

HAL GRIFFIN MAY 11 - 1976

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This is an interview with Hal Griffin the material to be used for the life and times of Arthur Evans The date is May 11 - 1976

J. Hal I'm going to call you Hal because ~~that~~ that's what I remember you as; could you tell me what period of time you knew Arthur Evans.

H. From about let me see ~~know~~ - I heard him speak when the Ottawa Trekkers took off from about 1935 until he died but I didn't see that much of him between the outbreak of war and actually the mid 1940's I was ~~out~~ either under ground or out of the province

J. Did you have any associations with Arthur when you were on the paper

1- Oh yes constantly.

- What line of think did he send articles or what

1- Some how or other - though I can't think of any 2 more disparaged characters - I had a tremendous regard for him - and he had a liking for me; now that's odd, because we had nothing in common outside of ~~the~~ being members of the same party. I was in the progressive arts into theatre and writing and the arts generally those were my interests and frankly these things were missing from his life - he had always been a mass leader an organizer and his experience at that time were

far beyond me

T | There's one area I would like to cover

what was his style in public speaking

could you give me some impressions of his

style build personality.

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H- spoke with considerable force and vigor it was colloquial English - well interlarded with obscenities or blasphemies depending on his audience and he wasn't too particular about that, he just spoke as he felt; and obviously most of his time speaking to workers - when he spoke to a large audience; it was the force of his words the sincerity of his words - he wasn't a strident agitator - he wasn't a very good speaker but the very force and sincerity of his words carried his audience - of course the content was what they wanted to hear

J - I heard he used a great many nick

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J - names when he spoke describing the class enemies -

H - Oh yes - this was common in the movement - when you talked about social fascists or social democrats and his pet peeves at that time around the movement were Tom McInnes he was the "Citizens League" and the Canadian ~~League~~ <sup>League</sup> of fascists; and they wrapped themselves in the Union Jack  
Old Tom McInnes was a virulent man and he had a long navy background - his was one of the first families of British Columbia and he had been technically at least from the bourgeois point of view - he had been a good poet - even "old Bil"

H - said grudgingly - that he used to be a good poet - but he drank of course and his pen was for hire - as well as his voice and Art had a tremendous contempt for him and a hate for him and so you may be sure and so words like lick spittle - phoney was in vogue in those days. - and two faced shyster and so on and so forth - Art used all the jargon of the day - and the people you spoke to understood it - the way they don't understand it now - this generation has its own jargon and its forever changing but this was working class - the class jargon of working people - in those years the class lines were drawn - they have become blurred

1 - but in those day the class lines were drawn very hard and fast we had the Trotskyist and the labour crowd - those are history - they delivered the labour truth out side meetings were we were trying to organize - remembered outside of a few of the craft unions there were no unions - except illegal organizations the IWA was trying to get established and the miners had the odd organization I worked in the mines up in the Yukon and you went down the road if you as much as mentioned the word union and they were trying to organize the underground union there that was in 31

So organizing wasnt an easy job in those days

4 - You took your life in your hands

T How about money

4 - There was no money

T - Would you give me a brief description of how people found themselves in the 30's

4 - There were - the first people that went on relief ~~were~~ usually managed to get it - when after 29 things

continued for a few months - people

were losing their jobs, but nobody

I suppose envisioned at that time that

this was going to be a permanent condition

at least as far into the future as they

could see - this is perhaps the difference

between then and now - when somebody

is laid off now - he doesn't consider

himself permanently unemployed he's



1. on vic he figures at some point<sup>?</sup>  
things will open up again for a job,  
and that's the way it was originally  
in the 30<sup>s</sup> and it had the effect  
after a while of those who hadn't  
been laid off who had jobs, they  
clung themselves in as firmly as they  
knew how and clung like leeches.

- Tell me in those days did you preach  
hate as they do now against unemployed?

1 - Yes - it was quite prevalent especially  
among those who had jobs - to say these  
people could find jobs if they wanted to  
and that after all there was lots of repair  
jobs to be done - that they could work  
for two bits an hr that they could  
mow lawns - and all it amounted to

4 was their exploitation of the unemployed

I started in the CCF, the fellows used to come into the CCF headquarters somebody liked to make a dollar 75¢ or a dollar by cutting my lawns - sometimes I would need money I would volunteer and I would find I would have to cut a field that literally stood up on edge in Dunbar you would work all day with a rusty old hand mower and at the end of it all they would give you 75¢ - There was this attitude that jobs if you weren't proud if you were prepared to work The beams - they were beams and prepared to ride up and down the road - the railroads on the rods - and they deliberately tried to divide the population

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H- the difference between the country and  
the city was in the city you had to buy  
food. - you had no means of getting out  
of the city ~~few~~ people had cars relatively  
speaking, if you had a car you had  
money it stood to reason - distinct  
from the United States where even the  
unemployed somehow had a model  
A or fleevier - you could read the "Trops  
of Wrath" where they piled into a car  
here they were lucky if they had wagons  
and horses - very few people had cars  
and no way to get around - so if you  
lived in the city there might be a surplus  
of food in Langley - potatoes might be  
rotting but how could you get there  
The unemployed of course use to organize

4- somebody with a truck if they could find  
 somebody and they would go out and  
 make a deal with a farmer - in  
 fact very often he would give it to  
 them - because in Surrey and Langley  
 you had workers the organized left  
 the organized - the protesters it was  
 the surrey farmers workers and farmers  
 the Langley workers and farmers there  
 was rural poverty and there was  
 urban poverty very little difference  
 between them except a farmer could  
 make a deal with another farmer; some-  
 body who had eyes would trade them with  
 someone who had potatoes - if you had  
 in the country ~~a few~~ you ate - The thing that  
 enabled the unemployed organizers

to organize was the fact that in the country there were sympathizers and they would feed them

J- I remember Ard being in the Okanagan ~~with~~ <sup>visiting</sup> the fruit growers where they organized

H- They were trying to organize them - the unemployed sold apples on the street for them - in the Okanagan they couldn't get a price for their apples - whatever the market would take they packed that many boxes and the rest went to the dump - nobody would take them - nobody could afford to buy them, and the consumers organization, the wholesalers organizations just wouldn't take any more

- I don't remember ~~any~~ oranges and

I - fruit being dumped into the freezer

#1 - They destroyed food deliberately

Deliberately let it rot in order to at least maintain some semblance of a market - People here used to go to Blackbarns market that was the famous market in those days the growers would bring in their stuff in directly - but for those who were unemployed it would be them very little

T- How did Art get involved with the unemployed do you know

1- I imagine it was a discussion made by the party - certain people were assigned to organize among the unemployed - we had the Relief

H- Project Workers Union here; there were one or two localized organizations there was a married organization at one time I just don't remember the name of it - but the condition of the married unemployed than the single unemployed - the married unemployed were living in rented houses; they had young families they had to stay the farmer might go to the prairies that was the logical but you went to the prairies and you helped in the harvest if you got some money - the price for wheat was virtually little above the cost of producing the wheat the drought was on in the prairies

4 during the years 31 to 34 and the farmers there were destitute, so the unemployed would go and sometimes they would come back with money sometimes all would be for not they had been fed but the farmers were unable to pay them and they would come back and it was another dream of getting a few bucks shattered - but at least the Burnaby unemployed married could storm the city hall - all other the country for that matter the city halls were being stormed by desperate heads of families and mothers and fathers both and script would be handed out sometimes cash relief very seldom cash and sometimes you would get a sack



of beans a sack of potatoes, it  
varied from place to place - but the  
single unemployed were rootless  
They were homeless they were kids  
whose parents couldn't afford to keep  
them - they had left home because they  
couldn't stand the poverty, they knew they  
were a burden on their families - in some  
cases they had been virtually driven out  
of home by desperate parents who said well  
you're 15 you're 16 you're on your own we  
can't do anything for you. They would  
come here we had the relief project workers  
union - there was Doc Wilson, he was working  
for me, Ernie Cumber and various people  
Doc Wilson was sort of the stable element  
there were maybe 200 or 300 not at any

one given time who were active members of the RPWU - they were at the hall that is now gostown and they would organize smoke parades and tin canning Sat mornings and of course they would be in eternal hassles with the police; and we had a drunken lawyer, the only reason we had him was because he was an alcoholic and we paid him forty dollars a month - he was such an alcoholic that he was virtually there was no way he could handle cases so he settled for handling cases for the unemployed and over the years he did a pretty good job providing he was sober

4. Even in those years you didn't find lawyers on the bread line - a lawyer somehow or other could scratch a living, providing he didn't have us Gordon Brand had an unquenchable thirst - and there was another man I'm trying to think of him they were forever in court - and the courts of course it got to the point where the jail was full and the city didn't want to keep them, and they had to be fed if they were put in jail, many an unemployed man would deliberately get arrested in order to spend a night even in jail

- I think Vagrancy A carried 30 days

- Yes what would happen you would

H- be arrested and come up next day in court and the magistrate would say I'll give you 24 hrs to get out of town or if you appear before me 30 days they would just pass the buck onto the next municipality, they didn't care if you ended up in the jail in Surrey or Langley, they wanted you out of Van or Burnaby or whatever it was - and then sometimes there would be a gathering some incident would touch off a mass protest and suddenly at any given winter there would be 10,000 unemployed at this town and most of them were trying to scrounge a meal ticket, they gave them a 3.00 meal ticket and if you went into the White Lunch, they

It punched it off; and the horizons narrowed. There was no future, you lived for the next 24 hrs, if you had a meal or two ahead or 2 or 3 days meals ahead and you were assured of a place to sleep at night - they used to sleep in box cars and various places around the waterfront, they were shifted around all the time by the police. They would go to Stanley Park - if the weather was fine that was excellent if it was wet it became a problem and they would get by as best they could, but the resentment was there and whenever they heard of any particular case, they came almost pouring out of the caves and you would

4- hold them for that protest - of course the thing would summer down and you would get back to your hard core of two or four hundred people

5- We had CCF both in B.C. and in Ottawa what was their stand

6- Well it would vary - they played politics; they couldn't ignore the real crisis their idea was of course the ballot box, they wanted their votes and they wanted their support I can remember Harold Weir one time the CCF - I couldn't tell you the year off hand - the CCF decided to make a protest against the extravagance of the Patullo govt in Victoria and they boycotted the curling grocers ball - except Harold

1 - Winch who was considered a radical and Harold Winch could usually be relied upon to make a revolutionary speech in Calgary or Winnipeg and he was usually quoted at his most fiery best in the papers. But when he came here somehow or other he always managed to divert and distract the point of the movement it was a typical Social Democratic game and I remember Harold Winch coming down to a mass meeting just around the time of the 1919 ball because he turned up in a dinner jacket - can you imagine before an audience in the Ukrainian Hall consisting mainly of old Ukrainians stalwart in the Ukrainian

movement and some local workers - they just sat there open mouthed and he told them the working class was as good as the elite and there was no reason why he wasn't going to the h. G. ball - this was the decotomy, there was Colin Cameron who played a seemingly left role - he helped the time I went out campaigning, I was <sup>on</sup> the first Spanish aid campaign here, I barnstormed the province, and I stayed at his place and he played a left game except when it came to the crunch, you could always rely on him to let you down. I remember one time on May day, he had agreed to speak with Jim Buck and Fergie McKoen. McKoen was driving them into Cumberland.



they saw a car leaving Cumberland and he said that funny that's Cameron's car he had an old beat up car, oh that can't be Colin he's speaking with us - he had discovered an urgent engagement and had agreed to speak and left town on some pretext where he wouldn't be tagged - naturally the liberals particularly the liberals who were the gov't and the conservatives who were as right wing as could be in fact probably included pro fascists; any time - they used the red bogey to smear the CCF so in election time there were people like Len Sheppard who represented the Surrey seat at that time who were sympathetic who in a weak way agreed

with the party and the program  
and they knew the party people were the  
ones who would go out and do the work  
and so they wanted the party supporters but  
they didn't want to acknowledge the party, every  
election there was a battle between our attempts  
to establish a formal united front and their  
desire just to use the party as a support  
without having to acknowledge it and of  
course kick it in the teeth when they got  
elected

- it seems as the years go by things remain constant  
Well social democracy doesn't change and  
won't change the best of them will move left  
under pressure and the worst of them will  
adapt whatever coloration is necessary  
and do their damndest to uphold the system.

- 4 - its that simple really
- 5 - Steve Brodie also talks about Mr Winch in later years in the post office
- 6 - Well he sold the post office out I could prove it but its history - Hes admitted since that he maintained touch with Col. Foster throughout the episode - they had seized the post office, they had seized the art gallery; the concern was for the Art Gallery - if under attack dont forget these were unemployed they had become militant and radical under the impact of the times and what was happening to them ~~at the time~~ but they were by now ways convinced understanding radicals, they had a smattering of knowledge, they knew the class issues, but they didnt know politics and there were elements among them that

would take their frustration and anger possibly by ripping the paintings of the wall, so long as they an organized body under disciplined leadership, they treated those paintings as every thing else with the utmost respect, but if the RCMP had attacked them, certainly the RCMP would not have been concerned with the paintings, and the men themselves some of them would have buckled up under the attack and probably taken out their frustration out on any thing around them, that's what the authorities were afraid of, so they didn't attack the 6th gallery that was the unemployed's strong point, they kind of back down, Wank's argument is that they called him up in the early 80s and made him a deal and double crossed

if - him, my feeling is - nothing will ever change it - is that Wrench agreed to act as their Judas goat in leading the unemployed out of the Art gallery to free the RCMP for their attack on the post office

- I think there are many of the unemployed who would agree with you

1 Most of those who were around would agree with me, but how do you prove it, except by Wrench's own statement, "Through out he had been in touch with Foster" - This was his most damaging statement if you want to know, if you can put it - maybe I'll have to put it when I write my memoirs - anybody else who didn't know every move - if you could place it the

1 way - Went decided that he was going  
 to go to the federal house, so he used his  
 health as the excuse for retiring from  
 the provincial leadership, he felt they weren't  
 going to get anywhere and the collection  
 the people who collected money for him  
 a sign of what the ruling class really  
 thought of him, he got money not from the  
 working people, he got money from all kinds  
 of business men, they sent him on a holiday to  
 Hawaii and he made a remarkable recovery,  
 and the next federal election he was ready  
 for the federal house, he had recovered so that  
 he could put in another 20 years

We've talked about the desperate situation of  
 the unemployed & that we can probably save  
 Regina we know that the boys did learn