Jacob Penner's Recollections

Introduction

by Norman PENNER*

Jacob Penner dictated these recollections, published here for the first time, from his hospital bed just before he died in 1965 at the age of 85. The *Winnipeg Free Press*, a bitter and long-time foe of his, had this to say editorially on Penner's death:[1]

> As a Communist member of Winnipeg Council, Mr. Penner was a political curiosity, not just in the city but in Canada. He drew his support in Ward 3 from dedicated Communists like himself, and from people who cared nothing for politics but who admired his efficiency and ability and who believed that he worked for the underdog. This support was enough to keep in council for nearly a quarter of a century.

But part of Penner's appeal lay in the nature and spirit of Winnipeg itself which he had helped to shape. For almost sixty years he had played a major role in building the socialist tradition there, and if Winnipeg today is still a uniquely Socialist stronghold, Penner's part in this must rank high: two studies lately completed make this abundantly clear.[2]

Although Winnipeg this year is celebrating the centennial of its incorporation, it was not until the first decade of this century that it became an important metropolis—in fact the third largest Canadian city at the time. Its population underwent a spectacular growth as tens of thousands of immigrants, many perhaps headed elsewhere, stopped in Winnipeg and found employment in the burgeoning industrial and commercial establishments.

The immigrants were drawn from two sources. From Britain came skilled workmen, most of them experienced trade unionists. A great number came from Central and Eastern Europe, unskilled "men in sheepskin coats," speaking no English, and dubbed from the outset with the epithet "foreigners." But in spite of differences, the two disparate groups more and more found a common language in the factories and in the railroad yards. It was a working class immigration, so much so that in this period Winnipeg emerged as the one city in Canada in which the working class element constituted the majority of the population.

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1 *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 31st, 1965.

2 Alexander Brian MCKILLOP, *Citizen and Socialist: The Ethos of Political Winnipeg 1919-1935* (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1970); Ernie CHISICK, *The Early Marxist Socialist Movement in Manitoba: 1901-1926* (unpublished Ms. University of Winnipeg, 1968).

Both groups among the immigrants contained a small number of dedicated socialists and these found the language of Marx to be an even firmer bond between them. Jacob Penner who learned his Marxism in underground circles in Tsarist Russia met on common ground with people like Hoop, Cassidy and later Queen, Russell, Heaps, Johns, who had come into contact with these ideas in Britain. Together they founded socialist circles that carried the message of Marx and Engels to the Winnipeg proletariat. In one federal election campaign the Socialist Candidate appealed for votes on the slogan "Expropriate the Expropriators!"

Although the socialist circles were small in membership as Penner points out in his recollections, their influence grew steadily, particularly in the trade union movement which, responding to the stubborn resistance of the Winnipeg employers, was constantly engaged in violent strikes, culminating in the spectacular Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.

Many of the prominent trade union leaders of the day were also leaders of the Socialist movement, and together they constituted probably the most outstanding group of genuine worker-intellectuals ever to appear on the Canadian scene.

By 1919 Winnipeg was irrevocably split into two camps, not only ideologically but geographically as well. Everything north of Portage Avenue was working class and this gave the labour and socialist parties the opportunity to elect candidates to all levels of government on the basis of these solid working class areas. From that time on, with few exceptions, the representatives from Winnipeg North and Winnipeg North Centre at Ottawa, in the provincial legislature, and in the Winnipeg City Council have been labour, C.C.F.-N.P.D. and Communist.

The Russian Revolution eventually led to a sharp split within the Socialist movement and Jacob Penner took his stand with Lenin whereas most of his colleagues did not. He became a charter member of the Communist Party of Canada founded in 1921, a member of its Central Committee and Western organizer. But although known in party circles nationally, his main and later his exclusive concentration was in Winnipeg politics. In 1933 he was elected to the City Council from Ward 3 which comprised the north end of the City and he held that seat until he retired twenty-seven years later at the age of 80. For a period during that tenure he was the only Communist member of an elected body in North America.

After his election he gave up his job to devote his full time to civic affairs and soon became recognized for his expertise on municipal problems and equally recognized for taking up the grievances big and small which the people of Winnipeg from all wards brought to him.

Although as a Communist he carried on a continuous ideological battle with the C.C.F. which he regarded as "opportunist," he worked in close harmony on most questions with the C.C.F. Alderman and Mayor, many of whom had been his colleagues in the old socialist days prior to the split. This cooperation was particularly dramatic during the depression years when Council meetings were the scenes of bitter battles between the labour block and the representatives of the Civic Election Committee, successor to the Citizens Committee of 1,000 which had played such a key role in defeating the General Strike in 1919. In fact many of these battles were like a replay of the 1919 events with many of the same people facing each other across the Council Chamber.[3]

Penner's role in this *de facto* coalition has been acknowledged by one of the C.C.F. leaders, Stanley Knowles, who said:[4]

> ...I had a great respect for him because one felt that he never let down his determination to achieve a Communist regime some day, but meantime, he was an awfully good alderman. He attended to his meeting(s) thoroughly—every problem that had to be coped with in Ward Three... You couldn't disagree with the things that he opposed and worked for in Council and we found ourselves voting with him most of the time. He either voted with us or we were voting with him...

Penner never wavered in his dedication to the Communist cause, which in his view was identical with the position of the Soviet Union. Thus some time after the Soviet Union signed the non-aggression pact with Hitler, Penner addressed a meeting on the Market Square justifying this step and characterizing the war with Germany as an imperialist war to be opposed by true Socialists. For this he was arrested under Section 21 of the Defence of Canada Regulations which permitted the Minister of Justice to detain people "at his pleasure... in order to prevent them from acting in a manner prejudicial to the public safety." The Minister kept Penner confined for over two years and released him a year after the Soviet Union had joined the war against Hitler. It was a tribute to Penner's popularity that three thousand people gathered at the C.P.R. station in Winnipeg to greet him on his release from custody and that in the civic election that took place a few months later, Penner was once again returned to the City Council.

It was a similar testimonial that all during the years of the Cold War he was re-elected regularly. This is as much a tribute to the political consciousness of Winnipeg as it to the good works of Jacob Penner.

His retirement from the City Council in 1960 was a moving event as Council members of all persuasions joined in a spontaneous tribute. In his

[3] For an account of some of these battles see Brian McKillop, "A Communist in City Hall," in *Canadian Dimension*, April 1974, p. 41-50.

[4] McKillop, *Citizen and Socialist*, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

valedictory address, Penner reaffirmed his faith in the cause that had motivated most of his life. Though admittedly there had been not much progress towards its realization in Canada, he felt buoyed by what he considered the worldwide success of Socialism, and he saw his twenty-five years on Council as a modest contribution to its eventual victory in Canada.

Recollections of the Early Socialist Movement in Winnipeg

by Jacob PENNER

I was born August 12th, 1880 in Russia in a village on the Dnieper which is at the place where the Dniepostroy Dam now stands. It was then a farm village — my parents were farmers — and it was a German Mennonite village. The farmers in that village were well-to-do. They had land the size of Canadian farms from 160 to 260 acres. I attended the village school and after finishing there, I decided to take a teacher's course.

My father tried to make a farmer out of me but I did not enjoy it. I took a course in a normal school and graduated at sixteen years of age in a town about twenty miles away from my home village. I entered normal school at the age of twelve for a four year course. Actually we took two years of ordinary subjects and two years of the profession. I entered at the age of twelve although that was not strictly permissible but I had skipped some grades and with some persuasion on the part of my father I was allowed to enter at twelve. The starting age in Russian public schools was seven years.

At the normal school I came in contact for the first time with revolutionary thought which was then sweeping Tzarist Russia, and which had also penetrated the school. Most of our discussion was on political subjects and the ideas that at that time were disseminated were along bourgeois-democratic lines rather than socialist.

I quite often came in contact with Russian peasants in the village. I had one particular friend with whom I liked to talk. He was an old man, over sixty, and had a great deal of common sense. I learned from him the incredibly difficult and hard life of the Russian peasant. This made a great impression on me and while I walked back to town I sat down and began to think — "There is something really wrong. There is a dire need for the peasants to have land." I became firmly convinced from that time on that the solution for Russia's problems was taking away the land from the landlords and giving it to the peasants. I talked to my friends in school about this. Some agreed with me and others did not. I thought I had the solution. I talked with the peasants and they agreed but did not know how it could be done.

I took over a school the year following my graduation. I was going into my seventeenth year and I had a fairly big school—a one room school in a village 40 to 45 miles away from home. I got very disgusted with teaching. I could not keep discipline. I was too young. When I finished that year I decided to enter a land surveyors' college.

In college we quite often received leaflets, usually mimeographed or hectographed from the underground movement. These leaflets contained no Marxist line or anything of that kind. The approach was that the trouble in Russia was the Tzarist régime. What we had to have was a democratic government as in other countries in Europe. The illegal literature of Tolstoy was very popular. He attacked the régime from the pacifist point of view. These leaflets were smuggled in. We quite often found them in our desks. I never got in touch with the people who distributed them as they were not signed.

I spent two years at this college. Here I made further connections with progressive thought and as a result gained a much better insight into the situation. We did not have any organization but a large percentage of college boys were of the same opinion, namely that changes must be brought about and that we must have a parliament in Russia, the medium by which these changes could be brought about. When I finished this course I got a job with the government as a land surveyor and was assigned to the city of Ekaterinoslav, some seventy miles away from the village where I was born. I was nineteen years of age when I came to that city but the department head under whom I worked there was quite progressive and so we became good friends and we talked quite openly and often about things which were not really permissible to talk about.

What changed my outlook a great deal was the Bryansky strike in 1902. This took place in Ekaterinoslav at a huge metal factory employing some 2,000 workers. They went out on strike in 1902 and set the whole town in an uproar because the strikers were very militant and continuous fights took place between the strikers and police. But the strikers could not be driven back to work so a regiment of Cossacks was brought in. The strikers held a demonstration—about two thousand of them marched down the main street when, without warning, the Cossacks swept down on them, brutally beating them. I never could have imagined such brutality possible. Some of the strikers were killed, many were sent to hospital. That scene brought this thought to my mind "After all it is not only the peasants who suffer — it is also the workers. There is a struggle going on of the workers also." At that time they were distributing leaflets and I helped to distribute them. We had a little group of close friends. On one occasion one of my friends brought a bundle of leaflets and said that these leaflets should be distributed and here in the leaflet the demands of the workers were enumerated. They wanted an extension of their lunch hour

to one hour without reduction in wages. They wanted the company to provide boiling water for their tea at lunch and a few minor things. They were not revolutionary demands and yet the company, which was a Belgian company with Russian managers, would not give in to these demands. This resulted in a brutal suppression of this strike. At the trials the sentences were quite severe ranging up to two years' imprisonment. All this impressed me to such an extent that I came to the conclusion that it was wrong to have these factories privately owned. I came to this conclusion without reading any literature on Marxism. I became what could be styled a "utopian socialist."

This strike took place in June and in the fall of that year I accidentally met an old friend of mine on the street. We had been together in normal school. He was in the uniform of the Technological Engineering Institute located in the city and I was very happy to renew his acquaintance and we became great friends. He said to me: "We have a group in the Institute. We study Marx and I want you to join us." This was the first time I ever heard the name Marx but I joined. It was a group of students—eight or nine. They had obtained some copies of Marx's works which were illegal. We studied for about one and a half years. We went through the first volume of Marx's *Capital,* and started on the second. We had lively discussions. I started to see that the thoughts I had were in that direction. I had come to some conclusions which were put forward by Marx.

At this time, through my friend, I became connected with the underground movement in the city. That was a circle of people of the intellectual type—students, white collar workers, and some women. We discussed a number of things but there was very little activity. Occasionally a leaflet was sent to us from some unknown place. We conscientiously distributed it. This was dangerous work. The activity in the group was limited to discussion and distribution of leaflets from time to time. That was all the connection I had with the underground movement. There were two factions in our group. I think that these factions were beginning to reflect the two factions which later became prominent—Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. We had very hot discussions on various subjects, sometimes just philosophical discussions. One discussion we had was "Had man free will? Is he free to choose his acts?" I was of the opinion that he was free. Others held the theory that he was not, that man's actions were determined by circumstances. My friend on one occasion said "Look what a fool I am! I saw a pair of opera glasses in the store window. They attracted me very much so I went in and spent all my money on them. This proves I am not free to act." We had a great discussion on that.

My father was a fairly well-to-do farmer in that village. He bought more land but was not satisfied and got a new idea. He sold his land, got a good price for it, went to the Don Basin near Rostov and bought a fairly

large estate. He only had money to make the down payment, to become a landlord. He took a mortgage on the land, bought equipment, but the next four years were dry and every crop was a complete loss. Then the mortgage company foreclosed on him and he was almost penniless. We moved to Riga and lived there for a few years conducting a small business there. This also was not successful. I paid a visit to them on a number of occasions and my father was talking about moving to America. We wanted to buy land as he was a farmer. He decided to move to Canada. His relatives there wrote glowing letters about the country. He insisted that I go with them. I did not want to, but he said that I was mixed up in the revolutionary movement and that I would be sent to Siberia, or something. My mother pleaded with me and so I came to Canada with them in 1904.

My first impression of Canada was a very bad one. It was in August, 1904. Here I travelled in this wilderness from Quebec to Montreal, then to Winnipeg. Nothing but rocks and wild country! I was used to seeing one village after another. I thought, "Is this Canada?" This is still an undeveloped country. Then I came to the prairies where I started teaching. I saw much of the lives of the farmers and I saw that life was very unattractive and my very first impression on that was also a poor one.

I wrote a letter to my uncle in Russia. My uncle thought that this was a very interesting letter and he sent it on to the local paper and they published it. Soon after this a C.P.R. immigration official came to see me. He said "our agent in Russia has sent us a clipping from a paper there which you wrote. It is horrible! You can get in trouble for that. The government won't stand for that!" I said, "Is it not a free country? He said "No, and I'm warning you that if this happens again, you will get the government on your neck." We had quite a hot discussion.

We came straight to Winnipeg. When I decided to come to Canada I took lessons in the English language. There were teachers who gave private lessons. There was also a French lady who taught French and English, so I just got in touch with her through a notice in the paper. I decided I would begin to learn English. I took lessons for a whole winter. When I came to London my English, I found, was not sufficient to make myself clear. I had to use my hands. I could read and understand but I could not speak. We went through Dickens' *Christmas Carol* and I could read and understand that.

Then I thought that the first thing I would do would be to learn the English language so that I could speak well. I heard of a college in Gretna, Manitoba. The principal of that college got acquainted with my father in Winnipeg and through that I got acquainted with him. That was in October. We had landed in August. This principal told me that they had a

good college in Gretna for German students who were preparing to take over schools and he advised me to take a course in English for one winter. The next winter I thought I knew enough English to take over a school. I went to the school inspector and had a conversation with him. He said I had no diploma to teach to which I replied that I had a diploma in Russia. But he said it was no good here but that he would give me a school for one winter and then I would have to go to normal school for a diploma. I did this. I taught one year near Altona, Manitoba. After that I did not know whether I should take that course. I was only getting $50 a month and had not saved enough money for the course. Besides, I did not like the life on the farm. I went back to Winnipeg and with my background in land surveying, which included horticulture, I found a job in a florist shop, the Rosary, which was quite a big shop in Winnipeg at that time. I became a florist designer, stayed at this shop for eleven years, the latter years as manager.

During the War I took a very prominent part in the anti-conscription campaign because I was a member at that time of the Social-Democratic Party, and it was the stand of that party. We had street fights with supporters of conscription. My position was not a very happy one at the florist shop as I was manager. We had all the bourgeoisie and the people from Wellington Crescent as our customers, and particularly at that time many army officers were our customers. And here I took this very unpopular stand. The *Free Press* and a paper called *Canuck* singled me out. They demanded that I be fired.

At one meeting in Fort Garry the Socialist Party arranged a picnic and they had asked me to speak. I spoke against the War. I was surprised the next day that my whole speech was in the papers and the editorials demanded my deportation. The proprietor of the florist shop came to me and asked me what we are going to do about it, that it was harming his business, so there was nothing to do but leave, which I did. I then took a position as salesman for a candy factory. I took that job and I was with that firm as a salesman for ten years. I was married in 1914.

When I was holding this position with the candy company the Workers' Cooperative was established in Winnipeg. First a fuel yard, and later a creamery, and when they established the creamery they hired me as accountant. I did not particularly want that job but as I had to have a job with a good wage I stepped into the creamery. So far as a living was concerned, I was never out of work. As soon as I was elected to the City Council in 1933 I left the creamery.

I came to Canada in 1904, taught school for one year, and then came back to Winnipeg. The first thing I did there was to look around to see if there were any Socialists in Winnipeg. I wanted to get in touch with them, and I quite often went up to the Trades and Labour Hall. Most of the trade

union officials said they had never heard of a Socialist Party. I did not give up. Finally someone told me that there was an old man who came to the Trades and Labour Hall with a paper, *Appeal to Reason*,[1] which was a Socialist paper published in Kansas. They did not know this man's name. Finally I found out where he lived and I went to see him. He was a man from the Old Country — England — and had been associated with the Social Democratic Federation in that country. His name was Beeching. He told me there were Socialists in Winnipeg and that he would arrange for me to meet them. I went to see a tailor who had a shop on Pacific Avenue. His name was Cameron, a Canadian, and an ardent Socialist. His presser, a middle-aged lady, was far more advanced than Cameron in socialist thought. So we already were a group. Then I got acquainted with a German fellow in the C.P.R. Shops and later with a letter carrier named Hoop. We often gathered in Beeching's home on Olivia Street near the General Hospital and then started in to socialist activity. We got bundles of *Appeal to Reason*. We sold a lot. We imported pamphlets from Charles Kerr Publishing Company in Chicago which was the sole publishing house for North American editions of Karl Marx and Engels' work.

In 1906 the Trades and Labour Congress Convention took place in Winnipeg. We already had had some correspondence with some Socialists in Vancouver and Kingsley,[2] the leader on the coast. In Vancouver they had formed the first local of the Socialist Party of Canada and when this convention took place a couple of these Socialists were actually delegates. Pettipiece[3] of the Typographical Union was one. We decided that while this convention took place we should hold our first public meeting and these delegates would be speakers and we would supply some speakers locally. We rented the Bijou Theatre and had that theatre filled with people and for the first time in the history of Winnipeg there was a Socialist meeting. We had had four or five speakers — Pettipiece, Hoop, and Cassidy were speakers. Cassidy was a fiery Irishman. Beeching was Chairman. We had also a man from Alberta who was not billed as a speaker, but who spoke in the discussion period. He was leader of the farm movement there. His name was Henry Wise Wood.[4] He spoke very well. The subject of the meeting was the need of transforming capitalist society into socialist society. The hall was filled with Winnipeg people and the delegates of the Trades and Labour Convention. After the farmer spoke another man in the audience jumped up and spoke in broken English. He

[1] This was the most popular Socialist journal in North America. Eugene Debs was a frequent contributor.

[2] E. T. Kingsley, editor of the *Western Clarion* and later president of the Vancouver branch of the Federated Labour Party.

[3] R. P. Pettipiece, leader of the Socialist Party in B.C. and later Western Organizer of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.

[4] One of the founders of the United Farmers of Alberta.

excused himself for not speaking English well and then spoke in Ukrainian. He spoke for about fifteen minutes. He had just come from the Russian Ukraine and had been in the revolutionary movement there and he spoke at this meeting. From that time on we held many public meetings. The Chairman announced that a local of the Socialist Part of Canada would be formed soon. We got in touch with several people and decided that we would call an organizational meeting to form a local. Forty-four people attended and all of them joined the Socialist Party of Canada. This took place in November, 1906. We met in one of the rooms in the Labour Temple on James Street. We elected officers—Hoop as Chairman, myself as Literature Agent, and the lady who worked for Cameron, the tailor, as secretary. Then we started our activities.

That winter we held meetings every Sunday afternoon and distributed leaflets advertising these meetings. We had good discussions. Soon we had a local of over sixty members. The literature we sold heavily was *Value, Price and Profit; Wage, Labour, and Capital;* and the *Communist Manifesto,* all written by Marx or Marx and Engels, and published by Charles H. Kerr in Chicago.

The public meetings, especially with guest lecturers mostly from the United States, were very popular over the years. We had people like Scott Nearing, Professor of Political Economy from Chicago, Big Bill Haywood, leader of the Western Federation of Mines and of the I.W.W., and many others. The anarchists used to bring Emma Goldman, who was a fiery orator, and it was at one of her meetings that I met my wife.

There was a Single Tax League in Winnipeg. The leaders were Fred Dixon,[5] S. J. Farmer,[6] and Mobias. Mobias was a very peculiar kind of man. He was a phrenologist with an office on Main Street where he would read the bumps on people's heads. He would go down to the market with a folding chair every Sunday and would talk on single tax. I was always there. On one occasion he announced a meeting, so I came up there. Farmer and Dixon spoke. I got acquainted with them and invited them to *our* meetings where they always harped on the single tax theory of Henry George.[7] Fred Dixon was a very ardent single tax man. I convinced him that he should read Marx. He asked me to order *Capital* for him and this was the first volume I sold. He read it and said that he did not agree with a single line.

[5] Elected to the Manitoba Legislature as a labour representative in 1914, he became one of the leaders of the Winnipeg General Strike; was acquitted after a brilliant address to the Jury in the trials that followed the strike.

[6] Became provincial leader of the C.C.F in Manitoba during the thirties.

[7] Author of *Progress and Poverty* in 1875 advocating a land tax, this book had a great influence on radical thought in England, U.S.A., and Canada up to the end of World War I.

I remember one time the Single Tax League got in a speaker from New York and had a big meeting. At that time the Single Tax theory was quite popular. Next summer we started open air meetings which were suppressed by the police and we had quite a fight. Two of our people were put in jail for seven days, Cassidy and Matthewson. We had been fined several times for holding the meetings but now we decided that we shoud have to fight for free speech in the city and we would rather go to jail than pay the fine. So Cassidy and Matthewson refused to pay the fine and went to jail. This caused quite a stir in the city. Finally we got our rights established. In the fall of that year Beeching suggested that he stand as a candidate for Mayor with a platform fighting for free speech. At that time we had differences and when his candidature came up we disagreed, as we felt that municipal administration had nothing to do with establishing Socialism. So, Beeching nominated himself. We would get on the Market Square in the coldest weather and talk about free speech, cold as it was.

But now the papers were objecting to the police oppressing us. On this occasion when Cassidy and Matthewson went to jail the police claimed we were obstructing the streets. We were arrested on that charge. Magistrate Daley, every time we were fined, gave us a lecture. Instructions from the police were that we should be prevented from speaking at street corners. There were other meetings held but there were no further arrests. When we decided to go to jail we took a picture of the meeting we held on Pacific and Main. A little further over the Salvation Army had a meeting and they had the street blocked. One of our members took a picture of their meeting as well. These pictures were produced in court but the Magistrate decided that the Salvation Army was doing good work.

In the Socialist Party of Canada differences started to become very sharp, and two definite wings began to form, one holding that the socialist movement must be politically active not only by propaganda but by contesting elections, by formulating a programme dealing with the issues of the day. The programme of the Socialist Part was that all means of production must belong to the working class. They did not deal with the issues of the day. They called that Reformism. They claimed to be a purely revolutionary party. They distributed Marx but they never actually had study classes. We had our discussions in the meetings. These differences became very sharp. We always invited someone opposed to Socialism and then knocked down their arguments. The differences developed to a marked degree.

Membership of the Socialist Party at the beginning was composed mostly of native Canadians. Then later on as immigration became quite pronounced from 1908 to 1914 plenty of Socialists from European countries came. They particularly found that there was such a difference from their methods at home that I myself became quite convinced that the line

of the S.P. was wrong and I became a leader of that wing that demanded political activity. I soon had the members who were immigrants among whom were John Queen,[8] A. A. Heaps,[9] Robert Riggs, all from England. Soon we were in the majority. The fights became so hot that we decided it was no use to transform the party but to step out and organize a new one. We stepped out and this left the Socialist Party Local in Winnipeg in a very weak condition. In 1908 we formed the Social Democratic Party of Canada. It was the first local established in Canada. In Toronto there was an organization in existence—the Independent Labour Party. We found that it was actually a Social Democratic Party. We worked out a programme here. Four of us were elected to work out this programme: R. A. Riggs, M. Statychyn, H. Saltsman, and myself. Every Sunday morning we got together and worked out the programme, and finally submitted it to the newly established local of the Social Democratic Party. We got in touch with the Independent Labour Party and found that they had a similar programme. We did not amalgamate with the Toronto organization at this time but organized locally, in other parts of the country, Regina, Edmonton, a Finish local in Vancouver. The composition of the Social Democratic Party locals was a great deal more European than that of the Socialist Party of Canada. We had a large membership in the Ukrainian field so we formed language locals. We had English, Russian, Jewish, Ukrainian locals and it was quite a movement. I was secretary of the English local. This local had in it Tipping,[10] Queen, Beeching, Morton, Robertson, MacGregor, Heaps, Riggs, and others. The Ukrainian branch was the biggest. They perhaps had a membership of some sixty or seventy. The Jewish branch had about thirty or forty. The English branch was the smallest.

The influence of the Socialist movement in Winnipeg was at first quite small. It was only later on as a result of the first World War and the Winnipeg General Strike that there took place a significant increase in this influence particularly in the trade union movement, and also in being able to elect socialists to public office.

Many of the leaders of the Strike were Socialists—R. B. Russell, Johns, Armstrong, Heaps, Queen and also Dixon who was more of a single taxer than a socialist. I was on the Strike Committee and headed the defence section. I represented the Retail Clerks' Union and also the Bakery and Confections Union. Though there were lots of different ideas represented on the Strike Committee, there was no division at all.

[8] Later Alderman on the Winnipeg City Council, imprisoned for his part in the Winnipeg General Strike, elected to the Manitoba legislature while still in jail, became Mayor of Winnipeg for seven terms during the thirties.

[9] Elected to the House of Commons in 1925 for Winnipeg North, he held that seat until 1940, first as candidate of the Independent Labour Party, then as C.C.F. member.

[10] Subsequently a leader in the Winnipeg General Strike, died August 1973.

The Socialist movement — both the Socialist Party of Canada and the Social Democratic Party — increased their membership very substantially during the Strike and right after the Strike. As a result of that upsurge a number of labour men were being elected to the City Council, provincial legislature and to the federal government, like Heaps and Woodsworth.

My house was raided by the police after the Strike because of my work on the Defence Committee. They broke in at three o'clock in the morning and they took more than half my books which they never returned.

The men who became prominent in those days went in different directions politically but most of them stayed active in some form or other of the Labour, Socialist or Communist movements.