Some History of the Kenny Oral History Project

The origin of the Kenny Oral History Project can be traced to the memorial meeting held for Robert S. Kenny at the Davenport Public Library on 30 November 1993. With help from my friend Russell Hann, a trained historian, I set up a table with photographs of unidentified individuals at events organized by the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) which had been included in Kenny's voluminous donation to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. A few photos were identified that night, but what proved far more important was the opportunity to meet several of "Bert" Kenny's old friends and comrades, particularly Bessie Touzel, Lil Green and her partner Ray Stevenson, who was a featured speaker at the event.

A week or so later, in December 1993, I attended a performance of the "Tale of a Mask," written by Japanese-Canadian playwright Terry Watada, at the Workman Auditorium located within the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. The cast was composed of roughly equal numbers of patients and professional actors and I was astonished that I was unable to discern which actors belonged to which category. I had another surprise when, during the intermission, Cyril Greenland invited me to his office on the premises for a chat after the performance. Cyril, an energetic and vibrant man in his early 70s at the time, had spoken at Bert Kenny's memorial and recognized me from that event. I later discovered that he had been a co-founder of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry (today the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health), had previously taught at UofT, and subsequently became a professor at McMaster University's School of Social a Work and an Associate in its Department of Psychiatry.

Cyril informed me that, as Bert's executor, he was concerned about how best to use the substantial sum of money that Kenny had left the Fisher Library, in addition to his enormous collection of books and other printed material (the bulk of which related to socialism and radical/revolutionary activities in Canada and abroad). Cyril said that while Bert's idea of creating some sort of scholarship to be awarded to promising leftist students did not seem feasible, he wanted to ensure that the endowment would be used to reflect and promote Kenny's interests and priorities. He did not want the money to be diverted into the university's general coffers nor used solely to purchase a few pricey bibliographic rarities. I assured him that I entirely agreed.

An Unlikely Candidate

Plans for an exhibition of the Kenny collection were already being discussed at the Fisher, but Cyril asked if I had any ideas about other possible projects. He was delighted when I suggested that it might be possible to find some smart young graduate student with an interest in the field to go around and interview as many of Bert's comrades and contemporaries as could be located. Cyril said he knew exactly the right person for the job. I was pleased to hear this, but my heart sank when said he wanted me to do it, as I presumed that, as Kenny's executor, Cyril must either be a party member or a very close sympathizer. His proposal put me in the rather awkward position of having to reveal that not only was I not particularly politically sympathetic to the Communist Party, but that I was also one of the hated "Trotskyists"—as at least several dozen CPCers could attest.

I was shocked when Cyril responded that he did not regard this as a disqualification. He told me that over the years he had known quite a few people in and around the Communist Party and was generally not impressed with them—in fact, he said, he had always personally inclined much more toward the politics of the Independent Labour Party, with which George Orwell identified. (I subsequently discovered that prior to Cyril, Robert and Janet Kenny had designated Peter Weinrich, a long-time friend and fellow bibliophile, as their executor, despite their knowing that he was more sympathetic to anarchism than Marxism.)

While Cyril's response was pleasing, I told him that, in view of the intensity of the animus that Stalinists generally felt toward Trotskyists, this would not be the best way to proceed. I sketched what I imagined the blowback might look like when Robert Kenny's co-thinkers found out that a "Trotskyite" had wormed his way into their midst to debrief them. I offered to help locate a suitable candidate with a less defined political profile. But Cyril was adamant, and, apart from my tactical reservations, I was intrigued by the opportunity to explore some of the deep background and hidden history of the largest, best organized and most influential socialist organization in Canadian history. Cyril assured me that if things went wrong and everything blew up, he would take full responsibility and treat it as his mess to clean up. On that basis I agreed to proceed. Cyril contacted Richard Landon, the Fisher's long-serving director/philosopher-king, who immediately approved the idea and invited me to his favourite local pub to discuss practical arrangements.

My concern about "blowback" never materialized, although at one point it seemed imminent. This was chiefly because it gradually became clear to everyone interested that the Kenny bequest was being handled in a way that would have pleased Bert and that the history of the movement to which he devoted his life was being treated seriously by the Fisher library. Bert's contemporaries were all rather elderly and more or less politically retired, so none of them ever recognized me from meetings, demonstrations or other public political events. At the time they had plenty of other concerns—Boris Yeltsin's triumph and the formal dissolution of the USSR had split the CPC down the middle. The "liquidationist" wing (eventually dubbed the "Cecil-Ross Society") led by George Hewison, who had succeeded "Wild Bill" Kashtan as party leader in 1988, more or less abandoned any claim to "Marxism-Leninism." Kashtan had meanwhile come out of retirement to rally opposition to Hewison by those committed to upholding the party's traditions and political legacy. Kenny's friends and associates were broadly aligned with Kashtan's wing, but it too was sharply internally differentiated, as I soon discovered.

Kenny's Comrades & *Northstar Compass*

Robert Kenny was one of many CPC members who had initially hoped for great things from Mikhail Gorbachev's plans to reinvigorate the Soviet Union through a combination of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. As it slowly became clear that Gorbachev's program was only accelerating the disintegration of the USSR, Bert and many others in the CPC who had invested so much of their lives in promoting and defending their socialist motherland, became increasingly distraught.

By 1991 Bert had gravitated to the "hard" faction within the broader "pro-party" grouping of those opposed to Hewison's liquidationist plans to transform the party into a broader, more all-inclusive leftist

formation. The hard-liners traced the problems in the Soviet Union to Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 repudiation of Joseph Stalin and his legacy--particularly the Moscow Purge Trials of the 1930s. In August 1991, the month that Boris Yeltsin's capitalist restorationists triumphed in Moscow, the CPC "hards" launched the *Northstar Compass* which soon attracted a following among pro-Stalin Communists around the world and eventually had editions published in English, French, Russian and Spanish. Mike Lucas (Lukak) served as editor and Ray Stevenson as associate editor. Bert, who had worked closely with Mike for decades in the Canada-USSR Friendship Association, was credited with suggesting adding "*Compass*" to "*Northstar*" as the name of the publication.

The editorial in the first issue of *Northstar Compass* downplayed the ideological homogeneity of its initiators, although their willingness to "eradicate" transnational corporate power signalled a commitment to socialist fundamentals:

> "We are non-partisan and we have no hidden agendas. There are Communists among us, and there are non-Communists as well. There are among us deeply held religious commitments. Each in turn receives the same respect and gives voice on an equal and democratic basis. We believe that 'by honest differences of opinion we shall arrive at sound conclusions'.
>
> "But we are united in our total disagreement with those who insist that only by 'privatization' and the total domination of individuals, nations, resources, technologies, social and physical sciences and development by transnational corporate power, can our species survive and prosper. We hold the precise opposite to be the road ahead, with the powers of the "corporate" monsters curtailed and controlled, or, if necessary, eradicated."
>
> Source: https://www.northstarcompass.org/nsc0806/17years.htm

After Robert Kenny died in 1993, many of his associates were shocked to learned that he had not made a bequest to the *Northstar Compass* and had instead left almost everything to the Fisher. Cyril responded to the grumbling by donating some Soviet commemorative medals and badges of little commercial value from Bert's collection. This gesture was viewed as little more than an insult and gave rise to considerable speculation about devious anti-Communist scheming, as Bessie Touzel informed me. Mike Lucas returned the medals to the Fisher within a few months.

In her 22 March 1994 interview, Lil Greene, Ray Stevenson's partner, said she had been "floored" by the value of Kenny's estate and "very surprised" that all the money went to the University of Toronto. When I talked to Mike a week later in the Queen Street offices of the Canadian Friends of the Soviet People, he alluded to the widespread disappointment that *Northstar Compass* had received nothing and suggested that despite his lifetime commitment to the Communist movement and the Soviet Union, Bert was evidently "not dedicated to such an extent that he would have left…the books, or money to [the] Canada-USSR Association." He balanced that with the observation that Bert's decision to donate his collection and money to the Fisher was a "brilliant thing" because, although he would have appreciated getting "$10,000 or $20,000 to keep our work" going, the Kenny collection would "in the long run" create a valuable resource for "future generations" of "people who are not already [leftist] converts."

The Canada-USSR Association promoted Soviet artistic performers, films and literature as well as "exploring avenues of friendship and understanding that will benefit our two peoples." By the time that Mike and Bert were running it in the 1970s, the group had shrunk to CPC members and periphery, largely as a result of the ferocious anti-Communism of the 1950s. But when its predecessor was founded, in the midst of World War II, it had enjoyed the patronage of the top echelon of Canada's ruling elite. Contemporary promotional literature from the "National Council for Canadian-Soviet Friendship" described its launch:

> "on June 22, 1943, [the second anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union] at a rally attended by close to 17,000 persons in the Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto, under the chairmanship of the Right Hon. W.L. Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada. The guest speaker was the Honorable Joseph E. Davies, former United States Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. [A film version of Davies' 1941 book *Mission to Moscow* justifying the purge trials of the 1930s had been released a month earlier. In one scene, Davies, played by Toronto-born Walter Huston, has an audience with a genteel 'Uncle Joe' Stalin who patiently explains what the Moscow trials were all about.] From its inception, the Council was sponsored by all political parties, all heads of English-speaking churches, and by citizens from all walks of life in the dominion."

At the friendship association's second congress, in November 1944, Louis Blake Duff, a prominent Toronto bibliophile, whose collection of "books about books" is today housed in the Fisher Library, chaired a panel on "Art" which featured Professor E.J. Pratt lecturing on "Canadian Literature."

The Kenny Advisory Committee

Cyril's role as executor was the focus of much suspicion and recrimination from Bert's old comrades who could not believe that he had intentionally excluded the organizations that represented his life's work. Cyril had been appointed Kenny's executor through the intervention of Bessie Touzel, who was close to the Greenland family. Bessie told me that Cyril had "no feeling" for the party, but that his wife was an independent person who was sympathetic to socialism and had travelled on her own to Cuba, China and the Soviet Union. According to Bessie, Cyril ridiculed his wife's interest in those countries.

Bessie cared for Bert during the last five years of his life, a difficult period during which he underwent considerable cognitive decline and occasionally exhibited acute paranoia. In hindsight Bessie thought that this probably accounted for Bert's decision to remove Peter Weinrich as his executor. She confided that she had suggested Cyril as a replacement because she did not particularly like or trust the "hard men" who put out the *Northstar Compass*, yet she was also distressed by the rising animosity between many of Bert's long time political collaborators and Cyril. She told me that on two occasions tensions between Bert and Cyril had become so acute that there had been discussion of seeking another executor. Bessie worried that she had been mistaken to have introduced Cyril in the first place because, while he was highly competent, he had little sympathy for the Communist Party (as I was already aware).

After Bert's death, Bessie worried that Cyril might act according to his own lights and ignore the principles and priorities which had governed the life of "her soulmate," as Bert was referred to in her 26 April 1997 *Globe and Mail* obituary. For his part Cyril was clearly concerned about Bessie's lack of confidence in him after all he had done to help Bert organize his affairs. Cyril told me that he was

particularly upset that his wife and children, who were in regular contact with Bessie, had begun to express similar concerns about his fidelity to Bert's wishes. This predisposed him to act in a fashion that would not permit any possible misinterpretation.

I found myself in a peculiar position: telling Bessie that, as far as I could see, Cyril was acting as an active and effective advocate for Robert Kenny's political legacy while, at the same time, seeking to reassure Cyril that Richard Landon not only understood the value of the Kenny collection but could, in my opinion, be trusted to generally do the right thing as he already had by supporting both the oral history project and the projected exhibition.

Richard was aware of many of these complications and he and Cyril agreed to take the unusual step of setting up an "advisory committee" to oversee the uses to which the Kenny bequest was put. The committee met for the first time on 21 August 1997. In addition to Richard and Cyril, Ray and Lil were members as well as my old friend, Professor Bryan Palmer, whose proposal to establish an annual Kenny prize for outstanding left-wing Canadian writing was enthusiastically agreed to. Anne Dondertman and I also sat on the committee as the Fisher staff members most closely concerned with the Kenny collection.

It was an unusual set of circumstances, but the inclusion of Ray and Lil on the committee, as well as the seriousness with which the exhibition of Kenny's Canadian material was undertaken, eventually calmed things down. Sean Purdy, one of Bryan's most outstanding graduate students, who was aligned with a grouping that identified with Trotsky while holding the position that the USSR under Stalin had become "state capitalist," was selected to organize the exhibition. Sean did a great job and presented a balanced and serious treatment of the history of the Canadian Communist movement.

As things were getting underway, Ray and Lil confided to me that they were concerned about Bryan's political inclinations and that their friends were starting to suspect that the Kenny bequest was being taken over by "Trotskyites." I found myself in the odd position of attempting to offer reassurances on that question. It helped that I was able to truthfully state that as far as I could see both the projected exhibition and the plans for a prize were shaping up well and that I expected they would be pleased with the results. It occurred to me that if Sean would agree to let them review the texts for the various chapters of the exhibition catalogue as he completed them, giving them a chance to correct anything they considered to be in error, this might ease their concern. Sean, like Bryan and me, was anxious to avoid a possible explosion and readily agreed to let Lil and Ray review his drafts, which were written in a strictly factual and deliberately non-factional manner. Ray and Lil were well pleased with Sean's work and, after offering a few minor factual corrections, all of which were incorporated, offered their enthusiastic endorsement.

The 1998 "Radicals and Revolutionaries" exhibition was hugely successful. It received intense and unprecedented attention on all national television and radio networks, as well in major newspapers across English Canada. The exhibition was heavily covered by all the Toronto media—the *Toronto Star* devoted the entire front page of its entertainment section to it just prior to the opening. This avalanche of publicity resulted from the energetic efforts of my old friend Dianne Weinrib, a professional publicist with a leftist background, who threw herself into promoting the exhibition. Dianne shrewdly linked her

marketing campaign for the Fisher exhibition to a series of major commemorations of the 150th anniversary of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* then taking place in New York, London, Paris, Berlin and many other international centers—and the Toronto media ate it up.

Nothing succeeds like success and *Northstar Compass* partisans, official CPC supporters, former CPCers as well as a broader milieu of pro-socialist leftists (including Trotskyists, anarchists and left social-democrats) were all enthusiastic about the exhibition. To my knowledge there were no further objections from anyone on the left about the Fisher's handling of Kenny's legacy. We did, however, get a complaint from a different quarter. Prior to the opening of the exhibition, Mike Lucas had agreed to loan a rather large Soviet flag—red with a yellow hammer and sickle—which was hung above the main exhibition area on the Fisher's second floor. Within a day or so the university administration at Simcoe Hall received a complaint from some outraged anti-Communist and we were duly instructed to remove the offending flag. The rest of the exhibition went off without a hitch.

An annual Kenny Prize for publications in the field of Canadian Marxist and Labour/Left studies was awarded from 1999 to 2008. The winners, selected by a rotating committee of leftist/Marxist academics, delivered a public lecture followed by a reception at the Fisher. These events, held as close to May Day as possible, proved quite successful, with many of Bert's old comrades and a broad spectrum of leftist academics and political activists attending. The prize continued while Bryan Palmer headed the committee that reviewed submissions and decided the winner. After Bryan stepped down the prize committee lost momentum and despite serious efforts by the Fisher staff, particularly Anne Dondertman, to maintain it, the Kenny Prize eventually had to be wound up. By 2008 few of Kenny's contemporaries were still alive.

'Party People': Lives Worth Remembering

"Party people" of Kenny's generation, having lived through McCarthyism and decades of discrimination and harassment, tended to be suspicious of academic researchers, and particularly anyone associated with the University of Toronto, a widely recognized bastion of the established social order. I was therefore very fortunate to have the assistance of Lil Greene and Ray Stevenson in contacting potential interviewees who had known Bert and Janet Kenny—above all, those on the "orthodox" end of the spectrum like Mike Lucas and Toby Ryan who were less inclined to talk to representatives of major bourgeois institutions.

In this connection I found it helpful at times to invoke my great-uncle, Roy Reid, the black sheep of our family, who had been on the presidium at the CPC's second congress in 1925 (something I only learned long after he had died while perusing Kenny's manuscript holdings). Uncle Roy was no theorist and his chief qualification for elevation to the presidium, a largely ceremonial short-term appointment, was undoubtedly his Anglo-Canadian ethnicity. The CPC was anxious to present itself as a party for people descended from earlier generations of immigrants. This is why many leading party cadres took Anglo names—John Boychuk became John Boyd, Harvey Chernikovsky became Harvey Murphy, Cecil Zuken became Bill Ross, Schmil Kogan became Sam Carr, etc. (The term "cadre" is used in the communist movement to refer to experienced and highly committed members at the core of any organization.)

My interest in preserving the recollections of an earlier generation of radicals and revolutionaries grew out of my participation in and identification with the Marxist left. While the people I interviewed generally did not share my assessment of how and why things had gone wrong in the Soviet Union, what we had in common was that, at least for a time, we had all engaged, as best we knew, in a struggle for a socialist future. I knew that a great deal can be learned from the experiences of others who confronted different problems, in different arenas under completely different conditions. It does not matter to me that they may have drawn entirely different political conclusions about the history of the socialist movement and/or the feasibility of attempting to abolish material scarcity in order to create an egalitarian society.

Many millions of people over many decades have made enormous personal sacrifices in attempting to advance the cause of socialism. Some of them risked their lives to build organizations, publish literature, organize unions and engage in a broad range of struggles they believed, or at least hoped, would help lay the basis for a better world. It isn't necessary to agree with their ideas or endorse their actions to respect their attempts and recognize the potential value of their experiences and the conclusions they drew for future generations. Robert Kenny imposed no rigidly ideological criterion in assembling the immensely valuable and extremely heterodox collection of socialist, anarchist and other radical leftist materials now housed in the Fisher—he scooped up what he could, where he could and when he could. I adopted roughly the same approach to the interviews I conducted for inclusion in this archive.

To find out more about Bert Kenny, I interviewed Peter Weinrich, his long-time friend and fellow bibliophile. While Bert had long been the CPC's unofficial archivist, he had managed to eliminate all but a few traces of himself from the voluminous collection of printed and other materials at his home which Philip Oldfield and I packed up after his death in September 1993. Peter provided me with useful insights for the biographical sketch of Bert that I contributed to a catalogue for the 1998 exhibition at the Fisher.

Peter and Bert shared an interest in poetry, literature and, particularly, the historical struggle of the downtrodden and oppressed for social justice. Peter was co-proprietor with Gord Norman of Blue Heron Books. Gord had specialized in literature while Peter's focus was on politics, history and social studies with a leftist tilt. I asked Peter if his anarchist inclinations and Bert's Official Communism had ever created difficulties for them. Peter said that it was never a problem because, despite doctrinal differences, they each recognized the other as "being on the side of the angels."

* *

I often found that potential interviewees who were initially reluctant to participate could be persuaded to do so by suggesting that both historians and future generations of socialists might learn a lot from their experiences. I discovered that for people who remained committed socialists, it was often helpful to point out that if they did not tell their own story, the only accounts of their activities would be written by hostile social-democrats, liberals or right-wingers. It wasn't necessary to suggest to people in their late 70s or 80s that they might not have many more opportunities to tell their version of events. The fact that the fall of the Soviet Union had shattered many political illusions and dramatically reduced any risk of political persecution for activities carried on in the 1930s and 40s probably also inclined people of Bert's generation to be more reflective and forthcoming.

Prior to turning on the tape recorder, I would attempt to get a general idea about the experiences of whomever I was talking to and what sorts of things they considered particularly significant. This would give me a rough guide as to how best to proceed. Inevitably questions would arise from the discussions that I hadn't anticipated; and these often led to the most interesting parts of the interviews.

One of the first things that many former party members wanted to know about during our preliminary discussions was who else I had been talking to. I discovered that being too forthcoming in response to such inquiries could create problems as a lot of the old cadres wanted no association with those they had fallen out with. And there had been a lot of fallings-out. I was sometimes not sure what approach to take with former party members, although the individuals Lil Greene put me in contact with tended to share her general attitude. As has been oft observed of former Communists, the tendency to regard those who left the party before they did as unserious or spineless is often accompanied by a predisposition to view those who remained after their departure as brainless woodenheads or unprincipled cynics.

My objective in interviewing the people I talked to was to get their political views and their personal histories in their own words. In the case of former CPC cadres, I was also interested in the behind-the-scenes considerations, mechanics and operational techniques that helped make the party as influential as it was. The experiences and observations of those involved in attempting to build a base for socialist politics in trade unions and other mass popular organizations seemed to me to be of particular value.

Ray, Lil & I: Socialist Affinities & Political Divergences

While I was very fortunate that so many people who had spent decades in the CPC were willing to talk, there were others with interesting stories to tell who declined repeated approaches. Beatrice Furneyhough, for example, whose picture Robert Kenny carried around in his wallet for decades after their break-up according to Lil, did not want to be interviewed. Lil informed me that Bea was herself carrying a torch for Kenneth Neill Cameron, a Shelley scholar and long-time Stalin admirer who left her in Montreal after he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford. Cameron only "came out" and began publishing overtly pro-Communist materials after he retired from academia.

While Lil tried hard to persuade Bea to talk to me, arranged for me to talk to Toby Ryan and was very helpful in many other ways, she refused to agree to a proper interview, beyond her initial comments on Bert. She initially presented this as a matter of priorities—it was, she assured me, far more important for me to talk to her partner, Ray Stevenson, who had been a central figure in the Mine Mill union during the 1950s and 60s. However after Ray and I completed a lengthy and comprehensive interview, Lil, who was extremely personally friendly to me and my family, remained reluctant to be interviewed for reasons I never really understood. Perhaps she had a somewhat different take on some issues than Ray and his associates in *Northstar Compass* and was uneasy about possibly bringing those to light. One thing that she and Ray both tended to avoid, which was not of great political import and I knew enough not to pursue, was the exact chronology of their relationship. Lil had originally been Ray's secretary in the union and when her husband died unexpectedly he had left his wife to live with her.

My interview with Ray, like most of the others, was pretty open-ended; we shared an interest in attempting to get as thorough a record as possible of his political history. I only attempted to steer the conversation when matters arose that I found unclear or particularly interesting. Ray turned 75 in the midst of our discussions and at that point declining health compelled him to step down from editing *Northstar Compass*. A few years later, in 1998, he and Lil took the step of formally resigning from the CPC because they had lost all hope that it might somehow be revived as a potentially revolutionary instrument for workers' struggles. (Ray's rather significant archive was deposited at York University. Lil's, which are considerably less extensive, are held at the Fisher.)

During our interview, Ray discussed his life as a Communist, trade unionist and peace activist, as well as some of the interconnections between these activities. In 1938, while still a teenager, Ray left the family farm in South East Manitoba to take a job as a miner in the San Antonio gold mine in the opposite corner of the province. He vividly describes these early experiences and the conclusions he drew from them. He recalled how the company hired members of the Winnipeg Blue Bombers football team in the off season—their work ethic did not impress Ray and he soon realized they were being employed chiefly as public relations assets, not miners.

Ray's next job, working for Upper Canada Mines in Kirkland Lake Ontario, proved a turning point; he soon joined both the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (MMSW) and the Communist Party. Ray's vivid account of his experiences in the bitter strike for union recognition in 1941-42 includes some interesting insights on the interactions of strikers with management, cops and scabs. (1942 Kirkland Lake Mine Mill Leaflet.) He also touches on the somewhat ambiguous attitude of the CPC leadership to the strike.

In 1942, at the height of World War Two, Ray joined the Canadian army. Following his discharge four years later, he became a regional organizer for the party before returning to Mine Mill in 1950, the year the union was driven out of the Congress of Industrial Organizations because of its Communist ties. During our 8 August 1994 talk Ray indicated that, besides being irritated by missing the occasional paycheque, his decision to leave full-time party work also reflected his alienation from a rigid, "lock-step" style of decision-making:

> "The other political thing that began to bother was that I perceived a sort of lock-step type of development within the party where the rigidity of command positions at the top seemed to me to be making me something less than my own man."

Ray evidently found more scope for being his own man in the union where he went on to play a central role in the struggle against both the repeated anti-Communist union-busting attacks by employers and "raiding" by the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). Ray observed that while many believed that the party had a stranglehold on the MMSW, in fact the CPC never had more than 28 members in the union—their "control" was essentially a function of their political authority with the membership. In 1967 when Mine Mill was finally absorbed by the Steelworkers, Ray and other union officials were all kept on staff.

In our 27 July 1994 discussion, Ray offered a few thoughts on why, ultimately, "we lost Mine Mill":

> "I may be wrong, as I said, but I believe what we did became in essence a struggle for positions, leadership; rather than placing at the centre of our policy the question of our real relationship to the working class, to the working people, which didn't require that we hold this or that [leadership] position. What it required was that the working class had to trust us, and we had to trust them. And I think we got away from that, I think we did. I think it's the greatest criticism of my own work in that area and of quite a number of other people….
>
> *
>
> "Looking back in retrospect, why did we not…instead of fighting more on the question of our [union] positions and so on, fight more on the question of explaining, educating, bringing the working class to an understanding of the new class relationships, or the new relationship that was coming out of the class positions? I don't know.
>
> "These are, you know, foggy if you like. One of the weaknesses, one of the weaknesses, of the party, to my knowledge there was never a collective discussion held as to why, for example, we lost Mine Mill amongst the Communists. That's where these things should have been examined and never were. Now we're pretty well all gone, I'm about the 'Last of the Mohicans' here. But this is an area of, I believe, there should be intense discussion and debate on the facts as we know them. And now it will have to be done by people who weren't there, and that's unfortunate."

After retiring from the USWA in 1978, Ray moved to Finland where he served as Canadian representative to the World Peace Council and had frequent contact with trade unionists and peace activists from many different countries, including the Soviet Union and its East European allies.

In our interviews, Ray was generally open about his experiences and made interesting observations about both the strengths and weaknesses of various people he worked with and the movements he had been part of. He was an unrepentant, although not entirely uncritical, admirer of Joseph Stalin and the achievements of the USSR under his leadership. As a long-time member of the CPC's Central Committee, he also had valuable insights and opinions about its leading figures and particularly the origin and development of what he regarded as its terminal degeneration.

Ray considered the inability of the CPC to successfully intersect the youthful New Left radicalization of the 1960s to have been a significant failure. His oldest daughter, Sharon, a talented poet who had been active in the party's youth movement, left the party over the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia along with her husband, Charles Boylan. They eventually joined the then-Maoist Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) [CPC-ML] led by Hardial Bains. The "Bainsites," who had far more success than the CPC in recruiting youthful New Left radicals, had a reputation for aggressive behavior toward their political rivals on the left and for frequent confrontations with the police. Many leftists, viewing CPC (ML) from the outside, regarded it as a somewhat dubious organization that operated as a political cult centered on Bains. Clearly, Sharon found life in Bains' group difficult. In *A Communist Life*, Jack Scott blamed CPC (ML) for triggering the nervous breakdown that resulted in Sharon's suicide. Ray alluded to this several times with me, but as it was obviously a painful subject I never attempted to pursue it.

I had never met Sharon, but I knew Ray's other daughter, Zoya, from the 1972 occupation of Simcoe Hall to win access to Robarts Library for undergraduates. At that point I was a Maoist New Leftist while Zoya was with the Young Communists; but in the struggle for "Open Stacks," leftist youth of many hues—including Communists, New Democrats, hard Stalinist/Maoists, proto-Trotskyists and hippie New Leftists—all worked together. One day, in the midst of my series of interviews with her dad, when Zoya came into the Fisher on an unrelated matter, she told me how pleased Ray was with our discussions and how glad she was that he was finally getting his political history on the record. She also alluded, in a slightly amused fashion, to the political gap that separated me from Ray and Lil and mentioned the Revolutionary Marxist Group (a Trotskyist group active in Toronto in the 1970s that I was never actually associated with—but she was close enough). Zoya assured me that she had no intention of spilling any beans or doing anything else that might disrupt my relationship with her dad.

Professor Danny Goldstick of the UofT philosophy department, a long-time member of the CPC Central Committee with whom I had generally friendly relations, took a less ecumenical approach. Danny had grown up in the party: both his father and mother were Communists and practising lawyers (an unusual occupation for a woman in Toronto in the 1940s). One day, while I was still interviewing Ray, I ran into Danny on campus. He told me that he had heard that I was becoming rather friendly with Lil and Ray, and added, gleefully, that the next time I saw them I should expect a rather different reception because he'd made an appointment to visit them and intended to tell them all about me.

This caused me considerable anxiety because, over the course of the many hours we had spent together, I had come to respect Lil and Ray as honourable people who had dedicated their entire lives to what they believed was the struggle for socialism. I knew that they would be deeply hurt and bitterly disappointed by Danny's revelation, yet I did not feel I had wronged them by remaining "in the closet" politically, as I had only been attempting to record their stories in their own words.

It was a very pleasant surprise, and a great relief, that the next time I arrived at 75 Essex Street things seemed pretty much as usual. Lil offered me a cup of tea, as she always did, and we chatted for a bit. She asked if I knew Danny Goldstick and I said I did. She said that he had dropped by a few days earlier to talk about me, but that practically as soon as he opened his mouth they ordered him to leave their house and never return. I made some suitably anodyne response—I could hardly be entirely disinterested in such an unusual event—but Lil replied firmly that what Danny had said about me was "so disgusting" that she would simply not repeat it. That was good enough for me.

This occurred a few years before Lil and Ray formally renounced their memberships in the CPC—the party they had loyally supported for over half a century. I wasn't particularly surprised, as they had on occasion openly disparaged what they considered examples of the new leadership's mealy-mouthed reformism. It was clear that there was a wide chasm between *Northstar Compass*, which celebrated Lenin, Stalin and the Bolshevik party and occasionally openly called for the revolutionary destruction of capitalism, and the more moderate, reform-oriented approach of the reconstituted CPC. It seems possible that, at one point or another, the *Northstar Compass* hard-liners may have been denounced as "ultra-lefts" by the new leaders of the CPC. Over the years such charges were also frequently accompanied by accusations of "Trotskyism" without much regard for the facts in a particular case. I do

not know if anything like that had taken place, but, if it had, Ray and Lil would likely have been inclined to dismiss Danny's allegations more readily than they might have a decade earlier.

Lil and Ray didn't share my estimation of how and when the movement launched by the October Revolution in 1917 came off the rails—a difference that put us on opposite sides of the single most important division in the history of the communist movement. Yet it also became clear to me that we shared a commitment to the creation of a more egalitarian and just society and a recognition that this could only be achieved through revolutionary political transformation. Our differences over political-historical questions, while great, were not absolute—for example, as a "Soviet-defensist" I bitterly regretted the triumph of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, and, like Ray and Lil, viewed Boris Yeltsin and his imperialist backers as being on the wrong side of history. While I considered their hard-core Stalinist politics to be profoundly mistaken, I had great respect for their sincerity, commitment and stamina. I also regretted not being able to openly broach the subject of our differences, but I knew that nothing useful could have come from any attempt to do so.

I didn't interview people in order to criticize, convert or polemicize with them, but rather to get them to describe some of the warp and woof of their political lives: what they did, why and how they did it and now, in retrospect, what they thought about it. In seeking to elicit their views, it helped that I had some general background in the field and understood their motivations. My own interests and predilections naturally helped shape the direction of my questions, but the purpose was chiefly to get as detailed a picture as possible of how things worked: how decisions were made, what problems were encountered, and what attempts were made to solve them.

A Conversation with Earle Birney

Prior to the Kenny project I already had some experience talking to people whose political activity significantly predated my own. I had read *Down the Long Table*, Earle Birney's lightly fictionalized account of his time as a Trotskyist in Canada during the 1930s. I had also skimmed some of the political materials in the voluminous personal archive he deposited at the Fisher. During the early 1980s Earle was a regular visitor to the library who had his own carrel where he worked away at sorting out his papers. I was aware that he had been a significant figure during the 1930s. He'd been active not only in Canada and the U.S. but also in Britain. In November 1935 he'd even visited Leon Trotsky in Norway.

On 21 April 1982 I found an opportunity to engage Earle about his political work, specifically his time in Britain where I had been politically active for a couple of years in the mid-1970s. I was no expert on the complicated history of the several small competing groups that made up the British Trotskyist movement of the 1930s but I had some general notions about their interactions. I still had connections in Britain and had learned that John Archer, who had been one of Earle's close comrades in those days, had recently completed a doctoral thesis on their activity in that period. I asked Earle if he had seen this text; he replied that he was very interested in it and that Archer had promised to send him a copy but had not done so. Earle speculated that this might be because he had perhaps not been portrayed in a particularly flattering light.

My librarian supervisors at the Fisher, all of whom held "Uncle Earle" in high regard, didn't want to interrupt our chat and found someone else to look after things for me; and so Earle and I spent a good part of the afternoon talking about the old days. I was a bit surprised, but quite pleased, when, instead of dismissing those years as wasted time or some sort of youthful mistake, he recalled them vividly and spoke respectfully of many of his former comrades as exceptionally impressive people who had selflessly committed their lives to a struggle in which they were hopelessly overmatched. At the end of our conversation Earle told me that our talk, and the recollections of his old comrades, had made him feel, just for the moment, like he was once again "back in the movement."

It had occurred to me during our discussion that I really should be recording him. The library had the equipment, but I feared that if I asked him it might break the spell and he would return to whatever he was doing when I had diverted him. I did have a pen so contented myself with scratching down a few notes, which, as soon as we finished talking, I immediately took back to my desk and banged out a three-page memo I entitled "Conversation with Birney." I followed this up several days later with a letter to Doug Hainline and Judith Shapiro, a couple of leftist American academics I had worked with in Britain, to see if they could help me get a copy of Archer's thesis:

> "I'd like to get a chance to have a longer talk with him [Birney]—he is one of the only surviving members of the Canadian section [of the Trotskyist movement] from the thirties. But he is very busy and has no particular reason to spend any more of his valuable time talking to me. However in the course of our conversation he told me how he and John Archer used to be roommates etc., in London. He also asked me if I had seen Archer's thesis on the history of British Trotskyism. Birney heard that he has finished it. Archer even promised to send him a copy but he has yet to see it."

I told them that I was sure that if I could get him a copy, Earle would agree to "a couple of long, taped interviews so he won't take all of his reminiscences to the grave."

I did eventually manage to get a copy of Archer's dissertation from Arnie Mintz (aka Markham), a Canadian Trotskyist with an archival bent who worked for years as a printer in Britain. By the 1980s Arnie had became an anarchist. He edited *Picket*, a newssheet put out by striking printers during their union's heroic last stand in the 1986 Wapping strike in London. Earle was delighted when I eventually delivered a copy of Archer's thesis to him, and, as I had anticipated, gladly agreed to let me debrief him on his years as a Trotskyist militant. The only problem was finding a suitable opportunity to do so.

When I travelled to Britain the next year, Earle gave me a note of introduction to Bert Matlow (letter can be retrieved via link), the venerable British Trotskyist who, along with Denzil Harber, had led the "Marxist Group" that Earle belonged to in the 1930s. Other members included Ted Grant, C.L.R. James, Ken Johnstone and Hans Vajda. At the time Matlow had a reputation for generally being unwilling to discuss his experiences as a Trotskyist militant with anyone he didn't already know. Earle told me that he and Matlow got together every time he passed through London and suggested that he might possibly make an exception for someone Earle vouched for. After arriving in London I phoned Matlow who invited me to come around. When I knocked on his door he answered by asking me to drop Birney's introduction through his letter slot, but after I did so he refused any further contact.

It would certainly have been interesting to have talked to Matlow, but I always regarded Earle as the one that got away. In hindsight, I suppose I should have pushed harder to nail down a time. Earle never

forgot his promise and often reassured me, when he visited the Fisher, that our chat remained high on his "to do" list, but he always seemed to have something more pressing at the moment. Confident he would honor his commitment, and not wanting to irritate him by appearing too pushy, I waited patiently. But my opportunity unfortunately never arrived; in 1987 Earle suffered a debilitating heart attack and I never talked to him again.

At the beginning of our 1982 chat, Earle had mentioned that when war was declared in September 1939, the Trotskyist group in Toronto decided to do some soapboxing in order to explain their view of the conflict as an inter-imperialist contest, one essentially similar to the First World War in which the working class did not have a side. Earle told me that there were two possible candidates for this somewhat risky assignment: himself and Frank Watson, a recently arrived English immigrant. Earle's job at the University of Toronto made him a source of serious financial support for the group, whereas Watson was unemployed, which made him more expendable. A secondary factor was that Watson's British accent was considered likely to give his remarks more impact.

A few years later, in May 1985, when an Englishman turned up at the Fisher and submitted a request slip signed "Frank Watson," I asked if he was *the* Frank Watson. He gave me a slightly puzzled look and asked what I meant. When I mentioned his 1939 anti-war speech, for which he had ended up in the Don Jail, he seemed amused and asked how I knew about that. He readily agreed to be interviewed, and we talked a week or so later.

Frank Watson, William Krehm, Jim Daly, Aubrey Joel & the Southam Connection

Watson told me that after the war he had returned to England. In 1959, he moved back to Canada and got a job at Southam publications. Jim Daly, who hired him, had belonged to the League for a Revolutionary Workers Party (LRWP), a small Trotskyist group in Toronto in the 1930s led by William Krehm. I subsequently interviewed Bill Krehm, whom I found to be coherent, often brilliant as well as slightly eccentric. Bill told me had joined the fledgling American Trotskyist movement in Chicago at the age of 15, after meeting Albert Glotzer in a bookstore. Bill Krehm connected with the Canadian Trotskyists when he returned to Toronto, but did not get on well with Maurice Spector, the group's leader. Spector, the only Canadian to have sat on the International Executive Committee of the Communist International, was a gifted theorist who had played a central role in the CPC from its founding until his 1928 expulsion for Trotskyism. He proved to be somewhat less successful as the leader of a small political organization.

In 1934 when B.J. Field [Max Gould], a Wall Street analyst who had joined the Trotskyists in New York, split after falling out with the group's central leader, James P. Cannon, Bill Krehm sided with Field. Field's group in the U.S. never made much headway, but north of the border, the "Fieldites" under Bill Krehm's dynamic leadership soon outshone Canada's official Trotskyist section. When Krehm visited Spain during the Civil War, he worked with George Orwell and others who shared many of Trotsky's criticisms of the official Communist Party's participation in the popular-front government alongside capitalist elements. In June 1937 Bill Krehm was arrested, along with many other leftist dissidents, and spent two months in prison before being released. In December 1937, after he was back in Canada, Krehm published a lively

and critical account of the history and dynamics of the Spanish Revolution and the policies of the various leftist forces supporting the Republican side in the Civil War.

Both the LRWP and the official Trotskyists dissolved a few months after the outbreak of the Second World War. In his interview Frank Watson described how he helped Ross Dowson and his brother Murray revive the official Trotskyist group in 1943 through participation in the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. But the LRWP never resumed activity and its members all found other things to do. Bill Krehm spent the war as a *Time Magazine* correspondent in Latin America and in that capacity attended Leon Trotsky's funeral in Mexico City in August 1940. Jim Daly, who had begun working as a journalist during the war, eventually worked his way up to become president of Southam Business Publications. Along the way he hired a number of former LRWP members, including Krehm's brother-in-law, Aubrey Joel, who by 1963 was listed as a vice-president in the company's annual report.

John Boyd: Neither Stalin nor Lenin

Southam's policy of tapping the talent of people with leftist backgrounds was not restricted to former Trotskyists—it also extended to people from the Communist Party like John Boyd. John had been a party functionary for 38 years, but resigned from the Central Committee in October 1968 when the CPC leadership endorsed the Soviet crushing of the "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia. In a political memoir he published John mentioned that Stanley Ryerson and Rae Murphy left along with him.

John was just a teenager when he began working for the CPC-aligned Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association. By the time he left the party he was in his mid-fifties and suddenly needed to find a "secular" job. He had decades of experience as an editor and writer, but all of it was for Communist publications. In applying for work with various publishers he didn't seek to hide his political history; only Southam got back to him:

> "I did get a call from Southam, their business and trade magazine section, and after one brief interview, got a job as editor of a magazine called *Hospital Administration in Canada*."

John was hired by Aubrey Joel (John Daly had already retired). When he reported for duty he was surprised to see a very familiar face:

> "On the first day I came to work for Southam I was taken around to be introduced to the various editors and departments. The director of the art department at the time was Mike Lukas. I knew him very well, because he was one of the younger leaders of the Carpatho-Russian Society, an active member of the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society and, of course a staunch member of the Communist Party. When we came to the art department, and Lukas was told that I had been hired, his jaw dropped in surprise."

John and Mike went out to lunch where they confirmed that they still disagreed over Czechoslovakia.

Mike must have been aware that among his colleagues at Southam there were at least a few former Trotskyists. It is interesting that his Wikipedia entry cites his positions as art director for Southam and CFTO-TV in Toronto as high points of his career, but his official obituary, reprinted in the 9 May 2020 issue of the *Toronto Star*, omitted any mention of his time at Southam.

John Boyd, unlike Mike Lucas, rejected Stalinism, but he thought that the root of the problems of the Marxist movement in the 20th Century went back further than Stalin. While he remained broadly in favor of socialism, John ultimately came to view the entire Leninist project as mistaken from the beginning and concluded that the social-democratic policy of gradualist reform, as opposed to the Leninist pursuit of revolutionary class struggle, represented the only viable path forward.

In 2003 when my friend Carla Caplan heard that I had been talking to some veteran Communists, she put me in touch with John who was living in her housing co-op. While unable to endorse his political conclusions, I had to respect John's lifetime of commitment to the ideals of socialism and the decades of hard work he had invested in the struggle to make the world a better place. (I recall how Lil Greene, who remained in the CPC for three decades after Boyd left and drew entirely different political conclusions, still referred, almost fondly, to "Johnny Boyd.")

John had many talents besides writing and editing—he had quarterbacked his high school football team in Thorold, Ontario, and when he and his wife Gladys were living in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s he took up painting, an activity he continued until his eyesight failed him in his mid-90s.

John agreed to talk to me, but to avoid wasting time and energy, he insisted that I first read "A Noble Cause Betrayed ... but Hope Lives On: Pages from a Political Life," a pamphlet he had recently published "in lieu of an autobiography." This text originated with a lengthy interview John did with Rick Stow on behalf of the Cecil-Ross Society. After their December 1992 separation from those who wished to continue on as the CPC, the Cecil-Ross Society funded an extensive set of interviews with former party members and a few other leftists which are deposited in Ottawa at Library and Archives Canada.

John's interview with the Cecil-Ross project had been transcribed by his son Zane, who in the 1960s had followed his two siblings (Kim and Bonnie) into Ross Dowson's League for Socialist Action. The generational rift between two parents who were CPC cadres and their three Trotskyist offspring led to some sharp political struggles in the Boyd household. This peculiar situation came with an additional twist: Trotsky's influence began to be felt in the Boyd family when Kim, the Boyd's oldest son, began dating the daughter of Nick Oleniuk. Nick had been something of a mentor to John from the late 1920s until he was expelled from the party in the early 1930s for Trotskyism. At that point he and John broke off their friendship. Nick was not politically active for decades, but never changed his views and in the 1970s, after John left the CPC, they renewed their connection. At that point, John wrote, "I quickly re-established my old friendship with Nick. And he welcomed me back very warmly. Besides, my three children, as fellow Trotskyists, had also become his dear friends."

John commented that many children of CPC members who became politically active in the 1960s had opted for Maoist or Trotskyist groups, rather than the party because they projected a more "vigorous" brand of leftism, particularly in relation to the U.S. war in Vietnam. John, who sat on the CPC's National Executive for a decade after 1957, told me, during our 10 March 2004 discussion, that there was never much of an effort to figure out how to intersect the explosive growth of the New Left:

> "It's a legitimate question…. the party didn't do any of that retrospective kind of thing, introspective I should say, looking and saying hey, what's happening?....It wasn't just the Trotskyists. I know that a few of

> us were worried about that, why is it that the young people aren't coming to the party? But you see, that would require a sort of more self-critical look."

In the 1960s, he said, the conservative, don't-rock-the-boat approach taken by Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow, "permeated the party leadership everywhere":

> "There wasn't enough critical self-examination or questioning, are we on the right track, or what are we doing wrong? There wasn't enough of that. So that, [if] young people were leaving, they'd look for objective reasons …they wouldn't look at what can we do differently. There were efforts…here and there, but half-heartedly, not really self-critical. And this is in retrospect, it's not as if I—I had my doubts or at least questioning when I was there, but I didn't have the answers, because I was permeated with some of that too."

Mike Lucas: Stalin's Champion

Mike Lucas and other hard-liners eventually also began to have doubts about the course steered by Moscow—although they focussed on the alarming and increasingly overtly pro-capitalist policies pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, which contrasted starkly with the relatively conservative policies of the preceding Brezhnev era. Ray Stevenson and Mike worked very closely together in producing *Northstar Compass*, which consistently portrayed Gorbachev as an agent of Western imperialism continuing down the revisionist path originally blazed by Nikita Khrushchev with his 1956 denunciations of Stalin.

Northstar Compass never achieved a wide circulation in Canada, but it played a significant role internationally in helping to rally thousands, or perhaps tens of thousands, of hard-core pro-Soviet militants around the world. Greg Butterfield, an American militant who holds these views, wrote an obit for Mike praising him for his role in reviving pro-Stalinist sentiment internationally:

> "In the difficult years after the USSR's destruction, *Northstar Compass* played a crucial role connecting socialists and communists worldwide with the re-emerging working-class movement in the post-Soviet states. After Lucas launched the Canadian Friends of the Soviet People in 1991, branches sprang up in the U.S. and many other countries, helping to bring together socialists of different views who had weathered the storm with their revolutionary commitment intact.
>
> "The national chapters of the Friends of the Soviet People sponsored commemorative events for socialist holidays like International Working Women's Day and the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, helping to preserve those working-class traditions until they could be revived by new generations of activists."
>
> Source: https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2020/05/11/michael-lucas-immigrant-organizer-and-friend-of-soviet-people/

Butterfield reported on some of the expressions of appreciation for Lucas by his overseas comrades:

> "The announcement of his death was immediately translated into Russian and published on communist websites, including the Workers' University in Moscow. In Nepal, the front page of the daily Majdoor newspaper ("The Workers' Daily") was devoted to Lucas on May 8. The same day, the Nepal Journalists' Association held a virtual meeting to pay tribute to him.

> "'We shall ever remember comrade Lucas as an anti-imperialist fighter, tireless activist for socialism, author and artist,' said Rohit, chair of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, in a condolence message to his family. 'The *Northstar Compass* brought us together. … We highly appreciate the initiatives he took and the great efforts he made to hold the red flag high as the founder-editor of the magazine for a few decades and as a chair of the International Council of Friendship and Solidarity with Soviet People. His contributions to raise the voice against imperialism and to spread the rays of socialism in different corners of the world, even during most difficult days, will long be cherished.'"

Bessie Touzel's Secret

The first interview I did for the Kenny oral history project was with Bessie Touzel on 14 March 1994. I had first met Bessie at Robert Kenny's memorial meeting five months earlier. She was a highly intelligent and emotionally warm woman in her very late 80s, who was rather fragile physically and walked with some difficulty using two canes. We talked in her comfortable apartment in an Art Deco building at 110 St. Clair Avenue West, where she told me Glenn Gould had lived for many years. As is evident from the sound quality of the interview, I had some difficulty using my new recording equipment.

Lil Greene had told me that Bessie had been romantically involved with Bert in the 1940s and that she reconnected with him during his final years after the death of his wife Janet. I knew that Bessie had been a career woman and a prominent social worker, but I hadn't appreciated her importance as a pioneer in the field of Canadian social work. Marjorie Johnstone, a professor at Dalhousie University's School of Social Work, recently published an appreciation of Bessie as "a socialist feminist [who] practiced a left-leaning form of social work."

When I arrived at Bessie's apartment she made it quite clear that she was only agreeing to be interviewed about Bert. I agreed to that stipulation and after a bit we went ahead and recorded the interview. I knew that Bessie had visited Bert practically every day for five years after his wife's death and, with Cyril Greenland's assistance, had continued to care for him until the end, despite the difficulties posed by his declining health and mental state. During our preliminary chat, before I began recording, I made the off-hand comment that I regarded Bert and those of his contemporaries who had put the struggle for a socialist future ahead of the pursuit of their own personal advancement to have been the best of their generation. Bess beamed at that remark and referred to it several times during our many subsequent conversations.

Once we concluded the interview and I was no longer recording, it became clear that Bessie was in no hurry to see me leave. She wanted to talk about what was happening to Bert's bequest at the library and told me that many of his old friends and comrades were concerned about what was being done with his estate. Bessie was clearly anxious about this herself, and she told me she felt some special responsibility, because she had arranged for Cyril to serve as the executor despite being aware of his disdain for the party.

I replied that, as far as I could see, Cyril's intent was to honor Bert, not demean him. I pointed to Cyril's enthusiasm about the upcoming exhibition of Bert's collection and reminded her that Cyril deserved

most of the credit for launching the oral history project. I also assured her, as someone who greatly valued the immense collection of leftist books, periodicals, pamphlets and ephemera that Bert had gathered over his lifetime, that I was confident that the University of Toronto library administrators, and Richard Landon in particular, could be trusted to honour this magnificent achievement by preserving (and eventually fully cataloguing) it so that it could be made available for future generations.

After our initial meeting Bessie phoned me fairly frequently at work and sometimes at home, to express concerns, and seek reassurance about how Cyril and/or the library were handling Kenny's bequest. I listened carefully and in every case was able, with a good conscience, to assure her that, as far I was aware, we were still on track and things were proceeding more or less as Bert would have wished. Sometimes our conversations would get into other areas, but they usually all related to the CPC, Bert and his comrades.

Bessie didn't seek to hide the fact that she had remained in love with Bert after their 1947 break-up. She said that their split resulted from her decision to accept a social work position in Ottawa (where she had worked previously) to avoid a looming McCarthyite inquisition in the agency that employed her in Toronto. Ottawa social services had already undergone their red purge, and Bessie was confident that by changing jobs she could avoid any unpleasantness. This didn't sit well with Bert as Bessie's move conflicted with the party policy at the time of standing up and fighting rather than trying to duck and cover. Bert's inflexibility on this point effectively ended their relationship, although for a few years she said they continued to see each other on a casual basis whenever she visited Toronto. This ended one day in 1953, when Bert met Bessie on Carleton Street and informed her about his impending marriage to Janet. They didn't speak again for 30 years (although during that time Bessie told me she'd occasionally caught sight of him from afar).

Bessie invited me to visit her again to talk at greater length but requested that I arrive without my tape recorder. On 18 June 1994, when I returned to her apartment, I recall her telling me several times that, in her opinion, anyone who was going to be a really good social worker had to be a Marxist. She didn't of course mean being politically active or even particularly conversant with Marxist theory; what she meant was the importance of understanding that the personal and family problems social workers seek to ameliorate are usually essentially social in origin. A good social worker, Bessie contended, had to see that a client's problems don't generally derive, fundamentally, from sloth, moral weakness or some other individual character flaw, but are rather the result of a form of social organization in which the existence of an underclass is necessary for the efficient operation of a properly functioning labor market. As a Marxist I was of course inclined to agree.

I found most of Bessie's political convictions to be congruent with my own, which was not particularly surprising given her fondness for Bert Kenny. But I did begin to wonder at how knowledgeable she was about the history and development of the Canadian far left and particularly her ability to offer what seemed to me like pretty well-informed insights into various episodes in the history of the CPC. I particularly recall her affectionate references to Dora Wilensky Salsberg, the wife of J.B. Salsberg, the prominent Communist who held a seat for the party in the Ontario legislature from 1943 and 1955. Dora, who Bessie described as her "best friend," was also an important figure in the field of Canadian social work.

The more we talked the more I began to wonder how someone on the outside could be so familiar with all the events and personalities in and around the party. As we talked, I posed questions to her about things that were not clear or puzzled me. In practically every case she responded by recalling, or at least claiming to recall, something relevant that involved the actions or comments of one or another CPC leader. What she said in each instance was completely believable and fit the facts of which I was already aware.

After we had talked for a few hours I told Bessie that while everything she had related seemed entirely plausible, I had the feeling that there was something important missing from her account. I said it just did not make sense that, at the height of the Cold War, so many old, experienced party cadres would be so forthcoming in talking to someone who was outside the party, however sympathetic they may have been. I also said that I also found it odd that someone who I could only presume to be some sort of left social democrat would be so attuned to internal developments in the CPC. I told her that all of this puzzled me and I could not think how to account for it—and that is why I thought there must be a piece missing.

Bessie gazed at me silently for what seemed like a long time. Then she said that I was right, that she had in fact been more than a proponent of social justice and a leftist sympathizer. And then she told me that for many years she had secretly been a full member of the party. I didn't think to ask her when she joined but, based on what she told me, it seems likely she was recruited by Bea and Bert in the mid-1930s in Ottawa during the time they were setting up the local branch of the Canadian League Against War and Fascism, a "front group" more or less openly linked to the CPC.

I was curious about how exactly secret membership in the party worked. Bessie explained that she was a member of a "closed club" with other people who supported the party and wanted to participate as best they could, but for one reason or another—usually because of the risk posed to careers and/or social status—could not afford to be publicly associated with it. She told me that in the course of her professional activity she became acquainted with Fiorenza Johnson, the wife of George Drew, Ontario's Progressive Conservative premier. Drew had a well-deserved reputation as a ferocious anti-Communist, so I was surprised when Bessie told me that she and Dora discussed the possibility of attempting to recruit Fiorenza to the party (although they never made the attempt).

What makes this plausible is that in Europe many talented artists of Fiorenza's vintage in recoiling from the rising tide of fascism became more or less automatically sympathetic to the socialist left. June Callwood touched on this in a profile she wrote of the premier's wife in *Macleans*, describing Fiorenza as someone who, as a youth, had acquired "an uncommon antipathy to dictatorships":

> "In 1936 [the year of General Franco's coup in Spain] she was more acutely aware of the advantages of democracy than most Canadians. She had lived in Italy during Fascism's birth, when mobs ran the streets and it wasn't safe to go to the corner store and she was in Germany during Hitler's rise to power."

Bessie told me that Dora reported that one day Fiorenza, who was no ingenue, had asked if Bessie was a party member. Dora parried by suggesting that Fiorenza "ask her," but she never did.

Members of closed clubs would meet regularly to discuss many of the same questions that other clubs did, they paid dues like regular members and elected surrogate delegates to party conferences. Their

only link to the party was through a single trusted cadre who would convene club meetings, collect dues and convey instructions. (In a subsequent discussion, John Boyd, who sat on the top leadership for over a decade following 1956, confirmed that this type of arrangement was made for a number of people who did not wish to be publicly identified as Communists.)

I asked Bessie at what point she had left the party. She replied that she never actually left, but that after the major dislocations of the internal crisis of 1956, which resulted in declining membership and morale, the party's operational capacity was severely reduced and the visits by the cadre who was their contact gradually became less frequent and finally ceased. At that point her club stopped operations.

Bessie said that to keep membership a secret, she had, over the years, sometimes been forced to misrepresent things to her family and professional colleagues and she didn't want to create unnecessary difficulties, embarrass herself or disappoint those who had been close to her at this stage of her life. We discussed the security implications and she agreed that covert political activities carried on between the 1930s and 1950s were very unlikely to be compromising for anyone in the 1990s. I told her that I thought her experience was an important and, as far as I knew, unexplored part of the operational history of the CPC that would be of interest to historians and also, perhaps, of some practical value for future leftists. I told her I thought that there might be a lot of interest in getting her take on how things worked, what was achieved and what mistakes were made. Bessie agreed to do a second interview to discuss her unusual political history. Her one condition, to which I readily agreed, was that I withhold the tape for a substantial number of years after her death. We discussed plans to meet again in the very near future and I didn't wait long before contacting her, but it was already too late: she had suffered a debilitating stroke and had to be moved from her home. I was advised that barring a miraculous recovery, it would not be possible to see her. She died a few years later in 1997.

Toby Ryan & Millie Ryerson

I interviewed two other women who, like Bessie, had Jewish backgrounds and were long-time CPC cadres, Millie Ryerson and Toby Ryan. Toby and Millie both became involved politically after leaving Canada for New York City's bohemian Greenwich Village, and they both went on to marry prominent CPC functionaries. While Toby and Oscar Ryan remained Moscow loyalists, Millie and Stanley Ryerson broke with the party over the 1968 Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia.

Lil Greene introduced me to Toby, who attributed her lifelong interest in theatre to her father, a Toronto official in a needle trades union who had taken his whole family to see plays performed in Yiddish theatres nearly every week. After graduating from high school, Toby's first job involved keeping the books for a Jewish hatmaker whose children subsequently joined William Krehm's League for a Revolutionary Workers Party. Toby never had anything to do with them, she told me, because they were "Trotskyites."

She saved all she could from that job so she could move to New York where she enrolled in a left-wing theatre school. Toby stayed in New York for a year and a half and, almost reluctantly, after repeated invitations from her friends and colleagues, finally decided to join the Communist Party. Shortly thereafter she was picked up and deported back to dreary Toronto. Things only began to look up when

she met Oscar Ryan through the intervention of the CPC's cartoonist Avrom Yanovsky. She was soon involved in launching the "Workers Theatre" which for its the initial production, in December 1933, staged "Eight Men Speak" (co-written by Oscar and several other CPC members). The play criticized the jailing of party leader Tim Buck and seven other party members under "Section 98" on the grounds that the CPC was an "unlawful association." After the opening night performance, Toronto police moved in to pre-emptively end the run.

Toby and Oscar retained their interest in theatre and the arts for the rest of their lives. They also remained loyal party members. Oscar eventually became the theatre and dance reviewer for the CPC's *Canadian Tribune* to which he also contributed the occasional poem. In 1981 Toby published *Stage Left*, a book that reflected her long-time interest and personal participation in leftist theatre in Canada. During our interview Toby expressed her disappointment that for the most part, party members showed little interest in the arts, although, she observed, Robert Kenny was "a good guy to talk to if you liked culture."

This is evident in a recording of a lecture Bert delivered on "The Poetry and Literature of the Labour Movement" (available on Soundcloud as part of the Kenny Oral History Project). The talk, a copy of which was provided to me by Lil Greene, while undated, is clearly from the early 1960s and was likely delivered to a Toronto meeting of the Canada-USSR Association—in any case, Bert is introduced by a man who sounds a lot like Mike Lucas, his long-time partner in that organization.

Like Toby Ryan and Bert Kenny, Millie Ryerson also "liked culture." Her father was a Jewish immigrant who was active in the Toronto Workman's Circle. After graduating from UofT as an occupational therapist (OT), Millie moved to Greenwich Village and became involved in a campaign to provide "Medical Aid to Spain," an effort organized by the Communist Party. She met her future husband, Stanley Bréhaut Ryerson, the CPC's leading intellectual and a member of its central leadership, during the early years of World War Two while he was living in New York after fleeing Canada to avoid arrest.

As the wife of a prominent party leader, Millie got to know all the central cadres. Blacklisted and unable to work as an OT in Toronto, Millie opened a shop called "The Artisans" in 1949 at 51 Gerrard Street where she sold the creations of various artists and craftspeople:

> "'I wanted to be able to work with people, to help design, to develop, to earn a living, so I needed an outlet to sell their work' she explains….
>
> "Without backing or supporters of any sort, Ryerson borrowed five hundred dollars to get started….
>
> "Ryerson was accountable only to herself and her bank manager. 'She determined not to make money and chose pieces for the shop and priced them so costs would be covered,' says Helen Weinzweig, a long-time friend who worked there in the mid-Fifties.
>
> "'I didn't like the idea of exploiting anyone, or making a lot of money out of other people's work so I didn't. It wasn't hard,' Ryerson smiles. Was she a good business woman? 'I don't think I was bad. I started with almost nothing and before I was through I was hiring four people to work there and I had to do a lot more work than they did.'"

--*A Fine Line: Studio Crafts in Ontario from 1930 to the Present*, Gail Crawford, 1998

In the 1960s Millie gave John Boyd's teenage daughter Bonnie a summer job at her shop. Peter Weinrich, who managed "The Artisans" for a short time before going into the book business, lived with his wife in the second floor apartment above the shop for several years.

Oakwood Collegiate Institute lists Millie as a "notable former student" and mentions her marriage to Stanley Ryerson, a long-time Central Committee member of the CPC. Millie is celebrated her as a "humanitarian" who, in 1987, "was awarded the Order of Canada for her role as a pioneer in community engagement, and for providing occupational therapy to marginalized and indigenous communities."

Millie and Stanley, like John and Gladys Boyd, were living in Czechoslovakia on the eve of the crushing of the "Prague Spring," an event that was to propel all four of them out of the CPC. Stanley, John and Rae Murphy (whose father Harvey was greatly admired by Ray Stevenson) resigned from the party's central committee in October 1968, after unsuccessfully demanding that the CPC condemn the Soviet invasion.

In 1970 the Ryersons turned Stanley's collection of books, pamphlets and other printed materials into a research centre dedicated to "demystifiying the artificial compartmentalization of the production of progressive thought and activist knowledge" while also seeking "to energise the exchanges between the sites of intellectual production of knowledge and the concrete realities of workers and their basic human needs." Andrée Lévesque, a "distinguished member" of the Ryersons' centre, whom I met when she came in to consult the Kenny Collection at the Fisher, introduced me to Millie in 2002. In 2008 Andrée won the Kenny Prize (the last time it was awarded) for her book *Red Travellers*: *Jeanne Corbin and her Comrades*.

American Trotskyists: Hainline, Keylor, White & Tanner Weiss

I had interviewed a number of people in the 1980s on my own initiative prior to the commencement of the Kenny project (Doug Hainline, Frank Watson, Myra Tanner Weiss and Geoff White). All of them had, at different points, participated in the Trotskyist movement in North America. I had known Doug Hainline and his wife Judith in London, England in the 1970s and, as related above, I had sought their help in my attempt to set up an interview with Earle Birney.

In 1985, when Doug was passing through Toronto on some family business, I took the opportunity to talk to him about his experiences in the American left. Doug is an interesting character—he is, for example, the only person I ever met who had a pet racoon as a child. He was also one of a tiny handful of white Americans growing up in the South in the 1950s who recruited themselves to socialism. He spent a few years in the Young Peoples' Socialist League (YPSL) a formation led by former Trotskyists who had transmogrified into social democrats. In 1964 Doug led a small faction out of the YPSL to join what became the Spartacist League (U.S.), a hard-Trotskyist formation within which Doug soon earned a reputation as the group's best recruiter (see "YPSL Tendency Joins Spartacists").

By the time I interviewed him in 1985, Doug no longer considered himself a Trotskyist and was instead interested in the possibility that Mikhail Gorbachev might perhaps be leading the Soviet Union in a genuinely socialist direction. At that point he and Judith had friends in the "tankie" wing of the British

Communist Party—i.e., those who supported Soviet military interventions abroad. Thirty years later, in 2015, Doug returned to Toronto and agreed to another interview; by then he had evolved into a self-proclaimed "conservative" and was a card-carrying member of Britain's ruling Tory party. I had lost track of the 1985 interview and was unable to review it prior to sitting down in 2015. As a result, there is a great deal of overlap, as one might expect from talking to the same person about the same events. But what struck me in reviewing them is that, while the amount of detail regarding particular questions varies considerably, Doug's personal political evolution to the right over the intervening three decades didn't affect his account in any significant way—the two interviews tally pretty closely.

Of all the people I interviewed for this project the one I'm both politically and personally closest to is Howard Keylor. I first met Howard and his wife Uschi in Vancouver in 1982 and we have collaborated on many projects ever since. Howard is a celebrated figure in the San Francisco Bay Area left and labor movement whose career as a class-struggle militant on the waterfront spanned three and a half decades. He originally joined the American Communist Party after getting out of the U.S. army at the end of World War Two. He remained in the party throughout the McCarthy purges despite political reservations about some of its policies as well as concerns about the character of the Soviet leadership. In the mid-1970s Howard broke with Stalinism and became a Trotskyist. In the summer of 1996, while he was in Canada on holiday, I took the opportunity to get him to recount his experiences on the waterfront and in the left. In a subsequent conversation he told me that he considered that the materials contained in the 1998 edition of Leon Trotsky's *Transitional Program* (which included thumbnail sketches of some of his work during the 1970s and 80s) provide the best single source for studying the key lessons of revolutionary trade-union work in America.

A decade earlier, in August 1986, while staying with Howard and Uschi in the Bay Area, I contacted Geoffrey W. White. Doug Hainline, who had worked closely with Geoff in the Bay Area for a year in the mid-1960s, put us in touch. Geoff invited me to his home in Berkeley where we spent an entire day doing the interview. Geoff was a Harvard graduate and had served as an American naval officer during World War Two. After he joined the Communist Party he was "industrialized"—first spending five years in a rubber factory in Cranston, Rhode Island before the party decided to send him and his wife to Chattanooga, Tennessee as part of an effort to re-establish operations in the South. Geoff broke with the Communist Party over the 1956 Khrushchev revelations about Stalin's crimes and subsequently joined the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). As the former party leader in Rhode Island he is probably the highest-ranking CP member to have joined the Trotskyist movement since the original 1928 expulsion of James P. Cannon and his circle.

A few years after joining the SWP, White found himself in opposition to its leadership over what he saw as a political capitulation to Fidel Castro and his insurrectionary guerrilla movement which, in 1961, had fused with Cuba's Communists. White, along with James Robertson, Tim Wohlforth and Shane Mage, emerged as a leading figure in the SWP's Revolutionary Tendency (RT), which ultimately became the Spartacist League (SL). In the interview Geoff gives his impressions of his RT comrades and their relations with Gerry Healy, a leading British Trotskyist at the time who was seen, initially, as the RT's mentor. As the leader of the SL branch in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1960s, White had close contact with Mario Savio, the central figure in the 1964 Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM), a major

milestone in the history of the American New Left. In 1965 Geoff wrote an insightful analysis of the FSM. Three years later, in 1968, Geoff gave up on Trotskyism, concluding: "Judged by its ability to influence the resolution of the political and social crises of our day, or of future days, our existence is, in my opinion, one of total futility." [Transcription of Geoff White interview.]

Other long-time Trotskyist cadres drew different lessons from their experiences. Myra Tanner Weiss, a leading figure in the SWP from the 1940s to the early 1960s, was more hopeful about Trotsky's legacy and the prospects for a socialist future. Myra, who led the SWP's Los Angeles branch for a decade until moving to New York in 1952, stood as the SWP's vice-presidential candidate in 1952, 1956 and 1960. In 1963 she was the only senior SWP cadre to oppose the expulsion of Geoff White and his co-thinkers from the SWP.

I was introduced to Myra by Paul Kneisel in February 1987, when Paul, Uschi and I went to Myra's Greenwich Village home to talk about her political experiences. Myra made it clear at the outset that she was quite willing to discuss her history and answer any questions but refused to be recorded. She had no objections to pen and paper, however, so I took copious notes. When I returned to Toronto a few days later, I relied on those notes to make a verbal report of our conversation to several interested people. That report was recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Myra requested that, as a sort of exchange for our interview, I put copies of a pamphlet she had recently published into a few leftist and feminist bookstores in Toronto. The pamphlet, "The Bustelo Incident—Marxism & Feminism," discussed the political implications of a controversy which had erupted in the SWP in 1954 over an article by Jack Bustelo (the pen name of Joe Hansen, who Earle Birney had recruited in Salt Lake City during his sojourn there two decades earlier). Hansen, who became the SWP's central leader in the 1970s, had written what he intended to be a humorous criticism of women's interest in cosmetics. Myra saw the article as a "blatant expression of prejudice" and characterized the dispute that subsequently erupted in the SWP over it as "a question of the relation between feminism and Marxism."

I asked Myra how she became a Trotskyist. She told me that in her late teens she had enrolled as a pre-med student at the University of Utah, and, as it happened, her chemistry instructor, Hal Ryan, belonged to the Trotskyists' Salt Lake City branch. In 1935 when she joined the group, Joe Hansen was already a member of the branch. Myra told me that many years later when, after considerable effort, she managed to gain access to her FBI file she was surprised to read that it was Earle Birney who had supposedly recruited her. She said that she had never actually met Birney, but that she would like to.

By the late 1930s, Myra was living in Los Angeles where she was dating the son of Greta Garbo's screenwriter. Through Garbo she met various German expatriates, including Marlene Dietrich and Ernst Toller, a close friend of Bertolt Brecht. Garbo found it great fun to invite Myra to various Hollywood parties and watch her torment pro-Stalinist "progressives" with awkward questions and pithy observations. Myra knew most of the leading figures in the SWP and was particularly close to James P. Cannon, its founder and long-time leader. It's unfortunate that she was so reluctant to be recorded, but I'm pleased I was able to get down as much of her story as I did.

'Criticism of the weapon': A conversation with an FMLN guerrilla

Most of the people whose interviews are included in this archive saw themselves as in some way committed to carrying forward the legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution—which in many cases roughly translated into upholding Stalin's legacy and opposing Trotsky's or vice versa. But my interview with "Alex," a guerrilla fighter in the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*—FMLN) had a distinctly different character. I was introduced to Alex by my close friend Paul Fraser, who was aware of my involvement with the Kenny oral history project, and knew that if Alex was prepared to participate, he would probably have an interesting story to tell.

Life in El Salvador in the 1970s and 80s was unspeakably brutal for most ordinary people. Óscar Romero, the Catholic archbishop of San Salvador who had long been regarded as a relatively conservative figure in the church, was brazenly assassinated by rightist gunmen while performing mass for having dared to criticize the tendency of state authorities to resort to extra-judicial murder and torture.

The Salvadoran left, as Alex explained, could only survive by operating more or less underground. His account of how his own family had to masquerade as right-wingers to safeguard their personal security speaks to a far more brutal form of repression than anything ever experienced in Canada or the U.S., even at the height of McCarthyism. The left nonetheless remained an important factor in Salvadoran society. During the 1980s, the FMLN effectively fought their own ruling class to a draw, despite the massive logistical and intelligence support provided by the American imperial colossus.

This amazing achievement, as Alex outlined, derived from a dense network of social connections that allowed the outnumbered and outgunned partisans to survive and retain operational capacity. The substrate of that was a commitment to a future egalitarian, socialist society—that vision allowed participants at every level, from sympathizers to senior commanders, to feel part of a project that gave their lives purpose and permitted them to be optimistic about the future.

In the face of the ruthless and unremitting level of violence perpetrated by the state, the Salvadoran left felt compelled to take up arms, as Alex outlined in his interview. This corresponded to the 1844 observation by Karl Marx that, "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses."

Most of the international left is far more experienced in wielding "the weapon of criticism" with critiques of capitalist exploitation as well as sharp polemical exchanges over "what is to be done." But the murderous repression unleashed in El Salvador during the Reagan years created a consensus among leftists of all stripes that the struggle for physical survival had to have primacy. This emphasis on the "criticism of the weapon" necessarily relegated discussion of broader strategic and historical issues and their theoretical implications to a back seat. The success of the FMLN insurgents, despite the overwhelming odds against them, was an amazing achievement. There is much to be learned from the magnificent struggle conducted by Alex and his fellow FMLN guerrillas, yet the relatively

underdeveloped Marxist theory which guided the insurgents—particularly their willingness to try to find a *modus vivendi* with "progressive" elements of the ruling class, rather than pursuing the logic of class conflict as essentially a zero-sum game—may have served to undermine their ability to ultimately realize their socialist aspirations.

By way of a conclusion

Like most participants in the socialist movement, my own conceptions about "what is to be done" have been shaped by a combination of study, observation and practical experience. On many issues my attitude has changed considerably over the years. This was also the case with the people I talked to, all of whom had undergone their own evolutions and drawn their own conclusions from their political activity. In many cases I did not share their views, but I tried, for the most part successfully I think, to avoid having my own perspectives colour the interviews (although in reviewing the recordings I glimpsed them peeking through here and there).

I believe there is a lot that contemporary leftists can learn from how the Communist Party operated, and how the people who composed it understood their experiences from the 1930s to the 1990s. Despite its Stalinist character, the Communist movement was always part of the broader workers' movement. At its foundation the Communist International had terrified global capital and the CPC's alignment with Moscow earned it the undying antipathy of Canada's rulers. For many decades the CPC operated on a far broader scale and wielded far more real social influence than any of its leftist competitors.

In reviewing these interviews, most of which were done decades ago, I have been pleased to find that they are on the whole better and more informative than I had recalled. At times it can be difficult to interview someone whose story you only know in broad outline, follow the thread of their remarks and also listen for things that require a follow-up question or clarification. Not all of those I talked to were equally forthcoming, for various reasons. But I think that, in all cases, enough of their experiences, as well as their personalities, shines through to make these recordings worth listening to for those interested in the history of the left. I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview such extraordinary people and record their insights and stories for posterity.

*

Thanks**:** *I've had a lot of help putting this together. I am particularly indebted to Jonathan Krehm, William's son, whose generous funding for digitizing many of the interviews helped accelerate the realization of this project. Thanks also to John S. Gray for doing many of the difficult digitizations. My friends Hugh and Rob Brockie also offered valuable technical support at different points which I greatly appreciated.*

I also want to thank Josh Decker and the International Bolshevik Tendency for providing the digitized recordings of the interviews with Frank Watson, Geoff White and Doug Hainline.

Many members of the staff of the Fisher Library provided valuable support and assistance at various stages. The late Richard Landon, who skillfully negotiated the rather tricky launch and always understood the importance of the subject area, played an essential role in getting both the Kenny Prize and the oral history project off the ground. Anne Dondertman, who was involved in cataloguing Kenny early in her career at the Fisher and played a key role throughout the Kenny Prize years, was supportive

throughout. My friend Susan Chater helped me rough-sort the enormous mass of Kenny materials after they arrived at the Fisher in 1993 and she has helped keep the wheels rolling ever since. I very much appreciate the enormous amount of hard work done by Forugh Sohbaty who has relentlessly catalogued many thousands of items from Robert Kenny's voluminous collection during the past several years. John Shoesmith patiently compensated for my lack of tech savvy at many points during this project and did most of the work setting up the audio materials on this site. I have also benefited from the advice and encouragement of P.J. Carefoote and Loryl MacDonald, both of whom have been very helpful in bringing the project to fruition.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all the support, political and otherwise, I have received over the years on this project (and many others) from Catherine, my partner.

Tom Reid

March 2021

Fisher Holdings: *Fisher has papers donated by William Krehm, Howard Keylor and Lil Greene (including some from Ray Stevenson) as well as those of Blue Heron Books and even a few items from Doug Hainline. Related collections in the Fisher, besides R.S. Kenny, include those of Earle Birney, Bea Furneyhough & J.B. Salsberg.*