

Labour

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

Le Travail

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



Proletarian Cromwell

Two Found Poems Offer Insights into One of Canada's Long-Forgotten Communist Labour Leaders

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Volume 79, Spring 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1039864ar>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Verzuh, R. (2017). Proletarian Cromwell: Two Found Poems Offer Insights into One of Canada's Long-Forgotten Communist Labour Leaders. *Labour / Le Travail*, 79, 185–228.

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Proletarian Cromwell: Two Found Poems Offer Insights into One of Canada's Long-Forgotten Communist Labour Leaders

Ron Verzuh

The saga of my life among the mass.
To the whole working class it should belong,
Immortalised in proletarian song.

HARVEY MURPHY, THE PUTATIVE AUTHOR of those boastful lines, once quipped that he was the “reddest rose in the garden of labour” and for some, though far from all, Canadian labour movement veterans of the 1930s and 1940s, this was an apt description of one of the most mercurial yet almost forgotten Communist labour leaders of the 20th century.¹ Alas, Murphy was no poetaster.² Instead, the authorship of the above lines, excerpted from one of two pseudo-biographical poems, belongs to Murphy's elder contemporary, the lifelong left-wing firebrand “Red Malcolm” Bruce.³ Indeed, Bruce, a founding member of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), penned some seemingly bitter criticisms of his youthful Red comrade. Then again, it could be argued that they were written in jest, that the poems were not so much an upbraiding as a jocular remembrance. As shall be shown, there is much in the poetry that could lead to such an interpretation, but evidence presented here also hints at some more serious personal and political motives for writing the verses.

1. Stephen L. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag: The Workers' Unity League of Canada, 1930–1936* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 126.

2. A poetaster is an amateur poet.

3. Ben Furey, Introduction, *Protest Songs*, <http://protestsongs.ca/volume-1/tell-my-friend-the-prison-warden-i-hadnt-time-to-call/>, refers to the nickname used in poet Dawn Fraser's *The Hair Breadth Escape of Red Malcolm Bruce*.

**Murphy was the
perfect candidate
for the Bruce
lampooning
(Endicott).**

Courtesy USW Local
480.



As historian Stephen L. Endicott notes, Murphy “was blessed with a confident, good opinion of himself and an ironic tongue,” a perfect candidate for the Bruce lampooning in the mimicked voice of a man who would become “one of the most popular speakers for a generation of the radical left in Canada.”⁴ Endicott published short excerpts from the poems in 2012, adding his comments. However, as indicated here they merit publication in their entirety accompanied by a broader explanation of their existence. Not only do they offer a rare insider’s view of the cataclysmic early years of the CPC, but also they offer insights into the labour and political events that occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The poems highlight the “Wilde” activities that brought

4. Endicott, *Raising the Workers’ Flag*, 111.



Bruce had left the CPC by the 1950s when this photograph was taken.

Unknown.

Murphy to the full attention of party leaders like Bruce but also the squads of police spies who would secretly report on both men for the next five decades.

At the time the poems were written in 1932, much was about to unfold in the Communist world of the reddest rose and his Byronic biographer as the Great Depression momentarily shifted the public's mind to the possibility that Communism offered a way forward. Promoting that possibility were Bruce and seven other leaders of the CPC, including party general secretary Tim Buck. But in August 1931, they were arrested and by February 1932 they were serving five-year sentences in Kingston Penitentiary for sedition under Section 98 of the Canadian Criminal Code.⁵ While in jail, Bruce set down his thoughts about Murphy in a long sarcastic poem entitled *Wilde Harvie's Pilgrimage* and a second shorter poem, *Irish Chiefs and Scotch Traducers*, apparently meant to serve as Murphy's fictional rebuttal. Typewritten manuscripts of the

5. Dennis G. Molinaro, "Section 98: The Trail of Rex v. Buck et al. and the 'State of Exception' in Canada, 1919–1936," 1, in Susan Binnie, Eric Tucker, and Barry Wright, *Canadian State Trials*, vol. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015). For another account of the imprisonment and subsequent public fight to free the eight, see Rev. A.E. Smith, *All My Life, Crusade for Freedom* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1949), particularly Chapter 14.

Bruce poems have been available for decades in university archives, in this case within the fonds of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW), but seem to have gone largely unnoticed and possibly dismissed.⁶ Aside from Endicott's effort to lift them from obscurity, historians do not appear to have seen the value of analyzing the poems and yet, as argued here, they help to illuminate the personalities of various CPC stalwarts associated with Murphy while also exposing the acerbic and at times caustic wit of the poems' radical author.

The unsigned poems (the author is identified only by a handwritten note) join a legacy of political poetry that flourished in the 1930s in both the United States and Canada. Canadian historian James Doyle, in his analysis of radical literature during that period, cites the political verse of Communists like Dorothy Livesay, Dawn Fraser, and Joe Wallace who frequently published in *The Worker*, edited by Bruce in the 1920s, and playwrights like Oscar Ryan who would co-author the play *Eight Men Speak* with its focus on the arrest and imprisonment of Bruce and the other Communist leaders.⁷ The Bruce poems were on the outer edge of that movement to create a radical proletarian literature in Canada and, though Bruce was perhaps an unwitting precursor, his prison jottings featured some of the bristling personal acrimony, political infighting, and cutting humour that were to characterize CPC relationships and the ideologically charged poetry to come.

As Endicott has noted, the longer poem, subtitled "An Alleged Autobiography of Harvey Murphy," "lampooned Murphy's restless personality."⁸ The shorter poem, "An Alleged Reply by Murph," points to some tensions among the jailed CPC leaders, but also suggests that the incarcerated men shared a sense of humour albeit at Murphy's expense.⁹ Both poems offer insights into left politics in Canada and capture some sense of the turbulent life led by these two party operatives, both often on the run from the authorities, sometimes adopting protective pseudonyms, and often risking jail sentences for their efforts to support the Communist cause. The full text of the Bruce poems provides a

6. Typescripts of poems were found in the IUMMSW fonds (boxes 68–84), University of British Columbia, Main Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver.

7. James Doyle, *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002). See also Bryan D. Palmer, "Rhyming Reds and Fractious Fictions: Canada's Heritage of Literary Radicalism," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 34, 1 (Spring 2004): 99–128. In addition, see Richard B. Wright and Robin Endres, *Eight Men Speak* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976). For an account of the rise of political poetry during the Popular Front era in the US, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997).

8. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 111.

9. For one view of Murphy's capacity to criticize CPC policies but also act bureaucratically to implement them, see Jack Scott, *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers Movement, 1927–1985*, ed. Bryan D. Palmer (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1988).



The jailing of CPC leaders stimulated the production of the play *Eight Men Speak*. This photograph was taken at the Standard Theatre in Toronto, 4 December 1933.

University of Guelph Archives, Toby Gordon Ryan Collection.

sense of that life, revealing some possible hidden meanings, cryptic political comments, and insights into Murphy's work as a Communist organizer. The annotated text of the poems is followed by brief biographies of Murphy and Bruce, a comparison of Bruce's style to the original works by Lord Byron, further discussion about why the poems were written, and about the political context within which Bruce and Murphy worked.



Bruce copied the style of Romantic poet Lord Byron.

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Wilde Harvie's Pilgrimage

"Pigmies are pigmies still though perched on Alps and pyramids are pyramids in vales."

– Edward Young (1681–1765)¹⁰

Introduction

Now that my fame has uninvited spread
Until my very name inspires dread
In Bosses' hearts, and my renown has grown
Until o'er all the earth my feats are known,
There comes from every land beneath the skies

10. Edward Young was an English poet best known for *Night Thoughts*, the long poem in blank verse from which Bruce quotes above. First published in 1742, it later gained renewed prominence when it appeared in a 1797 edition with illustrations by William Blake. Presumably Bruce took the quote out of context as a double jab at Murphy. Interestingly, M. Seivewright, "Malcolm Bruce" (unpublished manuscript, likely dated 1931 or 1932), 4, author's copy, called Bruce "a giant among pigmies."

Requests for detailed story of my rise.
 The comrades point to all of value gained
 From lives of Marx and Lenin – all the famed
 In Labor's struggles to shake off the gyves,¹¹
 And urge I place my tale in the archives.
 As rare Ben Jonson said so long ago¹²
 Of Avon's peerless poet, in his woe,
 "He was not of an age but for all time"
 So I to many urgings must incline
 And place on deathless pages for my class
 The saga of my life among the mass.
 To the whole working class it should belong,
 Immortalised in proletarian song.
 My innate modesty restrains my pen –
 I lay it down, and take it up again,
 At last resolved to give posterity
 The benefit of my activity
 Among the workers so that it will be
 An inspiration and a light to see
 The path from obscure state to Fame's bright glare,
 So all who have the will may gain a share.

Canto the First

Like many of the great and lowly sung
 I sprang from lowly stock and nether rung¹³
 Of social ladder, and my early youth
 Was spent within the "Ward" with the uncouth.¹⁴
 My wits were sharp, I managed to get on
 Without much toiling, and when called upon
 At times to take the money down to pay
 The light and water bills I fell away
 From grace by not depositing the "jack",¹⁵
 But spent it and forgot to pay it back.
 Time after time they chased me out of home

11. Gyves are shackles or fetters.

12. Ben Jonson, the 17th-century British playwright and poet, was known for his satirical writings.

13. Rolf Knight, Rolf Knight Papers, Harvey Murphy transcripts (file 8-2), University of British Columbia Main Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, includes a short family history by Maryann Hiebert (Murphy's daughter), indicating that Murphy's parents were poor Polish-Jewish immigrants. His father worked as a Kosher butcher in Toronto's Kensington Market area. His mother was an illiterate cook and domestic worker before coming to Canada. See also Rolf Knight, "Harvey Murphy: Reminiscences 1918–1943," *rolfknight.ca*, 1976, <http://rolfknight.ca/HARVEY-MURPHY.pdf>.

14. Gene Homel, "Spadina Avenue – The Cosmic Spine," *Jewish Outlook* (May-June 2007): 22, writes, "At the turn of the century, most Jewish immigrants lived in 'The Ward,' a crowded, run-down area between Queen and Gerrard west of Yonge." The Murphy family lived there.

15. Jack was a common term for money in the 1930s.

And left me with the "Mission Stiffs" to roam;¹⁶
 And I was made an Ishmael many a time
 For drinking my old man's Yum Kipper wine.¹⁷

I chanced into the orbit of class strife
 But little knowing I'd devote my life
 To leading great class battles, gaining fame
 Which made all tyrants tremble at my name.
 And little did Canuck, Uke, Yid or Finn¹⁸
 Suspect the towering genius smouldering in
 The callow youth, high talented but green,
 Who hung around the place at Five-Nineteen.¹⁹
 Fond memories cluster 'round that hallowed spot –
 The maidens toward me neither cold nor hot,
 Like phantoms now they flit before my eyes,
 Angels who strayed a space from Paradise –
 The Ausprich girls, and others plump enough,
 The Rosen girls and Fanny Kornlikoff.²⁰
 Round Moriarty's flame like moths they'd swarm,²¹
 He too respectable to do them harm.

The campaign Drury,²² sprung in 'Twenty-Three
 Gave latent gifts their chance, they called on me
 To act as chairman, I performed with vim,
 With Johnny Knight I gathered voters in²³

16. "Mission Stiffs" were down-and-out men who stayed in houses supplied by religious or charitable missions.

17. Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement is one of two Jewish high holy days (the other being Rosh Hashanah), a time to make peace with others and with God. According to Jewish tradition, Yom Kippur is also the day when God decides the fate of each human being. It is misspelled here possibly meant to add to the sarcasm that runs through the poem.

18. Slang references for Canadian, Ukrainian, Jewish, and Finnish immigrants.

19. The CPC was headquartered at 519 Queen Street West in Toronto.

20. I was unable to find any reference to these women; however, according to Allen Seager, "A History of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, 1925–1936," MA Thesis, McGill University, 1977, 137, "There were two women worthy of note in the revolutionary movement in Blairmore: Anna Apponen, a Finn whom Murphy described as "the best female revolutionist in the Party"; and Mary North, who founded the Women's Labour League (an affiliate of the W.U.L.) in the town in 1930."

21. William Moriarty was secretary of the Workers' Party of Canada (wpc).

22. Ernest Charles Drury led the United Farmers of Ontario-Labour Coalition to victory in 1919 and served as the province's eighth premier until 1923. Drury was associated with the temperance movement, an issue in the 1923 election.

23. Johnny Knight might be a reference to Bill Knight, the coal miner who was elected mayor of Blairmore, Alberta, in February 1932, but could also refer to Joseph R. Knight, an organizer for the One Big Union in Ontario and a Communist sympathizer. According to www.socialisthistory.ca, Joseph Knight addressed the Third Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) and the founding congress of the Red International Labour Union (RILU or Profintern) in July 1921. William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada 1919–1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 166,

To where from soapbox tribune they could hear
MacCausland²⁴ cursed for snaring votes with beer.²⁵

Full oft I'd heard the mournful changes rung
Of hardships suffered ere the obscure sprung
To prominence; I, too, endured my share
As Marx the giant did on beggar's fare –
Soho's slum lodgings for his brood and him,
And Number Two, Gerrard,²⁶ for me and Slim.²⁷
On bed of Telegrams and Globes and Mails,
Far harder than a felon finds in jails
Flopped Joe and Doug and I upon the floor²⁸
And slept the morning through until the door
Swung open to admit the C.E.C.²⁹
Ma Oustance with them in all purity³⁰
Her virtuous nose uptilted as she smelled
The odour of the Jungles where we dwelled
Sans soap, sans water, with malodorous socks,
Unshorn and combless my fast-thinning locks.³¹

notes that his pseudonym was "Morgan."

24. MacCausland probably refers to Alex MacAuslane, a Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) organizer in British Columbia who later worked with Murphy when he was elected first vice-president of the newly re-established BC Federation of Labour in 1944.

25. Presumably, part of MacCausland's electoral platform was to keep beer flowing as opposed to supporting temperance.

26. "Number Two, Gerrard" may refer to a Toronto address on Gerrard Street near Yonge Street, possibly a flophouse.

27. This might refer to Arthur "Slim" Evans, who was then an organizer for the Workers' Unity League (WUL) and would lead the famous On to Ottawa Trek in 1935. It could also refer to T-Bone Slim, a.k.a. Matt Valentine Huhta, the itinerant Wobbly songwriter during the 1920s. See Mark Damron, "T-Bone Slim: A Brief Biography of Matt Valentine Huhta," *IWW Biography*, <https://www.iww.org/history/biography/TBoneSlim/1>. It has been suggested that he also belonged to the Saskatchewan wing of the WPC.

28. Joe may refer to J.B. (Joseph Baruch) Salsberg, a WUL organizer in Southern Ontario and later a Toronto alderman and Ontario M.L.A. He headed the CPC's trade union section and was dubbed the "commissar of the trade unions," according to Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 25. See also Gerald Tulchinsky, *Joe Salsberg: A Life of Commitment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). The "Doug" mentioned here remains a mystery.

29. "C.E.C." refers to the Central Executive Council of the CPC.

30. Ma Oustance is a typographical error. Florence Custance was the CPC executive member who headed the Federation of Women's Labour Leagues in the 1920s. A "rather prim woman, puritan in her habits and an idealist," Custance could be "rigid and uncompromising" with individuals. She was attacked at the 1929 CPC convention for right-wing tendencies and lost her seat on the national executive committee. She died in 1929. Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 164–165.

31. Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band: The Clashes between the Communists and the*

Canto the Second

Perceiving I was fettered, bound and cramped,
 And all my young enthusiasm damped,
 I sought a winder field in which to find³²
 Expression for my fast-expanding mind.
 With Burpee on a freight train, with great fear³³
 Of Deviation's dangers in my ear,³⁴
 I travelled toward the prairies, sad, forlorn,
 By unrequited love asunder torn.
 The one I wanted most, who'd ne'er been kissed,
 Capitulated to a Trotskyist.
 The other's woes were writ in sand – worse luck –
 For she had wilted in the arms of Buck.³⁵
 In Saskatoon we finally detrained,
 Our meagre, joint resources sadly strained,
 We hunted up Tom Ewen and were thrilled³⁶
 To know that we could get our bellies filled.
 We stoked "bouquets" for Farmer John, and there³⁷
 I first encountered Wobblies in their lair.
 We organised the slaves and made things hum
 To strains of "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum";³⁸
 With them we preached "Industrial Control",
 Denouncing Politics with heart and soul.
 Equipped with crimson tie and Wobbly card

Canadian Establishment 1928–1932 (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1982), 42, notes that "In 1929, Harvey was twenty-four, tall, and attractive despite premature baldness."

32. Presumably "winder" is a typographical error. He probably meant wider.

33. Tom Burpee was the CPC's first national secretary. He was replaced by William Moriarty who was replaced by Jack Macdonald.

34. "Deviation" is probably an allusion to the right-wing deviationists that Bolshevik leaders warned were counter-revolutionary opportunists.

35. This refers to Tim Buck, Stalinist leader of the CPC from 1929 to 1962. Murphy was an early Buck protégé.

36. Tom McEwen, a.k.a. Tom Ewen, was a key CPC leader, secretary of the WUL for which Murphy worked in the 1930s, and later editor of the Communist *Pacific Tribune*.

37. "Farmer John" could simply be a generic reference meaning a farm hand, a ladies man, or unsophisticated behaviour. It might also refer to John Brownlee who became the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) premier in the 1930s. It could even be a reference to Murphy's sojourns as part of the Prairie harvester workforce in the early 1920s. See John Herd Thompson, "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890–1929" *Canadian Historical Review* 59, 4 (December 1978): 467–489; and W.J.C. Cherwinski, "'A Miniature Coxey's Army': The British Harvesters' Toronto-to-Ottawa Trek of 1924," *Labour/Le Travail* 32 (Fall 1993): 139–165.

38. Though it is sometimes attributed to Wobbly troubadour Joe Hill, his fellow Industrial Workers of the World member Harry McClintock (a.k.a. Haywire Mac) probably wrote the song in 1906. See *The Little Red Songbook*, Limited Centenary Concert Edition (Philadelphia: Industrial Workers of the World, June 2005).

And syndicalist phrases by the yard,
 Again I braved Toronto, but they turned
 A deaf ear to my theories and spurned
 My proffered leadership, so freely lent.
 So toward the South my hobo way I went.
 I spent a week in Windsor where I found
 No Y.C.L. above or underground,³⁹
 Nor party either, worthy of the name;
 I organised them both on solid plane.

This field being far too narrow for my pride
 I took the Detroit River in a stride.⁴⁰
 In this strange land I could not quite decide
 With which one of the factions I should ride.
 Too broke, too hungry and disconsolate
 To judge each faction's claim to rule the state,
 My chaste political Achilles heel
 Was soon the rival faction's shafts to feel.⁴¹
 To zero all resistance being reduced,
 By slick Jim Cannon I was nigh seduced.⁴²
 The situation, though, was just my meat
 With inner party strife at whitest heat.
 I entered it and stormed bold Jay's redoubt⁴³
 Not knowing what the fuss was all about.
 My natural bent for faction work soon found
 Expression on this faction-tortured ground.
 Bill Z became my leader in the fray,⁴⁴
 All former gods stood forth with feet of clay.

39. "Y.C.L." stands for Young Communist League but it was initially called the Young Workers' League.

40. Murphy discusses his early sallies into the US in his interview with Alice Hoffman cited earlier.

41. There were three Communist Party factions in the US led by William Z. Foster, James P. Cannon, and Jay Lovestone.

42. Cannon became a leader of the American Trotskyist movement. See Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

43. "Jay" refers to Jay Lovestone, a member of the Socialist Party of America, a leader of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) expunged by Stalin in favour of William Z. Foster, an advocate of American exceptionalism (arguing that American capitalism was strong in the US and therefore required the left to take more moderate approaches). He eventually became a labour spy for the Central Intelligence Agency and a right-wing adviser to the American Federation of Labour/Congress of Industrial Organizations. See Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999).

44. "Bill Z" refers to William Z. Foster. See Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), and James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002). "Feet of Clay" is a reference from the Book of Daniel, 2:33, and in common usage it indicates character flaws.

E'en Mack whom I had always idolised,⁴⁵
 Appeared to shrink and seemed quite undersized-
 (At thought of that great chief who led so well
 The tears from my fond eyes in torrents fell
 One night on Center Island in my cups,⁴⁶
 Which roused the raucous mirth of hard-boiled pups).⁴⁷

At intervals between group caucusing
 Bill urged that I should build a strong Left Wing⁴⁸
 Among the miners; so without a flaw
 I set them up from Maine to Arkansas.

I should digress at this point to relate
 A heart affair that nearly sealed my fate:
 One night into the Asses' House I strayed⁴⁹
 In working-plug habilements arrayed.⁵⁰
 I parked into a seat back near the door
 And flopped my tattered cap upon the floor –
 Anon, I was most strangely made aware
 Of some rare Presence, nymphian and rare.
 A glorious vision swam within my sight⁵¹
 And took the vacant seat upon my right.
 Her Venus form was draped in clinging gown,
 Incurring many a matron's envious frown.
 On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore
 Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore
 The stately goddess sweetly on me smiled
 And rendered me as abject as a child.
 She was a queen whom even Gods extol –
 But Minor got there – curst be his soul!⁵²

45. "Mack" probably refers to Jack MacDonald who tried to bring about a balance between Tim Buck's Stalinist faction and the party majority made of up Finnish, Ukrainian, and Jewish groups. His efforts failed and he was expelled from the CPC in 1931. He later became a Trotskyist.

46. Centre Island could refer to the location of a YCL training workshop on Toronto Island. The term "in one's cups" describes someone who is drunk.

47. Young pups may refer to three radical young Communists – Becky Buhay, Oscar Ryan, and Charlie Marriot – who were for a short time considering the Trotskyist proposition of expelled CPC leader Maurice Spector. See Bryan D. Palmer, "Maurice Spector, James P. Cannon, and the Origins of Canadian Trotskyism," *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 91–148.

48. "Bill" probably refers to William Foster, although it could be William Moriarty, the CPC's national organizer in the late 1920s and early 1930s. See Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 167.

49. The labour hall in Detroit was known as the House of the Masses.

50. Habilements from the French *habillement* were items of clothing associated with a profession.

51. Refers to Lydia Gibson, Communist author and political cartoonist for various left publications including *The Masses* and *The Liberator*. She was married to fellow cartoonist Bob Minor.

52. "Fighting Bob" Minor (1884–1952) was an innovative political cartoonist, radical

Like Tarquin as the fair Lucreese be gauged⁵³
 Vesuvian passion on my gizzard raged;
 I vowed I would her loyalty divide,
 Thus balm my jealousy and sooth my pride.
 I was not unsuccessful in my scheme
 Which roused the long cartoonist's angry spleen.⁵⁴
 He though[t] her his exclusively, and yet
 She handed me that night – a cigarette.

Canto the Third

Loaded with kudos and with laurel bough
 Perched high upon my hair-receding brow
 Back to Toronto soon my steps retraced,
 Resolved the party backwardness be faced.
 I ne'r saw such stagnation in my life;
 They'd made no step toward inner-party strife.
 I could not let the skill and training learned
 Across the Line exist without being turned
 To practical account, quite soon was formed
 A group – right in the midst of which I horned.
 But soon my bright career almost closed
 When in our faction's bosom core there nosed
 A Trotskyist wolf in Comintern attire⁵⁵
 As leader breathing Revolution's fire.

This balled up everything, for how could we
 Combat right dangers in such company?
 Should I keep silent, sitting on the lids
 Till Mack and Mike were safely on the skids?⁵⁶
 I feared my silence would be made to seem

journalist, active member of the CPUSA, and eventually a close aide to CPUSA leader Earl Browder. His cartoons appeared in *The Masses*, *Socialist Call*, and *Mother Earth*. He edited the Communist *Daily Worker* in the late 1920s. For a short biography see Mary Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 501.

53. The reference is to Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), a poem about the legendary Lucretia whose rape by the son of the king and subsequent suicide led to the revolution that overthrew the monarchy and the creation of the Roman Republic. The last king of Rome was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus.

54. The cartoonist was Bob Minor.

55. Refers to Maurice Spector, who chaired the CPC but became a Trotskyist thus splitting with the Comintern.

56. Mike is Michael Buhay, brother of Becky Buhay. See Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 163, for short biographies. Donald William Muldoon, "Capitalism Unchallenged: A Sketch of Canadian Communism, 1939–1949," MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1977, 103, notes that Michael Buhay became a union organizer in Montréal's garment industry and was a founding member of the CPC, but "he had supported MacDonald in the 1929 party crisis and was subsequently expelled only to return in the early forties to begin his career in municipal politics."

A base complicity in Spector's scheme.
 And yet, to think of all the nasty cracks
 We'd made on Mack in all our group's attacks
 He'd have the satisfaction after all
 Our group had done to bring about his fall,
 Of moving the expulsion of our chief
 And make us all vote with him, to our grief.
 You will admit it was no easy choice
 To wreck our group, and that with our own voice.
 Yet that we did – adieu ye caucus feasts –
 We threw Genossen Spector to the beasts.⁵⁷

Here I should pause and interject a word
 About the amorous side of me, now stirred
 To painful depths; I'd hoped when I returned
 That my advances would no more be spurned.
 Alas! to my chagrin I found the broads
 Preempted by the Party overlords.
 Each Grace had hitched her waggon to a star
 While rank-and-filers worshipped from afar.
 I covered my discomfiture and pain
 Beneath a cynic's pose, and made quite plain
 My great indifference to siren wiles,
 Imperviousness to sly come-hither smiles.
 I ridiculed the slobberers who'd place
 High value on Romance's warm embrace;
 And in their moon-struck faces shook my fists
 And branded them as sentimentalists.
 But 'twas all false – I hungered like the rest
 To coo and croon and cuddle with the best.
 And yearned with all my he-man passions' zest
 To press a shiksa to my hairy chest,⁵⁸
 And longed my weary fevered head to rest
 Upon some snowy undulating breast.

Canto the Fourth

My Party status was as yet too low,
 Although my climbing had been far from slow,
 To make an impress on the flighty kind
 Of local frail with a romantic mind.
 I needed local, district victories
 Not too far from Toronto's boundaries.
 With such increased prestige and art discreet
 I'd bring inamoratas to my feet.⁵⁹

I pulled a strike in Hamilton which showed⁶⁰

57. Genossen is Hebrew or Yiddish for comrade.

58. Shiksa is Hebrew or Yiddish for gentile girl.

59. Inamorata (Italian) is a female lover.

60. This refers to the National Steel Car strike of 1929 in Hamilton. The CPC leadership assigned Murphy to organize strike support. Tim Buck, *Thirty Years – 1922–1952: The Story of*

I was the only one could bear the load
 Of great responsibility and lead
 The slaves to glorious victory with speed.
 A novel scheme I put into effect:
 A strike's new aristocratic sect
 I did create; they stood above the rest –
 I rated riveters by far the best.
 The dollymen and lowly heater boys
 I placed in lower caste, with lesser joys,
 These base untouchables affected grief
 When they got only half as much relief.
 Nor Shelley's tears nor importunities⁶¹
 Could make me cancel one of my decrees,
 Nor could her strong political protest
 Deter me when determined to invest
 Relief funds in a Ford of doubtful speed
 To tote the strike chief o'er a far-flung field.
 No leader's life though it be e'er so pure
 But falls at some time to a false allure.
 And on my own escutcheon there's a blot –⁶²
 The comrades should forget, but they'll not –
 This dark, indelible, disgraceful stain
 Still casts its sombre shadow on my name:
 I got it when in young exuberance
 I fell for Mosher's guile and honeyed glance.⁶³
 Why worry? Did not others once likewise
 Consort with Trotsky, laud him to the skies?
 They lived it down in time and so will I
 And it will be forgotten bye and bye.
 Unconquered by repining or defeat

the Communist Movement in Canada (Toronto: Progress Books, 1952), 37, states that "Murphy, then twenty-two years of age, led that strike like a veteran."

61. The reference to Shelley most likely refers to Minerva Davis, a young Communist assigned to assist Murphy with the Hamilton strike. After joining the YCL in 1919, she adopted the pseudonym Minnie Shelley or Rose M. Shelley. See Minerva Davis, *The Wretched of the Earth and Me: One Girl's Communist Struggle in 1920s Toronto* (Toronto: Lugs Publications, 1992), 113, in which she describes Murphy as "capable," "hard working" and "very devoted to the trade union movement." The reference to Shelley could also be to Shelley Rogers, a long-time Communist trade union activist who left the Party with Fergus McKean. McKean joined the CPC in 1932 and became BC district secretary in the mid-1930s. In the 1940s he charged the CPC with subscribing to revisionist theory. See Fergus McKean, *Communism Versus Opportunism: An Examination of the Revision of Marxism in the Communist Movement of Canada* (Toronto: CPC Organization Committee, 1946).

62. The correct spelling is escutcheon, a shield with a coat of arms.

63. Refers to Aaron Mosher, president of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) established in 1927. In 1940, it merged with other groups to become the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) with Mosher as its president. John Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers: The Struggle for Industrial Unionism in the Canadian Automobile Industry, 1925–36," *Labour/Le Travail* 17 (Spring 1986): 105–133, 117, notes that in 1928, Mosher allowed Murphy and other Communists to serve as "unofficial organizers" during a multi-city autoworkers' strike.



CCL president Aaron Mosher disliked Reds like Murphy and worked to purge them from the movement.

BC District Union News, 23 October 1950, 8.



Workers rally in support of the founding of the Workers' Unity League. Murphy and Bruce worked as organizers for the WUL.

evelynhartthetorontoglobearandmail.wordpress.com

I next directed wanderlusting feet
 Once more toward the West, this time to match
 My wits and skill with Wheatley and to snatch⁶⁴
 The miners from his lewd embrace and tear
 Them from the faker's clutch and let them share
 All through the wizardry of my intrigue
 The blessings of the Workers' Unity League.⁶⁵
 A driving party boss I cracked the whip
 On comrades giving opposition lip;
 A proletarian Cromwell's holy wrath
 I poured on all who dared to cross my path.
 Mine were the Delphic words they must obey
 Or else in outer Party darkness lay,
 And in my scorn administer rebuke
 To every loyal Labor Temple Uke.⁶⁶
 The Crowsnest shook at my imperious tread
 And scores were left politically dead.
 Coleman's foundations to their base I shook⁶⁷
 And in the ruins lay John Stokuluk.⁶⁸
 A journal learned I published – its main job
 Being to impale A-1 Levers so the mob⁶⁹
 Could see what happened [to] enemies outside
 The Party, and I hung his yellow hide
 Out on a picket fence in Wayne to dry –⁷⁰
 A warning grim to every passer-by.

64. This refers to Frank Wheatley, a one-time president of the Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC), who was seen as a moderate who hired John Stokuluk as an organizer. Seager, "A History of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada," 59, describes him as "a God-fearing Fabian who ... regarded the trade union movement, not as a weapon in the class war, but as a vehicle for the spiritual and moral uplifting of the worker."

65. The WUL existed from 1929 to 1935 when the CPC ended it and adopted the new party policy of working within the established labour movement.

66. This refers to the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association. For a full explanation of its association with the CPC, see John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion: The History of Ukrainian Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada* (Toronto: PMA Books, 1979).

67. Coleman was one of the three main mining communities in the Crow's Nest mining region of Alberta where Murphy organized and supported union activity. Murphy also adopted it as one of his aliases.

68. The misspelled Stokuluk was national secretary of the MWUC, a Communist, Ukrainian, and Murphy's foe during the 1932 Crow's Pass strike. Seager points out that the dispute between Stokuluk and Murphy stemmed from the "basic make up of the Communist movement in western Canada." "Big John" would not cooperate with Murphy, including a refusal to distribute the Murphy-edited *Western Miner*. Seager notes that in December 1929, Stokuluk and most of the Coleman Ukrainian temple membership were banned from the CPC on Murphy's advice for "truculence." Seager, "A History of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada," 85 and 88.

69. A-1 Levers possibly refers to bosses or to enemies of the CPC.

70. Wayne, Alberta, is the Drumheller mining district.



Murphy speaks at May Day rally in early 1930s. Bruce also travelled the Alberta speaking circuit in the years before and after his imprisonment. Both men worked for the Workers' Unity League.

Photo by Thomas Gushul. Glenbow Archives, NC-54, 2008.

The art of living learned in old [W]ard days
 I made good use of, with my winning ways
 And Irish blarney weaved a subtle spell
 O'er housewives' gentle hearts – Lord, how they fell
 Nor piteous tales of my ascetic life,
 Of meals of “coffee-ans” and furious strife.⁷¹
 The women comrades' tender hearts I broke
 When with fine Machiavellian art I spoke.
 With unction I applied the potent bull,
 Their cooking praised and stuffed my belly full;
 On all my frequent visits they prepared
 Gargantuan feasts which left their cupboards bared,
 While turkeys with foreboding oft did dream
 Of guillotine and sanguinary stream.

My path was sometimes rough, despite renown,
 I soared to heights and sometimes I was down.
 For instance my temerity once led
 Me to attack Kid Burns, and on his head⁷²
 From the rostrums poured the vials of my scorn
 Which left him sullen, moody and forlorn.

71. “Coffee-ans” was slang of the day for coffee and a doughnut, a cake, or a cheap meal.

72. Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 122, notes that Kid Burns, Lewis McDonald's nickname, was an amateur boxer who served two years in jail in the mid-1920s for assaulting William Sherman, the District 18 president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), during a strike in Drumheller, Alberta.

I was too self-assured in my zeal
 As time was soon to painfully reveal.
 One night we met, and, contrary to law,
 He crashed his mighty fist against my jaw.
 My lights went out as with an awful thud
 He dumped me on my backside in the mud.⁷³

Canto the Fifth

With great industrial masses on my list
 I next launched forth as an agronomist;
 At U.F.A. conventions muscled in,⁷⁴
 Among the delegates of hoary age
 And patriarchal facial foliage.
 Upon the platform when I made my speech
 Was every form of rural human leech –
 Old Wood and Garland, Gardner and the gang⁷⁵
 Of future ccfers, but I rang
 Their death-knell in voice full trumpet-toned,
 The while the audience in anguish groaned.
 I fumed, I stormed, I vilified and jeered,
 I castigated and reviled and sneered,
 Denounced and charged, indicted and inveighed
 Against the fakers on the stage arrayed.
 I tore the lid off so that all could see
 Their vile political skullduggery.
 Bill Irvine squirmed and wriggled and disclaimed⁷⁶
 As my stern minatory digit aimed
 At him as one of fakerdom's worst spawn,
 Assiduously at work from night to dawn
 Advancing his career at farmers' cost,
 And if not "liquidated" all was lost.
 The miscreant made denial with a howl,
 I squelched him with my awesome Jorian scowl.⁷⁷

73. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 49, notes that Burns "knocked out one of Murphy's teeth ... and threatened to knock out more."

74. "U.F.A." refers to the United Farmers of Alberta as a provincial section of the United Farmers of Canada.

75. Henry Wise Wood was elected president of the UFA in 1916 and helped the party form the government of Alberta in 1921. Edward Joseph "Ted" Garland was elected in the 1921 federal election as a candidate for the Progressive Party of Canada. Robert Gardiner won a seat in a 1921 federal by-election, making him the first UFA Member of Parliament.

76. William Irvine was a three-time Member of Parliament, representing labour, the UFA, and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). He also participated in the radical "Ginger Group" of MPs. See Anthony Mardiros, *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1979).

77. Jorian is derived from Jorel, a Hebrew term meaning God will uplift, which suggests god-like anger, but the meaning of "Jorian scowl" is unclear.

The place was in a tumult from my speil [sic],⁷⁸
 My own supporters e'en began to squeal.
 They were outraged and shocked, and out upon
 A stretcher, down and out, went Axelson,⁷⁹
 From the right line I ne're did deviate
 Though tenth-rate comrades criticise and prate.
 The Center will attest my sterling worth,
 And silence ribald Party critic's mirth,
 Though even yet they ruefully reflect
 On all the telegrams I sent "collect".

My restless energy could not be bound
 By District limitations, so I found
 A field most fruitful, wide, neglected long
 By Party leaders, so with purpose strong
 I wrote the famous "Women's Program" which
 Could not be bettered even by Illyich.⁸⁰
 This first our women sternly claimed the right
 Of one hour' work per day and five each night.
 A valued contribution, too, I gave
 To the Trade Union Problem just to save
 The Party from dire opportunist breaks,
 And halt affiliation's "Right" mistakes.
 The question was: should we continue to
 Give infant unions to the Mosher crew?
 Or should we hold them as a nucleus
 For new Trade Union Center built by us?
 I cut the Gordian knot as strong men do
 And solved the problem, giving orders to
 Alf Hautamiki who at my mere word⁸¹
 Attached them to the Ontario Liquor Board.

Canto the Sixth

Although my fame had spread both far and near
 And as a Leader I had not a peer,
 I felt I'd exercise a greater rule
 If I would browse a while in Lenin School,⁸²
 Erase the bad impressions of the past
 And show the Duke that I was not declassified.⁸³

78. The correct spelling is spiel.

79. Refers to Clyde Carl Axelson, Communist president of the Farmers Unity League.

80. Refers to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

81. Alf Hautamaki was a union organizer and the Finnish Communist leader of the Lumber Workers' Union.

82. Murphy attended the International Lenin School in Moscow for nine or ten months in the early 1930s. Established in 1926, it was disbanded in 1938.

83. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 112, states that "The Duke" refers to Stewart Smith, the son of Rev. A.E. Smith and an influential party leader under Tim Buck. See also Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolkas, My Years in the Communist Party of Canada* (Toronto: Lugus

It took three years for Taffy, Sims and Carr,⁸⁴
 The Duke and Weir – slaves to the samovar –⁸⁵
 But brains like mine in nine short months could learn
 All stored-up knowledge of the Comintern.

However, I was up against a wall –
 The Center had not chosen me at all;⁸⁶
 I had to act, regardless who'd be hurt,
 Or be hornswoggled out of my dessert.
 So knowing how to work things, I did wend
 My way to eastern seaport, there to send
 The news of fait accompli – or, in part –
 And though they'd rave[,] they'd okay and I'd start.
 In Montreal I found my prestige low,
 So cast about for ways to stage a show.
 My chance soon came in shape of diatribe
 Appearing in *THE WORKER* from a scribe⁸⁷
 Out in Vancouver, one who saw a chance
 To make "sex radicals" cavort and prance.⁸⁸
 The freckled anthropoid from jungled bough
 Hurled verbal poison darts that hurt, and how! –

But like plumed knight from richly storied page,
 Of great Saint George against the dragon's rage
 With trusty lance in stout defense of Dave⁸⁹
 I vanquished the vituperative knave.
 In my reply I prudently ignored
 The leftist tailism which he deplored;⁹⁰

Publications, 1993).

84. Charles Sims, third head of the WUL after Tom McEwen and James Litterick and an adherent to the Tim Buck faction in the CPC, and Sam Carr, also a key CPC leader with Buck, were early attendees of the Lenin School. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 112, states that "Taffy" refers to Leslie Morris. Betcherman, *The Little Band*, 98, refers to Morris as "one of the petted young intellectuals that excited Harvey Murphy's envy."

85. John Weir was also at the Lenin School.

86. "Center" refers either to CPC secretary Tim Buck directly or to the CPC national executive committee. They eventually let Murphy go to Moscow.

87. Bruce edited *The Worker* from 1922 to 1924 and again starting in mid-1929. The scribe's identity is unknown.

88. The term sex radicals may refer to individuals in Vancouver or it could concern the free-love movement in the 1920s with its linkages to Sigmund Freud and Marx in the quest to fight American capitalism.

89. "Dave" could be Dave Kashtan, a YCL organizer in the 1930s. See Kirk Niergarth, "'Fight for Life': Dave Kashtan's Memories of Depression-Era Communist Youth Work," *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 199–236. It could also refer to Dave Weiss, a Montréal YCL activist who sparred with Murphy over party policy regarding unemployment.

90. John Manley, "'Starve, be damned!' Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929–39," *Canadian Historical Review* 79, 3 (September 1998): 466–491, 468, explains that Bruce took a "trenchantly" hard line against Montreal YCLers who were indulging in "easterners' 'tailism'" for arguing that the party needed to focus on transients and work with unemployed

And as a politician, always keen,
 I seized the chance to stride upon the scene
 And grab publicity, for don't you see
 The Center had not yet selected me
 As student, though it is the general rule
 To send outstanding genius to the School.

On charges made I did not write a line,
 But I lambasted haughty District Nine,⁹¹
 Said sharply to the captious B.C. gnome
 Self-criticism should begin at home.
 I charged them with not having moved a hair
 Toward organising mines in their care,
 That all that had been done in far B.C.
 Was done by District Eight – and that is ME –⁹²
 By stacks of WESTERN MINERS which I sent⁹³
 Although I have no inkling where they went
 After I sent them, (Later on I learned
 That they suppressed them after having spurned
 Their contents as a “mess of muddled tripe”
 Which made them think the writer hit the pipe[.])

Though bold I wrote I still disquiet felt
 At thought that those birds might remove my pelt;
 I feared that Bruce and Bennett in their spleen⁹⁴
 Might wreck me with their mimeograph machine.
 You see, they had a wretched weekly sheet,
 And for those cannibals I'd just be meat.
 I didn't rile them too much, being content
 To show the sloth I'd cure that I had been sent
 To duplicate work done by District Eight.

However, my life's purpose was achieved,
 Though other aspirants were sorely grieved,
 I was the one to make the trip across
 Thus Mecca's gain was Canada's great loss.
 At last I sailed, my pilgrimage begun,
 Face touching deck, prone toward the rising sun.

families. When the Comintern agreed with the YCLers, Bruce was criticized for “indulging in factionalism.” Manley, ““Starve, be damned!,”” 468n10, explains that tailism was a term used by V.I. Lenin to describe his Menshevik enemies’ “habitual tendency to ‘tail’ behind the working class’s ‘trade union.’”

91. The CPC divided the country into districts. District 8 was Alberta and District 9 was British Columbia. This may also refer to a similar numbering system for UMWA districts.

92. Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 156, notes that Murphy was assigned to District 8 which included mining areas in both BC and Alberta.

93. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 48, notes that Murphy got financial assistance from MWUC president James Sloan to start the *Western Miner*.

94. “Bennett” refers to William “Ol’ Bill” Bennett, a socialist labour journalist and founding member of the WPC. See Tom McEwen, *He Wrote For Us: The Story of Bill Bennett, Pioneer Socialist Journalist* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing, 1951).

Canto the Seventh

I was impatient with the tub's slow speed,
And sighed for wings to fill my chafing need.
It seemed an age before my famished eyes
Beheld the minarets in Mecca's skies –
Although I must confess I'd cooled a lot
Toward tackling stuff the Red Professors taught.

Mecca looked good to me and I had hopes –
Provided I'd a friend who knew the ropes.
Of mere vicarious joys I'd had my fill
And felt frustrated and quite blue until
I met one Springy, and we made a pair⁹⁵
Of gay Lotharios⁹⁶ round Pushkin Square.⁹⁷
He took me round, we met the very best,
My well known sex appeal did all the rest.
I grabbed a soulmate from a shock brigade
Whose errant fancy to great Leaders strayed.
I gained in amour's technique every day,
Urged on by Passion's call: "Skooray, skooray".

In School I was the boss iconoclast
And turned loose many a strident, withering blast
Against the students who in reverence stood
Before authorities half understood.
And once the German students threatened to
Have me garrotted by the Gay Pay Os⁹⁸
When I declared in voice both loud and deep
That Marx's theories put me to sleep.

At last I came from Leningrad's far shore,
Bursting with revolutionary lore.
And inasmuch as students, newly learned,
To higher tasks their erudition turned,
With gesture wiping out all past disgrace,
They pitchforked me into Tom Ewen's place.⁹⁹

95. "Springy" probably refers to British Communist Douglas Frank Springhall (often called Dave), another Lenin School student who later became a Spanish Civil War political commissar and Soviet spy. See Boris Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent: The Life and Death of Alexander Orlov* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 184.

96. A Lothario is a man whose chief interest is seducing women.

97. Pushkin Square is one of the busiest in Moscow. It was named after Alexander Pushkin considered by some to be Russia's greatest poet.

98. Gay Pay Os likely refers to the OGPU, which at the time was the name of the Soviet secret police.

99. "Ewen" or McEwen became the founding national director of the WUL in 1929. Eighteen months later he was jailed along with Buck, Bruce, and the other CPC leaders sometimes called the Kingston Eight. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 146, notes that James Litterick, later to become the first Communist elected to a provincial parliament, replaced Ewen. It is unclear, therefore, what Bruce meant by Murphy being pitchforked into Ewen's place, since he was by then working under Litterick as a WUL organizer.

This brings me to the present, and some day
 I may resume this great, heroic lay.
 My course has not by any means been run,
 My Leninistic work is just begun.
 For still I carry on to higher peak,
 An even greater glory yet to seek.
 And should I seek earned rest and work no more
 Or, unexpected, stand on Lethe's shore,¹⁰⁰
 On Fame's illustrious scroll my name you'll find
 In workers' hearts my memory enshrined,
 My footprints left where none but Lenin trod,
 And worshiped by all miners as a God.¹⁰¹

Irish Chiefs and Scotch Traducers¹⁰²

Being an alleged reply by Murph by Malcolm Bruce

Who is this libelous and leprous swine
 Who prostitutes the art of verse and line
 To spin irreverent biography
 And call the sorry tripe a work of mine?

While I in Labor's cause through the West
 To Brownlee's¹⁰³ janissaries¹⁰⁴ bared my breast
 This moron scribbles his buffooneries
 In housed security as Bennett's guest.¹⁰⁵

While I inspire great proletarian throngs
 He's sloughed up where he properly belongs –
 A jailhouse poetaster with vile pen
 Salaciously indicting lecherous songs.

'Tis jealousy inspires his owlsh screech,
 His creaking doggerel and noisome speech –

100. Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness, is one of the five rivers of Hades in classical Greek mythology.

101. Interestingly, Sergeant J.A. Cawsey of the Blairmore, Alberta, RCMP Detachment, reported on 14 November 1934, that Murphy was "a little 'God' among the Reds [and] this feeling is general throughout the Pass." See RG 146, Volume 4673, 4674, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

102. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 112, confirms that the poem borrowed its title from Lord Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Traducers* in which Byron satirized the literary critics at *The Edinburgh Review*.

103. John Edward Brownlee was Alberta's fifth premier, serving from 1925 until 1934.

104. A Janissary is a loyal political supporter (from Turkish military terminology).

105. Refers to Prime Minister R.B. "Iron Heel" Bennett.



Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, who incarcerated the CPC leaders, arm in arm with his Liberal successor William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Unknown.

“Base envy withers at another’s joy
And hates that excellence it cannot reach.”

He apes the style, for his obnoxious feats,
Of Goldsmith, Pope and even the great Keats;
Fouling the Muse, he dips his sewer quill,
Smirches the page and cowardly retreats.

But I whenever forced to recognise
The slanderer ape’s piled up putrescent lies
Employ great Khayyam’s style to lay him low¹⁰⁶
And raise myself triumphant to the skies.

There with the other outcasts let him rot,
With criminals and the whole pervert lot
Lamponing real leaders and although
Some strive for his release, here’s one who’ll not.

106. Omar Khayyam was an influential twelve-century Persian poet also known for his scientific and philosophical writings. As a poet, he became known in the West for his *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.



AS NOTED AT THE OUTSET, the poems give rise to several speculations as to what motivated Bruce to write them. Were they the work of an envious colleague or were they a fun-loving poke at a fellow Communist? Were they written in bitterness in an attempt to undermine Murphy's growing reputation? Or were they a laudatory statement, even a celebration, of a rising party star? Perhaps this was less a putdown of the young Communist and more a locker room-type joke in the spirit of masculine camaraderie. Before addressing these questions, a brief review of the biographies of both men will help clarify some of the references in the poems.¹⁰⁷

Undoubtedly, Murphy, born Harvey Chernikovsky on 1 July 1905 in Poland, was a committed, if occasionally unruly, Red with an enviable oratorical talent for swaying opinions.¹⁰⁸ Historian Allen Seager called him "the most influential communist in the Canadian trade-union movement in the 1940s" and "a colourful and resourceful foe of anti-communist forces."¹⁰⁹ But it was not surprising that the saga of Murphy's "life among the mass" had not been immortalised in proletarian song or even in mainstream labour history. Bryan D. Palmer, for example, cited Murphy's "authoritarian arrogance," calling him "a bombastic blend of talent and chutzpah."¹¹⁰ The increasingly anti-Communist leaders of the two central labour organizations – the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) and the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) – would have agreed.¹¹¹ Nor did the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) see Murphy in a positive light, characterizing him as a "persistent, reckless and dangerous agitator."¹¹² RCMP commissioner Cortlandt Starnes and his stable of police

107. The transcripts of six lengthy interviews with Murphy conducted near the end of his life, the longest being Knight, "Harvey Murphy," yield much useful biographical data. The Defence of Canada Regulations advisory committee chaired by Daniel O'Connell, Toronto, 1 December 1941, also conducted a lengthy interview before sending Murphy to an internment camp in 1942. See RG 146, Volume 4673, 4674, LAC.

108. Murphy cited contradictory birthdates in various interviews. The most persistent date on record, however, seems to be 1905. See the Alice M. Hoffman transcript of her Murphy interview, Islington, Ontario, 31 March 1976, 1. July 1 is the date specified in a Department of External Affairs memo signed by J.J. Connelly, a passport officer, Ottawa, 30 March 1931.

109. *Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Harvey Murphy," by Allen Seager, last modified 16 December 2013, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/harvey-murphy/>.

110. Bryan D. Palmer, "Small Unions and Dissidents in the History of Canadian Trade Unionism," in Mercedes Steedman, Peter Suschnigg, and Dieter K. Buse, eds., *Hard Lessons: The Mine Mill Union in the Canadian Labour Movement* (Toronto: Dundurn Press/Institute of Northern Ontario Research and Development, 1995), 39–49, 46.

111. The CCL subsumed the ACCL in 1940.

112. Cortlandt Starnes, RCMP Commissioner, letter to A.L. Joliffe, Commissioner of Customs, Department of Immigration and Colonization, Ottawa, 30 April 1930, in an attempt to have Murphy deported as a "public service."

spies constantly followed and reported on Murphy's activities in what might have seemed a comical cat and mouse chase to some observers.¹¹³ Indeed, Murphy had chutzpah and he used it to charm both Starnes's spies and the political enemies he would acquire during his long tenure as a CPC stalwart.

Oddly both local union leaders and later some captains of the mining and smelting industry shared a sometimes grudging respect for him. "Murphy was a very clever, accomplished and cagey operator, a great public speaker, and a superb strategist," wrote Al King, president of Mine-Mill Local 480 in Trail, BC, where Murphy acted as chief negotiator from its certification in 1944 to 1955, "But he could also on occasion be an unscrupulous bastard."¹¹⁴ Mine-Mill lawyer John Stanton shared that mixed view, claiming that Murphy could be engaging and "related well to working people who enjoyed his gravelly-voiced exposes of the greed and stupidity of certain employers and politicians." But "a generous ego and a certain foxiness were so noticeable that one could never be quite sure where one stood with Murphy."¹¹⁵ Bill White, a fellow Communist labour leader with the shipbuilders' union remembered him as "an easy guy to buy a drink for," but he was the "right-wingers' favourite target when it came to making an attack."¹¹⁶ White later condemned Murphy as a sell out when the IMMSW merged with the United Steelworkers of America (USWA).

As management saw him, Murphy was "really their leader [the mine and smelter workers] and that was it," causing them to both suspect him and respect him. Some would argue that he was a little too comfortable hobnobbing with such managers as he sat across the bargaining table from them.¹¹⁷ Nor would he escape criticism within the CPC for disobeying orders when it suited his strategies for local organizing drives or contract negotiations. "For the last god-damn time," wrote Tom McEwen, Murphy's WUL boss, "will you send a copy or two of the Minutes of the [Workers'] Unity Conference?" The 1929 letter thoroughly admonishes Murphy for his bad housekeeping, pleading

113. See police surveillance reports obtained by the author using Access to Information legislation, which track Murphy's movements from his first arrest, RG 146, Files A2009-00396, LAC.

114. Al King with Kate Braid, *Red Bait! – Struggles of a Mine Mill Local* (Vancouver: Kingbird Publishing, 1998), 57. Mike Solski and John Smaller, *Mine Mill: The History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Canada Since 1895* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1984) also offer insights into Murphy while he worked for Local 480.

115. John Stanton, *My Past Is Now: Further Memoirs of a Labour Lawyer* (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1994), 119.

116. Howard White, *A Hard Man to Beat: The Story of Bill White* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2011), 99.

117. Transcript of an interview with former Cominco manager and former Trail mayor Albert "Marc" Marcolin conducted for the Trail Historical Society by Greg Nesteroff, Trail, BC, 19 February 2008. Lynn Williams, interview with the author, 23 August 2011, noted this too-comfortable posture.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE	
District	Place Toronto, Ontario
Ref. No. 70-Dir. 6/555	Date December 7, 1929
H.Q. Ref. 1758/2972	
PERSONAL HISTORY FILE	
Re: <u>Harvey Murphy</u>	
Name:	Harvey Murphy
Aliases:	--
Nationality:	Irish descent, born in Canada.
If Naturalised:	
When and how arrived in Canada:	
Description:-	Age: Approximately 24 Weight: 170 lbs. Height: 5'10" Build: Heavy Colour of Hair: Bald in front. Colour of Eyes: Brown. Glasses (if worn): -- Complexion: Searthy. Hair on Face: Clean Shaven Teeth: Fairly Good. Nose: Straight. Deformities: -- Marks: -- Familiarities: Walks with a slouch. Usual Dress: Does not wear hat in summer time.
Manner:	Coarse.
Habits: (Smokes, Drinks, Games, etc.)	Smokes cigars and pipe, and drinks - pool player.
Speech:	Coarse, guttural.
Languages Spoken:	English.
Photo:	--
Married or Single:	Single.
Family:	
Home address:	No set home.
Present address:	
If not married, parents, name and address:	Detroit.
Past and Present Occupation:	Auto labourer.
Police Record. (if any):	Charged with disorderly conduct Sept 12, and fined \$25.00 and costs or 10 days. \$8.00. Sentence appealed and conviction quashed.
Associations affiliated with:	I.O.O.F., C.P. of C. Auto Workers' Industrial Union.
Influence and standing in same:	No position in Party but in good standing. Organiser Auto Workers' Industrial Union.
Intimate associates:	Extremely friendly with Bruce, Buck, Stewart, etc. etc. etc. and all leading lights of Party.
Ability and influence as Agitator:	Minor.
Present locality of activities:	Toronto, Oshawa and Windsor, chiefly amongst Auto Workers' Industrial Union in interests of C.P. of C.
Activities:	
General Remarks:	Murphy first came to prominent attention during the Oshawa strike in April, 1929. Later he joined himself in the formation of the Auto Workers' Industrial Union in Windsor, Oshawa and Toronto. He was again active in the Steel Workers' Strike at Hamilton and also took an active part in the Pro-Speech Demonstrations at Toronto.
List of files in which this man appears:	

RCMP officers were ordered to keep close surveillance on Murphy as early as 1929 when this profile was compiled by the Prince Rupert, BC, detachment.

Note: A transcription of this document appears on the facing page.

RG 146, Files A2009-00396, LAC (1929-1942).

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

"O" Division, Place: Toronto, Ontario
 Ref. No. "O" Div. 6/655,
 H.Q. Ref. 175P/2972 Date: December 7, 1930

Personal History File
 Re: Harvey Murphy

Name: Harvey Murphy

Alias: -

Nationality: Irish descent, Born in Canada

If Naturalized:

When and how arrived
 in Canada: -

Description: - Age: Approximately 24
 Weight: 170 lbs.
 Height: 5'10"
 Build: Heavy
 Colour of Hair: Bald in front.
 Colour of Eyes: Brown.
 Glasses (if worn): -
 Complexion: Swarthy.
 Hair on Face: Clean Shaven.
 Teeth: Fairly Good.
 Nose: Straight.
 Deformities: -
 Marks: -
 Peculiarities: Walks with a slouch.
 Usual Dress: Does not wear hat in
 summer time.

Manner: Course.
 Habits: (Smokes, Drinks, Gambles,
 etc.) Smokes Cigars and pipe, and
 drinks - pool player.

Speech: Coarse, guttural.
 Languages Spoken: English.
 Photo: -
 Married or Single: Single.
 Family: -
 Home address:
 No set home.
 Present address: -

If not married, parents name and address: Detroit.

Past and Present Occupation: Auto labourer.

Police Record (if any): Charged with disorderly
 conduct Sept. 12 and fined \$25.00 and
 costs or 10 days. Sentence appealed
 and conviction quashed.

Associations affiliated with: T.C.L., C.P. of C.
 Auto Workers' Industrial Union

Influence and standing in same:
 No position in Party but in good
 standing
 Organizer Auto Workers' Industrial
 Union

Intimate associates: Extremely friendly with Bruce,
 Buck, Stewart, ?, Sims, Rose and all
 leading lights of Party.

Ability and influence as Agitator: Minor.

Present locality of activities: Toronto, Oshawa and
 Windsor, chiefly amongst Auto
 Workers' Industrial Union in interests
 of C.P. of C.

General Remarks: Murphy first came to prominent
 attention during the Oshawa strike
 in April 1929. Later he interested
 himself in the formation of the auto
 Workers Industrial Union in Windsor,
 Oshawa and Toronto. He was again
 active in the Steel Workers' Strike at
 Hamilton and also took an active part
 in the Free Speech Demonstrations
 at Toronto.

List of Files in which
 this man appears: -



Murphy (centre) negotiated collective agreements on behalf of local 480 from 1944 to 1955.

Courtesy USW Local 480.

with him to “for Christ sake come down to earth.”¹¹⁸ Clearly, McEwen and Bruce were frustrated with Murphy’s methods, but they could not deny his success as an organizer of both unemployed workers and miners in the 1930s. As BC CPC leader Maurice Rush noted, Murphy was a “charismatic and successful organizer” who “played a major role in the working-class and people’s movements of B.C.”¹¹⁹ Still, Communist critics like Jack Scott considered him dictatorial and christened him “lord over all he surveyed.”¹²⁰

Bruce, twenty-four years Murphy’s senior when the poems were written, was born in 1881 in Seal River, Prince Edward Island, to Scottish parents. He quit school at Grade Five when he was fifteen years old destined to become a carpenter. His earliest encounters with trade union militancy came when he joined a bricklayers’ strike at the Dominion Steel Company in Sydney, Nova

118. Letter to Murphy from McEwen, 19 December 1929, quoted in the transcript of Murphy’s Defence of Canada Regulations interview cited earlier.

119. Maurice Rush, *We Have a Glowing Dream: Recollections of Working-Class and People’s Struggles in B.C., 1935–1995* (Vancouver: Centre for Socialist Education, 1996), 162.

120. Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 84. In the chapter “Working Out West: Harvey Murphy’s Fiefdom,” Scott describes several unpleasant experiences with Murphy in the 1940s when Murphy assigned him to Trail, BC, to “get the Party in shape.”

Scotia in 1898. In the early 1900s, he joined the radical Western Federation of Miners (WFM) in Butte, Montana, where he met the legendary WFM leader Big Bill Haywood.¹²¹ In 1910, he settled in Regina, Saskatchewan, joined the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, and became an organizer for the Socialist Party of Canada. While there, he may have been instrumental in the creation of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, according to some labour historians.¹²²

Jack MacDonald, the second leader of the Workers Party of Canada (WPC), was so impressed with Bruce when they met in Saskatchewan that in 1922 the WPC executive agreed that Bruce would move to Toronto and become editor of *The Worker*, the party's organ. Bruce, who became head of the CPC's third district, chaired the second convention of the WPC in February 1923. That year, he was active as an organizer in a bitter strike of miners and steelworkers in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, guided by the legendary J.B. McLachlan whom the party had recruited the year before. The prominent east coast union leader at District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) felt a "particular kinship for Bruce who he considered "a battler ... who stood well with the miners."¹²³ Bruce appears to have distinguished himself during the strike as "the most vehemently leftist" participant, calling non-CPC steelworkers "yellow curs."¹²⁴ While in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, he organized several meetings "notable for their bitterness and outspoken emphasis on force and violence." His "vitriolic" speeches led to his arrest for seditious conspiracy, but he was released for lack of evidence.¹²⁵

He was nominated to run in the 1923 provincial election, but lost as the Tories, under George Howard Ferguson, again won by a landslide. Still, Bruce garnered more votes than the CPC's other candidate, MacDonald.¹²⁶ (Murphy would not do nearly so well when he ran against William "Bible Bill" Aberhart

121. As with Murphy, the RCMP files on Bruce are voluminous and contain many candid observations about his personality and his actions. Otherwise, coverage of his historical role seems to be limited to Rodney's capsulation of his early life in the party, Allen Engler's too-brief obituary, "Malcolm Bruce, 1880–1967," *Workers Vanguard*, Mid-May 1967, Seivewright's "Malcolm Bruce" cited earlier, and a series of lectures in which Bruce provides snippets about who he was, reminisces of his party work, and possible reasons for writing the two poems.

122. James Warren and Jim William Warren, *On the Side of the People: A History of Labour in Saskatchewan*, (Regina: Coteau Books, 2005), 76.

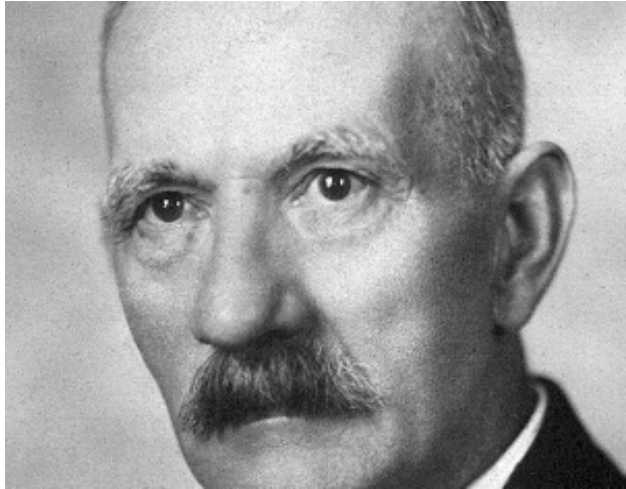
123. John Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922–1935," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 65–114, 71.

124. Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 75.

125. David Frank and Don MacGillivray, introduction to *Echoes From Labour's War: Industrial Cape Breton in the 1920s*, by Dawn Fraser (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976), 111.

126. Engler, "Malcolm Bruce," states that Bruce ran as a candidate for the Canadian Labour Party, which was started in 1917 by the TLC.

Nova Scotia
labour legend
J.B. McLachlan
considered Bruce a
"battler."
Unknown.



a dozen years later, losing badly to the future Alberta premier.)¹²⁷ Bruce displayed some early bravado when he criticized the Central Executive Committee at the WPC's third convention in 1924 for trying to create a united political front from above that failed to involve the rank and file below. The attack on party leadership lost him re-election to the executive. Nevertheless, he attended the Fifth Comintern in Moscow that year, travelling under the sobriquet F.J. Masson. Later in the 1920s, Bruce moved to California where he tried to organize carpenters in the Hollywood film industry, but he was eventually deported for his radical political activities. By 1927, he was in Vancouver.

By the late 1920s, he had earned a reputation as a "spellbinding orator" and proven himself a worthy party operative.¹²⁸ Secret police reports show that the authorities regarded him as "one of the principal Communists in Canada, and probably [he] is first in point of courage, energy and bitterness." A later police report described him as the

foremost agitator in Canada and most dreaded debater within the Party. Ruthless in his methods of holding the reins inside the Party, he has a cold hatred of the ruling class, which never abates for a single moment, in Moscow he was dubbed "Canada's Apostle of Hate." A Zealot, fanatic...¹²⁹

This dreaded debater, then, was at least Murphy's equal as a persuasive orator and a possible mentor for the younger comrade. One historian characterized

127. Knight, "Harvey Murphy," 70–71.

128. Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 76.

129. "Memorandum for the Honourable the Minister of Justice, 2 January 1931, Ottawa in "Malcolm Laughlin, Bruce," Record of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, RG 146, Volume 4673, 4674, File 94-A-00003, LAC.

Bruce as “a sharp-tongued, outspoken, bitter left-wing socialist”¹³⁰ who “often spoke out at labour gatherings” where he earned his reputation as a radical with his lengthy speeches about the need to oppose capitalism.¹³¹ Later in that decade he worked in the BC shipyards where he may have sustained a back injury in 1928. Police reported that he had been badly hurt after falling from a scaffold and was in “a precarious condition of health.”¹³² His bad health notwithstanding, by the time of his incarceration in Kingston, Bruce clearly had honed the colourful wit that he displayed in his Murphy poems and sharpened his ability to draw in “unwary hecklers to set them up for a rhetorical sucker punch and ritual pummelling.”¹³³



THAT THE POEMS BORROWED heavily on the style of 18th-century British Romantic poet Lord Byron (George Gordon) reveals Bruce as a more literary talent than his Grade Five education might suggest. He was a “self-taught proletarian intellectual” or autodidact who, like other leftist radicals, exhibited an “athletic enthusiasm for self-improvement through intellectual exercise provided them with their own personal model of social progress,” as historian Ian McKay explains.¹³⁴ He was widely read in the literary classics and displayed a self-learned understanding of literary style.¹³⁵ Though he does not explicitly copy Byron’s use of Spenserian stanzas in iambic pentameter, he does capture the necessary rhythm and rhyme. If we look first at the title of the long poem, we see that it plays on Byron’s title, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, “depicting a conceited, under-achieving candidate for greatness.” Byron wrote his poem in 1809 when the Napoleonic Wars were raging through Europe. It borrows on his observations during a two-year European voyage, telling the tale of a young British nobleman who “escapes his woes by embarking on a grand tour,” as Cambridge University’s John Gilroy notes. Gilroy argues that it is “a deeply personal work full of Byron’s ideas and opinions, full of mordant commentary on the political events of his time, and shadowed by his own publicly

130. Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 182.

131. Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 47.

132. “Memorandum for the Honourable the Minister of Justice,” LAC.

133. John Manley, “‘Audacity, audacity, still more audacity’: Tim Buck, the Party, and the People, 1932–1939,” *Labour/Le Travail* 49 (Spring 2002): 9–41, 21.

134. Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People’s Enlightenment in Canada, 1890–1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008), 67.

135. Many labour leaders and left intellectuals were self-taught. Few had the funds to attend college or university. US Trotskyist Jim Cannon was one example of the “working-class autodidactic.” See Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 45.

scandalous life.”¹³⁶ Although Byron insisted that the poem was not autobiographical, others argue that it was. Indeed, as one analyst noted, “Harold often vanishes entirely from the narrative to be replaced by Byron’s own narrative commentary.”¹³⁷

Bruce also attempted to borrow Byron’s structure and style in both his choice of title and his introduction. The word “Wilde” hints at a reckless man and police were in agreement with that assessment of Murphy.¹³⁸ A later police report on the WUL’s Needle Trade Workers’ Industrial Union in Montreal, is perhaps the most scathing in its denunciation of Wilde Harvey. Unsigned and undated, its author claims to be quoting WUL leader Tom McEwen:

Murphy had the reputation of being tough and hard-boiled, but it was all bluff and bluster. When he got a few drinks into him he either went on a ‘crying jag’ or else became nasty. At a recent drinking party in Toronto[,] Murphy had attempted to kiss [words redacted] wife [words redacted]. When she had resisted him he had bit her neck so hard that she had fainted for half an hour. The incident had created a scandal in Communist circles in Toronto. (It is evident that Murphy is not popular in C.P. leadership).¹³⁹

In the introduction, which varies considerably from the nine-line stanza Byron used, Bruce continues in a sarcastic strain adding a show of false modesty when he compares Murphy favourably to Lenin and Marx. Murphy’s alleged arrogance spills from these lines: “Now that my fame has uninvited spread/ Until my very name inspires dread/ In Bosses’ hearts, and my renown has grown/ Until o’er all the earth my feats are known.” While Byron invokes his muse in his introduction, Bruce uses it to note that “My innate modesty restrains my pen –/ I lay it down, I take it up again/ At last resolved to give posterity, The benefit of my activity.”

Byron uses only four cantos; Bruce includes seven. In Byron’s Canto I, he describes Child Harold’s character and his failings as well as detailing his family background. Bruce again follows the Romantic poet’s lead, writing that Murphy “sprang from lowly stock” and led a life of debauchery and dishonesty: “Time after time they chased me out of home/ And left me with the ‘Mission Stiffs’ to roam;/ And I was made an Ishmael many a time/ For drinking my

136. John Gilroy, course notes on “Byron: Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” Cambridge University Institute for Continuing Education, Cambridge, UK, 2012.

137. Analysis in “Lord Byron’s Poems,” GradeSaver Study Guides, <http://www.gradesaver.com/lord-byrons-poems/study-guide/character-list#childe-harold>.

138. According to police reports obtained by the author under Access to Information legislation, officers were chasing a wild man indeed. Apparently, the party, wishing to “make ‘Wild’ Harvey less wild[,] exiled him to the snowy wastes of the French metropolis,” according to J.W. Phillips, Acting Commissioner, “E” Division, Vancouver, 7 January 1935. A Calgary report suggests that “it is generally known that Murphy suffered from Syphilis,” according to H.N. Trickey, Detective Sergeant, “K” Division, Edmonton, 20 June 1934, RG 146, File A2009-00396, LAC.

139. Police report (unsigned and undated), 26 November 1934, obtained by the author under Access to Information legislation, RG 146, File A2009-00396, LAC.

old man's Yum Kipper wine." Canto II allows Byron to continue in an autobiographical vein, venting his frustration about the despoiling of Greek ruins, mourning the loss of his mother and three deceased friends, and denouncing one of his lovers. In Bruce's Canto II, Murphy, like Harold, travels to other lands in search of "a wider field," not Greece but the Canadian Prairies and the United States. He too travels in search of a love affair. Unfortunately, unrequited love is torn asunder when "the one I wanted most, who'd ne'er been kissed,/ Capitulated to a Trotskyist." Unlike Byron, here and throughout the other cantos, Bruce's sarcasm flows unrelentingly. Canto III continues the poetic travelogue based on the voyages of Harold/Byron. This time Byron guides the reader into central Europe and a discussion of the Battle of Waterloo, death on the battlefield, and his respect for Napoleon and French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Bruce takes Murphy back to Toronto where "in our faction's bosom core there nosed/ A Trotskyist wolf in Comintern attire." Interestingly, Bruce was clearly still an adherent of Stalinism at his point and Trotskyists were favoured targets for ridicule. He again returns to Murphy's search for a lover: "I hungered like the rest/ To coo and croon and cuddle with the best..../ To press a shiksa to my hairy chest." Canto IV of the Byron poem has Harold again bemoaning the destruction of earlier civilizations and pondering the eventual demise of great empires. Byron also uses the canto to salute nature, art, and pay homage to his heroes. In the remaining cantos of the Bruce poem, we follow the continuing travels of Murphy who now moves back to western Canada where he engages in much activity to enhance his position in the eyes of the party leadership. In the final canto, where we are nearing the probable date of the poem's writing, Murphy is sent to the Lenin Institute in Moscow. A training ground for young Stalinists, the school "was intended to create uniformity, commitment and efficiency, replicate the increasing conformity of the Russian party, filter deviancy and secure national allegiance to the politics of the Russian-dominated Comintern," according to one account of the experiences of British attendees.¹⁴⁰ On his return to Canada, said the poem, he was "worshipped by all miners as a God."

In furnishing a Murphy response to the longer poem, Bruce again mimics Bryon who's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* used heroic couplets to imitate Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* in a satiric attack on reviewers of Bryon's first book of poems, *Hours of Idleness* (1807). It has also been described as a critique of the Romanticism of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹⁴¹ Bruce's poem takes us to prison where the eight CPC leaders are incarcerated. Murphy calls out "this moron" (Bruce) as he "scribbles his buffooneries/ In house security as [Prime Minister R.B.] Bennett's guest." Bruce is

140. John McIlroy et al., "Forging the Faithful: The British at the International Lenin School," *Labour History Review* 68 (April 2003): 99–128, 100.

141. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," last modified 8 July 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/English-Bards-and-Scotch-Reviewers>.

further described as a “jailhouse poetaster with vile pen” who “apes the style of Goldsmith, Pope and even the great Keats.” Oddly Byron is not mentioned.



WHAT MOTIVATED BRUCE TO WRITE the poems from his federal prison cell and why do so with what could be read as vehement invective? It is true that Murphy made and would continue to make enemies inside and outside the party. In the future, some former comrades would come forward to Red bait him.¹⁴² He would become a target of anti-Communists inside the labour movement who were anxious to expose him as a Moscow dupe or use his proud public declaration of CPC membership as a way to discredit his value as a union leader. Murphy would earn further opprobrium for hectoring the labour establishment for failing to fight more vigorously to organize the unorganized, support Communist leaders, and assist the masses of unemployed workers.

It is equally true that Bruce was known for his “caustic wit and being absolutely fearless in his criticism of trade union bureaucracy” of which Murphy became a part.¹⁴³ Even so, what did Bruce hold against his young comrade in 1932? It is clear that he had been a keen observer of Murphy’s activities in both the CPC and the labour movement. So why would Bruce, the more experienced of the two men, write poems dripping with sarcasm about a rising young Communist star? What was to be gained from an apparent exposé of Murphy’s faults written by a major force in the Communist movement since the earliest days of the CPC? Or were the poems authored with a different intent? Murphy might have been a Bruce protégé at some point. Both men were dedicated Stalinists at the time. Murphy was said to have cut his political teeth at CPC Stalinist leader Tim Buck’s Toronto residence in the 1920s. Bruce was a founding member of the party and would become one of its national leaders. Both men were peripatetic rabble-rousers given to stepping outside party discipline if the situation demanded it. Both men liked alcohol and neither always handled it well perhaps explaining their tendency to verbally attack those with whom they disagreed.¹⁴⁴ Again, though, why would Murphy become the object of Bruce’s ire if ire is what it was?

142. John Hladun, “They Taught Me Treason,” *Maclean’s Magazine*, November 1948 and Patrick Sullivan, “Patrick Sullivan’s Inside Story of Communist Infiltration,” *Toronto Telegram*, 18 April 1955, both attacked Murphy as a dangerous Red.

143. Seivewright, “Malcolm Bruce,” 1.

144. Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 162, wrote that Bruce had an “inability to handle drink.” Murphy’s eldest son Rae testified to his father’s fondness for whiskey in a written response to questions submitted to him by the author, 1 November 2010.



WUL secretary James Litterick (left) with CPC leaders Tim Buck and Sam Carr. Unknown.

From one viewpoint, Bruce might have been kidding Murphy about his wild side. He might have intended to regale him for his exploits or roast him as a celebrated young Communist. Certainly, by the time the poems were written Murphy was in his mid-20s and had already lived up to his reputation as a “Wilde” youth in Toronto, joining downtown rallies, heckling speakers, and being arrested, as Lita-Rose Betcherman describes his early years. Later police reports speculate as to his wildness. A 1934 Calgary report, for example, suggests “it is generally known that Murphy suffered from Syphilis.” In 1935, a Vancouver report noted that “the party, wishing to “make ‘Wild’ Harvey less wild[,] exiled him to the snowy wastes of the French metropolis [Montreal].”¹⁴⁵ But Bruce’s critical Communist eye and serious nature seem to render this speculation less likely. After all, Communists could be bitter rivals as was demonstrated by the battles for leadership supremacy recalled in the poems.

145. H.N. Trickey, Detective Sergeant, “K” Division, Edmonton, 20 June 1934; and, J.W. Phillips, Acting Commissioner, “E” Division, Vancouver, 7 January 1935, RG 146, File A2009-00396, LAC.

Murphy, for example, was involved in the ultimate ouster of party leader Jack MacDonald who was replaced by Murphy's mentor Tim Buck. Locked up when he wrote the poems, Bruce might have felt compelled to express anger at his younger comrade's sometimes-reckless behaviour. He might have recalled how he and other top leaders berated Murphy after the 1929 National Steel Car strike, discussed in the long poem. They argued that his "'big stick' methods had produced a 'complete lack of confidence in the party leadership.'"¹⁴⁶ From that perspective, the poems were no joking matter, but a serious critique of Murphy, one of the Young Turks of the CPC.¹⁴⁷

The Crow's Nest Pass organizing battles in Alberta offer further evidence of the possible seriousness of the poetic critiques. Bruce and Murphy worked the same WUL territory during the early 1930s, with Bruce making several speaking tours as the senior CPC leader, but Murphy won the day in the Pass strike of 1932 and was named town solicitor when the mine workers elected Canada's first socialist municipal council in Blairmore.¹⁴⁸ As historian Ian Angus has noted the party leadership blamed Murphy's poor judgement during the strike, calling him "a right opportunist" who had perverted the party line. He added that

At the Workers Unity League congress that year, at which Stewart Smith, under the pseudonym of 'Burns' gave a major report in which 'fully a third ... dwelt on errors made during the Crowsnest Pass miners' strike'. Endicott speculates that Smith (who was CP general secretary while Buck was in prison) was 'reining in a growing admiration for the as yet insufficiently repentant Murphy.'

146. Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers," 117.

147. Historians today have a waning interest in the early years of the CPC covered by the Bruce poems, but notable among those who have pursued such studies are William Rodney, fully referenced in an earlier note; Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party of Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975); Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (1981; Montréal: Trafford, 2004); John Manley, "Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging? Communism, Labourism, and the Canadian Trade Unions, 1921–1928," *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (Spring 1998): 147–180; John Manley, "Communists Love Canada": The Communist Party of Canada, the 'People' and the Popular Front 1933–1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, 4 (Winter 2002): 59–86, and other articles; Tim Buck, *Thirty Years, 1922–1952: The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1952); Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto: Methuen Publications, 1988), Tom McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1974).

148. Kyle Randolph Franz, "Painting the Town Red: The Communist Administration at Blairmore, Alberta, 1933–1936," MA Thesis, University of Lethbridge, 2007, notes that regardless of the results of the strike, Bill Knight, an MWUC leader and a strike picket captain, became mayor of Blairmore and led his council to inaugurate numerous socialistic policies as Canada's first socialist municipal government. He was not defeated until 1936.



Bruce edited *The Worker* in the early 1920s and at the end of the decade.

Angus concluded, “it could explain the poems – Bruce was demonstratively promoting the orthodox view, siding with [Stewart] Smith et al against Murphy. If so, it wasn’t a Stalinist-Trotskyist issue, but a division among Stalinists.”¹⁴⁹

Endicott elaborates on the CPC leadership’s condemnation of Murphy’s actions during the 1932 strike, noting that they labelled him “a bureaucrat – in effect a dictator – and a factionalist.”¹⁵⁰ Seager argues that it was ideological differences within a diverse ethnic community, not Murphy’s leadership, which upended the strike. However, Murphy left himself open to party criticism when he convinced the so-called “radical foreigners” to accept a contract that offered the same wages as were agreed in 1930.¹⁵¹ Murphy acknowledged some errors, but he argued that the strike was “no mean achievement” and that it had advanced the larger WUL goals of inspiring local resistance to capitalist exploitation.¹⁵² Bruce, “not a personal admirer of Murphy,” faintly praised him for his work with the WUL in Alberta during the strike.¹⁵³ However, in a

149. Ian Angus, email correspondence with the author, 21 May 2013.

150. Endicott, *Raising the Workers’ Flag*, 122.

151. Seager, “A History of the Mine Workers’ Union of Canada,” 135–136.

152. Endicott, *Raising the Workers’ Flag*, 123.

153. Endicott, *Raising the Workers’ Flag*, 51.

separate discussion with the author, Endicott noted that “Murphy’s ways made him a prime subject for a poet.”¹⁵⁴

During that period, both men were prolific labour journalists and served as editors, Bruce on his second turn at the helm of the CPC’s *Worker* and Murphy as founding editor of the MWUC’s *Western Miner*.¹⁵⁵ Both are mentioned in the poems. Could there have been editorial rivalry between the two? It would seem doubtful, but we are discussing men with large egos, potent pens, and driven personalities. Still, perhaps Bruce, with his vast experience as a labour organizer and party member, saw Murphy as an upstart who needed criticism. Perhaps he was jealous about the younger man’s organizing successes. Murphy had been arrested several times and jailed on occasion as a Red agitator while protesting for better industrial working conditions or the plight of the unemployed. These jail sentences won him recognition as a workers’ friend as occurred when he served a short jail term for his work with the MWUC in Alberta.

As mentioned at the outset, the simple answer might be that the poems were a way to pass the prison time by sharing a laugh about the sometimes-wild exploits of Comrade Murphy. But long-time CPC observers suggest that the “often poisonous atmosphere within the CPC” did not always lend itself to such antics. With Stalin tightening his grip on the Comintern as the Great Terror began, and the Buck Stalinists continuing to follow orders from Moscow, light-hearted gestures were probably not recommended. Other scholars speculate that the poems may have been an exercise in self-criticism on Bruce’s part or a self-confession about his complicit role in ushering the CPC into the Comintern’s Third Period emerging from the poor results of the early United Front policy. Historian John Manley explains that CPC leaders were at loggerheads over the decision to follow the “new line” and remove the party from involvement with the reformist “social fascists” in the CCL and the TLC. Both Bruce and Murphy were strong supporters of the hard line advised by A.S. Lozovsky, head of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), but it was “a leap into uncharted territory with only the barest survival kit.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, in taking this left turn there was fear that the decision to go it alone would further alienate the CPC from the labour movement bureaucracy.

Murphy’s daughter Maryann Hiebert (nee Murphy) added more mystery as to the reasons Bruce wrote the poems. She did not remember the details of the

154. Endicott, email correspondence with the author, 24 May 2013.

155. Memo, CSIS, 2 January 1931, RG 146, Volume 4673, 4674, File 94-A-00003, LAC, notes that Bruce edited the *Worker* “in such a scurrilous manner that he had to be replaced.” Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 155, notes that in mid-1929, Bruce was reappointed editor of the CPC paper. Murphy wrote for the *Worker* and went on to edit the *BC District Union News* and the *Mine-Mill Herald*, both IUMMSW papers.

156. John Manley, “Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression: The Workers’ Unity League, 1930–1936,” PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1984, 86.

eventual disintegration of the Bruce-Murphy friendship, possibly after the two men lived together during their time in the burgeoning Vancouver shipbuilding industry during the Second World War.¹⁵⁷ But she recalled in an interview that her mother, Isobel, whom Murphy married in 1934, “was angry about the rupture with Malcolm Bruce and reminded Harvey of his treatment of their good and close friend with some bitterness when he was in turn shunned by the party.”¹⁵⁸ It was a sad and angry remembrance of how the Stalinist CPC treated its dissidents, but it would have had no influence on Bruce at that time, and, therefore, could not have been a reason for the caustic tone of the poems.

Perhaps Bruce himself supplied some of the answer to why he wrote the poems in a series of four lectures on the history of the CPC that he delivered in Vancouver in 1960. Murphy does not get mentioned as being among the bright lights of the early days. However, by the third lecture Bruce does discuss Murphy’s 1931 stint at the Lenin Institute where young leaders were “thoroughly indoctrinated.”¹⁵⁹ He noted that “those men who came back from the Lenin school took over in almost every district in Canada and acted in a very bureaucratic manner.”¹⁶⁰ In the last lecture Bruce talks of betrayal. “I never saw so many drop away under pressure of capitalist attacks and capitalist environment as I saw – and I do not refer to the rank and file now but prominent leaders – ruined and made into renegades, revisionists and class-collaborators as was done by Stalinism.”¹⁶¹ The period covered by the poems saw Murphy rising as one of those union and party bureaucrats.

As the 1930s ground on, Murphy continued to earn respect among the unemployed of the Great Depression as well as miners and smelter workers in BC and Alberta and he was a welcome speaker on picket lines and at rallies in support of relief camp workers. In the years after the poems were written, he assisted with major labour disputes at BC company towns like Anyox (1933) and Corbin (1935) where police collaborated with employers to break the strikes. At one point, police spies quoted him as claiming that he had participated in 500 strikes. He would use his early experience, working with leaders like Bruce, to eventually become the western regional director of the IUMMSW where he would continue to practice some of the shrewd and inventive methods alluded to in the poems. Much later he would mark many successes as a union negotiator and organizer of significant cultural events, including

157. Knight, “Harvey Murphy,” 93, quotes Murphy saying “Malcolm had his differences with the Communist Party, but I didn’t go into that too much” while he was living at Bruce’s Wall Street address near the Princeton Hotel.

158. Maryann Hiebert, email correspondence with the author, 27 May 2013.

159. Malcolm Bruce, Class III lecture notes, Vancouver, 1960, 64, author’s copy.

160. Bruce, Class III lecture notes, 66.

161. Bruce, Class III lecture notes, 89.



Murphy orchestrated the famed Paul Robeson concerts at the Peach Arch near Blaine, WA.

Courtesy USW Local 480.

the famed Paul Robeson concerts at the Peace Arch at Blaine, Washington, and his promotion of the blacklisted film *Salt of the Earth* in the early 1950s.¹⁶²

Bruce, like Murphy, remained an outspoken political force on the left during the Depression decade. His Communist past would follow him and police interest in Red Malcolm would increase. Over the course of Bruce's three-year prison term (originally a five-year sentence), poetry had become an increasingly important and potent form of proletarian literature. But the classical Romantic style that Bruce used was fully out of vogue by then and poets of the 1930s were turning to modernism as a way to make their verses serve as left-wing political tools. They passionately demanded that readers move to the barricades to do battle for social change at home or take up arms to support the cause of Spain's Republican government against Francisco Franco's fascists.

162. For full accounts of these events, see Ron Verzuh, "Mine-Mill's Peace Arch Concerts: How a 'Red' Union and a Famous Singer-Activist Fought for Peace and Social Justice during the Cold War," *BC Studies* 174 (Summer 2012): 61–99; and Ron Verzuh, "Remembering Salt: How a Blacklisted Hollywood Movie Brought the Spectre of McCarthyism to a Small Canadian Town," *Labour/Le Travail* 76 (Fall 2015): 165–198.

By the time Bruce was released from prison, the left political terrain was changing as well and he and Murphy, along with other radicals, would be challenged to reassert their loyalty to the CPC in the wake of the founding of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1932. It was a time to choose sides on the left, a time to make an ideological commitment either to fight capitalism or to join the “social fascists” of the socialist party. Both men chose to oppose the CCF for a time, but eventually came to support some of its policies and candidates in spite of CPC leadership dictates. The two political parties would soon be at war over which one would capture the allegiance and the votes of the working class, but the big ideological battles were still in the future when Bruce sat down at his writing table at the Kingston Penitentiary.¹⁶³

Several people assisted me in researching and writing this article. My thanks and appreciation to historians Allen Seager, David Frank, Stephen Endicott, and Ian Angus, to Rae Murphy, the late son of Harvey Murphy, and Maryann Hiebert, Murphy's daughter. Thanks also to Al Engler, Leola Jewett-Verzuh, L/LT editors Bryan Palmer and Greg Kealey, and the anonymous peer readers.

163. Bruce died in 1967, Murphy ten years later. Bruce had long abandoned the CPC for the Trotskyist movement. Murphy also resigned from the CPC in the mid-1950s on advice that it would be better for the IUMMSW to re-enter the House of Labour. Police spy reports suggest that he continued to meet his Toronto CPC club until near his death, RG 146, File A2010-00052, LAC.