

The Mill: A Worker's Memoir of the 1930s and 1940s

Alfred Edwards

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Alfred Edwards

Introduction by John Manley

DURING THE LAST DECADE students of Canadian labour history have benefited from a proliferation of working-class memoirs and oral biographies. In the main, this genre has been concerned with worker activists whose political commitments have featured at least as prominently as their working lives.¹ Alfred Edwards' "The Mill" is written from the perspective of a left-leaning but politically unaligned rank-and-file worker. Its focus is the workplace and the craft of silk knitting as practised in the fully-fashioned hosiery mills of southern Ontario.² Although "The Mill" cannot be considered representative or typical (since the very act of producing a working-class memoir marks out the producer as an "uncommon common man"), it provides

¹Communists have figured particularly prominently in this genre. See, for example, David Frank and Donald McGillivray, eds., *George MacEachern: An Autobiography* (Sydney 1987); Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers' Movement, 1927-1985* (St. John's 1988); Peter Hunter, *Which Side Are You On Boys? Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto 1988); Homer Stevens and Rolf Knight, *Homer Stevens: A Life in Fishing* (Madeira Park, BC 1992); Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolskas: My Years in the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto 1993).

²Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950* (Toronto 1990) is an indispensable source on the labour process in the knitting industry, although not specifically on the silk hosiery sector.

insight into the mentality of a section of the working class usually only witnessed in the mass. It also sheds valuable light on a key moment in the development of class relations in Canada, the decade between the beginning of the slow climb out of the Great Depression to full wartime mobilization.

Some may find reading 'The Mill' a frustrating experience. Edwards' disinclination to explore his motivations or explain his convictions may tempt the reader to do so, with no guarantee that the result will be recognizable to the author (this is by way of an apology for any misinterpretation which may follow!). The author deftly provides just enough information to get the story to its real starting-point: Edwards' employment at an unnamed London knitting mill in 1933. He tells us that by this time he had read the tales of Horatio Alger and imbibed their bourgeois individualist morality, information that prepared us for the memoir's single dominant motif here: the personal struggle — which many workers must have worked through at this time — to reconcile personal independence and autonomy with an ever-deepening involvement in collective action.³ We see Edwards growing in political awareness and social commitment but always jealously protecting his individuality. 'The Mill' ends with the author enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force and with the reader unsure whether this action represents unconditional acceptance of collective discipline and a transcendent cause or a last, whimsical flouting of capitalist workplace authority. It seems fitting that we last encounter Edwards preparing, literally, to fly off into the wide blue yonder.

The Frontier of Control

'THE MILL' provides an abundance of information on workplace struggle. The balance of forces stood heavily in management's favour, but the sheer variety of methods required to maintain it testified to the perpetuity of challenge and resistance. Management's overarching strategy was to engender and exploit divisions among workers. The employment of "Kiwaniis boys," for example, was an attempt to build loyalty to the company from an early age. In relation to these boys, fatherless or with fathers physically incapable of work, the company stood *in loco parentis*, exerting paternal authority both inside and outside the mill. The boys' boasts of how they had "conned their Kiwanis daddy out of fifty cents" pointed up the ambiguous character of paternalism. The reality of the wage relation and the boys' particular vulnerability to exploitation limited the extent to which they were prepared to buy into the family myth. The fact that "one third quit in the first few weeks and more quit before the year was out" suggests that something more than an occasional 50 cent gratuity was needed to keep paternalist bonds cemented. Every participant in Edwards' first experience of collective resistance was a Kiwanis boy — and only a few were stoolpigeons.⁴

³This is a document theme in Hunter, *Which Side Are You On Boys?*

⁴There is an obvious echo here of African American slaves' "puttin' on ol' massa." See, for example, Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York 1976).

The willingness of workers to inform on their more class-conscious neighbours was, nevertheless, a serious obstacle to collective organization. We know from other sources not only that company spies were ubiquitous but, during the formative period of industrial unionism, often found it easy to inveigle themselves into positions of authority and responsibility in the new unions.⁵ In the knitting mills informants formed a layer of the workforce with a distinct material interest in maintaining the *status quo*; diligent work could see them double their earnings. Ideally placed to finger genuine activists, the fear and suspicion they generated retarded the pace of union growth. When Edwards entered the National mill in Hamilton, the union was already being organized, but three or four months passed before he was approached and invited to attend a meeting. It seems likely that the existing members had spent the intervening period assuring themselves of his soundness.

Some of the older knitwear companies intentionally employed another form of class segmentation. They physically separated departments by means of location and shift times, keeping "high" and "low" wage departments apart. Pay levels were set according to profits rather than intrinsic differences in the character of the work being performed. Edwards presents the fully-fashioned *silk* hosiery workers as "the elite of the mills," a status reflecting their particular skills but which seems to have had at least as much to do with the relative selling price of silk to woollen underwear. In any event, silk knitters were paid double or triple the rate of woollen knitters. The separation tactic seems to have worked. In the early phases of trade union organization in the mills, the silk knitters found that they "couldn't get [other workers] to meetings and we really did not understand them." Since it is doubtful that management could have prevented workers from sharing concerns simply by physical separation, it seems likely that the privileged sections may have happily accepted market logic as arbiter of remuneration and status. Individual competition, moreover, was structured into relations *among* silk knitters. Although new knitters "always got ... the oldest and most decrepit machine," veterans enthusiastically engaged in "intense" competition to prove themselves worthy of the best — and most remunerative — equipment.⁶

Edwards has much to say about the province of the foreman. Supervisory staff seem to have enjoyed a fair degree of discretion over the mix of coercion and consent needed to maintain proper order. When they felt they could get away with it, some harassed and browbeat the men and women under them (often, of course, they were themselves under pressure from the managerial hierarchy), and they had

⁵Wayne State University, Joe Brown Papers, "Espionage-Labor" File, Statement of John Scarbury [re work as a Corporations' Auxiliary operative in the Automobile Workers' Industrial Union, Windsor, 22 January 1929; Fred Rose, *Spying on Labor* (Toronto n.d. [probably 1936]).

⁶Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 72 notes that: "knitters manoeuvred to secure the best running set to work."

the power to fire arbitrarily. At the same time, they had to be prepared to haggle over individual terms and conditions with workers whose skills they needed. On one occasion, Edwards engineered his transition to elite status by refusing to teach "topping" to three newcomers unless the company agreed to train him as a fully-fledged knitter. At the Monarch mill in St. Catharines, management actively cultivated solidarity *between* workers and "congenial and cooperative" shopfloor supervisors *against* a "completely unapproachable" plant manager who rarely left his office. Monarch foremen's discretion over the apportionment of "down-time" payments was an especially effective agent of class harmony. Whereas it was customary in the industry for knitters to be placed on unpaid standby when for any reason (repairs or bottlenecks, for example) their machines were "down," at Monarch foremen controlled a budget that paid knitters about 90 per cent of downtime. Edwards admits that only a minority shared his view of the system as "arbitrary and paternalistic" and a good one "for the company."

The most fascinating of Edwards' comments on the frontier of control concerns the role of "boomers" as knitters at Penman's London mill. In the industry at large these itinerant workers comprised about 30-40 per cent of the workforce, as opposed to the 60-70 per cent drawn from the immediate locality. Penman's, a notoriously "rough" place both in terms of its workers and conditions of work, reversed the normal ratio. Its break with standard practice represented a calculated risk that it would gain more in human knowledge from the skills boomers imported than it would lose through labour militancy. Although a high proportion of boomers were men blacklisted for leading rank-and-file struggles, Penman's relied on the discipline of the blacklist to suppress their militant instincts. To Edwards, these men were the "natural leaders" of the rank and file. Though hostile to politics and sceptical about the viability of unions in knitting, they "showed a sort of humorous disdain towards management." Quite spontaneously, it seemed, they looked after vulnerable workmates (including one who was mentally ill), operated an advice bureau for young workers like Edwards, and "In effect ... actually ran the place." The "night boss" even let them write his reports, "which he would copy out when he woke up." However, they also knew that the mill "had to make money to stay open and they made sure it did." Their complex, class-conscious realism clearly influenced his own worldview.

Building from the Union

GIVEN THAT TRADE UNIONISM in the Canadian textiles industry still awaits its historian, Alfred Edwards' rank-and-file view of early union building in the knitwear sector is particularly valuable. The limited accounts available tend to emphasize the rivalry between the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA) of the American Federation of Labor/Trades and Labour Congress (AFL/TLC) and the Textile Workers' Union of America (TWUA) of the Canadian Congress of Labour/Congress of Industrial Organizations (CCLCIO), beginning in the early 1940s.

Edwards' account suggests that at least some of the groundwork for the TWUA was done by the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) in its bid to organize skilled knitwear workers in the late 1930s.⁷ The rather fuzzy picture presented here of the Canadian Full Fashioned Hosiery Association and its apparent merger into the TWUA perhaps reflects the fact that the author was a young and politically inexperienced worker when he joined a campaign that was necessarily being carried out in semi-clandestine conditions. Over time, Edwards quite clearly became a committed activist. Although oddly reticent about his trade-union role, he brings out the laborious and unheroic organizing methods favoured by the ACCL and offers fascinating glimpses of three of the most important yet still little-known Canadian labour figures of the industrial union heyday: A.R. Mosher, Pat Conroy, and Arthur Williams.⁸

Edwards' union story began in 1935 when he was working at the National Mill in Hamilton. As noted earlier, secret organization was already under way. Edwards first encountered the union in cloak-and-dagger circumstances. Invited to a meeting at a secret destination, he was passed through several pairs of hands before finally arriving in a "semi-dark" room in a well-known local bootlegger's. The meeting consisted of speeches by two members of "one of the railway brotherhoods," who informed the audience that the ACCL had organized "huge numbers" of textile workers. How many and in which mills, however, they were not prepared to divulge.⁹ Edwards duly paid his \$2.00 initiation fee, and one month later received his first copy of the *Canadian Unionist* (he was particularly impressed by Eugene Forsey's "almost radical" back-page article).¹⁰

⁷Even earlier, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Communist Party of Canada made some inroads into the textiles industry and actually had most success in the knitwear sector. See John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class in the Great Depression: The Workers' Unity League, 1930-1936," PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1984, 257, 297, 381-3. Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973) and Rick Salutin, *Kent Rowley: the Organizer: A Canadian Union Life* (Toronto 1980) contain some fragmentary remarks on organizing in textiles in the late 1930s and 1940s.

⁸It is amazing that no biography of Aaron R. Mosher exists (although admittedly his union, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees [CBRE], has an official history, W.E. Greening and M.M. McLean, *It Was Never Easy* [Ottawa 1961]). The best source on Mosher and Conroy remains Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, but see also Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1977). Arthur Williams' entry into labour organizing came through the CCF and, before that, the unemployed movement. See Patricia V. Schulz, *The East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto 1975), 20, 25, 33-41.

⁹This was almost certainly the CBRE, although Alfred Edwards seems to suggest that the union involved was one of the Railway Running Trades' Brotherhood.

¹⁰Forsey was ACCL and CCL Research Director.

Over two years passed before the union in the mill proceeded to a strike for recognition. Meanwhile, it organized on the basis of "personal" approaches to individual workers (a method pioneered and perfected by the Communist-led Workers' Unity League in the early 1930s), painstakingly visiting potential sympathizers in their homes and talking them — and crucially, their wives — round to the union cause. The union underlined its awareness of the necessity of accommodating potential sources of internal disunity when the local union moved towards open activity. When it elected an executive committee, it made sure that the main ethnic groups (Anglos, French Canadians, and Germans) were represented. Equally significantly, "two of the older, best qualified women" were also elected. It was at this juncture that Edwards first encountered ACCL leaders Aaron R. Mosher and Pat Conroy. Mosher, the quasi-biblical prophet ("Moses leading the slaves out of Egypt"), and the most "somber ... gentle ... but tough minded" ex-miner Conroy addressed two mass meetings. They used the language of class struggle but left the decision to strike to the local union. Eventually, rank-and-file pressure produced strike action, and after five weeks in the summer of 1938 the National Mill conceded recognition. As was often the case at this time, minimal monetary gains were far less important than the experience of not losing; in the aftermath of the strike, with management forced to treat workers with greater respect, union life became unusually vibrant.¹¹

Edwards' move to the Monarch Mill in St. Catharines shortly after the strike means that we never learn whether the union survived at the National. The account becomes rather murky at this point, but it seems that the union disappeared during the period when the ACCL was working out its relations with the CIO, culminating in their merger as the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) in 1940. When we next encounter Edwards engaged in union activity, at the Monarch plants in St. Catharines and Dunnville, he was operating apparently — he is not entirely sure — under the auspices of District 50 of the United Mine Workers of America, "a catch all section John L. Lewis had set up to organize those who wanted a union but were not miners."¹² His brief account of this campaign introduces yet another important figure of 1940s industrial unionism, Arthur Williams. Most memorably, however, it includes an almost cinematic account (as I read it, I kept seeing flashes of Sally Field being feisty in *Norma Rae!*) of a union meeting that, the author disarmingly admits, still makes him "become very emotional recalling it." We

¹¹As Irving Abella shows, the United Automobile Workers' strike at General Motors, Oshawa, which is widely perceived as the real founding moment of the industrial union era in Canada, ended in very similar circumstances. Its most important effect was that it gave workers confidence in the UAW's ability to defend their *future* interests. See Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, ch. 1

¹²On District 50, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Cambridge 1987), 161-63.

know the bald facts that the Textile Workers' Organizing Committee was founded in 1941, giving way to the TWUA in 1945.¹³ 'The Mill' reminds us that the unionization process was made up of flesh and blood workers.

Personal Life and Class Politics

AFTER THE LONG SLEEP of the 1920s, the Depression and War years saw a marked upturn in class struggle and working-class radicalism. Canada's two main parties of the left experienced significant growth. The Communist Party (CP), despite its often disconcerting zig-zags, built a solid core of militants thanks to unrivalled efforts in trade-union and unemployed struggles; it underlined its leadership potential by the speed with which it recovered from the self-inflicted wound of the Nazi-Soviet Pact/'Imperialist War' interlude.¹⁴ The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), though its development, too, was neither linear nor ever-upwards, offered an increasingly realistic working-class alternative at the polling booth.¹⁵ Arguably, however, this period marked another missed opportunity for Canadian socialism. Alfred Edwards' case helps explain why the left came out of Depression and War and into another explosive moment of class struggle without a mass base. He was precisely the sort of worker (the type communists termed one of the "best elements" of the class) who should have been part of a mass socialist party. Yet, while attracted to the left, he never joined any party. Why?

As presented here, Edwards' political choices boiled down to the CP or nothing. Although largely hostile, his view of the CP nevertheless suggests that it had a more pervasive industrial presence than any of its rivals. We encounter communists in a variety of settings. There were the "couple of dedicated" members at Penman's who encouraged his auto-didacticism by providing him with copies of E. Haldeman Julius' *Little Blue Books* and other socialist writings. There was also an unnamed (instructively, no communist is ever named) organizer who turned up, apparently uninvited, at a union revival meeting at the Monarch Mill: "I knew him slightly but I knew all about him. He was C.P. but I had no objection to that except that they were very good organizers but could never hold a union together after it was organized. This man was not a good type. He was very glib and had full control of the meeting." Edwards accurately captures two significant but related aspects of CP culture. Communists were *always* being urged to immerse themselves in "the grandeur of Marxism," and hence many became amateur bibliophiles with impres-

¹³Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, 195.

¹⁴Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The War Series, 1939-41* (St. John's 1989) and *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The War Series, Part II, 1942-45* (St. John's 1993) are the best available sources on the CPC during World War II.

¹⁵On the CCF, see Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-1961* (Toronto 1971), chs. 4-5 and Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto 1989), ch. 7.

sive marxist libraries which they were always ready to share with likely-looking young workers.¹⁶ The “glibness” Edwards identified probably came in part from the confidence derived from familiarity with marxism, but it may well also have stemmed from the CP’s custom of training its industrial cadres in public speaking and providing them with speakers’ notes. On many occasions communists simply appeared so much sharper in their understanding of issues that many rank-and-file workers — as Edwards attests — were ready to follow them.¹⁷

More independently minded than most, Edwards was not impressed by glibness. During the Popular Front period he regularly attended the meetings of several of Hamilton’s left-wing groups. At a time when the CP was supposedly softening its appeal to attract a wider constituency, Edwards found its members humourless and doctrinally rigid. One group, “most certainly C.P., though no one said so,” never had any “real discussion. They knew the answer to everything and it was always the same.” Even one unusually “jovial, good type who called himself C.P.” in another group dismissed Edwards’ views on unemployment relief camps as more worthy of a “lily-white socialist” than a genuine “red.” With quiet understatement Edwards contrasts the certainty with which communists held their views and the suppleness with which they changed them. He was particularly exercised by their changes of policy on the war and the interests of the working class. When “Hitler attacked Russia ... all the C.P.s appeared again as if by magic ... They were no longer interested in unions. Their cry was for war production.”¹⁸

Although Edwards endorses a caricatured image of communism at its most unsavoury, the CP at least emerges from these pages with an identity. The CCF, on the other hand, seems to have had a negligible impact on Edwards’ awakening political consciousness. He does mention a CCF presence in one multi-tendency, left-wing discussion group from which, even if its interminable discussions were mostly “a waste of time,” he learned more than in his intellectual encounters with the CP. In one throwaway comment — that students of labour in World War II would do well to consider — he observes that it was only in the interim between the

¹⁶See, for example, Frank and McGillivray, *George MacEachern*, and James Napier, *Memories of Building the UAW* (Toronto 1976), 35.

¹⁷No adequate history of the CPC’s Popular Front years exists, although Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, ch. 5 is a very useful study of one aspect. Forthcoming volumes of the *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins*, covering the period 1935-39, will provide some of the raw materials for a more complete history.

¹⁸Edwards’ criticism here is possibly directed at the CPC’s cynicism in converting so abruptly to super-patriotism rather than at the principles of all-out production and the no-strike pledge. Without stating his personal views, he mentions that he and his wife attended a win-the-war rally at which prominent CPUSA member Anna Louise Strong made the keynote address. Strong was in Canada speaking under the auspices of the Russian Medical Aid Committee early in 1942. See Kealey and Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins ... 1942-45*, 251.

Nazi-Soviet Pact and the CP's rediscovery of anti-fascism in 1941 that the CCF emerged from the communists' shadow.

Can we detect a note of regret in Edwards' admission: "I went to all these meetings [but] I never joined any party?" Edwards' evocation of the issue that, for many on the left, was the benchmark of political commitment in the late 1930s — the Spanish Civil War — can certainly be read this way. In a brief, slightly dream-like portrait of a march-past by Hamilton's contingent of International Brigade volunteers (probably in the Spring of 1938), he describes the response of his immediate neighbour on the pavement to the choice of social commitment or self-interest. Friends among the volunteers called out to this man to come and join them, but at the same time on the opposite sidewalk — how symbolic! — other friends urged him to remain where he was. Finally, he ran off to join the volunteers. Edwards then immediately juxtaposes this decision with an account of his own decision to quit work — a decision stemming from his envy of the apparent freedom of a group of hoboes seen sitting atop a freight train. He notes also that he changed his mind again when his threat to quit produced a deal that led to his becoming a fully-fledged knitter. Can this juxtaposition be entirely coincidental? One is not quite sure whether his intention here is to counterpose heroic selflessness against unheroic self-indulgence or independence against political fashion. Perhaps he is suggesting that each decision contained an element of selfishness.

What Edwards may be saying is that, for all his trade-union activism and leftist inclinations, he was at heart an ordinary individual beset by often conflicting impulses and constraints. At the same time as these international, national, and local political events were unfolding, his personal life was taking more definite shape. His courtship of the young woman he was to marry in 1940 involved spending time and money freely on the contemporary leisure pursuits of young — employed — urban Canadians: his automobile, the movies, and dancing. Even if he had been less antagonized by the CPC's doctrinal dogmatism, he would have known that such a "normal" lifestyle was simply incompatible with the physical demands of membership in that particular party. Marriage, of course, brought new pressures. The Edwards' family faced the common hardships of wartime — inflation, rationing, and the apparent inevitability of the draft — and before long the self-induced pressures of parenthood. Right to the end, however, Alfred Edwards retained his prized individuality. Riled by an employer who had attempted to chisel him out of "promises and pay" and vexed by the terms of army call-up papers that ordered when and where to report for induction, he gave himself a temporary measure of control over his immediate destiny by volunteering for the RCAF. A third possibility was an offer. His employers wanted to retain his services and intended to obtain his exemption from the military service as a key employee. His wife's thoughts on his rejection of this alternative are not recorded.

With 'The Mill' Alfred Edwards has put Canadian labour historians in his debt. He emerges from this well-crafted narrative as a modest, decent, perceptive witness

to the 1930s and 1940s. I am sure I will not be alone in hoping that he goes on to tell us what happened next.

The Mill

Alfred Edwards

THE MILL WAS BUILT in the late 1920s. It was a wide, long, low, cement block building with large triangular sky-lights on its flat roof. All sides of it had large steel-framed windows.

Next to the mill itself was a two story brick building which contained the offices at the front and at the rear the shipping and receiving. Upstairs the silk stockings which were knitted flat in a weaving type of machine were seamed, looped, turned and, after dyeing, which was done in a small separate building, they were packaged under their trade names and under the names of some of the larger stores.

Around the perimeter of all the buildings ran an eight foot high chain link fence which was topped by four strands of barbed wire. The fence was constructed in such a way that the offices with their green lawn and flower beds were not enclosed at the front. The employees' entrance gate at the front was chained and padlocked except at starting and quitting times.

The Mill itself started work at 7.00 a.m. on Monday mornings but the knitters who ran the machines were usually in at 6.00 a.m. on Monday morning to "oil up."

The machines ran continuously until noon hour on Saturday. There were two shifts; one worked from 7.00 a.m. til 6.00 p.m. and the other 6.00 p.m. til 7.00 a.m. There was no lunch room or noon hour. The men on these machines were not allowed to sit down at any time; even leaning against a wall could bring a reprimand or a day's lay off. They ate their lunch on the run and only left their machines to go to the washroom.

The windows and sky-lights were white washed to prevent glare from the sun. The windows were made to open but had been bolted shut until the Fire Department ordered removal of the bolts. Thereafter it was considered an offense to open a window. The lighting was by a new and very expensive type of quartz tubing which gave everything and everybody an eerie, purplish glow.

When the mill first opened the knitters were paid over \$100 a week which were very high wages for those times but now with the Depression they had been gradually cut back until they were getting from \$15 to \$20 a week.

I used to see them some times opening a window to look out for a few seconds or I would pass them on their way to work when I was finishing my morning paper route. They were thin, pale fellows.

The Mill Superintendent, who lived across the road from my rooming house, and his neighbour, who was an official in London Life and knew our family well, came to see me in the hospital to tell me that as soon as I was OK I could start in the Mill at \$5 a week for the first 2 months, then \$6 for a month, then \$8 for a month and then piece rate and more money.

In vain, I told them that room and board cost \$6 a week and then there were all the extras. They told me I had to think of the future that I couldn't go on forever selling papers and doing odd jobs. Finally, they said if I had any trouble with money they were both available.

I was trapped. I had a job I didn't want in a place I didn't want to work.

The job started in November 1933. We sat on chairs in front of 'stands.' In full-fashioned knitting the stockings were started at full width to fit the thigh then narrowed to the shape of the calf and then the ankle.

Our job was to take those narrowed stockings and transfer them to a new, wider set of needles which were then transferred to another machine to make the foot of the stocking.

The job required intense concentration and patience. You worked at the stand for approximately 15 minutes and then transferred your work to the machine. Each machine had three toppers, as we were called, one learner topper and one knitter who was the straw boss. These knitters were older, more skilful men. These knitters worked a ten or twelve hour day with no shift work. It was the most coveted job in the mill.

Payment was piece work, based on a rate per dozen pairs. A machine was approximately 34 feet long and produced 24 stockings, one dozen pair, each perfect run. Regular production was from 40 to 50 dozen pairs a day.

There were only seven of this type of machine and the competition to be the leader, that is, to have the highest production was intense.

The first few days on the job were almost unbearable. The clattering, banging, crashing noise of the machines and the intense concentration with the insistent drive and hurry for production made those first days completely miserable. The job had always been done by women but all the women were aged from 30 to 45 and no newcomers had been taught for years. The laws in Ontario at that time were very strict as far as women workers were concerned. There was a minimum wage and hours of work law. It was very strict on overtime and night work was prohibited.

Because of these laws the company hired 'boy toppers' as we were called whose ages varied from 16 to 30. There were no laws to protect us. Most of the

officials in the company were members of Kiwanis and most of the boys hired were Kiwanis boys, that is, boys who had no father or whose fathers were incapacitated. About one third quit in the first few weeks and more quit before the year was out.

I was the first boy backed by the Mill superintendent and at the same time a fellow named Joe Coons was hired. He had caddied all summer for the mill owner. We became instant friends, he was a big dark fellow. "Black Irish we Coons are. We're the ones the foreigners couldn't chase out of Ireland. We have to stick together, Eddie, or we'll be overrun by the Kiwanis. All they can talk about is how they conned their Kiwanis daddy out of fifty cents, or what they did at the Kiwanis picnic."

The mill was rated as one of the most modern in the country with the latest and the best type of machinery. There was no time clock but you had to be at your machine ready to start work before 7.00 a.m. and before 1.00 p.m. We worked three days of 7 till 12 and 1 till 8 and two days of 7 till 12 and 1 till 6. We worked at cleaning on Saturday morning from 7.00 a.m. till 12.00 or 1.00. We were paid \$5.60 for the week, 56 hours at 10 cents an hour.

Saturday was clean up and therefore a free day, free for the mill, and we weren't paid for it. There were no breaks and we asked permission to go to the washroom. The closet stalls had no doors and no paper. The sink had a cold water tap. At noon hour the janitor filled a trough on legs which was about four feet wide with two pails of hot water, set out on thin towel and a cake of soap. Foreman washed first then knitters, boy toppers were last. The towel would be blacker than the black, gooey water.

We gradually fitted into the tempo and rhythm of the place. The noise wasn't noticed any more. It became sort of a rhythm that you were attuned to.

There were no holidays or vacations. We had Christmas day and New Year's day off but we weren't paid for them. May 24th, July 1st, Labour Day were ordinary working days. Saturday afternoons were our only recreation time. Sunday was literally a day of rest as the only things open were the churches and parks. Even the library was closed.

The mill superintendent who had hired me was very tough especially on foremen which, of course, made the foremen tough on the men. Wages were for production only. If a machine was broken down for a day or two the knitter worked at fixing it but he was not paid.

Somehow I had a knack for the job. I grew to like it and I liked the mill and the people I worked with. At the end of two months I was doing a topper's complete work for which the regular toppers were paid \$12.00 to \$15.00 a week. The mill superintendent stopped by to ask how things were going and I asked him if I could be put on piece rate. He said he would try.

Next it was the general superintendent. His name was Cooger and I had delivered his paper. He was angry. I would get 12 cents an hour for the third month,

not the piece rate. I explained that I was doing the whole job. He didn't care, rules were rules and it was not for me to question them.

I worked for the third month at twelve cents an hour and the fourth month at sixteen cents an hour. The superintendent stopped by to say how proud he was of me and how sorry he was about the pay but he was unable to do anything about it.

At the end of the fourth month I was on piece rate on the fastest machine in the mill. I liked the job and was proud of the mill. Discipline was strict and occasionally someone would be fired for no apparent reason. There would be complaining and talk against the management. I refused to take part in any of it. I had read all the Horatio Alger stories. They are the ones where the hero because of pluck, hard work and honesty always succeeds and I had read all the biographies of famous men and believed they always recognized the faithfulness and integrity of their employees. I knew that one day through hard work and diligence I would be foreman or manager. Life was good. I learned to dance, went to parties, etc., and was quite sure of my abilities and where I was going.

In February of 1934 there was a donnybrook of a row in the main office between the superintendent, my friend, and the general superintendent and the manager. The result was the superintendent stormed into the mill, packed his tools and was gone. The real story as it came out months later was that the lead foreman had been coached to fill his job. They had called him in and cut his pay and of course he had quit and the foreman took over as superintendent. He was part of the establishment, Kiwanis, etc., whereas the former superintendent was good at his job and they had needed him but he had a very distinct accent and was not part of the establishment.

All of this made no difference to me. I was good at my work and got along well with the people but perhaps I did miss his support and did not have any closeness with the new leaders.

About the end of May some of the boy toppers were told they would have to work Saturday afternoons at cleaning. They decided to protest to the manager and they wanted the rest of us to go along. I refused and they called me a company man and finally after a lot of arguing I agreed to go. Someone made an appointment to meet the manager at 6.00 p.m. and nine of us went to the shipping room to talk with him.

He wasn't there and we started to talk to the general superintendent. He wanted to know the reason for all the insubordination, etc. After about five minutes the manager walked in, "What's all this about?" Everyone froze and again he said, "Will someone explain this to me?"

No one said anything so I explained it all to him about how we looked forward to having Saturday afternoon off and how much it meant to us as it was the one time of the week we could count as our own. I knew that he was a good sensible man and I really believed in his goodness and decency. He went from one to the other of the eight boys who were all Kiwanis and said things like, "Tom, what are

you doing here?" and "Harry, I'm surprised at you." I kept talking all through this and finally ran out of talk. He stood gazing at the ceiling and then Cooger, the general superintendent said, "This is an orphan we took off the streets and this is the thanks we get, sir."

To an orphan the worst word in the English language is "orphan." No one had called me that in a long time and I was furious. "Yep, I'm an orphan but I'm not a drunk like you and I was never on the streets. I take good care of myself."

The poor fellow was a hopeless alcoholic and it was obvious that he had been drinking then. The manager said, "You boys go back to work and I'll look into this." One or two of the fellows started to file out and then we all went down the connecting ramp to the mill.

The exact sequence of events and the words spoken in the next few minutes are something I can't be sure about. The mill superintendent, a big, beefy man, came along and somehow either I bumped him or he bumped me. I said "Sorry, sir," and he walked on. In a moment he was back and said something about not throwing my weight around and kept lecturing me in this way.

I finally said something but what it was I don't know and why it made him so furious. He stood absolutely rigid staring at me then jabbing his finger up and down in front of my face said "You wait right here." He was very pale and stamped off toward the office.

He was back in what seemed a few seconds, handed me a cheque and went right on without saying a word. I was looking at the cheque with my name on it and wondering what to do when the night watchman came along "C'mon," he said and waved for me to follow him.

I was a little stunned and unsteady but followed him. He unlocked the gate and I stood there a few seconds thinking about going back to apologize but not knowing what to apologize for.

"C'mon, I've got my work to do. I can't stand here all night waiting for the likes of you." He looked at me angrily.

The gate clanged shut behind me. It was twilight on a beautiful evening in May and the air had the balmy, quiet feeling about it and I stood there trying to decide what to do. I felt empty, drained and stupid walking slowly back to the boarding house. Perhaps if I apologized, but for what?

Most of the night was spent going over and over what was my best way of handling things. I decided on looking for another job and telling everyone I had quit the Mill.

Next morning it was my former part time employer who took the first jab at the story when I went to his store. "If you quit it was two minutes before they fired you and there's no use coming here for a job, we don't need you. You've got too big for your britches, that's your trouble." It was the same all around the neighbourhood. People either avoided me or asked why in the world I'd quit. People

didn't quit their jobs in 1935. Even the landlady and her family were quiet and avoided me.

One woman who was always active in neighbourhood affairs insisted I come in for a cup of tea. The kitchen had that faintly sour smell of old tea leaves and grease. The kitchen floor was scrubbed pine boards. The kitchen table was scrubbed pine boards. She was a short, stout woman with a wide, flat face. Her hair was done in a nob at the back and her eyes looked straight at me as she handed me the cup of tea. When she was pouring I noticed the ring on her finger and the way the fat had grown around it and thought at one time she must have been as thin as her husband, a skinny, short man who had worked all his life at the Brass Company. The only time he dressed up was to go to church with her on Sunday morning.

She looked hard at me. "Alfie, I understand you quit your job." I nodded. "Why?" she said.

I had been through this so often that I had worked out my own method. I grinned and shrugged my shoulders.

"Now, Alfie, you can't go around quitting jobs like that. My Tom has worked at the Brass Company all his life."

She had three boys. One was riding the freights and the other two were at home. None of them had ever worked and that was likely what made her angry at me. It went on for at least an hour before I could get away.

The only person in the neighbourhood who had a good word to say was a tall Scot who was considered a dangerous radical. He stopped me on the street. "I understand you quit your job. The day you quit your first job is the day you become a man." He grinned down at me.

On the second day I went to the employment office of Holeproof Hosiery. A very nice fellow smiled at me across the desk and said, "Yes, we need boy toppers."

He wrote my name, etc., on a card and then excused himself and went into another room. He was back in a moment and looked at me with a blank face. "You're listed," he said.

I didn't know what he meant and smiled and waited expectantly. He stared at me a moment and then went into the other room. I was so stupid that I actually stood there for about five minutes waiting for him to come back.

It is one thing to quit a job but there is more to it than that, you actually quit a way of life. In the past year and a half because of the long hours my life had become centred on the mill. I still had my close friends outside the mill but the people I saw and talked and joked with every day worked in the mill. After the third or fourth day away from the mill I was lonely, desperately lonely. The mill workers I tried to talk to avoided me so I decided I would go to the corner by the mill when the day shift came out at noon-hour, that is, the ones who went home for lunch. I joined the crowd but no one would talk to me nor did anyone want to walk with me. I walked along by myself with the others in two's and three's before and behind me. My face was burning but I had to continue to the next corner when I could break

away. Suddenly Peggy White was walking beside me. Peggy had been a close neighbour and friend of our family and worked in the mill office. "Did you get a job yet, Alfie?"

"No."

"Where have you been?"

"Went to Holeproof."

"No use, Alfie. You'll be listed there. Best you try Penman's. They don't use the list."

I said, "It's not a good place to work. There's some pretty tough guys there."

Peggy had an Irish brogue and she could be forceful, "It's your only chance now. You'll be alright there, be sure now, go there this afternoon," she said as I broke off at the corner.

I went there at once and started working the next morning.

Some time after this the Canadian Government established a Royal Commission to investigate the labour practices of the textile industry. At one point a spokesman for the mills declared under oath that there had never been a 'Black List' and everybody who had ever been listed laughed. We called it a 'Black List,' they called it listing. Incidentally, I suppose every protest helps a little. The mill never did work Saturday afternoons until they went on eight hour shifts. I have never been near the mill since then and years later when they had a long strike the union wanted me to go as a support picket. I said "No!"

The full-fashioned section at Penman's was on the third floor. The first two floors manufactured underwear and at that time never had over twenty employees. The company was in severe financial trouble and the full-fashioned was the only part making money. Sometimes we waited in idleness for the bank to pay for the silk we needed to work.

The building was on the river bank behind the city jail and the county jail. We could look out the third floor windows and see prisoners in their striped clothes doing the chores around the jail. The building was very old and when the machines which were old and worn out started on a Monday morning the whole building shook and trembled and then settled into a rhythmic back and forth motion.

I reported to the superintendent's office which was in the corner of the room with a window where he could observe the floor. His secretary was typing as he talked to me. He was very English, unsmiling but a decent fellow.

"I know all about you," he said. "The foreman will put you on a machine and I don't want to ever see you in this office again."

The next four months were the most educational part of my life.

All mills had their original core of employees, that is, the ones who learned and stayed with the mill. They also had the 'Boomers' knitters, etc., who had worked in two or more mills. They could usually get a job because the mills liked the new skills and knowledge they brought. The ratio was sixty per cent or more originals and the rest 'Boomers.'

At Penmans the originals were about thirty per cent; nice, polite, obeisant, reverent awe at us outsiders. The other seventy per cent were fellows who were listed and had to work there. Most had been listed because they had been leaders in walk outs in different mills around the country.

They had not been organized. The employees had become so frustrated and fed up with conditions and low pay, long hours and constant harassment by foremen that they would revolt and walk out. They would then elect a committee of two, three or four men to do the talking. They would stay out for two or three days, the mill would agree to remedy some situation, they would go back to work and two or three weeks later the leaders would be fired and listed and fear and obedience would return to the mill.

The main cause of all the unrest was the miserable working conditions and the piece work system. Throughout the industry pay was for production only and it was not unusual to see grown men crying when they received their pay. The original types at Penman's were very decent, showing me around and helping me adjust. As for the listed types, well I was one of them.

The foreman was a man named Albert. He had a high pitched, English accented voice, perfect English manners and he knew nothing about the job and was not too bright. He was apparently a relative of one of the top officials. One of the listed fellows told me "Ignore Albert, tell him to get lost."

I didn't and honestly felt sorry for him but his ego was great enough. He didn't need my sympathy. After the first week in Penman's I moved to a new boarding house. I was glad to get out of the old neighbourhood. At that time I was put on the night shift. The foreman and fixer was a big, pleasant Englishman. He grinned at me. "You're the one as told Bill Cooger he was a drunken sot. I wish I could have seen him, laddie."

The reason he worked nights was because he could work fixing those junk machines the first part of the night and then retire to the office with a bottle til he fell asleep. We woke him in time to get mobile before the day shift came on.

There were unfortunately other reasons for 'listing' than leading strikes. We had two thieves who had done time and who we kept honest always. We practically checked them every morning to make sure they didn't steal anything from the company. One fellow had spent ninety days in jail for beating up a hated mill superintendent who spent two weeks in the hospital. He had spent ninety days in jail and on his release was hired by Penman's. The man was an exceptionally good knitter but he was also mental and a couple of fellows seemed to know when he was going off the deep end. They would hold him down and talk to him until he came around and quite often they would tie him up and leave him till he settled down. The man scared me and I stayed away. The foreman always gave his pay to one of the leaders who took it to his wife.

In effect the men who had been fired for leading strikes in other mills actually ran the place. The night boss was content to let them correct anything while he went

about his repair work. They usually made out his nightly reports which he would copy when he woke up. There were a couple of malcontents who were pretty well ignored. One outstanding fellow was a top notch knitter as he had learned the business in his childhood. His father was the manager of the biggest mill in the country. He would not work in his father's mill and the other mills would not hire him. He was an invaluable source of knowledge as to who actually owned which mills and how much they owed the banks as well as the pecadilloes of the owners and managers. We had a couple of dedicated Communists who introduced me to Julius' Little Blue Books from Chicago and who loaned me pamphlets by Jack London and books by Marx and Engels.

The best fellows though were the natural leaders. They had been more or less elected to represent the men and women in the various mills they had been fired from. They stood out, more charismatic, smarter and much better workers and somehow lacking in fear. Once you have gone through the loss of a job you lose all fear of dismissal and without that as a weapon management really has very little power over you except to use more common sense. These men were very sceptical of unions or anyone else and towards management they showed sort of a humorous disdain. The place was so poor that they knew it had to make money to stay open and they made sure it did.

They would talk endlessly about organizing the mills and most argued it was impossible. They also knew who to contact for help and what our legal rights were.

Five or six weeks after I started at Penman's my friend from the mill was waiting when I came off work.

"I wanted to talk to you, Eddie. I quit the mill. I'm going into business for myself. The manager gave me a big spiel about what a future I had but I told him it wasn't the sort of life I wanted. The reason I came to see you is to tell you I was a company stool. Yep, when he hired me he told me there were a lot of Communists and labour agitators trying to make trouble for the good, loyal employees. He wanted me to bring any information I could. I told him I couldn't be an informer as my family didn't approve of that sort of thing. He explained that it was necessary to protect the loyal employees and he knew I was a good citizen and so on, also I would find an extra amount in my pay from time to time. He is genuinely afraid of outsiders, that's why the high fence and barbed wire." Joe grinned and tapped his head.

"You got a rotten deal Eddie. That's why I'm telling you this. You have to know how these things work. You remember when you went over to the office I wouldn't go. There were ten of you went, remember, three of them were stools." He named them and I didn't really believe him. "There might have been more but those three I was sure of. When the Mill paid me extra, sometimes they doubled my pay. I knew they got extra as we compared our pays. The reason I wouldn't go to the meeting was so that I wouldn't have to inform about it."

"Yep, Eddie they were all ready for you. The whole thing was a set up and you stepped into it."

"That's why I'm here, I've got to get this straight. You're too honest and trusting. I'll never go near another mill but you'll stay with them so you better know all about the S.O.B.'s."

The fellows at Penman's were always discussing stoolies but somehow I never quite believed them. I had been taught endlessly about British fair play and about the rightness and fairness of authority.

My education kept on, now it included how to know a stool, but in reality because you can never know them you ignore the whole stool system and work as if every word you speak is known by management.

The four months I worked at Penman's were the most memorable of my life. One day two or three weeks before the end of the four months a group of the real leaders had a talk with me. I was too young to be around a place like that. It was just a matter of time before the machines broke down completely or the darned building fell down or the company went broke. The mill managements had scabs the same as the workers did and some had a convenient way of forgetting the listing when they really needed someone and they all needed boy toppers. They went over all the features of the different mills in Toronto and Hamilton and I picked the National. They helped me draft the letter and by return mail I was offered a job.

I went into the superintendent's office and he with no expression at all said, "Sorry to see you go."

That week I had lots of instruction on how to handle myself in the new job and in the new city. They even told me what restaurants to eat in.

At the weekend I packed my bag and headed for Hamilton. The first twenty miles was paved road, after that it was packed gravel. Two rides took me to a few miles west of Paris where a fellow about two or three years older than I driving a model T touring car with no side curtains picked me up.

"Going to Brantford if that's any use. Yuh workin'?" which was the usual greeting of young people.

"Think there's a job in Hamilton. You workin'?"

"Just in my dad's store. Wish I could get a decent job. My girlfriend lives in Brantford and we want to get married."

From the Paris city limits sign the road had been covered with fresh gravel and we slithered and slid going about twelve to fifteen miles an hour.

"Have to watch your speed here anyway. They stop everybody. Cops must be on commission."

Just then a policeman stepped out from behind a post and held up his hand. He was carrying an object about the size of a railway lantern. He wore a helmet and his uniform was apparently made to fit any figure. He, being tall and thin, the trousers were short and the coat was full of tucks held in by the belt. When he stopped to talk to us through the open side of the car I could see he was an old man.

"This is the brake test, sir. I will fasten this tester on your running board and then stand in front of it. I will hold onto the car roof with one hand and you drive at a normal speed. When I lower my hand put on your brakes and the machine will show how good they are."

"Is that a brake tester?" the driver said in apparent amazement. "Would you like to ride inside, Officer?"

"No, no. I'll be perfectly alright here. You go ahead as I said."

The driver pushed in the forward pedal and began inching the hand throttle downwards. Model T's had three pedals, one to go forwards, one for reverse and one for the brake. The car gained speed and then the cop lowered his arm. The driver hit the pedal hard and the rear wheels dug into the loose gravel. The cop struggled to hang on but it was no use. His grip on the roof finally gave way and when the car stopped he was lying face down, on top of the front fender with his grey hair hanging down and his helmet on the road.

I jumped out to help him but he struggled to his feet by himself.

"Foot must have slipped," he said as I handed him the helmet.

He dusted himself off very carefully and then stooped down again to tell the driver that he had remarkably good brakes.

We waved and smiled at him as we left and he gave us a courteous nod.

"You threw it in reverse, huh?" I asked as we were away.

"Yeah, there's no brakes."

"Shook the old guy up."

"Yeah, it's too bad but it couldn't be helped."

We were now compatriots and we joked and laughed until we said 'so long' in Brantford.

A flat bed truck took me the rest of the way to Hamilton.

The Y had a room at \$3.00 a week for members. I always went to the London Y twice a week. I checked in and tried the first restaurant on my list. Williams was on James Street, north two blocks from King and James where they had a cop about 6 feet 2 who wore a helmet which made him a landmark in the city. Williams had a long counter with about 40 stools on one side and booths on the other side. Meals were 25 cents each or 22 tickets for \$5.00. The meal was good; sausage or pork chops, etc., with mashed potatoes, vegetables, pie and coffee. They were good helpings and a full meal. At meal times the counters would be full of men and the servers were men. The booths too would be full and occasionally you would see a woman in a booth. I was the youngest man. It wasn't a hang out, you ate your meal and left. If you didn't want to or couldn't afford a regular meal there was Bowles Lunch a few doors down from the cop on the north side of James Street. It was cafeteria style. Coffee or tea was a nickel, beans and toast cost a dime. Chili and toast were fifteen cents. If you didn't have a nickel it was a place to get warm, for a short while.

Monday morning I reported to the mill. It was modern and well kept. The superintendent's office was an open wire mesh cage so he could see all around the mill. He was French-Canadian, short, stocky and tough. He stood with his hands on his hips staring me coldly up and down and I looked straight and evenly back at him. I had an advantage, I knew a great deal about him and he knew little about me.

"Well, if you're going to work here you have to sign a contract." He handed me a card, "Read that and be sure you understand it and then repeat it back to me."

The contract read, 'I solemnly swear that I will not under any circumstances have any communication with nor will I be a member of any trade association, labour union or any organization of this kind and I am fully aware that such membership will be grounds for instant dismissal from this company.'

I signed the card. It had been explained to me in London. It was a Red Dog Contract and had no validity in law, so it was safe to sign it.

I gave my age as twenty instead of eighteen and went to work; the only boy topper among eighteen women toppers mostly aged about thirty-five or forty. The mill was efficient. I had been used to working with all Anglo-Saxons. Here they were evenly divided between Italian, German, French-Canadian and Anglos. After a few days hesitancy they were good and kind with me and I liked the place.

On the second day I was there a man approached me with a card and quietly asked me to sign a card and join the union. I told him to get lost as I did not want anything to do with Communists. He was, of course, a stool and I have been warned in London about him. Any legitimate organizer would not approach you on company property as that was illegal.

It was about three or four months before a knitter talked to me on the street and said there was to be a meeting on that Saturday afternoon. If I was in front of the Tivoli theatre on James Street North between 1 and 2 p.m. a man would tell me where to go.

I showed up and was reading the blurbs for the movie when a man walked very slowly around me and said, "I'm being watched, go to the next corner and a man there will show you the way."

At the next corner a man directed me to the meeting place. It was a well known bootlegger's near the police station. I went along a hallway past numerous small rooms and then came into a larger room. There was a table and chair facing at the front of the room with a neatly dressed, heavily built man arranging papers and cards and off to one side another sparer built man sat on a chair puffing at his pipe and looking at the fifteen or more chairs in front of him, "Take a seat anywhere, brother," he said to me.

The room was semi-dark, there were no lights on and it was almost impossible to tell who the other people were. Two or three I knew because of their build.

The man at the desk finished with his papers and started to speak. He had a deep gravelly voice which must have been heard all through the building. He

introduced himself and his friend as Brother ——— and Brother ——— and told us that from now on we were all brothers. He outlined his own life in the labour movement. He wasn't a union organizer. He was a railway worker and belonged to one of the railway brotherhoods. He spoke for about twenty minutes or so telling us we could go on being pushed around by the Masters or we could be men and stand up for our rights. We couldn't stand alone. We must organize and work together, either hang together or they would hang us separately and don't think union members haven't been hanged for their beliefs. It's up to you and you alone he shouted as he finished.

The thin man got up then, he talked softer but he always emphasized the Brotherhood and our rights and duties. He told a couple of jokes that showed management to be a bit stupid. His talk sort of portrayed management as not too bright and us as the people who ran the place for them and made them their profits.

They gave out cards with their names and phone numbers and the Brotherhood's office number, also the address of the All Canadian Congress of Labour in Ottawa. They told us that huge numbers of our brothers in the textile industry had organized but they were not allowed to say in which mills or how many there were.

We could sign a card and pay the initiation fee of \$2.00 at the desk. Whether we signed or not we were to leave the room one at a time by the door behind the speaker's desk. I signed and about a month later I received my first copy of the All Canadian Congress of Labour's monthly magazine. It was glossy paper and about twenty pages. Eugene M. Forsey was the research and education director and he always wrote a one page article for the back page. They were good and for those times almost radical.

Shortly after this meeting our washrooms suddenly changed. All mills until this time had the same terrible washrooms. Ours suddenly had liquid soap, paper towels, paper in the closets and doors with privacy locks were put on the closets. It was unbelievable but the strategy was simple; an outsider reported the mill to the Health Department and they had to do an inspection. A couple of years after this some of us were handing out leaflets at an unorganized mill when the shift was changing. We were being very careful not to step off the public sidewalk when suddenly two well-dressed important looking men came running out of the office door. One was very upset and I was steeling myself for trouble.

"Which one of you S.O.B.'s reported us to the Health Department?" He was so angry he was almost spitting.

After I signed the card I said nothing to anyone. I knew who some members were and I'm sure they knew that I was a member but there were no meetings and I talked to no one about the union.

The management would occasionally encourage us to have a stag party, perhaps once every two or three months. Actually it was when tensions and disagreements were high. The management would chip in a few dollars and everyone would pay one dollar for a ticket entitling them to three beers, any

additional beer cost 25 cents each. The union decided to run a stag of their own to reach out for more members.

It was summertime and we had the stag at a farm near the city. It was a beautiful day and there were plenty of trees of shade. The turnout was perfect. They had brought in a couple of railway brothers to speak at the appropriate time. That time never came. Suddenly one fight broke out, then another. I never drank more than one beer at a gathering so that I was sober and didn't get involved in any of the fights and I could see what was happening. I watched one man deliberately instigate a fight without getting involved himself. The fights were separate but then it became one big melee making a shambles of the whole affair, no speeches, no talking, nothing. That was on a Saturday afternoon and Monday morning the day shift had a full assortment of limping knitters with black eyes and bruised faces. The fights had been started by company stools and that method of organizing was never used again.

Union talk was growing a bit within the mill but very, very carefully. There weren't any meetings or any way that members could be identified and the mill was being careful about firing anyone without just cause. The reason for this was the All Canadian Congress of Labour was quietly fighting any wrongful dismissals of union members. In Ontario there were some laws on the statutes protecting workers' rights and when it appeared a case might go to court that particular mill backed down.

I should explain that I only worked with the women toppers for about six weeks. We worked ten hour days five and a half days a week. They were able to hire two more, one from Penmans and one from the mill. With the three toppers the company was able to start a night shift which was equivalent to having an extra machine at no cost. We worked twelve hours a night for five nights a week. We were paid the same rates as the day shift. No one had ever heard of shift differentials. We did our work and we weren't hassled. The Penman topper was homesick most of the time and he quit after a month. The company managed to hire the only boy topper Hamilton had ever produced. He learned the job because his mother was a supervisor in another mill. He managed to make out good on the job without his mother. There were no union meetings but there seemed to be more undercover talk. Suddenly the company struck. They shut down three machines for overhaul and let the knitters on those machines go. All six of the men were union and all had families. The Congress immediately got on to their cases and some support money came to them from our members and from other locals. Eventually the company was forced to re-hire five of the men. The other man they would not and their reasons were so good a case could not be made for him. The Congress worked through the International unions to get him a job in England as the black list would completely bar him here. We raised the money to send him to England and he was to send for his wife and children when he was established. He never sent for this family and we heard he was killed in the Blitz.

Shortly after this, at midnight on an exquisite night in June, I had eaten my lunch while working so that I could sit outside and enjoy the air during our lunch hour. It was a beautiful, balmy night and I was sitting alone and thinking of my situation. When I left London I had about \$600 in the bank which was a good sum in those days that had now shrunk to about \$200 as I had changed my way of living. I owned a 1930 Model A Ford. I dressed well and enjoyed Saturday nights and Sundays. Sunday was a hard day to enjoy, no shows, no games, just dressed up people walking to church or in the streets and parks. I had been breaking out more and driving to the beach on a Sunday, but Sunday was proper and it was restrained and when you worked nights it was your only day off.

Two of the movie houses started opening at midnight on Sunday nights and people, most of them shift workers, would be lined up for two blocks waiting for the shows to open. One cold winter night we were standing in a path on the sidewalk which had about a foot of snow on each side. The roadway was deep in snow except for the streetcar tracks which had been cleared by the Street Railway. The roads weren't cleared because the city wouldn't pay to clear them. That had been the year before but a few weeks after it was spring and on a Monday afternoon I was downtown walking around. It was the one day I could do that. On other days I had to sleep.

A parade was coming down King Street from the east toward Gore Park. People were standing on the curb to watch them and apparently the traffic, little as it was, had been stopped. They were marching eight abreast which is hard to do and had a big chested Sergeant Major leading them. There were over two hundred in the group, all in civilian clothes. They were the volunteer brigade for the Spanish Civil War. I knew two of them. The fellow standing next to me who was about my age knew a couple of them very well. They shouted and waved for him to join them while a friend on the other side of him kept cautioning him not to. Suddenly he ran across and joined the marchers.

About my lunch hour, I had been in this mill for two and half years and I was in exactly the same position as when I started and no hope for any change. There was a railway track behind the mill yard and just then a freight train went slowly and almost quietly by. There were five or six fellows sitting on the roof of one of the box cars. I could see their forms in the moonlight and I could hear them talking. I thought here they are enjoying the night and bumming it and I have to go back in that mill.

I went back in and straight to the night foreman. "George," I said, "I'm quitting as of right now!"

He started to grin, then he said "Bad night, huh."

"Nope, I just decided to quit."

"C'mon Al, you can't quit just like that, you have to give notice."

"Not a bit. We work piece rate, not by the week."

He was frowning now. "You can't just quit like that, Al. What in the hell am I supposed to tell Eddie?" (the superintendent)

"Just tell him I'll be in for my pay in the morning." I went to the machine to get my tools and belongings.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?"

"I just quit."

"Nobody quits a job like that," the knitter said.

I didn't look back but hustled out the door not slowing until I was on the street. There was a railway bridge about one block from the mill and I stopped, leaned back on the railing and gazed at the stars. It was a clear, moonlit night and the stars seemed very bright or perhaps I hadn't looked properly at them for a long time. The night was quiet without any breeze, there was no traffic or people around just myself and the stars. I had a wondrous exhilarating feeling of freedom. I walked slowly home and sat on the front steps for over an hour feeling the night pass slowly and delightfully by. The landlady was good, she grinned when I told her. "I don't blame you. No young fellow should have to work continually on nights like that."

I took my time dressing well and got into the mill about 10 a.m. The superintendent wasn't around but his next in command met me brimming with joviality and good fellowship.

"What's this I hear about you quitting?"

"Have you got my pay ready?" I said.

More joviality, more charm and good fellowship. It turned out that the other boy topper from London had quit that morning.

"You know, you're sort of leaving us short-handed. We won't be able to run the night shift. We're letting Evans go but we want you to stay."

"Sorry but I've had enough. I'm in exactly the same place as when I started."

"You can't get work right now. What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going to work. I'm going to enjoy the sun and the daylight and the night time too until my money runs out."

"You know they're desperate to keep that shift running. You could make a good deal with them right now."

The dealing ended with me promising to teach three new boy toppers on the night shift and in three months if they were capable of doing the job, they would put me on knitting and pay me while I learned. I noted the date and at the end of three months I showed up on the Monday morning to go to work at knitting.

The superintendent looked at me somewhat blankly and searched for something to say. I stood there patiently and finally he said, "Come along. I'll put you to work."

They were very good. They paid me the same rate that I had earned at topping which was a very unusual thing. None of the mills at that time were teaching knitters. It was too expensive. This mill had recently tried to teach three new knitters. They had been outsiders who had connections to officials in the mill. They

had worked without pay for the first four months and then under the guidance of a knitter at a very low rate. Only one had become a knitter, the other two gave up. I fully earned what they paid as I worked all around the mill and filled in wherever I was needed.

The talk of unionism in the mill was becoming more and more open. Organizing was being done on a personal basis, that is, good knowledgeable members would go two together to a non-member's house and talk to him and his wife together. The wives were more supportive of the union than the men in many cases. The same thing was going on among the women in the mill. No organizing was ever done on company property or time as that was grounds for instant dismissal. Never in all this time did I talk union, instead I talked socialism and politics.

One day leaflets were handed out when the shifts changed, about a mass meeting for the following Sunday afternoon. The reason for the meeting being Sunday afternoon was that the knitters were now on three shifts of 48 hours each. The machines now started at midnight Sunday and shut down at midnight on Saturday. This eight hour day that was put in was not humanitarian but so that the company could get more production from the machines. The knitters who ran the footers and the toppers continued working a 55 hour week.

The hall was packed and they were standing two deep at the back. A slate of officers was elected and every other type of official; guards, representatives from all the departments. The president was one of the oldest and best knitters. The vice president was the same but younger and both were English background. The secretary was the oldest and best of the French Canadians. A couple of the stalwart German knitters had some type of office. They then elected a shop committee which was really the executive committee. The women were represented by two of the older, best qualified women.

We were told that we were organized under the All Canadian Congress of Labour and that most of the other mills were organized like us and that we hoped to form a union representing all the full-fashioned hosiery workers in Canada.

Three weeks later we held another meeting. The company had refused to meet the committee saying that they were willing at any time to meet with any employee who had a complaint. This meeting was different. The hall was packed as before but the prevailing mood was for strike action. Every time before when conditions became so bad that a mill had a mass meeting there was a strike which always failed. Naturally the members thought this time was the same, 'let's strike and get it over with' but this meeting had Aaron R. Mosher, the president of the Congress from Ottawa, and Pat Conroy, the general secretary.

A.R. Mosher was a giant of a man with a mane of white hair. He wore a black suit and a dark tie which gave him sort of a clerical look. Union meetings at that time, without any specific mention of religion, were somewhat akin to revival meetings. He addressed us as brothers and sisters. He congratulated us on picking such outstanding people for our leaders and he thanked the officers and other

workers who had done such an outstanding job of organizing our local. He was warmed up now and had the meeting with him. His voice rose and he could have been heard a mile away and the hall seemed to shake with his thundering voice. His white hair was flying and he became Moses leading the slaves out of Egypt. If the mill owners did not know how to operate so as to have decent working conditions and adequate wages, we would have to show them. We should be patient with them until they learned but we will not be too patient and we will exercise our right to democracy in our place of work. He thundered on, no more shall any foreman or any other management summarily dismiss any employee.

Then he talked about the rumours of strike action. We will not strike at the company's time, we will strike at our time. A strike is war. We will negotiate and force the company to negotiate. We will teach them our rights and if they will not learn and if they will not negotiate fairly we will strike and when we strike it will be war and when we win we will trumpet our victory from the rooftops. He finally sat down to tumultuous applause.

During his speech Pat Conroy had sat off to one side facing us. He was a shorter, wide shouldered, sombre looking man and sat with his legs spread wide, one arm across his chest supporting the other arm which held his pipe. He looked to me like a gentle sort of person but tough-minded. He had come up through the ranks in the miners' unions. He had been one of the leaders in the Colorado Coal Strike where the company police had opened fire on the strikers wounding many and killing eight. He got up when Mosher finished, slowly tapped his pipe, then started talking. We must not bow to the masters. We must take our stand as free and equal people and insist on our rights. Never, ever, at any time, expect any mercy from the masters if we strike. We must fight to the finish and fight to win. We had the right to live as decent, honourable men and women, work in decent conditions and receive decent wages so that we could raise and educate our children to be decent, honourable citizens. Somehow he came across to me as much more sincere and effective than Mosher. Actually they complemented each other perfectly.

After the meeting most of the members were pretty quiet, some were a bit glum. They had attended the meetings expecting action and immediate release from all their problems and now they were discovering it didn't go that way. It was a long, hard laborious process which never had an ending.

The company had now agreed to meet the shop committee. They would not allow any outsiders to represent us. This went on for about three months without any progress of any kind being made on outstanding issues such as payment for down time. If the machines broke down, the knitters were not paid. The summary firings and layoffs stopped but no one thought of that as a victory. Mosher and Conroy came back from Ottawa to attend another meeting. They gave a rousing pep talk and then went over our requests. It would be easy to say demands but we never demanded and our suggestions as to how the company could operate better were best for all concerned. They suggested that we should be more forceful with

the company, that we should let them know that we definitely expected action on our grievances. They didn't counsel us to strike or not to strike.

The committee met again with the company and came away with nothing. We held a meeting and gave the committee a vote to strike if necessary. The company postponed the meeting. They had a pile of lumber delivered and stacked by the employee's entrance. The rumour went around that it was to board up the windows as the mill was closing and moving to Quebec if there was a strike.

We had another meeting reaffirming our faith in and support of the committee. They had a meeting with the company the next day. It started at 2.00 p.m. and at 6.00 p.m. was still going on. The shift would not start work until they heard from the committee. Some fellows sat in their cars in the yard and a few of us stayed at the entrance. About 7.30 the committee came down. They were very shaky and their voices showed their nervous strain. They had a paper with a couple of very minor concessions the company had granted.

They said they wanted guidance as to what they should do and one of the French-Canadians fellows said "We voted to strike and they haven't agreed to the real issues so why are we waiting."

Two or three more joined in the cry for a strike and that was it. We were on strike. The next morning all the employees, women and men, were on the picket line. The foremen and the superintendent were the only ones to enter. Two police cruisers, each containing four men, parked on the side street and watched us. That represented about one third of the police cruiser force. The line had to keep moving. No loitering was allowed. In the afternoon about one third of the pickets showed up and none of the police. The *Spectator* had a two column heading at the bottom of the city page that the strike was caused by outside agitators and the mill had requested police protection as they were worried about damage to their property. The next day we had a token picket and held a meeting to set up a committee. I was on the strike committee which covered just about everything. We set up a picketing system of two hour shifts each containing eight people.

Union members from other mills showed up with donations for the strike fund. Married men received twelve dollars a week and single men six. If you didn't need it you shouldn't take it and quite a few of us didn't. We had a welfare committee and one family we visited who had not complained but were reported to be in trouble were almost destitute. They had sickness in the family before the strike and hadn't had time to recover from the setback. They had been living for two days on boiled white beans and the man's shoes were completely worn out, he had no socks. They were quite cheerful and told us the garden would be coming on soon and things would be better.

It was June and strawberry time and the weather was wonderful and some of us enjoyed the holiday. The market opened about three o'clock in the morning to supply grocers and dealers. I would be there at opening time and bargain for strawberries. I'd buy six or seven crates, 24 boxes each pay about 6 or 7 cents a

box, then go back to my boarding house for a nap, get breakfast and then go out to peddle them door to door for 10 cents a box or 3 for 25 cents. Most days I would be sold out by two or three o'clock but sometimes I would hit a bad neighbourhood and be still going frantically at six o'clock.

We had no scabs but during the third week of the strike someone heard some extra machines running. The foremen had been running machines and we knew their sound but these were new sounds so we set up a night picket. The company had brought in some fellows from Sherbrooke who spoke only French. The French Canadian fellows handled it. One man joined the union and went on strike pay and we paid the other two fellows' fares back to Sherbrooke.

The strike was getting rougher on the company. All the mills were separately owned companies in apparent competition with each other but they all belonged to an employer's association which we understood to be the 'Silk Council' which had set up the rules for employment.

The founder of the company was E.B. Eastbourne, who had been a salesman, then set up a sales distribution company which bought silk stockings from the mills and resold them. Seeking a higher quality and more standard product he set up a company to manufacture silk hosiery. He knew the facts of life. He was very independent and knew the other mills would let him go broke fighting the union so during the third week he agreed to another meeting. He either wouldn't or couldn't give in to any of our demands so the committee told him that the members would not come back without a proper settlement and they invited him to come to a union meeting and meet with all the members. The final outcome was that while he would never go to a union hall he would be glad to meet all the employees together in the company office.

They cleared the desks from the offices and filled it with chairs except for two desks at the front, one for the committee and one for the company. The head of the committee was chairman. He stated that the committee would have nothing to say, that the meeting was for the management to talk to the workers and then introduced Mr. Eastbourne as the president of the company. The manager, superintendent and top foremen were at the company table not to speak but to stare hard at various members. For our part we had put our strongest members in the front seats.

He was an excellent salesman and gave an excellent speech. He told how the company had grown, how concerned he was about all the employees but this company was his baby. He had founded it and he would not agree to outsiders telling him how to run it. He was very sincere and I think when he finished he thought he had us sold.

Before he sat down he said he wanted to hear from us as individuals what our problems were. One after another three of the older men in the front rows got up and told what their problems were which applied to nearly all of us, rates, payment for down time, and charges for bad work and needles. All machines broke needles and the knitters replaced the broken needles without payment which was fair

enough as it was considered part of the job but some of the mills, and this was one, charged the knitters for the replacement needles. It was obvious Eastbourne had not understood this before. It had been made a rule by some superintendent and he promised to look into it. The charges for bad work also mystified him. If a knitter turned in a stocking with a flaw in it he had to replace it with two stockings which was extremely unfair. Eastbourne like all salesmen was easily sold and he was on our side on these issues.

I was the fourth one to speak and said I could not understand why he would not sign a contract with our committee on behalf of us, his workers. He replied that the committee was receiving outside advice and no outsiders were going to tell him how to run his company. I said he must receive outside advice at times and he had certainly received outside advice on these negotiations and wasn't it only fair that we receive outside advice.

He was red faced and very angry and said, "That's enough." He dismissed me with a wave of his hand.

The strike only lasted a few days after that meeting. Our gains were very little and very few but we had a signed contract. We had been recognized as a union and that was a tremendous gain. We were the first local in the industry to be recognized.

The strike had lasted five weeks but there was a lot of grumbling that the settlement was no good. It is very hard to please members without identifiable gains. A.R. Mosher returned from Ottawa to give us a pep talk and tell us what a great victory we had won. We must be careful about the backlash and not allow any dismissals without just cause and proper discussion.

There was no backlash. Everyone was very sober and serious and conditions did improve. The bosses were quieter and more reserved. We held monthly, well-attended meetings and set up grievance procedures. We appointed shop stewards but no union business of any kind was conducted on company property or company time. The grievances were oral at the monthly meetings and entered into the meeting minutes. Union dues were collected at the meetings. Things went along pretty evenly, some of the shop committee meetings were pretty rough but all told it was peaceful.

In Europe Hitler was threatening war not peace and finally on September 23 and 24 Chamberlain travelled to Berlin to negotiate with Hitler. Everyone was fearful of war. A group of us on the 4 to 12 shift drove to the *Spectator* at the end of our shift and joined a small group of people watching for posters to be put up telling the progress of the negotiations. It was unusual for people to be on the streets at that time of night. The poster was put up. A victorious Chamberlain had returned from Berlin holding a copy of the agreement in his hand and claiming "Peace in our time."

We went home feeling sad that Czechoslovakia had been dismembered and no longer existed but glad that Chamberlain had achieved a peaceful settlement.

I had been running a machine for some time now spending my money as fast as it came on clothes, car and dances. Dancing was the main recreation at that time and there were quite a few dance halls. If they were a club type, that is, German Club or French Club you could buy beer but if they were the open type no drinks were available so people took their own bottle which they kept under the table and bought mix from the hall at exorbitant prices. All of the dance halls had one or two big, beefy bouncers. My girl friend and I usually went to the Y.W. dance which was crowded and sometimes difficult to get into. The dance was in the gym and admission was 25 cents which paid for a seven piece band and a dixie cup of fruit punch and two cookies at intermission. Men stayed at one end of the gym and ladies at the other end. Above the ladies section was a balcony on which four middle aged ladies stood watching the festivities. It was a surprisingly good dance without fights of any kind. The only time a fight nearly happened was when two fellows squared off on the dance floor. They settled down but at the end of the dance two chaperons descended from the balcony and asked them to leave which they did. They were back the next week and nothing was said.

Getting my own machine had not been easy. I was the youngest knitter in some time. A lot of tradesmen in any trade resent newcomers and knitters were no exception. The ones who are not good themselves are the worse. During all this time the superintendent had stuck with me, when he was forced into a situation where because of appearance he had to correct me he always returned quietly to kid me about something.

Now that I had a machine there was no kidding and the corrections became more and more frequent. I knew I had to do something about it or I would become the rube of the mill. It had become a habit with him and I didn't know how to handle it. One Thursday morning, Wednesday night was his drinking night, he followed me up and down the machine for almost two hours correcting every move I made. I couldn't say anything back and finally I said, "Here, you run it. I quit."

That night I went to see Elsie and her dad said "I understand you quit your job, Al. I don't blame you, you can never give in to the masters. How are you fixed? If you need a place you can stay here anytime."

All of the older Scots referred to the bosses as Masters. It was a common word in the trade union movement but it was only used by the Scots. The word meant much more than boss. It referred also to the English and to those responsible for the clearances and the diminution of Scotland's trade and commerce. When a Scot referred to the masters with a real brogue it was almost as though he was spitting it out. The word was filled with disgust and contempt. They were right in combining boss and English because most bosses were English.

I could not have quit at a worst time. It was mid-November, 1938 and I had 90 dollars in the bank. The next day I went to Weston. The secretary in the Weldcrest Hosiery said they had a couple of empty machines and called the

superintendent. He too was English and rough. He started out by saying "Who says you're a knitter?"

From there it got worse, finally he said. "Come in and show me what you can do."

I told him I didn't want to work for him and left. On the way back to Hamilton I began to think I should have taken the job but I knew perfectly well I couldn't work for him.

There was another mill, Monarch in St. Catharines. I hadn't gone there first because after our strike was settled they struck. They were out for three months and went back with a contract without any concessions. The company refused to take their leader back and he advised them to go back without him. Next day I went there. The superintendent was English but pleasant and decent. We talked about machines. Theirs were older German-made types. He invited me in to have a look at a machine that was empty. He wanted me to start work at once but I didn't want to be too anxious so I told him I would start the next morning. I recognized a knitter who had been at Penmans and asked him about the place. He said they were pretty good but then you had to make them be good.

The paper said there was to be a snowstorm so I got up early and left Hamilton about 4:30 a.m. on November 21, 1938. I could never forget the date or the trip. The car was a 1933 Oldsmobile, big, heavy and powerful. The road was later called Highway No. 8 but the Highways Department did not take care of the roads at that time. Some counties and towns cleaned the roads occasionally but never during a storm. In some places it was impossible to tell where the road was, if I felt the car leaning I knew I was off the road. The Burgoyne bridge in St. Catharines was blown clear of snow but was all ice. The car in front braked and so did I but the mechanical brakes had frozen and would not release so that the car went skidding sideways across the bridge. The oncoming cars stopped and I finally stopped. I got out and kicked the brakes loose as they patiently waited. I was in the mill very early. The superintendent came around to say, "Never thought I'd see you today. There's quite a few didn't make it."

They put me on #1 machine. New knitters always got #1 as it was the oldest and most decrepit machine. The man running it had learned on it and hadn't made it any further. He was a nice smiling fellow with his shirt half in and half out of his trousers. His hair was all askew and after taking a few seconds to shake my hand and say hello he dashed to the other end of the machine to remedy something. I tried to get him to slow down and figure the machine but it was no use. He dashed up and down making three trips where one would do. His face was glistening with sweat and loose threads were hanging from his clothing. He was such a cheerful, striving fellow that I liked him at once. The superintendent came around, smiled and said, "It's no use. Everyone has tried. You just have to accept that Fogger is the way he is."

The knitter from Penman's came around. He was a couple of years older than me and had learned in a mill in Truro, Nova Scotia. He was blonde, fresh-faced and looked like a choir boy. He cultivated the image as he had grown up in his father's pool hall and was an outstanding pool shark. He said, "Sa-ay the boss fellow was around after our chat yesterday. Wanted to know how good you were. Had to tell him the truth. You're the best welt turner I have ever seen. Say I better know your name in case they want to know more about you. My name is Thomas."

It was impossible to be a good knitter without being a good welt turner. After the war, I was working at the National in Hamilton. The superintendent asked me about a man who had applied for a job. It was Thomas and I gave him the same recommendation. When Thomas started, I told him, and he said, "Sa-ay, isn't that nice."

I fitted in well at the Monarch, not having learned there I was thought to be a top-notch knitter. Three quarters of their knitters had learned there. The rest of them had moved around like me. We movers had no fear of foremen or management. We did not challenge them nor did they challenge us. We knew the job better than the home town fellows as we had learned tricks of the trade from many others. The mill owners liked us because we brought new ideas. Mills and factories are like large families and countries. Without people from the outside they get inbred and inefficient. They did not like us bringing in ideas about our rights and how to get them. I did the same as before, talking to everyone as if each word was being reported to the front office.

Running a silk hosiery machine, that is, being a knitter was a very individualistic job. At the industry's peak there were about one thousand knitters in all of Canada. Knitting could be compared to driving a car that had loose steering, no seat which made you half crouch to drive it, while continually changing wheels and having the motor stall every block or so. A knitter had to concentrate and time his movements to the speed of the machine and he developed a sense of what the machine would or might do. A moment's inattention might allow a 'smash' which would take hours to fix.

The textile industry in Canada was large and powerful. It had no competition because the government had set high protective tariffs. There were no imports. These high tariffs actually ruined the industry. They allowed the owners to skim off the profits and let the machines and mills become old and obsolete. As the machines became more inefficient, the piece-work system in effect cut wages.

The coming of silk hosiery was something different. The mills, which produced cotton stockings, men's socks and all kinds of underwear, added the new silk hosiery machines to their existing mills. To get good knitters they had to pay higher wages which was alright because these machines were profitable.

New entrepreneurs saw the chance of making money on silk hosiery and built modern mills and installed modern machinery. Hamilton had the National which was a modern mill and Mercury, Chipman's and Eaton's which were older mills.

The silk hosiery business became so profitable that the silk boats from Japan were met at Vancouver by a special 'Silk Train' which was a fast train carrying only silk in baggage cars which had armed guards. All tracks were cleared to make way for these trains which made straight to New York City. It was said that the silk hosiery business built the Japanese navy.

The high moment of a girl's life was when she received her first pair of silk stockings and many older women never owned a pair wearing instead the heavy, wrinkly, cotton lisle stockings. The National in Hamilton was proud that it produced stockings for Mary Pickford. Those silk stockings were better fitting and better looking than the stockings made now.

The knitters and other full-fashioned workers were the elite of the mills. When my average pay was about 24 dollars a week one man who had run underwear machines for over 25 years received eleven dollars a week. He received that because he worked nights all the time. The day shift only paid nine dollars a week. At that time room and board cost six to eight dollars a week so you can imagine his living standard. Because of the different pay levels, the older mills tried to separate the full-fashioned sections from the rest of the mill through different work hours and other methods.

The Monarch was one of the old type mills. The management had been smart enough to put the new hosiery machines on the first floor. This was important as the machines had to be perfectly level to operate efficiently and it was impossible to keep them level on the upper floors. The machines were not the most modern but they were well maintained and had good production. The building was old and not in very good condition. On the night shift I always kept a couple of old iron weights at the dark end of my machine to throw at any rats which scuttled by.

Their strike had ended about two months before I started there. The leader who had been forced out was a brilliant, charismatic fellow and without him the union was not very active. It was recognized and the management dealt with it but it was not effective. The foremen and superintendent were congenial and cooperative and there was a good feeling throughout the mill. Any hostility was directed toward the manager who was in the front office and was completely unapproachable. It was a good system — for the company.

St. Catharines at that time had a population of about 22,000. McKinnon Industries, which was a branch plant of General Motors, was the main employer and it was closed. The unemployment rate that winter of 1938-39 must have been over 30 per cent.

There was an older style, four storey hotel on the main corner of the city which had been closed for lack of business. I rented a room there for two dollars a week. It was a huge room with marble topped dresser, large oak writing table and a sink with hot and cold running water. The bathroom was at the end of the hall. The building had two other tenants.

Next door was a large restaurant run by three Chinese fellows. It had about twenty tables and booths and a long counter with stools. I never saw more than eight or ten people in it at any time that winter and sometimes I would be the only customer. The food was good, sausage, pork chops and the full meal came to thirty or thirty-five cents.

The mill was on eight-hour days and I went to Hamilton on week ends to visit my girlfriend. On eight hours I had lots of spare time so I joined the 'Y' again and the library which must have had one or more C.P. members on its board as they had a remarkable collection of ultra-left books. Whether through the 'Y' or whatever, I was soon going to meetings or discussion groups almost every free evening.

One group I attended was certainly C.P. though no one said so. I had no quarrel with their beliefs and could go along with some of their theories, but their rigidity and lack of humour repelled me. There was never any real discussion. They knew the answers to everything and it was always the same. To me they were the same as the ultra conservatives.

Another group I attended had every political belief except Liberal and Conservative. There were socialists, anarchists, C.C.F.'ers, Social Credit, fellows who called themselves C.P.'s but were not. The discussions went on for hours and although most of it was a waste of time there was good argument and I learned a lot. So much time was wasted on pointless argument that I copied from one or two others and when someone went on too long I would cut in and take over. One time I did it to a jovial, good type who called himself C.P. He shut me up by saying, "It's easy to see Edwards was never in the camps. If he had been he wouldn't be a lily white socialist. He would be red like me."

The camps he referred to were the relief camps located in northern bush country. Many people think the depression had a good effect on young people because they travelled from one end of the country to the other and 'saw the world.' The reality was that the father was unemployed and the family was on city relief. A voucher to purchase the barest food necessities was issued to families after 1930 but not to single men over sixteen. The reason relief vouchers were granted was because 'food riots' were taking place. In London, Ontario one Saturday night at this time a very large crowd of angry, hungry men who had been denied help for themselves or their families went from store to store on the main street demanding food or the money to buy it with. They smashed the windows of storekeepers who refused. The police were too few in number to intervene. In one city block the only store spared was a butcher shop which distributed all its cooked meat and sausages to the marchers. If there was more than one son at home over sixteen, they usually left to get away from the endless bickering. They would team up with a buddy and hop a freight out of town.

On their first stop they would look for work which didn't exist and probably go in a soup line for a couple of days. A soup line was just that, a bowl of soup and

maybe a piece of bread. Begging was against the law. The charge was vagrancy and the term might be from three to thirty days. After a couple of days they moved on to the next place or the police would force them to move on. Sometimes the police would pick them up as soon as they arrived in town, drive them to the city limits and tell them not come back. It was not uncommon to hear, 'That place was so bad they wouldn't even give me a drink of water.' Sometimes the railway police would come through and club them off the trains. No one will ever know how many were killed riding the rods nor how many froze to death. Certainly many died from malnutrition related diseases.

The fellows on the road established hobo jungles on the outskirts of all the cities. They lived in old abandoned railway boxcars. Naturally the people living near these jungles lost vegetables from their gardens and milk from their milk boxes. When the complaints grew too numerous either the police chased the men out or a vigilante group would chase them out and burn the box cars. The newspapers always reported the burning of a hobo jungle but they never reported the food riots. The papers would have a front page picture of a soup line in New York city or Chicago but a soup line in their own city which might be three blocks from the newspaper office was never shown.

To get these men out of the cities, the Bennett Government established the relief camps. They were set up right in the bush. Long wooden shacks fitted with army bunks and blankets with a crude stove for heat in the centre. The men worked at clearing bush and road work and received their meals and five dollars a month for necessities. It was supposed to be voluntary and perhaps a few did volunteer but it was common to see in the paper that 'Judge ____ dismissed charges of vagrancy against two young men who professed a desire to volunteer for service in a camp.'

There was no recreation of any kind in these camps and the men could only play cards and talk in the evenings and their time off. Alas and alack the government discovered they had set up schools for political thought and discussion and they weren't discussing Conservatism and Liberalism. Most of the men who went to these camps became C.P. or C.P. sympathizers. When they discovered what was happening, the Government closed the camps.

Although I went to all these meetings I never joined any party. One group I went to was pacifist and was absolutely non-political. They were against the war they were sure was coming and we were even given instructions on how to beat the draft which we were also sure was coming. The funny thing is that when my draft call came in 1943 I joined up voluntarily.

To get back to the Monarch. A foreman had cut a hole in the wooden door for the men's toilet and fitted it with a glass window so he could see who was in there. The toilet was so small that only one person, or possibly two, could get in there. I had a fellow I knew call the Health Department, being careful as St. Catharine's was a small city. The Health Department was excellent. They were around the next

day and made the company install a new door. The foreman was reprimanded for ruining the door.

The Monarch had its own Poet Laureate and in the five years I was there no one ever discovered who he was. He had made or obtained a duplicate key for the time clock and he would post his jingles and poems on the inside of the glass of the clock. It would be read by everyone as they punched in for work but it could not be removed until someone got the key which was kept in the front office.

At that time George Bernard Shaw would have short paragraphs in all the newspapers commenting on world affairs and the stupidity of governments. Shaw's short comments would appear two or three times a week and so did our poet's. A foreman had gone to the manager about a raise and the manager gave him a lecture about eating too much high priced food and told him his wife should learn to cook things like baked beans. Next day it appeared on the clock; 'Lord help us — it's beans for the bosses.'

With the growth of the union the mills were forced to pay for some down time. This was not to please or appease the union but because the Congress made representations to the Ontario Department of Labour. The department was not active but they did act on proper complaints. The mills began to pay for down time if the problem could not be prevented by the knitter which meant they paid for one half of down time.

The Monarch had its own system. They gave each foreman an allotment of down time to use at their discretion, although this system was arbitrary and paternalistic the men liked it as it resulted in payment for 90 per cent of down time. One time I had the flu and only worked a day and a half. On payday I was paid for three days and went right to the superintendent as I didn't want any favours.

"It's O.K., Al. We had some day rate over and thought you could use it. You don't want to return it, do you?" He grinned.

Petty theft was an almost accepted thing. The boss dyer kept an open barrel of household washing soap just inside the dye house door so that people wouldn't damage his boxes and barrels of expensive chemicals. The lighting system was archaic and we were forever changing light bulbs. To prevent theft we had to turn in the old bulb for a new one. Men brought the old ones from home to exchange. The company put a special mark on the bulbs and in no time the offenders were bringing the burned out, specially marked bulbs from home.

Silk stockings, because of the dyeing and finishing process, cannot be stolen as the final step 'turning' is done in a separate room. The mills were saving money by having thirteen or fourteen year old boys 'turn' stockings after school. One night the day foreman came back in the evening to finish a job he was doing in the machine shop. As he crossed the yard something went flying over his head and landed in the weeds at the edge of the yard. He investigated and found a full bag of finished stockings. That finished the child labour. Nothing was done about it. We always wondered how many pairs they stole.

Some of the local knitters knew how to get men's socks which were made on the second floor. It was a well-kept secret known only to a few people. A bootlegger near the mill was raided and the police ransacked the house looking for booze. They didn't find much but they did find dresser drawers filled with neatly stacked men's socks which had been tendered for payment.

Bootleggers were plentiful. A man out of work and needing money to live on would set up and pass the word around that he was open after hours if he wasn't too afraid of the police. The price was the same as the hotels and the surroundings were quiet and congenial. On the night shift a group of us always went to a bootlegger on pay night. Our favourite was an old Dutch fellow just outside the city. He was almost 80 and had about three acres of market garden that he couldn't care for any more. His boys had left home and his old age pension was hardly enough to feed him. The thing he enjoyed about selling beer was having the company. Not talking to us especially but hearing us talk and joke. One night we went there and he told us the police had visited and warned they would have to lay charges if he didn't close. The next time we went the place was deserted. We went back in about six weeks and he was home again. He was sorry he couldn't sell us any beer but he invited us in. He had a keen sense of humour and told us about his 30 day sentence. The food had been pretty good, better than he could make. They served the meals on time and he didn't have to worry about the fire. There were people to talk to all the time. Some of them weren't the best but they treated him good. One son had visited him after his release and declared that he had disgraced the family. The old fellow chuckled, "At least he visited." He was sorry he couldn't sell us any more beer but the judge had warned him that the next time would be six months. Summer was coming and six months was a little too long.

Quite often after visiting my girlfriend in Hamilton on the weekend I would get a ride back with a truck driver I knew. We would arrive in St. Catharines' about two a.m. and go to the only restaurant in the city that was open all night. We would get an egg sandwich and a coffee, total cost 15 cents and when we finished I would go to my rooming house and he would go back to work. We were nearly always alone with the counter man but one morning a man was sitting at the far end of the counter. St. Catharine's was the county seat and there had been some talk about a man who was being hung for murder. We were looking sideways at the man who did not look up or say anything just continued staring straight ahead. He was a stocky, wide and heavy shouldered man in a dark suit. He was hunched over the counter. His dark brimmed fedora hat seemed too big for his head. His suit coat was bulging at the side and something was poking its way out of his side pocket.

The counter man, a skinny wide eyed fellow leaned over to toward us and said, "Its the hangman! That's the noose in his side pocket."

Whether that was the noose in his pocket I don't know but I have never had such a feeling of revulsion as I had then. What a horrible way for human beings to

live and die. I left the restaurant at once but it was very difficult getting over the disgust I felt.

The mill union was almost inoperative. There were shop committee meetings with the management but they were ineffective. The union meetings were sporadic and poorly attended. The war started and most of the groups I attended disappeared. There were no more C.P. members and even the socialists were quiet. The only ones left were the C.C.F. and a couple of Social Credit who looked and talked very vague.

We were married and managed to rent a house. Just after that the phoney war ended and Germany conquered France and the British rescued their men but lost their equipment at Dunkirk. Suddenly the war was on in earnest. Barbed wire was put around all the access areas to the Welland canal and armed guards, veterans of the first war, patrolled to prevent sabotage by fifth columnists. The Home Guard drilled with wooden rifles in the school yards as all available arms had been shipped to Britain to replace those lost at Dunkirk. The night watchmen at all factories were armed.

The General Motors plant started up and their union called a strike. Mackenzie King called a special session of parliament and 300 R.C.M.P. were dispatched to St. Catharines to protect the country from the red menace who were disrupting the war effort. The Reds, men from 35 to 60 who had been unemployed through the depression and were used to getting by on practically nothing, decided they weren't going to work for starvation wages. They didn't revolt or picket or challenge the R.C.M.P. They stayed home. It was a ridiculous sight. Three hundred mounties with red coats, riding boots and spurs, protecting an empty factory from nobody. When it finally got through to the authorities that the police could not make men work they were gradually and quietly withdrawn. Wages were quietly raised and work resumed.

Ever since starting at the Monarch I had tried carefully to get the union active again. One Sunday night two of the oldest and most reliable knitters came to see me. It was very late, but they wanted to see me before I went to work the next day. This was just before the General Motors troubles. They told me that one of the knitters, a quiet uninvolved type, had come across a knitter who we all knew was a hopeless alcoholic who never missed time at work but was always drunk on weekends. The weather was very cold and the man was in a very bad way. He had managed to get him to his rooming house where the fellow passed out completely. He had been concerned about leaving him and had stayed with him. That was how he noticed the sheets of paper on the bedside table with Pinkerton Detective Agency printed on them. The papers were a report by the drunk. He left with the papers and went to the other two knitters.

They were older and more experienced than I and one especially was very capable and very tough and sure of himself. They went to the drunk's room and spent some time getting him awake enough to talk properly. They showed him the

report and gave him two days to leave town and told him that if he turned up in any other mill they would immediately spread the word about who his employer was. They showed me the report. It had quite a bit in it about general things around the mill but it had a report on each of them and on me. There was nothing I could see wrong with the actions of them or me and it was a factual report. They wanted me to be prepared if anything happened when I went to work in the morning. Nothing happened and the drunk disappeared. He vanished completely. We never saw or heard of him again.

This made me a little more careful about union matters, but the General Motors' situation must have awakened some others. A union meeting was scheduled and an outside organizer turned up. I knew him only slightly but I knew all about him. He was C.P., but I had no objections to that except that although very good organizers they could never hold a union together after it was organized. This man was not a good type. He was very glib and had full control of the meeting.

I wrote to the Congress and told them that the mill was ready for organizing. About a month to six weeks later Arthur Williams appeared in the neighbourhood. He almost ignored me but in no time he was in touch with the oldest employees and very shortly he called a meeting which nearly everyone attended and signed new union cards. I believe we were affiliated with the United Mine Workers through their District 50, which was a catch-all section John L. Lewis had set up to organize those who wanted a union but were not mine workers.

Arthur Williams, he insisted on being called Arthur and did not recognize Art, had been a miner in Wales starting work as a boy. He knew everything about the union movement. He was a very quiet and moderate speaker but he had a proper answer for everything and was absolutely sure of himself. He dressed impeccably in well-tailored suits with matching shirts, ties, socks and shoes. His voice was perfectly modulated and he never smiled or frowned. He had a tremendous ego. During the time that I knew him and watched him I could never understand how he did it, but he was without a doubt the best organizer I have ever seen and he could control a huge meeting without raising his voice.

Our first union under the All Canadian Congress was called the Canadian Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers Association. The Congress would only organize and allow industrial type unions, that is unions where all the workers in a factory belonged to the same union. Originally they would only allow Canadian unions but they were beginning to allow unions that were affiliated with the C.I.O. in the U.S.A. to organize through them in Canada.

The old craft type unions were all members of the Trades and Labour Congress which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. At that time they were much more powerful. They included the Carpenters, Bricklayers, Typographical, Projectionists and all the other established trades and also the Railway Brotherhoods, which had started as an insurance group to cover their families in case of sickness, accident or death before Workmen's Compensation was established.

They were set up in lodges and members went to lodge meetings not union meetings. They were fiercely loyal to the lodge. There were no scabs among railway workers.

In the early days of our attempts to organize we went to the Trades and Labour Congress but they wouldn't help us. Although their unions were solid and tough, most of their officers were very conservative. The Railway Brotherhoods though affiliated were quite different in their attitudes and principles. They helped us, supplying terrific speakers and teaching us leadership and how to conduct meetings and do all the things necessary to have a good organization. We considered ourselves an industrial type union because we signed up all the full-fashioned workers in the old style mills. We gave up trying to organize the other workers who made men's socks, underwear, etc. We couldn't get them to meetings and we really did not understand them.

The Congress had reluctantly accepted this, but now we had Arthur who insisted that we sign up the few other workers. We told him to try as it could not be done. He signed them up and they came to our meetings.

Now he wanted to know about the main Monarch mill in Dunnville. The St. Catharine's mill was a branch plant. The older knitters explained the Dunnville mill to him. It was a large mill and the main industry in Dunnville. The people were so backward there it would be impossible to organize them. Arthur moved his operation to Dunnville and in a very short time he was back for a few of us to attend a meeting there. Two of us went, it was customary whenever a mill was organized for members of an established local to go, sit to one side on the platform and perhaps say a few words about the benefits of trade unionism. These first meetings had sort of religious overtones to them. The visitors were declaring their belief in the faith.

The hall in Dunnville was big and it was packed. They had used all the wooden kitchen-type chairs that were in the hall and then brought in folding chairs and some men were standing at the back. The two of us sat on chairs on the left side of the platform. The union committee were in the centre with the chairman and the secretary at the table. Two other members were on one side of the table and Arthur in his immaculate, tailored suit with perfectly matched accessories sat on the chairman's other side.

The committee were three older and very capable looking men and one woman. It was a well run and very good meeting with numerous motions and discussions. I sat there looking out at the crowd. All of them had home made hair cuts. The women had no make up. Many of the men were lacking socks yet the Monarch made socks. The men wore clean clothes that were worn out and shabby. The women's dresses were home made. How those people found the time to keep clean and respectable with the clothes they had and the hours they worked was amazing.

After the formal part of the meeting Arthur gave a short talk and then the chairman asked us to speak. I spoke about union strength and the way to achieve

it. I felt very uncomfortable and out of place talking to these people. They were all looking up at me with smiling expectant faces and trusting us to show them the way to obtain a better standard of living.

Afterwards I told Williams how I felt. It just was not right to lead these people on about all the good in store when we knew damn well it would be an awful battle. The thoughts of them without any experience of the wiles and trickery of management staying united in that single industry town was frightening. It was easy for us. We knew the score and we knew where we stood and what we could do, but these people had no experience at all. Williams would not answer me.

Three weeks later at our next meeting they returned the visit. Three men and two women all of them over 35 years old arrived in an old open touring car that was not worth over 25 dollars. The men asked if they could clean up as they had had a bit of tire trouble on the way over then they took their seats on wooden chairs on the left side of the platform. They had solved the clothes problem by all wearing light coloured bib style overalls cleaned and neatly pressed and they all wore white shirts. They still had those same awful hair cuts.

Our meeting went along in its same routine and they sat there attentively watching and listening. Part way through the meeting one of our members rose on a point of privilege. "Let's not kid ourselves," he said, "We've been going through this for years and what have we accomplished? All we've got is hot water, soap and paper towels."

It was a common complaint of malcontents. The facts were that any gains we made were always made to appear as a gracious gift from the company. Ordinarily we ignored this type of talk and went on with the meeting. This time there was a short silence, then one of the visiting women stood up and asked if she might speak. She started out easily saying that they now had soap and paper towels and that it was a welcome change. She went on about how she had started work in the mill on her sixteenth birthday and had married a mill worker in a different section who was not here as he was on the night shift this week. They had two children and they were going to be educated and were not going to work in the mill. She had blonde, straight hair. She was fairly heavy built and didn't smile and was about 40 years old. She told us her boss was a big man and a bully and at times he was very mean, almost vicious. She dreaded going into work in the morning. You women know how it is, she said. He would rub up against me and turn and smirk. It was his way of making them feel like dirt. I'm in the union now. I know my rights and his place. I go into work now cheerful and happy. I look him straight in the eye and he knows better than to put one finger on me. He is a foreman with a job to do and no more than that. I have my rights and my dignity and he must respect them. Her voice had been rising and her words were more distinct and cutting as she talked. Now she almost shouted, "You ask what has the union done? The union made me strong," and her arm with the fist clenched shot out. Those last four or five words were shouted.

The meeting erupted in applause and she backed away, groping for her chair red faced and flustered. Even now I become very emotional recalling it.

The Dunville mill was organized and the committee was recognized by the management and Arthur went on to organize in the newly operating war industries.

The government had brought in Selective Service and wage and price controls. Prices and wages could be adjusted in cases of inequity but only after many months of board hearings. Young, unmarried men could be called up for 30 days of military training for home defence and Mackenzie King said this was not conscription. Selective Service also said that industries could only hire men who were militarily exempt, that is, if you were married and less than 28 years old or if you were single and less than 40 no place could hire you unless you were unfit for military duty. The only way to prove you were unfit was to join the army. If you had an obvious disability you could obtain an exemption paper, but if your disability was not obvious you were in until they gave you a medical discharge.

As men joined the service, or those who were exempt for one reason or another quit the mills for better jobs at war work, we gradually reverted to ten or twelve hour shifts again. There were no eleven or thirteen hour shifts because everyone took their noon hours. The company became very friendly and co-operative as they did not have to worry about wages which were controlled. The price of stockings was the same as the highest priced ones before the war. Formerly there had been about five price ranges for stockings now there was one, the highest. The war time stockings were made of cheap synthetics where the pre-war had been made of expensive silk. The mill was making so much more money they gave us a 20 dollar Christmas bonus and our ungrateful time clock poet had a poem about our half cent raise. He had figured it on a yearly basis. About the same time G.B. Shaw had one of his comments on the front pages of the papers. He said 'I knew Hitler was mad, but I didn't realize he was stupid until he attacked the English.' Before the war Shaw poked fun at the English constantly. Now he used a subtler form of humour to show that the Germans did not have a chance against the English.

Herb, the night watchman at the Monarch, had been armed like all night watchmen at the time of Dunkirk. He was 72 years old and besides making his rounds every hour to punch the clock he had to care for the coal-fired boilers. His shift was twelve hours and by the end of the shift he could barely make the rounds. The gun they had given him was the old six-shooter type with a long barrel. The belt and holster would not hang properly on his skinny frame and the gun barrel struck his knee as he walked. Then one night it happened, he lost the gun. The police came and took him to the station for questioning. The whole of the St. Catharine's police force must have visited the mill at that time. They questioned all the knitters on the night shift. The R.C.M.P. were called in. They did not wear uniforms but they tried so hard to look like police in their civilian clothes or perhaps they always looked like that. They would stand near the time clock when the shift changed and silently look at people or walk around the mill looking at people. The

gun was never found. They outfitted Herb with a club for the rest of the war. I think he chucked the thing into the boiler.

The war effort grew. Women worked shifts in the war plants as the laws were changed to let them work nights. Women at home were organized into Red Cross, Y.W.C.A., Salvation Army and whatever else some selfless egoist could think of.

Meat, tea, sugar and gasoline were rationed. It became impossible to buy appliances and furniture. Hitler attacked Russia and all the C.P. members appeared again as if by magic. They were not organizing unions now. They were exhorting everyone to give their all to the war effort. My wife and I went to a meeting at the Collegiate where the speaker was Anna Louis Strong. The auditorium was filled and people were standing in the hall. The mayor and two council men shared the platform with three of my C.P. acquaintances from former study groups, strange bedfellows. They were no longer interested in unions. Their cry was for war production.

Because of the shortage of help, the mill tried innovative labour-saving ideas. One method they tried showed promise and the superintendent asked me to run the machine as my particular skills were suited to the method they were developing. It was impossible to pay piece rate so I agreed as long as they paid my average weekly pay. They agreed to pay me my last three month's averaged weekly pay until a rate could be established.

At that time our daughter was born. The doctor had told us the hospital bill would be 50 dollars and we had the money ready in the bank for the time it was needed. It was nine o'clock at night and the doctor said to go right to the hospital. When we arrived a short, unsmiling, thin lipped woman asked us for our 50 dollars. I told her it was in the bank and I would get it in the morning. She said that was no use as the fee had to be paid before admission or we would have to go to the Salvation Army unit. I refused and we argued for quite a while. Finally she said we would have to leave and I told her we were not leaving and when our doctor came to tell him we were waiting for our baby in the waiting room. She glared and marched back into the hospital, arms akimbo. Ten minutes later she was back and said, "You come with me Mrs. Edwards and as for you, young man. You go home. You're no use around here and we don't want you around here and be here in the morning with the money." In the morning another unsmiling woman took my money and gave a receipt and neither of us said a word.

I liked the experimental job and after about four months of careful work by the foremen and myself we had the machine on a steady productive basis. The mill then put the machine on two shifts and set a rate which was ridiculously low. The mills always set the rates without any discussion. Sometimes they were a bit high and that encouraged the men to make a larger than average pay and then the mill would cut the rate. We knitters were quite accustomed to all the manoeuvres of setting a rate. I worked along at my usual speed neither rushing nor dawdling. The

foreman and superintendent were in silent agreement with this as it made better quality hosiery and less machine breakdowns.

After about two more weeks of averaging my pay I suddenly received a pay of \$9.60 for a week's work. I went to the foreman and he, red faced said I would have to see the superintendent. He, poor fellow, said he could do nothing. We got into quite an argument about promises and obligations and he said the only thing I could do was go and see the manager in the front office. I refused and told him to get somebody else to run the machine. He wanted me to think about it as I would not be able to get a job anywhere else and would have to go in the army. I told him they could not get anyone else to run the machine so we would be even, then I gathered my tools and went home.

We had a cup of tea and talked it over and my wife agreed I had done the proper thing. The phone rang. It was the foreman to tell me that the manager wanted to see me in his office. I told him I would be pleased to pick up my proper pay but I did not want to meet with the manager in his office. We talked for a while about proper procedures and I repeated 'No' and hung up. Ten minutes later he phone back and said that confidentially he could tell me that the manager would pay me properly, but he wanted to see me in his office. I agreed.

His secretary was the older, unsmiling type. We knew each other from the shop committee meetings. She always looked at us as though we had no business being in the front office, after all our place was in the mill. She had that look now and told me to wait and she would see if the manager would see me. There was a short wooden divider with a gate in it behind her desk. I opened the gate and walked through with her staring coldly at me. There were some other people working at the desks in the main office and I went through to his office at the end of the room. He swung around on his swivel chair when I tapped on the door. He was every cartoonist's picture of a bloated capitalist. Huge belly resting on his thighs and sagging jowls. Now he was all smiles and good humour.

"Sit down, Al. Sit down. What's all this misunderstanding we seem to be having?"

"It's a matter of promises and pay, sir."

Then followed about ten minutes of him talking about the problems of management and the fact that this was only a branch plant and decisions and pay rolls were from Dunnville. I said nothing and finally he said, "We're going to continue you on the present basis until we can work something out but in any case your pay will not go below its present level."

I said "O.K." and was part way out of the office before I realized he hadn't made up the last week's pay. I turned around and said, "Where's the rest of last week's pay?"

"Are you going to quibble about that?" he said.

"Certainly, that's what I'm here for."

"What do you want me to do? Give it to you out of my own pocket?"

"That's O.K. by me."

He dug his hand furiously into his pocket, sorted out \$15.00 and put it on the desk.

I said, "It's \$15.20."

He added another quarter and I put down 5 cents change, picked up the money and left. On the way out I nodded and smiled at the secretary. She glared.

I went back into the mill and started my machine.

About a half hour later, the superintendent came by. "Good to see you're here, Al," he was grinning. "I'm putting you in for a full day's pay for today."

"Thanks, Bill."

The manager could not be nicer after our talk. He would walk around the mill, something he had never done, and he always stopped to chat a couple of times a week. It grew tiring and I avoided him as much as I could.

The draft call came about four months later. Although you know you have to go in the army sooner or later, a draft notice is a very scary and intimidating thing. It stated what I had to do. That is, where I must report and at what time and the penalties for not reporting. It also stated that I must notify my employer immediately on receipt of the notice. Finally it stated that if the person wanted to volunteer for active service in the Navy, Army or Air Force they need not report as stated.

Next day I went to the R.C.A.F. centre in Hamilton. There was quite a line up waiting to volunteer. They took eight of us, gave us a day's pay (the King's shilling) and put us on two week's leave without pay.

It was back to the mill the following day and I went to the office to tell them of my draft call. The manager was furious.

"You have to notify us immediately when you get that!" The reason was that they could apply for an exemption for you as a key employee.

"I joined up, sir."

He started to say more and stopped. His face was reddish purple. It was a criminal offence to counsel or advise, etc., etc., any man against volunteering his services.

I never saw him again.