakes. You know, those boom frontier towns weren't just here in Canada and the States. Of course the town is different now--pretty quiet but still beautiful.

We were very poor at the time. My father seemed to have a hard time to adjust himself. But my mother took hold quickly and she saw us through the first year by taking in boarders. Seeing as we were a big family my mother and father could hardly make ends meet; I had three brothers and four sisters. While we were in Rossnes it was fine but in Narvik it was pretty tough. We all had to go to work early. I had my first job when I was ten years old. Later on I got a job at the telegram office and then as a mail carrier. Eventually my father got a horse and wagon and started a small dray business.

Anyway I grew up in Narvik during those hard years. I had a lot of fun too. When I was eleven I saw a troupe of acrobats giving a performance at one of the warehouses down at the dock. It impressed me so much that I put up a swinging bar between two birches behind our house and started practicing. After a while I became quite a proficient acrobat myself and I'd have an audience out on the street watching me perform. I was also a great lover of the outdoors and spent a lot of my spare time up in the mountains.

In the spring of 1907 I got a chance to go out seal hunting with an arctic skipper. I journeyed over to Tromso and lived on the vessel while it was being outfitted. In the early part of May we sailed from Norway bound for the arctic.

Now I had lived by the sea all of my life but I can never forget my first day on the open ocean. To see just water and nothing else, no mountains or land or anything.

She was an English cutter, about eighty tons. A sailing vessel with a schooner rig on her. The skipper was one of the modern ones; he was one of the first to install an auxiliary gas engine. But it only ran a few hours after we left Norway, then it got stalled and we never got it going again. The propeller shaft had seized up because it hadn't gotten grease.

Well, we sailed straight north for Bernt Island, heading toward Svalbard (Spitzbergen). Eventually we hit the drift ice. We struck the seal herd there and began hunting.

There were three hunting boats, four men to each boat. Two oarsmen, the steersman and the harpooner. The boats were painted all white and the men had white jackets and white caps to blend with the ice. When we're within five hundred yards or so the two of us oarsmen lay in our oars and the steersman takes over.

Now, in hunting the seal the steersman faces the bow of the boat and pushes the oar instead of pulling it. He keeps his oar right in the water so as not to make a splash. When we get to within thirty yards or so of the seals the harpooner starts shooting. He tries to hit them right in the head. If he does, they just stiffen out. The rest of the seals don't take alarm from the shot because there's so much noise from the ice cracking and rubbing together. They don't even hear the shot. If the harpooner is a good shot he can shoot fifteen, twenty seals before they take fright. But the first time he misses and the bullet scams into the water, or if the shot doesn't kill the seal right on the spot, the rest of them take fright and stampede into the sea.

We all get up on the ice and start skinning the seals and putting the skins into the boat. In the meantime the vessel has been standing by with only the cook on board. We row back to the vessel and stow away the skins. We get a bite to eat and then go out after the seals again. At that time of the year the sun is up almost around the clock and the only sleep you'd get for days was just short catnaps.

That went on for four weeks, five days or so at each place we struck the seal herd. In between there'd be a couple of days work separating the blubber from the skins and salting the skins and packing them in big casks. Then for weeks

we'd just sail around and wouldn't do nothing but stand watch and eat and sleep.

I was a seaman as well, of course. We all took our tricks at the wheel. I never worked on sealing ships before but you learn fast. Young boys in Norway, always around those sailing vessels, it comes naturally, almost like driving a car here--kids pick it up in no time. Besides, with the kind of set-up we had you didn't have to go up into the rigging too much. We handled most of it from the deck.

The worst was the bowsprit; taking in the foresail in a rough sea. You'd stand out on a rope with the vessel heaving up and down and it would duck you under sometimes. You'd really have to hang on. The water was cold too. But I can't remember any particular hardships. (laughs) Of course, when you're young like that--I was seventeen--you can take quite a bit without noticing it. We sailed around the ice and took about two thousand seals. Then we set out into the Kara Sea. We tried to sail around the north of Novaya Zemlya but we got hemmed in by the ice. So we sailed back to the strait between Novaya Zemlya and Siberia and sneaked through on a foggy day, which was illegal.

Once we were in the Kara Sea we stopped at a native settlement, a Samoyed village. The Czarist government used to send a trading vessel once a year with some supplies and they'd take out all the furs from those places. We weren't allowed to land on Russian territory without clearing customs and we certainly weren't supposed to do any trading. But the skipper thought he'd take a chance.

We anchored near one settlement and rowed over to the beach. All the people came out and some of them invited us into their houses. They lived in some pretty miserable huts made from stones and drift timber. The people were very friendly but sort of child-like, they treated us to a cup of tea and were very eager to do some trading with us. The skipper done a land office business trading old rifles and rusty knives and axes for valuable furs--polar fox and marten.

After that we sailed quite a ways up the Siberian coast after walrus. In October, when we'd got our catch, we headed for home. Those arctic skippers were wonderful seamen when they could see something; they knew sailing. But when it came to navigation over long distances they didn't know too much. They knew the compass courses from Svalbard to any point in Norway but they weren't able to take observations at sea exactly enough to know where they

were. So instead of heading straight to Norway we had to follow the ice pack over to Svalbard and from there we set a compass course to Norway. The crew didn't make too much money. I only got about five hundred krone (approximately \$150 U.S.) for the whole trip. I stayed at home for a while playing the flush seaman. Then I got a berth on a boat carrying iron ore from Narvik to Rotterdam.

The first few trips out of Narvik I was the coal passer. Those ships were all coal fired at the time. It was the coal passer's duty to bring the coal from the bunkers to where the stokers could reach it. When the bunkers are full you can just shovel it, throw it out on the deck for the stokers. But as you work your way back into the bunker it gets too far to throw so you load up a wheelbarrow to bring the coal up. When there's a rough sea it's quite a trick to wheel that barrow out to the deck without being tossed from one bulkhead to another. It was pretty tough firing too. We didn't have much ventilation and it got pretty hot down there. Many times, when they were cleaning fire--you know, when the stokers had to rake the clinkers out of the fire box--the coal passer would have to stand there with a hose and play water on the firemen. Otherwise they couldn't stand it.

In them days sailors was very fond of live music because we didn't have any radio or gramophone or anything. So anybody that could make some music was quite welcome. I had a guitar with me and I was a pretty good singer and had quite a repertoire of songs. I got out of doing some work that way. It was also my duty to go back to the galley to get the grub in big containers and dish it up to the crew in the fo'c'sle. After that I was supposed to wash up the dishes and stow them away. But I got out of that because they were so fond of music that they always offered to wash the dishes for me if I would play the guitar. Which I did.

I made a couple of trips on that ore ship and then I quit. I was ashore in Holland for about a month when I got a berth on a German boat, a small tramp freighter. I was able seaman by that time and we sailed the North Sea and the Baltic. We carried coal from England and brought back timber from Riga and from some other Russian ports. On the last trip we picked up a load of mining props from Archangel for Hamburg. I quit that ship there and took a train to Antwerp, where I got berth on an English freighter bound for New Orleans. I thought I'd like to see a little of that part of the world.

## **In the Great Republic**

When we got to New Orleans I found out that my ship was going back to England to lay up. I had been in England just before that and it was very hard times for seamen (1908). There were thousands of seamen on the beach trying to get a berth, without any luck. If I'd gone back to England I wouldn't have had hardly any pay either. I'd made only one trip and my advance would be taken out of that. So I decided to jump ship in New Orleans and try and get another berth there.

You could get shore leave alright, but the problem was to get my dunnage bag ashore past the watchman. Since I had no money I had to have a dunnage bag to get into a sailor's boarding house. If you had a dunnage bag to show that you was a seaman they'd keep you whether you had money or not. When you got a berth you'd get a month's advance pay and that's when the boarding house would get their money out of you.

Early the next morning I lowered my dunnage bag over the side of the ship and managed to sneak off the dock when the watchman went to sleep on a bale of cotton. I went up to a boarding house I had lined up the day before. It's about five o'clock in the morning and I'm waiting for the boarding house to open when I see these two cops walking down the street. I didn't want them asking me any questions so I stashed the dunnage bag on the porch and walked away. After a few minutes I peeked around the corner of the street and the cops was gone, along with my dunnage bag. They had taken my bag to the police station. I didn't dare to go and claim it because they would have put me back on my ship again. Now I couldn't get into a boarding house.

Well, I walked around the streets and found an employment agency. But they wanted fifty cents to register and I didn't have any money. I fell in with a young Frenchman there and I says to him, "I've got this watch. I wonder if I could get any money on it?" He says, "Ya, I think so. I know this place where you can get some money on it. Come on, but let me do the talking." I don't know now how I could have been so dumb but I gave him the watch and he went into this pawnshop. I waited for a couple of minutes but he didn't come out. So I go in and as soon as I'm inside I see that there are two doors leading to different streets. The pawnshop was on a corner. I asked the guy behind the counter if anybody had come in with a watch. He says, "Somebody came in and beat it right out the other door. Didn't stop for nothing." So I lost my watch. I was getting pretty hungry. Not knowing what to do I went back to that employment agency. Just as that agency is getting ready to close this one guy come along who had paid for a job in a hotel. The employment agent tells him



how to get there--"You go up this street and down that alley and knock on the back door and ask for the steward named so and so." When I heard that I beat it to the hotel and got the job ahead of him.

The job was washing dishes in the Grunewald Hotel, one of the swankiest hotels in town. All the big shots would come there after the theatre and order fancy meals. They'd maybe only touch a little from one course and all the rest would go into the slop pail. There'd be whole sirloin steaks on silver platters coming back. Well, I was hungry enough that the first one didn't go into the slop pail. I was standing there with a steak in one hand and a wash cloth in the other. I worked in that hotel about three weeks. I'd accumulated seventeen dollars and figured I was rich now. So I quit.

But the times were getting tough in New Orleans. It was getting late in the season and lot of hoboos from the north were coming down to winter over. They were on the street looking for any kind of work. It was impossible to get a job. The only thing that was available were jobs milking cows in the dairies. Well, I never milked a cow in my life but Christmas Eve found me with just sixty cents left. So I thought I'd tackle one of those milking jobs. I paid fifty cents to an employment agency and had ten cents left for the streetcar fare to the City Dairy. They had barns with about a hundred cows out on the edge of town. I got there about four o'clock in the evening on Christmas Eve and the crew were getting ready to sit down to a big feast. I said to myself, "If they kick me out in the morning I'll have had my money's worth from this feed anyway." The next morning I put on a brave front. I got out a stool and a milk pail and sat down beside a cow. But I sat down on the wrong side. The cow wasn't used to that and in about thirty seconds she had kicked me into the gutter. The foreman was there and told me to sit on the other side. "Oh ya, we used to milk them from this side in the old country", I told him.

The first cow happened to be a hard milker and I couldn't get much out of her. I was afraid to squeeze her tits too hard for fear she'd kick me again. So after a while I said, "she's dry". One of the other guys sits down and milks a half pail from her. The boss of the place went by and I hear him say to the foreman, "Christ, that boy never seen a cow in his life." So I didn't think I'd last there too long. But they put me on a few easy milkers and the fourth cow I managed to milk almost dry. The boss said, "Well I see you're learning. I guess you'll be alright in a few days." I worked there all winter but in the spring I quit and went up to see the fair in St. Louis. I'd heard about that fair even before I got to America so I wanted to see it.

I got a job in St. Louis making railroad cars. After that I sailed on the Mississippi on the river steamers, both sidewheelers and sternwheelers. I sailed up and down the Mississippi and the Illinois and the Ohio rivers for about a year. My job was what they called 'sailor man'. I looked after the ropes and the rigging and fittings and did some of the painting. We sailed down the Mississippi quite a ways, down to Cairo and below that.

During the winter we were laid up. So me and a partner of mine decided we were going to see the country around there a bit. We hopped a train and rode the rods down as far as Little Rock, Arkansas. It was pretty cold but we got into a box car that had a lot of straw in it; that had been used for packing furniture. All the hoboes had found that car. There must have been thirty men in it, lying in the straw, sleeping. So we crawled in there too and laid down. After I'd been lying there about half an hour, half asleep, I feel hands trying to get into my pockets. One of those hoboes lying beside me trying to get my money. Riding the rods was just the regular thing, just the same as thumbing a ride now-a-days. You found out where the trains would slow down and where you could swing on them. Or you could get on when they stopped in the yards, sneak into a boxcar. As a rule you could give the brakeman fifty cents or something like that, if you had a little money. Then he'd look the other way and let you ride.

If you caught the train on the fly you might have to ride right on the bumper, between the cars, until the train stopped some place and you could crawl into a box car. I rode the coupling quite a few times, strapped myself to the ladder so I wouldn't fall off. But I never actually rode the rods underneath the cars. Coming back from Little Rock we got stranded in this lonely depot. Just a shed and a siding hemmed in by a sort of swamp. Me and my partner and two other fellows we met there. We were waiting for a freight. After a while another guy came along and started talking to us. Then my partner, like a damn fool, called me over to have a drink. He had a mickey of whiskey with him. This other guy says, "By God, you know I'd sure like to have a drink. I'll give you ten cents if you let me have a drink." So my partner sold him a drink.

"So you're all on the bum? Riding the cars?" says this guy. "Ya, ya." Then he says "Okay, come on. Line up. I'm a cop and I'm going to run you in." And he says to my partner, "It's going to go hard with you because you was selling whiskey and this is a dry state." He motioned like he had a gun in his pocket but I wasn't sure if he had one or not. Anyway, he started marching us away. The other two guys was pleading with him and I don't think that cop felt too sure of himself out there at night with the four of us. So he says, "Oh well, I think I'll let you all

go. I've been on the bum myself. Go on. You go back to the depot and catch the train." And then he left.

Well, that seemed pretty funny to me so me and my partner started up the tracks as fast as we could go till we came to stacks of firewood waiting to be shipped out. We crawled in and hid among that cordwood. About half an hour later we see these other two guys come hot footing it along and crawl in too. This cop had come back with about half a dozen men to look for us. These other two guys escaped just by luck. When a train came by in the morning we grabbed it on the fly and got out of there.

We were working on a bridge nearby when we found out how lucky we was. Some of the people working there told us about a racket they run in the prison farm in that county. You could get up to a year just for riding the freights. Then, while you were in jail, they could charge you with something else. Like attempting to escape. Once you were in there they could do whatever they liked with you. There were guys in there picked up for vagrancy that had been working in that prison farm for years. The county actually made money on the prison by hiring out gangs to work on some of the big farms around there.

Anyway I went back to St. Louis and after working in the roundhouse for a while I got sick. After I got out of the hospital I figured I'd like to work in the country some. So in the fall of 1911 I got a job with a farmer in Illinois. I worked in the woods with him that winter lumbering. He had a brother who'd gone up to Alberta and had taken up a homestead there. He wrote letters telling how it was such a rich country that they could turn their horses out in the fall and they'd winter over on the prairies and come in fat in the spring. Well, that seemed hard to believe but those letters got me interested in Canada and I decided to come up and to see what things was like here.

### **Where the Fraser River Flows**

I got to Winnipeg in March of 1912, looked around, and wasn't too impressed with the place. So in the early spring I shipped up to a railway construction job in British Columbia. They were building the Grand Trunk Railway and they'd gotten steel as far as Jasper at the time. While I was still in Winnipeg I got to talking to two guys who'd been working up on that road and they gave me some good advice. They told me, "When you sign up don't give them your right name. Give them a fictitious name. When you get to the end of steel don't go out with the bunch you came in with. Otherwise they'll stick you for sixty or seventy dollars transportation cost. That's supposed to be free but they'll

deduct it from your wages. Just go out on your own and then use your real name. They're hungry for men; they'll hire you at the first camp you come to." So that's what we did, me and my partner. We signed on at Winnipeg and rode the train. When we got near the foothills I stood gazing at them for hours. These were the first real mountains I'd seen since I left Norway.

Finally we arrived at Jasper, about two hundred men on the train, April 1912. A few bunkhouses was all there was and they didn't have no blankets or heat or anything. It was cold too. So we all went back and sat in the train. After an hour the conductor came along and told us we had to get off because they were pulling out. "You can't dump us out here with no facilities," says one guy. "Well, we're going to," says the conductor. And they did.

In the morning a big fellow, a tough looking guy with a Stetson hat on him and a six shooter strapped around his waist, comes along. He lines us up and was going to march us up the line to a certain camp. My partner and me hung back, further and further, until we could duck down behind some bushes and get off the road. Then we hiked to the first camp and got a job there, no questions asked.

We were working on a rock cut right opposite Mount Robson. I worked there one month and in that time they had pushed the steel down to Mile 52. That was about ten miles below Tete Jaune Cache, at the head of the Fraser. They had a sawmill there and a crew of carpenters who were building scows. They'd load those scows with thirty, forty tons of freight and four men would float them down the river with the current. That's the way they took their supplies in, it was a cheap way of getting freight into the camps. Just then they were setting up camps every three or four miles along the river so that there'd be thousands of men working on the grade all at once all the way down the line to Prince George.

After about a month of working on that rock cut with a pick and shovel I went down the river on one of those scows. We went down about a hundred miles and set up a camp. I was making railroad ties there, using an axe to cut 'dinkey' ties for the construction locomotives. That was contract work and we got ten cents for those small ties. Ordinary wage work was three dollars a day and grub. A good axe man would get about four dollars a day but ordinary pick and shovel work was three dollars for a ten hour day.

I got interested in the big wages I heard they were paying men to take those scows down the river--five dollars a day and board. They'd pay you for the time it took you to go down the river and also the time it took to walk back. I had

some experience with boats so I got a job as a scow man. After a couple of trips I got to be captain. I got six dollars a day--that was big wages then.

Those scows had a sweep on each end, like a big oar, with two men on each one. You could swing the sweeps over either side and row the scow enough so that it would keep you pointed down the current. Try and keep it away from the rocks and in deep water. Some of the green horns made the mistake of keeping too close to the shore. Every so often one of them scows would hit what we called sweepers, big trees that had fallen into the river but were still anchored on the bank. A scow going too close to the shore wouldn't have no time to get away from the sweepers and quite a few men got brushed off and drowned that way.

You try to keep to the middle of the channel and row to give you some steerage. Of course most of the work was done by the current but you had to have steerage. You got to be expert in diagnosing which way the current was going to set you. By pointing the scow in certain directions you would eventually get to where you wanted. The reason was that the surface water would be running faster than the water down below. The scow would be running in that deader water and if you kept the scow turned right that surface water would eventually push you where you wanted. When you see a rock ahead you have to decide which way you were going to try to dodge it. You had to start a long way ahead.

Scowing was a pretty dangerous business. The upper river wasn't too bad if you knew what you were doing. There was the Goat River rapids but the worst danger there was that you'd hit a rock and hole the scow. That usually wasn't enough to sink them before you got to shore. But the Grand Canyon, that was a terrible stretch of water. Unless you knew your business there you were pretty nearly sure to smash up.

The canyon was crooked, something like an 'S'. You'd come down the first chute and the current would be running about twenty-five miles an hour. Then, all of a sudden, you headed straight into a rock wall. Unless you've got your scow turned sideways, turned across the current so that it would shoot out to the side, unless you did that you would run right into that wall. Green men who didn't know that would smash up there all the time. And there was no chance of swimming, once you were in that water you'd had it.

Then, in the Lower Canyon, there was a great big whirlpool. It would fill up, a hole ten or more feet deep and about forty of fifty feet across. It would suck a heavy scow in there and whirl it around like a cork. As soon as you hit that

water you had to pull your sweeps in, otherwise they might knock you overboard. After about five minutes that whirlpool would boil over and throw the scow out and away you'd go down the river again. When the water was high that whirlpool go so big that it started to suck the scows down so we had to quite scowing for three weeks. There were a lot of men drowned on that river. Of course, men were cheap. It was the freight that the company was worried about.

A lot of men moved from one camp to another and travelled down river on little rafts they'd made because they didn't want to walk. Even on the good stretches of the river there were a lot of things that could happen. Men would get swept off those haywire rafts or they'd break up when they hit a rock or something. There must have been hundreds of men lost in that river while they were building the railway.

Anyway, I scowed for two seasons. We'd take the scow down to a camp and beach it. They'd unload the freight and break the scow up and use the timbers for something or other. We'd walk back to the end of steel which took us five days, a week or longer, depending on how far down river we went. We just stopped in any camp along the way for our meals and bed. The last scow I took down was going to a camp close to Fort George but it was the end of the season and we got hemmed in by the ice ten miles above our destination. Seeing as I had a little money now and wasn't too anxious to do pick and shovel work over the winter I thought I'd look around a bit until the scowing season opened again.

There was nothing much at Fort George but the Hudson Bay trading post and a few scattered houses. But in anticipation of this big boom that the railroad was supposed to bring, some early birds had staked out a 'town' about three miles down river at what was called South Fort George. One outfit had already built this big hotel there with a huge saloon stocked with liquor. There was nothing else there that fall except a few shacks. But real estate promoters were staking out hundreds of town lots. Some of the promotional literature had more railroads and industry coming into Prince George than Chicago. (laughs) Even I bought a lot, which a couple of years later you couldn't sell for taxes.

It was the next season (1913) that things really got rolling there. The railway building was at its peak and there was fair sized settlements growing up. Prince George was a wide open place. It was mainly a tent town with shacks scattered around and some frame buildings on the main street. There were some stores, a few doctors, quite a few saloons and lots of real estate salesmen. There was at least one big, fancy whorehouse. Some of them ladies carried

their trade right out along the line. They'd come out to the end of steel and set up a dance hall there, just a rough lumber floor, not even planed lumber, with a couple of big tents over it. There be a piano player and they'd sell whiskey and other drinks. Each of the girls would have their own little tent. It'd be three or five dollars or up to eight dollars to go and visit them there. And every few weeks when the main camp moved that dance hall set-up would pack up and move right along with them.

Prince George was really a tough place. There was a lot of graft and the local politicians and judges were in cahoots with the saloon keepers. When the railroad stiff came in with their stakes they'd let them spend a good chunk of it in the saloons and then they'd arrest them for getting drunk, fine them for whatever they had left and give them so many hours to get out of town. The gambling houses were running wide open in town but if the railway workers sat down to a poker game of their own the cops would come and raid them and haul them into court. They'd fine them thirty-five dollars and costs for gambling; anything those guys had left over the thirty-five dollars was for court costs. That was the law as we saw it operating in them days.

Those railway camps housed men worse than you'd keep cattle. The bunkhouses were just five foot walls made with rough logs with a tarpaulin over them for a roof. There'd be maybe fifty men sleeping in them shanties. Double deck bunks made from whatever scrap lumber and poles was available. You had to pack your own blankets. In most of those camps they wouldn't even provide hay to make a mattress - hay cost too much to ship in.

Them bunkhouses was crowded and smokey and smelly, and usually lousy too. There was no way to keep clean. They had a big heater in the middle of each bunkhouse and everybody would sit around that and chew tobacco and spit it on the floor. Dirt floors that turned into mud every time it got wet.

One time we had an outbreak of typhoid fever in our camp. Some government authorities came over with a doctor to inspect the place. Well, they poked around a little and said that the cause of the typhoid was the impure water we were using. Here we had crystal clear water coming right off the mountain and they blame it on the water. Nothing about the filthy condition of the camp, they blamed it on the water.

There's no doubt that the men working on the railroad was exploited to a fare-thee-well. So we are today too but capitalism hadn't moderated at all then. The I.W.W. came up and their walking delegates tried to organize the camps. I was a young fellow and joined them all right. Had a card and thought the I.W.W. was

pretty good. At that time lots of the railway workers had kind of revolutionary ideas. When I was up there I thought that we were heading for a revolution too. But when I came out of there and began to see what other people were thinking I realized that there was no chance for a revolution. That we was only a small minority that felt that way. That didn't mean that you had to accept conditions as they were but for years and years it seemed like the capitalists weren't going to give an inch.

By 1914 they were just finished up building the Grand Trunk but the P.G.E. (Pacific Great Eastern) was starting to go full steam ahead. So a partner and me took a flat bottom boat and went down the Fraser as far as Soda Creek. That was quite an experience too. Soda Creek was a big centre for river traffic then with sternwheelers coming in and supplies for the railroad stacked up there. The main depot for the supplies was Prince George because the Grand Trunk was completed by that time. The supplies and equipment for the P.G.E. camps came down river by steamer or by mule team. For awhile we worked on the grade but then me and my partner and two other guys took a contract to supply logs and timber for cribbing. But in August the war broke out and soon after that they shut down all work on the P.G.E.

The first war took me by surprise. Maybe because I'd been out in the bush all that time. But I never figured that the labour movements in Europe would allow that to happen. But this nationalism seems to be a very ingrained habit. That war struck me as the most needless, senseless thing imaginable. It still does. There was quite a bit of anti-war feeling here in B.C. and on the prairies too. Most of them railway workers said they weren't going to fight in no war for anything. We didn't figure we had to be mixed up in that and we were going to do what we could to stay out of it. Of course, there were a lot of patriotic types around too.

I always had a hankering to have a little farm of my own. So in between working on the railway I filed on a homestead ten miles west of Prince George, up the Nechako River. In between scowing seasons I went up there and did a little clearing. It looked like it was a pretty good piece of land, up on a bench, level like a prairie farm. No stones. But it had been burned over by a forest fire years before. I built a little shack on it and cleared about ten acres. The spring of 1914 I planted a crop but then I found out the soil was not good, the substance had been burned out of it. We got rain and sun plenty, it was a good crop year. The wheat and oats came up and then got yellow and withered away. There was good land in that district but I didn't know enough about soil at that time to pick the right thing. But it was clear right away that you couldn't



make a living off my piece of land. I did enough work on that homestead to prove up on it but I never really farmed it.

I went back to Prince George and got a job with a neighbour. He had a contract to take out logs for a sawmill there. We worked in the woods skidding out logs all that winter. But in the spring there was no market for lumber. Everything went belly up. The sawmill went broke so he never got his money for the logs and we never got our wages. Finally we got twenty-five dollars each for a winter's work. In May I decided to get out of that country because there was just no way of making a living there. Everything was shut down, there were ten thousand men stranded in Prince George in the spring of 1915. One railway was built, the other one was shut down and the sawmills were closed up tight. So all the workers started pouring out of there. Prince George went completely flat.

Going out to Edmonton was quite a sensation for me. My partner and me took the train over the line we'd help build. We rode the three hundred miles that had taken us close to three weeks to walk sometimes and covered that stretch in a day, my train.

### **Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan**

I worked in Edmonton for a while and then we shipped out for the harvest in Saskatchewan. A bumper crop came in that year and I worked on those big steam threshing outfits, going from one region to another. After the harvest was over I wound up in a town called Fiske, Saskatchewan.

How I met up with Ole Olson was this way. I'd finished harvesting and was thinking about where to go next. Here I was sitting in a cafe in Fiske playing my guitar and singing and this guy I'd never seen before comes in and asks me, "Where are you headed." "I don't know and I don't give a damn," I tells him. So he offers me a job as a hired hand at his place. That eventually led to me getting a ranch in Saskatchewan.

The next year I worked for another farmer near Saskatoon but in the fall of '17 conscription came in. I already had my Canadian citizens' papers and I had to report for the army. But when they gave me a medical exam they found that I had a slight hernia. They gave me a class 'E' classification and I wasn't called up.

I went back to Ole Olson's place. He had offered to go partners with me ranching. Olson had already taken up some open land and I took up a homestead nearby. Our place was at Bad Lake, a big alkali lake nine miles north of Fiske. It only had water in it during the spring and we had trouble watering the stock until we located some springs and made cattle dugouts.

The first batch of cattle we raised turned out to be a complete bust. We bought a bunch of calves and raised them on prairie grass and hay. But by the time they were ready to sell the bottom had dropped out of the market and we barely got the price of the calves for them. Olson had been a logger before and he got fed up with cattle ranching on the prairies. In 1920 he asked me if I wanted to trade my homestead in B.C. for his share of the fencing and improvements we had made. There was about forty acres of good timber on that B.C. homestead of mine that he was going to log off. So we made that trade.

I managed to get a government grazing lease on four thousand acres of grassland near Bad Lake. I had a cattle ranch but no cattle. And no money to buy any. So I took in cattle from the farmers around there. I'd get three dollars a cow for pasturing and rounding up an animal over the summer. Slowly I started accumulating some animals of my own and I broke up some of that lease land to grow feed. My own homestead was just scrub land, only suitable as a home site. All the good farming land around there had been taken up before I ever got there.

I put in hay for the winters and later I grew wheat on a quarter section I rented. There were no end of things to do and worry about. Hail, inside of a couple of minutes it can destroy your whole crop. I lost many crops that way. We were in a hail belt there and every third year or so you could count on being hailed out. Finally I had almost twenty miles of fences and that meant a lot of fence riding. My grazing lease was next to some rich, good, wheat fields. I was always afraid that the cattle would break down the fence--they were pretty poor fences anyway--so I was afraid they'd break down the fences and get into the wheat fields and do a lot of damage. Do more damage than I could pay for. Even after we moved back to B.C. one of my nightmares was of the cattle getting into those neighbours wheat fields.

That was a never ending job, riding fences. Once a wire gets cut or broken the fence goes slack for half a mile and posts start coming down. As long as the wire is intact, tight, then even if the posts go over it don't matter too much. But once you cut the wire everything goes.

I had batched on the homestead in B.C. and I had batched on the ranch in Saskatchewan for eight years. I was thirty-six years old and while I hadn't given up the idea of getting married I didn't know how it would come up. I was always busy but I felt that there was something incomplete in my life.

In 1926 something happened that made quite a change in my life. My neighbour had gone down to Minnesota and his niece had come back to Fiske with him for a visit. Ragna comes from Norwegian parents but she was born and raised in Minnesota. For a while she worked as a hired girl for some families around Fiske and we kept meeting. Well, I thought she was a good looking girl but I thought she was really too young for me to be interested in. There was eighteen years difference between Ragna and me which at the time I thought was too great. But we kept on meeting and finally we fell in love. Ragna had gotten a job about thirty miles south of where I lived. I could count on a sixty to eighty mile drive every time I'd take her to a dance. I'd have to drive thirty miles south, drive over to the dance, and then take her back home again. After that I'd have to drive back to my place. But I didn't mind that. I had a new T model truck and I kept her going all the time.

Well I told her it was crazy, me courting a young girl like her. But I was so much in love that I figured, "Okay, I'll be in heaven for a year or so then I'll be willing to be in hell the rest of my life." But it turned out well, very well. If we both live another year we'll have our golden wedding anniversary. And that's not too bad a record, even if it wasn't smooth sailing all the time.

We got married in 1926 and things looked just rosy for awhile. Over those years I had gradually built up and I'd gotten a pretty fair house built. I figured that in a few years I'd be well on my feet. A year later Ragna was pregnant. We went to the doctor and he said, "Don't worry. It's not going to come in an hour. When she first feels it coming on just come into town." This was in the fall. Well, Ragna started to get labour pains and we set off for town. The pain got worse and worse so we stopped in at one of the neighbours. The neighbour's wife said, "You can't go into town now. We'll send for the doctor to come out." And Lloyd was born in our neighbour's house the next morning.

How did I feel about being a father? Oh, it was a great feeling. You feel as if you've just grown up. But that also gave me one of the worst scares I ever had in my life. We were more isolated on that ranch than is usual for the prairies. Our nearest neighbour was about three miles away. When my wife was pregnant with our second child we had miscalculated the time she was due by about a month. I had been planning to take her to the hospital in good time. Well, on the twenty-ninth of February, 1932, we were sitting in the kitchen and

my wife says, "Wouldn't it be a joke if you'd have to go and get the doctor tonight." There was a raging blizzard outside. "That certainly wouldn't be no joke," I says. It wasn't half an hour afterwards that she started to get labour pains.

I didn't know what to do. I now know I shouldn't have left the house but I thought I'd be able to get help from the neighbours in time. Because a woman would know what to do better than me.

I set out across the prairie toward where our neighbour's house should be. You couldn't see nothing, but I steered by the wind. I was lucky and hit their house. My neighbour and his wife hitched up a horse to the sleigh and I walked ahead leading the horse with a lantern held down to the ground. You couldn't see nothing of the road--all drifted in--but you could feel it with your feet. When we got back to our house and I opened the kitchen door I see blood spattered all over the floor. I rushed into the bedroom, not knowing what I would find, and there is my wife lying with our new born daughter in her arms. She had a great big smile on her face and she said, "It's alright." Ever since that, whenever I have a fight with my wife, like married couples do, I just think back on how she looked there and I can't be mad at her anymore. She was brave as anything; Beverly was born just after I left.

By that time we were deep in the depression. When Lloyd was born, five years before, I figured I had a good chance to do well and really get ahead. But in '29 the depression set in and for ten years it was just hopeless to try and get anywhere. You could just hang on, and a lot of people lost everything.

I figured out one year, in 1931, all the foodstuffs I'd produced. I had a fair crop of wheat, about three thousand bushels, and I had just pastured almost four hundred head of cattle. Most of them belong to my neighbours but I'd pastured them over the summer on my grazing lease. All by my own work, without any help.

I estimated that a pound of wheat and a pound of beef was the equivalent of any foodstuff, it would feed a person for a day. Just about anyway. Well, I figured out that with my own labour I'd grown enough foodstuff to feed five hundred people for a whole year. Yet I couldn't make enough out of that to buy myself a pair of pullover mitts in the fall. My wife had to sew up a pair of mitts out of binder canvas. The economy was so upside down.

We sold wheat for twenty cents a bushel and it cost us twelve cents a bushel to get it threshed. We sold steers for as low as a cent a pound, after you paid the

shipping costs. Ten dollars for a thousand pound steer. What you'd pay for a roast now-a-days.

By 1934 it hardly paid to ship the cattle to Winnipeg because the transport costs were almost as much as what you got for your animals. So I slaughtered my own beef and started peddling it through the district. The very best steak cuts were fifteen cents a pound. Top roasts were ten cents a pound. Stew beef, that you'd buy cut as steak now-a-days, I'd sell for five cents a pound. I didn't make much but I still came out ahead of trying to ship the cattle out.

Most of the farmers were mortgaged to the hilt. What with the low prices and not being able to keep up with the mortgage payments many of them had lost their farms. The only reason that the mortgage companies hadn't taken the farms away from them was that they had nobody to sell them to. Nobody had cash to buy a farm. But as soon as things would pick up a bit, a little more money around, the mortgage companies were ready to sell the farms right out from under the feet of the farmers who felt they still owned them.

So a big part of the socialist program was a kind of land reform. The C.C.F. came out with the platform that the government would take over land mortgages and give the farmers a lifetime lease on their farms. They could even will that lease to their children. Naturally the Liberals and Conservatives seized on that and said the C.C.F. was going to take the land away from the farmers. Of course it was no such thing. If you wanted to you could sign that lease and the government would pay off the mortgage.

I had to laugh. One of my neighbours, a young fellow, had bought a quarter section from a land company. He said he wasn't going to vote for the C.C.F. "No sir. They're going to take my land away." So I asked him, "How do you figure that? How much were you supposed to pay the company for this land?" "Well the price had been \$2,500 for the quarter section." "And how much have you already paid on it?" He figured he'd paid something like fifteen hundred to date. "And how much do you owe on it now," I asked him. Well, on account of the years he couldn't pay and the arrears and interest and everything, he now owed the company \$3,400 dollars and was getting deeper in debt every year. (laughs) So I told him, "What are you worrying about? You already lost your land. The C.C.F. is trying to save it for you."

In the thirties there were quite a few socialists around, and some revolutionaries. Lots of them were what you'd call 'hard times socialists'. They could only understand it because we were pushed to the wall. And when times got a little better they changed their minds. The trouble during the thirties was

that most people regarded the depression like it was a natural catastrophe, as something that couldn't be helped. They couldn't understand that those things didn't need to happen. That it was part of capitalist economics and was man-made. They kind of took it as an act of God,

Now I've been of a socialist opinion even when I was in Norway. I read all I could on it, although the only time I was active was when I was in Saskatchewan. I followed the Russian revolution all the way from its beginning and read the propaganda for it and the propaganda against it. For quite a few years during the thirties I read a publication called *Moscow News*. That was pro-communist.

You was so smothered in anti-communist propaganda, of the most stupid sort, that you couldn't get no idea of what was going on by reading the newspapers. For instance, the *Saturday Evening Post* had this one story about the result of collectivization in Russia that was supposed to be an eyewitness account. A story about collective farmers hauling grain. They were going along the side of a river bank, this whole string of tractors, when the lead tractor went over the side and into the river through some accident. So, said this story, all the rest of the dozen or so tractors run into the river too because they figured they had to follow the leader. And that's the kind of stories you'd get in the newspapers.

Anyway, we worked hard on that ranch to make a living. I had twenty miles of fences to keep in repair and I'd be out there riding the fence with a hammer and staples, tacking up the wire where it had come down. In the winter we had to water and feed the cattle. That's a job that all of us worked at, even the kids when they was old enough,

I guess my wife done just about every job there is to do on a farm. She cut hay and stacked it, she stooked oats and helped thresh it, herded cows and fixed fences. She even drove the truck and shoveled wheat into granaries during the harvest. But we had a lot of heartbreaks in the thirties. In '36 and '37 we had two dry years and I lost the cattle. Had to sell them, practically give them away, because there wasn't no pasture for them. In '38, seeing as I had no cattle, I ploughed up the land I used to raise feed on and planted wheat. But it was a poor year for wheat and we hardly got the costs out of it.

Both the kids were going to school by that time. One of them little one-room schools that they had everywhere on the prairies in them days. But they learned well enough there too. The school was four miles away from our place and in the winter times that was quite a way for the kids to go. If it was really bad I'd take them in the rig but usually they rode to school. When they were old

enough to handle a horse and sleigh I fixed up a caboose for them, a sleigh with a little cabin on to keep the wind out. If a blizzard came up unexpected all the kids from that school would stay with some family with a house nearby. They'd feed them and bed them down there till they could get home safely. You could rely on that. That was one thing about prairie people, they were the most helpful, wonderful neighbours.

Lloyd's always been pretty musical. Both him and Bev were great singers. I used to play the guitar and both of them had good voices. Any social gathering going on for forty miles around wasn't complete without the Arntzen kids being there to sing.

We struggled along through those depression years. And we had good times too, it wasn't all struggle. One thing we never lacked was food. We grew most of our own food and we lived well that way. If we could get enough for the winter coal we were alright as far as housing went. But to go into town to buy a pair of overalls or to buy anything was just about impossible. We just didn't buy anything, we couldn't buy anything. We had to make our own stuff where we could, or do without it.

Our neighbours were wonderful people. We helped each other and lived a pretty good life together. We went to dances that they held in the school house or the community hall. In the winter we would have all-night bridge parties with our neighbours. Or we would curl. Even in the worst of the depression we managed to make some pretty good times for ourselves. Only we couldn't see no future ahead. It wasn't the actual hardship we went through as much as the blankness of the future. You couldn't see no light at the end of the tunnel. I had thoughts about leaving the ranch during the thirties. Sure. But not really seriously. Because it wouldn't have done any good. There was no way of leaving, and still being able to make a living. See, when you were on the farm you had no money but you had your house and we grew all the food we needed, except for a few things. If you could scrape up enough cash for the winter coal you were all right. It was hard to leave that for nothing. If we'd come out to the coast I might have been lucky just to get on relief. Staying on the farm was a lot better than that.

In '39 and '40 we had bumper crops of wheat and we got on our feet a bit. We could keep our heads above water. We were still only getting sixty cents for a bushel. But in 1941 we had no crop to speak of at all. Seeing as I didn't have cattle anymore there was no need to stay on the ranch in the winter. So I decided to go out to Vancouver to look for work. We all drove out in our old Chev truck. Coming through those mountains on that old road was something.

Right away I liked it. All them mountains and the water running down in little creeks and rivers everywhere.

I got a job in the North Shore shipyards scraping and painting ship hulls. Since I had experience as a sailor and was good at slicing ropes and cables they put me in the rigging loft. I was in charge of signing out and repairing the gear used for rigging the ship; blocks and tackle and slings. I worked in the shipyard and me and my wife liked the climate so well that we started thinking about moving out here. But we went back to Saskatchewan in the spring of '42 to put in the crop.

Next fall we came back to Vancouver again and I worked in the shipyards as a rigger. We were getting to like the coast very much but Lloyd was just starting high school and we couldn't move him back and forth. So we went back to Saskatchewan and I got into cattle again.

About a year or two later we elected the first C.C.F. government in Canada. They done a pretty good job, considering everything. You can thank Saskatchewan for the fight it took to put in Medicare. We wouldn't have had that here yet if it hadn't been for the C.C.F. And they didn't give away the natural resources like they did here in B.C. under the Social Credit government. That Social Credit is a farce anyway. They give away everything to the business interests for the price of some jobs. Well, they're just the backside of the Conservative party anyway.

Of course the C.C.F. made their share of mistakes too. The only businesses that the government seems to take over are those that have failed or aren't profitable from the start. The profitable businesses stick in the hands of the companies but the government gets stuck with the bum companies. Look at what happened with the railroads. The C.P.R. got the lush districts and the government got stuck with the service lines, with the railroads that failed. The C.N.R. runs through empty country most of the way. It's the same with mining and other industries. When you have government competing with mining companies the government gets stuck with the poor mines that the private interests want to get rid of while the companies run the paying mines. To have any success in running a nationalized business you have to take over all the big businesses. And the C.C.F. and N.D.P. don't seem to be able to do that.

Sonja, our youngest daughter, was born in 1945, two days after the end of the war. In a hospital for a change. Ragna always had the dread that the prairie was going to take one of our children from us. But it never did, she brought them all out here to B.C.



I thought about passing the farm to Lloyd. Yes, that's what you always think. But it didn't work out that way. Lloyd enjoyed riding horseback and fixing fences but he was no farmer. We'd put him on the tractor and he'd do a certain amount of work and then he'd be back in the house. He'd always do what you laid out for him to do but he didn't develop enough interest to do the various jobs on his own. I could see after a few years that it didn't suit him. And it would be silly to try to push somebody into work they don't like. He done much better himself off the farm anyway.

In 1946 Lloyd finished high school. He was going to go to the University of B.C. and Beverly was also going to get a job. My wife and me would have been by ourselves on the farm. Ragna said, "It's now or never." So we packed up and came out to B.C. for good.

I advertised the ranch for sale and got quite a few enquiries so I thought it would be a cinch to sell the place. Then the price of cattle started to fall and I couldn't get a buyer. The next spring I hired somebody to put in the crop because I was working in the shipyards. There was a good crop coming in when, in the middle of the summer, it turned dry and we lost the whole thing. It didn't even pay the threshing costs. I had to sell the place for whatever I could get. Finally I got a buyer for twenty-eight hundred dollars. For the whole place. Here I had a four thousand acre grazing lease, all fenced, twenty miles of fencing. The fences were worth that price alone. There were three hundred acres in cultivation. We had a good five room house, and a barn and outbuildings and the improvements on our own 160 acres of land. All for twenty-eight hundred dollars. But that's the way it went. Anyway, I don't regret it. We got tired of the prairies and the cold winters. And I enjoy it here.

## **On the Coast**

So here I was, in the fall of 1946, working in the Burrard Shipyards over on the North Shore. By this time I had a job in the regular rigging gang. We'd refit ships that came in needing new cables and blocks and rigging and we'd hoist heavy machinery into ships that were being repaired. A lot of ships came in that needed new chains for their booms and new wire for their winches and such. So we replaced them. Although I was up in years I was fairly active. I could climb up into the masts and set the blocks and everything. I wasn't afraid of that and I could do as well as the next man.

I worked there till 1949. During those years there wasn't much shipbuilding going on there but there were still ships being refitted. But finally work got so scarce and we had so many layoffs that I couldn't make a living at it anymore. So I decided to go fishing.

I had come out here with the intention of going fishing. That's something I always wanted to do. At first I didn't dare tackle it because I never had any experience with commercial fishing. But in 1949 I took our last savings and bought a small fishing boat for seven hundred and fifty dollars. I rigged her up as a troller and called her the *Sonja*. after our youngest daughter. The engine was pretty shot and conked out soon after. I got an old car block, had it reconditioned and converted, and set into the boat. It worked fine.

How did I learn how to fish? Well, I'd been asking questions and watching other fishermen who looked like they knew what they were doing. Besides, I've always been fairly handy with gear so it didn't take me long to learn how to rig up and handle the lines. I started out fishing between Lion's Gate bridge and Atkinson Point. The first day I got two salmon on the lines and I got so excited I forgot to put the line down again.

I trolled for springs (Spring salmon) early out of Vancouver. Later on, on May, I went up to Pender Harbour and fished for springs there. Then in July I went up to Blackfish Sound near Alert Bay, for the pinks and humpback and coho. There were a couple hundred boats up there at the time. It was the same story again, I had to learn how to fish there. We fished until the end of the season, the chuma come in in the later part of September. So i,d go after them.

That first year, if my wife hadn't taken a job I couldn't have continued. She took a job at Eaton's and we managed to pull through. I didn't make much money. Prices were poor; I caught enough fish the first year just to pay for my grub and my gas, that was about all. The whole first season I don't think I made over five hundred dollars, that's five hundred dollars gross. After you take off the expenses there isn't much left. So I started fishing for Rock Cod and I also learned how to troll for salmon in the winter. My catches increased year by year until I got to be a fairly good fisherman, for the outfit I had. One year in fact I was top boat of the day while fishing out of Port Hardy. I got the biggest catch that day of any of the other trollers.

I'd start out in spring over in Nanaimo and fish out of Silva Bay, around Gabriola and the Gulf Islands. Then I'd go up to Lund, over to Bakers Pass and get the coho run there. Then maybe over to Campbell River for the pinks and coho. I'd generally wind up fishing in Blackfish Sound at the end of the season.

You soon learn to spend your time in the best spots. You learn not to waste your time and gas by patrolling around. Like up in Blackfish Sound, there was a regular trolling run. You go around Bold Point, past Bold Point Rock and up Knight Inlet. It was just a run of about three-quarters of a mile and go back and forth. That was really the hot spot of that whole Sound. At first whenever the fish stopped biting I'd move along to somewhere else. That was the wrong thing to do. You just spend your time over the hot spot all day and eventually the fish come in and start biting again. They'd only be biting for an hour or so and if you missed that you'd lost your chance to catch fifty fish.

The most important thing in trolling, wherever you're fishing, is to go at the right speed and the right depth. And that's different in different places. You can't learn it out of a book. I'd watch the experienced fishermen and see where they spent their time. Some of them would tell you something and others wouldn't. You also learn handle the gear fast when the fish are biting. When they're biting the amount of fish you can pull in depends on just fast you can haul in and put down your lines. Another important thing is to have your flashers bent properly so they spin right. At another speed they won't spin at all.

I used to go to the union meetings and I knew Homer Stevens. I always admired his dealings with people, a very able and sensible man. He never tried to railroad things through. He's got lots of patience; more than me. But the whole set up as it exists now is wrong for the fishing industry. I was in the union (U.F.A.W.U.) for quite few years but eventually I left. Most trollermen never joined.

To my notion the best solution would be to have co-ops and force these canneries out of business. What I think is that seeing that we're paying for it all anyway, we might as well own these canneries along the coast. Then everybody in the industry could get a share of the multi-million dollar profits they make. But fishermen are the most bull headed people in the world and they don't seem to be able get together. I was a member of one Gulf Fishermen's Coop here; it was a good one too. But it got in too deep over its head. When the canneries started offering a few cents a fish more, just to break the Coop, a lot of fishermen went and sold all their fish to the canneries. So the Coop went broke.

While I enjoyed fishing it's pretty hard to do without your family. What I didn't like was that I'd stay away from home almost half the year, more than half the year. I'd generally go out when the season opened in the middle of April and I wouldn't come back till the middle of September. I'd make a couple of trips

home for a visit, just leave the boat tied up wherever I was and take a bus or plane to Vancouver. But when I was up the coast I'd be away for months at a time. I missed the family pretty bad some times.

We had a house in Burnaby, on Capitol Hill, and we liked the district. My wife didn't get too lonesome because she made a lot of friends and used to go all over the place, bowling, playing cards and visiting. I think she's really come into her own since we moved to Vancouver. By that time Lloyd and Beverly were already married and had families of their own. There was only Sonja left at home, going to school.

Beverly, right after her first child, got T.B. and it looked pretty bad. She was in the hospital for seven months. But after she came out she had five more children and adopted one more, so I guess she came out pretty healthy. Now, after raising them, she's going to university to get a degree in political science. But I still argue with her about some things.

Lloyd done quite a few things. He went to the University of B.C. to take engineering but after a year decided he wasn't cut out to be an engineer so he took teacher training.. He taught school for some years and then quit and went to work, first as a floor layer, then as a bricklayer and eventually into carpenter work. He's a darn good carpenter too. For a while he had a radio program where he sang old-time songs and he got together a Dixieland jazz band. But things changed and Lloyd went back into school teaching. By that time he had a fair sized family of his own. Well, that's not what you want to hear about. If you talk to my wife you can fill up a whole book about our kids. Ya, we're pretty proud of them.

We were getting on top of it. So I decided to take things a bit more easy. I wanted a small, fast boat that would let me run up into some of those remote inlets and come back without spending days and days travelling. I got a twenty-four foot cabin cruiser that I rigged up to troll. But it was a mistake all the way around. Because of various technical faults, like not having the proper reduction, I never got the speed I had expected. But I fished with that boat for some years and made a good living at it.

Me and Ragna was ready to have a little fun. We went over to Norway in '62. It was the first time that I'd been back in over fifty years. Then we went again in 1966 for a big reunion. All my brothers and sister were there, we were all living then--my three brothers and four sisters. That was first and last time we all been together since 1907. In the last few years we been dropping off pretty fast.

Norway was just as beautiful as ever. Narvik had settled down from its rough and ready days when I was a kid. It had all been destroyed during the war and completely rebuilt again. We went all over Norway and stayed with my relatives everywhere. Up north to the Finmarken (Lapland) and out to the West Coast and down to Oslo. We went back to Beier Fjord and sat up till three in the morning when it was still bright as daylight. It had been quite a settlement of farmers and fishermen when I lived there but now all farms have gone back to bush. All the young people from those places leave to work in the towns. Like here.

A few years later in '70, my wife and me took a tour through the Soviet Union. I learned a little Russian before we left but we never needed it because there was always somebody who could speak English. We went from Leningrad to the Pacific, we visited Moscow and saw about a dozen places in Central Asia too-- Samarkand, Tashkent, Lake Baikal.

On the whole I found things pretty much as I expected to find them. Some things wasn't what I thought but on the whole I was impressed with what they'd accomplished. Considering they been invaded and had most of their country destroyed, and had to start form scratch every time, they really did wonders. I was impressed by what they done with their cities. There weren't any real slums anywhere. Maybe you don't see the kind of luxury that you do in Canada or the States but you also don't see any of the miserable conditions that some people have to live under here either.

My biggest disappointment--and that didn't come from our trip to the Soviet Union--has been the conflict between China and the Soviet Union. I never thought that would be possible, I never figured that communism would produce saints but I always understood that the nature of that system would eliminate this kind of national competition. Because there shouldn't be the economic struggle involved. But it seems like the nationalist instinct is as strong under communism as anywhere else. Anyway at the end of our trip through the Soviet Union we took a boat to Japan to visit the World Fair held in Tokyp that year. Sonja was working as an interpreter in the Canadian pavilion. Sonja's the real scholar in the family. She saw her own way through university with scholarships in Asian Studies. We met her at the Canadian pavilion and they introduced me as Captain Arntzen of the *Narvik* . And I didn't let on it was just a twenty-four foot troller.

That year was also the last year I went skiing. Me and Ragna and Sonja went up to Seymour Mountain. I had Erik, my grandson, along. I rented some skis and

went up to get a ticket for the ski tow. The guy running it says, "You think you can make it up on the tow?" "Oh I think so," says I. "Well you try it and if you make it the rides are on the house." I didn't have any trouble making it up on the ski tow or going down the hill either. I was eighty and Erik was eight. We were the oldest and youngest on the slopes that day.

During those years we were taking these trips I'd still be fishing half of the year. Then the (Federal) government started to reduce the fishing fleet by taking fishing licenses out of circulation. Boats that caught below a certain average tonnage got a B license, which ran out after so many years. They couldn't be renewed, the license goes with the boat. There are still a few left but not many. Unless you could buy an A license you were out. So if you want to go fishing today you've got to buy a boat with an A license. Those A licenses cost three to four thousand dollars a ton. There was no such thing when I started or I'd never been able to get into fishing,

I still had the *Narvik* that I was fishing with. As long as I was in fair health I enjoyed fishing; going out in the summertime. I suffered from the cold and wet but I didn't mind too much. But now, after I got to be eighty-four years old, it got to be more of an effort than fun. So I sold the boat this spring and retired.

End