

Patrick Lenihan and the Alberta Miners

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DOCUMENTS

Patrick Lenihan and the Alberta Miners

Gilbert Levine

DURING THE 1930s, the Communist Party, through the Workers Unity League, was active in organizing in the mining camps and towns in Alberta. One of their most effective organizers was Patrick Lenihan. What follows are some excerpts from twenty hours of oral history of Lenihan's life recorded in 1977 when Lenihan was 74 years old. These tapes are on deposit with the Public Archives of Canada.

Lenihan was born in Kanturk, Ireland in April 1903, the son of a shoemaker and the grandson of an evicted peasant farmer. At an early age he joined the Irish Volunteers (Sinn Fein movement) and engaged in rebellious activities against British domination.

In 1923 Lenihan emigrated to the United States where he worked at many odd jobs such as auto assembly, construction, and hotel clerk. He joined the Wobblies during this period, travelled the country by boxcar, lived in the hobo jungles, and loved to sing the songs for which the Wobblies were famous.

Lenihan joined the Communist Party in Calgary in 1930. His organizing and oratorical skills were soon recognized and he was assigned all over the 1930s as a full-time organizer of workers, farmers, and the unemployed throughout Alberta, at \$40 per month.

Most of 1932 was spent in Fort Saskatchewan jail on a phoney charge of "unlawful assembly." He subsequently helped organize the Calgary Central Council of Unemployed Unions and led a strike of the unemployed which resulted in Calgary having the highest relief benefits in Canada.

Alberta in the 1930s was a Communist Party of Canada stronghold. Lenihan claims that CPC membership was about 5,000, with at least 600 members in Calgary alone.

In 1938 Lenihan was elected as a Calgary alderman running on the Communist ticket. In 1939 in his aldermanic capacity he "welcomed" King George VI
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and Queen Mary to Calgary. But by 1940 he was a guest of the Crown, spending over two years in internment camps for his opposition to the war.

On his release, his former aldermanic connections helped him land a city of Calgary labourer's job. He soon became president of the Civic Employees Union and by 1949 was its full-time business agent. Lenihan was instrumental in establishing the Alberta Federation of Public Employees and in 1954-5 the National Union of Public Employees, one of the predecessor unions of today's Canadian Union of Public Employees. On his retirement in 1968 he was the western Canada Director of CUPE.

LENIHAN'S FIRST CPC assignment was as a public speaker in Drumheller in 1930:

Drumheller

THE PARTY WAS getting calls all over the place for speakers and organizers. The party decided that myself and George Poole, couple of amateurs, would go to Drumheller to organize the unemployed and help the radical groups of miners.

Miners were all in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) locals there. But inside all of the locals there were groups of radicals who wanted to break away and join the Mine Workers Union of Canada. The mines were not working very fast. It was summertime and the mines were closed down.

Our duty was to encourage the miners in Drumheller to switch from the UMW to the Mine Workers Union of Canada. For years, most of the UMW leadership — the American leadership and the ones they had in Canada — were signing any kind of sweetheart agreement with the boss and the miners were in revolt! Its original history was good, but it became a company union. It was the same in the coal mines in Nova Scotia and the Maritimes.

We went to Drumheller by boxcar, the people's transportation. We come off the freight train. Inside of a couple of blocks we're coming up the main street. We come to one of the main corners of the town and here's posters a foot and a half long by a foot and a half wide "Mass Meeting: Two Prominent Calgary Speakers Will Attend." Well, as soon as I saw the bill, I wanted to catch the next freight train back.

I had never addressed a public meeting before of any size. I'd said a couple of words in a couple of Communist Party group meetings, but not much. And that's all. I'd never even acted as a chairman or anything.

I had never seen a coal mine in my life. I didn't ever see a coal miner in my life. And miners understand what's going on.

I told all the local ones that I couldn't do it but Poole convinced them I could and that he'd write me out a speech. And sure enough he did. And I'm memorizing it. And I'm memorizing it, for a couple of days. We met with the party people and everything got set up. The meeting was going to be a big one — an open-air meeting. Stevie MacDonald, a young Scotsman with a couple of kids, was the leader of the party and chairman for the meeting.

We had a kind of little platform set up at the meeting place. And, my God, I bet there was about 600 miners out in front of us. And here I am up in this chair.

Anyway, I'm called upon to speak. And I got up "Comrade Chairman, comrades, we're glad to be here and we're down here on behalf of the revolutionary organization" and a couple of more phrases and bingo! It was just as if somebody had hit me on top of

the head with a bottle. I couldn't think of another word and I just stood there, in front of 600 miners. *Me! One of the big speakers from Calgary! I just stood there, frozen. I think Poole even had to pull me down even onto the chair!*

When Poole got through, some of the sharp right-wingers in the Miners' Union like Albert Allan started firing questions, but we finished our meeting. But, my God, I'm still shivering when I think of it. I wanted to head for Europe or somewhere when I got through with that meeting. *But they held me there. They convinced me to stay and that I'd learn.*

Two weeks later Malcolm Bruce came to Drumheller to speak. He was a member of the central committee of the party at one time. In fact, he was even interned in Kingston. He was known and the meeting was to be in Wayne, a big mining camp, about six miles out from Drumheller. And he wanted to know who the chairman was going to be. So they all said "Oh, Pat'll be it." And I said, "Oh no, nothin' doin'". I ain't going near the platform."

And I told him what had happened. Anyway, he convinced me to chair and I guess I did a good job. And a couple of times after that I was chairman at different meetings. And then one day I got up as chairman and I take off for twenty minutes. That's how it comes.

We were very successful in organizing the unemployed miners. Huge success. In fact, we broke into camps that didn't have any kind of organization before, like East Coulee. That was eighteen miles out.

The radical groups in each local of the United Mine Workers kept on functioning and gaining strength. They were trying to change the activities of the locals and get them involved in struggle with the coal company for better wages and conditions.

The coal companies had blacklists. Any man that was thought to be progressive in any way at all was blacklisted. He wouldn't get a job anywhere in the Drumheller Valley.

The work of the left-wingers had to be in their houses. We lived with the miners. I lived as good as they did. They would feed us and clothe us, everything. While we were organizing, we received no wages. *We didn't need no wages.*

DURING 1933 LENIHAN was assigned to organizing work in many mining camps, including Canmore and Blairmore in the Crow's Nest Pass.

DURING THIS PERIOD I was reading a lot, every minute I had to spare. Sometimes night and day. I guess I could never read enough. I used to go hundreds of miles beyond Edmonton — north, up on Mountain Park, Rocky Mountain, Lusker, where they had big mining camps in those mountains. I'd climb the side of a mountain — maybe a quarter of a mile up — and sit there and read my book all day. I'd read Marxist pamphlets, such as, "Value, Price and Profit," "Wage, Labour and Capital." And I started reading *Lenin* for the first time. I read all his writings — everything that I could lay my hands on. And the reading of these put me in a position where I could pick up the first volume of *Capital* and read it and study it and understand it past page three. Naturally, the more I read of that, the more I wanted to delve into the history of different people and their development. I was always of the opinion that the fellow running around who thought he knew it all, that he really never knew anything.

Canmore

THE PARTY WAS paying a lot of attention to the miners in Canmore, 85 miles up the road, west, as you're going to Banff. We had a strong party club in Canmore, in the main all Anglo-Saxons. *We also had a club in Banff. The party assigned me there.*

Canmore had a coal mine and it was a big one. It's a big one today. The miners were the basic population. To give you an idea of how strong we were there and how the miners felt — the red flag was always flying over the Miners' Hall in Canmore. Night and day for years. We had people elected on the school board there. It's no wonder that the high school principal, Leslie Robin, was the leader of the party there. And Bill Sherwood: he was financial secretary of the union and he was also a leading Communist. The president was Blake — a big, big, big stout man. Oh, there were all kinds of them, Bill Foster and Gilles. Oh, we had a real stronghold.

By this time I was already supposed to be able to give some form of educational at the party group meetings. I engaged in public speaking at meetings and classes — educational work. Oh, I was working full-time. From associating with the miners there and also from doing my time in Drumheller, I was about to get a good knowledge of all the different activities of the miners and the structure of the mines.

Crow's Nest Pass

WHEN I COMPLETED my tour in Canmore, the party decided that they needed a man up in the Crow's Nest Pass. Harvey Murphy was the main organizer of the Workers Unity League there. He already had all the locals in the Crow with the exception of Michel, Fernie, and Hillcrest in the Mine Workers Union of Canada.

In 1933, or the latter part of 1932, when I was in jail, one of the basic demands of the union during negotiations — aside from money, of course — was for official recognition of the union in signed contracts. And, oh, this the company fought. The bosses decided they were going to nail down the Mine Workers Union of Canada. And I guess the greatest strike [1932-3] in the history of Alberta took place at Bellevue, Blairmore, Coleman, and Frank, where the miners all went out on strike. It became a vicious battle. It lasted for seven months. There were hundreds of RCMP in there. And, of course, the company and the right-wing elements in the camps were extremely vicious and active in trying to terrorize people. And many were arrested. One woman, Mary Peters, got twelve months. She grabbed a Mountie by the belt and pulled him right off a horse.

The Italians, Slovaks, Czechoslovaks, and Yugoslavs were in this. They were really the backbone of it, with the Anglo-Saxon leadership. Bill Knight was the president of the union. He later became the first radical mayor of the town of Blairmore.

There were two big mines in Coleman. I think one was controlled by the CPR. We had a very strong local of miners there. I'd say at least 25 or 30 of them were already in the party.

The Blairmore mine, which was supposed to be one of the finest mines in the country, was controlled by French capital. The various companies were working together. And they had the blessing of all the bourgeoisie. All the big businessmen and a lot of small businessmen were all in a united front to crush the Reds. That was their slogan — to beat the Reds.

In the latter stages of the strike, after seven months, the companies adopted a new tactic. The companies blacklisted about 70 of the top ranking miners. And for the ones they were sure would scab, they got a chance to go through picket lines, they established company unions — "home locals" we used to call them. They had one in Coleman, one in Bellevue, and, for a short time, they had one in Blairmore. And this kind of weakened the front.

Finally, a compromise was made. The strike was a long, bitter one. The strike ended in a partial victory. The demand for union recognition had to be dropped. They got some wage increases, but not a signed contract.

As a result of the loss in Coleman, about 70 real militant workers were blacklisted from that day until the war broke out in 1939. They were blacklisted in any mine in the province of Alberta. And they had to leave their homes.

The role of the mounted police during all of this was terror, terror, terror. Smashing picket lines and arresting people. The same old tactics down through history. The same as they do today.

With the aid of the United Mine Workers Union of America, these home locals, the company unions, were functioning and recognized by management. At this point they were independent, but they were getting funds through the back door from the UMWA to keep them alive. The UMWA's attitude was that it was better to have a home local, than to have the Mine Workers of Canada. That was the tactic.

The two basic leaders of District 18 of the United Mine Workers were Bob Levitt and Angus Morrison. They always had 45s in their pockets when they went out into a mining camp. The leaders of the union had to protect themselves from their own membership with 45s! And they pulled the gun in Bellevue, and they had it in Drumheller. They'd come to their own local meeting and they would be told by the miners to leave town. But the coal companies recognized the UMWA.

I wasn't in the Crow during the period of this strike, but I got there in the summer of 1933 just when the strike was over. I was endorsed by both the party and the Workers Unity League. Basically, I was always under the direction of the party because I was becoming kind of a party leader then in the province. My responsibility, as a Communist Party official, was to organize the unemployed and to organize workers into the Workers Unity League. There wasn't any kind of clear separation between the two organizations. All the people we would speak to on behalf of the Workers Unity League — we told them who we were, what we were. We never hid. We worked openly as Communists in a trade union. The relationship between the party and the Workers Unity League was very close. The Communist Party had been the founder of the Workers Unity League, had organized it and set it up. John Stokaluk was a leader of the Mine Workers Union of Canada. The Alberta president was Jimmy Sloan from Lethbridge. They were both party members.

At that time, there must have been 60 or 70 Communist Party members in Blairmore — a town of around 3,000. But we could have doubled the membership. We had a very strong Italian section and lots of them used to go to mass. They were Catholics. The priest wasn't bad. He never made no talks or sermons against the Communists. He did his duty as a priest. I guess in as fair a way as he could on the basis of his beliefs, he didn't interfere with politics.

When I got to the Crow, the hostility between groups and different sections of the people was still there. It was at a high pitch. Our big job then was to get people to infiltrate these "home" locals. We wanted these "home" locals to at least begin talking with us and forming a united action as far as the conditions in the mines were concerned.

Blairmore Municipal Elections

IN THE FALL OF 1934 the elections came up for mayor and council in Blairmore. That was the biggest mining camp and the main town in Crow's Nest Pass. Most of the executive of the union were not Communist, but the party would meet with the executive and discuss what should be done, in as broad and democratic discussions as possible. They would call in the women who were organized in auxiliaries. Their leadership would all be brought to a conference and it was decided to contest the town elections, to

run a candidate for mayor and to run a slate — I think it was twelve — for the council and a complete slate for the school board. Bill Knight was our candidate for mayor. He was an Englishman, a carpenter in the mine. He was not a communist. Nevertheless, he was a leader in the strike. He played a good role in the strike.

And we had a real campaign! And the result of it was, on election night, we had elected Bill Knight as mayor and I think we had eleven or twelve on the council and we swept the school board!

In spite of the fact that Blairmore had a “home” local, we took the works! We ran as a progressive slate, a miners’ slate. But they were all well-known activists in the communist movement. And, oh man, was there celebration! Was there celebration! Phew! man, oh, man!

As soon as the first council meeting took place, the social upheaval was on. And the first thing, of course, they called the old chief of police. He was fired and a new chief of police was elected, Joe Fitzpatrick, an Irishman. And he’d been a miner all his life, but he was well educated. As chief, he was always decked out in a beautiful uniform. He looked the typical part of a real police chief. And he took delight in his job. And Joe would be coming down the street and somebody would be under the influence. He would say, “Now, comrades, you’d better go home!”

After the council election, they about trebled the taxation on the coal companies to raise funds for the schools for the children. The coal companies were the main taxpayers and were they howling!

Blairmore can get an awful lot of snow — some winters three or four feet of it, or more. So they bought a big tractor for cleaning the street. And the orders were that, in case of a snow storm, the first places to be cleaned would be where the miners lived. The entrance to the coal mine and the coal company houses — that was to be last.

The town streets were all mud. But the town went in and graded them all, gravelled them all, built sidewalks. They improved and paved the streets where rows of miners lived. Oh, they worked!

There was a big parcel of land right next to the railroad tracks which run right along the main street. I think it belonged to the CPR. And the town takes it over and makes a park of it with special spruce trees planted all over. And they put a bandstand right in the middle of it, across from the Cosmopolitan Hotel, where they’d do band concerts. And, generally speaking, they livened up the whole town. They showed in a positive way what a workers’ administration could do! And this even affected lots of the small business people and fellows in the home locals, when they saw what was taking place.

Of course, they made small mistakes. They were trying to do certain things. They fired all the old administration who were against us in the strike. But, in the main, they accomplished wonders.

Then one of them at a council meeting decided it was time to change the name of the main street — Queen Elizabeth Avenue. They decided to drop that and call it Tim Buck Boulevard¹ because they had already built the park along the other side, so it became a boulevard. And they named it officially Tim Buck Boulevard. Then, just as you’re coming into town from the east, when you’re driving into Blairmore to go to B.C., they erected a big neon sign “Tim Buck Boulevard.” Here it is, flashing at you, “Tim Buck Boulevard!” and then they had another one at the other end of town, “Tim Buck Boulevard!” Oh, this got the headlines throughout Canada. The people of Blairmore

¹ Tim Buck at the time was general secretary of the Communist Party of Canada.

knew Tim Buck well, because Tim had been going in there for years. They adored Tim. *They kept that name for many years.*²

Bill Knight was not an ideological communist. He was more of a class rebel. After about a year, he started to try and get things through council that had nothing to do with the progressive movement. And the people were kind of losing faith in him. And this was going on for quite awhile. Well, the party organization immediately had to start looking over the ranks to see who would fill his place in the next election.

We had a president then of the miners union in Blairmore from Nova Scotia, Enoch Williams, who was a party member, very active, well educated and deeply read. Enoch had a car at the time, and he'd be driving me to meetings all over. He was a bachelor. He was about my age at the time. But he was highly respected by all the small business people because he was a very clean-living man. Didn't spend much time in beer parlours or anything like that. He was the man.

Then we started a campaign to see that he got elected. And, of course, our good old friend Bill Knight didn't like us very much and he turned against us. Enoch Williams was elected mayor. He had a two-year term. Knight became a businessman when his term was up.

Then there was an election in Coleman, three miles up the road at the same time as the election in Blairmore. We had candidates running for school board and alderman. We didn't have any seats there. Mike Daniels, a YCL organizer, and I were in one of the polling booths in Coleman where the working class were voting. Two Mounties came in and asked us what we were doing. We told them what we were doing and that we were entitled to do it under the law. "Come on" they said and they put us in their car and what do they do? They drove us down the main highway and put us out of the car between Pincher Creek and McLeod, the most miserable open spot in Alberta in the wintertime. And, oh man, it was below zero and it was snowing like hell.

We'd have frozen to death if we'd been out there long enough. Fortunately, a truck came by and picked us up and took us into Blairmore. This was the kind of tactics that was going on.

In February 1934, our oldest son, Dennis, was born. Anne was in Calgary with the son, but I was spending all of my time at this point in the Crow's Nest Pass, out on the road. As well, Anne was working in the movement somewhere, when she was able to get around. Our territory was from Pincher Creek up to Fernie. And the clubs were growing, growing and the unemployed organizations were getting bigger and bigger and it was really more than a full-time job. You were going night and day.

I stayed in Blairmore, in the Crow's Nest, about three or four months. And then I came back to Calgary for a while. I was working and participating in strikes in Calgary with the unemployed workers. Then the people in the Crow's Nest Pass, the party people, the miners, all of them wanted me back. Harvey Murphy was still in there. But they wanted me back. They had to have one man at least looking after the party because we had over 300 members by this time throughout what we called the sub-district of the Crow's Nest Pass. We had organized clubs in Pincher Creek, Beaver Mines, the Foot-hills, Blairmore, Frank, Bellevue, Michel, and Fernie — all farmers and miners.

So the party made a decision. I think it was in the winter of 1935-6. I was sent back to Blairmore to stay. The miners rented a little house they had all ready for us when we got there. And we were only three doors away from the secretary of the miners union.

² After Social Credit was elected provincially and militancy in the town died out, the progressive council was defeated, and eventually the name of the street was changed again.

Joe Kokolsky who, in about another year, got killed in a mine explosion. Oh, he was a loss to the working class. He had a brain, courage, everything! And he and his brother Martin were working together at the face of the coal and there was a cave-in. About a tonweight fell on Joe and smashed him. They buried him. I spoke at his funeral.

So we were only a few doors away from them and right in the centre of the miners' homes. The miners fixed up the house and stocked it. You should have seen the stock of groceries that was in it. And Anne came with our boy. Oh, we had a happy life there.

The Corbin Strike

AT THE TIME, I was doing my regular party work. The Mine Workers Union of Canada still had the mines in Bellevue, Blairmore, Corbin, and one local in Fernie. One local in Michel was still independent but they were very sympathetic with us. We had a park in Michel, Karl Marx Park, called after Karl Marx. Michel turned out to be a real radical town. You bet! We never elected a council there, or anything like that, but we had the strong support of all the miners and the union.

We had one mining camp up in the mountains, a place called Corbin, just across the border in B.C. It was a complete company mining town, controlled by the Americans. And we had a real strong union there. There must have been about 350 members in the union and they were forced to go on strike, I mean on a real strike. But in those days, in the days of Canmore and everywhere else, we had a tactic. We were going through them continuously, what we called "pithead strikes." Even though we had a general agreement on conditions with the company, there was very little in the collective agreements, where they existed. Practically no fringe benefits. They were always trying to violate it and promote who they wanted and giving the best places in the mines to their friends. When our members became acquainted with what was going on, the grievance committee of the union would meet in the morning. Then they'd try and see management. Management would say no. Well then, "Everybody out!" "No work!" Quick strikes! Might last a day, maybe two or three days. If the miners had a grievance, and they didn't settle it, then there was no work. And this was a very common tactic all over.

Anyway, the strike broke out in Corbin and the American company had decided to smash the union. And, of course, they had the class collaboration of the leaders of the United Mine Workers of America — the same forces that were used against us in the strike in Blairmore. They were united against the Corbin miners.

The strike went on for about two or three weeks. And we were going to go in there to speak to the miners — we'd go up on the train, Harvey Murphy, or the mayor of Blairmore, or myself and John Stokaluk, the leader of the Mine Workers Union of Canada, Jimmy Sloan, the president of the Mine Workers Union of Canada. Corbin was not easy to get to. We were able to go on the train, but you had to go up there by way of the train to Michel. And then there was a train twice a week from Michel up into Corbin. And I think it was about twelve or fifteen miles up, way up, climbing the mountain.

The B.C. government, of course, with the RCMP, had decided that Harvey Murphy, the mayor of Blairmore, Jimmy Sloan, the president of the union, Stokaluk, and myself, couldn't go into B.C. They would search all the buses and trains and have barricades on the roads to search cars. So, in order to get in, we had to sneak in. And on this occasion, there was a very important meeting of the miners and I got the assignment that I had to go in. We had a big meeting planned there for the next Sunday. Somebody had to be there.

On the Friday night previous, we had a big special dance down at Frank, east of Blairmore. It had a hotel and a huge hall behind it. And, my God, we had 500 people

there, at a dance. George Arbuckle — he was the leader of the party in Fernie — had come down from Fernie to the dance. And there, at Frank, that night, there was a blizzard on. Oh, the snow was terrible! George and I had a discussion about how to get into Corbin. And I said "Well, look I can't ride trains and you can't go by car." You know, we're all leading party people. "How can you get in there?" "Oh," he says, "That's all right, Pat. I'll get you in. I'll get you in. We'll walk."

It must have been thirty miles and it was all mountain! From the time you leave Coleman, you're heading right into the Rockies. I thought he was crazy. But they said, "Well, we got to go. We got to do it." So, of course, being a good Communist, I was willing to try anything once. And I'll never forget it as long as I live.

It was a good thing we did it on Saturday morning. The beer parlour was open. We all met in the beer parlour in Coleman and it was snowing like heck. George Arbuckle and I and Harvey Murphy and the bunch that was with us, I guess maybe we had six or seven beers apiece. And finally Murphy says, "Well, if you fellas are going you'd better get going." Ha! I didn't feel too happy about it.

We started walking from Coleman, and, Lord God. . . . I just had on an overcoat and scarf and cap and overshoes. We went along the road, the highway. But there was deep snow in places from the wind drifts. When we got into Michel, about ten o'clock at night, I was at the end of my strength. And we were lucky. Because again, the beer parlour — there were two beer parlours — were open. George was able to take his beer better than I was. They closed at eleven o'clock at night. So we drank all the beer that we could possibly consume in an hour.

And then we started out again towards McGillivray. It was seven or eight miles up past Michel on the way to Corbin. And, oh, it must have been one or two o'clock in the morning when we got to McGillivray. I could go no further. We were fortunate in that there was two or three little shacks. We knocked at the door of one of them and we introduced ourselves and we told the fella who we were and what we were doing and why and where we were going.

"Come in, come in, come in!" The snow was blowing all over the place. Well, I say it was the will of God! He happened to be a sympathizer of the Corbin strike. He was foreign-born. He was working on the tracks for the railroad. They had two-room shacks. Nothing fancy in that part of the world. And he took us in. He only had one bed. He fed us, gave us a couple of pints of whiskey, and he gave us his bed. And he said, "Go ahead, I'll get you up at six o'clock in the morning." And, boy, when he woke us up Sunday morning, he had breakfast for us and everything. He gave us a good drink of whiskey and shook our hands. He said he wanted to see us again sometime in the future and wished us all the luck in the world.

We started out again. We had walked the railroad track from Michel up to McGillivray. We got on the railroad track again and it was all covered with snow. But we were able to walk the track. The poles and the wires directed us. We were about halfway and my feet were in terrible condition. But George was strong as an ox and physically stronger than I was. And every once in a while I'd have to sit down and just sit there for a couple of minutes, and then we'd get up and go again. I was really, really beat and kind of fed up.

I'm yelling and kicking all the time, "Why the hell did we ever do it" and "We're crazy" because I honestly never thought we'd get there. And George would look at me and grin and finally he said, "Ah, quit, Pat. Remember Lenin going through Siberia?" Well, the mood I was in, I didn't care about anybody going through Siberia. But that was the kind of man he was. He was a staunch miners' leader in Fernie, B.C.

I don't know how in the name of God we ever made it. But finally, one way or another, we got there. And we got in touch with the union president. Well, they were mesmerized. They couldn't really believe that it was possible! Oh, it was a miracle!

The meeting was at one o'clock Sunday afternoon. It was a mass meeting and, of course, the hall was full, women and everybody, because it was kind of a citizens' meeting. And when the president introduced us up on the platform and told them what we had done, boy, they just went wild, standing up cheering! George made a few remarks. He wasn't a great speaker but he was active in his own miners' local in Fernie. Then I took over and I delivered my message and we got a wonderful, wonderful reception. If everything had been normal, they wanted us to stay forever.

We stayed that night in a miner's house. We wouldn't go near the hotel. Monday, we're faced with getting back. It was a choice of walking back or taking a chance on the train. On the train, we could have been picked up. I didn't care if I went to jail for two years. I wasn't going to walk back. I won my point! And we got the boys to take us over to the station and we got the train. And, by God, about two-thirty in the afternoon, we arrived in Blairmore.

Well, at that time, Bill Knight was the mayor. He had opened and operated quite a large pool hall. He had a party member hired to look after the tables. Since the miners were only working a couple or three or four shifts in two weeks, they'd congregate in this pool hall or immediately around it. And that's where we headed for. It was like the Puritan Café in Calgary, the headquarters of the movement. And when we went in, Harvey Murphy and a lot of party members were there. They knew we had tried to get to Michel. They all gathered around us. And Murphy was the main one. He was always teasing me. And he walks up and he says, "Well, you fellas look fine. You had a good trip, eh? You got as far as Michel. Had a good time?" And I said, "What are you talking about? We were in Corbin. We attended the meeting." Murphy wouldn't believe us. And finally, I pulled \$150 out of my pocket and I showed it to him.

He said, "Where did you get that?" I says, "In Corbin." Well, then his eyes opened up and he says, "What's that for?" I said, "The party insisted that I take it as a special donation to the Tim Buck Fund."

You couldn't raise money in the name of the Communist Party publicly in those days. A hundred and fifty dollars was, in those days, a lot of money. I think at the moment when I had that \$150, maybe I had two or three dollars of my own in my pocket. Then they believed us and wanted to hear the story.

In the end, the companies couldn't smash the strike in Corbin and the American company finally decided to close it down completely. And it's never opened since. And all that coal is still up there.

Arrest in Michel and Fernie

FOLLOWING THE CORBIN strike, the attention of the Mine Workers Union of Canada turned on the camps in Michel and Fernie. Fernie is 25 miles further west in B.C. Through our contacts in Michel, I got an invitation from the local union — Sam Weaver, I think, was president of it at the time — to come to speak to the miners about the Workers Unity League and the Mine Workers Union of Canada. I got to Michel by train on Saturday. It was open travel then because the strike was over. However, it was still risky for all of us that were known. We were marked men. They didn't want us in Fernie and they didn't want us in places like Michel.

The meeting was somewhere around two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. I went to the meeting. The miners' hall was full. And I made my speech. And when I had most of it made — in comes the police. They were the B.C. Provincial Police then. There were

no Mounties. They had their own provincial police. Alberta had too. And they come up to the platform and told me I was under arrest. And I asked them for what. "Vagrancy!" I was taken down to the police station and locked up in the cell. Right from the meeting. Right from the platform.

The miners let it happen. But the miners played it all right, because it would have been a frame-up on all the miners' leaders if someone had got up and clouted one of them. They took me over to the local dungeon and locked me up. But I found out afterwards that as soon as I was arrested and just about given enough time to be in jail, the leadership of the miners union was over trying to get me out on bail. But they wouldn't let me go. And it was then that the sergeant of the outfit came in and asked me: "Look, Lenihan," he says, "were you ever in Fernie?" I thought quick. I had been. And I said, "No, I've never been there." Then I heard him giving the order, "Okay, take him to Fernie."

See, they wanted to get me away from the miners of Michel.

So they put me in a car and dragged me right up to Fernie. They were checking me in at the desk, and searching me. They were going to put me in the cell, when I turned around to the guy behind the desk and I said: "I want to see Tom Uphill, the MLA. He's a personal friend of mine. I want to phone him." "What do you want to phone him for?" "Well," I says, "I want to see him."

Well, they couldn't refuse Tom Uphill, the MLA, because Tom was loved in that country. Tom had been elected years before that as a Labour MLA. Nobody could beat him! Nobody could! No matter who they ran against him, they couldn't beat him. He was that well liked and well known. I knew Tom. I had been in Tom's house and met his wife, his family. His son Vern Uphill later became mayor of Fernie. He was an electrician by trade.

And, sure enough, Tom Uphill put down \$5,000 bail. Vagrancy! And I had \$40 cash in my pocket. Even Uphill couldn't talk them out of dropping the charges because this was part of their tactics, to disrupt our activities and to make us spend money on lawyers and court cases. And, of course, I got out on bail.

When I came up in court, I got thirty days' hard labour. Well, we had the Canadian Labour Defense League who were doing a terrific job in raising bail money and money for lawyers. And we appealed my case to the Appeal Court and then the charges were dismissed. But look at the time lost and the money lost! It shows you their tactics at the time.

Unity in the Labour Movement

IN THE LATTER PART of the 1930s we in the communist movement were made aware and we understood that a big imperialist war was facing us any month of the year. With the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy and their invasion of Spain, we knew that it wouldn't be long before it would break into a world conflict of one kind or another. And our immediate objective was, before the war would come, to make every effort to reorganize unity in the ranks of the working class.

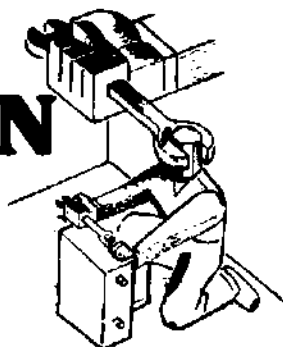
When that became adopted as policy, our big job in Alberta was to unite the Mine Workers Union of Canada with the United Mine Workers of America. John L. Lewis was in charge of UMWA then. In those days, he was a militant leader in giving all aid to the organization, not only of the miners, but of the CIO. Since the policies of the Mine Workers of America had radically changed it brought about a situation where we could approach and speak unity to them about setting up one union. Bob Levitt and Angus Morrison were in charge of the United Mine Workers of America, District 18, with headquarters in Calgary. Jimmy Sloane was president of the Canadian Mine Workers

Union and John Stokaluk was the general secretary. Harvey Murphy was an organizer. And I was in the Workers Unity League. So we held meetings and discussions to bring about an amalgamation.

The Mine Workers Union of Canada also had some locals in Nova Scotia, under J.B. McLachlan, a great man. I think Jim, in the early days, opposed the amalgamation. But anyway, we were very successful here in Alberta. On the basis of the leadership of John L. Lewis and on the basis of a militant policy from there on in the mining camps, it made it possible for the merger. . . .

John Stokaluk, very well known throughout the mining industry of Canada as a leading Communist, became District 18 secretary. Bob Levitt was president and Angus Morrison was the vice-president. In fact, not long after that, Angus Morrison ran for MLA up in the Luscar constituency where it was all basically miners and he got elected into the provincial house. He ran as independent labour but he was really CCF. But that was one of our big achievements in the latter part of the thirties. And the miners are doing very well today.

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