

MARK MOSHER'S RECONSTRUCTION  
OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOODWORKERS UNION  
IN THE ALBERNI VALLEY 1935 - 1950: A PARTICIPANTS HISTORY

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a participant's history of the development of the woodworkers' union in the Alberni Valley of British Columbia during the period 1935 to 1950. It is developed through Mosher's own accounts, which are treated as narratives, as the way of most effectively presenting his "insiders point of view". Mosher's interpretation, from his position as a logger, a local union leader, and a Communist Party member, adds to our understanding of the union movement by providing the perspective from the Left and information on the processes of unionization. In spite of the central position held by the union movement in the social structure of British Columbia, and the importance of the IWA within that movement, both have been under researched.

Mosher's accounts are given in the context of the documentary history of the union movement and the IWA, and his narratives create a challenging interpretation in response to those established accounts. Comparisons are drawn between the interpretations of the same issues given by Mosher and by the documentary sources. Mosher's accounts express the themes and values important to his alternative history, such as the need for a union and the leadership role of the Communist Party in improving work conditions, which he claims has not before been acknowledged.

This thesis is based on the assumption that there is no one true version of history. History is viewed as a process in which differing interpretations continually add to our overall understanding of a subject.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an individual's reconstruction of his involvement in the development of a woodworkers' union in the Alberni Valley of British Columbia during the period 1935 to 1950. As Mark Mosher reconstructs his own past, he also constructs a version of history of the woodworkers' union. His participant's history is developed here through the presentation of his own accounts.

Mark Mosher's position as an insider - a logger, a local level union leader and a Communist, active in events which led to the formation of a woodworkers' union - provides additional information and an alternative interpretation to existing accounts of the development of the International Woodworkers of America Union (IWA). As such, this accounting also adds to our understanding of the labour union movement, a significant feature of British Columbian society.

Mark Mosher began his career in the forest industry in Port Alberni, where he has lived all his life. Mosher first worked in the woods, blowing whistles, in 1935. Later that year he began working on logging locomotives as a fireman and in 1944 was certified as a steam locomotive engineer. He joined the International Woodworkers of America Union (the IWA) in 1942, becoming a shop steward shortly after joining. In the fall of 1945 Mosher was elected secretary to the union

local. This began his full time paid work for the union which continued until the 1950 disbanding of the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada (the WIUC) and the barring of WIUC executive members from membership in the IWA. Mosher joined the Communist Party in 1946.

Mark Mosher is a well known figure in Port Alberni. The role he has played in the community is of interest because of the apparent contradiction between his political views, which are contrary to the norm (he regularly runs for the Communist Party in elections and is active in promoting Communist Party causes) and his place of respect as part of the community establishment, evidenced by the many elected and volunteer positions he has held, such as Chair of the School Board, director on the Regional District Board, representative on the Hospital Board, and advisor on a number of community projects.

Mosher's personal recollections of the circumstances surrounding his first becoming a member of the Communist Party, a union member, then a paid union employee, and his analysis of the 1948 split within the IWA, bring together several features which writers of Canadian labour history agree are crucial to understanding the unionization of B.C. These are: the role of the Communist Party in the union movement; the ideological split within the IWA which resulted in the 1948 secession; the effect of the union movement on labour legislation and on workers' rights; and the methods and



processes of unionization.

Existing material on the labour movement does not adequately address these issues. Industrial relations professor Stuart Jamieson, in his study of labour unrest and industrial conflict in Canada (1968), points out that in the United States, books, articles and reports and a "well established folklore and mythology about organized labour and capital" exist, while in Canada there is a "paucity of literature on the subject of industrial unrest and conflict" (1968:6). And in 1987 the situation has not changed.

Material that has been produced on labour history lacks specific relevance to B.C. - it pertains either to the United States, to a comparison between the U.S. and Canada, or to Canada as a whole. Existing works focus on unions in general and on multi-union organizations, not on specific unions. They are, for the most part, statistical or based on information taken from official records and minutes of unions, political parties and the Canadian congress of Labour. Such documentary evidence is supplemented by interviews with key government officials and union leaders. Information from union members or local union organizers is lacking.

The paucity of existing research on the union movement in B.C. does not reflect its central position in the province's social fabric. The province's labour force is, and has been historically, highly unionized. The union movement in B.C.

is described by Irving Abella, a labour historian, as "...one of the more independent and irrepressible of the province's institutions" (1973:111) and, as discussed in Chapter II, British Columbia's labour movement is noted as particularly strong and politicized (Marchak 1975; Phillips 1967; Lembcke 1978). B.C.'s labour history is of note also because of the role the Communist Party played in its development. The Communist Party was a major force in the growth of the union movement in Canada, but was especially well entrenched in B.C. (Abella 1973; Phillips 1967).

The International Woodworkers of America has been a significant part of the province's union movement (Phillips 1967; Lembcke and Tattam 1984). The IWA was one of the unions established under leadership from the Communist Party and was instrumental in the development of the union movement on the west coast (Abella 1973:112; Phillips 1967:142). Until the late 1970's it was the largest and most influential union in the province (Province of B.C. Ministry of Labour). It too is under researched (Lembcke and Tattam 1984) yet the IWA makes a significant case study from which to further understandings of the labour union movement and its political orientation.

The development of the IWA is typical of other unions and in fact, the IWA can be viewed as a microcosm of the labour union movement as a whole (Lembcke 1978:1). In the 1930's and 1940's

most unions were experiencing similar conflicts between left and right factions for leadership control, with the internal dissension revolving around the issue of Communism. The same conflict and its repercussions were taking place in the rest of Canada and in the United States (Phillips 1967; Jamieson 1968; Jensen 1945). In Abella's view, "[t]he history of both the labour movement and the Communist Party in British Columbia from 1936 to 1948 is largely the history of the International Woodworkers of America" (1972:112)

Port Alberni is an appropriate location from which to consider the IWA and the union movement. As is typical of many British Columbian communities, its beginnings were with the forest industry and it continues to be a one industry town based on forestry. It is also a "union town", with a highly unionized work-force and a reputation for radical union activities such as illegal strikes. The IWA is, naturally, an important and visible feature of the community and Port Alberni has been historically, one of the largest and most powerful, as well as one of the more radical, locals of the woodworkers' union (Abella 1973:131).

The era in which Mosher was involved in the forest industry was a key one. During the period 1935 to 1950 workers were fighting for better work conditions and for the right to unionize, while unions were fraught with internal dissension and were struggling to be recognized by government and companies. The events of the 1940's were instrumental in the

development of the labour movement as it exists today: in the late 1940's and 1950's North American industrial unions took an abrupt change of course which resulted in the present form of unionship (Lembcke 1984:viii;175). Although it is agreed that this was a pivotal time and that the role of the Communist Party and the development of the IWA during that time were crucial, this period has been virtually ignored by students of labour. This thesis documents that era of change.

By focusing on one union, on one community, and by doing so through the experiences of a particular individual, this thesis addresses a number of the inadequacies in the existing literature. The topic has not before been addressed within this sort of specific context, yet a narrow focus gives a clearer view of the issues involved. This regional study adds to our understanding of the national and international movements of which the local institutions are a part.

There are several ways in which we can "make sense" of history. E.H. Carr describes the "common-sense view of history" as "a corpus of ascertained facts", "available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on", and which are then collected and utilized in the historian's interpretation (1961:6). This coincides with the positivist emphasis on the existence of "hard facts" which exist "objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian" (Carr 1961:10). Carr points out, however, that facts are not pure.

They are selected by the historian and are refracted through the mind of the historian, who creates a history which consists of "seeing the past through the eyes of the present" (Carr 1961:2).

History is commonly created from documents, but it can also be created from the recollections of participants. This thesis offers an interpretation of a particular era of history based on the reconstruction made by one individual who was a participant in the events of that time. The concept of a key informant is central to anthropology, based on the premise that an understanding of societies can be gained by eliciting the perspectives of the people who live in them. In this document Mosher gives, in retrospect, an insider's view of the culture of the woodworker and of events in the early days of the union.

Clifford Geertz discusses the anthropological "injunction to see things from the native's point of view" and questions how this knowledge is possible. It is not, he points out, through "some sort of extraordinary sensibility or capacity": "[t]he ethnographer does not...perceive what his informants perceive. What he perceives, and that uncertainly enough, is what they perceive 'with' - or 'by' or 'through'" (Geertz 1976:224). To understand the experiences of others, Geertz advises the ethnographer to attempt to see the peoples' experiences within their own framework rather than according to the ethnographer's conceptions. This is done by "... searching

out and analyzing the symbolic forms - words, images, institutions, behaviors - in terms of which ... people actually represented themselves..." (1976:225). While Mosher is not from another culture, the same understandings of interpretation can be applied. Mosher's experiences, values and perceptions are best understood within his own framework as it is expressed in his own narratives. Geertz's model also informs a premise basic to this thesis - that Mosher's interpretations make sense within the framework of his political ideology.

Geertz also discusses the dialectic between "the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them" (1976:235) as central to ethnographic interpretation. This describes the process of viewing Mosher's local and detailed interpretation in the broader and more general context provided by the non-participant's interpretations.

Personal accounts are, as Bruner paraphrases Renato Rosaldo, "...the attempts of active persons to make sense of the real life situations in which they find themselves" (Bruner 1984:9). Therefore, Mosher's accounts are treated as narratives and presented in the same format in which they were spoken, not as sources from which specific information is taken. The purpose of this work is to determine and convey Mosher's own reconstruction, to present history as Mosher

wants it recorded and to represent what is important to him by using his own descriptions, while placing them within the broader context. This is in keeping with what Edward Bruner advocates - an "...anthropology based on the interpretations made by active agents, both native consultants and anthropologists" (1984:9). "As anthropologists", he continues (ibid), "our first responsibility is to respect people's accounts of their experiences as they choose to present them". The people's "...representations - their sentences, stories, parades, and performances - are their interpretations of their own experiences". These are labelled by Bruner as a "first-order interpretation" (Bruner 1984:9). Bruner thus argues for a narrative focus in anthropology in which stories are not viewed "... simply as abstract plot structures isolated from their cultural context... but as rooted in society and as experienced and performed by individuals in cultural settings" (1984:5). The model of a narrative framework used in this thesis is developed from the works of Bruner, Bruner and Gorfain, Rosaldo, and Schwartzman, as they are found in the proceedings of the American Ethnology Society's 1983 conference, "Text, Play and Story: the Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society".

Schwartzman (1984), in a study of the stories told by the staff of an institution, shows how stories are used by employees to interpret their work experiences to one another. These stories "shape and sustain" staff's image of the

organization and their work in it. In a similar manner, Mosher's narratives reveal his interpretation, as a participant, of the history of the woodworkers' union in the Alberni Valley. They reflect his purpose, to "tell it as it was". His accounts create a particular image of the reality of working in the woods and for the union in the early days. The reality portrayed is that of the workers and organizers, and the beliefs, morals and themes expressed by his narratives centre on the need for a union for woodworkers and the successes brought to the union movement by its Communist leadership.

Mosher's accounts take two forms. Those described as "explanations" were given in response to questions. Others, which I label as "stories", are anecdotal, told many times with more or less the same content, format and wording. They are told as indirect, parable-like responses to questions, or are offered spontaneously, almost like telling a joke, at gatherings. The stories are told today in anecdotal form, but with the serious message of conveying the poor conditions in the woods such as long hours, indiscriminate firings, low pay and obstructions to union organizers, and the need for a union to correct those conditions. In the early days such stories would have circulated among men in the woods and played a part in promoting group solidarity and forwarding the goals of the union. The particular interpretation constructed by these accounts would have comprised a shared



knowledge, and have given the men a communal perspective on their culture as woodworkers and a common position toward the union movement. These accounts also provided a history of conditions before unions, the benefits won earlier, and information about the groups and individuals who fought for workers' rights before them.

Mark Mosher contributes to the understanding of the history of the woodworkers' union in two ways. First, his perspective is different than that of other analysts, and second, he provides information not fully covered by published sources. Mosher's perspective is distinct because it is that of a participant and because it is a dual perspective from his position as both a local union leader and member of the Communist Party. Mosher contributes information on the 'process' of unionization. He adds the view from the Left, and from the "bottom" - from his own experience as a logger and local leader and from the position of the workers as he saw it. This is in contrast to existing works which are from the perspective of non-participant researchers and reflect the position from the "top" - from the viewpoints of union and government leaders, of the dominant (anti-Communist) ideology and based on documentary sources.

Mosher's version of history is typical in that it is representative of a particular position - of the Left and from the local level. Yet at the same time Mosher's construction is an individualized interpretation of the past, and one of

many possible histories of that era. A different version of this history would be created by documenting the interpretation of another participant or of several participants. Individuals record situations to reflect what they think happened, what they want others to think or what they themselves want to think (Carr 1961:19). In addition, every individual experiencing a given event may perceive it differently and each interpretation represents a different position within the social structure.

Our understanding of what constitutes history, writes Carr, "...reflects our own position in time...and the view we take of the society in which we live" (1961:5). The view of history taken in this thesis follows Carr's notion that there is no one true objective version of any history. It also has a basis in the argument given by Gerald Berreman that it is not essential to judge the definition or impression of one group as any more real or true than that of another, but that all versions "...are essential to an understanding of the social interaction being observed" (1962:23). Therefore, as Mosher's accounts are compared to documentary histories and differing interpretations of the same issues are noted, neither version is labelled as the 'correct' one. In this thesis the documentation of history is viewed as a process in which various interpretations are seen as responses to one another and, considered together, actively create the history they interpret. In coming to understand Mosher's perspective,

we also understand about the making of history. This places Mosher within the context of anthropology.

As Edward Bruner argues, "[s]elf and society are always in production, in process; and one of our tasks as anthropologists is to specify how, in concrete instances and in different cultural settings, this shaping and reshaping takes place" (1984:3). He continues (1984:6), "[t]he constructions of self are simultaneously cultural constructions...". The history of the IWA is not fixed - as Mosher makes sense of his past in constructing his own history he at the same time reshapes the history of the woodworkers' union.

"[T]he meanings of a story are the constructions placed on it in a particular telling by socially positioned persons at given historical moments " (Bruner 1984:5). According to the model presented by Bruner and Gorfain, a story should be viewed, not in isolation, as a "monologic static entity", but within a dialogic or interactive framework: ...no story is 'a' story or 'the' story but rather a dialogic process of many historically situated particular tellings. Every telling of a story is unique." (Bruner and Gorfain 1984:57). A dialogic relationship in which "...every telling responds to and helps to condition its cultural and historical context", takes account of "previous and anticipated tellings" and responds to "alternative and to challenging stories" (1984:60). Bruner

and Gorfain find that every telling is a reflection of and a response to the teller, the audience, to what has been told or documented prior to that telling, and to what has been selected as the official account or context.

The documentary history of the union movement and of the IWA, which includes the IWA official history as well as analyses accepted as authoritative versions provides a context for Mosher's accounts. Mosher's reconstruction is also considered a response to these sources. He presents a "challenging interpretation" and an "alternative history", to these other versions.

Bruner also acknowledges the interpretation inherent in the recording of the native's interpretation. As he paraphrases Rosaldo, "... both informants and ethnographers are historically situated, positioned subjects. Just as our informants have active selves that engage in an interpretive process, ethnographers, too, are interpretive beings" (1984:9).

Others, too, have been mindful of the role played by the investigator in collecting, interpreting and presenting life histories. Anne Williams describes her attempt to place Charles Borden within the history of archaeology in B.C. as an "interactive history". She writes, "...in presenting history, I also engage in its creation" (1980:iii). Langness and Frank (1981) encourage fieldworkers to be aware of their own

presence in each situation. One of their major criticisms of life history as done by anthropologists has been the failure to recognize life history as a collaborative work and to consider the role played by the anthropologist or investigator.

In this thesis, the relationship between anthropologist and informant is also between niece and uncle. Although Mark Mosher is my uncle, it was my move to Port Alberni and subsequent explorations in the community which lead me to become aware of his present status in the community and his role in past political and union events. My research allowed me to see my uncle in a different perspective and also presented me with the possibility of documenting his life story.

Berreman (1962) discusses impression management as a feature of all social interaction, with individuals giving differing information according to their interpretation of the motives and social alignments of the individual they are interacting with (1962:24). In this case Mosher initially knew me as his niece. His perception of me changed with my assuming the role of Museum Curator, new to the community and obviously interested in learning about its culture and history. My position as Curator gave an understandable reason for my research. My obvious role was also that of student. Mosher knew I attended university and that I was interested in research and writing. As a person active in the preservation

of local history, Mosher was conscious of the importance of recording past events from those who lived them and he was aware that he held knowledge that others found of interest and which would become lost if not recorded. He was thus receptive to my documenting his history. He knew the research would contribute to my Master thesis and that in providing information he would be of assistance to me. He was also, as indicated, glad of the opportunity to document the Left's version of the development of the woodworkers' union, which was not widely known. Mosher is accustomed to being consulted on a variety of issues and for a range of information. As a local politician and a holder of historical knowledge he is also accustomed to being interviewed.

Before my move to Port Alberni in 1982 I had not spent a great deal of time with my uncle. In Port Alberni Mosher and I first developed common interests through our mutual involvement in the Museum: mine as Assistant Curator; and Mosher's as member of the Museum Advisory Committee, which functions much as a Board of Directors for the Museum, and as a founding member and key worker on the committee restoring the Museum's 1912 steam logging locomotive. As the committee's interests and expertise broadened they took on more projects and formed The Industrial Heritage Society, which continues to function as an operating wing and collections advisory for the Museum and with which Mosher has continually been actively involved. Mosher's role as a source of historical and technical

information for the Museum was thus already established and as I familiarized myself with logging terminology and practice, the history of the forest industry in the valley, and the general history of the Alberni Valley, I frequently consulted Mosher for information.

Mosher and I were often present at the same meetings, such as the Museum Advisory Committee, the Historical Society or the Industrial Heritage Society and at exhibit openings at the Museum or the Arts Centre. I also began attending, with Mosher, other community events, such as dinners, picnics, films, and speakers sponsored by the Communist Party, the Alberni Valley Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament, and the International Committee for Aid to Central America, and I followed Mosher's campaign in the last federal election.

Attendance at community events and meetings provided an opportunity to view Mosher as a public figure and as a politician, making speeches, giving public comment, chairing meetings. These were occasions to overhear Mosher relating to people in the community and thus gain a sense of Mosher's position in the community and of people's reaction to him. Of particular value to this work were the discussions which accompanied the restoration and running of the Museum's steam locomotive. At these times there was much talk amongst the restoration group and with visitors about characters and events from the past, about equipment and logging past and

present, as well as reminiscences by Mosher about the days when he was running a steam engine in the woods.

Through the combination of research and a growing familiarity with the community I became aware of Mosher's involvement with the early days of the woodworkers' union and discovered the interesting history of the union. I wanted to learn more about Mosher's role in the union movement and about the union's part in the industrial heritage of the valley, which had not previously been explored.

To this end, information was collected from Mosher during the period from 1982 to 1986. At first, material was gathered during informal conversations at community events, at the Museum, or, more frequently, during visits at his or my home, when Mosher would reminisce, tell stories, discuss contemporary situations or answer questions. This information was noted, from memory, later the same day. Some of that material has been used in this document, other provided background knowledge which assisted in the development of a research strategy and interview questions.

Tape recorded interviews were conducted with Mosher beginning in July of 1983 and continuing until August of 1986, with the majority during 1984. These resulted in ten hours of taped information. Interviews generally took place around his kitchen table or mine, often after a meal. The interviews were carried out over a relatively long period of time during



which published material on the IWA and the union movement was located and examined and discussed with Mosher and the topic for my thesis was refined. Interviews were also conducted according to Mosher's schedule, which during this period was affected by several haying seasons, a federal election campaign and his holidays to Cuba, as well as his weekly routine of meetings.

The interviews were informal, open ended and unstructured although each session generally pursued a theme or a particular line of questioning, such as the 1948 split, the nature of working for the union, or the work of the Communist Party. Interviews included questions based on stories overheard at other times and requests for comments on, or more details about, material from published sources. The purpose of the interviews was to encourage Mosher to talk and tell stories and thus at his own pace and according to his own sense making process reconstruct his own version of history. Most of the interviews were transcribed, then checked by Mosher for errors or omissions. This often prompted the addition of more detail or additional information.

Not all of the information collected from Mosher has been presented in this thesis. First, accounts were selected according to their pertinence to the research questions which developed as a focus for this work. These questions were pursued within two broad subjects - the development of the union and the 1948 secession within the IWA. Secondly,

accounts were selected to avoid duplication of stories, information, or the expression of the same themes and values.

While the narratives collected from Mosher have been presented in the way in which they were recorded, their organization in the text is my arrangement. Mosher's accounts have been sorted into two sections: Chapter IV, which deals with various aspects of the early days of the union - Mosher's own initiation to the union movement, his perception of the history of the union movement in the province, the tales he told of working in the woods and for the union; and Chapter V which tells of the events leading up to, during, and after the 1948 secession.

The thesis first provides the context for Mosher's accounts. An overview of the history of the union movement in British Columbia and a discussion of its political nature is presented in Chapter II. Chapter III gives a summary of the history of the IWA and compares the interpretations of several issues of particular importance to assessing the 1948 secession. Both these chapters are based on documentary sources, primarily from the labour history discipline. The Conclusion summarizes the contribution Mosher's accounts make to the history of the IWA and the union movement in the province, and then discusses the construction of this participant's history.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORY OF THE UNION MOVEMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The struggle by woodworkers to form a union and the conflict within the woodworkers' union which are documented in this thesis mirror the struggle that was going on in the union movement as a whole. Mark Mosher's accounts are given in the context of the history of the labour movement in B.C. and are considered a response to existing accounts of both that movement and of the development of the IWA. It is beyond the scope of this study to present a complete accounting of the labour union history of B.C. This chapter provides a brief overview of that history, as presented in documentary sources, to assist in making sense of Mosher's accounts and to provide a context for both his accounts and the published accounts of the IWA's development. The following overview first addresses the radical and politicized nature of the B.C. union movement and the role played by the Communist Party in that movement. These features, which make B.C. distinctive from other provinces, are central to the issues addressed in this thesis. The early development of the union movement is discussed, and background to the woodworkers' union is given, as preliminary to the following chapter which discusses the International Woodworkers of American (IWA) in more detail.

British Columbia has a unique political climate and is known for its radical union history. Several factors, addressed by

Marchak (1975) and Phillips (1967) and summarized here, contribute to the political orientation and radical nature of the labour movement in B.C. The economic and industrial structures of British Columbia developed differently than those of eastern Canada due to B.C.'s later development, its geographic isolation, which was accentuated by decentralized government systems, and its economy, based on primary extractive industries and fostering an unstable economy and cyclical unemployment. Historically, the province's public policy encouraged the domination of the economy by large and powerful industrial empires which were more concerned with the rapid exploitation of resources than with the welfare of workers and communities. The work-force in British Columbia included large numbers of oriental workers who were viewed as low wage competition by the white work-force, as well as immigrants from Britain and Scandinavian and eastern European countries, who were not only accustomed to unionization but whose purpose for immigrating was to improve their standard of living. Analysts have argued that these features of the economy and the work-force were recognized as being beyond what could be controlled by unionization alone and therefore leading to a work-force which was more politically orientated.

Historically, B.C.'s political and labour scene has often been described as having a frontier nature, mainly due to the conditions characteristic of its industries. These are: a

largely unskilled work-force; a high proportion of single, transient workers; geographic and social isolation of the place of work; limited opportunity for stable family life; the difficult and dangerous nature of the work; and the lack of institutions, such as collective bargaining, for handling conflict (Phillips 1967:163). In the camps and one industry towns that developed with the B.C. forest industry, workers

... form a homogeneous mass, undifferentiated in status, wealth, life-style; they share common grievances and are able to communicate these to one another. No other groups inter vene, no buffer state exists between these workers and their employers. No likelihood or expectation of mobility compromises individuals, and there is no easy exit route (Marchak 1975:70).

The west coast was the only place unionism developed with continuity (Jensen 1945:6) and all of the above mentioned factors culminated in a union movement which was strong, radical and politicized. An active political wing which exerted considerable influence on the labour movement was established early in B.C.'s labour history (Phillips 1967:162). Workers first framed their grievances in Marxist terms of a class struggle in the late 1800's when socialist parties were formed in several provinces, with B.C.'s being the most radical (Marchak 1975:69).

In other provinces, non-Communist unions were in a distinct majority; in British Columbia, they were so few as to be almost exotic....The British Columbia labour movement was, at

least until 1948, almost a personal fiefdom of the Communist Party (Abella 1973:111).

The Communists were particularly well entrenched in B.C. unions due to both their early involvement and their organizational experience. Lembcke and Tattam (1984) suggest that the Communists' commitment to organization among the unemployed and relief camps during the depression created a bond between Communist Party activists and communities which later contributed to party members becoming leaders in the industrial union movement. Their role in the industrial union movement was especially significant, for as well as providing organizational assistance, Communists headed the executives of several unions including the large and important Woodworkers and the Metal Miners. Through the control of these unions the left wing controlled the B.C. Federation of Labour and exerted considerable influence on the legislative process (Phillips 1967: 133;142).

Abella describes the relationship between the Communist Party and the union movement: these unions were

... built around a faithful and militant nucleus of experienced party members who knew how to chair meetings, make motions, give speeches, print pamphlets, mimeograph handbills, and organize picket lines - all indispensable when thousands of workers without previous trade union experience flocked to union halls (Abella 1973:25).

Abella quotes Tim Buck (a Communist Party theorist and one of

the leading figures in the Canadian Communist Party),

'our Party had trained and developed a whole cadre of people who knew about unions and knew how to go about organizing them. And the Party members, even though they didn't work in the industry, would go out distributing leaflets, helping to organize the union' (ibid).

Probably the peak of the Communist Party's strength in the union movement was in 1948 when the Communist-led B.C. District of the IWA seceded from the International IWA to form a Canadian woodworkers' union. While the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada (WIUC) was formed in a show of strength, the IWA raised such strong opposition that the new union was in existence for just over one year. Following this upheaval the IWA became consolidated as the sole woodworkers' union in Canada and the U.S. By 1950 the Communist Party was severely limited as a powerful force in the union movement.

The involvement of the Communist Party in the labour union movement has a long history which is summarized here from the works of Phillips (1975), Lembcke and Tattam (1984), Marchak (1975), and Wejr and Smith (1978). From the latter years of the 19th century the main focus of the Communist Party was organizing labour, and they organized unorganized workers, workers in several industries including forestry, and the unemployed. The labour union movement is said to have been shaped according to Communist Party strategy, as the Communists alternated between organizing through existing

organizations and forming alternative ones (Phillips 1975; Lembcke and Tattam 1984).

The Industrial Workers of the World, the IWW, also known as the Wobblies, was formed in Chicago in 1905 with the aim "to overthrow the capitalist system by and for the workers" (Wejr and Smith 1978:8). The IWW led several strikes in B.C. where it remained a presence until the first world war. During the 1920's the Communist Party carried out its work within what existing labour union structure there was to avoid anti-Communist harassment. By the end of that decade the American Federation of Labour (AFL) had gained enough strength to override Communist activities within the unions, causing the party to abandon this strategy and form their own organizations. Consequently, in 1929 the Communist Party formed the Workers Unity League, an alternative central organization with which the Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU) affiliated. The roots of the LWIU were with the woodworkers' union which had been one of the more active and militant groups within the One Big Union (OBU). The OBU was formed in 1919 by western Canadian radicals who split from the more conservative eastern Canadian unions to pursue a militant and united trade union movement. By 1935 the Workers Unity League had reached a plateau in terms of organizing among the unorganized and was competing against the strength of the AFL in the major industries. Once again Party strategy changed. Workers Unity League affiliate unions were then



incorporated into international unions and the Communists resumed their "boring from within" tactic (Phillips 1967:110).

The early attempts at unionization achieved some benefits for workers, for instance, the Wobblies are credited with improving conditions of camp life and with winning the eight hour day, although this was not legislated provincially until 1925 (Bergren 1979:24). The Workers Unity League lead a strike by Vancouver Island lumberworkers which was unsuccessful in its goal of gaining union recognition, but resulted in an order-in-council which legislated the first minimum wage in the country. (Phillips 1967: 102). As organizations, however, these early unions were short lived and did not develop into a large scale unified union movement, nor were they ever fully accepted by companies or governments.

Craft guilds and government and company sponsored organizations were the only worker organizations recognized by law or accepted by companies during the early decades of this century and much of the early union efforts were directed toward gaining union recognition. In 1935 the Wagner Act in the United States guaranteed workers the right to join unions, required employers to bargain with the unions, and provided a certification procedure.

In Canada, federal and provincial powers over labour were divided, and similar legislation was not enacted Canada - wide until 1943 when a federal order-in-council set out basic

labour laws. This was seen as a turning point in Canadian labour relations (Phillips 1967:129). Prior to this, B.C. unions were governed by the provincial Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. First passed in 1937, this act guaranteed the right to organize, but as it restricted collective bargaining to committees of employees instead of unions, it promoted the company unions and was opposed by trade unionists. The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act was amended in 1943 to clarify the status of trade unions, provide compulsory recognition, discourage company unions and make it illegal for employers to interfere with a union. This made it the most advanced legislation in Canada although at that time it was threatened by the federal Wartime Measure Act (Wejr and Smith 1978).

The initial attempts to organize woodworkers, which began as early as 1903 and were many and short lived, are an integral part of the history of the labour union movement. When the Communists arranged for Workers Unity League affiliate unions to integrate with international unions the woodworkers became chartered as the Lumber and Sawmill Workers affiliate of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of the American Federation of Labour (AFL). However, the woodworkers soon became dissatisfied with their low status within that group and with the philosophical and practical differences between craft and industrial unions. The two groups were also in conflict over the simple business unionism represented by the

craft unions opposed to the political and social unionism espoused by the industrial unions. Their differences finally led the industrial committee within the AFL to secede from that group and form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to organize, and work for the concerns of, industrial unions. In 1937 the woodworkers left the AFL and joined the CIO with full union status as the International Woodworkers of America (IWA). The IWA was born in what Abella considers to be "one of the most bitter labour struggles in American history" as factions within, as well as the Carpenters and Joiners and other AFL affiliates, vigorously opposed the woodworkers' withdrawal from the AFL to join the rival CIO. From its beginning the IWA has been synonymous with intense and political labour struggles, with issues most often that of rank and file control and a conflict for leadership between left and right wing factions within the union.

The newly formed IWA's first strike was by IWA lime quarry workers in Blubber Bay on Vancouver Island. This was a long and violent strike that nearly destroyed the union by exhausting its human and financial resources (Phillips 1967:116). However, by 1943 the membership in the IWA had risen to 15,000 from the little more than 100 it had been following the Blubber Bay strike (Abella 1973:114). Prior to 1943 agreements had been signed in one or two camps but after the 1943 strike in the Queen Charlotte Islands, which forced recognition of the union, union agreements became wide spread

Wejr and Smith 1978).

This brief overview provides a context - the development of the B.C. labour union movement - in which to examine the woodworkers' union. There were many attempts by woodworkers to organize and most were associated with radical political associations and in particular the Communist Party. As such they were typical of the labour history movement in B.C. The following chapter will discuss the development of the woodworkers' union in detail and with particular attention to the conflicting versions of its history.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE IWA

The previous chapter's overview of the history of the province's labour union movement provides a broad context for Mosher's participant's history. This chapter adds a narrower context in which to place his accounts. What follows is a discussion of the accountings given of the development of the IWA and a comparison of the interpretations of particular issues, especially those surrounding the role of the Communist Party in the IWA. The sources examined represent the established versions with which Mosher's accounts are in dialogue. They include the "official history" compiled by the union itself, and published scholarly political and historical analyses, both of which represent the conventional and accepted interpretations of the union.

As indicated in the Introduction, the IWA played a major role in the development of the union movement in the province. In Phillips' assessment (1948:148), the IWA emerged from the war years as the largest and most significant union in the province. It was a pace-setter, setting the pattern for industrial unions in Canada, reaching agreements which were often landmark decisions in industrial relations and playing a paramount role in the development of policies of the various labour councils in the province. According to Jensen, "[t]he conflicts within the IWA have colored the picture of

labour development" (1945:225). However, in spite of its undisputed importance the IWA remains under researched (Lembcke and Tattam 1984).

Both the B.C. District of the IWA and the International headquarters in Portland have issued brief "official" histories of the union. Sections on the IWA are found in some publications dealing with various aspects of labour history, but most treatments focus on the rise of the IWA. Until 1984 the two major works which dealt with the woodworkers' union were Vernon Jensen's Lumber and Labour (1945) and Irving Abella's Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour (1973). Jensen's work, the "first full and scholarly account of labour and the forest industry", long read as the definitive analysis of labour history, was completed before the events of 1948, which are considered central to this thesis. An economist, Jensen was arbitrating a dispute between the IWA and employers at the time he wrote this work. He minimizes the strength of the Communists, claiming the division within the union was not ideological, but was based on rank and file reaction to individual leaders. He maintains, however, that the rank and file woodworker rejected Communism and could not abide a Communist leadership. Abella's work, with the advantage to this study of being more recent and dealing with Canada instead of the United States, gives a more extensive treatment of the involvement of the Communist Party in the Canadian labour movement and includes an analysis of the 1948

events within the IWA. While the treatment of the IWA in that section is thorough, the theme of the book is national. It focuses on the internal struggles of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), the interaction between the two bodies, their struggles to "maintain autonomy in the face of the aggressive incursions of the American unions" and their internal struggles "to rid themselves of their Communist-dominated affiliates" (1973:v). Other topics, such as the development of the IWA, are dealt with in terms of how they relate to these themes.

Stuart Jamieson's 1968 study, Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900 - 66, is a general, Canada-wide treatment of all unions. Jamieson, a professor of industrial relations, takes as his focus conflict, which he defines as strikes, and his analysis is a statistical one. Paul Phillip's No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia (1967) gives an overview of the labour movement in B.C. from the 1860's to 1967. No Power Greater is published by the B.C. Federation of Labour where Phillips held the position of research director. Admitting a "sympathy towards the workingman's struggle", his perspective as a labour economist and labour relations specialist is from the position of assessing the advancement of benefits for workers. However, he is aligned with the less radical, or less extreme Left, factions of the labour movement. Phillips'

political history deals with specific unions only in terms of how they contribute to the labour movement as a whole, and his particular focus is the development of workers' organizations, in particular the provincial and federal labour councils, and their effect on workers' rights.

Jerry Lembcke and William Tattam rectify the omission of studies of the IWA with their 1984 publication of One Union in Wood, a comprehensive account of the history of the IWA. This publication stems from Lembcke's 1978 PhD dissertation (Sociology) which documents the origin and evolution of the regional political disparity which results in the IWA having two different faces: in B.C. that of militant social democratic unionism and in the U.S., conservative business unionism. Lembcke and Tattam have essentially re-written the history of the IWA from the perspective of the Left. In the section which follows, these sources are compared in terms of their analyses of the issues related to the development of the IWA and to the role of the Communist Party in the union movement.

The history published in 1971 by the B.C. District of the IWA was mainly written by Grant MacNeil, a CCF Member of Parliament who took an active part in labour issues and events. This publication is largely non-analytical, sets an antagonistic tone towards the companies and focuses on the improvements to wages and working conditions for which the IWA claims responsibility. It recounts early attempts at



unionization, from the Wobblies (IWW) in 1912, through the stormy founding of the IWA under a CIO recently split from the AFL, to 1970, and gives yearly membership numbers and the demands and settlements for each contract. Little mention is made of the Communist leadership of the early efforts to unionize or of the continual struggles between left and right wing factions within the union until, for the year 1946, it is noted that the union was having to become more militant to compete with an increased effort by the Communist Party to retain control of the union (1971:31).

A section devoted to the secession of the B.C. District is titled "The October Revolution" and describes the events of 1948 in dramatic terms, such as a "barefaced rape of a union", "a plot which had been cooking for over a year" and "a surrender to Communist rule." It considers the secession "[a] Communist plot to wreck a Union the Communists could no longer rule", which set up the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada as a guise to seize all the assets of the IWA (1971:33).

Several points about the 1948 move are emphasized. The rank and file and the leadership are portrayed as polarized, with the leadership, said to be under Russian control and holding the ultimate goal of destroying the Union's democratic practices, pursuing control and power at all cost against the wishes of the membership who were staunchly supporting the

IWA . In spite of accusations that the leadership was a puppet of the soviet regime, the account claims the IWA was not opposed to the Communist Party as such. The following excerpts from the B.C. publication illustrate its viewpoint and its dramatic style:

...only the staunch loyalty of the IWA membership saved the Union from complete disaster" (p.33); "...one Local after another rallied to the flag of the IWA, and rejected all appeals from the leaders of the new WIUC." (p.37); "The International Union was sustained everywhere, despite the appearance of a few WIUC buttons on the job." (p.38); "For a brief period, the WIUC fomented trouble in the logging camps..." (p.38). "The real issue, as internal conflict grew in the Union, was self government of the IWA by the membership; ... [R]ank and file IWA members were not adverse to Communist leaders, provided they took a militant attitude on questions of wages and working conditions (p.35).

The publication notes that:

... traditionally, woodworkers in British Columbia have firmly believed in freedom of conscience on ideological questions and have resented anything in the shape of 'witch-hunting'" (p.35). However it claims, "the policy of the Union was made to shift with the shifting policy of the Soviet Union Foreign Office... and ... the Communists in office insisted upon adherence to the Communist 'line' to the point where open cleavage with the trade union movement at large was evident. The Communist and pro-Communist officers of the District Council gained a measure of success which went to their heads. Invariably, absolute power wielded by officials is dangerous, and in the case of the IWA led to corruption in some instances. All the while, it was useful for the Communist Party, then fighting for its existence, to control an organization which provided salaries for its officials. From time to time, it was found convenient to siphon funds from the IWA to Party purposes, or purposes which were coincident with those of the Party (p.35).

The position held by the membership is important to a discussion of the IWA because of that union's avowed concern that control of the union remain in the hands of the rank and file (Phillips 1967:142; IWA 1971; Lembcke and Tattam 1984:179). According to Abella, most Canadian workers were indifferent to the issue of Communism: "[t]o them the Communists were no threat. To their leaders, however, the Communists and their left-wing allies were indeed a menace; the possibility of a Communist takeover of the Congress [CCL] - though highly unlikely - was never far from their minds" (1973:vi). Phillips claims that while the union membership was divided on the issue of Communism, the left wing leadership of the IWA created a problem in that it opened the door to red-baiting by employers and alienated potential supporters (1967:132). Phillips also states that the membership became disillusioned with the Communist leadership when the executive reversed its stand with regard to Russia during the second world war. As he describes it, initially the union leadership agitated against the war and encouraged a continuation of the use of strikes as a bargaining tool. After the invasion of Russia, they reversed this stand and approved a no-strike policy and supported the war effort. Phillip's work describes the union's interests as increasingly subjugated to the interests of the Communist Party (the Labour Progressive Party) which in turn disenchanted the rank and file: "[t]he turning point in the

struggle was not so much an ideological issue as membership dissatisfaction with the decline in democratic procedures within the union,...the failure of the district board to refer decisions to the membership, and the diversion of union funds to front organizations" (1967:142). The democratic principle of rank and file control expressed itself, according to Jensen, in the elections of 1941 which ousted the Communist leadership at the International level (1945:270). He believes the average timberworker rejected Communism (1945:233). In this respect both Jensen's and Phillip's analysis coincide with that of the IWA official history. They consider that the major issue was one of rank and file control which the Communist leadership was accused of undermining.

The "1948 upheaval" is regarded by the official history and others as a turning point where the IWA moved from a developing union into a "revitalized and re-built union entering a new era"(IWA 1971:38) . Phillips (1967:141) and Abella (1973:113) both write, however, that within the IWA, organizational work, economic gains and service to the membership were hampered by the leadership struggles between Communists and non-Communists. Furthermore, Phillips claims, the political debate and the left - right split in the B.C. labour movement hindered the normal business functions of the CIO and the CCL.

Abella notes that Communist Party members were elected to

executive positions in the IWA due to "their leadership abilities, obvious organizational talents, and their contribution to the founding of the union..."(1973:113). Lembcke and Tattam's work is in agreement. They note that the Communists stepped in and organized in the woods when nobody else would (1984:176). The Communists remained in power in B.C., according to Phillips, not only due to their superior organizing skills, but also because of B.C.'s traditional tolerance of left - wing views and the province's strong sense of independence from American control. Phillips (1967:142) views the Communist Party as the root of the polarization between the membership and leadership, as does Abella (1973:113), claiming that the leadership was Communist (because they held the leadership skills) but the rank and file was predominantly non-Communist. While Jensen argues that the Communist Party was trying to gain control of the workers, he comments that the strength of the Communists should not be overemphasized; as the Communist leaders' following was simply due to the personal unpopularity of the opposition leader. According to Abella, the IWA, "[w]ith its large force of organizers and its relatively sizable treasury provided both the personnel and funds for many of the Communist activities in the province" (1973:112).

Communist leadership of the International IWA ended in 1941 with union president Harold Pritchett and other B.C. District executive members being refused entry to the U.S. to attend

the International convention. White Bloc proponents were consequently elected to the International executive, but the B.C. District remained supportive of its Red Bloc leadership, with Pritchett continuing as the B.C. president. (White Bloc and Red Bloc are the names given the two political factions in the IWA. White Bloc refers to anti-Communists, and in this case those supporting the U.S. - based International IWA, and Red Bloc refers to Communists or Communist supporters.) The 1941 convention has been labelled by Phillips (1967:132) as "the beginning of the end" for the Communist leadership of the union movement in B.C. Abella's interpretation of the result of the White Bloc sweep at the 1941 convention is contrary to Phillips', and opposite to the intentions of the White Bloc in securing these positions. Abella suggests that the White Bloc's domination of the International weakened its control over the Canadian (B.C.) District and Pritchett's leadership, and at the same time strengthened the independent character of the B.C. membership (1973:114).

Following the 1941 convention, the B.C. District leadership became increasingly dissatisfied with the White Bloc - dominated International IWA. Relations between the B.C. District and the International at this time are described by Abella as "strained" and "consistently cool and occasionally hostile" (1973:119). By 1948 a B.C. District convention voted to remove the International president and jeered representatives from the International union off the stage. In

Abella's estimation this was the last straw which drove the International to increase their campaign against the Communists who were leading the B.C. IWA and to take direct measures toward removing the B.C. District leadership. The International dismissed organizers who supported the B.C. leadership; placed a ban on organizing new locals which were thought to support the Left leadership; initiated an intra-union and public campaign against the Communist leadership of the B.C. District; and began working with the anti-Communist forces in B.C.

Abella points out that the International IWA did not want to be seen as leading the opposition to the B.C. leadership for fear of accusations of initiating an American take-over of Canadian unions. They therefore worked with the CCL who had already been actively promoting the removal of the Communist leadership from the B.C. Federation of Labour and were next turning their attention to ridding the powerful IWA of Communists. Abella describes a "well co-ordinated onslaught" and an "attack the opposition mounted from three fronts" - the anti-Communist opposition within the IWA, the International IWA, and the Canadian Congress of Labour. He quotes correspondence between CCL executives which indicates their intentions to utilize documents and circumstances to "blow up the people now in control [of the B.C. IWA]" (Abella 1973:128). The intensified anti-Communist campaign made conditions for the B.C. District increasingly intolerable,

pushing the B.C. leadership to a move that had been under discussion for some time. In October of 1948 the B.C. District, under Communist leadership, disaffiliated from the IWA and formed the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada (WIUC).

The "large Port Alberni local" played an important role in this decision, as over a month before the secession they passed a resolution "calling on the District to hold a referendum on the question of seceding from the International" (Abella 1973:131), and they held a referendum on this question within their local.

Following the formation of the WIUC the groups which had been acting against the Communist leadership of the IWA turned their full force against the WIUC. Abella notes that union members were pressured to return to the IWA by International and CCL organizers who were operating in B.C. for that express purpose. The WIUC was further hampered in carrying out union business, according to Abella, by the attitudes of governments and the courts, as well as by the fact that it was not recognized by forest companies' management or by the Provincial Labour Board (Abella 1973:135, 137). By 1950 the WIUC had disbanded in most areas of the province.

While Abella documents the dissatisfaction the B.C. District found with the IWA he faults their methods for taking action on their grievances. In accounting for the loss of power by



the Red Bloc Abella clearly describes the manipulation by organizations opposed to the Communist leadership. He finds that this "overwhelming and well organized" opposition "unnerved" and "harried" the B.C. leadership, but concludes with some harsh criticisms of the B.C. IWA leadership and a condemnation of the Communist Party leadership. He claims that the B.C. District "vastly overestimated their influence" with the membership. The leaders expected the membership to follow them to the WUIC, when instead the rank and file found it difficult to "transfer their loyalties from the union to their leaders" (1973:135). Abella claims that the Communist Party made a "grievous miscalculation" (1973:111) and that the "union's leadership failed it at its gravest crises" by reacting "rashly and irresponsibly" on several counts: making the move against Communist Party strategy; acting too quickly and seceding rather than waiting to be expelled; and acting without checking the mandate of the membership by referendum (1973:138). Abella notes, in conclusion, that other major Communist-led unions, who had the same disagreements with the CCL as did the IWA, at least had the support of their International unions, whereas provincially, the IWA had no one on whom to rely (1973:138).

One can readily understand the frustration which precipitated the secession. Ideologically, the International and the District were at opposite poles. Organizationally they had antipathetic views. Financially, the British Columbia District felt deprived of the nearly \$600,000 in dues it had sent to the International between 1943 and 1948 - only \$235,000 of which, it claimed, was spent on

union activity in the province. These disagreements, along with such irritants as being barred by immigration authorities from attending International policy meetings and conventions and being subject to attacks from both the Congress and the International, combined to create in the minds of the district leaders an almost fanatic desire to be on their own (Abella 1973:138).

Lembcke and Tattam (1984) argue against these earlier interpretations. They disagree with Jensen who concludes that the ultimate ousting of the Communists from the union leadership was due to the rank and file's rejection of Communism and their utilization of democratic procedures to change the leadership (in 1941). Lembcke and Tattam also disagree with Abella's argument that the failure was ultimately due to errors of judgement and tactical blunders by the B.C. leadership. Their study of union documents leads them to argue instead that the Communists were defeated by a sophisticated and well planned move spearheaded and funded in the United States and supported by the CCL, CIO, companies and governments - a "...resourceful combination of corporate state power with social democratic trade unions" (1984: viii).

Abella and Lembcke and Tattam raise the possibility that not only was opposition to the Communist leadership and WIUC coordinated by a number of organizations, but the split itself was orchestrated by those groups and the situation manipulated to the eventual advantage of the right wing forces. CCL leaders are quoted in Abella's work (1973:131) as suggesting that the secession should be encouraged in a subtle

way, as it would save them the trouble of expelling the B.C. District IWA from the CCL and still attain the same purpose of ridding the CCL of Communist involvement. Certain White Bloc leaders in the IWA, he claims, did not take action to halt the secession before it was finalized as they wanted it to be obvious, to the membership and the public, who had initiated the step - that the Communist - led group was separating, not being expelled (1973:131). Encouraging the secession is thus viewed as part of a campaign by the CCL to rid the Canadian union movement in general of Communist involvement. According to Abella, the actions of the CCL and others assisted B.C. unionists to "repulse the Communist tide in the province" (1973:111).

The secession is described by Phillips as a "move to seize complete control of the Canadian IWA", a desperate last action of a Red Bloc "...facing defeat at the next convention and having lost complete control of the B.C. Federation of Labour..." and a move made over the "strong objections" of White Bloc delegates (1967:143). He connects the split within the IWA with a post World War II trend to Canadian nationalism which, for many unions, "...gave impetus to the move for Canadian autonomy..." (1967:130). This period saw several unions cease conforming to the practices of the American unions, particularly regarding their relationship to their affiliation union organizations.

Phillip's analysis of the causes of the failure of the WIUC

are less detailed than that of Abella or Lembcke and Tattam and he considers the WIUC less of a threat to the IWA. According to Phillips, this "breakaway group" lost ground soon after forming, with an original claimed membership of 10,000 dwindling to 400 within two years (1967:143). He claims that much of the opposition to White Blocs and to the International was based less on ideological issues than on fear of American influence, citing the IWA's constant concern with independence and internal democracy. Jamieson (1968:51), like Phillips, identifies a Canadian suspicion and hostility towards American dominated unions.

The turning point in the struggle is designated by Phillips as membership dissatisfaction with the decline in democratic procedures and diversion of union funds, rather than a matter of ideologies. He introduces the audit of the B.C. District's finances ordered by the International as concrete proof that the B.C. District leadership was incompetent and was operating more for the benefit of the Communist Party than the union. He implies that the secession was timed to be completed before the release of the auditor's report which cast suspicion on the leadership's credibility. Phillips reports that \$100,000 was found to be unaccounted for, including union funds transferred to Nigel Morgan, provincial leader of the Labour Progressive (Communist) Party (LPP).

While Phillip's analysis does not cite manipulation by other

organizations in accounting for the WIUC failure, he does state that the employers and the provincial Labour Relations Board insisted that bargaining authority remain with the IWA. "Even if the breakaway union had received more membership support it is unlikely it would have been able to obtain certification to bargain for the industry" (1967:143). Jamieson, Abella and Lembcke and Tattam all document government's active role in union affairs through certification procedures, the court system and control over legislation.

Jamieson notes that while Canadian employers were more inclined than American ones to remain within the law, they still showed no hesitation to "...call upon governments to support them in their struggles with organized labour and to sanction the use of force and violence by police or military personnel where they felt their interests to be seriously threatened in industrial conflict situations" (1968:51). He states, "[g]overnment industrial relations policy has not been simply that of a neutral umpire between two main conflicting interest groups" (1968:15). Canadian government policy has shown, according to Jamieson,

...a marked preoccupation with attempting to settle disputes and prevent strikes, rather than with protecting the rights, liberties and prerogatives of the contending parties. It has placed major emphasis on compulsory intervention and restriction of unions' and employers' freedom of action as a means for settling conflicts. In practice, however, until well on into World War II, such compulsory intervention favoured employers

more than unions (1968:53).

In this chapter the accounts of the development of the IWA as given in the IWA's official history and labour history publications have been summarized and compared according to their interpretations of key issues, which centre on the role of the Communist Party in the woodworkers' union. The issues discussed are, the motives of the Communist Party for their involvement in the IWA and the degree to which the Communist Party dictated union affairs, the views of the rank and file with regard to Communism and the extent to which they had an effect in the final outcome, and, of major importance, the interpretations of the 1948 secession.

The sources are in agreement that the Communists held leadership positions in the union due to their established leadership and organizational skills, their history of involvement in the labour movement and B.C.'s tolerance of the left wing. However, the official history and Phillips argue that the Communist Party was using the union as part of its strategy to gain control in Canadian society. The summary notes that Jensen, Phillips and the official history label the rank and file as opposed to Communism per se and as responsible for ousting the Communists from leadership positions. The interpretations of the 1948 secession vary according to the analyst's positions with regard to the role of the Communist Party in the union.

The sources discussed in this chapter thus form the documentary history of the development of the IWA. These analyses are shown to lack agreement on several issues, yet they nonetheless comprise what has been accepted as the official and established versions of the IWA's history. The following two chapters give Mark Mosher's participant's history of the development of the IWA . His accounts provide a distinct alternative to all the official versions.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOSHER'S ACCOUNTS OF EARLY UNION DAYS

In this chapter and the one to follow, Mark Mosher's narratives are given to portray his reconstruction of his own experiences in the woodworkers' union during the years 1935 to 1950. These accounts at the same time construct a history of the woodworkers' union, the IWA. The previous two chapters have discussed the established documentary histories of the province's labour union movement and the development of the IWA. These sources provide a context or a framework in which to consider Mosher's accounts, and Mosher's accounts are a response to these interpretations. The documentary sources offer an overall history based on other documentary sources, statistics and information from union leaders. Mosher's narratives elaborate on aspects of that history, with details based on his experiences as a worker, a local union leader, and from the perspective of the Left. The established sources outline the series of events undertaken in forming the woodworkers' union and Mosher's accounts in this chapter detail how that happened in the Alberni local.

This chapter first presents Mosher's personal remembrances of learning about and joining the woodworkers' union and the Communist Party. Next is Mosher's accounting of the established history of the union movement and the IWA, and finally is a series of stories which give an image of life in



the woods and its well known events and characters.

Particular themes emerge from the narratives in this chapter. Foremost, Mosher's accounts demonstrate the need for a union in the woods and thus provides useful background to the documentary sources which do not address that issue at all. His narratives also emphasize the long arduous process involved in developing the union: the dedicated and difficult work by individuals, particularly the well known leaders of the union; the attempts at unionization by workers' organizations before them; and the importance of personal contact to the growth of the union. The third theme is the important role played by the workers and the unions in the development of labour legislation.

#### FIRST EXPERIENCES OF UNIONISM

The following series of accounts give some personal background to Mosher and to his involvement with unionism as he addresses events which had a part in the formation of his beliefs.

When I was a kid, camp was just up back of Maquinna school. Those guys would be home from work, fed and down at the bar before Dad got home from work.

Mosher's father was a steam engineer in the APL (Alberni Pacific Lumber Company, the largest sawmill on the Port Alberni waterfront and the forerunner of the present Alberni

Pacific Division of MacMillan Bloedel). Among the earliest efforts by labour was the struggle to have the legal work day set at eight hours. The loggers, who Mosher describes here as getting home much earlier than his father, were granted an eight hour day before the mill workers, who continued to work a ten hour day.

I don't know too much what Dad thought of the union. He wasn't active, I don't think. Although somebody told me he was engineer there [APL Mill] when they passed the 8 hour day legislation. Dent [the mill owner] said he couldn't operate on 8 hours, he had to have 10, and he apparently ordered guys to come to work at 7 instead of 8. One guy told me Dad wouldn't blow the whistle at 7! I guess he had the backing of the sawyer. A fellow by the name of Charlie Clark was sawyer and he wasn't coming in til 8. Dad probably had to be there at 7, being the engineer, to steam up the engine.

I don't know how much it influenced my thinking, but was when I was still in high school, we were coming along 5th Avenue and there was a great big meeting in the community hall right where the City Hall is now. We went down there and there was a fishermen's meeting. There was a fishermen's strike on. It was in the fall, it was dog-salmon season and they were getting 5 cents a fish, so I think they wanted 10 cents or something. The lower hall was just chock full of people and it was the first meetin' I'd ever been to. I don't know who the chairman was but there was a couple of guys there, I guess they were organizers, prob'ly Communists, and jeez, they were real fiery speakers. Me and Manning, and I don't know who else, were in the back of the hall. Old A.W. Neill, he came in, he was sort of supporting the fishermen. It must have made an impression, I guess.

Mosher's accounts indicate the importance of personal contact between organizers and workers in developing the union. A recurring theme in Mosher's accounts is the influence of

particular individuals, on him personally, but also on union organizing as a whole. The men who influenced Mosher's life, Bergren, Pritchett, Dalskog, Dewhurst, were well known leaders in organizing the union. They developed a long lasting reputation, were known by many, and were widely respected (Abella 1973:116; Lembcke and Tattam 1984:110).

We were raised in a very conservative kind of an atmosphere. My Dad was a strong supporter of the Conservative Party all his life, and Mother was a Liberal, so I didn't really get any left wing ideas from home.

It wasn't until after, through the influence of guys like Pritchett, Dalskog, Dewhurst and Bergren. I guess they were feeding me literature, too. But they were the ones that seemed to have the answers for any situation that would come up. There'd be debates in meetings, and their solutions seemed to be the most practical. Then they had a series of public meetings too. Pritchett was one of the speakers, and he was real good, he was quite an orator, actually. And that makes an impression on you, you know when you're kinda scared to even get up at a union meeting, and someone gets up and talks like that. Well jeez, he's sort of a god, you know. There was some pretty darn good speakers.

I first met Pritchett in the 1940's. He only had a grade six education. He couldn't write but he sure could talk. He had a column in the B.C. Lumberworker. It was bloody awful, he'd have a paragraph go on for ever with two or three subjects in it. But he was an impressive speaker.

The B.C. Lumberworker was the union newspaper, put out by the B.C. District of the IWA and after the 1948 split, by the WIUC. Distributed to logging camps, it provided news of workers, events in camps, and primarily, union business such as membership gains, negotiations with the companies and current union issues. The Lumberworker was considered an

effective and important tool in organizing for the union.

I quit school in Grade 12. In Port you had your choice of the mill or the woods. That was about it.

I guess when I first went to work in the woods, I was, you know, makin' big money, \$3.20 a day, jeez. If I had been approached then, I wouldn't have joined the union.

There was a lot of anti-union sentiment around town in 1934 and I guess some of it rubbed off on me. It wasn't til I'd actually been in the woods for a while... and the conditions weren't bad in the camps I was in. Bunk houses were good and clean, food was good. We bitched a bit 'cause it tended to be a lot the same, you know, but actually there wasn't too much to really bitch about as far as food goes. There was all kinds of variety and good quality food.

Old Moore, the engineer I was firing for, he made a deal with McCall. He didn't want to go down and work away from his home, so McCall gave him free board and he turned in his own time, so and I got whatever time he turned in. That one year, I guess it was '37, I made \$2400, which was as much as the rigger had made. I worked a lot of hours for it at 40c an hour or whatever it was. But it was good. You always liked to get to town, you know, but I didn't dislike working like that, even long hours. They were a good bunch of guys.

There was an organizational drive in the late '30's in the mills. A lot of guys got fired. One guy Charlie Mitchell, he was later a CCF candidate. He pret' near got elected to the legislature, he didn't miss out by much. He was one who got fired down at APL mill.

Before the big drive was on there used to be "Lumberworkers" come into camp you know. Everybody read them. They'd be passed around. And there was news in there of various camps, letters to the editor and stuff like that.

Then I got distributing the union paper 'cause

Creelman was in the union. He'd bring them up to the China Creek crossing and hand them up to me and I'd put them around, generally on a Saturday night, when there wasn't too many guys around.

I don't know if Fos knew or not. I have an idea he might have, 'cause there was always stool pigeons around.

Fos Mosher was camp foreman and Mosher's cousin. He gave Mosher his first job at Camp 4 and Mosher followed Fos to other camps he was foreman in. Ede Creelman is a friend of Mosher's and a close friend of Mosher's brother. Again, it is personal contact that initiated Mosher's involvement in the union. Creelman is also a long time Port Alberni resident. This is an important consideration in placing people socially and politically, as is discussed with regard to Mosher's position in the community and as Mosher indicates as he accounts for his election to the union executive.

I'd met Bergren and John McCuish. They came into camp one night and were talking to us. I didn't join that particular time. But I think most people thought it'd be a good idea to have a union.

Then there was the big push, particularly in the States, from '36 and '37 on. The CIO was in the news all the time - John L. Lewis, the United Auto Workers, sit-down strikes and things like that, so it was topical. I think just instinctively most guys figured that it'd be better with a union.

I just forget exactly, whether a notice went up that there would be a union meeting at a certain night, and Bergren came into camp. Well, McCall, the superintendent, came over and told us we couldn't have a meeting there, so we all walked down to the gate and had a meetin' down there! I don't know what percentage, but prob'ly 80 or 90 percent of the guys joined up.

The monthly union meetings were in town and I usually went. Not many did, unless something big was happening like the '46 strike.

I got elected to the executive in 1945. I guess I was known from attending meetings and from being from here.

I worked my way up through the union. Pritchett once told me of going to a conference in the late '40's and he was the only proletariat there - the others were from the party or university trained. I came up through the big growth movement [time of IWA growth, expansion]. But I never made any big economic sacrifices like guys like Bergren did. They lived off the land.

Mosher's account is of interest, and unique, because his perspective is not solely that of a union leader - he worked in the forest industry before he worked for the union. This is in contrast to many of the union leaders used as sources for the established versions of union history, who were career union administrators. Lembcke and Tattam note that it was common among the Communist union leaders to have worked in the industries in which they organized. According to them, the "real strength of the Communist unions...was the indigenous members of the mill towns and logging camps in which they worked and organized" (Lembcke and Tattam 1984:176).

#### THE COMMUNIST PARTY

As noted previously, the Communist party was a major force in the union movement. Individuals like Mosher, active in both the union and the Party were common among woodworkers.

Well, in the union I worked with all these guys that were in the Party and I'd been to a lot of their public meetings. Tim Buck was around, Sam Carr, A. Mcleod who was the MLA in Ontario, Joe Salzberg. They used to tour around the country. Morgan ran here in 1945, in Comox-Alberni, because A.W. Neill didn't run that year. Morgan got a pretty good size of the electorate. Actually he ran as independent labour because it had been an independent riding before. Neill and Woodsworth who was the head of the CCF and some other guy who was an independent were instrumental in getting the old age pension through by holding the balance of power between MacKenzie King and whoever the Conservative was.

I guess Bergren and Dewhurst were wanting me in the Party. They must have convinced me it was a good idea, but it took a few months. I didn't join the first time I was asked, I know that. It's not like joining the CCF, or something, where you pay \$5 and you're a member.

I did some reading, but I guess I got most of my information from talking to guys. We used to have Party educationals where you'd study some of the classics, Marx and Engels. I think the Party is more based on issues now [over philosophy] but it shouldn't be. It should be 50 - 50. To really understand what's going on there should be a little more theoretical reading.

There wasn't as much anti-red sentiment right then [at the time Mosher joined the Party] as maybe later, in '47 and '48. But you see, we didn't have that Taft Hartley Act here to contend with that they had in the States. I guess there were lots of police around and about, but the Canadian government never really cracked down hard on the Communist Party. It was obvious that they.... Well, when I got pulled off that plane in Seattle that guy knew all about me. So he must have got it from the RCMP.

Well, the Party had been underground at the start of the war, and then I guess it was about 1942 that they let the guys out of Kingston. Tom MacEwan was one of them. I think they called it Section 98 of the criminal code, the Communist Party was outlawed and there was 5 guys in the penitentiary. When the Party became legalized again they changed the name

to the Labour Progressive Party and Tim Buck made a tour of Canada and he was in Vancouver. I wasn't in Vancouver at the time, but they had a big meeting up at the old athletic park. Apparently it was quite a good meeting.

From the '30's on, the focus of the Party was on organizing unions. I think now the Party has quite an influence with unions and labour, a greater influence than our numbers would indicate. They generally have a caucus of Party members at union conventions and there'll also be a lot of people who aren't members of the Party that attend those caucus'. It's kind of a left caucus, which is pretty effective a lot of times.

When I was on the union executive the Party generally would have a caucus on an important issue and try to thrash out what was the best way to approach it. We would try and look at the positive and the negative and arrive at a solution by a lot of heads together instead of one or two. Generally the party would do this first then we'd go into the [union] executive meeting with a proposal. It would be thrashed out so that everybody was clear on what the issues were and what were the best solutions. I think it worked fairly well. Ya, I was meeting with the Party before I actually joined.

#### UNION HISTORY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNION MOVEMENT

Mosher's reconstruction of his own history in the woodworkers' union includes an accounting of the broader history of the IWA and the union movement. His accounts thus reflect a concern that in creating a history, in adding to the knowledge about the IWA, his construction be as complete as possible. This section, therefore, includes some information, such as labour legislation and the IWA's move from the AFL to the CIO, that is described in the earlier chapters. These accounts indicate



that Mosher views his personal history in the woodworkers' union as part of a larger movement and as having ramifications beyond his own local.

The 8 hour day came in around '23 or '24. I guess there was exemptions for some occupations, but I think the actual operations of the plant couldn't go over 8 hours. There was times in the woods, I guess, maybe one crew might work more than 8 hours to finish one set or finish moving or something. But generally speaking there was an 8 hour day.

Chapter II has described the political history of earlier attempts to unionize the forest industry and identified the Wobblies and the Workers Unity League as the forerunners of the IWA. Several accounts in this chapter demonstrate Mosher's knowledge of the groups which had attempted to organize before his time and the woodworkers' awareness of the practical benefits they had gained due to these earlier organizations.

I think it was pretty evident in the '30's and '40's. I knew what the Wobblies had done, like the 8 hour day and the blanket, and the crockery dishes in the cook house and that sort of thing.

There was also the Workers Unity League which was organized by the Party. They organized the fight for wages and that in the late '30's in the woodworking industry, particularly in the logging camps. The outgrowth of that was the strike in '34. They didn't win everything they wanted, but they virtually shut down the logging section of the industry. George Pearson, provincial Minister of Labour, appointed his Deputy Minister, a man named Adam Bell, to investigate it. Bell came up with a proposed settlement that increased chokerman's wages from \$2.60 or \$2.65 a day to \$3.50 a day. And they cut the board back from I think it was a dollar and a half a day to a dollar twenty and established a minimum wage of 40 cents an hour, \$3.20 a day. So there was big gains there

even though the companies broke the strike in the final analysis.

The discussions of the established versions of IWA and labour union history include comparisons between Canada and the United States and Mosher too, in accounts in this chapter, often places his comments in a context of the union movement in the United States. Some of the initial battles of the labour movement were fought in the United States where labour practices were advanced earlier than in Canada. Most of the major unions in Canada, as was and is the case with the IWA, were international unions with head offices in the United States. The next chapter raises the question of whether the formation of the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada was influenced by a nationalistic motive.

Quite a bit before my time, I guess from the middle '30's til about '37 when the IWA was formed, there was the AF of L (American Federation of Labour) Carpenters and Joiners, and there was a woodworkers' section of that. I think in Canada the only ones that were in it were the shingle weavers.

In the States they were a few years ahead of us. The loggers and the millworkers in the States were in the Carpenters and Joiners. They had some kind of a class B membership, they didn't have any voice or vote in the conventions. I wasn't involved at the time. We weren't in the organization at that time. They broke the union during the strike and any union activity was underground.

The documentary history of the IWA given in Chapter III made note of the IWA's concern with rank and file control and that is an important issue to the discussion of the 1948 secession

in the following chapter. As Mosher notes here, union democracy was one of the major causes for the move from the AFL to the CIO.

The CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) was a more democratic organization. The AF of L was very bureaucratic and the leaders made all the decisions. In the early '30's, maybe '32, '33, '34, Roosevelt passed the Wagner Act, and that set up procedure for unions becoming a bargaining agent. Well the AFL set up this Committee of Industrial Organizations, and John L. Lewis was the head of it. He was the head of coal miners. I'm not too sure of all the history of it, but I guess the contradictions became pretty severe and they said to hell with Bill Green and they formed this Congress of Industrial Organizations. Before, it had been the Committee of Industrial Organizations. They were organizing in the basic industries like steel, wood. Some of the places there was already some form of organization and they switched over to the CIO, like in the woods. The Carpenters and Joiners in the mills, they had some organization but they all went in the CIO, or most of them. The same with the Longshoremen on the coast, they all belonged to the AFL but then switched to the CIO. I guess the same thing happened in the mining industry, electrical workers and some of the other ones. Most of the international unions were affiliated with CIO and the Canadian Congress of Labour. There was a fraternal relationship between the Canadian Congress and the CIO. Like the IWA belonged to both, the Longshoremen belonged to both. At that time there were two, the Canadian Congress of Labour and the Trades and Labour Council which was the AF of L unions.

The bulk of that happened down in the States (the CIO - AFL split). There was a whole break away from the AF of L. John L. Lewis had the support of the [Communist] Party in it. I guess there was a similar condition in most of the industrial organizations like lumber, longshoring at the same time.

The U.S. unions had the jump on us for a while due to this Wagner Act. In Canada there wasn't much protection or rights for the union, as I remember,

until they passed the amendments for the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. It gave you something to work on you know. Once you could sign up 50% of the men in a camp and you applied for certification then they'd freeze the payroll at that particular day. Might be a month before the guy from the Department of Labour would get around. They only had so many inspectors. He'd check the applications and the receipts to show that someone had actually paid money to join the union. Then if there was a majority of those people who were eligible, it became certified, the union was certified as the bargaining agent. Then the company was compelled to sit down and bargain with you. They had to talk with you, that didn't mean that they had to give you anything. I guess it was 1943 before the first agreement.

While the published versions of union history indicate the long process involved in finally gaining acceptance for the union - the leadership struggles, the many organizations formed and the various attempts at legislation to reach an agreement suitable to both companies and unions - Mosher's accounts add the experiential details of that struggle as it affected the workers and union organizers. He notes the gradual addition of improvements to working life which came with various organizations and legislation - wage increases, hours of work, camp conditions, plus the details of organizing at the time. The threat of strikes was used to gain initial union recognition. Strikes, however, were treated very seriously and were well remembered.

About 1943 they had open meetings [i.e. not secretivel]. The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act established the certification procedure. That was when George Pearson from Nanaimo was Minister of Labour. He was a pretty good guy actually, coming from Nanaimo which was a

traditional union town from the coal strike in 1913. It was a coalition government then, Liberals and Tories.

There was an agreement signed up at Oyster River. Simpson was the fellow who owned the camp and he was fairly sympathetic to the union. He signed the first union agreement with the IWA. Then there was a 2 week strike in the Queen Charlotte Islands and that's when they really started to sign agreements. I guess due to the fact that they needed lumber for the war effort, and I guess the federal government told them to quit foolin' around. That would have been '43 probably. I think there had been an agreement down at a camp at Cowichan Lake. I know they got a raise down there and we got one automatically. I think it was 5 cents or something. That was before there was any organization in the local camps. That was the idea, to buy you off.

Prob'ly the best organized section [of the IWA] was the shingle weavers. There had been the loggers strike in '34 and when that got beat, smashed, there was a period there when there wasn't much. I guess there was the hard core union guys but you didn't know who the hell they were, you know. Well you'd find out the odd guy when you got talkin' to them, you know. There was a Finn slept in the next bed to me for a while. I'm sure he was in the union. Mostly the Scandinavian and Slavs were, and a few Nova Scotians I guess, they were the mainstays, you know. (laughs)

Mosher is joking because his family is Nova Scotian.

The dates of the 1946 strike are easy to remember because we went out on Ros' birthday and we went back on our anniversary. It went on from the 15th of May to the 20th of June.

It was the first strike since the union had been rebuilt, since '34. The reaction around town was entirely different than it had been in '34. There was more local support, the union had been accepted by then. There was good support from the townspeople for the strike. There was a committee that set up bunk houses in the army camp for single guys. They put an appeal out for blankets, that sort of thing. They had them all numbered and itemized, whose they were and they were returned after the strike.

After the 1946 strike the mills worked a 44 hour week, including Saturday mornings. They wanted a 40 hour week but settled for 44 in the mills.

In camp we were to work a six day week until November 1, then go to a five day week to average out the season. We were supposed to go back to a six day week the first of April or May. Whatever date we were supposed to be back to six days no one went to work that Saturday. I was out tryin' to get guys not to go back. Some did. I remember McCready, the bull bucker, saying, 'you might as well go back, its in the bag, they'll agree anyway.' The next contract had a forty hour week. If there was any going to work on Saturdays it was marginal.

#### TALES AND CHARACTERS AND WORKING FOR THE UNION

This section includes accounts which have the slightly different nature of being stories or 'yarns'. These are commonly known stories, repeated often, usually with much the same wording and format. They are not Mosher's accounts of his own experiences. Rather, they are stories of infamous events or characters, told at gatherings now, as in the early days. Such stories contribute to what Schwartzman calls "shaping and sustaining" the views of an organization. Today they give a retrospective image of life as a logger and a union organizer while also expressing Mosher's belief in the need for a union for woodworkers. In earlier days such stories, which were common in the lore of the loggers, would contribute to the creation of a shared view of themselves as woodworkers, a shared history, and a common perspective toward the union.

I remember this guy, his name was Irwin but he went under the name of Logger Bill. He said he'd been up Powell River or Powell Lake or somewhere, some camp, when they first got the blankets. They all threw their old blankets together and they had a big fire. Jeez, he said, some of those guys didn't want to throw their blankets on, we had to throw them on for them!

It was a symbolic gesture, to burn your blankets, you see. Some guys were a little more thrifty so they didn't want to burn their blankets, so some of them guys had to do it for them.

Prior to this time workers had to take their own blankets and bedding to camps. As previously noted, the Wobblies were responsible for several practical improvements to camp life which were well remembered by the workers.

This thesis has already discussed how Mosher's life was influenced by the leaders in the union and the Communist Party and how the personal strength of these leaders was an important factor in organizing for the union. Other individuals gained reputations too - as characters or for carrying out a particular deed, usually a show of strength against the company. The following are examples of stories which circulated about these leaders and other infamous characters in the movement. Such stories spread the personal reputation of individuals and reinforced a belief in the strength of the union and the toughness necessary in organizers.

After we became certified we went in with an agreement. The company said they wouldn't meet

with Bergren, so there was a committee of us went in to talk to Ross Pendleton who was the general manager. There was a committee from the camp then there was a committee from the mill. They'd just as much as tell you to go to hell, you know. They didn't want to meet with Bergren because Pendleton apparently had been a manager at Youbou. There had been a shut down there because of lack of orders and Bergren was able to point out to them that there was orders in Australia, but it had to be produced by union labour, you see. Apparently Pendleton told him to get the hell out. Bergren told him, 'Well one of these days you and I will be sitting down and you'll be signing an agreement.' So I guess that's why he didn't want to talk to Bergren.

There was one guy, I didn't know him at that time, but he pulled out camp 3, that was up near camp 6. That was in 1934. He was a Finn, had no education, but he must have been a hell of an agitator cause he pulled that camp out, him and the whistle punk.

I run into the whistle punk after. We were going to Cuba, and this guy come up and said, 'You're Mosher', I said 'ya.' He said, 'I was in Alberni in '34.' I said, 'Oh.', and he said, 'Ya, I helped pull out Camp 3.' I said, 'Oh, I thought it was, what the hell was the guy's name, Gunnered, Ted Gunnered, and the whistle punk pulled it out.' 'Oh ya,' he said, 'I was punk!'

He got blacklisted and he went to work for B.C. Electric.

McLary was a CPR worker who used to belong to the Wobblies. The first day of the strike (in '46) he came in and donated a day's pay. He told us how they used to donate scabs. They do a good job of messing everything up. Those scabs would get the freight orders all mixed up. Cars that were 'sposed to go to Oklahoma would end up in Los Angeles. He was quite a character!

Ya, there was some guys that never did join [the union]. Not too many. There was one old engineer there, Eddie Johnstone. He was a nice enough guy, but he never did join the union and he never stayed in a bunkhouse. He had his own little shack for some reason. No running water in it. I don't know whether he figured it was prestige or what,



but they'd moved this thing from camp 5 up to camp 7 then to camp 1. But he'd worked for the company for a long time and I guess he was a reasonably good engineer. He wasn't as good as Moore, but pretty good.

This guy I worked with in the woods, his name was Jimmy Wilson. He wore a long stanfield and a felt hat - no hard hat. He didn't do very much himself but he sure had things organized. They went like silk. He had everyone running around when they were "moving track-side machine". He was directing it all; everyone had their allotted job. Every once in a while he would do something. He knew how to delegate.

Many of Mosher's stories are humorous but the moral behind them is to show the need for a union for woodworkers. Previous accounts described the poor camp conditions before the Wobblies. Unwarranted firings without notice were common in the woods and were one of the major complaints that led to the desire for union protection. Just as certain union leaders gained wide spread reputations, so did particular bosses and foremen - for the opposite reason.

I guess the odd guy got fired. But they were a little careful, you know. They had to have a little bit of reason, which was something that was new. Before that, you could get fired for nothing, they didn't have to give a reason or anything. In fact, there was a guy, old Nelson, he was a foreman at Camp 5 at Nahmint, and he'd been at camp 4 and 3, or 2. He had a reputation for firing guys. Apparently every boat there'd be new guys on it, just automatically. People figured he had an in with union steamships or something!

There was a foreman at Horne Lake. He came out one morning and every seat in the speeder was full. He said 'You! [pointing] Go to town.' This meant the guy was fired and the foreman got a seat.

There is this story of a high rigger who was up the spar tree. The foreman, named Koski yelled out, 'Can you see Vancouver?' The high rigger answered 'No.' The foreman said, 'Well come down, you'll be seeing it tomorrow.' The high rigger had been fired.

You see, in the camp that Fos ran, he wasn't like that. I guess he fired guys, but it wasn't done just in front of the whole crew, you know, you go to town, you go to town, that sort of thing.

I wasn't unhappy with my working conditions, but I guess we figured there was more money there than we were getting. I remember old Moore, the guy I fired for. He went down to Oregon there to get this 6 Spot locomotive, the one that's up at Woss now. He came back madder than hell. I think engineers were gettin 65 cents, he might have been gettin' another nickel more, because that was all he liked, if he was gettin' a little more than anybody else he was happy, well, reasonably happy. But he gets down there, and Christ, here's a guy sweepin' up in the mill - he was makin a dollar an hour an here's a locomotive engineer only makin 65 cents. So Jesus, he was really hoppin' mad about that, I'll tell ya. He's chewed off and sayin' 'thats right, better have a union'. Obviously the guy was makin' a buck an hour for sweepin' up because there was a union there. So I guess instinctively we knew there was more money there, if we had a union.

As noted in earlier chapters it was not until 1937 that the right to organize was legislated and even after that, companies did all they could to prevent the establishment of a union (Lembcke 1978). That meant firing known union organizers, the use of a blacklist and the refusal to negotiate with the union or to co-operate with the organizers. Working for the union thus involved a certain degree of risk - of losing one's job, of possible arrest, or in the case of some strikes, of physical violence. The

following stories emphasize the rigorous nature of the organizers' life style and the dedication this required. They also re-inforce the constant personal contact utilized in organizing for the union. The awareness of the practical everyday work carried out by the organizers in the locals is a feature of the development of the union which is not seen through the established analyses.

Up 'til prob'ly '41 you'd get fired for union activity if the companies knew. Then in '42, '43, '44, men were so scarce they couldn't stop it really. And besides that, you were 'sposed to be frozen on the job. I forget what the name of the act was, or the order in council, but you were 'sposed to stay on the job during war time. I remember somebody sayin', about Morley Hunter, for a while he was what they call man catcher for Gibsons up the coast. And Morley apparently signed this guy up to go to this camp and I guess it was pretty crude. The guy said as soon as he got his cheque he was going to quit. And someone said to him, 'you're frozen, you can't quit'. The guy said, 'when I get that cheque you'll see how fast I thaw out!' 'Wait til I get that Morley Hunter', he says! 'Sendin a guy to a place like that!'

So I don't know if anybody ever got prosecuted under it, but there wasn't the same freedom. Besides, young people who were military age were prob'ly on deferment. The logging companies, if you would go to work for them, had quite a bit of pull with this deferment board. I was on deferment '44 and '45.

I haven't got proof of it, but there was strong suspicion that sometimes the bed makers or bullcooks would go through your luggage. I'd heard of that, and there was one guy at Camp 1 there, that was suspected of doin' it too. I guess if guys got caught with union stuff they'd get eased out. Maybe not right at that time, but when a layoff came or something like that. Nothing in black and white.

Most of the guys that were organizing had been blacklisted. The hiring was pretty well all done from Vancouver. The loggers agency in Vancouver which did most of the hiring for the big association camps was presided over by Major Black. It was called Black's Agency. They definitely had a blacklist there, no doubt about it. He must have got copies of the payroll and if anybody showed up on the payroll that had been hired locally they'd get a message from him that a certain guy had to go. They could hire locally all right, but the bulk of the hiring was done through Vancouver 'cause most of the loggers were transient, they kept moving. There were one or two other hiring halls that hired for gypos up and down the coast. Some of the guys on Black's blacklist could get out to one of the other camps but they wouldn't be going to one of the big camps. This was in effect from the 1934 strike on.

I remember down there when I worked at Camp 4 there was a guy by the name of McCuish. He used to get letters from the States all the time. I'd know 'cause his mail was in the same box as mine, being under the M's you see. I'd see letters to McCuish from Aberdeen, Portland, so forth. Then I guess Fos got the word he [McCuish] had to go down and get straightened around with Black, and he never came back. He got fired from Camp 4 and the next I heard of him he went organizing for local 71, the loggers local of the IWA. The loggers navy was that old boat that used to go up the coast.

McCuish, he had a core of trouble shooters in that Local 71. That guy that built the West Bay Hotel was one of them, what was his name, Paul Cumola. They were working loggers, but actually, they were as good organizers as the ones that were on the payroll. Any camp that wasn't doin' too good, they'd send them in and they'd work in the camp and organize. Very good capable guys. You could hire guys on anywhere pret' near, you know, particularly isolated camps like those, there's no problem gettin' a guy in there.

Grafton and Bergren had a mining claim off the side of one camp. They'd sneak over the boundary and do a bit of organizing, then get back on their own land. If the cops were called, they could just say they were working on their mining claim, and dare them to come on it.

It wasn't that bad when I was organizing. After the first little bit of protest by the employers, they kinda... I guess it was during the war too, and they had to have lumber. Probably the international politics bore down on them a bit to keep production going. Besides, with the shortage of men, they couldn't fight back the way they could have before or how they could now.

I remember George Grafton and I went up to a little camp a guy by the name of McQuillan owned. It was at McLean Point, when you go past Long Beach there, you know, and you turn to go to Tofino, and the road goes straight ahead. It was down on that road. We went down there and we were walkin' in. The plane had come in and this guy MacKenzie was the foreman there and he was goin' up to get his bottle, I guess, off the plane. He stopped and he said, 'You guys can't get a bed there.' We said 'To hell with ya, we don't need a bed from you.' So anyway, the guys came up and we had a meeting there.

I told Grafton we had passed a shack down the road, we could go back there and sleep the night. So we walk back, it was a couple of miles back from the camp, I guess. Walked in the shack and looked up and there was no bloody roof on it! We found an old door and leaned it up against there and built a fire and old Grafton pulled his coat up over his old bald head and Christ, he was snorin' away to beat hell in a few minutes and I had to stoke fire pret' near all night!

Generally the organizer would come out for the sub-local meetings [in camp]. He'd give a report, tell you what was happening. I guess if you read the minutes now they wouldn't be that earth-shaking. After a while it got so there wouldn't be as many people as there was at first. I guess the novelty kind of wore off, until they got into a strike situation.

Later on when I went to work for the union, well even when I was in camp, you had to sell it to a lot of guys, you know. And there was no check-off. You had to go around with your receipt book and collect dues. But there was kids that came in from the farms, the prairies, places like that, prob'ly had heard nothing but bad about unions. You had to

sell it. It wasn't until 1946 we got the check-off for union dues. You had to sign a declaration you wanted your union dues checked off. But before that it was personal contact every month.

I had to go around and collect dues each month. I mainly covered the rail guys, but once I started working for the union I travelled all around collecting. I tried to get to each camp once a month. This local was the Alberni Valley and out to Kennedy Lake. There were sub locals within that area.

The Franklin River Camps, there was two camps there, A and B, and those were generally an over-night trip. There was a camp at Ucluelet, I had to go down there, and one camp up at Central Lake about half way up the lake. That was over-night. Then Camp 1 was accessible, you could drive into that. I pretty well had freedom to set my hours.

You would have a camp all signed up, then go the following month to collect dues and find out most of the guys had left. Then you'd have to start all over again.

There was a big turn over of men all the time in the camps, but I got to know an awful lot of key people that were more or less steady.

We had little contact with Portland. We mainly dealt with Vancouver. There wasn't a problem of the District executive not knowing the situation in the locals. Nigel Morgan was secretary of the IWA. He travelled throughout the island and knew the area well.

Periodically there'd be Morgan or Pritchett or Berggren or somebody'd be around, make a tour of the camps and the mills. I think most people were reasonably happy with that situation.

This chapter has focussed on Mosher's accounts of the early years of the IWA: his remembrances of the circumstances that led him to join the woodworkers' union and the Communist party; accounts of the work he and others did for the union;

his construction of how the woodworkers' union related to the broader context of the union movement as a whole; and the stories which circulated about characters and events in the woods. While many of these accounts are humorous they portray themes which are central to Mosher's alternative history. These are the need for a woodworkers' union, the long and difficult struggle which went into organizing a union, particularly the arduous work of the organizers. His accounts point out that the influence of individual leaders was as important to the union movement as it was to him personally.

These narratives add to the documentary histories in a number of ways. As a participant's history this account describes what is important to Mosher as a worker and union leader, and adds to the official histories an awareness of the roles of individuals in working for the union. These accounts have provided background explanation as to why the woodworkers felt a union necessary - wages and conditions of work such as firings, camp conditions and hours of work. They have described what it was actually like to establish the union - travelling to logging camps to meet with workers, facing threats from bosses and threats of blacklisting. Mosher's accounts provide detail and explanation from a personal perspective.

## CHAPTER V

### MOSHER'S ACCOUNTS OF THE 1948 SECESSION

In October of 1948, as has been discussed previously, the B.C. District of the International Woodworkers of America withdrew from the International IWA to form a Canadian union, the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada (WIUC). The union executives leading these moves, both at the provincial level and in the Alberni local, were Communist Party members. Opposition to the break-away was quickly mobilized from the International IWA and U.S. locals, as well as from a faction within the Alberni local which had been involved in a power struggle for the leadership of the local. This opposition grew to a point where it involved other labour organizations, government and through the media, the general public. The battle between the new union and the U.S. based IWA was polarized along political lines, as the division within the IWA had been, the two sides being known as the "Red Bloc" (the Communists) and the "White Bloc" (non-Communists and those who supported the U.S. based IWA).

The executive at the International level was undergoing the same power struggle as in the Port Alberni local, with the Red Bloc and White Bloc each competing to lead the union and have the union follow policy sympathetic to their philosophy. The situation at the local level was effected by the struggle in the International Union and by policies the International White Bloc attempted to implement which caused



increasing dissatisfaction in the B.C. District.

The WIUC was a viable union for the better part of a year but continually lost ground. The time it was in existence was marked by a struggle to maintain a power base among the workers and to be legitimized in the eyes of the IWA, the public and the government. The Canadian union was continually opposed by the White Bloc in Canada and the U.S., and was served with court action by the IWA. The WIUC officially disbanded in 1950 and the IWA once again became the sole woodworkers' union on both sides of the border.

Earlier chapters have identified this event as the peak of the Communist Party's power in the labour union movement: it substantially reduced what had been a long and influential relationship between the Communist Party and B.C. labour. This split has also been discussed as a critical turning point in the history of the IWA. A substantial portion of Chapter III has been devoted to a discussion of the 1948 secession as it is portrayed and analyzed in the established labour history literature. This chapter adds Mark Mosher's interpretation of this event.

The fact that the WIUC was relatively short lived and had no continuing impact on the union movement caused it to be labelled a failure. However, Mosher's accounts portray this as a period of success for the Left. He notes that the Left had sufficient strength and membership support to form an

independent union and he interprets the actions of the Left as forcing the companies and government to begin to agree to workers' demands.

The secession placed Mosher, as a member of the local union executive, in the midst of an international struggle centered on his political ideology. Mosher's accounts, based on his active role in these events, add a specific focus and fuller detail to the existing interpretations which are based on documentary sources and from the perspective of union and government leaders, not workers. The existing interpretations, although they lack agreement in many respects, form an authoritative telling as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in Bruner (1984:59). They represent "prior discourse" backed up by legal, political and moral authority. Most of the "authoritative tellings" referenced here are not sympathetic to the Communist interpretation of the era (Lembcke and Tattam 1984). Mosher's reconstruction is thus a response to these interpretations. He attempts to correct the established accounts by providing an analysis which gives what he perceives to be the truth. Mosher is thus, in Bruner's terms, a "challenging voice" as he creates this alternative history.

Chapter III has discussed the labour historians' inadequate treatment of the development of the IWA and the lack of agreement with regard to interpretation of the 1948 secession. Certain factors have been identified which are central to

developing an understanding of the disaffiliation yet which receive inconsistent interpretation in the documentary sources. These are: the circumstances leading up to the secession; the role of the Communist Party in the secession and the motives for its involvement; the causes for the WIUC's failure; the position of the rank and file regarding Communism and the role played by the membership in determining the outcome of the situation. Mark Mosher's accounts of this era, which follow, give his interpretation of these factors.

Mosher's narrations have been organized into three chronological sections which include the issues listed above. The first discusses the dissatisfaction, which had been building for some time and for a variety of reasons, that the B.C. District found with the U.S. based IWA and which led to the secession. Secondly, his accounts of the period during and after the Canadian bid for independence reflect upon the role of the Communist Party. These tell of Mosher's activities as an organizer for the new union, the obstructions met by the WIUC, and Mosher's experiences after the disbanding of the WIUC. The third section gives Mosher's analysis of the reasons for the demise of the WIUC. Mosher identifies and discusses four factors as instrumental in the downfall of the new union.

## BUILD-UP TO THE SECESSION OF THE B.C. DISTRICT

As Chapter III points out, the IWA official history and Phillips identify the move toward disaffiliation as part of a strategy by the Communist Party to gain power and control in the IWA and Canadian society. Abella, however, points to the 1941 defeat of the Communist leadership of the International as the beginning of continually worsening relations between the B.C. District and the International IWA, the result of which was a campaign, carried out by the International the Canadian Congress of Labour and anti-Communist factions within the IWA, to rid the B.C. District of its Communist leadership. In the narratives which follow, Mosher discusses incidents which caused the B.C. leadership to be dissatisfied with the International IWA and to eventually disaffiliate from it. Some of these, International-appointed organizers who were opposed to the B.C. leadership, the barring of B.C. leaders from the U.S. and thus from International conventions, the anti-communist clause in the IWA constitution, are the same as those cited by Abella.

During this time there were two blocks. One bunch called themselves the "White Bloc" and they called us the "Red Bloc". I think this emerged somewhere about the time Pritchett wasn't able to get back into the States. The White Bloc was kind of like an opposition

Things built up for quite a while before 1948.

There had been a couple of sub local meetings and

the White Bloc had them really stacked. The White Bloc was always pickin' away at things, you know, little picky issues. Except during the '46 strike, of course, they had to lay low then. They had to support the strike.

I guess it was more theoretical than it was practical, the idea that the companies were international and that the union should be too. But there was never any such thing as international negotiations on both sides of the border at once. If one area was on strike 90% of the time the other area would be working.

The CIO basically was a pretty democratic organization. The old AF of L was very bureaucratic, you know, and I guess there was a reaction to that that made the CIO ultra democratic, or just democratic. The [union] positions were all elected. The only appointed positions were organizers, appointed by the International in Portland, and there were a few district organizers.

This George Brown was director of organization in the IWA and he wouldn't consult with the people in B.C. about who should be the organizers there.

There'd been a lot of appointments of organizers for B.C. I remember one guy, Mike Sekora, was appointed, and he was one of the leading White Bloc-ers. He'd been going into camps that were already organized, tryin' to get White Bloc-ers, and holdin' meetings with the various locals. Basically they were going around trying to organize the White Bloc against the leadership. At the time, especially in the interior there was a lot of the industry that wasn't organized.

So it was kinda obvious that it really wasn't working out the way it should have done internationally. The International was really screwing the B.C. District around.

There was resentment about that money (dues) going to the States.

Another thing that was a problem was that the International Board member, anyone we elected, wasn't allowed to cross the border into the States. Nigel Morgan was International Board member for B.C. for a while and then Bert Melness was and

he was turned back. That was when I got turned back and was not allowed to enter the States. I was going down to a board meeting in Seattle in 1947 when they pulled me off the plane. It was American Immigration, probably in collusion with the White Bloc in the States, they were probably puttin' the finger on people. It was part of the old witch hunt.

Well, when I got pulled off that plane in Seattle that guy knew all about me. So he must have got it from the RCMP.

The Northern Washington District was pretty well under Communist leadership too. Their president was a guy by the name of Karly Larsen. Him and Pritchett were good buddies.

The IWA constitution both before and after the '48 split had a clause forbidding you to belong to the Communist Party. It wasn't until about ten years ago it was taken out of the constitution of the IWA. It said something about the Communists, the Fascists and the Nazi Party you weren't allowed to belong to. Of course they lumped everybody together, you know. They suspected we were members but they didn't have the proof. They drummed some guys out in the States, wouldn't accept their per capita, but the guys were still in the IWA working locally for quite a while. The International constitution provided a trial procedure before you could be expelled. They tried to expel them without any trial. It was one of the things that led up to the dis-affiliation I guess.

There was this guy in Washington State, Red Wallace, his name was. They did that to him and I can't remember how many more, but there was quite a few. We all knew it was in the constitution, that belonging to the Communist Party was forbidden, but there was never any formal move to get it out. It probably wouldn't have been successful. There would have had to be a referendum ballot by the international convention to make a constitutional change.

I guess it was not long before '48 was about the time the Taft Hartley Act came in in the States, where the union officials had to sign an affidavit that they were not Communist Party members.

One of the big arguments in the conventions was

over this Taft Hartley act. That was the big one in '47 the last convention I went to. I guess they knew who was in the Communist Party all right, or suspected it. But up in B.C. nobody ever really laid charges under the [union] constitution.

I guess Taft Hartley eliminated any people who were sympathetic to the Party in the IWA in the States, like Karly Larsen, Jim War.

Well there was few other difficulties, like, they had the CIO convention every year and the delegate from B.C. would be elected at the International [IWA] convention. The whole International voted on it, so generally it would be a White Bloc-er that would be elected to represent B.C., but he wouldn't really represent B.C.

The following accounts detail the beginning of the series of events that led up to the disaffiliation. Mosher interprets the call for an audit of the B.C. District as a strategy to cast suspicion on the leadership. In contrast, the official history, Abella, and Phillips all claim there was a diversion of funds from the union to the Communist Party, Phillips citing that as a major source of member dissatisfaction with the Communist leadership which led to its downfall.

The New Westminster IWA local was the only B.C. local to be strongly White Bloc .

Well there was a big stink over an audit.

It started in New Westminster. There was a fellow named Eric Bee, who was the union auditor for the Trade Union Research Bureau. He reported certain things in New Westminster that weren't right. Of course the White Bloc, Alsbury, Mitchell and them in that local, they got control of the New Westminster local and they brought in another firm of auditors. They raised so much hell about that, that we agreed to an audit of the B.C. District done by somebody other than the Trade Union

Research Bureau. That's when they came up with the thing about the vouchers - that there hadn't been vouchers put in for some travel expenses. The expenses were noted on the cheque stub but there was no separate voucher, and the auditor said that wasn't a good practice. The White Bloc really made hay out of that. Actually there was nothing, you know, it was above board. Any of the district officers, if they were travelling, they got a cheque or they submitted a bill and got a cheque and it was noted on the cheque stub. Of course they played that up to mean there was funds missing.

I don't know what difference it made, but they sure as hell made a lot of hay out of that. As far as I'm concerned the expenses weren't out of line and they certainly weren't exorbitant, but that's the easiest way to try to discredit a person, to suggest there's been mis-use of funds. Compared to the way union bureaucrats live today, Christ, we were penny ante. So that had quite a bearing on it and that's when the threat of trusteeship came up. That probably precipitated the break-away in 1948.

I don't know that they officially threatened a trusteeship, but it was certainly implied and thought to be a strong possibility. They would have appointed somebody, maybe an International officer, who were all White Bloc-ers anyway, somebody like Carl Wynn who was a real rabid Red baiter. He later became a labour attache for the state department somewhere. It all lead up to an intolerable situation.

If we had stayed in the IWA and if the International had put a trusteeship in, I think the membership would have supported us. But then you don't know how these things are going to turn out until they're done.

Mosher's accounts discuss the process of disaffiliation, and as noted by Abella, the Alberni local played a significant role in that process (Abella 1973:131). The White Bloc position, as represented by the official history and Abella, was that the move was not carried out democratically. Mosher's accounts indicate the support by the membership for the move.



Well what happened, they had a district council meeting in Vancouver and they had delegates from all over. They voted there to dis-affiliate. Well the White Bloc, as soon as that motion went through, they all walked out. That was on a Sunday. It was the following Saturday that we had the big meeting here in the Capital Theatre. There was International officers up and it was quite a meeting. It kinda got out of hand a bit. The big motion was to conduct a referendum [on leaving the International] and the White Bloc were against it, against having a referendum on it. They boycotted the referendum. They didn't want any part of it.

The Capital Theatre meeting was a pretty hectic meeting and it was questionable about how the vote went. I guess it was a standing vote or something. We said it passed, they said it didn't. So we went ahead with the ballot anyway, and the White Bloc boycotted the whole thing. But that's one thing that should have come from that district council meeting. We did that on our own, here in the local, decided on the vote. I can't recall the percentage of the turn out for that referendum but I know when we were in court over the Eric Graf Hall, that went in our favour, that we did have it. I think if there had been a referendum over the B.C. District it would have put us in a lot stronger position legal-wise. When we were in court we should have made that our strongest point. We should have played it up higher than we did, the fact that we had a referendum here.

I think there was a lot of sympathy for the idea of a Canadian union but I guess the pressure was too much. This was going on too in things like the Seamens Union on the lakes, when they brought in the SIU and that Banks from the States. He broke the Canadian Seamens Union and the SIU took over. But then the Canadian government got out of the shipping business and outside of the Great Lakes there were practically no Canadian ships. But they were a very bureaucratic union, you know, they used goons and every god-damned thing to get signatures.

## DECLINE OF THE WIUC

During the time the WIUC was active and the IWA was opposing it the two unions actually operated concurrently. Woodworkers had their choice of which union to join. Phillips and the official history argue that the WIUC made little impact on the labour movement, while Lembcke and Tattam and Abella, and Mosher, discuss a WIUC supported by the membership and formed for legitimate reasons. Their accounts describe a significant struggle between the two unions. Mosher's accounts give examples of the difficult nature of organizing at that time and of the opposition the new union was faced with - from the IWA, from the companies, and their foremen, and from the government.

The companies didn't want us [the WIUC]. I was able to get the hall at Camp 1 for meetings. A fellow by the name of Rod Moore was superintendent then. I don't know what his orders had been, but the guy that was superintendent at Kennedy Lake told me I wasn't welcome there. Also there was a camp up McLean Point, a fellow who was member of parliament later owned it. He wouldn't let us stay in camp for a meal or anything, whereas they tolerated you before. They were pro IWA, no doubt about that.

I guess the best example of that [the companies refusing to deal with the WIUC] was the Iron River strike. Iron River was pretty solid WIU. They fired a faller so the WIU guys put up a picket line. The White Bloc went up there, organized bus loads of people went up there, to run scabs through. Alsbury and Lloyd Whalen went and Squires, Muir, Allen, a lot of them from here went up there too.

In the negotiations in 1949 the companies were

bargaining with the IWA, but I think what the IWA figured was their biggest victory was getting the question of board negotiable. See, right after we negotiated the '48 agreement they pushed the board up 20 cents or something like that.

There were no negotiations during the time of the WIU, maybe in individual sub locals but not on a wide scale. All our work was going into organizing and getting established.

It was kind of a demoralizing situation. We couldn't justify going on. We weren't getting anywhere due to procrastination on the certifications. It pretty well knocked us back. It was obvious that we weren't going to win and that it would only split the labour movement more and that would benefit the employers. That's why we cancelled it, called it off. Around early in 1950 we decided it wasn't working, that it was doing more harm than good so we packed it in.

The WIU ran for a year, anyway, but the last few months, it was obviously not working. The mills dealt with the IWA and we had very little membership there. We had most of the camps.

The woods were more radical than the mills. I think there was a kind of a hang over from the old Wobblie days. At that time there would be guys that had taken part in the struggles for the eight hour day that the Wobblies got. So there was that, besides, there was a lot of guys that never stayed very long in any one camp. The solution had always been, before there was a union appeal, if you don't like it, you quit. You just quit when you didn't like a job. They didn't change things. There was a lot of movement between camps, they just moved around when they didn't like it. Even during the 30's there was lots of jobs around for experienced men. Because of the isolation and the continual movement there was no unemployment hardly for an experienced logger. There was some loggers that were better than others who had a good reputation, could get jobs pret'near anytime.

The following accounts discuss the personal positions of the left wing leaders after the WIUC folded. Even though some of the key figures returned to working in the woods they were

denied membership in the IWA. Once the IWA consolidated its position it took strong hold of the political orientation of the union and, as previously discussed, their interpretation of history was established as the official one. The secession continues to be described as a "revolution" planned and orchestrated by the Communist Party (IWA 1971).

I don't recall any - I don't think there was any - repercussions against individuals that belonged to the WIU in the mills or in the camps locally. A lot of them did go back in the IWA but a lot of them didn't belong to either, until it became mandatory. The IWA had no problem rebuilding in the mills but they had more problems in camps. I forget what year they got union shop, might have been '50 or '51. I guess they made that one of their biggest demands, and the companies prob'ly didn't offer too much resistance. Well there was thousands of loggers who weren't in either union. They wanted them in, to get the dues. I think there was a strike in '52, but I don't remember what the issues were.

I don't know if there was any formal blacklist of guys that had been in the WIU because men were pretty hard to get, that is, good men. So most of them got out to work all right. It was before signed union agreements came in with the IWA in the early 40's that the blacklist was most common.

We [the WIU executive] could work in the woods but we couldn't get membership in the IWA. Harold Pritchett, he had no trouble getting a job after. He was a good shingle sawyer. Bergren was fallin', and Dalskog went out into the woods again. He eventually became a first aid man or time keeper or somethin'. Guys like Otto MacDonald, they didn't have membership but they continued to work.

I think I was blacklisted, It wasn't too tight in the contract. You could get a leave of absence to work for the union, it was 'sposed to protect your seniority - but it wasn't too effective.

I didn't actually apply to get back to camp. I don't know if I told you about Don Moore, about him lookin' for a locomotive engineer up there. I fired for him. They had a little dispatch office up there at Camp 1. Moore was in there one night after they finished work and Ollie Olliasen, another foreman, came in and asked Haynes, who was the dispatcher, "Did you get an engineer from Vancouver yet?" "No, there's not an engineer in town" Olliasen replied. So Moore said, "I know where there's an engineer," "Oh", says Ollie, "is he any good?" Moore says, "Ya, good engineer." "Oh who's that?" And Moore said, "It's Mosher." Ollie says "ha ha ha!" So after Moore told me that I thought, well, there's not much use applying.

Well, then I went to work for Ruttan. He was a gypo, a small operator. He had about four guys working logging and maybe ten or twelve in the mill. It was only about 10 or 15 minutes from home, and I enjoyed working there, was a hell of a good crew, good guys, and I prob'ly would have stayed with him, only MacMillan bought the timber. Manning had some pretty valuable timber and I guess that's what he wanted. Ruttan had a small mill cutting for Manning and Manning was doing the exporting. There was 3 gypos up in that area, up the mountain, and they all folded up more or less, and that's when I went longshoring.

The manager of the stevedoring company was doing the hiring there, I knew him pretty well. He hired me and I think I got help from one of the foremen, he'd been a buddy of mine in school. You were on the spare board for a while. I forget whether you paid dues on the spare board. I was on the spare board there I guess for 8 or 9 months. Fairly soon after that I was on the executive of that union. Dates are a little bit hazy, I forget when I became president. Ya, I guess my reputation from the woods had an influence on that.

Even though the WIUC lasted about a year the court battles continued long after. The accounts which follow provide local information that is not covered in the documentary histories.

Soon after the split the IWA took the WIU to court to try to get back the funds, the equipment and here, they were interested in the Eric Graf Hall .

They wanted it pretty bad because it was a symbol, it was our home base. There was an action in every local and also one for the District Council. There were any amount of actions. We appeared in court over the Eric Graf Hall, but mostly it was handled in Vancouver. Our lawyer had been John Stanton. As soon as the heat came on, he found he had to go to Europe to get some kind of evidence. He just snuck away 'cause he couldn't stand the heat. Stanton turned it over to a guy named John Burton. Burton said, 'Christ, you'll never win against these guys,' but he did a good job, as good as could be expected. It dragged on for a year anyway. I guess old Dalskog went to jail for a while. He was ordered to turn over the strike fund.

In all cases the courts settled in favour of the White Bloc and the IWA. We [the WIUC] won the Eric Graf Hall because we had clear title. During the court case Squires read from the minute book something about our hall. Judge Cody said, 'Well read, Mr. Squires, with the emphasis in the correct place. Adjourned until 2.' He didn't fall for it.

The Eric Graf Hall was built around 1931 as a workers' hall. It served as a centre for the unemployed, the headquarters in the 1934 woodworkers' strike, and the office for the WIUC. Title to the hall was held by four people but when circumstances resulted in the title being held by one of them, those using the hall became concerned over the possible actions of his wife if he should be killed in the woods. Title was thus transferred to three other individuals, then a holding society was formed. The Port Alberni Woodworkers' Holding Society included Mosher, Creelman, Praisley, and Saxby. Because the hall was owned by the holding company, not the union, it was not granted to the IWA in the court case. The IWA subsequently built a new hall and the Eric Graf Hall was rented out as a meeting place, then rented to the

Indian Friendship Society for \$1.00 a year. The holding society later gave the hall to the Indian Society who are the current users.

Judge Cody specifically asked after it was mentioned about the referendum and he wanted to know all about that. So I think if we had conducted a referendum over the whole district it would have made a difference. I think we would have had more legal support, it would have helped.

As noted in all sources, one of the major features of the B.C. labour movement was the constant struggle for leadership between the right and left wing. Mosher's accounts give the local manifestation of that struggle. Documentary sources (Lembcke and Tattam and Phillips) give accounts of the sometimes violent opposition to Communists in the union movement. Mosher repeats that he was not discriminated against in Port Alberni for his well known political views. As has been noted, to Mosher, being "from here" is important in placing people in the local social system.

On the surface anyway the guys I worked with didn't care about my politics. I don't know if there was any rancor underneath, but I never felt it, it didn't hurt me.

I guess the town was split [in opinions over the secession]. I never experienced any ...I never felt isolated in this town, partly because I was from here and I knew an awful lot of people.

I guess I did feel some pressure over the split because I had that sort of a little heart problem at that time. But it wasn't devastating, you know what I mean. I lived through it. But I didn't feel isolated in this town at all, personally, because I'd grown up here. The people in town were people that I'd gone to school with. The White Bloc wasn't able to cause me to be ostracized, is what

I'm tryin' to say. I think in some areas people did have trouble that way. In Port, well, I think Yates got out, he couldn't stand the heat I guess. He was on city council at the time, and figured he wouldn't get re-elected. They were really pushing, you know. I think places like here, Courtenay, Campbell River, I think the people that were in those areas weren't ostracized to the same extent they might have been in a bigger city where the general public wouldn't know them personally like they did here.

When we were in court over the adoption of the girls their mother's lawyer brought it out right away about my politics. It was Sam Toy who cross examined me and that was his first question. "Are you a Russian Communist or a Chinese Communist?" I told him I was a Canadian Communist. But I don't think he was trying very hard.

In 1971 Mosher and his wife adopted two girls who had lived with them as foster children. The girls' mother opposed their adoption and a two year legal struggle ensued. The court's decision broke the precedent of the primacy of mother's rights. Mosher's political affiliations were part of the evidence brought up in the court and in the media coverage of the case.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF THE DEMISE OF THE WIUC

Many of Mosher's reminiscences of this period take the form of trying to make sense of what happened to the WIUC.

In our case breaking away from the IWA was obviously a mistake because it didn't work, the membership didn't follow. Not that there wasn't any justification for breaking away. Maybe ten years down the road it would have been successful,



the same as it was in pulp mills when the Canadian union organized in Harmac and Crofton.

There was a lot of dissatisfaction in the union later. If we had tried, there was times I think we could have started a new union again. I'm sure we could have. There were some agreements signed that were pretty poor for the time. There was a lot of apathy among the membership. They weren't going to meetings or anything. This was maybe ten years down the road after '48.

I think if there was anything positive about it it might have been that it demonstrated to other unions who were in similar situations that that wasn't the way to go. I know Pritchett was opposed to it until the majority decision was made.

It is Mosher's contention that it was due to the efforts of labour and the unions, led by the Left, that existing labour legislation came into effect.

We led the fight for the 40 hour week in 1946 and '47. So here it is forty years later and there's been no reduction in work week time at all. I'd venture to say that would have been one of our big pushes would be to get the six hour day or something like that. If we'd have been in the leadership I think we'd have had a six hour day by now even, or sure as hell be fighting for it. Actually, outside of wages and pensions there hasn't been that much improvement since '48.

After we got the 40 hour week, seems to me the legislature passed a 44 hour week thing. After they got rid of us they legalized the check-off. Then I think it came in federally too. There was legislation after it was an accomplished fact. That applied to the 8 hour day too and it was the same with vacation pay. It was always after it was a fact that the legislation was passed.

After '48 the White Bloc / Red Bloc division was not as formal as it had been in the '40's. There was always opposition to guys like Morris and Allan, but it wasn't reflected in the elections.

The IWA had a few problems after '48. There was still power struggles for leadership. Alsbury got voted out. Joe Morris eventually got in as

president. The president of the local after the split got voted out, somebody else got his job, and there was quite a few power struggles like that.

There were no moves to form Canadian union again until the Pulp and Paperworkers of Canada, the one that's at Harmac. The Party opposed that for the reason that it split everything up. We learned our lesson in '48 and figured that wasn't the way to go, that it was better to stay in there and fight.

The discussion among the documentary sources of causes for the failure of the WIUC centre on the issue of Communism and the role of the Communist Party in the union, specifically, the position of the rank and file toward Communism and the motives of the Communist leaders. Each author's analysis is given in Chapter III but they are briefly reviewed here to facilitate their comparison to Mosher's interpretation.

Jensen, based on the union's history until 1945, argues that the rank and file rejected Communism and ousted the Communists from the union leadership (in 1941) by democratic means. Rather than an outright rejection of Communism, the description according to Phillips and the official history, is of a rank and file which became disillusioned with the Communist leadership over the erosion of democratic control and the diversion of funds. These sources also point to errors made on the part of the B.C. leadership as contributing to their own failure.

The interpretations given by Abella and Lembcke and Tattam, however, describe a well organized effort among the White

Bloc, the International IWA, the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) and the Canadian and American governments to rid the IWA and the union movement of Communists. While Abella documents the well orchestrated opposition which overwhelmed the Red Bloc and the legitimacy of the complaints the B.C. District had with the International, he assigns major blame for the failure to the leadership and its poor handling of the secession.

Rather than finding any intrinsic fault with the ideals or the philosophy behind the secession, Mosher looks to other forces for explanations: to opponents and power struggles within the IWA; to conflicting political ideologies within society which resulted in collusion to oppose the WIUC; to the political system; and to the notion that it was an idea before its time.

In the accounts that follow, Mosher establishes four factors as causing the demise of the WIUC. These are: the inexperience of the Red Bloc leadership in reading the position or loyalty of the membership and in being unable to override the opposition they were faced with; the media and the role they played in presenting the struggle and informing the opinion of union members, the general public and the authorities; the White Bloc and the effective opposition it created; and the involvement of the governments of Canada and the United States.

As noted, the failure of the WIUC has been attributed by some

to tactical errors and personal blunders on the part of the Communist leadership, particularly at the International level, and to the idea that the membership could not, in the final count, abide with the idea of having a Communist leadership (Abella 1973; Jensen 1945; IWA 1971). Mosher's account, while admitting inexperience of the leadership as a factor in the failure of the enterprise, provides an alternative interpretation. He does not consider that the politics of the leaders influenced the membership one way or another. Mosher indicates that the leadership may have overestimated the degree to which the membership was supporting them, or more likely, that initial supporters changed their minds under pressure from various sources. The Red Bloc exhibited naivete in underestimating the power of that pressure. The Communist executive, confident they had the support of their membership, were overwhelmed by the massive organized opposition.

We tried, no question. We were active. We would go into camps, have meetings. We put out a lot of leaflets, had a newspaper and radio broadcasts, explaining the problems that had been occurring, the Red Bloc position, the whole spectrum. But I guess we were affected by the anti-Red crusade in the United States and in Canada. It was along about that time that they broke the Canadian Seamen's union, so it wasn't just happening in the woodworking industry. You get that constant propaganda and a lot of it rubs off.

Well as far as we were concerned it was a union move, not a political move, but I guess the opposition had really played it up that it was the Party, you know trying to take over. No, we didn't consider it as a strategy of the Party.

For the first little while after the break there it was pretty hectic. You're the only one travelling to the different camps and not getting a real good sleep. It was pretty tough. But then when you're younger, you know, you can roll with the punches.

Locally we had no reason to doubt but what it would have succeeded. I remember George Brown, director of organization, was up here once for one of the local meetings. I don't remember exactly when it was, prob'ly in May before the October split. They [the White Bloc] stacked the meeting. Jeez it was the biggest meeting we'd had for a long time. The first motion that went through, I don't remember what the issue was, but we lost it. First couple of votes they slapped us down, but before it was over the meeting turned right around and the guys were sidin' with us. This was one of the things that made us more confident than we should have been.

So we were pretty confident that the guys were behind us. We thought we had strength there. But we were pretty inexperienced. I don't know just how to explain it. Maybe we got a little cocky, I guess.

We'd assumed everybody would have been in favour of breaking away. I remember running into Tommie Noble, he was the personnel manager for Bloedel Stewart and Welsh, the mills and the camps. I ran into him on the Monday morning following that Vancouver meeting, and he said, 'Oh hell, you should have done that years ago.' So that was the sentiment...

A good part of the membership was supporting us. I don't know if it was 50% or not. Then there was a big, quite a big chunk that weren't supporting either.

A lot of the loggers just revoked their membership in the IWA but they didn't join the WIU. They were waiting to see what was going to happen. They wanted to support us, I think, but they were going to wait and see how it turned out, you see.

By and large the White Bloc had the mills and we had the camps.

I guess we underestimated the whole situation - maybe the White Bloc had more support than we thought. There was quite a bit of apathy too, you know. A lot of people never bothered going to a meeting or bothered voting on anything, until '48, then all hell broke loose.

I guess the workers didn't really know, weren't too much concerned, [about the role played by the International] other than the fact that there was dues goin' down there. Here locally the interference from the International wouldn't be so obvious as it would have in another place I guess. The local leadership was aware of the difficulties and I guess we were pretty cocky, figured well to hell with them [the International], who needs them, that sort of thing.

The situation quickly gained the attention of all forms of the media, who actively took sides in the dispute. The documentary sources do not discuss the media as having an effect on the dispute. Mosher, however, describes the media as being responsible for drawing the issue into the public forum and for making it a debate based solely on ideological grounds. In the media the issues of union independence and accountability became submerged in an argument polarized along political lines.

When we broke away all hell broke loose in the papers too, and the media really got right in there. No question that the daily press had a hell of a lot to do with it. You know, we got bad press consistently. Oh ya, the Vancouver papers definitely influenced things here in Port Alberni. There was no daily paper here, most people got the Vancouver Sun. Webster was writing for the Sun then and he was supporting Alsbury. He was right in with the White Bloc and writing real dandy stories about the whole thing. He was in there to get rid

of these Reds. The Vancouver media has a hell of an influence, you know. You can't underestimate it.

Stewart Alsbury was an employee at Fraser Mills and a White Bloc leader contending for the leadership of the B.C. District.

And of course there was headlines in the papers. You got the media behind you, you got a lot of power there, as far as moulding opinion goes. We grossly underestimated that.

There was nothing equivalent to the Taft Hartley legislation in Canada, but I think there was a lot of support for that sort of thing in the media, government agencies, in the courts. To some extent it was in the local media as well, but there was only a weekly newspaper, it wasn't the same, it wasn't a real factor. I think the town was split. Prob'ly more people in town supported the IWA I imagine. We had a radio broadcast which was pretty well uncensored, usually. But the momentum was such that, it just didn't work, that's all.

Port Alberni's reputation as one of the more radical locals is noted in the Introduction. It was a large and important local, and one the International leadership, both White and Red Blocs, were concerned about. It therefore became one of the major battle grounds in the struggle between left and right for control of the IWA. The organizational resources developed by the International White Bloc were put into use to aid the White Bloc supporters in the Port Alberni local (Lembcke and Tattam 1984). The published sources have described the active role the White Bloc played in opposing the Red Bloc and the WIUC. The accounts which follow add

specific information about the activities of the White Bloc and the way in which they carried out their opposition in the Alberni local.

The White Bloc was pretty active. At union meetings there would be a core group of them. It didn't matter what you proposed, they were opposed to it.

There had been a couple of sub local meetings and the White Bloc had them really stacked.

You see, one of the things the White Bloc did, or various ones of them there, every so often at a union meeting they'd go, 'well where does all the dues go?'. So you'd explain, so much went to the International, so much to the District, so much to the Canadian Congress of Labour, the rest stayed here, and here's the financial statement.

Like, there was one old 'White Bloc-er' there, every meeting pret'near he'd ask, 'Where do all the union dues go'. You know, tryin' to cast doubt among the membership.

Our meeting in the Capital Theatre was where the motion was put forward to conduct a ballot on it [the secession]. Well the White Bloc, they were opposed to having a ballot on it.

The White Bloc had a fairly hard core. It didn't seem to be that great but they must have had more support than we thought because when the thing broke, particularly in the mills, they had a lot of support.

The hard core was organized. They'd been active as leaders before the split. They had regular meetings to decide strategy etc. I'm sure of it. The bulk of them were CCF'ers.

These were the guys who took over the IWA leadership locally after the WIU disbanded.

The core group was Squires and a few of them, an old guy by the name of Hans Johnson, Sharp. They were able to do a hell of a mobilizing job, particularly in the mills, but they didn't have a great deal of support in the camps. The mills were a more stable population, that is, the key jobs. There was quite a floating population of the common labour jobs. I think there was hangovers from the



old Wobblie days in the woods.

We stashed the records. The IWA wanted to get everything they could. They never did get them, I guess they probably just got destroyed eventually.

One thing they did get..., We took a referendum vote here on dis-affiliation and when we were over there in court about the hall we submitted as one of the pieces of evidence an executive minute book. Well then after the court was over they got that.

The WIU lawyer was John Stanton, who gave us a lot of bum advice, and then when we got in court he toodled off to Europe, supposedly on some kind of a case. So I never had much use for Stanton after that.

The International put out a newspaper that was pretty strongly White Bloc.

We had very little local contact with the International. I guess the [B.C.] District had some. I'm sure the White Bloc had connections with them.

The White Bloc didn't really have the forces here before 1948 [ie. help from the IWA White Bloc in the U.S.]. At least if they had them they were underground more.

After the split the local White Bloc was financed for the first while, before they got some dues coming in, by the International. The United Auto Workers under Reuther gave the International money to stamp out the Reds in B.C.

The fourth element that Mosher's notes as a factor contributing to the failure of the WIUC was the intervention of the governments of Canada and the United States. In earlier accounts Mosher alludes to, as do Abella and Lembcke and Tattam, the government intervention which caused the immigration authorities to bar the Communist IWA leaders entry to the United States and thus contribute to the

Communists' loss of power at the International level. Abella and Lembcke and Tattam also document, as does Mosher, the interference to union organizing caused by government's influence over the certification procedure, their control of the police force, and influence on legislation. Chapter III discusses Jamieson's assessment that government policy and action favored the interests of employers over the rights of workers (1968:53).

The following accounts focus on the Canadian government's involvement in the union movement through certification procedure. Once unions won the right to exist, legislation came into being to assure fair practices in union organizing. Among these was the regulation that when a union had recruited a majority in a local, the membership had to be verified by a government agent and a government supervised vote taken. The local was then certified as a local of the IWA who could then bargain with the companies on their behalf. Mosher describes how government control of certifications and its delays in responding to the WIUC requests for certification votes were responsible for the WIUC losing ground in their organizing work.

On the certification, they'd freeze the payroll at a certain date and if we had an application they would consider it for that date. This was how it was legislated.

And of course we got the run around from the government too, as far as certifications go.

The Department of Labour procrastinated on the

certifications, held them up for a year or so. It was prob'ly 6 months or 9 months before we got a certification, although we had the majority in several camps. But then with the transient nature of it, you know, you go on for a year and you'd lose your base, new people'd come in. There was a big block in the woods that didn't belong to either for quite a while. They wouldn't join the WIU and they wouldn't join the IWA. They were kind of waiting to see.

In the camps there was always a core of people who were semi-permanent but there was an awful lot of change in crews. Jobs were easy to get and fellows were moving around, work a month or two then move on.

After the break we would organize a camp and get the majority and apply for certification. They [the government] would dilly dally around and Christ, it'd be months and months before you'd get any check on it.

Lembcke brings out pretty good about the delays in certification and that sort of thing. Obviously there was collusion between the government and the employers and the IWA. Oh ya, I don't think there's any question. It's a hard thing to prove. I know that the employers didn't want the WIUC. I guess they figured it would cost them. We didn't get any cooperation in going into camps, whereas the IWA had a welcoming committee pretty well.

There was a number of operations, particularly camps, that we had the majority in, not so much right here in Alberni, but in a lot of camps. They just didn't process them as I recall. Finally I think the WIU went to court and got what they call a writ of mandamus which is an order from the court for a government body to do what they are supposed to do in the legislation. This was to make the department of labour process the applications under the act.

We had a few smaller outfits all signed up and applied and it was hung up for a long time until finally somebody got a writ of mandamus against the department of Labour to make them comply with the act which they finally did. They had a vote in maybe three small operations. The IWA won two of the bigger ones of the three and we won one. Had it been six months earlier we probably would have taken all three. They put a lot of heat on the

guys on those operations to go IWA.

About the only place I recall there being any violence was Iron River when they had that strike. I guess that got pretty bad. They brought in a bunch of goons from somewhere, probably from the States. They had the cops up there and everything. I know they took bus loads of guys from here up there to protect their guys, the ones scabbin'. There was a few fights on the picket line. Stewart Alsbury got beat up. Couple of guys went to jail for that. Otto MacDonald tells of the court case over Alsbury being beat up. Dan Holt was on the stand. The judge asked him if he saw Farkas hit Alsbury. He said 'yup'. The judge asked, 'what did you say?' Holt answered, 'I said hit him again Mike!'

That had been one of the first camps to get signed up in the union in the early 40's. They had an agreement with, can't remember the name of the company, but somewhere along the line MacMillan got the camp. I guess he bought it out and by 1948 it was a MacMillan camp. Ya, the guy Simpson that owned it before was kinda sympathetic to the union. He signed one of the first agreements. Maybe it was the first one after MacDonald Murphy.

Oh I think there was covert action between the RCMP and the FBI, things like that. And of course the whole legal structure worked for their benefit too. They could get search warrants with no problem at all. Here, Sargent Service and maybe one other constable came in with Squires and somebody else, down at the Eric Graf Hall. They searched that over and took some stuff. Well they had a search warrant. I guess they took a bit of equipment, a mimeograph machine, and I don't know what all else. Well it was bought by IWA money, so I 'spose technically they were legal.

The 1948 Communist-led secession of the B.C. District from the International IWA and the subsequent formation of the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada have been the focus for this chapter. These events were critical to the Communist Party's decrease of influence in the union movement and a

key point in the development of the woodworkers' union. As Lembcke and Tattam note, the events of the 1940's were instrumental in the development of the labour movement as it exists today (1984:viii).

Many of the critical issues raised in the documentary histories of the IWA centre on the interpretation of the B.C. secession. As noted, the role and motives of the Communist Party in this move, the causes leading up to the secession, the reasons for its failure and the position of the rank and file with regard to Communism are particularly controversial factors.

Mosher's accounts of the events leading up to the secession, his experiences working for the WIUC, the period of its decline and his analysis of the causes of the failure of the WIUC express his alternative interpretations to the established documentary versions discussed in Chapter III. The official history interprets the secession as part of a Communist plot to take control of the union. Jensen argues that the rank and files rejection of Communism caused the failure of the WIUC and Abella blames the B.C. leadership for errors which caused its own failure. Lembcke and Tattam and Mosher discuss reasons external to the B.C. union as causing the failure, the former based on the international political situation and Mosher based on his observations at the local level.

Mosher's accounts tell of the support for the Communist leadership both within and outside of the union and he identifies four factors as contributing to the demise of the WIUC. He describes a leadership inexperienced in gauging both membership support and the strength of the opposition, not leaders who made crucial errors as cited in documentary sources. He discusses the role of the media in influencing opinion and creating a public debate, and he describes the tactics employed by the White Bloc in opposing the local Communist leadership, such as disrupting meetings and questioning the financial situation. Thus Mosher's accounts, in combination with Lembcke and Tattam's, re-interpret the accepted interpretation of the demise of the WIUC.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In reconstructing events of his own past Mark Mosher has at the same time constructed a history of the woodworkers' union in the Alberni Valley during the years 1935 to 1950. This history, from his point of view as a participant, contributes additional information and a different perspective to the existing labour history literature. Mosher's position as a worker, a local level union leader, and a Communist Party member in a B.C. local of an international union, brings together a number of features critical to the study of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) and the labour union movement. These are, the role of the Communist Party in the union movement, the ideological split within the IWA which resulted in the 1948 secession, the effect of the union movement on labour legislation and the methods and processes of unionization.

This thesis has pointed out that the union movement, with its radical and politicized background, is a central feature of the social structure of British Columbia and that the IWA has been an important part of that movement. Yet neither has been adequately addressed in the existing literature. The argument has been made here that the IWA, historically the province's largest and most powerful union, is a suitable case study from which to further understandings of the union movement. The

thesis has discussed the instrumental role the IWA played in the growth of the union movement and the ways in which its development and internal conflicts, particularly over its Communist leadership, were typical of other unions of the time. The era under discussion is noted as being important in the development of the union movement.

The review of labour history literature presented in Chapters II and III shows an overall analysis which is incomplete and inconsistent, particularly in regard to the history of the IWA. To summarize: 1) there has not been a great deal of scholarly research conducted on the labour union movement in Canada and in particular in B.C.; 2) the IWA was and is an important force in both the labour union movement and the economy in B.C., yet it is under researched; 3) the Communist Party played an influential role in the union movement but that role has not been sufficiently investigated and there is disagreement regarding the nature and result of its influence; 4) the publications that have been produced on these topics are general in nature and do not reflect the reality of the working class participants.

Mosher's accounts make a significant addition to this body of knowledge by adding the perspective which is local rather than international, personal and anecdotal rather than statistical, and specific rather than general. His narratives pertain to one union, the IWA, and to one area, the Alberni



Valley of B.C. Mosher provides a history from the point of view of an individual who played an active role in the era. His perspective is from the 'bottom' - from his own position as a local level union executive and from the position of the workers as he saw it. This stance makes Mosher's account complementary to Lembcke and Tattam's. The two analyses share the same political orientation and theme of re-writing the history of the IWA from the perspective of the Left, but they write from different positions. Lembcke and Tattam's perspective is from the 'top' - based on the accounts of international and national leaders and government officials, and with a global viewpoint which looks at the IWA as a whole and its situation in terms of international politics.

Mosher is an example of what Lembcke considers to be "the real strength of the Communist unions" : the union leaders who were " ...indigenous members of the mill towns and logging camps in which they worked and organized", who had been "...residents of their communities for about thirty years...", whose "...working class identity derived from their own family and work experience..." who had not "...arrived at their radicalism via an academic route..." and few of whom "...had even a high school education". IWA Communists, they conclude, "...learned their politics either from exposure to the IWW movement when they were young or from parents who were socialist" (Lembcke and Tattam 1984:176). Mosher often says, "I never felt isolated or ostracized in this town [in

spite of anti-Communist sentiment or the split within the IWA] because I grew up here and have lived here all my life. I know a lot of people." He considers his first election to the IWA executive as due to the fact that he was "from here", that is, raised in Port Alberni. Similarly, he attributes his 'local' status as responsible for his political position within the community.

The overview of the relevant labour history sources and comparison of their analyses of particular issues has shown considerable divergence of interpretation centered on the role of the Communist Party within the IWA. The struggle between Communist and anti-Communist camps for control of the unions figures in all accounts as the central issue of the formative period of the IWA and of the union movement as a whole. Issues which emerge as particularly controversial in the documentary sources are: the attitude of the rank and file membership to Communism; the degree to which the Communists influenced the IWA and whether that influence was positive or negative; the motivations for the Communist Party's involvement in the IWA; the reasons for the B.C. District's secession; and the causes of the failure of the WIUC. Mosher's accounts have been examined in terms of those issues. Summaries of the issues and a comparison of the differing interpretations follows.

The importance to the IWA of rank and file control has been noted. Jensen argues that the rank and file rejected Communism

outright. Phillips and the official history describe the rank and file as becoming "disenchanted" with the Communist leadership, not over the issue of Communism as such, but due to the erosion of rank and file control which the authors claim was occurring due to the subjugation of union interests to the interests of the Communist Party. Mosher describes the restriction of rank and file control of the union as caused by the American based IWA, not the B.C. leadership. He does discuss a decrease in support for the Communist leadership by the rank and file, but not until after the 1948 secession. His narratives indicate that the leadership had overestimated the support of the membership but also that they had underestimated the strength of the opposition and its ability to sway the loyalties of the rank and file. Mosher's accounts describe a strong rank and file support which gave the leadership the confidence to attempt the secession, while Jensen, Phillips and the official history argue that the Left did not have full rank and file support at any time.

According to Abella, the rank and file were indifferent to the issue of Communism and the role of the Communist Party in the union was of concern only to the leadership, who feared a Communist take-over of the union movement and in particular of the CCL. Mosher's accounts, too, show the membership as more concerned with practical issues specific to union and work conditions and with the quality of the leadership than with his political affiliation. He comments, "...the guys I worked

with didn't care about my politics" and he states that his politics never caused him to be treated any differently in the community.

There is considerable divergence between the published sources and Mosher regarding an assessment of the role played by the Communist Party and the motives for their involvement in the IWA. The official history's interpretation is most radical. It states that the Communist Party was a puppet of the Soviet regime, and as such, its attempt to gain control of the IWA and seize its assets was part of a "Communist plot" to gain wider control in North American society. Jensen also writes of the Communists attempting to gain control of the workers, though he states that the following of the Communist leadership was not significant. Phillips, Abella and the IWA raise the issue of a diversion of funds from the IWA to the Communist Party and the use of paid IWA staff for activities of the Communist Party.

Mosher discusses leaders of the IWA executive who were also Communist Party members and describes caucuses of the Communist Party over union issues, but he recalls that the actions of the left wing executive were not guided by the Communist Party or initiated to assist the Party. He discounts as red baiting the accusations that the Communist Party used the IWA, its funds and resources, and that the union was merely a pawn in a larger power struggle. His

interpretation of the audit, which Phillips describes as finding funds both unaccounted for and transferred to the provincial leader of the Communist Party, is that it misconstrued their informal bookkeeping procedures and was intentionally used to cast suspicion on the Communist B.C. leadership. Mosher says the easiest way to try to discredit an organization is to suggest there's been mis-use of funds, and he argues that funds were not missing, that there were no irregularities in their claims for expenses, and that the union's expenses were not unreasonable.

Sources agree that initially Communists filled leadership positions in the union due to their superior leadership and organizational skills, their early involvement in the union movement and the general tolerance in B.C. of the left wing. Mosher describes the Communists' impressive oratory skills, their superior solutions to problems and the lasting impression several individuals in the Party made on him personally and on the directions he took in his life. It is clear that the Communist Party was essentially the founder of the union movement. Mosher's accounts of the gains made early in the century such as the 8 hour day and the improvements to camp life made by the Wobblies show his awareness of the practical advancements made by the early Communist-led movements.

As a general assessment, Phillips, Abella, and Jamieson all claim that in the late 1940's the ideological differences and

the disunity within the industrial union movement over the issue of Communism detracted from organizational efforts and prevented the trade union movement from functioning effectively. Mosher's accounts indicate, to the contrary, that it was not the Left which hampered the advancement of the union movement, but interference from right wing factions, the American based International and the White Bloc, and lack of co-operation from foremen, companies and governments which disrupted the work of the democratically elected left wing leadership of the B.C. IWA. This interference was based on ideological differences but manifested as various actions, described in Mosher's accounts, which interfered with the work of the left leadership and attempted to weaken their control while strengthening the power of the Right. Mosher repeatedly argues that in spite of the opposition and disruption, this period, under direction from the Left, was not only a positive one in terms of gains made by labour but was the time of labour's greatest advancement. Mosher's accounts detail regulations initiated by the union which ensured improved conditions for workers. According to him, government legislation always followed, "after the fact", while it was the unions, under Communist leadership, who were responsible for first developing the improvements.

The 1948 move by the B.C. District of the IWA to separate from the International IWA and form the WIUC is discussed as an important juncture in the history of the IWA which also had

repercussions for the labour movement as a whole. As previously stated, the struggle between the Communist and non-Communist forces for control of the leadership of the union movement is described in the documentary accounts as the central issue in the formative years of the union movement. It is generally accepted that the split within the IWA brought this left - right struggle to a head and enabled the Right to suppress the Left and essentially eliminate it as a force in the labour movement. The interpretations of the reasons for the B.C. District's separation and of the causes of the WIUC's failure vary according to the analysts' interpretation of the role played by the Communist Party in the union movement.

Several times the secession of the B.C. District is related to anti-American sentiment. Phillips draws a connection between the secession and a concurrent trend to Canadian nationalism visible in other unions which were moving toward autonomy from their American associate unions. He claims that fear of American influence was a factor in the membership decision to allow a separation from the U.S. union and Jamieson also identifies a "Canadian suspicion and hostility" towards American dominated unions at that time. Mosher often gives descriptions within a context of comparison with the United States. His discussions of the development of the union movement and the woodworkers' union include commentary on corresponding developments in the United States, usually

concluding that the United States was "ahead" of Canada. He finds, however, that as Communists in Canada they were allowed more open participation in the union, compared to the United States where Communism was much less acceptable. He notes that in the U.S. the Taft Hartly Act denying Communists a seat on union executives was enforced, whereas in Canada it was not, and police involvement was not invoked to the same extent as it was in the U.S. According to Mosher, Communism as such was a greater issue in the United States than in B.C.

The discussions of the 1948 split are, of course, given in terms of a Canadian - U.S. comparison. Mosher admits that union dues going to the U.S. was one of the issues that created dissatisfaction with the International IWA and he notes the difference of opinion regarding the union's direction between the U.S. leaders and the B.C. leadership. Mosher often refers to the WIUC as the formation of a Canadian union, even though when questioned, he claims the WIUC was not created in a nationalistic or patriotic spirit. His response is, as it is to queries of the political role of the Communist Party within the IWA, that the sole motivation of the B.C. District leadership was the benefit of the union and its membership.

The analyses developed by Phillips and the official history include an interpretation of the secession as part of a strategy by the Communist Party to gain power and control in



the IWA and in Canadian society. They interpret the actions taken by the White Bloc and the American IWA as carried out to protect the membership from the Communist take over of the union. Both sources claim that the failure of the WIUC was due to the rank and file rejection of Communism and disagreement with the erosion of democratic procedures and the diversion of funds. They cite crucial errors made by the Communist leadership which led to their losing support and to their eventual failure.

Mosher's narratives give an accounting of the conditions which led the B.C. leadership to the decision that separation from the International IWA was the only solution to their situation. Mosher's documentation of his experiences portrays the circumstances at the local level which led up to the secession as being based on practical considerations, not political motivation. He provides examples from the local level of the issues raised by Abella and Lembcke and Tattam as contributing to the dissatisfaction felt by the B.C. District.

In documenting grievances against the International union and the active role played by the International union in opposition to the B.C. district leadership, Abella indicates more clearly than other early sources the concrete concerns held by the B.C. District which led them to secede from the International. This places Abella with Lembcke and Tattam on the side of the issue which considers that the action was more than a strictly political move by the Communist Party, aimed

at the eventual overthrow of Canadian society.

Chapter V gives Mosher's analysis of the causes for the demise of the WIUC as due to the inexperience of the B.C. District leadership, the bias of the media, and pressure from the White Bloc and the Canadian and American governments. He does not fault the B.C. leadership in their rationale for the secession, but instead notes factors primarily external to their control and finds the leadership overwhelmed by a well organized opposition and a vigorous anti-Communist campaign. His analysis collaborates Abella's and Lembcke and Tattam's who describe the well organized opposition from several sources which combined to defeat the WIUC. While Mosher admits that the inexperience of the leadership in overestimating the support of the membership was a factor in their own defeat, he views the strength of the campaign mounted against them as the main cause of their failure. Abella sides with Phillips and the official history in finding fault internally. He criticizes the leadership for acting irresponsibly, for failing the membership, and for making grave miscalculations and errors. Abella holds the B.C. leadership ultimately responsible for their own defeat.

This thesis has shown that the study of an individual's reconstruction of his own involvement in the formation and restructuring of the woodworkers' union provides additional information and a unique perspective which makes a significant

contribution to the understanding of the union movement in the province.

A number of theoretical perspectives have been discussed as underlying the construction of history given in this thesis. Mosher's own narratives have been presented as a way of determining and describing an "insider's point of view". Interpretation based on the insider's perspective is central to anthropology, and has been discussed here in terms of the works of Geertz and Bruner. Geertz, who questions how the anthropologist constructs the knowledge of the insiders' point of view, notes the understandings gained by seeing other peoples' experiences within their own frameworks. The point has been made that Mosher's interpretations make sense when considered within the framework of his political ideology.

Bruner, too, argues for an anthropology based on the people's accounts of their experiences as they choose to present them. From the works of Bruner, as well as those of Schwartzman, Gorfain and Rosaldo, comes the narrative focus which is utilized in this thesis. Throughout this document Mosher's narratives shape the image of both the woodworkers' union and the culture of the woodworkers. His accounts also express the interpretation - the themes and values, such as the need for the union and the significant role played by the Communist Party in improving work conditions - which emerges as important in his correction of the existing versions of union

history.

The ways in which we make sense of history have been discussed: this thesis has been based on the assumption, following Carr, that there is no one correct version of history. History is seen as being selective and coloured by both the historian and the sources. The construction of history is viewed as a process in which differing interpretations are not judged as correct or not, but are considered to contribute to an increased understanding of the topic. Therefore, in comparing Mosher's accounts to the documentary sources, particular issues were identified as contentious, but no resolution made in terms of selecting one version as the correct one.

Society is continually being reshaped, and as Mosher constructs his own history he at the same time reshapes the history of the IWA. In this sense, as Bruner and Gorfain suggest, all accounts are responses to previous and anticipated versions. Mosher's narratives have been given in the context of the documentary history of the union movement and the IWA. These versions have been described as authoritative because in spite of the lack of consistency between them on many issues, these interpretations, in general, have been considered the accepted view of that history as backed by legal and ideological authority. Mosher's accounts respond to those versions with a "challenging" voice as he consciously presents a interpretation of history which

he views as correcting the previous versions. He is thus constructing an alternative history.

Mosher is considered typical in that he represents one particular viewpoint - that of the Left and from the local level. His account is, however, unique in the sense that every individual perceives, remembers and records events in a different way. Furthermore, every history is a result of the interaction of the interpreter with the data, or in this case, with the informant. The awareness of Mosher's interests and motives as participant historian, and my role and motives as an anthropologist has been part of the construction of this history.

The understanding of history as a process allows Mosher's version of the development of the woodworkers' union to stand as an alternative interpretation of history against the "authoritative" documentary versions of that history. Mosher's participant's history contributes additional information and a different perspective, which had not before been considered, to the documentation of the history of the woodworkers' union. His accounts thus make a significant contribution to our understanding of the labour union movement in British Columbia.

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