Chapter 6

Underground, Imprisoned, And Interned

The international news went from bad to worse as Bill Walsh and Anne Weir took their leave in the spring of 1939. Madrid had fallen to Franco. Fascism had overtaken Spain. Hitler occupied all of Czechoslovakia and some observers predicted that his next move would be the Ukraine through Poland. As if on cue, the German minority in Poland and the predominantly German population of Danzig demanded annexation to Germany. It was the same deadly pattern. Where would it stop?

Windsor

Walsh spent his first few weeks in Windsor getting an overview of the local scene. “I'll never forget, Anne was with me from the start this time,” he recalled. “After our first meeting a cousin of hers asked how long I had lasted in Kitchener. When I told him he laughed. ‘Well, you won't last three years here. The last guy stayed for six months and the one before him eight.’ That was my welcome to Windsor. Party organizer was a very tough job back then.”

The UAW victory in Oshawa a few years back had sparked organizing drives in several Windsor feeder plants, but the main Ford and Chrysler plants had never been tried. Walsh learned that the auto worker local was just beginning to recover from a series of aborted strikes that had begun in August 1938. Those bungled efforts caused wholesale firings and blacklisting of organizers. He got the story from Jimmy Napier, a cocky little man who had been involved in union organizing as long as anyone in the Windsor area. “It was Charlie Millard, that's who bungled it; that phony Sunday school preacher and his bunch from the CCF and Catholic Action.
He got me fired as staff rep and isolated all the other people that built the local. He's never organized anything. Neither has the CCF bunch. They've just about wrecked what we built up. As for Catholic Action, they'll do just about anything to get rid of the Left."

Charlie Millard had been a lay preacher with the United Church of Canada in the early 1930s. He came out of the social gospel tradition, much like J.S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas, and Stanley Knowles, and took his evangelical fervour into the trade union movement. Millard was on the national executive of the CCF. He had been elected president of the Oshawa local of the UAW and was a key leader in the 1937 strike. Millard was an inspiring orator and organizer — as capable in this regard as any of the Communists — and if anything even more determined to ally the unions to his party, the CCF, as they were to the CP. The Communists despised Millard and maligned him, just as he despised and maligned them, so much so that he devoted much of his energy over the following decade to the campaign to oust them from the labour movement.

Following the 1937 strike, Millard was elected Canadian Director of the UAW but his popularity was already dwindling. Union activists complained that he was spending too much time politicking in Detroit rather than organizing and strengthening the new locals. His close association with Homer Martin, a disaster as president of the UAW, did nothing for his credibility. In January 1939 Martin had expelled most of the key US organizers because of their political leanings. Communists in the UAW on both sides of the border were determined to turf him out, along with his supporters, including Charlie Millard. They did just that. At the March UAW convention held in Cleveland, Millard was replaced by George Burt, treasurer of the Oshawa local.

But within a matter of weeks, John L. Lewis created a new position for Millard, as secretary of Canada's CIO Committee. Early in 1940, he became president of the Ontario CCF and executive director of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. One of his first acts as SWOC director was to oust Dick Steele and other Communists who had done the pioneering work in organizing the steel industry. He replaced them with a group of bright and energetic young CCFers including Larry and Bill Sefton, Bill Mahoney, Murray Cotterill, and Eamon Park. They would soon form the new leadership of the Steelworker-CCF joint enterprise. In 1942 Millard was elected National Director of the Steelworkers in Canada. A year later he was elected a CCF member of the Ontario legislature.

The situation Walsh found himself in was radically different from the situation he inherited in Kitchener. Windsor was among the best organized cities in the country and with a sizable Party membership in the auto and auto parts industry. The spade work had already been done, strong links
with Detroit set up, and activity in Chrysler already underway. When he proposed that he make contact with George Burt, who had just moved UAW's Canadian district headquarters to Windsor, he got no opposition.

"I walked in and I said, 'I'm Bill Walsh, organizer of the Communist Party. I want to help you organize autoworkers.' That's the way I used to do it." He seemed proud of it. "After the initial shock, Burt and I talked for a good hour. He was suspicious as you might imagine, but not hostile. After all, he was part of the compromise slate put up by the Left in the ouster of Martin and Millard. He wondered why I as a Communist Party organizer would be offering to help organize autoworkers. He thought I might be looking for a job with the union. I told him the same as I told Mustin and that no, I didn't want to be on his staff; he had plenty of auto workers he could get for his staff. I told him I wanted to bring the Communist Party into the campaign and I laid out some practical suggestions."

"He was interested in getting our help but he asked if that meant I would be bringing the Party into the fore. I said 'We won't bury our name but we won't embarrass you either.' I promised that we would clear everything with him. I did a lot of recruiting into the Party over the next few months and some of them became fairly well known — people like Jack Taylor, Cyril Prince, Vince Colson, Mike Kennedy, Alex Clarence (who became an MLA), and of course Jimmy Napier. As a group they played a big part in the organization of the UAW in Windsor."

Under Walsh's guidance they held quick hit-and-run factory gate meetings at lunch time and quitting time. He instructed them how to make a two or three minute pitch, how to pick out workers who appeared friendly or expressed thanks for leaflets, and to follow them home or get their address for future contact. Members of the organizing committee frequented nearby restaurants and pubs to pick up plant gossip and secure contacts. Jimmy Napier sought help from some of the militants from the feeder plant campaigns. For security reasons they avoided mass meetings. It was well known that both Ford and Chrysler had built up a formidable network of informants.

The Chrysler Spark soon made its first appearance. Walsh took the name "Spark" from ISKRA (Spark), the name chosen by Lenin for the first Bolshevik newspaper. It was a four page mimeographed job, typed in justified columns, which would become a Bill Walsh trademark. He composed the copy from information brought to him from Cyril Prince and other Party activists, stories about what was going on in the key plants, about what workers were complaining about and demanding — like repairs to the toilet, longer breaks, and improved lunch space. The campaign was moving into high gear with a strong unity group taking shape. But it was not to be. International events suddenly overtook the organizational drive.
Hitler-Stalin Pact

Early in September 1939, Party headquarters received the cablegram from the Comintern announcing the Hitler-Stalin pact. When Hitler invaded Poland the Communist Party of Canada, like the movement elsewhere, had proclaimed "This is our war," and urged Prime Minister Mackenzie King to immediately award all possible aid to beleaguered Poland. But within weeks this war against fascism was declared a war between imperialists in which Communists had no stake. The cablegram from the Comintern sent shockwaves through the Party. The Soviet and German governments had signed a non-aggression pact guaranteeing the neutrality of the USSR. Communist Parties were instructed to oppose the war. The Communist Party of Canada did so without hesitation, converting the war into a campaign against British imperialism.

Thoroughly angry and confused by this sudden change, dozens of members in Canada joined hundreds of thousands in other countries in exiting the Party. Molotov's reported statement to Ribbentrop, that after all "ideology is a matter of taste," was the final straw for many. Canadians by the thousands had joined the party in recent years because it represented the most effective voice against aggression and appeasement. Now they left in droves. But most accepted the rationale: Wasn't it true that for years the USSR had pleaded with western powers for a military alliance against fascism? Instead, the allies came to an agreement with Hitler — at Munich! And didn't the Pope swear he would do everything in his power to stop a western alliance with the Russians? Could the Soviets have come to any conclusion other than that the Allies were maneuvering to push Hitler into a war against them? The West had only itself to blame. Play for time by signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler or take on the Germans alone and face wholesale destruction and certain defeat. Those were the only alternatives.

However problematic all this may have been, the directive to oppose Canada's involvement in the war went unquestioned by most Party members. As far as they were concerned, they were participants in a common battle with the Soviet Union as the bulwark of the world socialist movement. If they had to take it on the chin because this particular battle front was unfavourable at the moment, it was nonetheless necessary in the interests of the overall struggle.

The immediate consequence for the Party was devastating, their credibility was destroyed. They were suddenly isolated, suspect, and without allies. New epithets were coined at their expense: "red fascists" and "communazis." Under the War Measures Act, the Party was once more declared illegal on 6 June 1940. Over a hundred top, middle, and rank-and-file-
When he heard about the switch, Walsh was understandably confused. He had just spent the past three years organizing a campaign against fascism and now he must support it? The official explanation, that the pact “seriously weakens Hitler’s hold on the German people,” encouraged cynicism, if not downright derision. The sudden switch left Communists everywhere isolated from the mass of people, and deprived of allies.

But as often occurred in these situations, immediate events crowded in and allowed Bill Walsh to bury himself in trade union work rather than raise these or other questions fully, even to himself. “I had a sense that things were happening in Europe, but I really wasn’t paying too much attention to it at first,” he recalled. “That’s interesting. Here I was, I suppose intelligent enough, alert enough, and interested in world news, yet my nose was so deeply dug into the local scene that the Pact didn’t have the same impact on me. It had a delayed impact.”

All-out effort was required to defeat the drive to force CIO unions out of the Trades and Labor Congress. As Party organizer in Windsor, Walsh rallied support in the region. The effort was doomed to failure. AFL President William Green ordered all affiliated unions in Canada to vote for the expulsion of CIO unions from the Trades and Labor Congress or have their charters revoked. After the expulsion, steps were taken to follow the American example of setting up a committee, the Canadian Congress of Labour, to coordinate the work of CIO Unions.

When, on 10 September, Canada declared war against Hitler, the Communist Party of Canada instantly demanded withdrawal from this “imperialist war.” For Canadians, the Party insisted, “the principal danger of
fascism comes not from Nazi Germany but from the war policies of the King government.” Walsh could make little sense of the Party line. “Hitler was occupying much of Europe and all the Party was saying is that ‘our task is to transform the war into a civil war against our bourgeoisie’, and that ‘Canadian capitalism, not German capitalism, is our main enemy.’ But the slogan that really got to me,” he remembered, “was BOMB THE CROPS IN ENGLAND, FREE A MILLION INDIANS. That wasn’t neutrality. It was pro-Hitler. I couldn’t go along with it.”

He couldn’t go along with the Party line, but to question the Pact itself was never an option. In the final analysis, he assured himself, “the Soviet Union is the bulwark of world socialism. Our battleground is only one in a world-wide struggle. If we have to take it on the chin, it’s a necessary cost in the overall struggle. To question is to be disloyal.”

In October he and Anne slipped down to Toledo to be married. “It was what we had always intended,” he recalled. This was just a convenient moment and marriage certificates were easily and quickly obtainable in Ohio.” This was undoubtedly so, but very likely both of them also viewed marriage as something permanent and secure in a menacing and rapidly changing world.

On Armistice Day, 11 November 1939, Bill Walsh organized a blitz of the Windsor region to distribute a four-page pamphlet sent down from Toronto calling for Canadian neutrality. Within hours the RCMP arrested dozens of Party workers, Party headquarters were raided, and The Clarion closed down. Through a courier Bill got the word: Bury yourself. Go underground. He headed for a farm owned by Serbian comrades in nearby Amhurstburg. There, in a barn atop a hay loft, he made his headquarters. Only now did it dawn on him. He was a hunted man, separated from his wife and cut off from his work. The Hitler-Stalin pact had taken its toll. The Spark still got produced but under primitive conditions. Production was slow and difficult and from that distance it was nigh impossible to keep tabs on what was happening on the shop floor. The organization campaign bogged down.

Trade union work everywhere began to collapse. Walsh got the news from Dick Steele who still managed to operate above ground. All along Steele had been a central figure in the Steel Workers’ Organizing Committee and a main cog in the machinery to set up the Canadian Congress of Labour. He and Bill rendezvoused in London, where Anne had fled.

At first the Communists held their own. At a conference called to unite the CIO forces in Canada, Dick Steele concluded his conference report with a passionate plea to devote every effort on the front lines at home rather than focusing on events abroad. But soon after, Steele was replaced by Charlie Millard as head of the SWOC. According to Irving Abella’s account,
the move to fire Steele and the other Communists was begun at least nine months earlier under orders from Phillip Murray, international president of SWOC. When Steele authorized a series of ill-prepared strikes without notifying the international office, Murray sent in his personal representative to fire him.²

But Steele did not submit without a struggle. First, against the charge that his “political opinions were responsible for the slow growth of SWOC,” he simply denied his Communist affiliation. Second, Steele composed a five-page mimeographed letter protesting his dismissal and the appointment of Millard. It had an immediate effect as four Ontario locals demanded an emergency convention to reverse Steele’s dismissal. “Without Brother Steele’s capable and first hand direction, it would be difficult to maintain our present membership,” they warned.³

The conflict moved to a different arena that fall. The founding convention of the Congress of Canadian Labour was held in September 1940. Despite the fact that its constitution had been written by Joe Salsberg and Dick Steele with the help of Communist Party lawyer J.L. Cohen, the convention was a complete disaster for the Communists. The entire CCF slate was elected to office and the Communists shut out. By a vote of 111 to 81 a resolution was passed condemning both Communism and Fascism and urging all affiliates to refuse membership to members of “such subversive organizations.”

This convention may well have sealed the relationship between organized labour and the CCF (and its successor, the NDP) for the next 60 years. An ecstatic David Lewis, who had been paid by the All-Canadian Congress of Labour leaders to spend the week at the convention to assist them, wrote to Ontario party president Ted Jollife that, this “establishes the relation between our office and their work on a much more direct basis ... and [shows] the need [of the new Congress] for working together with the CCF.” Encouraged by these results, Millard completed his campaign of cleaning the Communists out of SWOC. By now Steele had also been forced underground. Walsh himself barely escaped arrest when the RCMP raided Jimmy Napier’s place where he was staying while directing the strike at Chrysler. The strike had dragged on for a few months, but now it fizzled.

Without access to mail service, contact with the national centre was difficult. The Party developed its own courier service, but with officers and staff forced to move about, it had only limited effect. “We wore disguises,” Walsh joked, “but we were pretty obvious. We all wore dark glasses, a moustache and a top coat so you can be sure anybody walking down the street looking like that was in the communist underground!” From his hay-loft headquarters with the primitive equipment available to him, Bill Walsh carried on his propaganda work against the war. He compiled a
mailing list of Party members, supporters and trade union militants. To protect them on the chance that the list might one day fall into enemy hands, he padded the list, adding names and addresses of local notables like Windsor mayor David Croll, and people picked randomly from the City Directory.

Walsh claimed he revealed his reservations about the Party's slogans to Dick Steele and Charlie Weir when the three met clandestinely. Steele had been named Party organizer in the Hamilton area and Weir handled the Niagara area. They prepared their own material independent of Party headquarters which by then had also been forced underground. They agreed to meet regularly and exchange materials and lists in case any one of them was picked up. London was the spot chosen for a rendezvous in late December.

Just before that meeting, Walsh received a message by courier: "Make your way to Toronto for an urgent meeting." "About time," Bill told himself, "haven't had a chance to meet Toronto for over a year." A Czech comrade loaned him his Chevy coupe to get to Toronto, and a panel truck picked him up at a designated spot. Inside, Stewart Smith and Charlie Sims were engaged in animated discussion. Walsh got a formal hello and nothing else. They were hot under the collar, something about teaching someone a lesson. "Someone is going to get the business," he told himself. "Hope it's not me."

They reached Steele Avenue, then a forested area on the extreme north side of Toronto. At first glance it seemed uninhabited, but Bill spotted a store behind a clump of trees near to where they stopped. He heard a dog bark. "Must be Smith's underground headquarters," he thought to himself, stepping from the truck. Dick Steele and Charlie Weir were there too. "What gives?" Bill asked nobody in particular. He got only shrugs in response.

Stewart Smith began to speak. "I've called you here to deal with an important issue facing the Party. One of our Toronto clubs has adopted a resolution that claims our line on the war can't be put over. This defeatist attitude is bad enough but these comrades go further. They say that the non-aggression pact is a betrayal. I have to point out that Comrade Lon Lawson is the president of the Club and he himself is the writer of most of its pamphlets. This kind of action is unforgivable. It violates every tenet of democratic centralism. We cannot tolerate it, Comrade Lawson. We will not tolerate it." The words spit out of his mouth like bullets from a gun. Nobody stirred. All looked to the ground. Bill Walsh hung silent like the rest.

Only Lon Lawson dared to speak: "The USSR was put into a difficult position," he said. "We all know that. But there are things that must be answered. At first we were told that the pact would weaken fascism. Now we hear that the USSR is actually cooperating with the Nazis. We call for peace,
yes. But peace on their terms, with Hitler occupying half of Europe. We could have defended the pact as an unavoidable defensive move but still continued our policy of unity against fascism. It is not only the reactionaries that denounce us. It is the entire democratic spectrum. Is fascism just a matter of taste as Molotov has said?"

"Enough, enough," Smith hissed, reddening, his veins protruding from the forehead of his balding head. "We know your views. That is why we have called you here. I am compelled to give you a final warning. If you persist in violating Party policy, we will have no alternative but to expel you."

Very uncomfortable, Bill Walsh fidgeted, cleared his throat, and prepared to speak. "Not now Bill," Charlie Weir leaned over to whisper. "Let it go." And he did.

But Norman Freed started up all over again. Bill couldn't take it anymore. "What are you trying to do, kill the guy? You've made your point. It's enough!" Smith looked piercingly at everyone present, then turned round and walked away from the circle they had formed. The drive back to Toronto was funereal. Bitterly disappointed in himself for not rising to defend Lon more directly, Walsh's shame registered as a dull ache in the pit of his stomach. It was only when they took leave of each other that anyone spoke.

"You know Bill", Charlie said, "there's been a fight in the leadership over this question. Tim, Joe Salsberg, and some others have complained that Stewart has been too mechanical in his thinking. Of course, no one goes as far as Lon. But with Tim underground in New York, Stewart has full control." "See you in London," Bill said, as he headed back to home base. "We'll talk then."

In The Pen

They met again on Christmas Eve, 1940. London seemed a good place to meet since none of them were known there. Besides, it gave Bill a chance to visit with Anne. They decided to distribute stickers and a leaflet early in the New Year. Al Bernard, local organizer of the party, recommended a printer. Dick Steele returned to Hamilton on Boxing Day, Charlie Weir to the Niagara Peninsula. The printer agreed to have the paper and stickers ready by New Year's Day. On New Year's Day Steele was held up by a snow storm and never did show up. After waiting all morning Bill and Charlie made their way to the print shop in the Chevy coupe. They circled the building. Everything seemed normal. When Walsh entered the shop, the owner was playing cards with a young boy, likely an apprentice or the owner's son, Bill thought to himself.
“Okay, is the stuff ready?”
“Yeah.”
“Where is it?”
“All wrapped up ready to go. Got it in the safe.”

Bill looked out and motioned to Charlie to give him a hand. Each lifted up a bundle, Charlie first. When he opened the door of the shop several police and RCMP officers were swarming over the car. They seized the parcels and hustled the two of them into two separate police cars.

“Charlie, this is a set-up,” Bill whispered before they had them separated. “You’re just my brother-in-law visiting Anne. You know nothing.”

All CP organizers had been told to carry two registration papers — one real, as required by law, and one fake, in case they were picked up. Bill chose the name Bill Potter, whose tombstone he had spotted in a cemetery not far from the Weir farm at St. David’s, birthdate the same as his, only a hundred years earlier. Sitting in the back seat of the car, he managed to pull one of the papers out of his pocket and slip it under the seat.

It didn’t work. At the police station they finger-printed him and removed the materials from his pockets. “So, you’re Bill Walsh, the big Communist.”

“No, not a big Communist, just a Communist,” Walsh replied. “Do you know Tim Buck?” asked one of the officers. “Sure, everybody knows Tim Buck.” An officer opened a parcel and took out a sticker. It read, “STOP THE WAR. BRING THE BOYS HOME.”

Walsh and Weir were charged with being officials of an illegal organization and attempting to distribute literature aiming to undermine the war effort. Years later Walsh still boiled at the way the RCMP twisted the truth at the trial: “One of them testified under oath that Bill Walsh boasted he was a personal friend of Tim Buck and a big Communist. That got me mad; it had been the other way around. I wanted to get on the witness stand and make it clear that they were telling a bunch of bloody lies but my lawyer [David Goldstick] wouldn’t hear of it. He knew that if they asked us if we were members of the Party and Party organizers we wouldn’t deny it.”

Walsh was sentenced to nine months plus a $300 fine or an extra three months and was moved to the Ontario Reformatory in Guelph. Charlie got off, when the printer was unable to identify him. The RCMP asked the presiding judge whether he would recommend that Charlie be sent to one of the internment camps set up for Communists and Nazis. “How can I do that? I’ve just found him not guilty of the charge.”

“We know, judge, but whatever you recommend we’re going to intern him anyway. Thought you knew that.” Within days Charlie Weir was interned.

Walsh was something of a mystery to the inmates in the Guelph Reformatory. As he related it, “They’d say, ‘what’s your racket?’ So I’d answer,
‘I’m a Communist organizer’. And they’d say, ‘what’s a Communist organ­izer?’ I’d say, ‘It’s about organizing workers. You know the rich against the poor?’ ‘Okay’, they’d say, ‘but what do you get out of it?’ They never did get it, but when one guy asked, ‘Are you against the cops?’ and I answered, ‘yes’ he said, ‘well that’s okay then, you’re one of us.’ Another said, ‘You know, he does the same as us, but he’s organized, like the Mafia’.

They were bank robbers, bootleggers, and automobile thieves. One was a rapist. ‘‘What was your sentence?’ they asked me. ‘Nine months plus three more for not paying the fine and when I get out I might have to go for an indefinite term to another jail.’ ‘Jesus Christ,’ one of them said, ‘I’m sure glad I didn’t do anything like you.’ They just couldn’t figure it out, especially when I told them I got picked up for printing a sticker that said ‘Bring the boys home’.

At first he was assigned to a work gang that was closely guarded, but soon they had him making marmalade for provincial institutions, and then they transferred him to the garden gang where he could wander off on his own. Escaping would have been easy and he thought seriously about it, but when Anne put the question to the Party the word came back that they didn’t want anyone breaking out. There was a campaign to get them all released.

Upon his release from the Reformatory, Walsh was sent to an internment camp as a Prisoner of War. Altogether he was a prisoner for two years, Anne followed him from town to town, finding work in restaurants and arranging weekly visits. She was unable to hold on to the jobs for long because the RCMP made it their business to inform the owners that her husband was in jail.

Over that time they carried out a correspondence which reveals much about their relationship. She wrote at least every other day, sometimes every day and even twice a day, while he wrote at least once a week. Anne’s letters were chatty and loving. They spoke of her loneliness, her dependence on Bill, and a growing bitterness about their long separation. Bill’s letters were more formal and, because they were restricted in length, more carefully crafted. They spoke of his concern for her health and bring to light a rarely revealed romantic side in his character. In fact, their letters displayed an intimacy that is quite exceptional among Communists of that generation.

4 February 1941

Dearest:

The hour is very late, three a.m. to be exact, you see I worked until one a.m. By the time I got home, washed stocking and undies, cleaned up, well it all takes so much time — I’ll admit I’m tired, and my selfishness comes to the fore. How I wish you were here, to massage my back and legs as you used to do, remember? And then you could tuck
me in, and kiss me goodnight. How much and how often I long for the luxury of such moments of love and tenderness. It seems that my mind keeps reverting back to those precious days gone by when you and I were together. Tonight I remember the night you carried me home from work because I was so tired - - you often washed my stockings, I remember one evening especially, when I sat in the bathroom watching and directing the process. And then one time in particular comes to mind, when I worked in the shirt factory and we lived away out on Wilmot Street. You insisted on doing the whole wash in the machine, with me sitting on the steps directing but you made one stipulation, that I kiss you every five minutes.

Do you know something Bill, besides my loving you and your always being kind and thoughtful, you were a very good husband. I've often thought about it, but I don't know whether I ever told you, perhaps I was afraid of spoiling you.

Good night sweetheart.

Anne

Saturday, 15 February 1941
The Ontario Reformatory, Guelph

Anne Dear,

Both your letters of this week gave me gratification. You are right as usual when you point out that for me 'the immediate future' is decided and I have little or no control over it. Yet I imagine that an experience such as I have just 'embarked' upon (wouldn't 'shanghaid' be more appropriate?) is not entirely barren of possibilities for a substantial degree of learning — learning that my previous academic studies have failed to give me (although they have possibly enabled me more systematically to observe).

And now look — one side of a paper is all I'm permitted and it's already covered. Thank you for your delightful and thoughtful valentine message. Au revoir, Love,

Bill

P.S. At time of writing have not yet received Globe and Mail.

Friday, 15 March 1941.
Bill Dear:

My new job is swell, really it is, everyone is so helpful, and two of the girls told me yesterday that they hope I stay, and the boss said it was the smartest thing he ever did, hiring me. It's nice to work with people like that.
I told the boss that I was married, but living alone now, and oh how true it is. He was very sympathetic, and wanted to know why we couldn't get along, so I told him we just found we couldn't live together anymore. I don't like lying, and technically I'm not, but it hurts to leave these people with the impression that you must have been no good because they think I'm pretty nice so it couldn't be my fault. How I wanted to tell him how beautiful and fine I've found our marriage, because it was with you. But of course I couldn't. I could only think back, and review the last five years and more and see what a full life we lived, Bill, we lost traits and habits that were worth losing, and acquired and developed some of our better characteristics. You see dear, what I'm trying to say is — not only was our marriage happy, it was good.

I keep referring to our marriage in the past tense but honestly I don't mean it that way because in the present and the future we are living it together. And no matter what happens, we will live it together because we are too much a 'whole' to be really separated regardless of circumstances and conditions.

What I'm trying to say is Dearest I love you. I have since we first met. I always shall. Completely.

Anne

Saturday, 3 May 1941

Dearest girl. My fingers reached confidentially into the envelope of your letter of today for that which I hoped to find — and there you were. It is almost as though you yourself stepped out to greet me — for this picture is one in my small collection of frank likenesses of you that I treasure more than I can express. I can study it more intently than I can regard you in person in your one hour visits. Is it bashfulness (after 5-1/2 years) or my yearning to cram so much into one hour that invariably results in my seeing you as a composite whole at the expense of the dainty details for which your picture compensates — the graceful throat, the firm lines of the chin, the even curved irresistible lips, the petal proud tilted nose, the honest expressive eyes bordered by perfect lashes and eyebrows all set, as though by the master hand of the greatest sculptor, on a face more beautiful and intelligent than which there could be none.

But those are not the things I meant to write in this note, my sweetheart. You looked so worried and tired during your last visit and verified in this latest snapshot. That you have a right to be tired is unquestionable, for you have borne far more than your share, and you absolutely must rest. But as for worry, my darling, that is one enemy which you can well do without. The future is ours, just as that hymn tells us: "When the nightmare of the present fades away, we shall live in joy and laughter — and will not regret the price we've had to pay...."
All my love. Fondest caresses, 
your Bill 

Saturday evening, 28 June 1941.

My darling Anne. Received both your letters this evening, and along with the two previous ones of this week. They'll brighten the intervening days until I see you. I'm grateful for them — no that's not right, you're being kind, your being yourself — the dear Anne I fell in love with so completely. You sometimes characterized me, quite rightly too, with being insufficiently thorough. In admitting it again, I submit one bright spot that shows at least a capacity for thoroughness — I am completely in love with you. And that, my sweetheart, follows from our love being a natural slow and steady growth, not an overnight affair. And (is it strange) that happy development is in complete harmony with my ardour expressed so vividly in the following lines by Byron:

Oh! might I kiss those eyes of fire, a million scarce would quench desire; Still would I steep my lips in bliss, and dwell an age on every kiss; Nor then my soul should sated be; Still would I kiss and cling to thee.

Shall I continue? No, you know as well as I. I've read it in your eyes and tasted it from your lips, and felt it from your hands -

Yours always XX XX Bill

20 July (A.A) or 1941 (A.D)

Happy birthday, Anne Dear.

I hope the weather was as ideal where you are, as it is here. And I hope (and I feel confident) this makes the only birthday anniversary of yours which I am prevented from greeting you in accordance with our traditional ceremonials.

You are quite right darling. I did dream of you last Wednesday night, and now (you asked for it!) I will attempt to record it. In your more compassionate moments you may call it (if it deserves a title) — "We'll Love Again"

Here in these steelbarred four-wall cells, As others sleep (what else to do?) As I lay awake, my fancy dwells On joyous times that we two knew.

Or joys not bought by fancy frills; (or other peoples' perplexed pain) Not artificial fleeting thrills That bloom in sun and wilt in rain. We'll share them again.

'O Henry' from us smiles induced; You laughed as I read 'Pinafore'. Poor Allen Poe our plaudits produced With 'Quo'te the raven nevermore' We'll read them again.
Or when those friends were laid aside, And contemporary ones were not in view, Yet once again you'd be my bride, With caress grown sweeter and sweeter anew We'll love again.
All my love sweetheart, XX X XX Bill
Each x represents 7. The middle one for luck.

Friday, 11 August

Bill Dear:

I'm writing before going to the post, knowing there will be a letter from you. I wonder if you know how much your letter per week mean to me. It's wonderful to have something you've touched and written. I wish I could explain it.

We had last night without interruption. It was, as always, full of sweet love and loneliness. Sometimes I forget for a little while, and there is happiness, then my lips, arms, and heart grow hungry for you, the reality not the dream. At such moments the loneliness that tears at my insides is almost overpowering. I could kick and scream and swear at the ugly unnaturalness of our life. I cry and protest with all the viciousness of bitterness at that which has forced such a life upon us. Selfish, perhaps, but then remember Bill dear, it's only for moments at a time. There are many oh such happy moments also.

Darling, I love you.

Sunday, 7 September 1941

Anne dear. You will not be surprised to hear that I love you completely. It isn't a new discovery, is it? But there are times when the consciousness of just that wells up and surges through me like a great upheaval before which every diverting influence is swept aside. And this is such a time.

I cannot explain why other than to describe the feeling itself. It is connected, I know, with a re-devouring of the letters written by you during the long days and nights, the weeks and the months that we have been kept apart 'each in our separate cells'. Then too, although you haven't complained something has been known to me of the difficulties, the nasty situations, the disappointments that beset you. And the loneliness. Yet, throughout, your concern for me has been uppermost. Your letters, your weekly visits, many of them accomplished when neither your health nor purse could afford; and always the steadfast faith and love which inspires you. All these and more have to do with the overwhelming feeling for you.

Next Saturday I'm to leave this place; having paid in full the penalty for my 'career in crime' ... I look forward to that final sweet meeting with you in here and perhaps one or two precious letters.
Then? ... Well, we are but one unit among hundreds of millions, and we live in extraordinary times. Even if we should strive, no matter how strenuously, we could not isolate ourselves in some selfish paradise retreat. But this I know — we shall never be entirely separated. Moments of joy and hours of sadness we'll share; and our joys will bring more elation to us and others. It's a steep hill, my darling, but we've learned how to climb together. All my love, dear wife, is for you always.

Your Bill. XX XX

In June 1941, when Hitler attacked the USSR, the Communist Party of Canada reversed its opposition to Canada's involvement, urging Ottawa to increase its contribution to the very limit. Party members clamoured to enlist, preferably to fight in the front lines. Bill Walsh wrote a letter to the Minister of Justice, pleading that he be released from jail so that he could fight overseas:

11 July 1941
Ontario Reformatory Guelph, Ontario
Hon. E. Lapointe, Minister of Justice, Ottawa.

Dear Sir:

Your consideration of my application for remission, herewith submitted, is earnestly solicited.

My record of Anti-Nazi Anti-Fascist activities during the past few years, will, I trust, not be overlooked. I humbly suggest that several hundreds of citizens in the Kitchener region still remember with gratification, the weekly radio broadcasts I addressed to them on the crimes and menace of Nazism. These broadcasts and public meetings at which I spoke, played a not insignificant part in exposing the activities of local Nazi agents, leading up to the successful public demand for the closing of Nazi halls and the appreciable curtailing of their activities among large German-speaking groups of citizens — and tending to make it less difficult to apprehend several Nazi agents when Canada declared war on Nazi Germany. There are other examples of my efforts in that sphere of public activity, some of which brought threats from Nazi agents to the physical well-being of my wife and myself.

It is my intention to enrol in the Canadian Army for overseas service after being released from prison. Perhaps in addition to my ability to fire a rifle (with a fair degree of accuracy) my familiarity with several languages may prove of some slight use to my officers.

Should I not be accepted as a private in the Canadian Army, or be unable to perform some equally essential service in Canada, I am prepared to make my way as well as I can to the USSR, there to volunteer.
in defence of that huge sector of the growing world resistance to Hitlerism and all it represents.

Very truly yours,

William Walsh

Within a few months, he was in fact released, but as he described it in a letter to Anne, he would not be shipped overseas, but to an internment camp for an indefinite period. Whatever the justification for the original sentence, it had now clearly lapsed. Now that the war had, in the eyes of the Communist faithful, been suddenly transformed from an imperialistic conflict into a democratic struggle against fascism, it had no more enthusiastic supporters. But this indubitable fact, and innumerable protests from within the Party and without, had no noticeable impact in Ottawa. The ban of the Communist Party was retained throughout the duration of the war, making Canada the only western country to declare its Communist Party illegal while the Soviet Union was an ally against Germany.

11 July 1941.
Middlesex C. Gaol London, Ont.

My dearest girl, I love you and can well imagine your feelings that now, after having expiated my "crime", we are still forcibly separated after almost nine months. My own feelings are a sure indication of yours. Hopes and yearnings, so long held in abeyance, are again suddenly straight-jacketed, and this time for an indefinite period. Cruel though it is, my darling, we won't let it beat us, will we dear?

The details are disgustingly simple. Shortly after you left me, I was in bed but didn't get to sleep till 1 a.m. At 4 a.m. I was awakened. Then had to wait around until 9:30 when two RCMP got around and escorted me without a word to their car. They informed me I would be advised in London of the reason I was being detained. The trip down was as pleasant as could be expected. In the gaol office one RCMP'er showed me 2 typed lines which said I was being detained because it is alleged "that you are a Communist". He read perfunctorily from a paper that I had 30 days to launch an appeal and volunteered to inform some member of my family of my predicament if so desired. I filled out the papers immediately and that's that. If the soul of justice is not dead in Canada, my appeal will be successful, and you and I, my sweetheart, can be free together again. Your Bill XX XX

His appeal before the Advisory Committee failed. He wrote to Anne that he was not at all satisfied with his presentation. "The very star chamber nature of the procedure had a stultifying effect upon me — and for all I know upon my counsel as well. Seeing the indifference written all over their
faces at the moment that I am literally turning myself inside-out for them to see and understand — all the time gnawing consciousness that your happiness, my freedom, the very ideals for which the nation's sweat and tears and blood flows — all leans so heavily upon such a method of dispensing 'justice', it made me so angry that at times it was only with an effort that I could force myself to continue."

Interned

"Canada seems to have excelled at internment its own citizens and residents during the war," writes author Reg Whitaker. According to Whitaker, Britain, within a few miles of Nazi-occupied Europe and with a population four times that of Canada, interned only 1800 people. By war's end Canada had interned over 2400 citizens and forcibly relocated the entire Japanese population of British Columbia. Most were interned as pro-Nazis, pro-Italian or pro-Japanese. A hundred and thirty-three were interned as Communists, although by the time of Bill Walsh's internment some had already been released.

Communists were interned under section 21 of the Defence of Canada Regulations which allowed for the internment of any person who might act "in a manner prejudicial to the public safety of the state." The communists interned were an assortment of trade union officials (eight), elected municipal politicians (four), leaders of ethnic organizations (three), members of the national party executive (two), as well as a number of its paid staff, but mostly they were rank-and-file members of the party or its closely linked ethnic organizations. Most top party leaders escaped internment. Tim Buck, along with Charlie Sims and Sam Carr fled to New York where they hid out with the help of the American Party.

By September 1941 when Bill Walsh was interned, all arrested Communists and alleged Communists and a few other assorted trouble-makers had ended up in Hull jail, a structure recently completed but never used. The prison, a new three-storey structure of brick, stone and steel, was on the outskirts of Hull. The inhabitants included 30 internees arrested in western Canada who had been first sent to the Kananaskis Internment Camp in the mountains south of Canmore, Alberta, and the 60 or so arrested in central Canada and the Maritimes first stationed in Petawawa, about a hundred miles from Ottawa. In both camps anti-fascists were mixed in with other "enemy aliens" or "war prisoners", mostly Canadian fascists sympathetic to Hitler or Mussolini, and captured German seamen. Petitions from both inside the camps and outside finally caused the government to separate
them out from other internees and they were sent to their own facility in Hull.

Walsh was given his own Prisoner of War number, POW H3, and the standard POW uniform — red striped pants and a denim jacket with a big red circle on the back. Easy target for sharp shooters should he try to escape. The first person he saw was Charlie Weir who, along with other members of the welcoming committee, greeted him with “Hold the Fort” and other welcoming songs. John Weir was there too, and many other comrades known to him, including Muni Ehrlich, Fred Collins, and Norman Freed. Altogether, nearly 90 POWs were interned in Hull jail, a few of them merely guilty of association with Communists. Another, C.S. Jackson, was reportedly hauled in at the request of a Canadian General Electric executive who convinced the Minister of Justice that Jackson’s campaign to organize the workers of CGE was jeopardizing the war effort. C.D. Howe, Mackenzie King’s Minister of Munitions and Supplies, fought to keep him there: “No group of saboteurs could possibly effect the damage that this man is causing.” Jackson, a maverick Communist even then, vehemently denied his Party membership. He must have made a convincing case, for he was released after a short time in Hull.

The cells, lined up on both sides of each floor, were allowed to stay open. There were no locks on the doors and the prisoners were allowed to go out to a compound to exercise, or to a wooded area to sit under the trees. The internal administration was left entirely to the inmates, but aside from cooking, dish washing, cleaning, and a few other menial jobs, there was little to do. They set up history classes with textile union organizer Kent Rowley, German classes with Winnipeg alderman Jacob Penner, as well as math and French classes. Literature was quite abundant including a copy of Capital. They even had occasional access to the party newspaper, the Clariom, used to wrap up food sent in to them by comrades and wives. They played volleyball, arranged concerts and put on plays. Bill Walsh was the pinochle champion. Pat Sullivan of the Canadian Seamen’s Union was the hooch maker. Food parcels were thrown together with Sullivan’s whiskey to produce a sumptuous feast every few weeks. Besides parcels from Montréal, Bill got regular shipments from comrades in Kitchener and Windsor. At the first toast in the new year, with a banquet table groaning with steak, turkey, vegetables and potatoes, he remembers delivering a rendition of “Arise ye Prisoners of Starvation” to his inebriated friends.

Joe Wallace was the camp’s resident poet. Mitch Sago and Ben Swankey set some of his poems to music. Wallace wrote his own words to a melody, “Men of Harlech”, sung by Walsh at one of the regular socials where everybody was expected to tell a story or sing a song. Joe Wallace’s version, “Night is Ended” was later published in a volume of his Collected Works.
Wake, the Vision splendid
Flames, for Night is Ended,
Rise and March
Thro' Freedom's arch
To name the fame unended.
March in mighty millions pouring,
Forges flaring, cannon roaring,
Life and Death in final warring
Call you, Workingmen!

At your benches planning, speeding,
In the trenches battling, bleeding.
Yours the help the world is needing,
Answer, Workingmen!

So shall pass the battle thunder,
Poverty and pelf and plunder,
So shall rise a world of wonder,
World of Workingmen!

One of the biggest problems in the camp was lack of world news. Papers were censored before they were allowed in and, except what came to them from intermittent copies of the Clarion, news items on the war were cut out. A crystal set and earphones smuggled inside a cottage cheese pail fixed that. Within days, Dr. Howard Lowrie and Jim Murphy, a CBC radio technician, assembled the parts into a receiving set. For an antenna they extended a fine wire across the compound from a second floor window bar to one of the poles holding up the volleyball net outside. The tiny radio, hidden under the pillow on one of the beds, got turned on at newstime. For security reasons only a handful knew about it. They shared the news with the others, but never let on that it was coming hot off the airwaves. The jail commandant, a Major Greene, almost discovered the set one morning. While inspecting the courtyard, he happened to glance upward and saw some clothes hanging in mid-air. One of the internees had observed the wire and hung his clothes on it. Miraculously, the Major made nothing of it. Weeks later when the story leaked out and found its way to the local press, Lowrie and Murphy paid the price with a week in solitary confinement.

Prison life was harder on some of the men than on others. Michael Sawiak, former editor of Farmers’ Life, became so ill that he dropped 70 pounds. Mathew Shatulsky contracted tuberculosis, and Dr. Lowrie, colic. For others there was a different kind of sickness. Fred Collins confided to Walsh that his wife had taken up with someone else. Bill Walsh stayed healthy and though he had concerns about Anne’s health, he had none
about her loyalty. Coming in from Hamilton, she visited as often as she could and upon moving to Ottawa in April made weekly visits.

A release campaign instigated by the wives of internees, led to the founding of the National Council for Democratic Rights. It launched petition campaigns, put out leaflets, raised funds and eventually paid lawyers to represent internees at hearings. After Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union, the government’s rationale for interning Communists vanished and public response to the campaign became quite positive, including that of the Liberal premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn. Noticeably absent among those calling for the release of Communist internees were trade union leaders who continued to take advantage of the absence of their Communist rivals.

Walsh himself kept up a steady stream of letters to the federal government, expressing the Party’s new national unity line while pleading for his own freedom. It would be months before the campaign to release the prisoners brought results. In the meantime, Anne’s letters, expressing an increasing sense of despair, loneliness and misery began to alarm Walsh and added to his own sense of loss and outrage. Prime Minister Mackenzie King attended Canada-Soviet friendship rallies and hymned praises to Russia while refusing to legalize the Communist Party of Canada and holding nearly a hundred of its leading members in an internment camp.

Whereas his earliest letters to Anne describing his first days in the camp were light hearted and even cheerful, they ring a little false. A letter written on Christmas eve comes closer to expressing his true feelings: “Soon we’ll be having our feast and concert .... We’re preparing to have ‘a good time’ and I’ll try to get into the spirit of the thing. But to be frank with you, I feel punk and I know others do too. To be forcibly separated from you today ... You dashing around in a restaurant dishing out grub to holiday makers, and I doing the same to a bunch of swell fellows trying to be more hilarious the more melancholy they feel.”

Early in the new year, Walsh’s letters display a growing alarm about Anne’s health. Her denials did nothing to qualm his fears.

25 February 1942
My darling Anne,

There’s 14 September 1941 no use of me trying to pretend otherwise to you, dear — I’m worried. At times, since Saturday night, I’ve been near frantic. Please my precious girl, for you, for me, for us together, be as considerate of your health as you would be of mine, were I ill. Helen told me yesterday that it’s stomach ulcers. You must have had some awful suffering, sweetheart and I wasn’t around to help. You will have pain before you’re cured of them. They are curable if cared for, but if neglected, they can make you progressively more and more
miserable. Isn't it the sensible thing to put up with the nastiness of dieting and abstinence (from smoking) for the freedom it will give you later? We will be together again before long. I know my beloved girl, and won't you try to get well soon?

It's obvious what's brought on this ailment. Anyone put through what you have been for 14 months — some ailment is to be expected. The government has said our internment is by no means meant to be punishment. I wonder if he knows the punishment you've had to take every hour of our separation — the emotional punishment, and the brutal physical afflictions as well. What can I do to help you, beloved mine? I'm giving up smoking. Maybe it's silly, but will it help you just a little to know I'm on a sympathetic no-smoke diet too. It's so little. What can I do? Except keep right on loving you.

28 February 1942
My darling Bill:-

Received your letter today regarding my health. Please don't worry anymore. It's true that since you've been taken away from me I've had stomach trouble, but then that was to be expected. After all, I didn't start with a good stomach in the first place, did I? I've been to see a very good doctor and the results were all good except for the stomach which is possibly ulcerated. He gave me medicine and a rather rigid diet. Only one cup of coffee a day, no smoking on an empty stomach and at least four glasses of milk a day.

Thanks for the moral support in not smoking, but gosh you give me a guilty conscience when I think of all the cigarettes I've enjoyed while you were abstaining for me.

Bill you know I wouldn't lie to you so you know all I've said to you is true and this is true also that in the past week I've felt healthier than I have in years. In fact last night we took a long walk, miles literally thru the streets of Toronto and you sang to me and told me many stories about your trip and I loved you and every minute of it.

Good night Sweetheart

3 June 1942
Bill Darling.

Got your Saturday card yesterday, like the letter of a few weeks ago it was doubly censored. Got a letter yesterday, putting the proposition to me that if your dad was assured that we would have a marriage ceremony performed in his faith he would do all in his power to help you now. Forgive me for laughing dear, but what I want to know is how often do I have to marry you to make an honest man of you? Also since when is he so anxious to make sure I'm a member of his family? Of course I have no objections and shall inform our go between to that effect.
9 July 1942
Dear Bill:

In nine hours I shall be with you, hold your hand in mine, kiss you and feel the nearness of you. But now I should be asleep and I'm not. I went to bed, and tried to doze off, but couldn't so many questions kept running thru this weary brain of mine, so many questions unanswered, till it seemed to me I could never sleep again peacefully until I knew the answers — why must we live this unnatural unreal life of ours this way? And for how many more long days and weeks and months that stretch into years?

And will that gaiety and joy of living return that I once had, that sparkle in life that come of being loved and cared for by you. Because its gone Bill. Only rarely do I feel it now, after seeing you, or receiving one of your precious letters. And how could it help but go Bill, when all I have now are dreams and memory and hope. How can these things leave you any other way except cold and hungry and lonely. How can these things help but change your character and often as tonight I wonder have these things been written into myself, with pencil, or indelible ink. Bill, with all I am, from the bottom of my heart and with all my mind I love you, always and forever. Always and forever, and I know it is so with you as well, and if that is all we are to have in this life Bill, it is still so very much. But I cannot help worrying and wondering sometimes, if added to these years, that have been taken from us, something more precious and dear has not been stolen, those of your qualities I've always loved so much, light heartedness, patience, gaiety, Those same that I fear have been pilfered from me.

The sun is rising dearest, the milkman has come and gone with a great deal of noise and talk to his horse. At least he has a horse — whereas I have only a cold sheet of paper and pen.

And I should be asleep for tomorrow. I shall see you and I do not want to appear bleary eyed and tired for your already difficult life I shall add another worry about my health I'm sure.

Forgive the early morning mood my sweet, tomorrow is another day, a very important one to us, and with one kiss from you, my worries will take wing and fly away.

Good night sweetheart.

Freedom And Tragedy

When the German army attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the war between imperialists became a just war of freedom and liberation. With relief, the Canadian party, like Communist parties everywhere, resumed its place in the anti-fascist coalition and Communists volunteered for overseas duty. With Hitler's armies advancing towards Stalingrad, the Canadian
party became the most zealous of all patriotic forces. Hunted down for treason only months before, Communists were now the most loyal of Canadians. Virtually all its able-bodied members volunteered to fight overseas and several of its most able young leaders did not return. On the home front, Communists insisted that workers go all out in cooperating with their bosses to maximize production. The same labour leaders they had attacked so bitterly for having supported the war effort, they now condemned for not supporting it strenuously enough. They championed incentive pay, sanctioned speed ups, and opposed strikes.

By early fall 1942, the campaign of Communists to gain legality was gathering support. The Communists, though still underground, had already demonstrated their support for the war in various ways. Through an organization called the “Tim Buck Plebiscite Committees,” later named the “Communist-Labour Total War Committees”, they launched a campaign to win support for a national plebiscite on conscription called for by Mackenzie King. Tim Buck’s pledge of support to Mackenzie King in his pamphlet “A National Front For Victory,” and his promise that Communists would be a moderating influence in the trade union movement, did not go unnoticed. Norman Robertson, an advisor to Mackenzie King, suggested that for tactical reasons the Communists had “become a restraining rather than a revolutionary influence in trade union organizations” and should now be encouraged rather than suppressed. No doubt he also calculated that a renewed Communist Party could steal away some of the alarming support being gathered by the surging CCF.

Mitchell Hepburn, seasoned union-basher and red-hunter, must have come to the same conclusion for, he now became a leading figure in the campaign to lift the ban on the CP. He was instrumental in getting Dick Steele a quick release from Toronto’s Don Jail and even invited Esther and the newborn Steele twins out to his farm near St. Thomas.

On 25 September, through their lawyer J.L. Cohen, Party leaders that had escaped internment arranged to surrender to the RCMP to finally end the charade. Tim Buck, Stewart Smith, Fred Rose, Sam Carr, and a half dozen others were removed to Don Jail and after a brief, symbolic incarceration, were released with the signing of undertakings not to participate in the still illegal Communist Party or to engage in anti-war activity. This gesture opened the way for the release of all remaining internees.

The leaves were falling off the trees on 9 October as Bill Walsh stepped out of jail. It was chilly and overcast, but there was Anne. The nightmare was over; life could begin again. First to Montréal where Herschel received them graciously and they discussed arrangements for a Jewish wedding. Then it was off to Toronto to see Dick and Esther and the twins, and to visit
his brother Sammy’s family, and to a reunion with comrades Walsh had not
seen for two years.

At Party headquarters, Tim Buck told Bill he was to take over again as
Party regional director in Windsor. Back in Windsor, Walsh found the UAW
locals still under Party influence and fully committed to the new policy of
no strikes and full cooperation with company owners to increase produc­
tion. He’d been two years behind bars for opposing this war and for
condemning unions for working hand in hand with government and
industry. And here he was heading up the district Communist-Labour Total
War Committee and denouncing these same unions for not supporting the
war effort more strenuously. None of it made any sense but Walsh was very
relieved that the party had rejoined the mainstream. It was like being back
in the popular front days with Tim Buck filling Massey Hall in Toronto, the
Hebrew Sick Benefit Hall in Winnipeg, and everywhere else. With the party
taking a leading role in advancing popular causes and with the heroic feats
of the Red Army, party membership soared again.

Walsh’s only regret those days is that he were not already overseas
fighting the fascists in the front lines. But there was another reason for him
to stay behind now — Anne’s failing health. In addition to her ulcers and
her colds Anne was victim to painful migraine headaches. One February evening with Anne retired to their bedroom and Bill conversing quietly with the landlady in the living room, he heard a piercing scream, “BILL!” By the time the doctor arrived, Anne had died in his arms of a brain hemorrhage. He buried her in Windsor, choosing for her tombstone a passage from “Hymn to a Fallen Comrade”:

“The dream is in sight for the toilers
And you too are marching along”.

Anne may have had a premonition that their reunion would be brief for, after describing a dream where “the walls recede, the doors dissolve and our feet are freed”, she commented: “Wondering about that day, I’m almost afraid. Will it be too much for us?”

“I was in a state of shock. I blamed myself for not having realized how sick Anne was,” Bill recalled. “I told myself I should have insisted that she see another doctor. Telegrams of condolences poured in but in my heart, my life had ended. Esther and Dick came to my side immediately and insisted on taking me away for a few days to the Laurentians. All I could think of doing was going overseas to fight the Nazis. What did I have to lose?”
Suddenly there was nothing to stop him from going overseas. Dick Steele, Muni Erhlich, and another friend, Johnny Miller, were already in uniform. By the summer Bill Walsh had joined up.

Notes

1 For more on the internment of Communists see Reg Whitaker, “Official Repression of Communism During WWII,” Labour/Le Travail, 17 (Spring 1986), 135-68.
2 Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour (Toronto 1973), Chapter four.
3 Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, 58.
6 This story was related to me by Bill Walsh, but it was evidently part of the lore of internal Party members since it and other stories turn up in the memoirs of internal Party members collected by Bill and Kathleen Repka, Dangerous Patriots (Vancouver 1982).