

Bob Hamilton

This is an interview with Bob Hamilton; the material to be used for a biography of Arthur Evans, September 1975.

J. Bob, I think you were a resident of the Princeton area when you first met my father. Could you give me a little of your background.

B. Yes as a matter of fact, I was trapping out of Princeton. I came down out of the hills when this issue was on and met Slim Evans and had a talk with him and got my first insight into what the overall international political situation was. And Slim was a man with great courage and I got basis in class struggle from Slim Evans.

J. Father was in the Princeton area and had been asked to come in and organize the miners. Could you tell me some of the intimidations used against him to try and stop this organization. I have read some of the material such as the halls not being rented to my father and problems with police and Klu Klux Klan. I'd like some of your recollections of some of this area.

B. Well, it seems like in the area of Section 98. The cops did raid anything relative to the union actions on an average of once or twice a day maybe not that often but fairly often anyway and they also did intimidate the party that owned the hall, a fellow by the name of Bill Thomas, and I saw him come puffing up the street one day. He had already arranged to rent the hall and there was going to be a meeting that day and ~~he had a room at the Tulameen Hotel it wasn't heated, there wasn't even bathroom facilities. Slim knew he~~ and the cops had got a hold of him and incidentally I don't believe that he did stop it and if I remember right that meeting did go on anytime there was a meeting there was a cop standing on each side of the door looking in which was merely an intimidation. Slim didn't fear anything anyway, he just laughed ONE little episode he had a room at the Tulameen Hotel it wasn't heated, there wasn't even bathroom facilities. Slim knew he was going to be raided,

J. By raiding, that was a common occurrence

B. Oh yes, you bet it was. Slim, as I say, there wasn't plumbing in the rooms, so there was a white owl ~~xxxxxx~~ or a chamber pot in each room. Slim ~~xxxxxx~~ used this and goes ahead and writes a note and sings around the edges and tore it all up and put it in there. Soon Miller and Hatherill, the two cops the two of about 30 or 40 that were there, I think they were Provincial and Thompson was the local provincial and all the rest were guys that were brought in,. If I remember rightly there was about a dozen and twenty Mounted that were brought in. And I understand they were brought from Oakhalla, I could be wrong about that. However they were very sadistic and they came into to raid Slim this night, and they said Oh Hear, he's ~~xxxxxx~~ been trying to hide something and they get down on their hands and knees with these little pieces of paper and when they get it all together it says Aren't these cops a nosy bunch of B's That's just one incident of Slims'

J. You were talking about these police being brought in especially for the miners' strike

B. Yes, all of them were, there was only one cop there named Thompson. Then, the provincial then Hatherill and Miller, they were brought in I ~~believe~~ believe they were provincial police Now these guys that came in were mounted, there was about ten Mounted, there were others as well and I've never given a thought to as what they were, they were uniformed but I was told they are usually stationed at Oakhalla

J. Could you tell me something about picket lines? Were these police at the picket lines? What were they doing to discourage the strikers?

B. Well this goes on and the picket lines are set up and I was on the picket line. I wasn't a miner, I was a trapper, I had just come down and I just wanted to see what was going on Now, in any case we'd been on the line a few mornings, myself and a few friends, Bill G. and George and some other fellows but incidentally this one morning we decide not to go, we lived 3mis out of town, we had an old pickup we drove, for some reason of other, that was the day they drove into them and the cops come out on there horses and we came into town later and we heard

about it and talk about a bunch of mad miners. They couldn't believe that cops would do that and they clubbed them but I didn't actually see it but the next day we went out and we went up to where the mine was, we didn't go into Princeton, we went to the bridge that crossed the Tulameen River out of Princeton and we just went by there and on up to the mine. It was still dark and the cops stopped us and we weren't going to stop and they fired a shot, I think at our back tire and it left a dent in the back of our car which I think was a rock thrown up, to try and scare us which they did, but we had quite a little argument with them and we had paper in our hats which is incidentally a tactic we learned from Slim Evans, if you got hit with a club it wouldn't hurt you so much and we also had clubs so they give us a bit of hazing about one thing or another and then decide to let us go, I could never figure why some went back and had a look at the other picket line, we came back and then we found out why. We drove by going back down to our shack down the river and here was all the other pickets stopped on the other side of the bridge by a cordon of cops and they knew if they started to row with us these guys were going to charge the picket line. And there is another funny thing about these things I was a local, I went to school in Princeton, and these other fellows were not, my partners the Gee's, they come from Manitoba they were in this country a short time but I was a local, they were afraid if they got tough with a local, there would be more sympathy, that seemed to be true, as far as intimidation other than the time Slim was kidnapped, I can't give too good information because I was out of town at the time but I came in later, and I knew everybody, that is I didn't know the miners incidentally, they are people that come and go, but I knew all of the residents, and according to my information that came in Ted Burt and Claude Snowden, uh were the two main forces in the kidnapping, and I was further told that Claude Snowden pulled a gun, that they took Slim the information I get now seems a little different they took him up to Brookmer and put him on a train and told him to get out of town and he came back on the next train, maybe not the next train, he was back very soon in any case, but I've heard from Mrs. Sheils other names that I know the people, I didn't know that they were active in it, the ones I knew were one hundred per cent anti strife, Buck Allison and those guys

J. And our member, The Board of Trade

B. Ya, that's the one, but I don't even remember him, I knew him years before, because I was working on a fulltime typographical survey back in the woods and he was ~~there~~ their contact in town I knew him well, Gregory, his name was, he was a surveyor, and he ran for the provincial party; you wouldn't remember that; the party they'd tried to start and he ran; and I remember the boss on the survey saying "Well we should know better than that, because he was depending on the Government for work." That is aside from the facts, I was a bit surprised, he didn't seem like that kind of a guy. He was an Englishman, the kind of a guy that did the action that he did in relation to Slim Evans; but I guess he did all right.

J. There was a paper taken around and signed by about 22 of the 30 businessmen in Princeton asking for these extra police to be taken out of Princeton. Are you aware of that in any way?

~~Do you know anything about that?~~

B. I remember...

J. Do you know something about it?

B. You jogged my memory, I never thought of it and I know that they did they were all very mad. But you've got to see another thing, the businessman, the majority of their business was with the miners, because that was the only operation there and they always thought well, close the mine permanent, they would like to see the men win and get a little more money for them but there you are, you're on the fence. but they still were horrified at this action Well I saw it in Vancouver before that, and police would ride into men with clubs and hit them over the head.

J. I understand, that there were women and children on the picket lines as well.

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B. I can't say, I wasn't there that day

J. No,

B. There might have been, the times I was there, I don't know I don't remember women and children

J. Now, O.K. There's one other area, too, that I'm rather interested in, that's the Klu Klux Klan, that seems to be some thing we associate down South, can you tell me

B. I can't really know if there was an organized Klu Klux Klan but they did burn a fiery cross and I saw it and according to information gathered later, Claude Snowden, the one that pulled the gun on Slim Evans, and kidnapped him later is the guy that, he was there anyway, cause they found his oilcan there, you see, they were then building that airport there on top of the hill and that was where the fiery cross was, right up on top of the hill ~~and across the street~~ at the end of the street and across the river til you could see it all through town and it was a relief project and Snowden was there and he was kind of a project boss and mind you this is all second hand information, but I'm quite sure it's true and Slim's oilcan that he used for burning brush was there found at the ~~the~~ cross, and knowing him and knowing also in the kidnapping episode he also scabbed in 1923 longshoreman's here in Vancouver I, uh, he was just an old fellow ~~he~~ who didn't have too much sense. Do you think that covers it?

J. Well, I would like you to tell me something about my father's personality, you knew him at a time when things were pretty tough. Would you tell me if he had a sense of humour, how did he impress you? The kind of things that aren't easy for a daughter to ask. I'd like to know.

B. Well, for one thing, he had terrific courage and such a powerful personality and I think that episode about the note he tore up that the cops put together ~~explains~~ expresses it pretty well. I can just see a picture of Slim alone up in that room with two cops during the era of section 98 when they could've done anything they wanted to him and got away with it and I can see him sitting on the bed sneering at them because Slim wasn't afraid of anything, he had a very powerful, to the point attitude, and that was all there was to it. As far as sense of humour, ya, Slim had a sense of humour, Slim lived for the class struggle and he was a powerful speaker and Slim, when he started to speak at a meeting; I remember in Merritt, we had a meeting there, one time and Slim sat down with a pencil and wrote a few things out and they were just notes he hadn't written out a speech; he didn't have to, but just in case he forgot something he would just consult his notes. That's all he ever had and he could talk very impressively because he knew what he was talking about and he wasn't afraid of anybody and Slim was a great man and another great man I knew was in the fishing, and that was George Miller. And when I look back on my experience in the class struggle they are the two outstanding individuals that I know and when I see guys today that are in the leadership of unions simply for their own interest, which I could name a few, I'm disgusted.

J. That's very interesting. Tell me, how did the miners react to father, as I understand we had quite a few European men who worked in mines who, from the information that I have, were not necessarily long Canadians, their English might not have been too good, was he able to converse with them also?

B. Well, he brought in a man who could speak the language,

I don't remember his name. but I can remember him; a big fine looking ~~man~~ fellow. He could speak some language, Yugoslav, I don't know. And he spoke to him, but my experience, in my organizing in Zeballos, I organized the mine in Zeballos and the Yugoslavs are the best union men on earth. They seem to be real, all of them are good. They had a hell of a job to write or sign their name, but you could depend on them once you got it down.

J. Now could you explain to me a little bit to about Coalmont and Tullameen. From some of the information I have, it appears that the lights, the cost of lights into these mining towns were increased four hundred percent to the miners. Could you tell me something about the conditions and why these miners had called for an organizer?

B. No, I can't. Incidentally, I had never heard of that. I can credit it but I don't think I ever heard of it. Actually I wasn't there when they called, I didn't know it. It was on when I came out of the woods. I ~~came out~~ <sup>went into</sup> of the woods in the latter part of October

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and I didn't come out, as I remember until sometime around Christmas, was it? the date when

J. Yes, it was in December, and Father was charged with 98 on the 22nd of December.

B. Ya, I know it was in the winter. I go in the bush, I did then when I was ~~xxxxxx~~ trapping about the end of Oct. and then I came out and so what happened to start with, I don't know. And I never heard about that increase in light but I can credit it. You can credit anything at that period.

J. Now you were saying that father interested you or increased your interest in world situations. He was a political animal then as well as an organizer.

B. One hundred percent, I remember the first time I met him. A friend, Bill ~~Bo~~ Gee, said " You got to see this man, Slim Evans, you got to talk to him, come on" I'll introduce you to him, ~~xxxxxx~~ so we went up town, we lived, I stayed with them and it was actually my shack ~~xxxxxx~~ and the boys were shacking ~~x~~ up in it and we went in town and met him and he introduced me to him and on the street it was cold and so we went into the restaurant and sat down and ate and my position on the or education or lack of education on the political situation in the world more or less, it seems funny that, it's quite evident that capital can't run the world; we have all the resources in the world and all the technology and we've certainly got hungry men that want a job and yet they can't run it and here I've been reading the horrors of the Socialist country in the Saturday Evening Post and they couldn't run it either, that's quite evident. So, Slim opened my eyes to the facts of life and I got my basis in class struggle ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ from Slim Evans as many ~~x~~ many other people did, most certainly the Gee boys, the three of them and I was directly connected with but a good many others.

J. Could you tell me the kind of things he used. Was he strictly a Marxist, did he speak with the high type of words at a level a working man could understand. How did he give you this philosophy?

B. Hundred percent at the level a working man could understand. He didn't put in all of his time talking about the marvels of the Soviet Union, he merely referred to it and he talked about the terrible things at that time, he referred to the strike in Estaven when they shot miners and sighted different experiences and then...

J. You would say then that he was a Canadian Communist.

B. Most certainly

J. He was talking about Canada.

B. Most certainly, no no Slim was not a guy who got up and raved about the marvels of Communism, ~~xxxxxx~~ the marvels of Socialism he just pointed out to ~~x~~you that things in the Soviet Union were a hundred percent better, why, and all about it. He started people to thinking, he certainly started me to thinking. And a good many people under those circumstances would be a little bit afraid to associate with him with cops all over the

country because he was always the centre of he certainly started a lot of people to thinking and I don't think I'm the only guy he converted.

J. You were saying that you also went with him to see the unemployed. Was that during this period of later?

B. No, this was later and I can't remember just how it happened. I came down off the trap lines, this was in the summer or the spring, there was a little snow anyway, and Slim was ~~gix~~ going up to ...and I think we wound up in Princeton, I don't remember too well but we stopped at Merritt for a meeting with some unemployed and Slim had already had contact with them that I didn't know about ...I know we drove out in the country somewhere and went over a bank and here was about ten or twelve of the unemployed from some camp, I don't know where it is, it must have been a camp around around Merritt. I know there were camps out of Princeton, unemployed camps so we had quite a talk with them and then we had a meeting in Merritt that night and had quite a turnout of people from Merritt and Slim gave them quite a talk and there my memory fails me, I don't even remember whether we went to Princeton or not ...I don't even remember where we got the car .. It was a Model A Ford, a pick-up but I can't even recollect where we got it, I don't think we stole it.

J. And was this prior to his going to Vernon, prior to his going to jail for section 98, that would have been in '34 then or '33 I guess.

B. No, I don't know, it was right after the strike, you see the strike was in the winter, it was the spring after the strike

J. That was in 1933, I say. He was still working with the unemployed, that's very good. And you also with your education ~~came~~ became an organizer, yourself.

B. Yes, I did some organizing, I organized the fisherman and in about the '38, '39, '40's I was prospecting over in the Zaballos area and I come out in the fall and I went to work underground for the winter. And I organized a camp there ... Uh, Mount Zaballos. I think we had the best, the most active union in the Zaballos area. But I only stayed with it till the snow went in the spring and then I went back prospecting.

J. Very good, I find it very interesting so many of my father's comrades along the way have taken an active part in trade unionism.

B. Well, that's what Slim said, they'll come out of the working class, the people that would come forward, I guess he wouldn't realize what a small percent. I didn't anyway.

J. Well, there is still time

B. I think so, it's a progressive movement.

J. May I have permission to use this information for my father's biography?

B. You can do anything you want with it. I don't care, it's all facts as I understand it, I'll stand behind it anytime, because they are true and Slim was a great man.

J. Thank you very much.