

May Martin interviewed by Sara Diamond.

Accession No. 3603. Tape 1, Track 1.

S. Diamond: Could you give me your name and when you came to Canada?

M. Martin: Well, I'm May Martin; my name is May Martin, and I was born Mary Pearse...does it register?... umm, in South Africa near Capetown, and we came, we came back to Canada oh, when I was not quite a year old. And I lived in the Maritimes until, uh, until late in the twenties. Umm, now let's see...

S. Diamond: When did you start to work?

M. Martin: Well ...

S. Diamond: And why did you look for it?

M. Martin: Well!...ha, ha, ha, it was a matter of a large family, and I was the oldest, oldest of ten. When I was 16 I felt it necessary to get out and help support myself and, well, mostly support myself.

S. Diamond: Had you been going to school...then?

M. Martin: Yes, and I'd left school at the end of grade nine. I had spent that year with my grandmother in Truro, Nova Scotia, and went to the Academy there. I was sorry to leave school because I was very interested in learning and in the back of my mind when I went to work the idea was that I would get to the point where I could go back to school again and go on to higher training, education. I wanted to get into physics eventually ...and later on I decided to go in for training as a nurse and use that as a stepping stone to get on. However that never happened; in the meantime I met my first husband, but, but...I worked mostly as

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a...well, first in a store, in a grocery store, and then I went into hotel work -- waitress^{ed} at first, mostly...

S. Diamond: Was this before the depression?

M. Martin: This was in the twenties, getting on in the late twenties...now wait a minute...no, the waitress work was in the thirties because it was at the end, it was in 'twenty-eight that I went to the States first. And this was as I told you: that I entered illegally in the sense that I couldn't get my visa or had to wait two years for a visa from South Africa, but in the meantime I went in on a permit, from six months extended to a year, and then I came home and back again, and when I went to have it extended for another six months -- we're getting into 1930 then -- they didn't want any unnecessary people in the country; jobs were getting fewer so...so, it was rather interesting when I had to come back I received these forms to be filled out and sworn to before a notary of the public and, of course, in that it came out that I was working, so I had 24 hours notice to leave the country or, as they put it, be liable to possible arrest and deportation. I was in Naugatug, Watterbury, near Connēcticut and I had to get an early morning train. My friend went to the train with me, and I stood on the station and watched one of the first of the electric trains. I just watched it come in early in the morning; it was loaded with workers and it was interesting, and then when I went to the station master after it had gone out, he said, "Well, that's your train; ^{it} just went out." That was a train? Well, anyway... to cut a long story short, I got a taxi to take me to -- I can't think of the name of the town now -- where I had to make

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connections with the train from New York, to get back to Boston. He charged me \$ 15 and I thought it was reasonable enough, even for then; he could have charged me 25, he could have asked anything. I had to get that train. As we came, went over a mountain, went down, we had to go over this -- I don't remember the name of the mountain now, but I was very...I was sitting on pins and needles in the back of the car because he was going so slowly. It was an hours run by train and we had about that much time by the time I got --the, wherever, had less thanthe hour actually -- by the time I got the taxi. When we got to the bottom here was what was then a huge transport turned over in the field and merchandise all over the place. He turned around and he said, "Well, that guy came down the mountain too fast." I thought, well, even if I don't make the train I'm alive! We got into the city -- I still can't think of the name -- with ten minutes to spare. Got a train, got into Boston. As we were told, the boat would leave Boston at one o'clock and this train would get me in Boston before one o'clock. As I left the train in Boston I bumped into a girlfriend I'd gone to school with, from home, returning back to, so we got onto the shipping office. As we're about to board the boat we're asked our names -- she had to spell her name, and mine was simple, Mary Pearse. But I really got the once-over. They had my documents there; they were watching for me, making sure that I would get that boat. And incidentally, this was when I found out that they were on the summer schedule already and the boat didn't leave until five o'clock, and I didn't need to have that taxi. Then -- this was in March -- and I decided -- it was then that I had the idea of

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taking training for a nurse and to use that as a stepping stone to get on into further studies; I wanted to get into research chemistry, that was what I really wanted to get into. And I had gone to nightschool while I was in Waterbury, and taken chemistry; I had covered a year and a half at night school there. Because I had -- well, that's what I wanted to do. However... So, when I went back to speak to the principal at the school -- he had known me -- he had been there just that -- incidentally, this is six years less a few months from the time I had left school. B.C. Silver was the principal the last year I was there, and he was a very progressive person for those days. He had lots of things going on in that school that now are taken for granted in schools. He had the first orchestra, school orchestra, and it broadcast over ^{the} radio station from Halifax, and sports, and all the things that we now take for granted in the schools. And another thing they had there, they used to have at Christmastime, a concert. The three high school ^{grades} ~~would~~ ^{compete,} more or less plagiarize, I suppose, but more or less create our own show. I can show you a picture and that, it's just 50 years old, and of our group winning that year, the high school trophy -- I've forgotten what it was. We had quite a lot of good singers in our group so we had an operetta. What he had suggested -- I had thought I would review grade nine in those couple of months -- three months and then the next year take grade 10 which was sufficient in those days for entry into the hospital. He was aware of my record and he suggested that if I dropped the languages I could take the other subjects, major subjects, while they reviewed for the grade 10 and then be able to complete high

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school the following year and in the period, which is what I did. That was one of the most interesting times of my life, was to go back to school like that and six years after I was...

S. Diamond: Were you older than most of the kids there?

M. Martin: Well, I would be, you see, six and seven years older than...and many of them were younger brothers or sisters of those with whom I had gone to school. So I found that very interesting and I worked -- I could help them with some things that, for instance, chemistry and other things that bothered me a bit, they would help me. I was rather happy and proud, I think, when they nominated me valedictorian of the class when we graduated. This was in Wolfville, Nova Scotia in the university town, Acadia University. And this was another thing, B.C. Silver had arranged that we had the use of many of the facilities at the university, including the use of their auditorium for our graduation exercises. I worked the summer between and ^{then} after I graduated I went to work. This was when I went into the hotel work. I went to a summer hotel where I would do very well in tips. In the wintertime I went to Halifax and worked in a restaurant or a hotel there. This was where the hours we worked: seven days a week. We worked any hour they wanted us to work. Split up any way they wanted it. And if they only needed us a couple of hours, which sometimes happened, well that was it. But in the hotel mostly your hours were--you put your full hours in. And we made enough to get by on. It was the summer job that sort of kept going, and after the summer job I could go home for a couple of weeks and have a little time off. But I didn't seem to be getting any nearer my objective. I did

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put my name into the VG hospital in Halifax and I was accepted and I was waiting for the call. And then at the last hotel I worked in Kentville, Nova Scotia, I met my...the chap who became my husband. And we went down to Halifax but after summer was over; it didn't work out there so I took the train for Montreal and he hitchhiked. This was what, 'thirty-two? Something like that, thirty-two, thirty-three.

S. Diamond: So you decided not to go?

M. Martin: Decided not to go to school...And in Montreal I remember through the thirties and into the beginning of the war years when family men worked for twenty and twentyfive cents an hour. And we were getting, in a restaurant I worked in we were getting big money when we got twenty cents an hour and twentyfive cents off for any meals we had and again this was where...we did have a day off there in Montreal -- when it suited them. We could be called in, of course. But, anyway.

S. Diamond: The restaurant work^{was} completely unorganized?

M. Martin: Completely unorganized! I hadn't come in contact with, or knowingly, with the organization. I know, I realize afterwards that I had met people who were in the, what was it, the big activity there at that time in the trade union and particularly affecting women was in the needle trades. I didn't quite understand it but of course you, the, subject to the way things are reported then in the papers we were beginning to get radio then too. But I left Montreal -- of course I'm leaving out various -- I'd been back down to Nova Scotia in the meantime and then up to Montreal again and then when we came back we came on to Toronto.

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S. Diamond: This was still during the depression?

M. Martin: That's still during the Depression. And I still didn't come in contact with the trade union movement there. I was a little more aware of it because they were organized in the beer parlors... No, that must have been Montreal I came in contact with that because in Toronto at that time they had no beer parlors.

S. Diamond: Prohibition ^{was} in effect?

M. Martin: They had prohibition in Toronto. It was a matter of choice; a city could vote, it used to be called Toronto the Good. (Laughs.) Not that a drink of beer wasn't available, ha, ha, ha! But... And it seems a little strange after Montreal because at that time Montreal was comparatively wide open, beer parlors, and you could buy a bottle of beer at a corner store.

S. Diamond: Did you work in mostly an English speaking milieu in Montreal?

M. Martin: Yes, yes.. And here just a little something has always bothered me in a sense that we were taught...when...I had one year of French the year I was in grade nine, and the class was divided in two. It was a man and wife who taught French. Well in one they spoke French, in the other class...I was in the class they didn't speak French. we learned to write it and so on...which was a pity. But the thing I regret is that it was drummed into our heads that what we were learning was Parisian French and that what they spoke in Montreal and in Quebec -- I forget what they called it -- but it wasn't supposed to be French. It was a pity because what it did, it made me -- I was in Montreal for about three or four years, three years anyway -- and I would not learn to speak French there. I had

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every opportunity because I worked in, ^{the}predominantly English speaking area. Still there were French people and I liked the people very, very much. But I wouldn't learn to speak it. And it wasn't till many years later that I realized and was very, very sorry...I can read a bit of French but it would have been so much better had I learned to speak it, as they speak it. But...

S. Diamond: Then you went to Toronto.

M. Martin: Then Toronto. I rather liked it there. Then my husband and I were going to go to the States and we couldn't get across the line. They wouldn't let us through.

S. Diamond: Why was that?

M. Martin: Um...we didn't have a visa, ^{we}couldn't get it and I guess they -- oh, we decided to go across independently, separately, so we wouldn't be tied together and we were just going to visit. But I believe they had somebody on the bus. Anyway, they tied us together and I can remember them putting us in a room, having spoken to us separately, and then they put us in a room and left us there for awhile, and Ted started to say something -- this was Ted Ansell -- and I would tell him "sshhh, the place might"-- we would say bugged today, but ha, ha, ha...cause I was going to fight it right to the last. Finally I -- they had some kind of a court they held there and asked us questions and I tried to stick it out, I wanted to get across -- finally I laughed at them. And we were barred from entering the States for a year.

S. Diamond: Was it because of the previous experience?

M. Martin: No, no, this was just the general -- they didn't want people in the country. Still in the thirties, you see, and the

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job situation is bad, and they just didn't want any extra people there in their labour force.

S. Diamond: Did your husband work?

M. Martin: Yes, he worked in the restaurant, in the hotels rather too.

S. Diamond: Was he a bartender?

M. Martin: He worked...no he wasn't a bartender, but he worked in some...he worked in a club in Montreal. That's a long time ago and I don't quite remember what was ^{it} all about.

S. Diamond: Did he feel alright about you working?

M. Martin: Oh yes, yes. Well I mean it was a matter of necessity in those days. Either you stuck at home with nothing or -- I guess I was a bit...I wasn't content to do that, anyway, and I had I suppose I was...what's the word I want -- progressive? -- not exactly but -- a little bit ahead of my time and independent as all get out!

S. Diamond: What kind of attitudes were there in the thirties towards women working, generally, like did you ever run into stuff where people would say women shouldn't work cause they're taking jobs from men?

M. Martin: You did to some extent, but there weren't that many women working, except in certain -- like in the needle crafts, in restaurants and hotels. It was still limited, jobs for women, definitely. And there was always a man superior to you, like the head waiter or...if there was a hostess under him she was just no more than you were. And I can remember quitting, when I quit a job in...we stayed in Windsor cause that was where we had tried

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to cross the line. We stayed there and I got a job at a hotel there. This was something -- it was easy, there were more jobs it seemed for women in those days, or easier for a woman to get a job in ^{these} certain trades, I mean, whereas at another time they might have waiters. At that time they would take a woman because they paid her less. She might be doing the same work as a man beside her or a man had done, but they paid her less. So we stayed in Windsor for a couple of years and just at -- I'm trying to think -- the war broke out while we were in Windsor and that would be what, 'thirty-nine? And whether it was -- no I think we stayed there until forty-one. Something like that. And we decided to come out to the coast because Ted had originally been out here and told me all about it and so ^{its} fine, and adventuresome, I want^{ed} to come out and see it too. And we had an old Model A I think it was a Pickup truck. We started out with that and I've forgotten how much money we had, whether it was something like 60 dollars, which was a tremendous amount and to come across Canada, come to the coast ...we'd got to Calgary in the meantime, of course, we had some trouble. Something, we'd had the car checked before we left Windsor, but...no incidentally, we were back in Toronto then, I'd forgotten we'd been to shifting around there, I won't go into, but we'd left from Toronto actually. Oh, that was it, we had gone down after the war started we'd gone back down to Nova Scotia and we didn't like it there, oh, Halifax was being the port of ^{entry and} exit and so on. We didn't like it there at all. And so we came back up to Toronto. And it was from Toronto we came out here. Well, we'd had the car checked over and they put something in backwards, --I've forgotten what it was now, ~~x~~ which gave us some trouble and took most of our

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money on the way. Now by the time we got to Calgary we had I think something like fifty-five cents in our pocket and the car. But at this time that type of car was very much in demand on the prairies and we sold it, actually, for more than we paid for it. We'd paid sixty-five or something like that for it and we sold it for a hundred. And then we thumbed our way the rest of the way to Vancouver. Landed here in a downpour. "And this is Vancouver?" However. Then the thing was to look for work. Of course now we're getting on into the war years and there's more jobs for everybody. And I went to work in the, uh, a restaurant. And the first restaurant I didn't like it because there were too many bosses and I quit and went to another restaurant. I can't remember the name of it now. It was down near Hastings, just above Hastings. Anyway, when I applied for the job, this struck me a little bit funny the way he asked me my credentials and so on and what I had done, which was fine -- I qualified for the job -- then he said...and we bargained on and on how much I would get, I've forgotten how much that was now, but not much more than we got paid in the east, that's for sure. But, he said, "Now if you keep your eyes open and your mouth shut I'm sure we'll get along fine." And I thought...what? is all this about? "I worked there a few weeks and there seemed to be a lot of discord and discontent and afterwards I realized that he fermented a lot of this, that he deliberately, to make most of the women, make them quit. And finally, when -- then I realized that these girls belonged to the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. And he was a new employer, he'd just bought the business and he wanted to get the union out of there. And this was what was

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behind what he'd said to me and why he tried to get those girls out. Well, when I realized what was going on...I'd talked to the cashier with whom I'd become rather friendly and told her that -- I mean I knew very little about trade unionism but I certainly didn't agree with what was going on there and I didn't like what he was doing and he could take his job and stick it. "Well," she said, "I'll go with you." So we quit and I went right from there -- I found out where the union hall was -- I went up to the union hall. Barbara Stewart was -- I've forgotten whether she was actually business agent...I think she was. Seems to me there was a man there too. Anyway, oh yes, Barbara Stewart was on the executive. There was a man who was business agent. I can't remember his name. And I told him, I said "I want a job in a union house and you get me a job in a union house. I want to join the union." I explained what had happened and I couldn't understand, and as time went on I realized that they had been remiss, that the union had been remiss in letting this happen there.

S. Diamond: Instead of signing everybody up?

M. Martin: Yes, yes, yes, and they should have put a picket on the place rather than...of course I didn't at that time, however ...that was the beginning of my work in the hotel and restaurant union. Till about forty-four I went north to the Yukon to Whitehorse to work...

S. Diamond: Nineteen forty-one, after around say, forty-one or forty-two to forty-four or, did you go for two years to the Yukon?

M. Martin: No, I'd only gone one winter, actually. So, it must have been about forty-two. ^{Tape I. Side 2.} I'm not quite sure of the years then,

but I went up there and I organized the first restaurant workers that were organized in the Yukon, in Whitehorse. I don't know how they...oh yes, the organization went on after that, but...

S. Diamond: How had you become pro union, in terms of the kind of attitudes that you brought into that kind of situation? You must have had some level of...at least ^{interest} been open to trade unionism, or was it watching the employer abuse...

M. Martin: Well, this was just the final...and having worked under the different conditions across Canada, and being an independent person not wanting to be shoved around -- I didn't like to see anyone else shoved around either. And then as I look back I realized that most of what I had seen that was good in the labour movement was there because of the organization. I didn't blame the union per se for what this man did, I blamed individuals in the union for not stopping him from doing that. After being up in the Yukon just for a long winter I came back down again and --I'm still a member of the union -- and then the next elections, I was elected business agent. Now this was in the...still around forty-four, or forty-five possibly. And of course we proceeded to ...Emily Watts...have you come across her name?

S. Diamond: Yeah, I just got a letter from her today.

M. Martin: Oh, did you!

S. Diamond: I'll let you read it.

M. Martin: Oh, I would be delighted. I was going to give you her address if you hadn't contact. She was president and we hired a another, a young fellow as organizer. We worked in conjunction with the beer parlor union, I've forgotten what they called them then,

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but now, as you know, it's amalgamated into one large union. I was in favor of the industrial type of organization rather than the individual trades. Of course at that time it was the, what was it, the...

S. Diamond: The A.F. of L., the Trades and Labour Congress?

M. Martin: We belonged to the Trades and Labour Council here and the Congress, but what was it the A.F. of L.? We were A.F. of L., which was mostly organized in, according to trades. I believe there's a great many changes now. So we not only had to sometimes fight the employer, but we often had to fight the hierarchy of the union across the line -- the headquarters was across the line. During that last year of the war and just following, during that period we organized...we negotiated and had signed what was then recognized as the best agreement, hotel and restaurant workers agreement in Canada. We had gotten it signed by a majority of the restaurant employers and we were in the process of organizing in the hotels.

S. Diamond: In organizing the entire hotels?.... or mostly the beer parlors?

M. Martin: No, now the beer parlors, you remember, they're organized under the, what do you call them?

S. Diamond: The Beverage Dispensers.

M. Martin: Beverage Dispensers Union, yes. But then they gave us a great deal of help too. In nineteen-forty...the war ended in nineteen forty-five, didn't it? And in nineteen forty-six, quite early in the year, late in the spring, actually, we had the first international convention at Milwaukee. There hadn't been one held

during the war. None of the trade unions held international conventions during the war. And ours was one of the first. Things happened there that weren't completely understood even by the trade union movement. Because it was like in our union the first... there during the war, workers were, workers had it not too badly, not too bad because, they were needed. But once the war was over they didn't need all these workers and there were all these men, and some women, who returned from the forces looking for jobs, so the employers could have it their own way again, and they wanted to tear down some of the things -- many of the things -- that we had won during the war years. For instance, one of the things we accomplished in the Hotel and Restaurant Workers was a new and better minimum wage for women, and hours of work regulation, so that if a -- and I don't know whether this is still important or not, but it was -- if a girl couldn't work after I've forgotten whether it was 12 or one, and be let out from work after 12 or one, which ever it was, without means of transportation home. She could work all night until sometime in the morning, but she couldn't be let out in those wee hours through the night onto the streets. There had been a girl attacked and killed at that time and we used that to...anyway, we had this legislation.

S. Diamond: Can I just go back and ask some questions from you?

M. Martin: Ummm hmmm.

S. Diamond: When you established a minimum wage for women was that in the entire industry and was that because of the union organization that the government was forced to do that?

M. Martin: Yes.

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S. Diamond: Was that done through the Minimum Wage Board?

M. Martin: I have just forgotten the mechanics of it now, just how it all worked, and we didn't do it completely by ourselves, we spearheaded the movement and there were other women in the other unions, like from the fishermen's union for instance, a lot of women there. So that we had the support of the trades in every labour council and so on.

S. Diamond: In establishing a new minimum wage for all females.

M. Martin: Yes.

S. Diamond: Could you describe your ^{experience} organizing the Yukon? Could you like tell that story of what it was like?

M. Martin: It's a little bit hazy in my mind. I remember more some of the conditions of living up there and for instance, when I went up there we were fortunate in that we had a house to go to live in. We went to work in a laundry and the house had belonged to the man who owned the laundry and they had moved somewhere else and so he let the women who worked in the laundry live in that house. Otherwise, we saw some places where there were about six by ten or ten by ten what would you call, cabins I guess, and some were a little bit larger and sometimes with one, two in them. Remember this is the Yukon but they had very little in the way of heat. And the hours of course they were much like it had been in the east was that they worked any hours the employer wanted. Mainly we worked...the wages were good because this is the Yukon and the wages were much higher than anywhere else. And of course ^{correspondingly} the cost of living was much higher. As I say, like the hours of work, the conditions of living we were mostly concerned in. The pity of it

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was that I didn't stay long enough to carry on the work. However it was carried on by others and...

S. Diamond: So did you like go in there and sign people up?

M. Martin: Yes, yes, oh yes.

S. Diamond: And was there any legislation at that time that was a legal certification^{process}?

M. Martin: No, no.

S. Diamond: What would you do once people were signed up, just bargain with the employer?

M. Martin: That's right. It was much the same here as far as that goes. A lot of the trade union movement as a whole has been responsible for much legislation that has been put on the books to help the workers. And of course at times of depression and times like we're coming into now, the employers try to break it down again, take these things away from the workers...^a gainthey want to get the workers in their control. It's...this I had recognized many years before that it was the worker against the employer and it was when I got to Vancouver that I realized you had a much better chance standing side by side with other workers than you had fighting on your own.

S. Diamond: But you had earlier come to some class consciousness...

M. Martin: Yes, my experience working under different conditions had made me so. And I came from a working class family...

S. Diamond: Did you come from a family that was pro-union?

M. Martin: Oh no, no. At least he was a liberal, he...my dad I'm speaking of, he was a saddler, harness maker. I guess we get our independence going back a bit: my grandmother who came over...I'm
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if it was she or her parents, her people anyway, came over on the Hector, Boat Hector from Scotland and they was from the Highlands of Scotland and the Hector -- this was the first boat that brought Scotch settlers to Nova Scotia. My grandmother, while she was alive, attended the hundredth centenary of the arrival of that boat in Picto. My grandmother lived 'till she was 97. Worked in her garden right up to the year before she died. Anyway, that's just a little sidelight.

S. Diamond: Okay, I was also going to ask...you said earlier that you were in favor of industrial organization rather than trades. Where did you, how did you learn that or decide that?

M. Martin: Here mostly, ^{be} cause we were organized according to trade and I could see that we would have a much better chance for instance in a hotel if the chambermaids and so on, you know, everybody working in the hotel were all in the union with us. In fact, if I'm not mistaken I think we did make an attempt to organize the chambermaids along with the other workers in the hotels. We had to do it somewhat on the sly: meet them as they came out, away from the hotel and this sort of thing. Unfortunately, we didn't complete the work at that time because of what happened subsequent to the convention and which put the organization of the hotel workers back some time in B.C., because the, in our international the bartenders union were in the same international as we were and we were sometime before the end of the war the ^{of the union} president had died and the ^{first} vice-president was acting president up to a few months before the convention...at which time the executive appointed him president pro tem just to go into the convention. As I could see it was

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that being in office he would have a better chance of being re-elected and of course they represented reaction in unions and remember that behind this union was the racketeers. I don't mean that they supported the union, but go back into history and think of rum-running and this was the liquor; all this was in...represented this union and the racketeers are making their first big bid to control labour because they need to control labour to control -- I'm lost for words there -- the money, this was where the big money as far as racketeers were concerned, this was where the big money was -- connected with liquor. So that the first onslaught against labour following the war was against us. And the vice-president -- we had a Canadian vice-president -- and he went along with the "ins" shall we say. He toured Canada, came to every trade union, both in the bartenders and the restaurants, restaurant workers where we were organized. Wherever there would be delegates going to Milwaukee. To import us, to impress on us that we must support the present officers. Now we knew of a...that there was quite a progressive group centered in, around San Francisco and the west coast who were endeavouring to oust this group from office. Things happened before the convention and the man who was going to run ~~against Ernst~~ ^{"in"} was the man at the time...he had been ambushed on his way from somewhere. He was going home and it just happened that his wife was driving the car and she was killed and he was badly -- this was about two weeks before the convention -- he was badly injured so that he was in hospital. Now I'll get to the convention. That wasn't the only instance of gunfire. It was getting really - they meant business.

S. Diamond: You were dealing with the Syndicate.

M. Martin: Absolutely, we're dealing with the Syndicate. Now, Emily Watts and I went as delegates from here and there was...I've forgotten her name, from Victoria. We had taken it up in our unions, had told them what Johnson, who was our Canadian vice-president, had wanted us to do; we explained the situation as we saw it; we asked them what -- you know. They told us to go down there and follow -- you know -- go with the opposition to the "ins". When we got to Milwaukee, we gathered first not in the hall where we were going to carry on -- I don't know whether the hall we were going to use wasn't quite ready but whatever it was...we were...also, we knew that there would be guns at that convention. As it turned out there were probably something like thirteen-fourteen hundred delegates there and there were probably close to two hundred...well, gunmen and what-have-you. We knew that if we won the vote, that somebody was going to pay for it. We were ready to, in the hall, I mean, to drop to the floor, to avoid gunfire if it came, if it could come to that. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of it a little bit. This first meeting, we are in this hall and we were sitting at individual seats and there seemed to be an awful buzzing going on and I looked around and there were people all over the hall sort of going along, crouching down and talking to the delegates. And then this fellow came along^{and started}^-- and I know now. McDonough was the name of the man we were supporting to oust the president. And so a lot of us were wearing the McDonough pins. We'd previously had a caucus meeting, a Canadian caucus meeting and they tried to get us all to vote as one, ^{to} put in one vote -- each union was...each

see
correction:
end of tape

delegate according to the membership of the union was, had carried so many votes. But we wouldn't agree to that; we wouldn't go along with a solid vote.^s So which meant -- within a union, one person could vote, could cast all the votes for the union if you agreed, the delegates agreed. If you didn't agree among yourselves you had to get up. There wasn't anything like a secret ballot: you got up and declared your vote.

S. Diamond: And get shot.

(Laughs.)

M. Martin: Anyhow...so this fellow started talking to me and he said, "What's a nice young lady like you wearing a McDonough pin for?" This is how he started. Of course, right away my hackles were up. He tried to control me and then he got a little nasty and he even threatened me. And when this was going on I realized all over the hall it had become so bad that they even decided to put a halt to it from the platform and they asked everybody who didn't have accredited member^{ship} etc. etc. to leave the hall so they could get down to business. Well, that was the first indication as we got there. And then, meetings went on, we had discussions...

S. Diamond: What kind of issues were the differences around, do you remember? Was it policy?

M. Martin: It had to do with policy, yes. But mainly, what they were concerned was -- of course it was on issues...I don't remember the issues so much as I remember the general atmosphere, the general...they wanted to re-elect those who were then in office because they were obviously in the hands, one way or another, of the racketeers.

S. Diamond: So, was one of the issues trade union democracy?

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in terms of having the right to run your own union?

M. Martin: Yes, that would be one of them. ~~Because~~ here it was almost like dictatorship, this was like dictatorship coming down from the top, and we were asked to go along with that. It was about what it amounted to. So we carried on through the week, had meetings, and I remember the highlights or rather the results rather than what we discussed. And when it came to Friday there were to be the elections on Friday afternoon and Friday morning there had been discussions. We were threatened from the -- threatened -- from the platform, that if we didn't fall in line, and they were speaking directly to us from Canada, from the west of Canada and from the west coast particularly, that if we didn't conform we'd be sorry. It was unbelievable. When we came back and told the story at the Trades and Labour Council I know that many of them thought we were romancing, thought we -- I don't know what they thought, but they certainly didn't...it was too soon after the war for the workers generally to realize what could happen and what was happening already. I remember, there was a young delegate from Quebec who had...it was a small union...and he, Johnson had been to their local as he had to all the others and they had agreed to go down there and do as Johnson wanted them to do. But when he saw what was happening and listened to the discussions, which got very heated at times -- mikes were shut off on people if they didn't want to listen to you or didn't want you to be heard -- horrible things that happened ^{that} were just out of this world. Well, after this morning of discussion and before the elections, he...now how is that...now I'm not quite clear whether

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it was before the election or whether...no, it was after that, it was...the election itself, he...after the morning of discussion he felt he couldn't go on with the old line, the power, and he wired his union and told them just in a few words that it wasn't as they had thought it was and what should he do? And they wired him back and told him to do as he saw fit. So that he voted with what they called the "progressives", for McDonough. And he was so upset, because after he -- well, I'm not quite clear whether it was he had voted or he had spoke but he had declared himself, anyway, and as a result, a man who was definitely an agent^{and he had been sitting up,} and he had bothered us^{and he had} from time to time, and he came down onto the floor of the convention and started to berate him, tear him down for what he was doing, what he was saying. I guess the vote hadn't taken place yet, the way he was talking. It was so blatant, so noticeable, that this man was finally ordered off the floor. And this young chap from Quebec was so upset that when we had the noon recess, he didn't come back after. And we really were concerned; we didn't know whether he had been followed and attacked, or what. We knew these things could happen. But finally, about two o'clock he came back. And he had gone out so quickly when the noon recess was called that they hadn't been able to follow him. And he'd gotten off by himself and sort of walked off his anguish and he'd come back for the vote, that was it. But when we reconvened in the afternoon, McDonough came into the ...now wait a minute...McDonna wasn't the one to be elected, I'm a little wrong: McDonna was the one who was spearheading the fight for the election of the progressives, of this person against the old line ...but his fight had been that good that that's why he had been

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attacked before. He came to the convention accompanied by a doctor, a nurse, and two bodyguards. Which was spectacular in itself. I mean, he really wasn't supposed to be out. But he came there specifically to nominate the person who was to run against the old line -- that was it. Of course, we put on quite a welcome when he came in. The highlights of that convention were just...it makes me shiver and makes my blood ^{run cold} at times even now thinking about it, you know. And this was when we knew, when those votes would be counted and there was no way they could -- because you voted openly, you got up and declared your vote -- there was not too many votes between the two; the old line got in by a few votes. And they put on a display that made me think of fascist Germany. The group who were working hardest for the old line got up --, oh, maybe a couple hundred of them, maybe not quite that many...seemed like a lot -- they got pans, I don't know whether, they musta had the things ready -- but they paraded around the hall. This one fellow led them, this one...and beating these drums and makeshift drums and what-have-you, making an...that just...I thought "my god is this what it was like in Germany before the war?" I guess there musta been such things. Anyway. Finally, the convention is over and we returned home and it was only a matter of a few months after that that Johnson came into the hall one day. And like I said, we had just completed the best agreement that had ever been signed in Canada and had it signed by most of the restaurant workers, and we were in the process of organizing in the hotels. Johnson came in and said he had asked me to hand over the keys, that he was appointed by the international, that the union was put under trusteeship,

and he was there to handle it and to appoint officers to operate it. I think Johnson heard a few truths about then because if anyone ever got a calling down, he did. I just let him have it. However, while this was going on I got the stamp out of the drawer and put it in my purse and came immediately over to North Vancouver where Emily Watts was living and we talked, she signed a cheque, we had both signed a cheque you see, so that I withdrew all the union money from the bank before they got to it and put it in the hands of a lawyer. I went back and she was to call an executive meeting for that night and I went back to go to the bank and get the money etc. and do a few other things. And then we had the executive meeting that night and we were going to fight them.

S. Diamond: What year was this now, was this 1948?

M. Martin: This was forty-six. Could have been into forty-seven cause it was some months. Forty-six was the convention and whether this was later in the year or early in forty-seven I'm not quite clear. Now, one of the things Johnson told me, he said well, if we just handed things over and acted like good little girls, nothing would happen to us, we would remain members etc. etc. etc. And I had no intention of remaining a good little girl...and not Emily or a few others of us. Because...the organizer and...after the executive meeting we wanted to call a union meeting but we couldn't do it openly so -- there were shop stewards in every house -- and we...the organizer took the hotels and I took the restaurants and started to go from restaurant to restaurant. When I was going into the second restaurant I felt somebody was following me. So, I've forgotten what I did, someway movements I made-when I came out of

there I realized I was being followed. So I went right from there to a restaurant where I knew how I could get out the back way, and just walked in and sat down, had a cup of coffee, and then went down to one of the back booths, and this man came in and sat down at the counter. And while he was there I slipped out the back and slipped away and went on about my work. And from that and the fact that --oh, we had a Sunday meeting, we called a Sunday meeting and we made arrangements with them whereby they would know if any message was sent out, how to identify whether it was really sent by us, and not in our name. We'd also made arrangements...and at that meeting we'd agreed to carry on and fight for our autonomy and our right to run our own affairs within the...so...then we made plans, after the Sunday meeting, to take back the union hall. They had had the -- because I still had the key^{with me}-- they'd had the locks changed. And early Monday morning, when they came to the office, they couldn't get in. Yet there was no sign of how we had gotten in. That had taken a few hours of a couple of boys working. I don't know how they did it but they somehow removed the door, and we got in, and of course when we were in we put a chair at the door and we had a couple of boys, two or three boys from the beverage dispensers in the back room too. That was when we hit the front page of the papers, then, because, for instance it was in our constitution that you didn't divulge your activities your etc. business to the press. And yet when this happened, when they came and found they couldn't get in and realized what had happened, that we'd gotten in, that we were there, we were in possession, within minutes photographers and reporters and so on were in the hall. Now they

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had been tipped off, which was completely against the by-laws. They tried to get us out and almost succeeded. Emily was going to go down the elevator, I've forgotten what the pretext was, and I went out and I grabbed her and I said, "What do you think you're doing?" I said, "What do you think they're doing?!" And I pulled her back in and locked the door again. And that was the picture they got when it got in the front pages that time. But we knew that we couldn't hold the office, we knew that they'd get a court order. But mainly what we wanted to do was get a copy of the names and addresses of members. In fact, we took the records and we took them to the lawyer's office and made copies there. And I sat and erased every address and phone number from the records because I knew that they would get a court order too to repossess the records. I can hear that lawyer laughing now -- he didn't know a thing what was going on, you know, cause he's laughing in the other room. But these are just little things. The long and short of it was of course that now we had been bad girls etc. and so we had to go before a labour court. You talk about a kangaroo court.

S. Diamond: Was that because the international had more power and authority over the local?

M. Martin: Right, right, right. Right. We had very little actual autonomy, particularly in the A.F. of L. because -- I know that it changed vastly since then, I couldn't tell you just what the situation is now, but that's the way it was then...

S. Diamond: So you were in front of the labour board?

M. Martin: No! No, this was a court set up by the international.

They had somebody come from Seattle, the local there and some from the Beverage Dispensars and I've forgotten now just who/all was in that group. And I was expelled...both Emily and I were expelled. A year later Emily was...we decided that one of us probably could get back in again and at that time we decided it should be Emily.

we could appeal it after a year and Emily did get back in the union after a year. Which meant, of course, the end of the organization in the hotels at that particular time. As I said it was fortunate that we had just completed the restaurants. There were still a few hotel...still a few restaurants at that time that weren't in the union but we were in the process of getting them in. But it did give a setback to the organization for quite some time.

S. Diamond: How did the membership react to this whole question?

M. Martin: Oh, this was another thing, eventually we realized that the membership, while those who were at that Sunday meeting were solidly with us, that on the whole, the membership was pretty well split down the middle on the question. And which meant that this group, we could have withdrawn as a union from the international, but which would have meant that about half the union would have been on the outside and half the members still on the inside and we felt that to split them like that wasn't in the interests of the workers. We held another meeting and discussed this and it was decided that as a group they would remain members of the international union and we were out of it as individuals.

S. Diamond: Did they protest what had happened to you there?

M. Martin: Oh yes, oh yes! Well, I wasn't exactly a heavyweight then but I remember during that period, a few weeks, of losing

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about twenty pounds. So you know the stresses we were under, the activity and all. It's too bad that I didn't -- I knew that I had a lot of notes and I don't know where they are now. I've looked at different times and they could very easily have become lost. I will show you a picture...no, that had nothing to do with that, I'll show you the other, the picture of just about 50 years ago less a couple of months. That's the high school group. But...all in all, they never lost ground completely. And the work we had done was the basis of work that was carried on later.

S. Diamond: From what I understand from talking to Jim Morrison,

he said that you and Emily were really instrumental in getting the restaurants organized.

M. Martin: Right, right.

S. Diamond: That you were the people who were most responsible for that.

M. Martin: Yes, yes, yes.

S. Diamond: Can you talk a bit about organizing in the restaurants and how that went, what kind of work you needed to do to insure that the union got in?

M. Martin: Well, in most cases it meant talking to the people off the job. Naturally. And we would have to -- ^{once} we got one person in a restaurant, and very often it was because in a restaurant already organized they knew somebody in another restaurant and... you used every means of getting a contact in another restaurant. And of course we went after the major restaurants to begin with. But we didn't bypass the little ones. Sometimes there was only

two or three workers in a restaurant. We organized the kitchen staff along with it in most cases. Sometimes it was difficult -- where there were Chinese in the kitchen -- I don't recall that we ever recruited a Chinese into the union, but they were by no means antagonistic, in fact they -- you know...but I guess they had their own reasons for not joining a union at that time. It (organizing) meant a lot of night work.

S. Diamond: Why was that?

M. Martin: Well, because most people worked -- like the waitresses 'til worked after dinner, for instance, and you would meet them coming off the job. Then there were the later shifts. And sometimes you could go into a restaurant and sit at a counter and talk to some of them. In some cases the employers weren't- in many cases, the employers weren't anti-union, they didn't care too much one way or the other...some of them were quite...quite anti-union, because they realized that it would mean regulation of wages and hours^{and} conditions. So...I think there were --I think I should mention one employer or group of employers. I don't know whether -- I think they're dead now -- but originally there was Love's Restaurant on Granville Street and the Fish and Oyster Bar was almost directly across. The Fish and Oyster Bar was operated by one of the Love boys and a brother-in-law. They were very much pro-union. Now why, I don't know. I don't know what their background was. But we certainly received their best support and they went quite along with the fact of-what we were fighting for was closed shop...in a union house. A lot of the employers had the idea they didn't mind the union too much if they didn't have to

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have union members, if they didn't have to belong. But of course that was one of the -- in this agreement we had that we finished with that it, they could, if there wasn't a union person available for a job they could hire non-union, but they were required to join the union within a certain period of time. And that, at that time, was quite a progressive step...in the hotels and restaurants.

S. Diamond: Did you have a Rand Formula, that kind of thing,

M. Martin: I don't know. Actually, that was the period of just where a lot of legislation was...well, the unions and the union leaderships were responsible for a lot of labour legislation. That was the real, that was the period of the real beginning of getting the whole idea of minimum wage, the question of hours, workmen's compensation improved and all of this legislation that we today take for granted.

S. Diamond: Also did...I guess during the war also the right to organize was established.

M. Martin: Yes.

S. Diamond: Did that make a difference?

M. Martin: Oh yes. Well, whereas before, goons could be used -- and I myself didn't come in contact with this but I've known of it happen back east and places and so on, and that was now against the law. The worker was protected, was given the right to join the union of his choice by legislation. Somewhere in that period, timewise I'm mixed up with what happened then, what happened subsequently, but the question of the labour board being set up and being able to, if you had a majority belonging to a union in a

house or as we ^{used to} call it or on a job, then the employer was required to recognize the union and to negotiate an agreement to cover. Just previous to that time,^a closed shop was practically unknown. Except that the beverage dispensors had that pretty well.

S. Diamond: Aha, ^{could} you use their contract as a basis to work on?

M. Martin: Not particularly. Because conditions were varied, you know, different work and I suppose we took some things; we took whatever was good from any other agreement.

S. Diamond: Did you go into the restaurants and organize?

M. Martin: Yes.

S. Diamond: You had to talk to people?

M. Martin: Yes, oh yes. And once you would get somebody, one or two -- it was surprising how many of the workers were open for the...

S. Diamond: Why was that? Do you think the general conditions were the same?

M. Martin: Yes, I think so. I mean I'm sure that they were subject to the same conditions that I was. I came to it through my experiences and so on and the war years -- during the war years a lot of benefits were granted -- oh, that isn't exactly the word I want but, concessions to the workers and so on. They needed the workers badly. Well, it was nice to keep those and to improve them...

S. Diamond: So would that affect even a sector like the restaurants which were not under the war legislation in the sense of essential services?

M. Martin: Oh yes. Oh yes. That affected everybody at that time.

To one degree or another. There were still those who were willing to go along with the employers for one reason or another.

S. Diamond: (Pause.)

M. Martin: Yes, that was my second husband's name and I was known mostly as May Lenny because Leniczek was -- people would always have to ask how to spell it etc. etc. and he'd worked during the war in the shipyards and some of the boys there I guess had sort of shortened his name to Lenny so that's how I finally became known as May Lenny.

S. Diamond: So were you, during this period when you were active in the union, had you...were you married for a second time?

M. Martin: Yes, yes. Yes, I was already business agent in the union because it was after I came back down from the Yukon that I met ^{Phil} Phil and he was a beautiful dancer and we used to go to these old dance halls. I remember a lot of the old country type of players and singers and so on. A lot of them used to come to Vancouver. So we were married during that period and I carried on.

S. Diamond: How did your first husband and your second husband react to your trade union activities? Were they supportive of them?

M. Martin: Well, my first husband -- we were separated before I went to the Yukon so I was completely on my own then and was ^{Phil} a member of the Boilermakers union. So he was labour conscious and ...but he was from a prairie background...he wasn't dedicated like I was, for instance, but he understood it and went along with it.

S. Diamond: Would that create any kind of conflict in your life to have his sort of attitudes ~~towa~~^{to} a union?

M. Martin: It may have, underneath you know. I think probably it

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did and probably had something to do with the fact that we finally separated. I don't think it was -- you know there many other things entered into it too.

S. Diamond: When you were an organizer, what kind of skills were needed to be able to go up there and organize people into the union?

M. Martin: Well, just I guess an understanding and the ability to talk and the fortitude -- I was going to use a more expressive word -- the fortitude to go out there at all hours and, I don't know... in other words, to do what you believed.

S. Diamond: Was it difficult having to organize at night?

M. Martin: At times. It had its...you know, I wasn't out every night by any means. What we would do --now I wasn't the only, remember there was this chap we had helping us to organize. Sometimes we went together. Sometimes he went places where it was difficult for me to get to, to get to the workers. We worked together. But on the whole he worked more in the hotels. It was more difficult to get in to the workers in the hotels for one thing. I worked more with the people in the restaurants.

S. Diamond: Were you mostly working with women, in terms of organizing?

M. Martin: Mostly, but there were quite a number of men. But the union was predominantly women. Because you had mostly the waiters and waitresses and some busboys.

S. Diamond: When I talked to Jim Morrison, one of the things that he said was that in the 1950's the union abandoned -- well, pretty well, this is what inferred -- abandoned the restaurants

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for the hotels cause the hotels were a bigger dues base.

M. Martin: In the fifties?

S. Diamond: Yeah, in the later years.

M. Martin: Well that would be after my time.

S. Diamond: Oh yeah.

M. Martin: And that could well be. I know, yes, I believe that did happen because I was aware -- while I was away from the union I went into office work for a number of years before I married and came over to the North Shore. And that's just 25 years ago. But I was aware that the work we had done wasn't followed up at that particular time and that a lot of it was lost and they didn't put any -- well, they didn't go out to organize like we did.

S. Diamond: Did you people have like a...

M. Martin: They lost ground.

S. Diamond: How did you understand organizing restaurant workers? Did you see it as important to get all workers, no matter how small the workplace was?

M. Martin: Yes, yes, yes. Because, as we saw it, every non-union house was a threat to the union. I mean, this was brought home to me so vividly that my experience at that restaurant when what went on there was responsible for me going up to the union hall and joining the union. I realized that the workers had to stand together. There had been a union agreement in that house, you see. But, of course, the union agreement wasn't sold with the business. And the union officers of that time didn't follow up as they should have and see that the workers stood together. So that they were like sitting ducks to the new employer's tactics of fermenting

discord and disagreement until they'd get to the point where they would quit. He didn't fire them. He worked it that they quit.

S. Diamond: Do you think it was important that you came out of work in the restaurants in terms of being really familiar and also feeling really strongly identified with the conditions that workers face there? Like would it be different for you to be an organizer than someone who had never worked in the industry?

M. Martin: Well, I suppose I had gained something by the experience. I left that field mainly because...now wait a minute, I'm not quite clear on that, I can't quite remember all the...it seemed there was...oh well, like I had said, after the year -- we were expelled for a year, which meant we couldn't work in the restaurants, certainly not in the union restaurants during that year^{be} cause we weren't members of the union, and after the year, it was decided that Emily would reapply for readmission to the union. And of course in the meantime I had to work, and this was when I got into office work. That's another story.

S. Diamond: You went through unionization?

M. Martin: No.

S. Diamond: Were you really angry about about this whole process that happened in the HREU?

M. Martin: Well angry, yes. Here was work we had done and it wasn't a question, it wasn't a personal thing, here was work done with and for the workers that was, we knew it would go by the board for^{a good} many years if the...that the whole set of conditions would be set back, which of course was what happened. Like I say, for many years there was nothing done in the restaurants. And that always

did hurt me.

S. Diamond: Were you working with the union when they tried to get certification for Hotel Vancouver?

M. Martin: That was just a bit before my time, and it was Barbara's husband who was business agent at that -- Barbara's husband, Bill Stewart, who was business agent at that time -- did she tell you something about that?

S. Diamond: I don't think she did. I would like to hear the story if you know it.

M. Martin: I don't know it -- only generally. I know they had organized in the hotel and I believe that they called a strike. But, beyond that I don't really know...I suppose I did at the time know more of the particulars but I don't remember them. All I know was that they were beaten down and out of the hotel and that nothing was done in the hotels from that time until the time that I was in the union and we were beginning to get back into -- we had the Georgia pretty well organized at that time. Now I don't know what the situation is now, I guess it's...

S. Diamond: organized now...

M. Martin: Yeah, but. And after, we had some ins in the Hotel Vancouver and we were working on it. But of course that too was ...the work we were doing, this was the thing that made me angry, and angry at the leadership of the union -- I mean from the international. That they sacrificed the conditions of hundreds of workers, just to maintain their position. And partly, it's it was getting back at us personally too. Which as far as I was concerned had no place in human relationships, let alone trade unions.

There was no doubt about why they took that position, that they were one way or another in the pay of the, the hands of the -- I don't remember if it was the Mafia at that time. I don't know.

S. Diamond: Getting back to the organizing drive. When you went out and organized, when the drive began, did it have the effect where workers from different restaurants that were non-union would hear about it and come to the union?

M. Martin: That happened, yes, that happened. It was just every way -- they would come to us, we would go to them, we would get them together...and of course we would hold special meetings from time to time, and always there was the regular meeting.

S. Diamond: What ^{would} the special meetings do?

M. Martin: Well, it would get groups together who wanted to have discussions, talk it over, what it would mean, and so on.

S. Diamond: Do you remember any specific restaurants or hotels that were particularly difficult or interesting or militant?

M. Martin: This was an interesting point that just came to mind. There was quite a difference working on Granville Street and working down on Hastings.

S. Diamond: Oh yeah...

M. Martin: See, Hastings then was sort of getting into the tenderloin of the city and I worked first on Granville Street and then I later worked down...I never went all the way down, but -- yes I did, I'd forgotten, I worked at a place quite well down on Hastings and I got the feeling that some fellow workers, I mean some workers from other fields, oh it might be clerks, it might be anybody, who came into the restaurants. After all, it was mostly

other workers you served in the restaurants, except perhaps in the evening. And I got more respect, I felt, from the overall worker than I did from the white collar worker. This was something that was very noticeable at that time. So I would rather, myself, work down on Hastings than up on Granville.

*found in
history*

S. Diamond: Did that reflect itself?

M. Martin: And that did reflect itself:

S. Diamond: How?

M. Martin: Yes, that did reflect itself because...I don't quite know why, but perhaps it's a matter of understanding or not understanding as far as the workers are concerned. Perhaps they wouldn't all see it that way. I have a feeling that they...many funny things did happen down in that area -- I remember one girl who worked in the Fish and Oyster Bar and at that time -- this was before I went north and I was shop steward in the house. She had an awful lot of trouble; she was often late coming in, missing time altogether, and coming in...I'm not sure what it was, but...I talked with her quite a bit. She never said very much, but...now this is a little bit hazy in my mind -- I remember something happening...somebody coming into the restaurant and they threatened her in some way...I don't remember details, but the whole thing was that obviously somebody had a hold on her for some reason and the employer, the manager, was a bit down on her for her irregularity and so on and I stood up for her because, I said, "There's some very good reason for all this, I'm sure. It isn't something she wants to do, particularly. There's somebody with a hold over her."
...and eventually when she didn't come in on time and I had an

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address and I went down to see. It was down in the lower part of the old tenderloin there. And, it was on the street below...

S.D.: Powell?

MM: Yes, somewhere in there. Oh, one of those awful old buildings and I had to go up steps...she was just in a little room and when I got there and knocked on the door I realized that there was a Tape III. Side 1. ^{TAPE 3 Side I} man in the room with her and she asked me to wait. Finally he came out. The thing was that she had come in from down from the country somewhere to the city as many young girls did, and the only...without any special training, the restaurants were the easiest places to get work. But in the meantime, one way or another somebody had gotten hold of her and she was being used...this was a house of prostitution where she was living and the man who owned it was using her and harrasing her on the job, trying to get her fired from the job to get her completely under his control. Now I don't remember the final outcome of that. It's a long time ago and I don't remember. I remember another instance of a girl who I knew quite well and got into such a situation and...she committed suicide.

SD: So did this kind of thing happen to waitresses?

MM: Yes. I mean it didn't happen every day, every month, but these things happened. If a girl wasn't enough on her toes to realize what was going on she could -- well, they used means of -- they used drugs, they used liquor, they'd get a young girl under their control by any means they could, and then...

SD: Was it partly because you'd run into waitresses who were receiving low wages?

MM: That would be part of it. Any money that they would be given in the first place would seem like a lot of money. Of course I never knew too much about what went on. I just sort of knew a little bit; I knew these things happened and this was one case with which I came in contact.

SD: Were many of the women who worked in the restaurants really young?

MM: Yes, yes, a lot of them were young. And then you had others who worked in the restaurants for years and years and years.

SD: Were they generally single or married or...

MM: They were both. Single...the young girls who came into the city looking for work would be single, usually, and may marry later on and they may still have a husband or may be on their own for one reason or another. Just any condition. They had to work to support themselves or their family or help support their family.

SD: Did the general sort of attitudes ^{change} toward women working during the war?

MM: Yes. I mean there was a time when - and I think this featured in the differences in the attitude towards girls working up on Granville and girls working down below. I can remember when I first went into the work in the hotel, it was thought...well, the biddies who sat at home and chit-chatted and criticized, etc. etc. the young people: anyone who went into a hotel, well that was a very menial and very low job -- and they -- it was taken for granted that they would sink to that level. Now, that goes back sixty years. But I've seen that attitude change over the years...I always found that I got the respect I demanded. And many, many women in

their own way have found the same thing...because there were some very wonderful people, I met a lot of very, very wonderful people.

SD: Was unionization really important in terms of that self-respect?

MM: Well, it helped in that a woman then didn't feel alone. She wasn't an individual target for any boss who wanted to cut her hours or pay or whatever. And in some cases the bosses had amorous...

SD: Was that a problem -- sexual harassment?

MM: I don't think it really was a problem as such. They were there as business people and -- mainly -- and all they were concerned with was getting the most out of people for the least.

SD: What were the central kinds of demands that went into the first union contract? You talked about the best contract in Canada; what was in that contract?

MM: Oh I couldn't begin to give you details now. All I know, that generally, it was conditions of work. Hours. Wages. And mainly, maintaining the dignity of the individual, with the right to belong to a union.

SD: What about shifts, with hours?

MM: Well, that's when I say hours of work, I mean that shifts... as I recall, could only be split once, and within a certain number of hours. It couldn't be spread over, say, 16 hours. I've forgotten what the hours were, but it was a certain bunch less than that.

SD: You also established a short^{er} work week?

MM: Well, that had been established. Remember that in B.C. you had the highest rate of organization at that time and even in the non-union places conditions of work -- their wages and so on --

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were affected by conditions won by unions in where they were organized. And that stood -- they wouldn't be able to get the workers otherwise. And this was one of the arguments we used, I remember, was that the conditions that they had were there because of the organization around them, but could be bettered if they too were organized.

SD: Did the employers react against the union drive in specific ways, was there blacklisting?

MM: Well, I remember we had a few stormy meetings. We'd meet with the -- there were a group of restaurant owners who -- now I don't know whether they had an organization as such or whether they got together, but a group of them, sort of headed the negotiations -- and they tried to make a stand against us on this new agreement. We didn't get what we asked for originally, altogether but there was a point below which we wouldn't go. In other words, we had bargaining...and even when it was finally agreed on there were a few standouts who didn't want to sign it. But as I say, fortunately, the major houses had signed the union before.

SD: Had you generally established a master contract.

MM: Oh yes, this was a master contract.

SD: So all places had signed it.

MM: Right, right. Yes, that was a very important point; I'm glad you brought that up. It was a master agreement.

SD: And was that how you tried to make the conditions uniform?

MM: Yes, yes.

SD: Did you have support in the organizing campaign from other labour bodies?

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MM: Oh yes.

SD: What kind of support did you get?

MM: Well, it was a sort of tacit support you know. They were behind us in the fact they knew we were organizing and if we had had to have a strike they'd honour our picket line etc. etc. But we threatened strike, in getting this agreement. In fact we almost had to go on strike. But finally one of the bosses capitulated...
(Laughs.)
we worked on that angle to, ha, ha, ha...we were going to pull the workers out of his house... we had to know these things.

SD: When you were involved in the union were there any strikes or job action?

MM: Not in our -- it never quite came to anything like that. We had to negotiate, we had to take up grievances from time to time and this sort of thing you know...

SD: What kind of grievances were common? Were there any that came up again and again?

MM: Um... Isn't that funny. I can't recall anything specific at the moment, in this regard. I guess we didn't have too much trouble.

SD: What about the uniforms, laundering uniforms?

MM: Oh this was another thing. We had, the uniforms had to be-if the uniforms were required they had to be supplied. And laundered.

SD: And that was something the union fought for?

MM: Yes, that was established in the master agreement. And that was-I can remember years back having to buy my own uniforms and having to launder them and oh brother!

SD: Do you know what the differences were in ^{the conditions in} the union and the non-union shops?

MM: Well, it would be wages, wages wouldn't be as high in the non-union. The hours wouldn't be as regular. Generally, the conditions would be not as good, no regulation. And a person could be fired at the whim of the employer and nobody to take up their cause. This was a very important, this was a very important factor in the ...

SD: Were there struggles going on that the unions supported that were like beyond the industry, for ex~~mm~~ple, the fight for unemploy-^{one}ment insurance or work against fascism, that kind of thing?

The policies adopted on those things?

MM: Well, we were of course members of the Trades and Labour Council there and ~~A~~ were delegates from every union and made up the Trades and Labour Council. Um, I could give you a little sidelight into a little incident that happen^ed. I was a member of the Trades and Labour Council and this was for legislation, how was it? Legislation of some sub~~stance~~ stance to do with the Labour Board and I'm not quite clear now. But anyway we would have to go, we discussed this and won our point in the Trades and Labour Council itself, just progressive people from all over, ~~from~~ different unions, to get certain legislation and to...Oh, Bill 33, I'm quite sure that was the number, which was anti-labour, this was it, anti-labour, was proposed by the government. We were, through the Trades and Labour Council, fighting against this. And there was a committee of ten. I believe it was ten. Elected to the Trades and Labour Council to go over to Vict0-ria, meet with the cabinet, etcetera, etcetera and bring pressure and what have you. Um, against this Bill 33. And I don't remember the details of its now except I know that it was violently anti-labour, and. Maybe I shouldn't use the word viol^ent, but anyway...

we went over on the boat, the midnight boat. I don't think there were ten of us...Whatever the number was I don't know. One of the members who was a member of the Fishermen's Union was over there on over busieess and he was in a bad car accident the day, in fact that evening, the night wewent over on the boat. I sometimes had reservations about how that accident happened, but that was just one of those things. And, one of the leaders, one of the officers in the Trades and Labour Council was a member on this committeee and tried to get us, draw us all together in a group to all to agree on certain things. None of us to this point had seen the copy of the - we knew generally what it was, but nobody had received a copy, at least none of the members. I don't know whether any of the executive had or not. But we wouldn't go along with making a blanket agreement or anything like that. We wanted to see, we wanted to discuss, we insisted on having a meeting over there, at which we could see the contents of this Bill. And the chap who had been in this car accident was to have led the group within the delegation, spearhead the real opposition to this Bill. And of course when he was out of commission like that, at the meeting that morning , I just jumped in and took the leadership. And, that's the way it happended. And I can't remember just how everything went onn...I know that, that night there was a dance or something at the um, put on^{by} the Victoria Labour group, in the old, I know that the building's there now and I can't remember what it is. An old building that had been there for years, and years and years. Um, we had a very pleasant evening and a member of the Executive from the Trades and Labo ur Council who was on the committee accompanied me back to the hotel, asked, me in to have a nightcap and I thought I was on guard against everything, but I

didn't see him put a mickey in the drink. This actually happened. Because we were meeting the Cabinet the next morning and with the role I had played in our own meeting, this was to endeavor to put me, and it did, I couldn't get up in the morning, in fact I didn't. I, uh, I didn't...When we had arrived on the boat, we were going right to our meeting and so that we just dropped our things ^{all} pretty well in one room. And I had, I, somehow, this person, tried to keep me in the room after giving me this mickey. But, my determination, and I had to get back to my room, And I got away, and it was like a nightmare, wandering through the halls, through the, what's the hotel in Victoria, the, uh, you-know its the oldest hotel - The Empress. Wandering in the halls in of the Empress to get to this room where my, where I'd left my bag, somehow I got there and I sort of, I remember knocking on the door, and I, asking for my bags and the boys that had them in there were in bed and one got up and gave me my bags. The other one, later told me, he said, "When I heard you, Oh God", he said, "I wish I'd gotten up." Because, he said, "when I heard you, I thought, "Oh, hmm...hmm...May is drunk". Which I wasn't. But I was under the influence of this whatever, they call them a mickey-whatever this drug was. And I, again I somehow got back to my room. How I did it I don't know because as I say, it was like a nightmare. You know, have you had these dreams where you are wandering, oh, and you can't find your way. Anyway-when morning came I, the phone rang to wake me-you leave messages for the phone to be waked- I tried to get up, I really tried to get up, I really tried to dress,

I couldn't. With all my determination, I couldn't. And, nobody, of course, they went to the meeting and I just didn't turn up. And after the meeting, this is when the chap who was in that room who had heard me and had misunderstood. This was when he came into the room, and he took one look at me and he said, "My God, you've been drugged." And I said, "I don't know if I've been drugged but I just couldn't get up this morning." Oh, he was indignant! And when a couple of the other, and the one who was responsible for it, when they came in and looked at me, they got scared. I'm telling you, they had a doctor in there pretty damned quick. I don't know what the drug was and I don't know how strong it was but it might easily have been an overdose, but...

SD: You could have died!

MM: I could have died there because nobody would have known. And it's my strong constitution again, but... (Laughs.) But I, but I, and when we, and of course, the idea was, another follow-up was to use this when we got back here, against me. That I had gotten drunk and I couldn't, you know, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. This was going to be used against me. And I had to call home for something to the Trades and Labour Council and this party asked me how I felt and I said, "Well, I don't feel too badly now, but I never felt so much like a person being drugged." Or some words to that effect. So I got the message across that I knew what had happened. I couldn't make any accusations openly or otherwise. But I certainly stopped them

because then when I went down to the Trades and Labour Council and met this person I uh, would, just the way I met him, he knew perfectly well that-like for instance, like I started to smile as I met him and then I let my face freeze and then I just stared at him, and to say, "You dare." And he never did. And in a round-about way I heard that that was what he had intended to do as a follow-up was to discredit me.

SD: And was this because you were a militant?

MM: Because I was militant. And it subsequently turned out that he was an agent of big business. What we would call an agent provocateur. I think you've got, you've got a little bit of history there.

SD: I have a few more questions. Just to ~~review~~: what positions did you hold in the union? You were shop steward...

MM: I was shop steward in the beginning, and I've forgotten what I was first on the executive. Um, and then after I returned from the Yukon, the next, um, nomination meeting, I was made Business Agent.

SD: Was that a paid position?

MM: It was a paid position, but it was elected.

SD: Did you receive the same wages as when you were working in the industry?

MM: Well, I've forgotten what it was. It was enough to - you certainly didn't have anything to throw away, you had enough to live on.

SD: And what was your major work as business agent?

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MM: Well, you name it...it was everything to do with the union, with the running of the office, with the, with the and then, we didn't do anything without...Well, the executive had the right to carry on the business in between, but certain things had to be referred to the union. Policy had to be referred to the union and any new innovations and so on you referred to the union. You put forward your point and then you called for...

SD: In the union during the War, did you have a no-strike policy?

MM: I believe that was a general policy, wasn't it, a labour policy.

SD: Of the B.C. Federation of Labour unions. It was generally agreed with then?

MM: Yes, yes it was. Well, after all, it was everything for the war effort then.

SD: Did the union do anything for the war effort, for example war bonds?

MM: I don't believe as a union that we did.

SD: And um..

MM: We didn't have the money for it. It was, there, I've forgotten what percentage of the dues had to go into the International office at that time...

SD: Were there any layoffs or did men move into waiters' positions after the war when they came back? Was there any shake-up in the union because of that?

MM: Not while I was still with them. Of course I wasn't there too long after the War.

SD: Was turnover a big problem in the union?

MM; ~~Maum~~. No, most of the workers for one reason or another, were, at least went along with the idea.

SIDE TWO

MM: I don't recall that we ever had any instance in the rank and file of the union where anyone was violently, or in any way, actively opposed to us.

SD: Were political organizations active in the unions at all?

MM: Not as such, I mean everyone in the union had the right to his own politics as far as that goes. I'm sure that political understanding was brought into the union individually.

SD: People I've talked have said that you and Emily-they've described you as Communists. Were you Communists at that time?

MM: (Laughs.) I suppose you could say that I was.

SD: So were you a party member?

MM: Yes.

SD: Was that one of the reasons why you were attacked because they brought up the right-wing?

MM: Not for that reason itself. And because, of the, I suppose it had its bearing - yes. But it was the fact that we were perhaps going a little too fast for the... Remember, this high official of the Trades and Labour Council with whom I came in contact on my trip, he was a representative of the employers. And that was the, and still is throughout the labour movement, you still have agents of the employers

and they work up as high as they can. You have the same thing happening in political parties.

SD: Did you become active in the Communist Party through your trade union work?

MM: Yes it would be the...

SD: So that's like how you sort of radicalized beyond it?

MM: Yeah. Yeah. Well, one would lead to the other. Because you can't do labour movement without...it is political. It is political action.

SD: And did that kind of political focus give you a collective framework out of which to do trade union work?

MM: Oh yes, oh yes definitely. Because as such I had access, direction, to different studies and so on that gave me a deeper understanding into the background of the labour movement.

SD: In terms of the other people who were really active in the union- were most of the people either Communist Party members or members of the CCF?

MM: no, no. Most, the majority of the union members were just people who when it came election time voted for somebody who took their fancy at the time, or because their dads did or whatever reason people voted for. I remember my first vote was a Liberal vote because my Dad voted that way. But, ohhhh(Laughs.) ^{either} Liberal or Conservative! (Laughs.)

About the time I was in Montreal and Toronto was the time the CCF was becoming active and they were... I,,, because of ideas put forward they struck me as being sensible and in line with facts.

SD: Were many women on the Executive and bodies of the union?

MM: In the, in our union Yes, we were predominant, the women on the executive because the membership was predominantly women. As far as the union was concerned, as far as the union was concerned, we made no difference. There were, there were, it was the type of work they did.

SD: Do you feel that ^{that} you were a woman helped you to organize other women? Did you make you more open to them, to their problems?

MM: Oh, I'm quite sure it did because one thing that, (Laughs.) I guess I was a good listener because many of them came to me with their problems. Not always union problems.

SD: And, did the women who were active, were they mostly young women. Older women? Married or single?

MM: Um I would say that the slightly older women who had been in the industry for awhile were the more militant in the sense that, I suppose like myself they had a deeper understanding through their experiences. But the ^{young} ones, well, they had the vim of youth and so on.

SD: Did you find that the women were generally quite militant? Do you have any ideas why?

MM: Well I suppose that it was part of the whole movement, of the move for women's rights. And while women have worked in ~~the~~ this industry for a good many years this industry was one of the- it comes out of the domestic- at one time I guessthey were sort of considered as

domestic workers, considered in with domestic workers. Very lowly, very menial and something only for women, etcetera, etcetera. But this organizing and getting conditions was part of fighting for your rights.

SD: So there was sort of a new women's consciousness.

MM: Oh yes, I would, oh yes, definitely.

SD: Did people talk about that at all?

MM: Oh I don't know to what extent it was talked about.

SD: It was something new essentially.

MM: I remember going on the radio at some time. I can't recall what it was about, I just recall going on the radio. It was something tied in with women's right to work and to organize. It was something to do with domestic, I can't quite remember what it was about.

SD: Do you remember what radio it was?

MM: No, I don't remember. Perhaps it, I don't know there weren't as many radio stations, perhaps there was only one radio station then, I don't know. That would be along about forty-six or somewhere in there.

SD: Was that in part in response to lay-offs of women?

MM: Well, the fact that I was a union official, a union leader was one of the reasons for me being chosen to do that, I can't remember what this discussion was now?

SD: The responsibilities of women in their homes, outside of the workplace, taking care of kids and housework and so forth. Did that effect their activity in the union?

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MM: Well it did to the extent that where there were children there was always the difficulty of someone to look after them. During the War there was a certain amount of, there were places for them to leave their children, but that dwindled after the War as you know because there wasn't the support for it. After all the government is predominantly male. They wanted to put the little woman back in her place.

SD: Did the women talk about childcare at all?

MM: I suppose that we did. I don't recall now because. There was nothing that we wouldn't discuss when the question came up. Not necessarily in the union meeting...

SD: Did women raise any particular other kinds of issues, like maternity leave? Or sexual harrassment by employers? Or equal pay? Equal pension rights?

MM: Well, I don't recall just what we achieved in this respect but these things were all part of the picture. We were fighting on these issues, trying to take it from the realistic point of view, rather than an extremist point of view.

SD: Did being a Progressive help you in terms of having an analysis of women's rights?

MM: Yes, I think so.

SD: You were able because of this to realize...

MM: Oh yes, it helped me immeasurably. I always was a reader. What am I reading now: All the Presiden't Men. I don't always read

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I like a good mystery too. I was a reader and to, to find various books on these subjects. Its just an endless...number of books you can go to and it gives you insight into so much. Always, always of course relating it to reality, to your own experiences. And it made it so that I could understand things that happened which I hadn't perhaps understood at the time.

SD: Did the union agreement include any special women's issues like equal pay?

MM: I don't recall specifically. Just, I do know that it was, that the wage scale was good. And we wouldn't, it certainly wouldn't have allowed for inequalities on the job. A job was a job, and it didn't matter who did it.

SD: Did you have different races working within the union?

MM: To some extent, yes.

SD: And was that, did employers try and use racism at all?

MM: Not, we didn't come into contact with it ^{too much.} I mean there was a lot of work to have been done still in the restaurants and quite probably we would have some into contact with it, quite probably more and more as we went farther afield. But we had, we had different there were a lot of Greek people who were in the restaurants, and Chinese or the other nationalities, English, you name it. We weren't concerned with who or what they were, we were concerned with the workers' conditions.

SD: Did the women in the union ever get together and meet as women?

MM: Not as such, no.

SD: Were there other organizations for working women at that time other

that unions?

MM: I don't recall now. Certainly not like there was later on.

Remember, this was the sort of the uprising, the process of...

I just happened to be a pioneer.

SD: In terms of the men in the union: were they supportive of women's rights or did they have any problems with...?

MM: I didn't come in contact with anything like that. You were a trade unionist male or female.

SD: Did you encounter, your union was predominantly female so in a way you might expect that, but on the Trades and Labour Congress or on any of the labour bodies, did you encounter any sort of prejudice against women?

MM: I don't recall being aware of any.

SD: Now I recall that that trip to Victoria about Bill 33 was right before we went to Milwaukee. Because when we came back and one of the members of the committee made a report to the Trades and Labour Council, left out so much, and he made it on behalf of the committee, that I got up and made a minority report and brought the house down. As a result there was a heated discussion - I'll never forget that, it was just one of those things, there was a heated discussion after that and as a result, where as the leadership of the committee was going to let it go at that and let the government do as they saw fit, another committee was elected to go over to Victoria to go over there and carry on the fight. Now I wasn't

part of that because as I say the trip to Milwaukee, the convention intervened. I had to be there at the time this was going on in Victoria. And I had gotten, we defeated the most reactionary parts of that as I recall, I don't remember details, but generally, we put a few spikes in there.

SD: I think there was a strike actually. I... (laundry workers)

MM: I believe so. That's right.

SD: Do you have anything else that you'd like to say?

MM: I can't think of anything. I suppose tonight or tomorrow something might come to mind. But all I can say is if this is any help in any way I am more than happy. Doing this little reminiscing is something, some things I've forgotten.

BREAK.

SD: Mrs. Martin speaking about her trip to the convention in the United States.

MM: It seems that my recall was a little off as far as names are concerned. And I referred to Mc Donough as the person who was ambushed before the convention and later I referred to wearing a McDonough pin so something didn't jive. Anyways, as I thought it over after:

McDonough was the man who was being nominated. For President; And

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23.

I don't recall the name of the man and his wife who were ambushed. But he came to the convention specifically to nominate McDonough for President. And of course that was quite a highlight, his entrance, as I referred to it before, it was quite a highlight of the convention. And they didn't lose by too many votes. I think that's about all I can say about it, that gives the correction.

END