I LOOK OUT MY WINDOW
and see my neighbors' children
head for school.
I recall that there are generals
and corporation heads
and ornery politicians
with some unpleasant plans
for these kids,
and I know that this is no time
for me to give up
on the unfinished business
of the IWW.

Sure I have other interests
and causes:
Amnesty International, socialism, peace,
environmental protection,
etc., etc.,
but I see little point to any of these
unless workers develop
a substantial voice
about the work they do,
how they do it,
and where they ship the product.

Industrial democracy
is indispensable
to any good cause.

Fred Thompson

CHARLES H. KERR  ESTABLISHED 1886

Fred Thompson in 1930, a teacher at Work People's College

FELLOW WORKER:
THE LIFE OF FRED THOMPSON

Compiled, with an Introduction by

Dave Roediger

from the recollections of

Fred W. Thompson

FIRST PERSON SERIES
Number Four

CHICAGO
CHARLES H. KERR PUBLISHING COMPANY
1993

On the Cover:
Fred Thompson in 1986
(Photograph by Jon Randolph)

Printed on recycled paper.

Write for our free catalog.

Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company
P. O. Box 914
Chicago, Illinois 60690

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

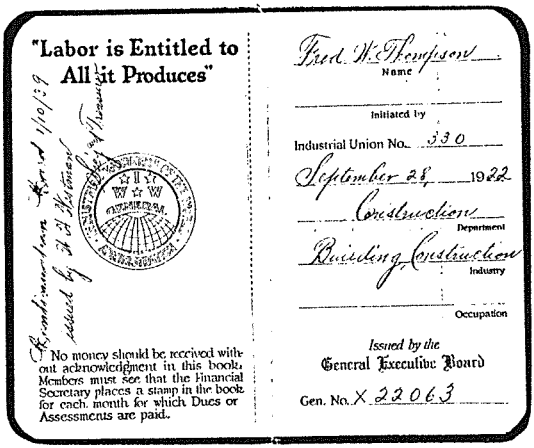
Although my long relationship with Fred Thompson resulted in little that could be called "oral history," I cherish the opportunities I had to talk and work with him. Thompson very patiently taught me a great deal. The sense of him which I formed guided the selection of texts and gave energy to this project. Also appreciated are the conversations I had about Thompson with Jack Conroy, George Rawick, Franklin Rosemont, Penelope Rosemont, Archie Green, and others. The Rosemonts' tireless checking on facts, spelling and sources made it possible for me to do this book from London and Ghana.

Thompson's papers are in the Reuther Library at Wayne State University in Detroit. I have worked, however, from materials in the possession of the Charles H. Kerr Company or in my own possession. In most cases these were Thompson's photocopies of materials sent to Wayne State, or copies kindly provided by his correspondents. In addition, I have profited from access to videotapes of Fred by Warren Leming and interviews with him by Richard Altenbaugh. Guidance on Canadian labor history, and on editorial matters, has been generously and expertly provided by Ian McKay, Peter Campbell and Bryan Palmer.

Thanks to Paul Garon, Wayne Heimbach and Lisa Oppenheim for various forms of technical assistance.

And special thanks to Jenny Lahti Velsek, a lifelong Wobbly and Fred's companion in his last years, and to Fred's daughter, Florence Tromater, whose generous support made publication of this book possible.

—D. R.


"Labor is Entitled to All it Produces"

No money should be received without acknowledgment in this book. Members must see that the Financial Secretary places a stamp in the book for each month for which Dues or Assessments are paid.

Fred W. Thompson
Name

Initiated by

Industrial Union No. 330

September 28, 1922

Construction
Department

Building Construction
Industry

Occupation

Issued by the
General Executive Board

Gen. No. X 22063

Fred Thompson's IWW "Red Card"

INTRODUCTION

Fred Thompson used to warn me off some of my more exotic ideas for books with a damning, if smiling, appraisal: "That would be of interest to you, me and a half-a-dozen other people." He would probably put this book in that category. His many writings contained little that was autobiographical. His fine histories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) scarcely mention his own half-century of leadership of the Wobblies. When others wrote about him, he professed shock, even horror, that magazines and newspapers would feature his "ugly old mug" on their covers.

Although the personal modesty inherent in such a stance was real and appealing, Thompson's lack of concern with himself also reflected his politics. Like many within the Old Left, he regarded class forces as the motor of history and history as the record of class struggles. His writings on the IWW's past tended toward lean, even spare, accounts of strikes and other mass actions and of who won. Excursions into social history came rarely, though when they did come they were often superb. Personal observations were even rarer. Coming from a specifically IWW tradition, which refused to cast anyone as humanity's savior but the working class itself, Thompson also deemphasized the role of leaders, not just of himself but even of such especially heroic Wobblies such as Big Bill

Haywood, Joe Hill and Frank Little. Finally, Thompson was much more at home talking about, and organizing around, socialism and unionism than he was speaking in terms of any of the "isms" named after "great men." He differed from most twentieth century radicals in holding so fast to the view that classes, and not great men, shaped history as to be not so much opposed to, as amused by, Stalinism, Trotskyism, Titoism, Maoism, and Castroism. Like Marx, he delighted in deflating the pretensions of Marxism. He was easily moved to sing a rollicking version of "Karl Marx's Whiskers," not just at parties but also in meetings. When he edited the autobiographies of other leftists for publication by the Charles H. Kerr Company, Thompson unfailingly argued for editing out accounts of personal impressions, triumphs, disasters and even assessments of the wisdom of revolutionary leaders.

Though intellectuals as diverse as George Rawick, Studs Terkel, Jack Conroy, and Archie Green all have unsolicitedly observed that they regarded Thompson as a "great man," there seemed little chance he would take that view and even less that he would write or speak his memoirs. I tried to interview Fred only once, using my research on the IWW poet Covington Hall as an occasion to see how much he would open up. Hardly at all was the answer, although a follow-up letter provoked a more expansive written response. The episode seemed a reminder that Fred was himself a writer. Afterwards, though we talked frequently, I never asked to interview him again but instead posed specific questions on IWW history in letters. His useful responses always came speedily but never raised hopes that Fred was ready to tell the full story of his remarkable life.

In 1987 the news that Thompson had died left me in profound sadness. Though I knew that at 86 and with his health utterly failing, Fred was ready to die, the feeling was for the loss of a good friend and of one of very few "great men" I knew. But it also included a sharp disappointment that the grandeur and excitement of Fred's life, which he had conveyed in bits and pieces to those close to him, would never be systematically recorded for the larger audience it deserved.

In looking through the papers Thompson left I was thrilled to find that his memories of large sections of his life, especially in Canada, but also to a considerable extent in the U.S., were recorded. Some interviewers, such as Richard Altenbaugh and Warren Lem-

ing, did far better than I in getting Thompson to talk, but most of his extended reminiscences were written, often in wonderful long letters responding to queries. Though he usually directed conversations and letters toward discussing the IWW generally, he was at times expansive about his own past. He seemingly enjoyed recalling his Canadian youth especially, and to appreciate that he was an important source on Canadian history. Lacking the factual details he would have most liked to supply, Thompson by default had to stress "how all of this affected me, for I do remember me," as he once apologetically observed when giving John Bell his recollections of the post-World War One labor movement in Halifax. He even delivered one long, largely autobiographical, public speech on his Canadian past. His Canadian origins also contributed indirectly to our being able to piece together Thompson's past in that they caused him to fight a long battle with United States immigration authorities in a case which turned on his being able to describe and date his activities in the U.S. and Canada.

Fred tended to open up most when he thought his past held lessons. Though he was the most sincerely nonsectarian radical I have ever met, Thompson could be an effective, insistent fighter for his own views. He often used personal examples to carry points, at times warming, for example, to remembering his years in prison as illustrations of the dangers of ultra-left posturing. His reminiscences on Cleveland amount almost to a primer on tactics. Thompson's longstanding interest in workers' education and in radical culture was often shared by the young historians, who interviewed him, causing his discussions of Work People's College and of revolutionary songs to be especially animated. He liked company and he liked to be in the company of professional historians, who seemed to have things to teach him and to learn from him.

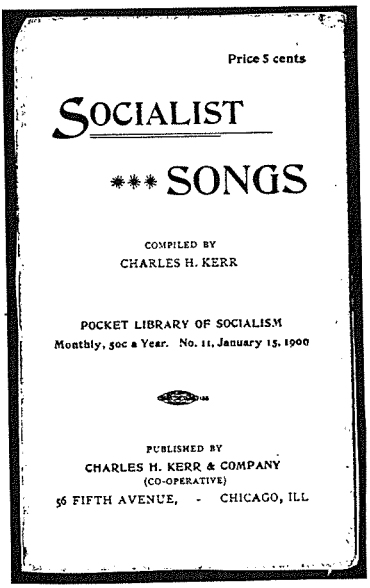
This volume is a hybrid of oral history and unpublished writing by Thompson. I have tried to use the best letter, interview, speech or court record on each period in Thompson's life as the central text on that period, adding particularly vivid passages from his words in other documents, as noted. Thompson often told the same thing, in nearly the same words, to different interviewers and correspondents, sometimes even when they posed rather different questions. The words undoubtedly therefore reflect a fair measure of reflection and authorial control on his part. Moreover, he often followed initial statements up with a series of letters expanding on

points and making corrections. Where appropriate, and again as noted, the text incorporates material from these letters.

Despite this combination of sources, Fred's life story cannot be completely told in his own words after his Canadian years. Indeed, even in the Canadian section he often leaves chronology aside to digress engagingly. To get a firmer sense of the order of events, readers should refer to the biographical portion of Franklin Rosemont's obituary of Thompson, appended to the text. Rosemont's sketch is even more useful for the years Thompson was in the U.S., which are more episodically treated in Thompson's scattered reminiscences than the Canadian ones. It also provides a good brief guide to Thompson's achievements, such as general-secretaryship of the IWW, which the memoirs tend to omit mentioning. For the period after 1950, when Thompson led a more settled life and did little direct labor organizing, about which researchers asked him far less often, no narrative memoirs are possible. Those years are therefore treated in a brief and impressionistic afterword. Particularly worth regretting is the fact that the fragmentary U.S. materials do not discuss Thompson's family and friends in his U.S. years.

Fred was perhaps the most avid fact-checker on the American left. His reviews of academic books on the IWW regularly identified dozens of factual errors, large and small. In editing other people's memoirs, he was loathe to accept their memories on the smallest points. His questioning and digging could lead to remarkably voluminous correspondence with the authors, who might have been forgiven for wondering if Fred was not coming to know more about their lives than they did. Even the classic *Autobiography of Mother Jones* was not spared, as Thompson produced a remarkably admiring, but critical, essay included in all recent Kerr editions of the book—a massive chronicle of the places in which Jones' memory failed on date or detail. I have not interrogated Thompson's memory anything like so closely and have kept annotation very light. I have sometimes made small copyediting changes and cuts, and at times added a sentence of transition between sections. In some passages he notes a difficulty in remembering the precise sequence of events. It is most unlikely that he claimed greater precision of memory than he in fact had, as Thompson passionately believed that only the truth would set us free.

Kumasi, Ghana, 1992 David Roediger



Title-Page of North America's first socialist songbook, published by Charles H. Kerr in 1900

Chapter One
"HOW I BECAME A SOCIALIST"

This chapter largely reproduces pages 132-48 of the transcription, held by Roosevelt University in Chicago, of Thompson's "Speeches and Discussion Before the Canadian Student Association of Waterloo, Ontario," delivered in 1970. Intercut into that text is material from the following: Thompson to Michael Lonard (5 January 1985); Thompson to Charles Curtiss (18 January 1985); Thompson to Penny Pixler (12 July 1985); Alan Maass, "The Little Red Book House," Chicago Reader *(17 October 1986), quoting Thompson; undated (1961?) draft of a letter from Thompson to Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS); Thompson to John Bell (9 August 1976); videotaped Thompson interview with Warren Leming, 1987; Thompson to John Bell (8 September 1976); Thompson, "A Rebel Voice: Fred Thompson Remembers Halifax, 1919-1920,"* This Magazine *(Toronto, 12 March 1978), 7; Thompson to Edith Fowke (12 March 1978).*

I was born in Saint John, New Brunswick on June 5, 1900—the same date Lord Roberts' forces took Pretoria in South Africa. Folks stuck me in a basket out the window to view the torchlight parade held that night. I took sick and suffered chronic bouts of illness as a child, with the result that I became a bookworm and thus a radical. I hope this dissuades patrioteers from having torchlight parades.

My real life began in October, 1913 when, while warming my wet feet in my mother's kitchen range, I read in the local paper that there had been excellent crops in Canada. That was big news because in 1913 I had hungry schoolmates who liked to come home with me because my mother, raising myself and my six brothers and sisters by taking in boarders, somehow managed to have something for me to eat when I got home. I went straight to my mother and my great-aunt with the good news that now everyone could eat. They told me it didn't work that way but I figured it must. When my older brother came home, I asked him about it, and he said too that big crops did not let everyone eat. It seemed to me a case of poor housekeeping and management in the large world outside of my home, where somehow we always managed to make ends meet. I'm still shocked that folks go hungry when there is lots to eat. I felt that my mother could handle the food better than the folks who were handling it, and I haven't changed my mind on that since.

My brother said it was something called economics, so I looked up that word in the small encyclopedia we had, and it talked about Adam Smith, Ricardo and John Stuart Mill. I read them and I haven't been the same since. Smith's *Wealth of Nations* gave me only the clue that workers bargained for their wages at an extreme disadvantage, but reading the book opened a window where previously for me there had been only a brick wall. Now the men looking for work at the docks, or walking into the sugar refinery, the cargoes going in and out of our harbor, the crowds in the farmers' market, and the fortunate outcome of food on our table, no longer seemed happenstance and confusion but a process as orderly and explainable as the great tides of the Bay of Fundy. It is probably true that Adam Smith gave me the framework on which I have tacked every idea I have picked up since.

This new curiosity led me to read much outside my schoolbooks: Ricardo, who made me hope that economics could be made as plain

and as indisputable as my geometry text then seemed to me; Mill; Herbert Spencer, who led me to see evolution in process everywhere and who incidentally made me distrust big government; Ruskin, whose *Fors Clavigera* gave me my first socialist thoughts; Carlyle, whose *Past and Present* put my original problem in unforgettable imagery, but seemed to offer only the proposal of building one big monastery to make sure all could do useful work; and Guiseppe Mazzini, who somehow had come to be my boyhood hero. Mazzini made democracy mean to me something far more inclusive than the electoral process—a regard for my fellows and a code of everyday practice without which the electoral process becomes an empty ritual. Mill at the time added little to my thinking on systematic economics, but two of his works had a profound influence. The *Essay on Liberty* reinforced with convincing logic a libertarian proneness that I seemed naturally to have and that had been fed by the poetry of Burns and Shelley. In another essay he outlined the ideas of the French utopian socialists of the first half of the 19th century. I found these people, like myself, had had to reject Say's Law that production creates its own demand, as it was contradicted by the observed fact that those who had worked for wages to produce these goods lacked the funds with which to buy them. Their various panaceas to cure this with paternalistic housekeeping on a scale that embraced all society intrigued me but seemed very lacking in regard to individual freedom and initiative.

Then the First World War was on in 1914, and an agitator for the Socialist Party of Canada, Wilfrid Gribble, who anticipated some of our modern lifestyles by having a very gorgeous beard, came to Saint John. I read about it in the paper. He had made a speech down where there was a crowd because a Provincial Fair was there. We had big billboards all around town, urging recruiting: "Your king and country need you." This newspaper account said that they had charged him with sedition because he had said, "Your king and country bleed you."[1] And it was further charged that he had alleged that the king was a parasite. I had that same suspicion for a long time, sort of a feeling it might be nice to have a republic, or something like that. Later in my life I decided it didn't make very much difference whether you have republics or kings or what have you, that it seems that those who run the industry run the world. But at any rate, his arrest caused me to play hooky from school that day and go to the court house where he was being tried.

There, I encountered some real live Socialists. They actually breathed! They were kind of elderly people, but even so, they were still alive and warm—in fact, quite cordial to me, quite enthused to find some young person who had a keen interest in Socialism. Every Sunday night they had a meeting up in the Trades and Labour Temple in town. I had never known. So I started going up to the Trades and Labour Temple every Sunday night, and pretty soon I was a member of the Socialist Party. Part of my enthusiasm came from a belief, early in the war, that a general strike of European workers could end the bloodshed.

We used to try to make a little music at the Socialist meetings. There was Goudie, who taught violin lessons and manufactured violins, and there was old John Blair, a coal heaver who played mandolin. I did a bit with the piano, and the three of us used to provide a sort of instrumental musical opening for the meetings. We had the book *Socialist Songs* published by Charles H. Kerr and Company and used it at our meetings.[2] Regularly "The Red Flag" was sung (to the "Maryland" tune) and we tried the labor version of "The Marseillaise" in that same song book, and "The Internationale," but neither of these ever seemed to come off very well. (I suspect "The Red Flag" may have become so widely sung as it has because it sounds passable even when rendered by those of us who can't sing.) I believe we also used to try singing that "England Arise, the long, long night is over" one, or possibly there it ran "Labour arise," etc. Our meetings seldom had more than twenty people, probably seldom more than fifteen, and I don't recall that any of us sang well. But my recollection is that we always tried one or two songs at our meetings. This memory seems all the stranger because, in the much larger socialist and similar meetings I attended in Western Canada, I don't recall any singing whatever.

Since the Socialist local used the Labour Temple, I met several American Federation of Labor officers. They too were informed men and seriously concerned with economics (more so than their counterparts whom I have met in the last few decades). Their economics and mine ran in the same groove: wages could be raised, the work week could be cut, and this should be done. Most of them realized too that this would eliminate some marginal employers, induce some concerns to invest in more labor-saving machinery, raise productivity, and thus re-create the same marketing problem

at a new level. When I pointed out that this would involve an endless struggle over hours and wages, they assured me that this precisely was what unions were for. This seemed to me good sense, and still does. My socialist friends were sympathetic towards the union, but I was surprised to find that they did not quite share my enthusiasm for what the unions were doing. They explained that the unions could make only very limited gains. The great waste of a competitive commercial society at the time was very apparent in Canada from parallel railroads in the more profitable sections with no service to other areas. The Socialists pointed out that elimination of such waste could release far more abundance and leisure that union bargaining could ever achieve. My union friends did not dispute this, but insisted they were making that part of social progress they were in a position to make. I felt a strong allegiance to both groups.

I became the Socialist organizer in town. It seems odd; this little high school kid joined the Socialist Party and became an organizer. It happened just this way. I was the only person, I think, under forty in the local Socialist Party. I asked, "Isn't there some way we can do something to get more people coming up here?" They said, "Well, we used to have more people before the war, but they've been a little leery of coming up here since the war is on." And they suggested, "Maybe you ought to go and talk to them and see if you can get them coming back." Fine and dandy, so that's why they called me organizer, gave me a bunch of names and addresses. That experience, going around to visit these people in their homes I can still recall. Most of them were Jewish people who had immigrated from Europe and brought a great deal of old-country ways with them. For the first time in my life I entered homes of that kind. I was hopeful of doing something in those homes, not only to get these people back in, but because I saw that some of them did have younger members of their family. I thought it would be very nice to have some people somewhere around my own age in the Socialist movement.

By that time I had read a few Socialist pamphlets. Materials from Chicago, the old Charles H. Kerr books, were my introduction to socialism. It seemed to me such a wonderful idea; it seemed to me so plain: the world goes bad because the workers do not control the means with which they work. And it is very important that they should somehow acquire the control of the means with

which they work. I thought all we'd have to do is elect enough Socialists and pass a law saying, "From this day forward the workers shall control the means with which they work," and there wouldn't be any of the waste of capitalism; we'd just have the application of industrial efficiency to make sure everybody ate real well and had a good time, and ate strawberries and ice cream every day maybe. I thought that I'd just have to tell my friends and neighbors and everybody I ran into about what a wonderful, efficient, pleasant system we could have and they'd say, "fine." Well, I tried talking to my friends and neighbors and schoolmates about it, and they figured there was a catch in it somewhere. I didn't win any recruits.

But when I went around to these homes of former members of the Socialist Party, I found that most of them were 40, 50, 60 years old and restricted by a terror such as I don't think I've met again until the days of the McCarthy regime in the United States: "We would like to be there; in our hearts we are Socialists; but there was some irregularity in my coming to this country." Or, "There are ways in which I might be considered an enemy alien, because I was born in a country that now is at war with Canada; my chances of making a living here might be imperiled." But there were also people who'd say that I was critical of the capitalist system, and the wars that capitalist governments get into, simply because I hoped that the other side would win. There were many occasions where they were left rather afraid. It's the first time I'd run into any large-scale fear—a very unpleasant memory, one of the few unpleasant memories in my recollection. I was reminded of it again in later years, when people hesitated to subscribe to certain publications in the United States because of the trouble they might get into. But at any rate I did get a few of these people to come in and I tried particularly to get some of the younger people in these families. I figured some of the Socialist ideas of their parents should have rubbed off on them, but they evidently hadn't. It took me a while to figure it out, but most of them felt, "Our fathers are from the old country; they have the speech of the old country; they talk about things that make me seem different than the people in this country. And the talk about Socialism is one of those things that they bring along and that marks me off, and that makes me a little bit unacceptable in this world." I think that was the attitude. The radical movement in which I grew up was pre-

dominantly one of old men with hardly any young people in it at all, something very different than the radicalism you're experiencing today.

Bit by bit I did eventually find two young people, one in the sugar refinery where I worked. I saw graffiti of "Marx," "Bolshevik," and one thing like a cartoon of a big fat capitalist being hanged somewhere. I wasn't in favor of hanging a capitalist, but I took it that this is a man who has something in common with me, whoever drew this thing. And I did observe carefully the distribution of these things, and found that the center of them seemed to be the power plant. I got in there and finally found there was a young Russian lad who spoke very little English, and he'd been putting these things up. So I became friends with him, and he tried to teach me Russian and I tried to teach him English. He liked to play a violin, too; he played well at it. At the place where he was boarding he found a returned soldier, somewhere around our age, already back from the war because he had been gassed over in Flanders. So the three of us constituted a sort of unholy trinity, and I felt much better, that we could undertake things that the more elderly Socialists, I think, frowned upon somewhat.

In March 1917 the Tsar was overthrown, and it made at least one schoolboy in Saint John very happy. In November the Bolsheviks, portrayed as the most radical of all radicals, set up their own government. Here was the prospect that a vast country, escaped from Tsarism, might demonstrate to the rest of the world the advantages of a thoroughgoing socialism. Most of my socialist friends doubted this. They said Russia lacked the industrial basis for socialism, and the most that could be hoped for was orderly progress in building both democracy and industry, probably through a mixed economy, with extensive ownership. Divergences of opinion soon developed among them. Some approved what went on in Russia. Others felt that from November 7th on, with Lenin's dismissal of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets and his appointment of a council of commissars, the democratic upsurge was grounded, and the old Tsarist patterns of social control were reappearing masquerading under Marxian phrases. Gradually I came to much the same viewpoint, reluctantly.

Next year (a few months after I had graduated from high school and gone to work in the sugar refinery), the World War ended with revolution in Central Europe, followed by upsurges in many coun-

tries. It seemed that everywhere there might be a sudden awakening, a desire to replace old ways designed to favor the few with new ways designed to benefit the many. Instead of welcoming this new development, governments everywhere were busily gagging discussion of a new social order, in Canada by Orders-in-Council. There was a widespread fear of new ideas. It seemed to me that the outlook of Mill in his *Essay on Liberty* was much more constructive, and when a Commission investigating industrial unrest came to Saint John, I told them so.

I don't know whether readers will have seen any of these things that the Wobblies had used—the sticker you wet with your tongue to put up some kind of propaganda slogan or some cartoon or something like that. We hadn't heard of anything like that; we invented them. Somewhere in anthropology I've run into this stuff that all cultures are diffused and the same thing is never invented twice. I know that isn't so, because the Wobblies and I quite independently invented the idea of the sticker. We used to write slogans on paper, put a lot of mucilage on the back, lick them, stick them up on some big plate glass window or some place like that. Our ideas of public relations were a little bit weird. We'd take nice quotations that stirred our hearts, warmed us, like, "Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to gain." It seemed as obvious to us as any axiom in a geometry book (and, I think, should be). We pasted this up here and there. There was some dissatisfaction with that. They suspected we three young obvious radicals were the people doing it, but they couldn't prove it, till somebody who was working in a veteran's office got some nice fresh carbon. He was typing up this stuff to make stickers out of and somebody came in. He put the carbon away. Somebody happened to look at the carbon, just out of curiosity, saw this slogan, and so that was the end of that.

The police had been bothering me a little bit. By that time I had become secretary of the Socialist local, and they used to come around to my house once in a while. I was thinking it was maybe time for me to leave the family nest because the rest of the family didn't see eye to eye with me at all, and I think they were rather embarrassed by police wanting to look over my Socialist records; which I told them I didn't have. I kept them in the family Bible, a nice big family Bible. I used to stuff them in there, because I didn't like the idea that they should find the names of the members,

though it would have been so simple just to come up to our meeting anytime and find us all there. There was really no point to subterfuge or any great secrecy. But it seemed that they might get this soldier, Roscoe Fillmore, for some reason or other, because he supported socialism but still had his military connections, and some of the stickers hadn't said entirely kind words about this idea that you cross oceans to shoot holes in your fellow workers. We didn't think that was a good idea either. So we felt we had to get out of town.

I'd met Fillmore a couple of times, one of the most interesting Socialists I ever met. He's continued to be rather active in the Communist movement. He became a famous agronomist. I know he's written several books on how you can cross this kind of a tree with that kind of a tree. He's made several trips to the Soviet Union to advise them on some of their problems. He had started out to be a minister, graduated, had a course in theology and so forth from Mount Allison University.[3] Another theological graduate from Mt. Allison that I know of, A. S. Embree, became an IWW organizer among coal and metal miners. A lot of ministers fall by the wayside and do that sort of thing. In fact, though I left "churchism" rather quickly, Methodism shaped my own youth, in musical terms and in getting me used to going to meetings.

Anyway, we went up to the place Fillmore was managing near Oromocto—a large nursery. You start young trees there, things of that sort; he needed a lot of bull labor, so we went to work there. We enjoyed ourselves, but it seemed to us we weren't doing anything about Socialism. Fillmore's household had a piano. I think we tried all the songs in the Kerr songbook, but my chief recollection is one of them, William Morris' "Down Among the Dead Men," in the form of a toast, which we always used as an excuse to imbibe some of Fillmore's homemade hard cider. We were reading. He was getting publications from the United States and the Canadian Socialist Party paper. They had to change the name of that so often. It had been the *Western Clarion*, and then they suppressed that, so they published the *Indicator*, and they suppressed that, and they published the *Red Flag*—the same thing coming out with a new name. Frequently the Socialist paper would come out with a big white chunk in it, deleted by the censors. And ordinarily nothing very exciting. But the military censors that looked it over in accordance with Orders-in-Council, which still applied at that time in

Canada, didn't like what we were saying. We were getting all kinds of literature, leaflets and so forth, from different radicals around the United States and Canada.

I remember once a circus came to Fredericton about twenty miles north of Oromocto. Fredericton was at that time a city of beautiful shaded streets. Not only was there a university there, but a mining district not far from it and a lumbering operation. When the circus was in town all these people came into town to it, and we thought we should pass them some literature. We went to the circus; we wanted to see that, of course. Then came our chance when the show was all over and we stayed down in this shaded area passing out these leaflets. One of our fellows was to go off down the street, and if ever the crowd, which had occasion to go only one direction, if ever they started coming back, he was to start whistling "Kathleen Mavourneen," as a signal that we might be pursued. Whenever I hear "Kathleen Mavourneen" I think of the same thing, that if the crowd started coming back, he was to whistle that. And we heard him whistle that tune about a block up. I had a cap and my partner had a hat, and we just changed into those and went with the crowd. We spent all that night going with that crowd hunting for those damn Bolsheviki! It was an almost blood-chilling experience. Later on I happened to read this book by a fellow I think is considered very unscientific today, Gustave Le Bon, about the crowd. But somehow, what Le Bon wrote did remind me very much of the feeling I had with that crowd that was going all night, hunting for those Bolsheviki. And I wonder what my own actions might have been had they found a victim.

I actually have wondered whether I would have gone, simply as a hypnotised member of the crowd, to do what the crowd wanted or not. I don't believe I would have, but there certainly seemed to be a pressure in that direction. And I think a great deal of mob action does proceed in some process of interstimulation along that line. What amused me most about that event, though, was that a day afterward the Fredericton paper had a notice that the chief of police had urged everybody who got any of that literature to turn it into his office. A few days later, came another little item that none had been turned in to his office, and he understood the reason was that everybody that got them was so ashamed of it they didn't want to show it. You know, we radicals are always optimists and we hoped that the chief of police's request that everything like that

be turned in just made it all the more valued and interesting to people. I haven't heard of any social revolution occurring in New Brunswick yet, though I have heard that they have had a Socialist mayor in Halifax in recent times.

Shortly after that I went working around different jobs and more or less stayed away from home. I worked at a saw mill, worked in building this big dry dock that they have, mixed around with workers there through 1919, and tried to talk with people to interest them in these ideas. I could get some little feeling from some workers. But it was strange; I got more response that what I'm saying makes some sense from old people than I did from young. Young people seemed to be such conformists at the time. I do remember when I was working for the sugar refinery, my job once in a while made it necessary to see that certain cars of coal were moved from one place to another, and the man who could arrange that stayed in a little shanty right across from the sugar refinery. That man, sitting in that little shanty to do jobs like that, was the president of the Trades and Labour Council of Saint John. He wasn't a Socialist, he wasn't a radical, but I think he understood some of these things better than this young whippersnapper, myself. I remember with some embarrassment a time when my boss told me to tell him that we absolutely had to have those cars moved so that we could unload the coal right away; so I went over there with some of my boss's authoritarianism on my shoulders, and I told him, "We need those cars moved right away!" He looked at me and knew that I was secretary of the Socialist local and he said, "You say *we* need those cars right away and you call yourself a Socialist? You think that you and the company own those cars? And you call yourself a Socialist?" I think I learned a little bit from this old non-socialist trade unionist on that occasion. I think I've tried to avoid that misuse of the word "we" ever since. I find that it's very frequently misused.

Around Saint John in particular, about the only response was amongst these older people. We had a strike there in the dry dock and the young fellows would support that, but there was no interest in any of my ideas that I can recall at all. And that rather puzzled me. At that time, in 1919, I was receiving one copy each of a large number of publications that came to me from the United States. The Socialist Party of America had split into the Communist and the Communist Labor parties, and there were three or four

other factions within those. Each one felt that they had their own particular divine light. I was getting all kinds of things from different parties, magazines, leaflets, pamphlets, periodicals, all written as though revolution was right around the corner. I remember some people in Boston in particular arguing that it's silly to bother with any trade union demands, that we have just one demand: we want the earth; and you gotta take it away from the capitalists. Prepare for mass action of any sort that may be required. This idea of mass action included massive confrontation, the expectation that maybe we should buy a few little guns to fight that big army with, or something like that. The atmosphere of much of this left-wing literature that came to me from the United States was quite a bit like some of the leftist underground press I've run into, some of the Maoist type of publications I read in the 60s and 70s. That's about the only thing I could compare it to for recent times. I was puzzled by that, because the implication there is that every working man is ready for the revolution—it's just a few of those lawyers and skypilots in the Socialist Party that stop the working class from getting rid of capitalism. This was sort of the implication I got from reading these papers.

One of my friends had occasion to go to the United States, an old Socialist. He said, when he came back and I asked him about this, that he had mixed around with some of these people that were issuing these papers, dropped into their offices and things like that. And I remember that time and I've noticed it since, that frequently working people who haven't had the advantage of any extensive education like to take a nice choice collection of six-bit words, as we call them, and put them together. He spun one on me that time. I asked him, "Why is it that the papers down there say this, and here I can't find hardly any working men that are enthusiastically waiting for a revolution?" And he said, "Well, it's the same thing down there, but the people that issue these papers, they never talk with ordinary people. They just live in the miasmata of their own effulgences."

I think I've seen a parallel situation today. I was a very lonely young radical, because I didn't find any other young radicals at the time. And I think today, where you have the opposite situation, and find people talking only to those who share much the same outlook, the same opinion, there is a serious danger of getting a very wrong impression of what the world is like and what

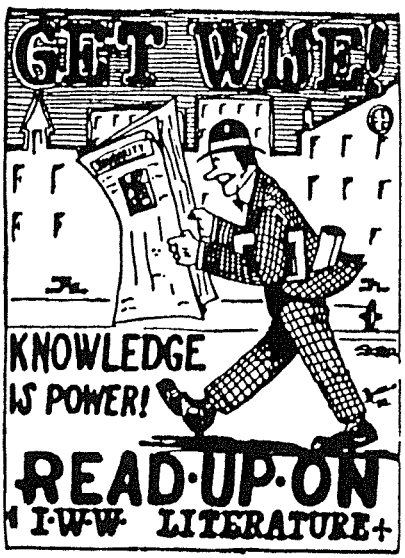
the attitudes of people are in it. It's good to have people who share your ideas, or slightly different ideas. It is hard to have a serious discussion of your own thought with somebody who shares none of it whatever—it's impossible. But at the same time I think you have to have considerable conversation with those who share almost none of your thought. It's difficult to have such conversation, but you won't know what the world is like unless you force yourself to have it.

From there I dropped off in Amherst, just for a speech or two on unemployment. I guess I was full of words then, as I have been ever since, and I thought I knew it all, too. There was a certain lodging house to which I should go and there I would be expected. The woman in charge had radical sympathies, and I was met by a middle-aged fellow who took me to be interviewed by the newspaper and thus get mention of the meeting I was to address—a first of that sort for me, too. I looked for work there and there was evidently some hope I might land something and stay around to help develop a movement; vaguely I recall a meal-ticket, a piece of cardboard with numbers around the edge that could be punched out to cover the cost of meals, and I'm not sure now whether I paid for it, or was it an inducement to me to look around there for a job. The labor slang expressions—''meal ticket'' and ''pie card'' for appointive union positions—refer back to this older practice of supporting organizers.

It was in Amherst that I read in the newspaper about Centralia, Washington and the IWW lumberjacks supposedly trying to shoot down a parade of legionnaires, patriotically celebrating on November 11 the Armistice of the First World War. I didn't believe it then. It was quite a long time after before I got all the full facts. These people had coils of rope in their hands and they were busting in the door and they were going to take these Wobblies out and lynch them. And the Wobs had notified them, way in advance, ''If you come to lynch us, we're going to protect our hall.'' And that's why the shooting occurred. The day after the Centralia events, I wrote some verses on the news reports about them for John Reed's Chicago-based *The Voice of Labor.*

One thing in particular kind of riled me up. I had given a speech there at a hall that the Labour Temple had secured for me; the labor movement at that time, while not radical, was quite willing to let us radicals who were in it make speeches, use their premises

and things like that. They felt that we were doing something that should get a hearing. And in my speech on unemployment, explaining the similarity between the wage worker's status and the status of a serf or a slave, much as Karl Marx had explained it, I used the expression that we are essentially wage-slaves. I thought that was nice. A couple of days afterwards, when I was getting on a train to go to Halifax, one railroad man asked me, "Well, good morning, wage-slave, how are you?" I thought it didn't sit well with me at all. I didn't like the idea that I was a slave. I knew that there is wage-slavery and it's an awful thing, but to feel, myself, that I was one of them was most disturbing and uncomfortable.



An IWW "Silent Agitator" Sticker

Fred Thompson at 18

Chapter Two
HALIFAX, 1919-1920

This chapter largely reproduces the one major piece of published autobiographical writing to appear under Thompson's name: "A Rebel Voice: Fred Thompson Remembers Halifax, 1919-1920," from This Magazine *(Toronto), 12 (March, 1978). The genesis of the article lay in requests by John Bell, then an archival assistant at Halifax's Dalhousie University, for recollections from Thompson for deposit in Dalhousie's library. So full and vivid were Thompson's subsequent letters that Bell put them together for the* This Magazine *article. Characteristically, Thompson had his doubts about the value of the piece. He (2 March 1978) wrote Bell to express a "shock, a pleasant one" at seeing his high-school graduation picture on* This Magazine*'s cover. The letter acknowledged that Bell had followed Thompson's recollections and had left little out. It added, however, a worry "that the reader will take this as originating with me, as though I had started to write my autobiography, when the fact is that it all came about because you asked me to write my recollections."*

Bell later wrote with news of his own able research turning up evidence of relatively minor events (such as support activities for west Canada workers), which Thompson did not recall, and of the trajectories of Thompson's Halifax associates into pro-Communist directions which Thompson would not have predicted. This information intensified Thompson's worries concerning "how distorted my memories run" (Thompson to Bell, 23 July 1977). The result of this anxiety was a remarkably perspicacious comment on memory and oral history in a letter to Bell on 6 October 1976:

> Another very obvious hazard in the memories of our youth is the simple obvious but I fear often overlooked fact that in our youth we were young. I have now dug out that graduation photo of me, aged 18, and I am surprised to see a boy, and recognize it as me. I do remember me, but the me I remember is always remembered as a fully mature person of sound judgment, even in years much earlier than 1918. But the face I see here fits so well into the misjudgments listed above that it may explain them. I was very wet behind the ears; I knew the world only from printed words. If you want to put a title on my early letter it should be "The Misinterpretation of Halifax Labor, 1919-1920, by a Boy Brought Up on Books."

Thompson went so far as to hold, writing Bell on 2 March 1978, that "the chief value of our correspondence to students of history . . . is the information it gives about the untrustworthiness of recollections." But this assessment is as much a measure of Thompson's overwhelming concern with the facts of history as it is an indictment of real deficiencies in his memories. He seems to have been pleased that the article was reprinted in New Maritimes *in 1982. In 1985, he wrote to a correspondent that the* This Magazine *article was the lone example of autobiography on his part and "wondered, does the world look as wonderful to folks aged 19 today as it did to me back in 1919 when I was 19 too?" In 1986 he referred to the article as "my memoir" in a letter to Susan Dawson.*

In addition to the This Magazine *article on which the chapter is based, material is intercut from Thompson to John Bell (9 August 1976); Thompson, "Speeches and Discussion Before the Canadian Student Association of Waterloo, Ontario" (1970, Roosevelt University transcript); Thompson to John Bell (23 September 1976); Thompson to INS (draft letter, 1961?); Thompson to Susan Dawson (3 November 1986); Ian McKay to Thompson (11 September 1977), and Thompson to Edith Fowke (12 August 1966).*

I was 19. In the year since graduating from high school I had worked as shipping clerk in a paper box factory, as engineer's clerk in a sugar refinery, as laborer at the tree nursery up the Saint John River, later piling laths at a saw mill, and running a drill for the excavation of the drydocks in east Saint John. I had headed for Halifax with the misconception that the big harbor explosion would have made lots of jobs for me. It didn't.

The first thing that comes to my mind about Halifax was how often in my first few weeks there I could not afford to eat as much as I wanted. The memory of those two months comes scented with the odor of the very proletarian "hotel" where I roomed, a mixture of the smells of cabbage, spilled beer, and the kerosene they used in the mop bucket.

There were few help wanted ads in the paper and none of them helped. I went to the *Citizen* office, talked the employment situation over with the editor, Paul, and he asked me to write a story on it. I did and it was my first news story. That *Citizen* office and the hall above it—at 57 Argyle if that twinge of memory is right—became the place in Halifax where I most felt I belonged. The *Citizen* was a weekly paper, a labor paper, privately owned, but closely linked to the unions and the newborn Nova Scotia Labour Party. I can still see clearly how Paul looked in 1919 and the linotype operator, bushy haired, who was a genius at reading my handscrawl. I became a regular writer on the *Citizen*, but this paid nothing, and my chief problem was how to eat regularly.

One ad asked for a salesman for a bookstore. There I figured I might shine, working indoors all winter, prudently guiding customers toward those books that had some glimmer of social intelligence. What was wanted as it turned out, was a lad to canvas the better homes on the edge of town or just outside it getting orders for personalized greeting cards. It was not the sort of job I wanted, but it was a job and it kept me alive awhile. One customer who was supposed to get orders for 1921 calendars handed that assignment to me. My memory of the pre-Christmas season is how beautiful the uncrowded suburban hills looked in the snow, how different life was there from in the barrack-like tenements that had been built for the explosion victims, and how wet my feet were every night. But it all brought in enough so that a week before Christmas I felt flush enough to venture sending presents home, with the result that with sales dropping to zero, on Christmas Day

I had a few coins and one dollar in my pocket. I went to the Chinese restaurant where usually I ate meals priced from 20 to 30 cents, and found that for the occasion there was just Christmas dinner—one buck. I felt the rational thing was to walk out, but pride made me gulp and act nonchalant, as I ate a good meal feeling it would have to last me for a day or so. It was the first time for that.

The day after Christmas I was to start peddling almanacs to the small craft that anchored in Halifax harbour. This solved my eating problem with blessed promptness. The almanacs sold well and I enjoyed visiting these vessels and talking with owner, mate, cook or whomever I could find. They all wanted almanacs to keep track of the tides if for no other reason. Most of them had time to talk and I was a willing listener. They all seemed determined to impress me that the rigors and hardships of life at sea were not for me. I tried to turn the talks to world affairs and economics and such, hoping to find some kindred spirit, but found none aboard ship.

Perhaps these conversations with seafarers may have led to a strange experience I had with someone posing as John Reed, editor of *The Voice of Labor* in Chicago. I got a letter at the hotel where I stayed signed by him, saying he had fled America to avoid prosecution and hoped I could find some way to scuffle him on some ship bound preferably for Europe. The handwriting looked like Reed's, though I had kept nothing against which to check it, but the language didn't. The mechanics seemed to me most unlikely—how could he under those circumstances acquire a post office box? I sent his letter on to Roscoe Fillmore who might have some writing to compare with it. Since I was a subscriber to his *Voice of Labor* it didn't surprise me that Reed had my address; and since I knew about everyone locally who might subscribe to it, yet knew of no other local subscription than my own, it did not surprise me that I would be asked. Some cagey correspondence went back and forth. I tried to keep an eye on that P.O. box whenever I could see that my letter was in it, but caught no one removing. A friend had a friend who worked in the post office and thus I found that this box was owned by the Minister of Justice. To me at nineteen all this was a grand game, very exciting. A related recollection: Before I left Saint John, Goudie, the socialist violin-maker there had suggested I enclose one short hair in any letter I wrote him or other local socialists, they to do likewise. I very seldom found a hair

in their letters, nor they in mine.

The Labour Party's first public meeting was after Christmas. The *Citizen* editor asked me to take notes and report it fully, and I think this was my first lengthy article in his paper. There was a good crowd, larger than the Argyle Street hall could accommodate. After R. A. McDonald gave his report on some meeting in Sydney, it drowsed down into a rather drab affair until Donald Stewart rose up to speak from his seat midway back in the hall. It was the first time I encountered him. He was old, very old, rather dirty, grime on his face and grease on his clothes, his hair dirty too, unkempt and bushy. He told the chairman and audience that this was no time for small things but a time for old men to have dreams and young men to have visions. He spoke and it made me think of my younger days of going to Sunday School and church. His spirit was contagious. The dead meeting came to life. I thoroughly enjoyed reporting it. Later McDonald met me and told me the *Citizen* article caught just what he had hoped to get across.

By spring Donald Stewart was to become my close associate. He was so old he could remember Chartist meetings and their troubles with the police. He taught me a song that he and other boys of his time sang from each of the four intersections whence police could approach and arrest an outdoor speaker. It ran

Our good friends the police,
Our dear friends the police,
Our good kind friends,
Our dear kind friends,
Our dear friends the police.

Donald Stewart labelled his hope Co-operation. As foundation, he built up his argument that whatever became compulsory must also become free; for example, when school attendance became compulsory it was necessary that it be without charge. (I wondered had Hegel ever thought of that relation between freedom and necessity?) Food, clothing, shelter too were compulsory, and these too he argued should be free. In his disarming brogue it seemed very convincing. He once told me that he had been to school for about two hours in his life, but then escaped out a window and had never gone back. He had a large vocabulary, a good feeling for words and how to string them.

Stewart used to inject scraps of songs into his conversation. He is the only person I ever heard sing "The Red Flag" to a Scottish tune, the original tune to which I understand it was written. He is also the only one I ever heard sing that song asking workers "why crouch ye like cravens, why clutch an existence of insult and want?" Later I found it repeated in various editions of the Wobbly songbook, but only from this old man have I heard it sung.

Donald limped a bit, for he had only half of his right foot. He told me how he had lost it when trapping in his early days in Ontario. When walking his lines, his foot went through sheet ice above the boot's top, and soon his wet foot was frozen. He was miles from any other person, got back to camp and tried to care for his foot, but gangrene set in. He had to handle the situation by himself. He sharpened an ax, got a piece of iron red-white hot, set himself up so his reaction would bring his severed foot against the iron to cauterize it, and swung his ax. It saved his life and half his foot. He had guts.

Another grand old Scot in the Halifax labor movement was the president of the Marine Trades Council, George Borland. He was a devoted socialist out of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, holding views that most today would call doctrinaire, of the sort the Socialist Party of Great Britain and World Socialist Party still spread. I doubt that Borland was involved in the Labour Party, for surely its reform program is something he would have called "palliative piffle." It differed so from Saint John socialism that I had asked my mentors there whether it would be proper for me to belong both to the Socialist Party of Canada and the Labour Party, urging at the same time it seemed the only way I could be active in the Halifax labor movement. I heard no objection and did belong to both. Borland and Donald Stewart were the two visible mentors of Halifax labor. There was some sort of friction between them. I never quite figured it out but believe it grew out of programmatic differences back in the old country.

At that time it seemed only natural to me that when these labor people learned that I had read Marx's *Capital*, they should ask me to explain Marxist economics to them. They organized a study class for that purpose to meet Sunday afternoons above the *Citizen* office, in the hall that I think was usually called the Labour Temple. Looking back now I doubt that such things just happen. Perhaps Borland arranged it, for that was his dish. Anyway the study class

got going.

I have no clear recollection of how the classes went, and since I have learned of our tendency to suppress our less ego-building recollections, I judge they did not go very well. But I do remember the faces and backgrounds of some of my "students." Two or three had been active years earlier in the Knights of Labor, several in the movement in Britain, some stateside. One former Knight put the word "Solidarity" into my vocabulary. A disciple of William Morris added his views. There was McDonald, a miner from Cape Breton and leading spokesman for the Labour Party; Borland, wiry and pithy and straight SPGB[4]; a house painter, named Frazer I think, who had been in New York and knew Floyd Dell. There was a stout plumber, Healey I think was the name, who was president of the Trades and Labour Council. He was Irish and much concerned with Sinn Fein.

Of all these people the one I call Healey was furthest removed from my thinking, I judged, yet there was no one with whom I had a warmer personal relationship. He liked his rum and indulged in it and unsuccessfully tried to get me to do likewise. I recall one time when he had had a few and was in the profound philosophic mood his rum induced, and I was in a revolutionary mood, he urged me: "Thompson, don't get so far ahead of the parade that you can't hear the band." May his spirit know that I've often since then repeated his admonition to myself. I recall one evening he called his trades council to order, obviously drunk, and promptly adjourned it. My housepainting friend asked me if I knew what this was all about. I had no idea and he explained all the devious details which I have since forgotten. He, this housepainter, also once told me that the reason I had this economics class in the Labour Temple was to give a redder image to the local bureaucracy, so radicals would be less likely to dump them. I'm puzzled why it was arranged, but have to doubt this because I found no rank and file more radical than these bureaucrats.

Our economics class did not always meet in the Labour Temple. I recall for a while me met in the YMCA, I believe to encourage others to drop in. During questions after my discourse on how technological improvements enable us to produce our keep in fewer hours and thus enable us to generate an additional "relative surplus value," one woman made it plain she had come to this class in economics hoping to pick up recipes for cheaper meals. It set

me off balance. I muffed the chance to tie this down-to-earth concern with Marx's doctrine and instead tried to distinguish between his scientific concern and her pocketbook concern. Borland came up with a lament on cheapness, a denunciation of how we are driven to cheapen whatever we make, cheapen our lives, cheapen our human relations, and that it was time to revolt against this cheapening and not further it. The woman looked amazed, never came back and I did not learn whether this raised her level of social consciousness.

One Sunday instead of holding our class we decided to attend a lecture some minister was giving on socialism. He started off with a most effective recitation of Markham's "Man with the Hoe," far better than I have ever heard these lines at any other time. Then he went on that he had been out in Manitoba and had seen the man with the hoe, only now he sat on a tractor, pulling a plow, smoking a cigar. He said similar good things were happening or were about to happen to all those callings whose miseries had evoked the compassion and anger of Karl Marx. He urged that all who shared the fire of the early socialists should help these developments and not hamper the economic system that made them possible. In the audience participation that followed we tried to counterattack, but I felt none of us could topple his cigar-smoking reconstituted peasant.

We sought confrontation with establishment ideas. For the weekly forum we scheduled a debate between Borland and a banker, on some question going into the merits of capitalism. Borland had statistics to counter the banker's opening contentions, statistics that he felt didn't leave the banker a leg to stand on. He was less acid in his rebuttal and urged on his opponent a larger perspective than balance sheets provided, some vision of what the human race could do to make this an earthly paradise, inviting him to open his mind to a brand new understanding. The banker got a laugh by noting how appropriate a new understanding would be since Borland had discovered that he had not a leg to stand on. My *Citizen* report recorded this repartee in proper place so that readers could share the laughs too. Later the editor told me the banker had come to him to say he was surprised that the *Citizen* would report a point where he scored; the editor told him that honest reporting was the deadliest attack any socialist could make on the system.

But about making a living. Selling those almanacs to the seafar-

ing population was a pleasant chore, but a flash in the pan that burnt itself out in a couple of weeks. A classified ad brought me to a jeweller who wanted a lad to run the press on which he produced wedding announcements and business cards from the plates that he engraved. It was a one-man business on a shoe-string and he had trouble paying his rent or paying me. I think I worked part time for him and canvassed stores to get orders for 1921 calendars all at the same time. The jeweller had a kindly disposition toward socialism, but wanted to dream up a kind of socialism congenial to artisans and small shopkeepers, and this was not my dream. He didn't attend any of the meetings in which I was involved.

I ran out of calendar customers and he ran out of money owing me some back pay, and my rent was up, so he asked me to stay with him for a while. It was pleasant to be in someone's home again, the first home I had stepped into except on sales calls, since I left Saint John. In a few days I found a job with a contractor who was putting up a row of buildings a few blocks from the jeweller's home. In a few weeks the contractor was through with the concrete work for which he had hired me and another laborer. I tried once more at the shipyards and this time I connected with a job. I moved to a rooming house not far from the shipyards and my jeweller friend lost his lodger. It was the least lucrative but most pleasant relation I have had with an employer in my 76 years.

The *Citizen* remained my anchorage. There was talk of the movement buying out the *Citizen* and I was asked how one could figure out a fair price. I felt Marx offered no insight here, though I tried to reckon the labor that had gone into building up the paper as against the living the editor and owner had derived from it, but felt labor theory of value of little use in reckoning the sale of obligations due to subscribers as against the advertising income this might yield. It made me realize how little practical use there was to the sort of economics I knew. The best I could come up with was the jingle Marx had quoted: "The value of a thing is just as much as it will bring." It remained in private hands. I recall no discussion of the issue of whether it is better to have a labor paper controlled by a union, by a labor coalition, or by a free-enterpriser, or whether a change in ownership would mean a change in policy. I was naive. Marxism hadn't got me over my habit of thinking of people in terms of what ideas they had rather than the power structures they were entrapped in.

At the *Citizen* office I met, I suppose, most of the people who took an active hand in labor matters. Most of them were bald or gray. One who was neither was an advertising writer, Joe Wallace, who had his own agency, and who was a leading spirit in the Labour Party. He did a good job on party documents, but neither he nor anyone managed to get the masses much concerned with the party. We warmed up well toward each other though our thinking was miles apart. He not only disagreed with the materialist conception of history as theory; he found it repulsive, as repulsive as child labor and slum conditions. So we talked of many things, the English poets among them. Wallace was fond of quoting Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven" to me, perhaps to convey his Catholic perspective, for he was a staunch Catholic too, but I expect in the hopes of improving the wretched verses I kept writing. We soon reached an understanding that though our philosophies were poles apart, our concern with social conditions required us to work together.

Very soon after I had got acquainted with the *Citizen* editor he urged me to find some union I could belong to. There was a man—name again escapes me—a stout fellow who had an office a few blocks away that served a number of small unions. One was for lads who cleaned boiler tubes. Since they were around my age, he and the editor decided that was the place for me. This was the first union I had joined. At the meeting where I was accepted, the organizer gave them a talk aimed chiefly at sobriety, and adjourned the meeting by having them sing some verse about each for all to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne." I tried to mix with these lads after the meeting but they all had places to go. I felt like a pariah and suspected they suspected me of having been put in by the organizer to try to find whether they were drinking. Repeatedly in Halifax I found I had to do the limited socializing I did with folks much older than myself.

The day I hired out at the shipyards I moved to lodgings near it, a rooming house with a long hall and small rooms off it. That evening I rejoiced to find that Donald Stewart lived there too, three doors down the hall from me. Despite his age, he was storeskeeper at the shipyards and went to work every day. When I told him I had just hired out as a laborer there he asked why I had not told him I wanted a job there and he would have got me into his department and taught me his trade and a familiarity with all the many

materials and tools and pieces of equipment a shipyard storeskeeper must be sure are on hand. I certainly would have welcomed getting on any steady job, that included, and as engineer clerk I had relieved the storeskeeper at the sugar refinery and had some idea of what was involved. No movement person there during these months had suggested where I might land me a regular job; it just didn't seem to be the sort of thing that occurred to them. Looking back I feel they missed out on the usefulness of music, on the practicality of watching out for jobs for each other, and on what a cement a bit of socialibility can provide. Here was Donald Stewart, much respected, but so far as I could see without one close friend. I don't think he was ever invited to anyone's home. His life was work, meals in a restaurant across from his lodgings, an occasional public meeting, and otherwise to read and drowse in his room. The nearest he had to a close friend was Borland and whenever the two met they bristled at each other. Years fell off their shoulders as they bristled, and they relished their game of retorts, but still it was no close friendship. I felt the same want of sociability and hit it off well with Stewart. I got him to go places with me, sometimes to other restaurants than across the street, to see sights in pleasant weather, and, on one occasion that he heartily enjoyed, to see a Gilbert and Sullivan troupe put on "Ruddigore." He changed. He got a haircut, started scrubbing his face and washing his hair, and spruced up so that folks mentioned the change in him.

Then came the shipyard strike and tragedy for Donald. He insisted on going to work right through the picket line. I am puzzled why. For a man of his age to have any job, let alone a rather good job, was unusual. Did he fear that he would be fired and never get another? I doubt that. His views were so publicly known that the shipyard management knew them well too. He held his position chiefly, I judge, because of his competence, though management may have reckoned that it was to their advantage to have a man there who would have the respect and good will of those who requisitioned tools or materials. I feel I knew Donald well enough to be sure he would never let the fear of joblessness or any fear make him cross a picket line.

I was not present at the confrontation between Donald and Borland, chairman of the strike committee and president of the Marine Trades Council, but I heard of it. At a streetcar stop there was a gate and stairs leading down to the shipyard offices and

facilities. There Borland faced Donald with one question: "Donald Stewart, will you please define the term class struggle?" Donald answered this was no place for definitions and walked in unimpeded. Throughout the strike he faced these old associates each day and went on to work. Several asked me to bring all pressure on him I could to stay out, for they felt ashamed that he of all men should scab. But he was adamant. He insisted he was a salaried employee not subject to strike call, and that he pictured himself as an executive of sorts. He would have nothing to do with the suggestion that he just stay away indisposed. He did question the wisdom of calling the strike, and hint that it was Borland's strike for Borland's satisfaction, but from years of involvement with unionism it was surely in the marrow of his bones by then that one works out such a disagreement in union meetings or discussions, and not by crossing picket lines. I'm still uncertain why he did it but suspect that the conditions of his job, where he was consulted by superiors rather than ordered by them and did order others, made him forget that he too was a wage-slave and belonged with his fellows. He surely did miss them.

First day of the strike there was a mass meeting of all strikers. Borland brought me up to the platform to represent the laborers, who as I recall had no union, and to put in a word for them. Thinking back I almost recover the tingle in my spine from facing what seemed to me a huge audience indeed, and an audience ready to reason along with me. My main point was that the wage structure like any other structure had to have a foundation, and was no more trustworthy than that foundation, and that the foundation was the rate the laborers got; that while it showed their heart was in the right place demanding a sizeable improvement for us, it also showed that their heads were on right, too: it was enlightened self-interest for the best paid crafts to look to the rates of those paid much less and fight to raise them. I said something about last fall's steel strike and how the corporations had schemed to pit one trade union against another and to break up their solidarity, and as a loose gathering of diverse unions in the shipyard, we faced that same peril, and must guard against it as our greatest hazard, that solidarity would win the strike. I got a big hand and felt mighty good, and was elected to the strike committee, but don't recall meeting much with it.

In the early days of the strike there were many meetings of the various groups, laborers meeting together, arranging our part in

picket duty and so on. One of my clearest recollections was away from the strike, at the weekly labor forum. Joe Wallace was the speaker. The audience was largely strikers. He came forward with a proposal that the strike be settled by a committee consisting of thirteen lawyers, five merchants, seven real-estate promoters and three farmers. (I am pulling these figures out of the air, but he had the exact numbers that applied). There were boos and loud remonstrance from the audience. He got them quiet enough to say that the committee he had described, made up in that exact proportion, was the provincial parliament, that many strikers had felt should settle the strike. It was a good punch adroitly delivered. His argument was that they should make sure they changed the occupational make-up of that committee, but I think most of the audience felt one couldn't wait until the next election but must figure what to do now.

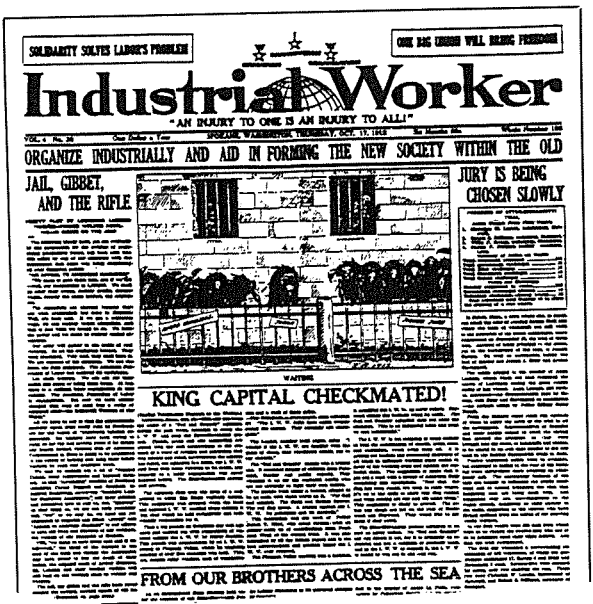
It wasn't long until someone told the strike committee that there was temporary work for a few of us laborers in the cemetery. Those of us who wanted to go did, including me. Thereafter I had little to do with the strike—in fact, little to do with it before that, other than to meet with my fellows and hope for good news. We laborers were young fellows out of money and had the blessing of the strike committee. Our new job was to dig graves, and Borland, still very much a Marxian, admonished us not to forget that as wage workers we were also and always the grave-diggers of capitalism. It was spring, good weather, no high pressure on the job, and we lads made the cemetery a reasonably sociable place. I relished that sociability. But it was temporary work. I could not wait for the strike to be won—it wasn't—and hired out with a contractor building a highway, and boarded near the work. I saw little of Donald after that. He was miserable, and one Sunday when he suggested we go some place where we could go rowing, I suspected suicidal intentions, and told him we should never do the enemy that favor. A Russian lad I had got to know in the sugar refinery, who had helped me put up stickers in Saint John, wrote suggesting we head west on a harvest excursion. I left Halifax and have not been back. My economic accounts with it: I left with enough money to get to Winnipeg, engage in the amenities in Saint John, and reach my next job in Kilscoty, Saskatchewan, all without wondering if I could afford to eat.

In 1977, the Canadian labor historian Ian McKay dug up what the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had to say about my activities in Halifax. Their 24 July 1920 report, packed with misinformation, praised me highly, if wrongly:

> *The shipyards strike, apparently in considerable part was the work of F.W. Thompson, a boy of not much more than 19 years of age. He was employed by the Halifax Shipyards Company on 11th May. He at once organized the labourers into an industrial union . . . and he had the men out by 1st June.*

That, of course, is nonsense. The strike took me by complete surprise.

An IWW "Silent Agitator" Sticker


SOLIDARITY SOLVES LABOR'S PROBLEM

ONE BIG UNION WILL BRING FREEDOM

Industrial Worker

"AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!"

ORGANIZE INDUSTRIALLY AND AID IN FORMING THE NEW SOCIETY WITHIN THE OLD

JAIL, GIBBET, AND THE RIFLE

JURY IS BEING CHOSEN SLOWLY

KING CAPITAL CHECKMATED!

FROM OUR BROTHERS ACROSS THE SEA

The *Industrial Worker*, western organ of the IWW

Chapter Three
WESTERN CANADA AND ONE BIG UNION

The eventful years of the early 1920s saw Thompson's political ideas take much more definite form as he traveled widely, agitated boldly, changed jobs often and organized with some success in western Canada. A member of the syndicalist One Big Union (OBU) organization, Thompson hoboed his way across the West, often with his Russian friend, Ivan Lasiuk. He wrote a fairly extensive account of his OBU years in a series of letters to John Bell at Dalhousie University (with most information in the letter dated 23 July 1977 and, less so, of 3 November 1976), and in the draft of a letter to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), undated but perhaps from 1961. His 1970 talks to the Canadian Student Association of Waterloo, Ontario (transcribed and deposited at Roosevelt University) add details. These three sources have been combined, often within individual paragraphs, to produce this chapter, which also draws very briefly on a letter from Thompson to Edith Fowke (12 August 1966). In general, the letters to Bell best illuminate daily life and union struggles, the INS material best

describes ideological changes and the Waterloo speech contains the best material on organizing. The discussion of attitudes toward Communism in paragraphs twelve and thirteen also draws on Thompson's words in his 12 July 1985 letter to Penny Pixler. Material on names in the first paragraph comes from another undated letter to the INS, this one to its regional office in St. Paul, Minnesota, and from Thompson to John Bell (8 September 1976). Internal evidence places the former of these letters as being written at some time in 1941.

I left Halifax in 1920 as F. Willard Thompson and by 1922 when I came to the United States, I was calling myself Fred Thompson. Much else also changed in the period after my Russian friend Ivan Lasiuk and I decided to take a harvester excursion train from Saint John to Winnipeg. Lasiuk, whom I knew from working in the sugar refinery in Saint John and looked up on briefly returning there from Halifax, took his fiddle. Ivan and I had known the Kerr Company's book, *Socialist Songs*, and we tried to propagandize with the fiddle and those songs. In general, it didn't take. If I had known of the IWW's *Little Red Songbook*, we might have met with a better response. As it was, the songs I remember from our moving west were popular ones, such as "Oh, What a Pal Was Mary" or "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." Some rather indecent parodies of popular songs were also sung, but nothing laboristic.

The bargain excursion train taking labor to the 1920 harvest cost, I think, $20. Its remarkable facilities included long cars with double bunks in them. At the end of every second car there was a place you could do a little cooking. But it was a deplorable trip. Some of the fellows on the upper bunks had drunk way too much beer and didn't go to the toilet. I remember that as being a very depressing situation. I didn't dare lie down in my bunk for days after, until they got sobered up. We got west and that's where I joined the One Big Union. I had planned to; I'd been in correspondence.

In the spring of 1919 there had been a general strike in Winnipeg called by the AFL unions, and the people running that general strike were charged with conspiring to overthrow the government. They issued permits to distribute milk, bread, and things like that. They were tried on the charge that they issued permits. That's the government's job, so by doing that you tried to overthrow the government. Their lawyers asked, "With whom have they been conspir-

ing?'' They listed a bunch of people they'd been in correspondence with. I was listed as one of those people they'd been conspiring with. It was simply that they were sending me their publicity releases. I think I'd sent them a contribution for a strike fund or something like that. They certainly weren't asking me how to run the strike or anything. Later many of these people were in the One Big Union of Canada. Anyway I went out west to join the OBU and work at taking in the harvest.

I found pretty soon that you could really make more money working on the construction jobs that other people left to take in the harvest. So I worked in several places like that. A very pleasant time, as I recall it. I think, like most young radicals, I had decided not only that there wasn't any Santa Claus and there wasn't any good in the capitalist system, but there wasn't any God either. I was a rather militant atheist at the time. That got me into a rather embarrassing situation going out west. We'd had a discussion one place about how frogs got on a roof during a rain storm. I forget just which side I was taking, but anyway the lady who ran the house took the opposite side. Her son said that since I disagreed with her I was calling his mother a liar. I said I was doing no such thing. It made such an unpleasant situation I went on to the next town.

In the next town, they were building a church. I wanted to get a job building the church. They said fine and dandy but there's no place to board here. Someone said, ''Well, there's an old couple in that house over there. I think they could put somebody up.'' This was late in the afternoon. This young Russian fellow and I were together. He never got into trouble over what he said because he didn't know any English.

I went over there. I could smell homemade biscuits, fried potatoes, all kinds of things that activated my innards. I told them that I would very much like to help build their church there, but I couldn't unless I could find a place to board. The old lady looked at the old man and said, ''Do you suppose we could put these two young men up?'' They thought we seemed nice young men. They said, ''Would you people like supper?'' We said that was exactly what we would like. They put it all on the table very nicely and then sat down.

They said, ''Would you mind saying grace?'' I was wondering what to do. I didn't want to head down the line with no supper and I did really want to work on that job and I did really have my

principles. But I had read quite a bit of Omar Kha'yam and I took him very much to heart. I liked the *Rubaiyat* and I had some of the verses memorized. So I bowed my head quite nicely and said,

O Thou Who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the path I was to wander in
Thou wilt not with predestination round
Enmesh me and impute my fall to sin.

And the old lady said, "It's so nice to have a young man with a proper religious upbringing." The *Rubaiyat* stood me in good stead.

There's a beautiful piece of music that Anton Rubinstein wrote called "Komenoi Ostroi," supposed to relate to the time when Napoleon was in exile on St. Helena. It brings to mind a beautiful recollection in my life. We'd been hoboing toward Edmonton, Lasiuk and I. He had his fiddle still with him. Once in a while he'd play a little tune. He wasn't expert, but rather good at it. We stopped in this little town, a point at which time changes going west, and there was a little bake-shop in it.

We went up there to buy some doughnuts. One thing after another led to some little comment about what was going on in the world. We were just hoboing through there, riding boxcars. We talked with the baker; he rather liked some of our disagreement with the system. He was a Socialist actually, a member of the Socialist Party of Canada. He hadn't run into any people either for a while who liked to talk socialism. So he said, "You fellows hang around a while. I'll make you some coffee and you can eat your doughnuts here, and we'll go home and have dinner after a while." So we went home and had dinner. He not only had a nice dinner for us, but a very beautiful daughter. Not for us, of course, but he had a very beautiful daughter. She played that "Komenoi Ostroi" piece on the piano; and whenever I hear it, I think of that very pleasant interlude in my hoboing. If memory serves, that was the only evidence we encountered in crossing those prairies that anyone else shared our hopes for a new social order.

I then worked in the railroad shops in Alberta. We were active in the OBU there and went on to Calmar later on. In all that time I was running into wonderful people, staunch trade unionists. Quite a few of the radical workers were not members of the OBU because they didn't dare be. They'd lose their right to earn their bread and butter if they joined. In these western provinces the AFL unionists

had found both the structure and the outlook of craft unionism too narrow, and as entire bodies had formed the One Big Union of Canada, with an industrial union structure. The internationals obtained court rulings that contracts were with the AFL international unions, and that employers holding such contracts must hire their men from the AFL, and not from this new body. This soon whittled away most of the OBU membership even though most of the members of the craft unions were openly in favor of the industrial structure. It was my first experience of how unionism can be used to stop the unionists from doing what they want to.

But OBU members or not, these workers certainly were my guide and counsel. And somehow, I don't know why, so many of them were interested in the writings of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the earlier writings of John R. Commons, and particularly the institutional economics of people like Thorstein Veblen. They got me doing some reading like that. My ideas were changing and developing rapidly.

In early 1921 I wrote an angry letter published in the January 15 issue of the *OBU Bulletin*. When the archivist John Bell dug it up and sent me a copy in 1976, its tone surprised me with its ferocious sound, for I was a very mild-mannered young man. The letter attacked, as "such a fragmentary part of the truth as to approximate falsehood," a rather obscure section of the OBU preamble. That section, reflecting an exotic current in the prewar Socialist Party of Canada, especially in Vancouver, implicitly likened trade union struggles to the disagreements of grocers and their customers over the price of sugar. This opened the way to trivialize union struggles and I was at pains to point out that the class struggle "finds its roots not in the relations of buyers and sellers, but in the relation of [wage] slave and master." The issue seemed important because in the winter of 1921 we in the SPC met once a week to debate the 21 points, conditions for affiliating with the Communist International (CI). I opposed affiliation chiefly, I believe, out of a feeling that these points and Lenin's views bore so little correspondence to what I saw in western Canada. And I expect that is the reason why on the day after New Year's 1921 I wrote that letter. I did not want to see the OBU given up because of CI notions of left-wing "infantilism," or their disparaging of left unionism and trade union consciousness.

I doubt whether IWW thinking influenced me much at the time, though I was somewhat acquainted with it. I expect my own thinking came more from a sense of history I had been getting from reading some economic history, such as Thorold Rogers, from dabbling in Veblen, and despite my revolutionary animus, from feeling Webb and his sense of historic continuity fit the facts of life: that whatever was done in social superstructure, the foundation of life in the new society would be what workers did at shop level in generating the new society. I also objected to the CI's view that one should set out to build an "illegal apparatus" and announce one's intention to do so to the authorities. Fearing that our radical comrades in the U.S. were too much like kids playing a pirate game, I wanted no part of affiliation though I joined my comrades proudly in organizing a tag day, advertised by banners on Calgary streetcars, for famine relief in the Soviet Union.

My thinking and rethinking came as I moved around often, picked up experience, learned new skills and met smart and interesting fellow workers. Ivan and I went out to Calmar and got jobs in the Canadian National Railway (CNR) shops. We had no difficulty getting jobs. I was to learn how to run a steam hammer and become a blacksmith. Ivan knew very little English but convinced them he could repair anything on a locomotive. We got a boarding spot in Calmar, then went back downtown—my recollection runs that Edmonton was built at that time around a hollow unoccupied square and we went around three sides of it from Calmar to downtown. There Ivan pawned his camera and violin in exchange for some books on locomotives, which he could not read. He would strip down an engine one day and go over appropriate illustrations in the book with me that night, and I would read the text and try to figure out how things worked, and evidently he did his work OK on the basis of this.

I am puzzled in recollecting all this that he needed to pawn anything for those books, for we had been working quite steady. Also I don't know why that fall, I would judge late October or early November, we quit and hoboed to Calgary. We surely had some money, and I judge we must have hoboed because we considered this proper procedure. He had his fiddle back and we entertained the train crew. One memory of Edmonton: there was a newspaper office with life-size cartoons of the staff in concrete basrelief along the outside of the building. I wish I could recall more

about those Calmar car shops. My vague recollections are of some arrangement for shop stewards that served various craft unions and OBU also, collecting dues for whichever one you belonged to.

I do recall that working conditions in Calmar struck me as pleasant. We weren't rushed. Jurisdiction over work made many jobs leisurely—one reason Ivan could investigate what was to be done, research it with me at night, and do it the next day, was the vigilance with which crafts exercised their jurisdictions over the work. He would strip some area, or in some instances require a stripper to do so under his supervision, until he came to a wire or piece of pipe that needed to be disconnected, and then he would sit and pass the time away waiting for someone with membership in the appropriate union for disconnecting the wire or the pipe to do so. In retrospect I have a hunch people who wanted OBU were having a game to ridicule craft union structure and use that ridiculous structure in revenge against those who were forcing them to remain in it though they wanted industrial organization. Out west workers treated each other with far more respect, and with a sort of job etiquette, that I had not seen back east. The clearest remembrance of those shops: taking a cube of steel and trying to make it into a sphere with a steam hammer, and using clippers for the first time in my life to make sure that it was not more than a sixteenth inch out-of-round—that was something I was training to do to warrant a higher job status, and there was no question about my right to use the steam hammer for practice purposes.

In Calgary, Ivan and I at once hunted up a boarding house on Eighth Avenue a few blocks east of downtown. It was run by a Newfoundland family, and was my intermittent home when I was in town until late 1921. I believe we landed by freight and riding into town saw a sign on it and got off and domiciled ourselves there. A Mrs. Frazee ran it, and her husband was a spiritualist, with slightly socialistic notions he had acquired from some theosophical writings. There was a piano there and it was quite homelike. I've forgotten what job Ivan got, but I landed concrete work, laborer, on the construction of a flour mill out toward Ogden. A remark made on the job about winter being likely to close it down soon and the need to have a stake to carry one through a Calgary winter got me worried, and one morning I kept on the streetcar all the way to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) car shops at Ogden, and rustled me a job in the power plant there, firing at night. Soon

after, I realized this was one of the more rational things I had done so far in life, for I had a job when many didn't, including soon my pal Ivan.

My 1920-21 winter job at the CPR power plant came about from the need for an extra fireman on winter nights to keep up steam for heat, largely using the refuse from the woodshop as fuel. So in the spring that job disappeared, and I shipped out on sundry jobs out of town, working for a week or two here and there, and coming back to Mrs. Frazee's boarding house, then out on another. The job situation was not good, and some of the jobs I took were on extra gangs, to improve track conditions, the last sort of job anyone takes if he has better options. I recall the first such job, and the first time I slept where I worked in a bunk car, and how I took off my clothes and put on my pajamas. Everyone thought this was very funny for all slept in their underwear. I did feel embarrassed, but tried not to show it, and kept on using pajamas, convinced that they felt more comfortable and are one of the good things of life that proletarians should not leave to the less worthy to wear.

There was a lively radical movement in Calgary. The Socialist Party and the OBU shared a hall across from the CPR depot, upstairs. It consisted of a meeting room and a smaller room used as a library. One detail marks off the customs of those days in Calgary from Chicago in these days. The hall was always open, and in winter we kept a gas stove running in the library and anyone was welcome to come in and get warm or read or both. One wall was lined with books in bookcases, and some would have been difficult to replace, but the bookcase doors could all slide open. At a SPC meeting someone expressed concern that a rare book might turn up missing, and moved that only the ordinary books be kept in accessible cases. I recall this because of the puckishness of our secretary, Lewin, who recorded the motion that the ordinary books be left accessible, but that the extraordinary ones be segregated into one section that could be locked. I don't recall the loss of either ordinary or extraordinary books though the place was open and usually unattended night and day.

I had daytime hours available as I worked a night shift at the power plant, but this hall was not my hangout. Instead there was Morris Rapport's pawnshop. There were likely to be three or four revolutionists discussing deep questions there at any time, but he

managed to support a family just the same. Years later I met him in Petaluma, California. His very young son had grown up and gone to Spain in the Lincoln Brigade[5] and got killed there, as did Ivan. Rapport's pawnshop was on the same street as the hall, and a couple of blocks down. Around the corner from it and toward Eighth Avenue, was a tobacco shop and bookstore that carried a wide range of radical publications from the United States. It was there I first read the IWW paper, the *Industrial Worker.* This shop was a place for discussions too, and I must have been pegged for concern with economics, for I recall the owner urging an *Industrial Worker* on me with the remark, "You'll like it. It is as economic as hell." Fay was a regular at these sports and so was Ambrose Tree, who enjoyed pondering the relative form of value and the fetishism of commodities or playing a flute. Lewin was the local intellectual of the Socialist Party, a Britisher who wrote music criticism for the local press, and was correspondent for the grain exchange and reputed to be able to dictate three different letters to three different stenographers all at the same time. He could discuss any aspect of socialist literature or theory, and his study classes in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* went considerably back of the text to explore the philosophical assumptions of sundry socialist and anti-socialist contentions.

We took advantage of every trend in popular culture which created openings for socialist ideas. Blue laws helped socialists get a hearing, at least on Sundays. It was illegal to charge admission to a theater, and on Eighth Avenue every Sunday afternoon the Forum, run largely by those most active in the OBU, got a good crowd. Every Sunday evening the Socialist Party took over. I don't believe I ever missed a session. The socialist meetings invariably had good orthodox Marxian speakers; the Forum had a much wider range. The same theater was used by the Forum crowd in the afternoon and SPC in the evening. In these pre-radio, pre-TV days, many people relished speeches and discussion as entertainment, diversion, and they wanted it with no holds barred. I recall a meeting in the Arena addressed by the visiting premier of Canada, the audience mostly workingmen, most of them unemployed. He spoke of the need for high tariffs to keep other countries from dumping their goods on Canada, thereby pushing more workers out of jobs. I hopped up and asked him about US tariffs and how they compared, and he said down in US that they had nice high tariff walls.

So I asked him did they have any unemployment down in the US, and he said yes, far more than Canada had. As I pressed the point of wasn't there something inconsistent here, the crowd insisted on me taking the platform to debate him. So up I go in my Mackinaw, a bit greasy, to debate the premier, who soon excused himself for another appointment, leaving the field clear for me to give what I thought was a crystal clear Marxian analysis. Perhaps it was this incident that led a Finnish farmer near Drumheller, where miners made a good electorate, to come to Calgary and propose I run for parliament from there. He felt a socialist could get elected. He also had a very beautiful daughter, flaxen haired, but I felt parliament was a snare and delusion and wouldn't bite.

The *OBU Bulletin* meanwhile was sustained by the football (soccer) betting pool. That pool gave it a large number of subscribers little interested in radical ideology and also the funds with which the editors could offer and tempt these subscribers with a sizeable weekly largely filled with reprints of what they deemed most important or suitable from the periodical literature of their time for the education of these happenstance subscribers. My recollection runs that they did a good job—though they must have been disappointed to find that even a good paper does not readily radicalize the masses.

The Labour Church opened opportunities to appeal to religious workers. It started in Calgary, part of a movement across the prairies of those who wanted to go to church but resented the attacks of the clergy on the Winnipeg general strike. I believe I spoke in the Labour Church twice, once about the life and poetry of William Morris, and once on "The Ethics of Revolt": how early classless societies had developed an ethic of mutual aid, mutual responsibility, and concern for the common good; how once class societies arose, this primary ethos got transformed into one for the robbing class akin to that of Vikings raiding a Norman village, considerate of Viking survival but not of victims; how the underlying population was lured into the ethics of "slaves obey your masters" and made to seek a reward in heaven; how any rational reverence for the primary ethic of the common good required us to rescue the earth from its spoilers, and our descendants from rule by the robbers. It was the custom to follow the format of church services, and my reading and text was from *Ecclesiastes* 16: "What peace between the lamb and the hyena, and what peace between the rich and the

poor?'' I enjoyed my sermon but I wasn't asked back.

National origins did not keep radical workers apart. On a extra gang job northwest of Swift Current, I became friends with a young German named Smitty, an OBUer not in the Socialist Party. To escape atrocious conditions we got ourselves fired— otherwise our passage would have been subtracted from our pay— and started back to Swift Current on foot to get our wages. It turned out that a hot, sandy desert lay between us and payday and we made it across only by moving at night, navigating by the North Star. Smitty and I would meet again later in Saskatoon and in Vancouver and I would cross into the U.S. with him in 1922. On another extra gang job I absentmindedly whistled ''The Internationale'' while working. Two French workers, tamping a tie nearby, were excited and happy to hear an Anglo whistle that tune on this gandy-dancing job. They became my very good friends and, since we didn't communicate very well otherwise, I doubt if we would have found out what hopes we shared if not for my whistling.

Back in Calgary as the winter of 1921-22 set in, we did begin some organizing which I can remember with the sweet taste of youthful success. In it, I cooperated with a fellow worker, Fay, despite the fact that he was inclined to support Leninism in the debates we were having in the Socialist Party. Sometime that winter, I expect after New Year's, Fay and I noted that those looking for a day's work or better gathered early in the morning outside the provincial employment office, and thus could be reached there. We asked permission of OBU to try organizing the unemployed on some special basis of nickel or dime initiation fee and dues, and asked SPC for approval of use of the hall for that purpose. We had no mimeograph—clear evidence that no one was taking seriously any talk about organizing the unorganized or building class consciousness in the great masses. A comrade who ran a business college offered to mimeo some simple notices saying that those interested in forming an organization of the unemployed to protect their interests should come to the Socialist Party hall any time that day. We distributed these leaflets about 6 a.m. to those seeking day labor jobs at the unemployment office. (There were no private job sharks at the time, I believe). Then we dropped off for coffee and drowsed to the Socialist-OBU hall, where we found the stairway packed with men who couldn't go up the stairs because it was full upstairs. I have never again met with such prompt and

thorough response. Fay and I looked them over and wondered now what do we do next.

I think my innocence perhaps took us out of the quandary. It struck me that we needed to get back in touch with Hollister, the socialist business college proprietor. So I called him up and explained that here's all these people we'd never expected. We hadn't made any of the membership cards or anything like that. He said, "I'll tell you what. There's a lot of girls at my school that should get some kind of practical training, some training to use their own initiative. What you need is someone to make up cards." I had to make up a name for it in a hurry. "It'll be the Calgary Unemployed Association." They made up a little thing that you could record if you paid dues, a thing for them to sign, index cards.

These young women had a much better idea of what you'd have to do to form a union than I had. They came down there. The people were real happy because they were good-looking. Most of the unemployed at that time were still single men. Their eyesight, I think, is much better than married men's eyesight. These young women did a wonderful clerical job. We had so many people there we couldn't use that place and pretty soon this large arena was turned over for our use for meetings. A special office was given to us.

One of the facilities in town for the unemployed was a woodlot, as they called it. It was a great big barracks-like place with a lot of beds in it. People could sleep there and you're supposed to saw a little bit of wood each day, sort of as a token I guess, like a means test or something of that sort. They had meals there, such as they were. Even though I had friends who would be happy to have me live with them where I was living at the time, I figured since I was going to be active in this unemployed thing, I'd better get down with my constituency. I'd become president of the unemployed in Calgary.

One thing I remember, there was no such shelter for the few unemployed young women around. We did arrange that facilities were set up, much better than for us. After we'd begun to organize, one big squawk came that this big sort of flop house that was provided for the unemployed men had no facility for delousing clothing. Some people had lice and they did spread. Quite a few of the people were veterans and were quite familiar with the practices used for delousing equipment. By putting blankets and clothing at a high

steam, it would kill the lice, kill the eggs. This was the practical military way to do it. We wanted facilities of that sort constructed and the mayor said he didn't have any money for anything like that. He was willing to listen to committees. We went back there day after day to urge this. This was really something that hit these people. They needed this kind of facility where clothing and blankets could be suspended and steamed at a high temperature.

One day he sent a call down there to get Fred Thompson to the phone. I went and he said, "We have got an appropriation for that delousing cabinet you want." I said, "Thank you, that's very nice." I didn't know at the time what it was all about. It seems that some fellow from our group that was in the committee (I don't know who else would have had access to the essential materials) had gotten a little bottle that people keep toothache drops in, things like that. He collected a little sample of these lice. He kept them in this bottle. When the mayor definitely said no, we were sitting in these nicely upholstered chairs. I understand he let some samples loose. I have heard that that was the reason for the sudden budgetary change in the city council. I have only indirect knowledge of anything like that.

Well, I stayed along there for some time. The newspapers had a message for me one morning when I got up that a tunnel had caved in near Banff, Alberta. I've forgotten the exact wording. My recollection runs that three men and two hoboes were killed or something like that. That struck me that if there's a cave-in there, well, there's a job for me. There was a vice-president of the unemployed forum, and an elected council, so I was quite free to head out there.

I remember something of that trip to Banff that maybe explains why I still don't feel like calling cops *pigs*. A cop can do a decent thing. At that time there was a Chinook in Calgary, warm winds from over the mountains in the middle of winter. So I set out for Banff riding the blind on a passenger train. I put on all the clothes I owned—I think it made three-and-a-half layers of them—fastened them on and got on the back end of the engine on this passenger train going out. The weather changed; the Chinook stopped. It was way below zero when we got up to Banff. I was so chilly I practically had to lock myself on the iron to hold on. I don't remember too distinctly getting off. My only recollection was sitting in a railroad depot and a cop pouring whiskey down my throat bring-

ing me to. I recovered quite nicely and went to work that day where the tunnel accident was. I worked there for some time and then took a freight train out to Vancouver.

This would be the late winter of '22 by that time, the end of February or early March. I landed in Vancouver with my Mackinaw all covered with oil. And going through those tunnels, the soot holds in there and you get wonderfully dirty going through those tunnels on the outside of a train. I landed in Vancouver on a Sunday. That was quite an English-type town. I started going down the street from the first city stop the train made, unfamiliar with the town. Never been there before. I saw families coming down the street. The father with the Bible under his arm, the nicely dressed wife and all the children going along.

I felt very much out of place, that I should find a skid row or something and get down there. That is a thing that does happen, if a person's clothing makes him feel that he can not mix in with that society. Even if he's tasted that style of life, he feels more at home on the skid row with the lumpenproletariat, at least until he gets cleaned up.

I got down there and there was a big unemployment demonstration that day. It struck me as my first evidence of what I felt was revolutionary fanaticism. There was some order that you had to carry the union jack in the parade. So they had a red flag and a union jack on two ends of the same pole. The red flag was up high and the union jack down dragging along in the mud. I could understand the sentiment that was behind it, but I was thinking then, these people need to consider how to get the ordinary citizens, the working people, who do have homes to live in and are not in this parade, to back up the demands of these construction workers, miners and lumberjacks for some decent facilities to take care of themselves.

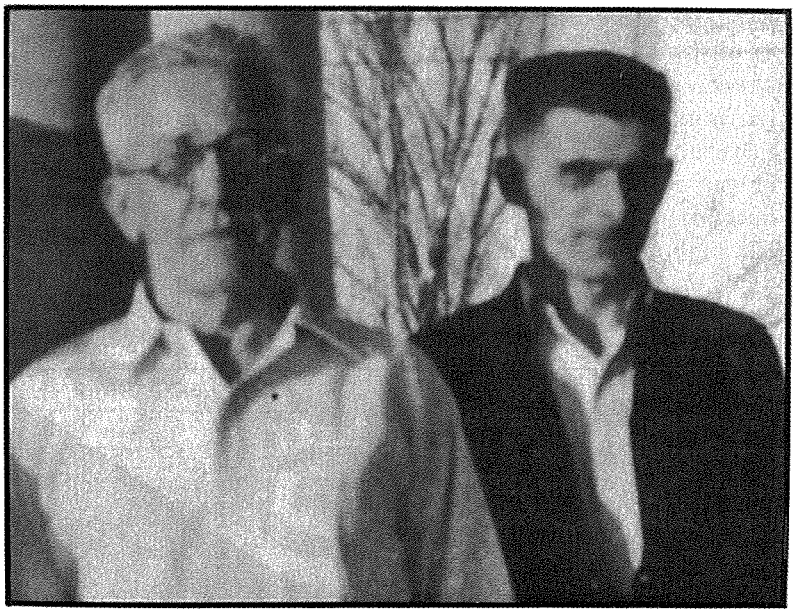
It was a time when we philosophized, and I recall one old and famed Vancouver soapboxer who had gone on a very singular track, lamented by all the radicals. He held a firm conviction that there was no such thing as labor-saving machinery. I can't recall his name, but he sunned himself when there was sun on a park bench where I was told I should certainly go see him, as one of the things any visiting radical always did in Vancouver. In earlier years he had been one of the more popular exponents of Marxism. Visiting this aged man I felt as though a block or so away I might find Diogenes,

tub, lantern and all. He had picked up numerous illustrations from mechanics about the conservation of energy, and tried to apply this to economics, that the labor spent in harnessing a waterfall to do our work in the long run saved us nothing. I tried to convince him that even if experience should warrant such a conclusion, the truth of that conclusion would rest on other facts than the physics of the conservation of energy, but don't believe I put the point across. He reinforced his belief with the fact that we still had to work so hard. Repeatedly he came back with the question: If labor-saving machinery saves labor, what is done with all the labor saved?

I have been asking myself the same question ever since. It is not only in modern times but back in those Dark Ages and in antiquity that mankind has been devising better ways to do work, getting grains that yield more food for labor, livestock that feed people better for the same work, irrigation systems to increase productivity. Yet in substance, as this old soapboxer pointed out, we work about the same hours, eat much the same food, wear much the same clothes, get much the same wine, pleasures, housing. Where does the saved labor go? I spoke to him of the increasing indirectness of production and of capital accumulation. He recognized these, but had figures to show they could not account for the labor purported to be saved.

Since then I have concluded that the labor saved goes largely into doing work that need not be done: policing ourselves, keeping track of ourselves, selling things we don't want to each other, and preparations for war. I did not realize then how much of the world's work ought not to get done.

An IWW "Silent Agitator" Sticker



With Covington Hall at Work People's College, mid-1930s

Chapter Four
"INMATE, ORGANIZER AND PROFESSOR"

When Fred Thompson entered the U.S. in 1922 he was barely old enough to vote, but within months he would be shown that he was quite old enough to be placed in San Quentin Penitentiary for "criminal syndicalism." His "red card" number in the IWW was X22063 and his prison number was 38579. His career for the two decades thereafter was filled with remarkable variety: more brushes with the law, the threat of deportation, constant changes of jobs and residence, two marriages, a child, organizing in Colorado, Montana, Detroit, Cleveland and elsewhere, beginning his history of the IWW, editing Wobbly publications, professing radically at Work People's College, receiving a belated pardon for his "criminal syndicalism" conviction and even trying his hand at farming.

Unfortunately, Thompson's reflections on these events are not as full as those on his years in Canada. Perhaps the "fellow diggers" (as Thompson nicely called others researching the past) into U.S. labor history were less diligent in posing questions than were historians of Canada, and perhaps Fred considered his writing on

the IWW to sum up his perspective on the major U.S. campaigns in which he was involved. The extant autobiograhical material makes it possible to piece together a spare narrative account of Thompson's life through the early 1940s and to expand upon his prison years, his legal battles, his organizing activities in Cleveland and Detroit, his teaching and his changing ideas, especially in the '20s.

The sources are as follows:

Thompson to John Bell (23 July 1977); undated (1961?) draft of Thompson letter to INS; undated (but probably 22 February 1941) letter from Thompson to INS; Thompson, "Speeches and Discussion Before the Canadian Student Association of Waterloo, Ontario" (1970), Roosevelt University transcript; Thompson to Paul Ware (8 April 1985); Thompson to A. A. Almeida (19 April 1985); Thompson to Penny Pixler (12 July 1985); Thompson to John Bell (28 July 1976); information from Thompson in Franklin Rosemont's obituary "Fred Thompson, 1900-1987: Wobbly and Scholar," Labour/Le Travail *20 (Fall, 1987), 9; Thompson to Bruce Kayton (12 July 1986); Thompson to Steve Kellerman (Day after Thanksgiving, 1982). Thompson to Joyce Kornbluh (23 April 1964); Thompson to Franklin Rosemont (23 August and 16 September 1974); Thompson to Carl Keller (21 February 1941); John Russell to Thompson (28 February 1941); Thompson. "Digging IWW History for Tactics: A Memo to Penny Pixler and Anyone Else Interested" (Fall, 1986); Thompson to Roberta McBride (17 September 1963); Thompson to Greg McDaniels (16 April 1976); Thompson, "Record of Residence" (June 1941); videotapes of Thompson by Warren Leming (1987); Thompson to Roediger (16 October 1985); the fine interview with Thompson on Work People's College by Richard Altenbaugh (20 February 1984); Fred W. Thompson and Patrick Murfin,* The IWW: Its First Seventy Years *(Chicago, 1976), 165; Thompson in "An Evening With the Wobblies" (4 October 1963) at Wayne State University as cited in John S. Klemanski and Alan DiGaetano. "Wobblies and Autoworkers: The Industrial Workers of the World in Detroit" (1980?); Thompson to Roberta McBride (17 September 1963); Thompson to Dave Roediger (13 March 1986); Thompson to John Klemanski (25 November 1978 and 22 October 1980); Thompson to Don Benedict (25 June 1985); Thompson, "Outline for Talk, Madison" (9 November 1978).*

Spring was coming to British Columbia in 1922, but no spring jobs. I was getting restless for a boss who would pay me wages and, more than that, had a young man's desire to see the world. Smitty, my German OBU friend, and I decided we could do better on construction jobs south of the border. One March day I changed what was left of my stake into U.S. currency and we walked into Washington without declaring our arrival. We crossed over at Blaine with a group of laborers also seeking work. I would not get back to Canada for forty-five years.

There were lots of jobs but I kept none very long. I first went to work for the National Lumber Company, at Hoquiam, Washington. I worked there a few weeks and went to Medford, Oregon, where I worked for a couple of weeks for the Sacramento Short Line at a station near Pittsburgh, California; then for a few weeks for a paint company in South San Francisco; then I lived in San Francisco working as a building laborer; then for a month or two for Hercules Powder Company, at Pinole, California, then again as a building laborer in San Francisco until January 1923 when I went to work on the Hetch Hetchy project until March or early in April.

I had long been hoping to find more young people in the labor movement and in the far west of Canada that began to be the case. When I came down stateside, there I increasingly found that on the West Coast radical activities and demonstrations drew far more people under thirty than over. Perhaps the depression was making it so, but for whatever reason, young people on the coast were willing to participate in radical causes, while older people had their homes, their lives and their kids to keep them busy. General experience tells me that the West Coast in those years was not typical of the longer run of the history of American radicalism. After World War Two, I asked an old-timer in Chicago, in his 90s and a champion meeting-goer since the Knights of Labor, about whether the young or the old had come most often through the years. He said that "youth only periodically erupts" but that the continuity of the left came mostly from people with bald heads and gray hair. From his boyhood on, he said, people had always said, "We've got to get more young people into the radical movement."

A young Wobbly and an old one recruited me to the IWW in September of 1922. Old George Holmes shamed me into joining and A. L. Nurse was the young delegate who lined me up. Nurse

is still an IWW delegate in Montana as I write this [in 1985] and still keeps in touch. I had read some IWW publications before coming from Canada and had it in mind to join them, but put it off because I had heard these stories of their burning barns and so on. I hoboed down the coast, working here and there, mixing with Wobs, and folks who said they were Wobs, and got conflicting answers. Eventually I sifted these answers out, concluding that the folks who claimed to have destroyed things were not actually familiar with any of the details an active Wob would know, such as hall locations, industrial union structure or numbers.

The general drift of what the older Wobs told me was that the war had given a new meaning to the word "sabotage," and so they had quit using the word. Newspaper usage had by then identified the term with demolition, arson and similar physical damage. Before the war it had meant "If the boss is paying you for a strong back and a weak mind, give him a strong back and a weak mind." It had evidently meant to them what Veblen formulated as the "withdrawal of efficiency." Even this was to be used only where appropriate, for if employees did not cooperate with those employers who did improve conditions there would be no incentive to improve them. It has also been used in a sense of malicious mischief—for example, before striking a restaurant, putting Limburger cheese where it would not be conspicuous but would be heated up by lighting fixtures. Even this was now to be avoided because it tended to reinforce a wrong impression people had got of the IWW, and the organization was being hurt by this wrong impression. These old-timers assured me that it had never been IWW policy to engage in any serious damage. They were serious and yet jovial and dedicated to democratic unionism and to improving the job conditions, showing far more regard than most people for their fellow workers whether organized or not.

When I joined, I became fairly active, teaching an economics class at the Marine Transport Workers Hall, for example. The IWW lost the strike on Hetch Hetchy, and some of them asked me to go up there, hire out and see what could be done to re-build union feeling. I did that, but rather foolishly had IWW papers mailed to me at the job, and soon got fired; before that I had openly promoted the IWW in the bunk house. I headed down to Stockton where there was to be a conference, but once there got word of a free-speech fight in Oroville and headed that way. I was surprised

to see hundreds of Wobs converge on the hobo jungle in Oroville; we sent a delegation to the sheriff, and the two parties agreed that the IWW newsboys would come out of jail, be allowed to sell IWW papers, but would avoid bawling out those who didn't want them. Someone in the bunch there suggested that on my way back to Stockton I should drop off in Marysville, and pass out a few papers.

I did so and in April, 1923 was run in, charged first with passing out literature that advocated sundry illegal things. Then the charge was switched to being a member and organizer of a union whose intents were in violation of California's criminal syndicalism law. There was nothing in the literature to support either charge, but on the second, they had two professional witnesses who would swear in one courtroom after another, that the IWW was a conspiracy to burn, wreck and ruin.[6]

On my first trial the jury hung, so I was kept in jail in Marysville to the fall term of court. By that time they had arrested two more, so three of us went to trial. The jury convicted Dawes and me and acquitted a young fellow who had been arrested with Dawes. Later I heard—and believe—that the jury was split 8 to 4 to acquit us, but they wanted to get home for the weekend, and agreed to convict two and let one go. Dawes and I landed in San Quentin on November 7, 1923, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. We drew four-year sentences, which, with good time off, took three calendar years, but I lost three months good time for strikes and other protests in prison and so came out March 7, 1927. My full pardon came in December, 1940 from California Governor Culbert L. Olson.

San Quentin was perhaps the clearest example in my life of an experience which changed my perspective 180 degrees. I went there expecting to find, outside the other Wobs there, a vicious lot very unlike the folks I usually associated with. I was surprised to find they were for all the world almost a sample of what I found on jobs or in hobo jungles or around town. A tiny percentage were the folks I would not like to encounter alone on a dark night (in both environments) and the general run much the same in both worlds. It was a shocking discovery to me. And all the thinking by both scissorbills and criminologists disregards this basic fact. When I am told, "Socialism would be okay if it weren't for human nature," I think of some of the behavior I have seen in prison yards, or in lines of people waiting for a job, or in such more favorable

circumstances as a crowded Chicago beach. I am convinced that this creature has no business preparing to toss bombs at his kind but fits much better into a cooperative commonwealth.

I met a bunch of good guys in jail, some of them rather famous. Tom Mooney, the iron molders' leader charged with the bombing of a military preparedness celebration in San Francisco, was a figure whose unjust imprisonment I had protested against as far back as my Halifax days. Now I had the chance to talk to Mooney in jail. Also there was James McNamara, who was accused of blowing up the Los Angeles *Times* Building. But the building never got blown up. There was a big fire, and he did plead guilty to it. I asked him one time, "Did you?" I didn't know that the building had never blown up and he seemed such a nice guy. He had charge of dead man's row, for the people who are waiting to be hanged. Good guy for the job, I guess, because he had been there and anticipated being hanged himself. He had been talked into this idea of making a confession. When I asked him, "Jim, did you blow up the L.A. *Times* Building?" he says, "I confessed to it. That's bad enough." A very injudicious confession.

I ran into a lot of fellows in San Quentin who had the same attitude. They were in jail because they had confessed to something on the idea that they might be charged with something more serious. A lot of them said they had violated laws but it was a different violation than the one for which they were serving time.

There were about 104 of us Wobblies in there, arrested on the same kind of charges as myself, and two jailed on other charges. We managed to keep some kind of organization going there. We had a library of our own. One thing I didn't like about the place was you had to stand in line for everything. If you wanted breakfast, you stood in line. If you wanted to go to the dispensary and get something because the beans you had been eating were troubling your stomach, you had to stand in line. That used to be miserable. But I cherish the memory of one old Wobbly, an old prospector, Baldy Stewart. On a miserable raining morning as we stood in line to get into the dining area for breakfast, old Baldy, who had three hairs on the top of his head, would take out comb and pocket mirror and try combing two to the left side, then decide on two to the right side, and get us all in good humor. Laughter also helped on the day a friend and I noticed that the heads of everyone watching the action as inmates played quoits in the prison yard moved

simultaneously, as if on a string. Somehow it broke us up and the laughter proved very contagious.

Some young radicals have the idea that part of living your life right is landing in jail. I don't think the fear of jail should stop one from doing what he feels he definitely should do. But at the same time, don't try to get in jail. You can do far more out of jail than you can in. And the cuisine is very bad.

That's one thing the Wobs did do in San Quentin. We did change quite a few of the jail conditions while we were in there. Our specialty was improving jobs and we felt like we should improve that job too while we were there. Did it largely through taking action that caused news in the paper. We'd go on strike in San Quentin; it was unusual in those days to have strikes in a penitentiary. We'd go on strike and that would make the newspapers.

At other times we'd get some newspaper cooperating. They were after the warden's political scalp or something like that. I know there was one paper that would publish the main news for the week; little items like what we used to get to eat: "Monday: we had oatmeal with maggots in it. The beans were nice and new but they hadn't been cooked yet. Tuesday they had some cornpone which was very nice for breakfast and also on Tuesday the beans were cooked well enough. By Wednesday, however, the beans had gotten sour." We'd get stuff like that out in the newspapers, the little details of life there in San Quentin. Gradually the food did improve. Pressures can be used. I don't care what the situation is; people can do things together that they cannot do alone.

I remember some of the things I did to get the amusing things in the *Chronicle* papers. I couldn't dictate them and mail them out. There was one fellow who wasn't a Wobbly at all, but who did like to see any pressures we could exert to improve the restaurant facilities—the food in San Quentin. He had a girlfriend who was very ample in her bosoms. We just had a screen so high between us, and I'd have my little stuff for the *San Francisco Chronicle* all nicely wound up. We'd watch and toss it over when the guard wasn't looking. It would land down in her dress. I used to make sure it landed there and my eyes popped out of my head in those days. That's another very bad thing about jails. They're not coeducational. That was one of the great objections I had to San Quentin.

Well, all good things must end. I got out of there. Actually, I

think it's a terrible place, but I do have a lot of rather choice memories from my days there.

Sitting in jail provided plenty of time to think and my ideas changed considerably. My views on nationalism were a good example. I heard of the various small wars in Europe following World War One and compared how similar were the impediments to the development of solidarity offered, on the one hand, by the system of national states and, on the other hand, by the system of craft unions. Previous to 1923, I had been much in favor of nationalism, though not of World War One. The Balkan Wars of 1912 had seemed to me wonderful assertions of national independence. I devoured the collected works of Mazzini on nationalism and even Woodrow Wilson's views on the rights of small nations sounded good to me. Irish independence had my sympathy and I was glad that the Scots kept Robert Burns' idiom and sure that the earth was more interesting because it was inhabited by so many nationalities. I avidly read *Current History*, not immediately noticing that its maps made it plain that you can't draw boundaries around language groups because the damned kids on the boundaries grow up and marry each other, creating problems for patriots and ethnographers.

Mussolini greatly helped in making me a confirmed opponent of nationalism. For a time he seemed to be a man in the legacy of Mazzini, and with a special interest in the working class. From what I could learn of Italy, the odious nature of fascism became clear and I came to realize that nationalism had begotten this monstrosity. Reflecting from prison on Mussolini, on my organizing experiences and on my studies of the 1848 revolutions, when a healthy upsurge of democracy had been shattered on the rocks of conflicting nationalisms, I came to see nationalism as akin to the theological formulae over which men had killed each other three centuries earlier.

The 1924 split in the IWW forced more rethinking on me and the other criminal syndicalism prisoners. There is a widespread notion that the war and wartime repression eradicated the IWW. In fact, the organization held on and even experienced a revival early in the '20s. This revival was largely based on very practical union action in the lumber industry and on public works construction sites. Wobblies did the things that made the job a better place to live. This is hard to convey to modern readers. These workers didn't live at home and go to their jobs. They lived on those jobs

every day and night. On the basis of practical job action among these men, we rebuilt a stable membership base of perhaps 35,000, not far from the IWW's 1916-19 figures and with influence well beyond its dues-paying membership. The 1924 split cut the membership to ribbons, perhaps to 7,000 or 8,000. Obviously far more people dropped out of the middle than became staunch members of either side.[7]

The split presented those of us in San Quentin with a tough practical problem. Most of us were undecided, and wished there were no split. We wanted unity and could not afford to be divided in jail. Meanwhile, both sides in the split had been using the reputations of some the Wobs imprisoned in Leavenworth to back up their position. Some of us in San Quentin therefore decided we should resist this irrationality. Herb Edwards and I got up a statement, which we got virtually all the criminal syndicalism prisoners to sign, saying that we were not going to give out statements in favor of either side and that we wished they would bring themselves together to fight the bosses instead of each other. A fellow worker and fellow prisoner named Ray House and I studied the constitutional issues and the ways some arrangement could be made acceptable to both sides. We remained united in the penitentiary but outside the 4-Trey ("110") faction and the Emergency Program (EP) factions stayed apart.[8]

In 1927, after I got out, House and Edwards and I and a number of others got a unity committee from both sides working in the Bay area. I went to various construction jobs on my way north, carrying the organizing credentials of the 4-Trey group, yet holding good talks with EP people. In mid-1927 I headed for work on the Cascade railroad tunnel in Washington and the related Chumstick Cutoff. I was there when Sacco and Vanzetti were executed and pulled out three camps in protest of the execution that day—hitting one as the men headed in for lunch, the second in the dining hall at lunch, the third before the camp had set out for lunch. I regret the conference that was planned for that area between the two factions never occurred, because groups of 4-Trey members intercepted the EPs, and prevented them from getting there.

As I considered how such a destructive split could occur, I became more and more suspicious of the then prevalent doctrine of the "militant minority" and of the Communist Party. The "militant minority" doctrine, it seemed to me, held that most people

are wrong, even most people in the union are wrong, and that a small minority knows better than the rest of us do. You can argue that case beautifully. It wasn't so very long ago that only Louis Pasteur believed that there were any germs in the world. I think he was a minority of one at the time. But simply because it is a minority opinion doesn't necessarily mean it's so, either.

The roots of the 1924 split lay, I came to believe, in the presence of a "militant minority" in the Northwest lumber industry. In the summer of '23 loggers from the Northwest met together and decided that the boss was expecting them to strike, was sort of set for them to strike. They felt it an inopportune time to strike. After that decision had been reached in a good democratic way at a time when most of the lumberjacks were in town over the 4th of July, a few of the folks who held to the doctrine of a militant minority—they weren't Communists, but they allowed some of the elitist thinking that I feel is typical of Communist habits—hired airplanes and dropped leaflets all over the lumbercamps saying, "Strike for such and such demands. Release all political prisoners." Of course the Wobbly lumberjacks wouldn't stay in the camps when the strike was called. They came into town and talked it over among themselves, held meetings again and decided this was not the time when they wanted to strike and went back. But, of course, the feeling that they could be called out on a strike entirely contrary to their wishes was not the kind of unionism they wanted. That came about simply because the revolutionary fanatic feels that he knows what is the worker's interest better than the worker himself.

My suspicions of the "militant minority," or any lack of democracy and of factionalism contributed to my increasing distrust of the Communist Party (CP). Some of my suspicions were long-established, dating back to the Canadian experiences I have described. The socialists I grew up with had taught me that the State is essentially a body of folkways, practices and habits and not made out of bricks to be smashed with a hammer. A lot of Wobblies also worried that those people who said, "We are going to acquire the capacity to run this company," were out to run us too. The Communists' attempts to limit the IWW to lumber and agricultural organizing hurt relations in the early 1920s, a time when we actually had more people in the seaman's union, the longshore union and the maritime trades than all the AFL unions combined. Unlike the Communists, we believed that folks we disagreed with

in the labor movement should have free speech. This extended even to Trotsky's followers, despite the fact that I considered Trotsky a son-of-a-gun who had shot down our fellow workers in Petrograd. When the Trotskyites complained that the Communists beat them up when they attempted to hold meetings, we told them they could state their case in our hall, in the interests of free speech.

In the summer of 1928 the General Executive Board asked me to go to Butte to take over the records of I.U. 210-220 and send them to Chicago. I was on the Board at the time. The secretary of I.U. 210 was quitting—there wasn't enough income to pay him a salary—and delegates were to report to Chicago instead of to Butte. In Butte, bundling up the records, I found the correspondence of Kristen Svanum who had earlier been the I.U. 210-220 secretary. It included letters to A.S. Embree, with whom I had worked in Denver and who was also on the Board, and letters to Alexander Howat of the Kansas United Mine Workers union. These letters disclosed that these three and William Z. Foster were already contemplating the creation of a Communist coal miners' union—something the CP did not formally announce until the next year, for they were still in the stage of "boring from within." The correspondence indicated that it might be easier to bring the Colorado miners into such a body because they had avoided issuing them IWW cards and instead had issued white cards saying "Striking Colorado Miner." Prior to going to Butte, I and other Wobs had been questioning this white card policy, but Embree had insisted on the importance of keeping all the miners united whether they were for IWW aims or not. So they issued the white card to all strikers, and the IWW card only to those who asked for it. I sent the correspondence to the IWW in Chicago and a report to all board members including Embree. He made no denial of the plan but contended it was simply something under consideration. Later he was employed by Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers when it was, according to most, under CP control. Nonetheless we should not in retrospect have any illusion that CP antics were what kept the IWW from becoming a successful organization.

Nor were my post-prison years consumed by factionalism and bitterness. Nice things happened in my life. I got married in 1928—first offense of that character in my life. We were divorced and I remarried in the mid-30s. In 1938, my daughter Florence was born. The life of a radical maybe sometimes makes you miss

some meals here and there, but there are many memories to cherish.

The first time I met Matt Valentine Huhta, better known as T-Bone Slim, was at a Saturday night IWW social at 1618 West Madison Street, a hall we had from 1929 through the early '30s. Somebody took me across the hall to introduce me to him, and I felt rather foolish blurting out in some surprise, "Hell, you look just like your picture." There was a picture we ran in his *Industrial Worker* column, of him chawing on a t-bone, and sprouting horns. He did not actually have horns, though they would have seemed appropriate somehow, and I have never seen him chawing on a steak held up by the bone, but still he did look surprisingly like that cartoon. I hadn't expected it to be so lively a resemblance.

I talked with him several times. My main recollection, however, is his writing habit. He regularly kept a pad—not a notebook, but a pad on which he wrote his inspirations in a fine script. In IWW halls, even at socials, lectures, etc., he tended to sit off by himself, without being particularly hermit-like, and now and then add to the material on his pad.

I was the *Industrial Worker* editor for quite a few years in which he was writing. That was off-and-on editing for me. My first such experience was to replace John Gahan for a month so he could go on a speaking tour in 1930. Breaking me in, Gahan said I could take T-Bone's copy and turn it over to the printer without typing it. That was the practice—no editing. I asked Gahan how much I should send in, as there was even then a supply on hand, and Gahan said one printed just how much space one wanted to fill, but there was a more or less customary size for T-Bone's column.

I suspect I was the first to have the temerity to "edit" T-Bone. Since he wrote things down as the ideas struck him, with no particular sequence, and since we had a supply on hand more than could be printed, I later took to the habit of trying to find paragraphs that had some sequence in their content, and link these together. I don't believe I ever changed a word, at least not intentionally, in retyping as was needed to arrange sequence. The result was that T-Bone would read his column and be a bit startled to find things he had written weeks apart put together and making a presentation with some continuity. He said he liked what I was doing with his stuff.

His writing was widely enjoyed among our members and readers, and the projection it gave of him as a person made him

liked. Pieces about what the IWW was doing from time to time mentioned him as our most persistent columnist.

Even though most of his copy was given to the printer without rewrite or editing, our usual amount of misprint occurred in his column, too. This did make him unhappy. It made me realize that he had a great concern for sound sequences, rhythm, etc., and didn't like mistakes that spoiled that.

He was fond of unusual twists that could be given words. He ran a feud with the Hearst newspapers' front-page columnist, Arthur Brisbane. T-Bone called him Arthur Twistbrain and referred to his gems of wisdom as *brisbanalities*. I believe that quip was quoted fairly widely by others who got weary of Brisbane's customary stance of gladhanding the radicals in support of the status quo.

I understand T-Bone was born in Ashtabula, Ohio, which was an extensively Finnish community. I doubt whether he was familiar enough in Finnish to be funny, though he could speak it, and I think some of his work was translated into Finnish.

Usually we Wobs have not been given to modesty, and T-Bone Slim stood out amongst us because he was so damned modest and unassuming. I don't recall his ever holding a union post, or for that matter carrying job delegate credentials. He was not a soapboxer. He was largely a "loner," hoboing alone, rustling a job alone, and often seeking and getting the sort of job that kept him by himself, such as "barge captain," which he was for many seasons in New York port. Not that he was unsociable—he periodically sought and enjoyed company and conversation, or listening to the sound of people talking. But I think he had a sort of built-in recording system for it, and liked to spend ten hours reviewing and digesting these sounds for every hour spent picking them up.

My guess is that he was close to fifty when he died in 1942. He did some fine things—"The Lumberjack's Prayer" is a wonder—but somehow my own favorite is a piece he wrote around 1928 or '29 on why miners should not have the check-off—along the general theme that if a man is old enough to go to work, he ought to be old enough to pay his own dues.

In 1932 in Flint, a policeman to whom I passed a handbill arrested me for doing so. No charges were filed but I was held for investigation by the immigration authorities. The same thing happened in Cleveland in 1935 when I went to the police station during the National Screw strike to protest against strikebreakers being allowed

to brandish weapons. The INS already had pretty good files on me by the time I was pardoned for my criminal syndicalism conviction in 1940. This time I went to them, beginning the process of petitioning to be a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1941. I finished the petition in 1946, was recommended for denial in 1961, lost in court the following year and won on appeal in 1964. Part of the case hinged on my showing continuous residence since 1924. That I paid my dues regularly to the American IWW administration, and would not have if I were out of the country, was important to my case and the longtime keeper of the IWW's books assisted me in showing that, and often in determining where I was when I paid.

The INS also wanted, and got, information concerning my work history, IWW officeholding and political views. When I wrote the INS in 1941, I could say, "I have moved around so much and so much of my employment has been short jobs that it is impossible to put this information on your form," before giving a pretty complete account. The section on work and residence from late 1927 till 1941 read:

> . . . Then to Duluth to teach at Work Peoples College until April 1928. Then to Denver, Colorado, and vicinity organizing miners until July; then to Butte on union business; stayed there working in mines until end of August; returned to Colorado, married in Denver on Sept. 5; went to work erecting a Montgomery Ward Building there, then went to Duluth to Work Peoples College toward the end of November.
>
> April 1929 I went to Denver, worked in a greenhouse, returned for a summer school in Duluth in July, then to Chicago where I worked for the Western Electric Co. . . . quitting in October to take my wife to Denver for an operation so she could be with her folks; then to Duluth to teach until April 1930.
>
> April, May & June 1930 I lived in Chicago, selling electric ranges part of the time. . . . In July I went to Ashtabula, Ohio, to teach a summer school and in August to Detroit for the same purpose. I returned to Chicago staying there until mid-September without work as I recall, then went to Trinidad, Colorado and worked there as a building laborer until November; went to Superior, Colorado to visit the in-laws for a week or so, then again to Duluth to teach.
>
> April 1931 I went to Chicago and edited an IWW paper for a few weeks in May and June. In July I returned to Duluth for a summer school, and then went to Superior, Colorado where I

mined coal until November when I returned to Duluth for the winter, teaching. I stayed in Duluth to the middle of May, 1932, took a trip to Chicago and Milwaukee, returned to Duluth in June for a month's summer school and then to Detroit for another month's summer school. Toward the end of August I went to Flint, Mich., as an IWW organizer, arrested there, held for immigration service—see your C.O. file in St. Paul 55824/668. Remained in Detroit working for IWW until November when I returned again to Work Peoples College in Duluth.

Returned to Detroit in April 1933 for immigration hearing, and remained in Detroit, working for the IWW until February of 1935, except for a few brief trips to Chicago in August 1933, to Cleveland, Philadelphia and New York City in the summer of 1934.

From February 1935 to June 1935 I was in Cleveland working for the IWW, then in Idaho, Oregon, etc. working for the IWW organizing lumber workers until November 1935 when I returned to Work Peoples College in Duluth.

March 1936 I went to Chicago as general secretary of the IWW and at the expiration of my yearly term of office in March 1937, stayed on until June as editor of their paper. Came to Phelps [Wisconsin] for the first time in June, 1937, stayed a few days, went on to Duluth for a month's summer school, then to Cleveland as an IWW organizer until October, then to Phelps for a while, then to Duluth for the winter at Work Peoples College.

In the spring of 1938 returned to Phelps, took up a farm, and have been here ever since except for . . . periods at Work Peoples College.

The state made sure that I would have good records of my jobs and changes of residence in these years.[9]

Short of discussing all these many experiences, I would like to concentrate on two high points which took up my time for considerable stretches: teaching at Work People's College (WPC) and organizing industrial workers in Detroit. Looking back on Detroit, I wish I could dream 1934 again. Both Detroit and WPC held great promise and got some modest, but real, results. As long as we realize that tactics have to fit situations—that those suited to one time and place probably do not fit another—something can be learned by looking at the WPC years and at the Detroit organizing.

Work People's College is a very poor translation of *Tyovaen Opisto*, Finnish for Workers' Institute. It started as a Finnish Lutheran school to train ministers, but became a more general

educational institution. It gradually was taken over by Finnish socialists, and around the time of the Mesabi Range strike, IWW Finns came to predominate in the board that ran it. From 1919 on, it offered its facilities to the IWW for general educational purposes in English, but all costs were defrayed by the Finnish groups, except that students coming were expected either to pay $30 to $39 per month for room, board, tuition, or to acquire a "stipend" for that. These stipends were the result of raffles held by supportive Finnish groups across the country, the winner often not wanting to use the "scholarship" and so selling it for a nominal amount. The Finnish groups who handled this made positions at WPC available at almost nothing to English-speaking job delegates who would accept them to go to Duluth to study, but most wound up giving an easy winter to the son of some Finnish farmer—usually a lad who had little interest in the aims of the school. Such students did, however, make its operation possible. Related to all this is one of my major criticisms of the school: IWW unions should have arranged to make systematic use of it. In the years I taught there, I felt fortunate if among the sixty or so students, there were a dozen who came there with the idea of increasing their capacity as organizers or labor educators.

During the winters beginning in 1927, 1928, 1929, 1931, 1932, 1935, 1937, 1940, and in the summers of 1929, 1931, 1932, 1937, and 1939, I taught economics, labor history and whatever else needed to be taught at WPC. I also taught IWW summer schools at Ashtabula, Ohio in 1930 and in Detroit in 1930 and 1932. My high school education and long experience, going back to my years in Canada, as a teacher to workers' groups helped me as a "professor," but my main technique was to keep it lively by keeping preaching at a minimum and student participation at a maximum. As far as I was concerned, the whole thrust was to get people interested in finding out something else and then getting on their hind legs and talking about it. I tried to get it so that they were doing it and I was the instigator, rather than the lecturer. There were one or two seamen there to whom I taught spherical trig so they could plot great circle courses. Most students needed ordinary arithmetic, especially those who were figuring they might get in the co-op movement. You have to know your arithmetic for that. My presentations of Marx's *Capital* were almost mathematical in a way: What proportion of the working day is the worker working for himself?

If you double our productivity and raise the standard of living ten percent, what's the advantage to the employing class?

The summer schools were especially good, filled with folks as young as ten to seventeen years, who were enthusiastic students in the morning and enthusiastic ball-players or pole-vaulters or what-not the rest of the day. In contrast to some of the winter students, most summer students came expecting and wanting a labor-oriented curriculum and wanting to shine in their own roles therein.

In my classes the most studied book was *The History of Labour in the United States* by John R. Commons and Associates, with an emphasis on Volume Four (1895-1932), after that became available. On economics and economic history we tried to reach some understanding of how we got into the current mess using assignments from Volumes One and Two of the Kerr edition of Marx's *Capital* and Justus Ebert's *IWW in Theory and Practice.* There was no special attempt to counter Communist influences on the students, but the question of Communism did come up in classes. We debated whether Lenin, and before him William Z. Foster, had been right in discouraging left unions like the IWW and encouraging "boring from within" the AFL unions. In sociology, we made considerable use of Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*, at a time when he was being tried by the Stalinists. In economic history, we studied Lenin's and other explanations of imperialism side-by-side. The Soviet war on Finland drew attention as an example of Soviet imperialism.

There were also classes in sociology, public speaking, organizing, basic English grammar, arithmetic and bookkeeping. The students ranged from some who had a bit of college to some who had little knowledge of either English or Finnish, and had been perhaps through the fourth grade. Much study was therefore fitted to the individual, aiming primarily to develop his or her personal capacity. The content normally related to IWW concerns, for example in the topics of English themes and of debates in public speaking classes.

WPC drama troupes toured to raise perhaps a third or half of the school's annual deficit. They usually put on a Finnish play of about thirty to forty-five minutes and a shorter play in English. *One Big Union Monthly*[10] printed one of their plays, "Bankers' Island," a dramatization of an old soapbox speakers's story. There were also shorter skits. They usually had packed halls. Part of this

success grew out of the subculture of the area—farm territory largely settled by blacklisted miners. The Finns backing the school were from a culture that thought well of the Wobblies, whether they themselves were Wobblies or not.

WPC ended with World War Two as its prospective students faced the draft. Its attendance had been dropping in any case. By that time the grandchildren of the founders were speaking English and it probably suffered to the extent that some thought it was a Finnish college. It offered about the same curriculum in Finnish and English to more and more English-speaking students. The good things about it were many, including an opportunity for me to teach with the great Southern Wobbly organizer, Covington Hall. Hall, a prolific poet, hated the Minnesota winters but shared my love of the verses of Robert Burns and of Shelley. WPC also gave me the opportunity to teach at least two students who later became college professors and a number who went on to organize workers. But the numbers of organizers we produced was too small. I think that good labor education goes hand in hand with organizing and wished then, and wish now, that we could have set up accommodations for organizer-students in Detroit, Cleveland and other places where organizing drives were happening. Their days could have been spent partly on organizing chores, partly in systematic study and always in trying to relate one to the other.

Organizing certainly taught me a lot, especially in Detroit between 1932 and 1935, when the IWW captured the ears of workers in the auto industry. The labor movement of the early 30s was really born out of the unemployed who were insisting, "Don't be afraid to go on strike. We won't come and scab. We'll knock down anyone who does come around trying to scab on you." The revival of unions came as much out of the neighborhoods as out of the factories. Our neighborhood street meetings in Detroit were a typical, hopeful act at a time when job organization seemed hopeless even in a city like Detroit, where the IWW had enjoyed a presence for two decades, had a fair-sized hall at 3747 Woodward and had a local ranging from 50 to 150 members well before the organizing upsurge of 1933. Soapbox meetings focused on a general denunciation of the system and gave us the small start in spreading IWW philosophy we used the following year in organizing at factories. The meetings also made clear the tie between unemployed and employed workers making the employed feel able to dare to strike

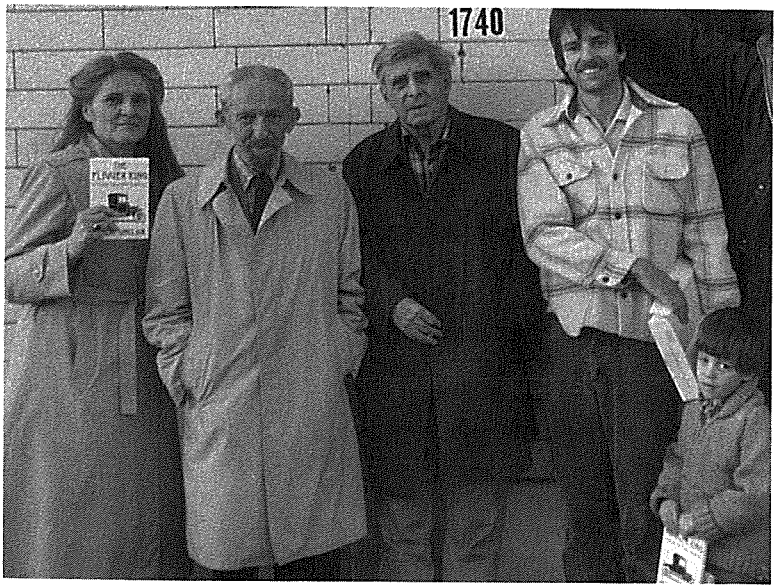
against the wage cuts of late 1933 and 1934. Through them we met people like the motherly old soul none of us knew who brought a big pitcher of lemonade as I finished a summer evening of soapboxing in Clark Park.

Soapboxing in parks was not entirely our preference, and neighborhood meetings disappeared as factory gate activities took their place. Sometimes the transition from being a soapboxer for an "ism" to being a union organizer was not easy. In late summer of 1933 when I returned to Detroit to begin a long stay there, the organizing campaign at Murray Body, the IWW's most successful in Detroit, was under way. We had soapboxed at Murray Body for weeks with little result. Then Leon Pody, a metal worker who had joined us earlier in 1933 as a result of the Briggs strike, told us that the finishers were angry about not having new files to replace worn-down ones. Frank Cedervall made a noontime talk poking fun at management for the files and that was the start of our making real progress there. The best information for making an appeal concrete has to come from those on the job.

Several former Briggs Company activists came to Murray Body, often after Briggs fired them. Wobbly organizers got jobs on each of Murray Body's floors. They soon recruited about a thousand members, almost all within the months of August and early September, 1933. This was an astronomical figure for an organization which had only five to twelve members in the other scattered Detroit factories at which it had a presence. For a brief period the IWW was the constructive hope among those seeking industrial unionism in auto. We looked forward to the possibility that the IWW would be the major industrial union in Detroit. Just as quickly, the Murray Body organization was drawn into a smash-up, a strike coinciding with layoffs as car models changed. The strike was lost, along with most of the jobs of the organizers and the momentum of the drive. Even so, we maintained a presence in Detroit for a time thereafter. Pody went on to Hudson Motor Car and got the idea of passing out printed cards—for which I cut the stencil and did the mimeographing—saying "'Sit Down and Watch Your Pay Go Up.'' Hudson workers, using such tactics, won round after round of wage increases in winter of 1934. One reason to use Pody's tactic was to show that the IWW was in the plant rather than outside leafleting it.

Always broke, we managed to distribute over a million pieces of literature at plant gates in Detroit in the first half of the 30s. When I conjure up my picture of the thirties the old mimeograph machine sits there front and center, somewhat surrealistically surrounded by hands reaching out at change of shift from some plant a mile or two away. With treasurer Gust Hunt digging into the bottom of the Bull Durham tobacco sack where he kept the funds, we even managed to buy time for pro-Wobbly publicity on radio station WEXL. We put on plays and ran dances where kids as young as eight, organized in the Junior Wobblies, shared the floor with folks as old as eighty. We drew no firm line between recreation and propaganda, for if one was full of spaghetti, drinking wine and singing Wobbly songs it was hard to tell the socializing from the propaganda. We used drama and music like printers' ink to make our points, to lambaste the system.

Ultimately we Wobblies got very little in the way of lasting membership out of all this work. Within a few years after our efforts the United Auto Workers (UAW) had done what we failed to do by organizing auto workers across craft lines. Historians have noted that several Wobs became important UAW organizers and stewards. These included Pody, Nick DiGaetano, Perly P. McManus, Lloyd Jones and John W. Anderson. I admired all these leaders but would want to suggest that the IWW's influence on the best of the early UAW was far more in the people whose names are forgotten, who read the leaflets, went to IWW department meetings at Murray Body and developed an expectation of what a union should do and of how it should be something to enable them to do together things they could not do individually. One obvious carryover is the use of the term "solidarity" and of the song "Solidarity Forever." Back in the 20s I was peddling *Industrial Solidarity* on the streets in Denver and someone asked me what language it was in, since the "solidarity" in the title was a strange word. We did make it better known.[11]



At a Charles H. Kerr Company Board of Directors' Meeting, 1984.
l to r, Penelope Rosemont, Theo Waldinger, Fred Thompson, David Roediger, Brendan Roediger

"OLD WOBBLY": AN AFTERWORD

In a series of speeches to the Canadian Student Association in Waterloo, Ontario in 1970, Thompson gave a talk on his own life but trailed off at about the time of his twenty-seventh birthday. He had talked a long time, he said, and had managed to cover the time until he was "middle-aged." He then wove later personal experiences into a separate talk of the recent history of the IWW. This book uses letters and interviews to tell Thompson's story in his own words up until the actual midpoint of his life, the early 1940s. It becomes impossible to continue to do so in a sustained narrative after that point.

The destruction of the IWW's remaining industrial base in Cleveland, where Thompson had helped to organize and maintain unions which often succeeded in bargaining with management at places like American Stove, Magic Chef, and smaller steel-barrel and brass plants in the late 30s and 40s, came quickly with the Cold War. When the Wobblies found a place on the Attorney-General's "subversive list" in 1949, the IWW, in Fred's words, "felt it might be better for these people [to] protect their job interests [by] going

into another union rather than staying with us.''[12] *After that point, Thompson was an editor, an historian and an instrumental force in keeping the IWW together, but he was not, by and large, a union activist. One result was that labor historians tended to quiz him on his last forty years far less than on his first forty. Another was that he wrote of the later period not as autobiography but as history which incorporated reminiscences, as in* The IWW: Its First Fifty Years *(Chicago, 1955) and the revised (with Patrick Murfin)* The IWW: Its First Seventy Years *(Chicago, 1976). When he wished to make a political point, he often referred to the more dynamic earlier decades of his experiences rather than to the less eventful recent past.*

In a paradoxical way, one is tempted to say that the best avenue toward finding out what Thompson was thinking in his last decades is to look at what he was remembering about his earlier decades and researching about the more distant past. But this is at best a partial insight and a misleading one if taken to imply that he was a sad or lonely figure whom time had passed by. He was full of life and utterly in touch with the present, including the antiwar movement, and with the future. In 1971, he got a chance to repay an old debt to the Charles H. Kerr Company, publishers of the socialist classics he had read as a youth. Along with Irving Abrams, Virgil Vogel and Burt Rosen, he set out to make sure the ''Salvation Army [would not] get the last of the Marxist [Kerr] classics and . . . turn them into wastepaper.'' [Thompson, quoted in Alan Maass, ''The Little Red Book House,'' Chicago Reader *(17 October 1986), 12]. Characteristically this gesture toward the past—the original idea was dignified dispersal of the inventory of the 84-year-old publisher—ended with Thompson and the others reorganizing the company and giving it a future. He liked new language and new things. In one of his early 60s letters, he referred to a fellow worker as a '''cat from the West'' [Thompson to Roberta McBride, 17 September 1963] and in the 80s he wrote of his appreciation for modern ''things the old rebels would have loved [like] global TV shows'' [Thompson to Pixler, 12 July 1985]. He was likewise capable of very fresh new interpretive writings, like* World Labor Needs a Union *(Chicago, 1969) and of arresting, prescient insights on labor and ecology.*

But none of this existed in contradiction to Thompson's concern with the past, for in important ways he perceived that memory

is itself political and that the past could bring him together with young people instead of dividing him from them. In my own case, he was an extraordinarily gentle teacher, almost via parables. I often heard the warning against ultra-leftism, delivered by an old-timer to Thompson in his youth: "Don't get so far ahead of the parade that you can't hear the band." Much of what Fred taught addressed the tendency for young people, at first gung-ho revolutionaries, to despair quickly. He pointed out that at one time coal miners in one "holler" hated those in the next. Meager as progress sometimes seemed, we had gone all the way from that situation to "inter-holler" unionism and to national organization. Global unionism was not then an idle hope. He was also very fond of likening a modern radical's situation to that of a sandhog (tunnel worker) during a tunnel collapse: There was no sure way out of this mess but every reason to keep trying.

Because the material in this afterword is so much more episodic than that in the other chapters, there is a brief individual subheading for each division in it.

"I Got Into the Publishing Business"

Thompson's association with the Charles H. Kerr Company is bound up with his relations with the Proletarian Party, a small Marxist grouping whose members ran the publishing house from the mid-1920s until 1971. Thompson's accounts of the Proletarian Party and the Kerr Company came mainly in letters to Franklin Rosemont (1 August 1983), to John R. Salter (10 May 1983), to John R. Lind (16 August 1971) and in drafts of various promotional letters written on behalf of the Kerr Company. Taken together, these sources provide a rich account of a chapter in the history of left publishing in the U.S., and suggest that sectarian differences did not always prevent highly positive interchanges among radicals in differing political tendencies.

Probably no labor publishing service has been at it so long, anywhere, as the Charles H. Kerr Company of Chicago. Charles H. Kerr founded a publishing company in March 1886 to issue the magazine *Unity* and pamphlets expressing the social concerns of Unitarian radicals. In 1894 the Rev. William Carwardine found

publishers unwilling to print his description of the conditions that led to the Pullman Strike; Kerr published it and gave all proceeds to the strikers. Soon Debs was writing articles on socialism to run in Kerr's magazine, *The New Time*, alongside a serialization of William Morris' utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*. In 1900 the firm started the monthly *International Socialist Review*, arranged for translation of Marx's *Capital*, and became the leading socialist publisher in America—independent, however, of any party control.

Sometime in the 1920s John Keracher and others in the Proletarian Party bought Charles H. Kerr's shares in the publishing house he had started in 1886. The Proletarian Party was a militant group that originated around World War One in the Socialist Party of Michigan, which was ousted from the national Socialist Party. Perhaps "militant" is an incorrect word for the PP: Their emphasis was on the study of Marx rather than on action, though they spoke kindly of most militant labor action, and were friendly to the IWW.

The first live socialists I met were members of the Socialist Party of Canada, a "sister party" of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, represented in the U.S. by the World Socialist Party. During World War One some of its members, moving back and forth to Detroit, were in contact with and perhaps members of the groupings within the SP of Michigan that gave birth to the PP, so that despite substantial doctrinal differences, there was a warm relationship. I was active in the SP of Canada, and wrote in its journal even after I came to the U.S. in 1922. When I came to San Francisco I found the Proletarian Party there a natural both for involvement and for good fellowship, though for doctrinal reasons I did not join it. It was in San Francisco that I joined the IWW and became active in it, too. I don't recall my PP friends being surprised or shocked or disappointed in this, though none of them belonged to the IWW, and they assigned an historic role to the importance of parties that would not be welcomed in the IWW, even though the IWW has never to my knowledge turned anyone away because of his political philosophy or connections. During that same period I mixed with socialists at McDonald's Labor College as well as with Communists under whatever their name was then. I even visited the Socialist Labor Party and was viewed there as a curiosity.

For purity of Marxist doctrine, no doubt the PP would get an A. The most bizarre group of fakirs had taken hold of the CP in

1920, dominating it through foreign-language federations taken over from the SP, which were built up of newcomers, especially Russians, who had minimal acquaintance with economics or any other relevant subject. As a friend put it to me in 1920, the CP "lived in the miasmata of their own effulgences."

In early years the PP had hopes of becoming a large party. Certainly the role it cut out for itself in those years was to acquaint American workers with their class status, with the "headfixing industry"[13] and with the bare bones of their exploitation. I expect they would have viewed their function in a time of revolutionary crisis to have a larger organizational element and not be so confined to educational work. They did believe that the emancipation of the working class was something the working class would have to do, and would have to educate itself to do it. The PP offered speakers to pep up strikes, and felt it was important that workers win strikes and not lose them. But they felt unions could achieve only rather limited gains, and that building a non-capitalist society was a job for The Party—and it had to be the simon-pure right party, too.

I had my first contact with John Keracher by correspondence when I was in San Quentin. There I made a very thorough reading of the first three volumes of *Capital*, Kerr edition, even summarizing each chapter (I've often wished I had retained those notes). In doing so I found some passages that made no sense, syntactically or algebraically, in the second and third volumes. I wrote a long, detailed letter to the Kerr Company pointing these out. In return I received a letter from Keracher saying he would look into it. A month or so later he wrote again, in more detail, saying he had asked associates familiar with the German edition to check these passages, and in all instances found they were either poor translations or simply garbled typesetting not caught by proofreaders. It was a very cordial letter and impressed me favorably with Keracher. He was a genial human being, and it showed in his writings.

I should mention that once I had made contact as a boy with twentieth-century socialists who breathed and smoked, my favorite reading had largely come from the Charles H. Kerr Company. I had looked forward to coming to Chicago some day, and high on my list of things to do there was to visit the Kerr Company. Yet I was here in Chicago for years, starting as a short visit in 1929, and though I met people active in the Kerr Company, I didn't visit

the Company until 1970. I saw the PP's publication, *The Proletarian*, off and on [in the 1920s], but my next contact would have been either in Detroit or Flint, *circa* 1933-34. PP members came to IWW socials in Detroit at the time, and I had a debate at an open forum with the PP, something about running candidates in state of Michigan elections. In Flint I had warm friendship with PP members. They gave me free use of the Proletarian Party Hall, while I was looking for connections there to build the IWW, rally support for Kentucky miners, and build the IWW's General Defense Committee. Two of the PP members were brothers who operated a drugstore (I believe their father had lost money on Bill Haywood's bond[14]) and it was a place I felt welcome to drop in. They gave me access to old mailing lists in the area for folks it would be worthwhile to visit. I got arrested in Flint and was held for deportation—arrested while passing out handbills announcing a meeting about what was going on in Harlan, Kentucky, and since I could not be at the meeting, IWW members from Detroit came there and, in cooperation with PP people, arranged a good meeting.

In 1936-37 for about eighteen months I lived in Chicago, and during that time I noticed that a handful of folks from the PP attended our socials and picnics, and were warm friends. During World War Two I was I.U. 440 secretary in Cleveland, and Keracher came there to address some non-IWW meeting, but asked about visiting our job-branch meetings. He did visit a couple and told good union jokes.

This is a long record of friendly relations personally and also between the PP and the IWW. Yet I had no doubt that if our discussions were confined to analysis of theoretical positions, we would be at loggerheads, more so probably than with socialists of other varieties. Perhaps the explanation lies there: The SLP, for example, is theoretically in favor of what the IWW is trying to build, and there is no warmth between them; the PP was not theoretically congruent, yet personal relations were warm.

Under PP control the Kerr Company dwindled and was about to die in the late 1960s. The PP at that time seemed to consist only of a handful of people, and the one who had been handling the Kerr Company business, Al Wysocki, was dying. The Kerr stock was warehoused, and rent on warehousing it was due with no funds on hand. I feared their stock might experience the sacrilege of being sold as waste paper, so a few of us leftists who happened to

be together at Carlos Cortez's wedding decided to raise enough for the Kerr Company's decent burial, and the disposition of its stock of books and pamphlets to groups that could sell them or make some use of them. What came out of it, to my surprise, was an effort to resurrect the Kerr Company, by adding to its Board of Directors some of us who weren't in the Proletarian Party. In 1971 the Kerr Company was reorganized as a not-for-profit corporation by a group representing various labor and radical tendencies.

So inadvertently I got into the publishing business. The Kerr Company, which has operated continuously since 1886, thinks of itself as the publisher to the working class—the whole class, and all segments of it. It has had the cooperation of the various labor history societies that have developed across the country in recent years. We need the support of those in the labor movement who want to promote the ideals of labor, and help contribute to the further education of workers, to make them more effective unionists, and thus strengthen the ability of labor to defend its interests.

These Kids Today

In 1965, Thompson replied to an old IWW friend who had written in distress over the IWW and New Left generally in the Bay Area. Thompson's remarkable letter was that of someone who wished young radicals would take different paths, but also wanted to understand the directions they were taking and to work with them. He wrote in "Thompson to Herb Edwards" (14 August 1965):

The term "sexual revolution" refers to changes in attitudes and behaviors of the sort advocated by Wilhelm Reich. I have not read his stuff, but second-handed I gather the argument to go something like this: If there is to be substantial social change it must be brought about by individuals whose personality structure permits them to engage in the efforts to bring it about; the personality structure of the people on hand is that shaped by our own past and present with its many forces inhibiting the development of the autonomous type of personality needed to bring about a free society; these inhibitions have largely been sex-oriented; therefore, in the view of this school, we should not count on history generating changes that will produce the more ideal human personality, but instead we must

struggle also for the freeing of all chances for that type to develop within the present authoritarian and exploitative society. The school's practical conclusion, I understand, is that encouraging copulation earlier in life, and with greater frequency during adolescence, will remove these inhibitions, develop a loving, outgoing, constructive, autonomous practicer of solidarity and revolt.

The theoretic has obvious merit; the practical conclusion runs up against such readily made observations as that many of the current group of adolescents who do just that are not developing the specified personality structure, but instead becoming rather exploitative and sadistic. To that an answer can be given that even their early sex relations are tainted in the same way and are in the nature, from the boy's point of view, of exploiting the girl friend, ''collecting'' as it is sometimes phrased, and of use of the girl to obtain pleasure with little thought of giving it, and in that sort of sense, not Sade's, sadistic. (The common use of terms for copulation as pejoratives indicates the attitude quite clearly). My practical conclusion is that while both sides probably have merit in their argument, the nature of the dispute shows the issue to be indeterminate, and evidently not of quite such moment or tactical importance as the Reich followers insist. There are some rather good rebels brought up on Victorian inhibitions.

Getting back to the boys in the Bay Area—and the girls—while I have gotten very perturbed over some of their actions, and even wondered at times was someone using them in an effort to destroy the IWW, still they do get active about good causes too, and they do have the advantage of youth. I remember how old members looked averse at me when I was a new member ''wet behind the ears'' and I suppose they feel much the same as I did then. We must build with those who will help us build, for we can build with no others. I am painfully aware that growth is largely a process of assimilation: an organization, especially one that organizes truly voluntarily with no job inducements, tends to attract to it those individuals who feel at home with those who are already in it; and thus what we can expect to get depends on the impression we create. That is one reason why I wish you were doing more of the organizing. You can work with the young. (You are only middle-aged, the age that comes between adolescence and obsolescence).

Changing Labor

In an undated, but probably 1961, draft of a letter to the INS concerning his naturalization, Thompson outlined his views on everything from nationalism, to cybernetics, to the Cold War, to the atomic bomb. He included a striking section on World War Two and the postwar labor movement:

I have found that the most democratic constitution is no guarantee that a union will practice democracy unless the habits of thought of its members make them feel personally responsible for maintaining democracy. Such habits of thinking have been on the decline. Union members today tend to speak of their union as "It" or "They," discarding the "we" or "us" that was wordage in my younger days. The change in pronouns has corresponded to an actual change in relations. This change became almost customary during World War II, when issues that formerly would have been settled at the job had to be argued before War Labor Board or similar bodies, which thus transferred these functions "downtown." It started earlier, and I have been much concerned with it. Where Veblen had anticipated a growth of rational outlook among machine tenders as what he termed "the cultural incidence of the machine process," I noted this was largely frustrated by what in parallel terms could be called "the cultural incidence of the time clock." From punch-in to punch-out the worker is under a discipline of doing the bidding of others, where it is not deemed proper to show initiative or assume responsibilities, where problems are things to refer to others, as the foreman or the shop steward. Workers appear slowly to have transferred this attitude from the job to their free hours. This formative timeclock situation has been with us for generations, but even in my own youth it had not taken hold of free time. The tradition of workers deciding for themselves was still powerful; the chances still seemed good that one might escape from wage labor; in the union hall men met to look at the available information, reach a decision which became their instruction to their officers. In all these relations changes in the same direction have pushed each other along. Forty years ago any large public meeting concerned with a major social issue drew an audience chiefly of wage workers. Today such meetings are attended by those who do not punch time-clocks, with labor represented, much as

in collective bargaining, by those it too has exempted from the time clock.

Stickin' to the Union (and to Socialism)

Even as he continually reformulated his positions, Thompson remained a firm supporter of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist Party-U.S.A. Two of his most sustained reflections on these continuing loyalties occurred in letters to Bill Shakalis (21 October 1974) and to Michael Tatham (12 February 1982). In the former letter Thompson explained why he saw no conflict in holding "socialist and syndicalist ideas" simultaneously:

I have been a socialist in my thinking ever since about 1914 when I got in touch with the Socialist Party of Canada. I was active in it, in the Labour Party of Nova Scotia and the One Big Union in Canada up to the time I left there in 1922. I feel my activity in the OBU there and in the IWW here grew out of my socialist outlook. I don't think I ever felt that we would get a brand new world marked "Patented by Socialist Party," or IWW, or whatever, but that whatever replaces capitalism would be the product of the whole anti-capitalist movement and bound to carry traits of its conflicting founders into a new sort of conflict which I prefer to the kind we have now.

A socialism with democratic industrial unionism as its base is what I hope for as end-product—at least "end" for the time being—and since socialism for me has far more meaning as the movement to bring about the new society than as a term to describe it, I'm concerned not only with the institutions labor develps within capitalism, but even more with the folkways and shopfloor practices, and believe me, there we have a long way to go if we want to miss Siberia.

That is a rather clumsy way of saying that for me personally my socialist and syndicalist ideas merge and integrate and give me no great conflict. But I know good socialists who shy from syndicalism, and good Wobs who shy from socialism. I feel it is futile and divisive and counterproductive in the Socialist Party to press for IWW positions or commitments, or in the IWW to recruit for the Socialist Party. You say you feel there is room and need for various types of political action as well as for economic action; so do I, and that is why I am a member of the Socialist Party,

U.S.A., and since you feel that way, welcome to its ranks; but I see no point in inducing folks who don't feel that way to join it.

Until I became a citizen of the U.S.A. I did not see the propriety of belonging to any political party here, though I participated in many SPA activities. Shortly after I became a citizen and joined the SPA, it fell for that weird Shachtmanite twist of bedding down with the Democratic Party, supporting the war in Vietnam, etc. That I could not stomach, so I withdrew. A while back, after that crew gave up the name Socialist Party, others who had felt the same way as I did, including some who had remained members in opposition to those policies, took the name over and are currently trying to build a party in the general tradition of Berger, Debs, Thomas, Kautsky *et al.* It is deliberately an "umbrella" party, avoiding dogma, and I feel quite at home in it.

Perhaps my attitude toward participation in both the IWW and the SP-USA would be clearer if I added that if there were a food co-op store nearby, I would feel I should buy there; if there were a daily labor paper here, that I should subscribe to it even though I quarreled with the editor; if there were labor cultural institutions in which I could participate and had the time, I would do that, too.

Thompson's letter to Tatham directly addressed queries as to how he had managed to persist as an IWW member:

Why do I stick with the IWW? Simple—because it set out to do something that needs to be done and isn't finished yet.

I look out my window and see my neighbors' children head for school. I recall that there are generals and corporation heads and ornery politicians with some unpleasant plans for these kids, and I know that this is no time for me to give up on the unfinished business of the IWW.

Sure I have other interests and causes: Amnesty International, socialism, peace, environmental protection, etc., etc., but I see little point to any of these unless workers develop a substantial voice about the work they do, how they do it, and where they ship the product. Industrial democracy is indispensable to any good cause.

I gather your question may not be so much why did I stick, but why did a million or so join but not stick, and millions more not even join? The miracle of capitalism is that the working class supports it, and somewhere in that mystery lies your answer.

I have stuck perhaps because I saw a bit clearer than others the importance of sticking; but there is much else. You mention the many discouragements our members have faced. I have had little discouragement. I have had three wives—no, not at the same time—and all of them have encouraged my involvement with the IWW; I have known members not so fortunate in their families. From my first contact with the IWW, it offered me unusual chances to say my piece: talking, writing, editing, etc. I expect most of those who joined and left did not have these satisfactions to the extent that I did. Somehow I wind up answering letters from students, and letters such as yours, all of which leave the pleasant feeling that I am really somebody.

Yes, I've lost jobs on account of union activity—but I figure that usually ended in my getting a more congenial job. My life certainly has not been worse than the life of most non-Wobs; I've had more to enjoy than they had. If in my early days I hoboed around missing meals, so did the non-Wobs on those trains with me. Jails, yes, but I've met some fine people there, too—Wobs and non-Wobs; the cuisine was bad but we improved it; we should have made those places co-educational; and certainly the fact that the lackeys of the upper crust threw me in the slammer is no reason to give up the fight to shove them out of the manger.

Toward a Third Way and a New World

On July 11, 1961 Thompson typed "A Short Summary of My Social Views." In many ways this two-page document was a restatement of old Wobbly principles, but he had begun to emphasize, in a way strikingly like C. L. R. James [see Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, C. L. R. James and "The Struggle for Happiness" *(New York, 1991), 21-24], the impossibility under modern conditions of separating the struggle of the working class from the struggle for the survival of all humanity. In a world consumed by Cold War, and largely able to see only an American Way and a Soviet Way, Thompson's emphasis on a "third way," a "union way," had to be dismissed by many as both antiquated and utopian. Whether his views can now be so easily dismissed is another question.*

At first Thompson tended to express the reason that labor's and humanity's fate had become inseparable in terms of the need to prevent nuclear holocaust. H-bombs, Thompson argued in a 1985

letter, "have ended the validity" of Ralph Chaplin's expectation in the labor anthem "Solidarity Forever," that "We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old." He gradually expanded this antinuclear stance into a critique of the ways the Soviet and American capitalist systems courted ecological disaster, and began to argue that seeing the world in these terms necessitated that the labor movement, and even the radical labor movement, had to thoroughly reinvent itself. The concrete political expression of this idea was Thompson's persistent agitation over his last years for a broad, all-labor May Day celebration which would keep the socialist connections of the holiday but would also recapture the "green," pre-1889 roots of celebrating on May 1. He proposed a brilliantly simple slogan, which he argued was labor's demand, for such a celebration: "Let's Make this Planet a Good Place to Live."

To convey, however imperfectly, this evolution of Thompson's thought, this section reproduces six paragraphs from Thompson's "Short Summary of My Social Views," then one from "Thompson to Penny Pixler" (12 July 1985) and finally one drawn from "Thompson to Graham Moss (4 December 1976).

Where many people view unionism as one of a long list of current social problems, I view it as a process whose more complete development can provide a solution for most of the remaining problems, or at least re-shape them so that their solution becomes easier.

The labor union movement is an institutional development with indirect historic consequences of even greater importance than its direct bargaining achievements. The growth of modern industry itself is such a consequence, for without the wage demands of organized labor it would not have paid to mechanize so extensively. Modern industrial society set out with a working class torn from its previous sources of security and put in to a situation where it was without effective voice in its own affairs. By repeated trespasses on the previous prerogatives of management, the labor movement has changed this. To accomplish its wage and related objectives, it is steadily impelled to push against managerial prerogatives. It is my expectation that it will continue to do this, and by doing this become the major institution for co-ordinating and directing our economic activities in a post-capitalist society. The IWW does not

create this historic development, but it favors it and tries to make the world aware of it.

The current situation gives me additional reasons for favoring this point of view. For technical reasons, man's work becomes steadily more interdependent, requiring more extensive coordination. This has resulted in systems for centralized control, either as government control, or control by corporate structures, or by combinations of the two. The same general trend is visible in such diverse social situations as the Soviet system, American industry, the recent ill-fated attempts at fascism, or the middle-of-the-road mixed economies of northern Europe or India. It seems apparent that the trend is for industrial life to be controlled either by corporations or by politicians, or—the third possible way—by organizations of those doing the industrial work.

Our past experience shows the shortcomings of control by corporations or by politicians or by a combination of the two. We should not close our minds to the third possibility, that of control over industry by the democratic organization of those engaged in it. It should be noted that already almost all of those engaged in all phases of industry, including the front office, are now hired hands. This too is a modern development, and substantially worldwide.

The process of social change in our times has become characterized by a race between those economies in which the corporation is a major institution and those in which a communist government has replaced it. The race is one for technical advance, military might, national prestige, and economic and military alliances with less developed areas. Recent technical programs have yielded to both sides such items as H-bombs and missiles. This race, carried on in this way, menaces the human race and may even make its survival questionable.

If the labor unions were to assert their constructive capacities, and proceed to plan how best to use the world's resources for the good of mankind, and to seek agreement that they be permitted to carry out their plans, this change would put the great problem of our day into a shape that permitted solution. In this and in many other respects the labor movement can accomplish what even best-intentioned governments and corporations cannot accomplish. I favor democratic industrial unionism. I want the labor movement to develop its organization and its channels of communication, so that it can make the third way, the union way, a choice available

to the human race.

One change of my thoughts runs this way: I used to think workers in the industrialized countries would make a nice revolution and then the rest of the world would follow belatedly as we directed our attention to the problems of the colonial world. And labor movements would be the central agency of change. But in the race the labor movement has been the tortoise, and the folks who play with H-bombs have been the hare. This has given us a different problem than classic socialists or classic anarchists or classic unionists have faced: How do we get the human species to survive long enough to permit more rational developments? The old equator was between classes; the new one between those of all classes bent toward nuclear madness, and those of all classes struggling for the survival of the species. It's a switch that came about not from splitting parties, but from splitting atoms.

There is an old labor tradition that jobs are good and more jobs are better—that any stimulation of demand for goods and services (or disservices), no matter how useless or destructive, is beneficial for it makes more jobs. This slant, although we must never lose sight of the need to do something pronto for the unemployed who need help, has ceased to be appropriate. Waste is not the solution, waste of time, of men or of means. We must resist the liberal demand for growth when this means hierarchical management of us and of resources. The problem of mankind in these days, whether we face full employment or massive unemployment, is how the human race can make good use of Planet Earth. The demand of the unemployed for *useful* work is the most threatening demand they can make on capitalism. They should not leave the selection of such projects to others, but should arrange to do the work that they want to get done.

An IWW "Silent Agitator" Sticker

NOTES

1. For context, and a specific reference to the incident Thompson describes, see David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes, 1899-1916," *Labour/Le Travail*, 4 (1979), 85-114, esp. 110.

2. *Socialist Songs* originally appeared on 15 January 1900 as No. 11 in Charles H. Kerr's "Pocket Library of Socialism," and was reprinted many times. A larger collection, *Socialist Songs With Music*, was published the following year and went through at least four editions.

3. On Fillmore, see Frank and Reilly, *op cit.* and Nicholas Fillmore, *Maritime Radical: The Life and Times of Roscoe Fillmore* (Toronoto: Between the Lines). The secondary sources cast doubt on Fillmore's attendance at Mount Allison and on his having a theological education generally.

4. That is, Socialist Party of Great Britain.

5. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was a Communist-initiated internationalist force in which Americans fought against Franco's fascist troops during the Spanish Civil War.

6. In rejecting an appeal of Thompson *et al.* on 27 October 1924, California's Third District Court of Appeals justified use of hearsay testimony to the effect that an IWW not on trial had once bragged to a government informer of "plac[ing] potassium hydroxide in several men's shoes," because "the record is replete with innumerable unlawful acts committed by members of the I.W.W." The "criminal character" of the union had been established and this "justified, . . . drawing the inference of the guilty knowledge of the defendants," since they were members. See 229 *Pacific Reporter*, pp. 896-98.

7. For a fuller treatment, see Thompson, "They Didn't Suppress the Wobblies," *Radical America*, 1 (September-October, 1967).

8. The "4-trey" or "110" faction of the IWW was so called because its leadership centered at IWW headquarters, then located at 3333 West Belmont Avenue in Chicago, and its major supporters were officers and members of Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union 110. The competing "decentralist" faction proposed an "Emergency Program" for the union, and hence were often known as "EP's"; most of its supporters were members of Lumber Workers' Industrial Union 120 in the northwest.

9. In this paragraph and several other instances, materials are drawn from Thompson's letters to immigration officials. Obviously these letters were part of politically-motivated proceedings and Thompson had goals in his communications with the authorities. In the 1930s, he wished to avoid deportation and from 1941 until he succeeded in 1964 he pressed for naturalization. Nonetheless, and this is perhaps one reason that his dealings with immigration officials lasted thirty-three years, he appears to have been utterly straightforward in answering questions. As late as 1962, he was still pointing out to authorities pressing him on whether he would defend the U.S. versus Australia, if Australia was governed by the IWW, that this was not a very good question. See "Amended Findings of Fact" for "Petition for Naturalization Examiner"; see also Frederick Willard Thompson v. INS (United States Court of Appeals for the Seventy Circuit. September Term, 1963. No. 140454.

10. *One Big Union Monthly* was a publication of the IWW in the U.S., not one of the OBU to which Thompson had belonged in Canada.

11. The UAW named its magazine *Solidarity* and its headquarters Solidarity House.

12. Thompson, "Speeches and Discussion Before the Canadian Student Association in Waterloo, Ontario" (1970, Roosevelt University transcript), 171 and 286-87. Thompson's writing on the IWW in Cleveland and on the problems raised by the Taft-Hartley Act and the "subversive list" for the IWW is of considerable value but it is not cast as memoir.

13. A pioneering Marxist critique of mass-media manipulation, John Keracher's pamphlet, *The Head-Fixing Industry*, was first published by the Proletarian Party in the late 1920s and later reissued in revised editions by Charles H. Kerr.

14. William D. Haywood and eight other indicted IWWs forfeited bond by going to the USSR intead of Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1921. Communists had agreed to make up the bond losses, but failed to do so, leaving the large sums to be paid by Wobblies and their friends.

At IWW headquarters, 2422 North Halsted Street, Chicago, *circa* 1945. *l to r,* Walter Westman, Charles Velsek, Jenny Velsek, Fred Thompson

Appendix
FRED THOMPSON: WOBBLY AND SCHOLAR

by Franklin Rosemont

IWW editor, historian, and president of the Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, Fred Thompson died 9 March 1987, in Chicago, at the age of 86. Active in the Industrial Workers of the World for nearly 65 years, he was the most influential Wobbly since the 1930s. For countless younger radicals and labor activists today, Thompson provided a unique personal link to the IWW heritage.

Youngest in a family of five brothers and two sisters, Frederick Willard Thompson was born 5 June 1900, in Saint John, New Brunswick. A radical in his early teens, he started attending meetings of the Socialist Party of Canada, joined as soon as its bylaws permitted (probably at 16), and not long afterward became secretary of the Saint John local. In 1920 he took part in the Halifax Shipyards strike—an important part, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who, in a 24 July 1920 report, noted that the strike "apparently in considerable part was the work of F. W.

Thompson, a boy of not much more than 19 years of age. He was employed by the Halifax Shipyards Company on 11th May. He at once organized the labourers into an industrial union called the Marine Trades and Labour Federation; and he had the men out by 1st June." When this RCMP evaluation of his role was first brought to his attention a few years ago by a Canadian student, Thompson pronounced it exaggerated and false. But there is no doubt that he was already at 19 a significant force in the labor movement. His friends included such prominent figures as Roscoe Fillmore ("the first socialist to impress me as knowing his subject thoroughly"), George Borland, and Donald Stewart, the last of whom regaled him with harrowing tales of Chartist battles with police decades earlier in Britain. When Thompson gave classes on Marx's *Capital* to groups of workers in the hall above the offices of the Halifax *Citizen* (a labor paper which published his first news-story), most of his students were far older than their teen-aged teacher; some had long before belonged to the Knights of Labor.

In summer 1920 Thompson headed west for the harvest and joined the Canadian One Big Union, a group he later described as having combined IWW structure with "the general ambience of the Labour Party in Britain in its somewhat radical 1919 period." He participated in OBU activity in Saskatoon and Edmonton as well as in Calgary, where he was especially involved in organizing the unemployed. When OBU members were charged with conspiring to overthrow His Majesty's government in the aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike, Thompson's name was included in the list of "co-conspirators"—evidently because, as secretary of the Saint John SPC local, he had corresponded with some of those who were involved in the strike; but he was not indicted.

In winter 1920-21 he took part in SPC debates regarding affiliation with the Communist International. He opposed affiliation because he felt—as he wrote many years later—that the C.I.'s "Twenty-one Points" and Lenin's views generally "bore so little correspondence to what I saw in western Canada."

After a brief stay in Vancouver Thompson went south in March 1922, and worked on construction along the Pacific Coast. In San Francisco in September, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World, signed up by A. L. Nurse who is still active in the IWW today, in Montana. With red card number X22063 in his pocket, Fellow Worker Thompson devoted the rest of his life to the Wob-

bly dream of working-class Education, Organization, and Emancipation.

It was not an easy life. In April 1923 he was arrested in Marysville, California, and charged with "criminal syndicalism" (IWW organizing). Convicted after two trials, he spent the next several years in the penitentiary at San Quentin. The young radical who had spoken at a Tom Mooney Defense meeting in 1919 now had the opportunity to speak with Tom Mooney himself in the prison yard.

When his term as a class-war prisoner ended in 1927, Thompson returned to the point of production, armed to the teeth with IWW leaflets and membership applications. He organized miners in Butte, Montana, and Denver, Colorado in the late 1920s; auto workers in Detroit in the early 1930s (several of his fellow Wobs went on to enjoy long careers in the United Auto Workers); and metal workers in Cleveland later in the decade and all through the 1940s. Some of the plants he helped organize in Cleveland in the 1930s were still Wobbly shops as late as 1950, when they were lost to the union as a casualty of Taft-Hartley.

First elected to the IWW General Executive Board in 1928, representing Construction Workers' Industrial Union 310, Thompson served often on the GEB in later years, and in 1936-37 he was the union's General Secretary-Treasurer. From 1943 to 1946 he was secretary of the Metal and Machinery Workers' I.U. 440 branch in Cleveland where, in extremely adverse conditions, his abilities as Wobbly strategist and tactician were especially impressive. The IWW of course had refused to sign the wartime "no-strike pledge." Unlike most of the U.S. workforce in those years, Cleveland workers organized in the IWW during World War II won appreciable gains by means of brief walkouts, slowdowns, and innovative job-actions.

Many times editor of the weekly *Industrial Worker*, Thompson also wrote much of the union's organizing literature, from the famous "Bread Lines or Picket Lines?" leaflet of the early 1930s, which had a large impact on unemployed organizing in those Depression years, to more recent pamphlets such as *World Labor Needs a Union*.

For several months each year from 1928 to 1941 Thompson taught Marxist economics and labor history at the IWW Work People's College in Duluth, Minnesota. Interested in history even as a youngster, in the 1920s he was already "digging"—that was

his expression—IWW history, and before long he was recognized as the union's "official historian." His study, *The IWW: Its First Fifty Years*, was published by the union in 1955, and revised and updated in 1976. An excellent survey, this 200-page volume includes an abundance of invaluable information not to be found in much longer works, especially on the IWW after it reached its peak membership in 1923. Nonetheless, as its author readily acknowledged, the book is in many ways "too cramped"—a reflection of the IWW's limited financial resources. Thompson's earlier histories, serialized in the IWW press (see Bibliography), include much fuller accounts of many events and issues that are treated too summarily in the book.

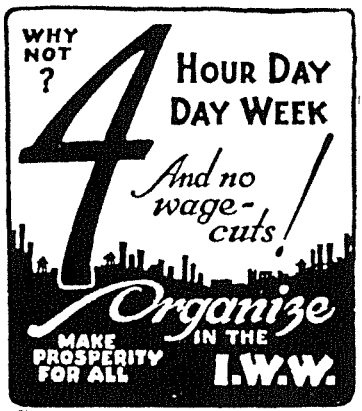
Thompson had no university degrees, but his experiences as a hobo, IWW organizer, and class-war prisoner helped give him a well-rounded education. He had a profound insight into working-class history and culture, a perception of the reality of working-class life, that too few historians have shared. His prodigious knowledge of IWW history and lore was drawn on by virtually every historian in the field. His running commentaries and reviews in the *Industrial Worker* and other publications remain a key source for "diggers" into any subject touching the IWW. A charter member of the Illinois Labor History Society and an active participant in Workers' Education Local 189, he maintained an extensive correspondence with scores of labor historians all over the world. His papers are now part of the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Like so many radicals of his generation, Thompson learned much of history, economics, sociology, anthropology, and revolutionary theory by reading books and pamphlets published by the Charles H. Kerr Company of Chicago. In the early 1970s, when the venerable socialist publishing house had fallen on hard times, he was instrumental in bringing together a group of old-time labor radicals to reorganize it. Elected vice-president of the Kerr Board in 1971, he became president in July 1986. If the century-old Kerr Company has enjoyed an impressive resurgence in recent years, as a publisher of important works in the field of labor and radical history, a large share of the credit belongs to him.

Fred Thompson's IWW dream of a truly free, nonrepressive society—a society without classes, exploitation, poverty, or war—underlay everything he wrote. His ability to communicate that

dream, in his historical no less than his polemical writings, was far from the least of his virtues. A free society is still very much worth dreaming about today, and Fred Thompson will remain an inspiration to all who are active in the struggle to realize that dream.

This obituary originally appeared in the Canadian journal Labour/Le Travail *20 (Fall, 1987, 7-11) and is reprinted with permission.*



"Silent Agitator" sticker issued by the IWW

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