Chapter Eleven

A New Career

Bill Walsh was close to 60 years old when he began his new career. Working as a union consultant in the years following his severance from the UE turned out to be truly liberating for him. He relished both the variety of work and the variety of roles he found himself in. The problem of authority that had dogged his relationship with the national officers in UE now largely disappeared. As a consultant, advisor, spokesman, or representative, his role was always clearly defined. In a very short time, his services were in great demand and he was back to twelve hour days, seven days a week. The basement of his Hamilton home served as his office, and soon he was employing a near full-time secretary. He also took on a series of young men as apprentices, some of whom, such as Paul Middleton and Peter Warrian, went on to build distinguished careers in the labour movement. One of these young men, Brian Switzman, would become a full-time assistant. By the mid-1970s only a small portion of his work was based in Hamilton, so in 1980 he and Esther moved to Toronto as they wanted to be closer to Michael and their grandchildren who lived in Toronto.

By the mid-1970s, Walsh had already worked for at least 50 locals and national unions. It is no exaggeration to say that he mesmerized many of the people he worked with. Many regarded him as one of the most outstanding trade unionist they had ever witnessed. What was the secret of his success? Jim Tester, president of the Mine-Mill local in Sudbury, saw him up close, as Walsh led that union through three sets of negotiations beginning in 1969. “There is no question that Bill Walsh is a masterly tactician in negotiations,” wrote Tester. “His ability, opposite the best management lawyers, is brilliant.... He never equivocates, never bluffs, never lies. And for that quality, he is respected by all sides. I've seen it in the startled faces of management people, and in the admiring eyes and voices of our own people.... But it is as a strategist that he is an outstanding trade union leader. He knows how to bring the power and strength of the membership into the bargaining room. He can do this because he listens to
the membership, gets to know their problems, their thinking. He can rally and unify them behind their program." Percy Brown, Chairman of the Draftsmen, offered this comment in a tribute to Walsh at a Draftsmen banquet:

He has led us in six sets of negotiations. Each one has been an eye-opener. When Bill does it, when he speaks for us, it always sounds new and exciting, as if we were hearing it for the first time. Bill always insists that we keep in close touch with our members, that they are the source of strength. He inspires confidence among the members and among the leaders. What a guy!

In 1981, Walsh handed all of his clients over to Union Consulting Services, a firm set up by three of the men he had been working with. His goal was to finally remove the work from his home and to begin to reduce his own workload. Although listed on its letterhead, he was never a partner in UCS, but did act as consultant to the firm and continued as the nominee for those unions that insisted on it. He also took on some clients outside the UCS and continued in a reduced capacity until his full retirement at the age of 80.

Working For Mine-Mill

Bill Walsh considered his experience with Mine-Mill Local 598 in the late 1960s and the 1970s to be a highlight in his long career in the labour movement. He resumed his relationship with Local 598 towards the end of 1968. As part of the terms of the merger arrangement between Mine-Mill and Steel, the bulk of Mine-Mills national officers were absorbed into the Steelworker staff. This left the Falconbridge local with few experienced leaders. Walsh was thus asked to represent the union before arbitration boards and to help the executive prepare for upcoming negotiations.

He was shocked at what he found. The leadership appeared to have little understanding of the most basic elements of their own contract and was ill-equipped to formulate the demands for a new one. The existing contract was ghastly. It was not so much the wages, although even these had fallen drastically relative to other industrial workers; the main problem was that the operative language of the agreement — the grievance procedure, seniority, promotions, compulsory overtime — was on the lowest possible level, language that hadn't been seen elsewhere for twenty years. This neglect was a measure of the price miners paid for the years of internal disputes and raiding.
Walsh's first arbitration involved a case where the union had launched a grievance over a practice that was within the collective agreement. "I don't believe you guys," I said to them. 'Don't you realize that an arbitration board is obliged to determine only whether or not the company is living up to the collective agreement, not whether it's been nice to you, or carried on as it may have sometime in the past? What kind of a world have you fellows been living in?" He actually won that case, but only after convincing the chairman of the arbitration board that there was some ambiguity in the clause and that therefore past practice should prevail.

Walsh helped the executive formulate demands for the next round of negotiations which were then presented to the membership for ratification. This was the proper role of the union president, he knew, but the executive thrust the leadership function on to him and although he wouldn't admit it, he was not unhappy to accept it. Through the course of the negotiations and the strike that followed, he had in many ways become the de facto leader of the local. Another decision largely determined by Walsh was the strike deadline. According to Ontario law, a union could only strike after the existing contract had expired and a government conciliation officer had been brought in to help bring about a settlement. Quite often workers laboured for several months under the old contract while negotiations continued. Most unions conducted a strike vote only after the company's "final offer" has been rejected. In the meantime, many companies were willing to "sweeten the pot" to avoid a strike vote. This had become the established practice in Falconbridge. Walsh preferred the system long adopted by the auto workers' union — conduct a single vote on the eve of the expiration date: accept the company's best offer or strike — no contract, no work. The executive agreed with Walsh's approach and asked him to sell the idea to the stewards and members.

By mid-July negotiations had been ongoing for some time and the 21 August expiry date loomed. Inco workers represented by Steel were already on strike, and had been for two weeks. Walsh warned the company negotiator, Toronto lawyer Norman McLeod Rogers, that the union would strike on 22 August if the members turned down their final offer. By this time the company, realizing that the union was serious, came up with a proposal which would have given Falconbridge workers an immediate 8 1/2 per cent wage increase and a guarantee that they piggyback onto the eventual Inco settlement. This looked good to many members, and had long been established practice at Falconbridge.

Walsh voiced his disagreement to this practise at the negotiation table and also had it reprinted in the 598 News for the membership.
There is no point in you repeating to us again that if the company is not highly profitable it would have a bad effect on the workers — that we would have little job security. We tell you this: If it were not for the workers, you wouldn’t make any profit at all! The ore would remain in the ground and your smelters would be useless. Your management, sales and personnel departments and all the rest would be redundant.

Your whole approach to monetary matters is that we follow ‘district patterns.’ Well, gentlemen, this committee has instructed me to say to you: we have no advance knowledge of what Inco workers will accept as settlement of their strike. We wish them the best and we will do what we can to assist them. But we want you to understand that it is for your workers that we speak. We will not be tied in advance to anyone else’s settlement. If you tell us, in effect, that we have been the tail to Inco’s dog, we tell you that whether or not that was the case in the past years, we are not such a tail now. We don’t intend to be wagged by them or anyone else! Mine-Mill members are standing on their own feet. This fact had better be recognized.

At that point, there had never been a strike at Falconbridge, but realizing that one could be imminent, Rodgers improved the offer somewhat, though in the final analysis it still depended on the Inco settlement.

Walsh knew that repeating this pattern would be a disaster for the union, only perpetuating its weakness and widening the split with Steel. “I was beginning to sense a certain disquietude in the community,” he explained. “The Inco workers were on strike and our people were still working. The Vietnam [War] was on and I was telling the executive that Mr. Nixon was going to be crying for nickel. I said there is no reason why the Inco strike should be undercut by Falconbridge. The thing to do is to shut down the industry and close off all the supplies. Then we have much more power in dealing with both companies.”

The only executive member he knew from the old days was Jim Tester, a long-time Party member who had just recently been elected president of Local 598. Tester agreed with his position, and together they convinced the bargaining team to recommend rejection to the membership. 598 News carried this account of Walsh’s appeal to the members:

You have a choice to make. You can choose the nice easy road; the comfortable full-stomach road; the road that assures your children will have shoes and socks when they start school after Labour Day. Or you can choose the hard road, the road on which the future is unsure — except that you will not be letting others fight the battles, while you hang on their backs. It’s not the smart road — not the road of the business unionists. But it’s the real union man’s road. We ask you to turn your back away from the easy comfortable road, and put your feet
firmly on the hard road of strike — the road of honest class conscious workers.

The hall was in an uproar, cheering and stamping. The vote was 92 per cent to reject. They struck at 8:00 p.m., 21 August and stayed out for three months.

The Labour Day parade that year was a historic event, the first time there was a united Labour Day in Sudbury in many a year. The Mine-Mill contingent, led by Bill Walsh and Jim Tester, marched down one street; the Steelworker contingent marched down another. A large crowd of cheering supporters was waiting for them when they merged. The strike ended 21 November. Letters of congratulations poured in from unions around the country. More important, nearly all Mine-Millers regarded the whole experience as a great triumph, a new beginning, and a victory of principle over expedience. In a statement to the membership, Jim Tester had this to say:

At the start of this negotiation battle with Falconbridge many people said openly we would fail because of our inexperience. Some were gloating because we would be humiliated and smashed, and they would pick up the pieces. I pledged at the time we would get the best trade
union brains in the country to help us. Our members, our friends and our enemies know that's exactly what we did. We could have searched the length and breadth of this country and could not have come up with a wiser, more knowledgeable adviser and spokesman than Bill Walsh. He confounded the company experts time and again. He gave fantastic guidance to our negotiating committee, insisting that each proposition be completely understood and agreed on before being put to the Company. He gave leadership to our strike captains, pickets and general membership, such as we have never seen before. His spirit and energy inspired all of us.

There was one sour note to this episode, one that earned for Bill Walsh the hostility of yet another element in the labour movement. In July 1969, the Council of Canadian Unions held its founding convention in Sudbury. Roy Scranton, a militant underground miner and vice-president of Local 598 was elected president of the CCU.

The CCU was the creature of Kent Rowley and Madelaine Parent, long-time leaders of the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union (CTC), a small independent union they established in the early 1950s after Rowley and Parent were fired as Canadian directors of the United Textile Workers of America. As far as Rowley and Parent were concerned, the CCU was the realization of the 1953 Hamilton Unity Conference. Mine-Mill, proud of its made-in-Canada constitution, and a staunch advocate of independent Canadian unionism, was for many years a staunch supporter of Kent Rowley. During the worst days of the Steel raids, Rowley and Parent were frequent visitors to Sudbury, speaking on behalf of Mine-Mill. The history of mutual support spanned over a decade. But during the strike problems in the relationship surfaced.

During the strike the company had cut the workers off from hospital and medical programs and the union had to raise money to cover these payments as well as strike pay. Letters were sent around the country calling for financial assistance. The money poured in, a large part of it from Canadian locals of international unions, many of whom visited the Mine-Mill offices. In the midst of this hard-earned support, strategic to the success of the strike and perhaps to the survival of the union, Mine-Mill judged it necessary to remove CCU materials attacking these very same internationals.

When Madelaine Parent came up to Sudbury to prepare for the CCU convention, she urged Walsh to settle on the terms the company was offering. She wanted Walsh to let the Steelworkers fight their own battles. Why, she asked, make common cause with them? Whatever they get you'll get anyway. Walsh assumed that she feared Mine-Mill might get beat up in a strike and be vulnerable to another raid by Steel. "I told her 'If these people are going to be an independent union they have to earn the right
to be an independent union. They can't be a union on their own and put out their hands after another group has done their fighting for them. There's a name for that. That's a company union.'”

After the strike was over, Local 598 agreed to affiliate with the CCU. Not long after, as Mine-Mill was preparing for the 1972 negotiations, CCU secretary-treasurer Kent Rowley requested that Local 598 aid CCU efforts in its campaign to raid the large Steelworker locals in Hamilton, Thompson, Trail, and Kitimat. Remembering the complications that arose from similar pressures in 1969, the executive declined. Jim Tester was the first to see the writing on the wall. Unless Mine-Mill made a clean break from the CCU, it was inviting another raid from Steel. Walsh backed up Tester. An April 1972 membership meeting voted to disaffiliate from the CCU. A series of increasingly heated letters of correspondence from Kent Rowley, vehemently denying that the CCU had a raiding policy, followed, with Rowley requesting a meeting with the Executive Board of the union. The request was denied and an editorial written by Tester appeared in the May Local 598 News supported the need for solidarity with all unions, but also the principle of independent Canadian unions. “[However,] we do not believe the road to Canadian unionism will be through raiding activities. We think this will only fragment the trade union movement still further, and makes us all easier victims for the employers.”

In the middle of July, Rowley circulated an Open Letter, again requesting a meeting with the Executive Board and the membership of Mine-Mill. By then the union was in the thick of the 1972 negotiations. Tester described the letter as “a thinly disguised attack on the leadership of our union. Its distribution certainly was not calculated to strengthen our bargaining effort.” Rowley’s letter was read out to a membership meeting that passed a resolution “to bar Kent Rowley from further entrance to our halls.”

Later, Jim Tester added this note to his President’s Report: “I have known Kent for a good many years. As a former International Vice-President of the Textile Workers Union of America he got a dirty deal as did the textile workers in Canada. He has an axe to grind. But as far as I am concerned he is not going to do it at the expense of Sudbury workers.”

Rowley struck back in an editorial appearing in the October 1972 CTC Bulletin. After reviewing the events leading up to his debarment from Mine-Mill halls, the editorial zeroed in on Bill Walsh, seen as the figure behind the sudden Mine-Mill reversal:

Their advisor in Sudbury is ... William Walsh, who also does work for American unions, including Steel. Walsh has become something of a ‘god’ to some officers of Mine-Mill. Every edition of the 598 News carries numerous pictures and the golden sayings of ‘Chairman’ Walsh. And what is Walsh’s position? He doesn’t really think that Mine-Mill should
exist. He thinks they should be in Steel. Then Unity, O Unity! would finally come to the hard rock mines.... The Testers and the Walsh's of this world cannot or do not want to understand that the achievement of unity is the simplest thing in the world: All you are required to do is lay down your arms and join the enemy.... To save their faces, they concoct disgraceful and demeaning charges ... and since they cannot sustain their charges, they retreat before locked doors.

Predictably, Jim Tester answered the charges, concluding in his November President's Report in the 598 News:

... I am convinced that sooner or later unions in Canada will be run for and by Canadians.... At this stage it is impossible to know how this will come to pass. There is more than one road. Circumstances and experience will determine the best way. Each union must choose its own course in its own time. For our part, we must continue to play our small role, with principle and honour.

These events had echoes as far away as British Columbia. It was a sad way to end Kent Rowley and Madelaine Parent's proud record of service to Sudbury workers. To the day he died, Rowley blamed Bill Walsh for having orchestrated it. Walsh waited until 1973 to answer Rowley. The occasion was a speech given at a 26 May meeting commemorating the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Western Federation of Miners of which Mine-Mill was the direct descendent.

"Every union has the right to exist," he said, "only so long as its members consider it is protecting them from the employer's greed as much as is possible in the given circumstances; and only so long as it rallies its members to exert their combined strength in their own interests and in the interests of the community." Walsh continued:

But there is a special right to exist for this union ... The constitution of the Mine Mill union is unique today. It sets out the goal, not only to protect the workers in their role as wage earners exploited daily by the employers, but it speaks of the working class and its historic role — to transform the entire system of capitalism, with its uncertainties, its undernourishment, its pollution, its corruption, its wars and butcher of populations. It would transform this into a society where men and women work together for the good of all.

... Surely there is a distinct place for a union which calls on the working people of Canada to join together in the struggle for a genuine just society, a Socialist Canada for all the people.
What appealed to Bill Walsh was not that Mine-Mill was a Canadian union, but that it had socialist roots. His problem with Steel was never that it was an “international” union, but that it was an ineffectual union that consistently failed to find, develop, and use its potential power. Nationalism *per se* never had purchase for Walsh, especially if it produced weak unions. Socialism had purchase, but only a living socialism, not merely a historic one, which is no doubt why he chose to remind the audience about the socialist ideals and goals inscribed in the Mine-Mill constitution.

Walsh worked closely with Mine-Mill through most of the decade. A tape-recorded speech he delivered to the stewards in the winter 1972, before negotiations started, was published as a pamphlet entitled “The Name of the Game.” The pamphlet has been reproduced many times since for use in union education programs (see Appendix B). Walsh led the Mine-Mill negotiations again in 1972 and in 1975. In the latter instance Falconbridge agreed to a pay and benefits package that substantially exceeded the limits set by Trudeau’s wage and price control regime and Walsh had to appear before the Anti-Inflation Board to defend the settlement.

In 1978, 29 year-old Dave Patterson led a brutal eight-month long strike on behalf of the Steelworkers against Inco. Another young man, Mine-Mill president Jack Gignac, very much a Walsh protegé, shared a platform with Patterson at a strike rally. For the first time in years a President of Mine-Mill was speaking to a strike rally in the Steelworker Hall in Sudbury! The large crowd in attendance was aware of the meaning of this moment. Twenty five years of enmity in the Sudbury labour movement had ended. Local 598 contributed a series of $10,000 monthly cheques to Steelworker Local 6500. Plant gate collections at Falconbridge conducted by the Wives Supporting the Inco Strikers (WSIS) added several thousand dollars more. That fall at a Stewards’ Banquet held in Sudbury’s historic Mine-Mill Hall, Jack Gignac presented Bill Walsh with a life-time Mine-Mill membership scroll. Walsh would visit Sudbury many more times, but this pretty well marked the end of a decade long service to Sudbury miners.
Postal Workers

Walsh was involved in several other significant contract negotiations in the 1970s. In the six month period between April and September 1970, he spent nearly every day working as a consultant for the Council of Postal Unions, then negotiated a contract with the federal government on behalf of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada (LCUC).

These unions, certified only a few years earlier, had signed their first collective agreement in 1968. But their histories as employee associations went back many years before then. A 1965 wildcat strike in the Post Office had a profound effect on Bill C-170, the Public Service Staff Relations Act. In its original form, this legislation provided only for compulsory arbitration as a means of resolving disputes. Its amended version adopted by Parliament in 1967 gave public service unions a choice. In the event they were unable to obtain a settlement through negotiation, they could choose to either strike or to accept an arbitrated award. It should be noted that the right to strike was granted to federal government employees only when it
became clear that some of them would strike anyway, whether or not it was legal.

On behalf of CUPW and the LCUC, the Council of Postal Unions elected to go the conciliation/strike route if its 1969 negotiations should end in a deadlock. Besides wages and tightening the contract language to assure employee rights, the main issues were fringe benefits and job security. The Post Office was in the early stages of modernization and automation, and Post Master Eric Kierans was committed to cutting the deficit from $130 million to $40 million in one year. The Treasury Board, bargaining on behalf of the Federal government, refused to budge from the six per cent voluntary wage guideline set up by the Price and Incomes Commission.

The Postal Council asked Bill Walsh to represent them on the Conciliation Board. Representing the government was Keith Campbell, Vice-President of the CPR. Chairing the Board was Judge Rene Lippe. Lippe’s report, released on 7 May 1970, satisfied neither side. In its news release, the Council of Postal Unions announced that the minority report of union nominee Bill Walsh “may well become the strike manifesto of the postal workers.” On 27 May the postal unions began their country-wide rotating strike which lasted three months before a settlement was reached. Throughout the intermittent negotiations, the unions retained Walsh as an advisor.

The strike was brilliantly orchestrated. By keeping the Post Office open in most centres, the unions concentrated their resources; by rotating the strike in 24 hour walkouts, they kept the Post Office off-guard and put pressure on management; by suspending the strike to deliver old-age pension cheques, the union kept public support. Even the Globe and Mail editorialized that it was unfair for the government to hold to the 6 per cent guideline for “the low paid postal workers while half the other unions in the country were romping gaily through it.” Paymaster Bud Drury was concerned that if the postal workers were allowed to break through the six per cent limit, 190,000 public servants would also abandon binding arbitration and go the strike route as the best means for settling disputes.

In the third month of the strike the Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, stated that the rotating strike was intolerable. He threatened a government lockout, or a Parliamentary back-to-work order and an imposed settlement. In the end, he appointed a new mediator and gave him ten days to produce a settlement. At this stage Walsh was asked by the union to take over as the union negotiator. The final agreement broke through the voluntary guideline and achieved many of the objectives set forth in Walsh’s original minority report. These included fringe benefits for part-time workers, greater job security for casual workers, and a commitment not to layoff any full-time employees. In announcing acceptance of the settlement to the press, Walsh chose the same words he used in describing every settlement
he was ever involved in: "Its not what the workers deserve; it never is. But it is the best we could do."

Walsh acted as consultant to the postal unions on several other occasions, most importantly to draft amendments to CUPW's constitutional structure. He travelled several thousand miles, seeking input from union activists from one end of the country to the other. The constitutional structure he devised was presented to the 1971 convention and remained in effect until CUPW and the Letter Carriers were merged twenty some years later.

Bill Walsh And The Ontario Waffle Movement

At the invitation of the President of the Hamilton Mountain New Democratic Party, Walsh joined the NDP in 1969. With his hectic schedule, he thought there would be little time for politics. When he attended the 1970 convention of the Ontario NDP, he was surprised to meet up with some old comrades, many of whom he had not seen for a decade or more. They took him along to the caucus of the Waffle group, barely a year in existence, but already in high gear.

The Waffle Movement enjoyed only a brief moment in Canadian history. It began towards the end of the 1960s and had all but vanished by 1972. Yet, as much from its failures as from its successes, it had a powerful impact in its time and beyond. The Waffle reflected, galvanized, and focused left wing economic nationalism. "[Our] struggling against American control of Canadian oil and nickel industries was [part of] a worldwide resistance to American militarism and imperialism," James Laxer wrote in retrospect. "It took on an aura of immense moral urgency." The Waffle Movement challenged more mainstream nationalists like Walter Gordon and Peter Newman to establish their own organization, the Committee for an Independent Canada, so as not to leave the nationalist territory exclusively to the Left.

But by far the biggest challenge posed by the Waffle was to the NDP. The Waffle Manifesto had an electrifying impact on the delegates to the 1969 Winnipeg convention. It won the support of a third of the delegates. The Waffle Manifesto was reminiscent of the Regina Manifesto of the 1930s in that it called for widespread public ownership, but for many Wafflers its main rationale was to combat foreign ownership, something that was barely mentioned in the earlier document. In any event, the NDP never accepted public ownership as an important tool in building a better society. And its notion of a good society bore little resemblance to the socialist vision of either of the two manifestos. Rather, it was content to advocate a larger role for government in regulating and moderating the market economy of
corporate capitalism. This had been party policy since the 1950s. Responding to pressure from the Waffle Movement, the mainstream NDP did come to accept foreign ownership and control as somewhat important, but it would never accept the Waffle's position on such issues as Québec's right to separate, workers' control of the workplace, and a host of other issues.

It was less this conflict over ideology and strategy and more the Waffle's challenge to the NDP establishment inside both the party and the NDP-affiliated "international" unions that was to be the Waffle's undoing. Party leaders were not prepared to see their authority challenged by a throng of long-haired, often bearded, unruly young people. Party parliamentarians were concerned that the Waffle's radical positions would cost them votes and possibly seats. For its part, the Waffle understood that it could not mount an effective offence against the leadership unless it established its own organization, and developed its own network and publications. It also mounted its own campaigns on issues such as promoting the public takeover of corporations like Imperial Oil. The Waffle's support for independent unionism was anathema to the heads of Canadian sections of "international" unions, and they were close to hysterical when the Waffle began to intrude into their space.

Wafflers were often rowdy and headstrong. They could also be arrogant towards others in the party, relentless, and even abusive in their eagerness to nail down points of order and win debates. Though they never won majorities, they always had substantial support in the party. While most Waffle members were young, middle class, and university educated, Waffle extra-parliamentary campaigns most often involved working-class, trade union constituencies. In part this was because union locals frequently requested support from the Waffle group. Dissidents in some of the unions, including the Steelworker local at Stelco in Hamilton, and autoworkers in Windsor, gravitated to the Waffle group. In January 1972 the Waffle group sponsored a conference in Windsor on the Auto Pact. The conference was endorsed by the Windsor and District Labour Council and by the mayor of Windsor. The conference, which drew 350 participants, many of them autoworkers, attacked as inadequate the UAW leadership's attempts to preserve the Auto Pact safeguards through lobbying Parliament and writing letters. Instead, it called for a demonstration and a one-day work stoppage by Canadian autoworkers. These developments alarmed the various leaders of the Steelworkers and the United Automobile Workers. While initially they had complained that the Waffle was a collection of academics and students who had no concept of working class and trade union issues, now they began to fear that the Waffle group was making inroads into their own organizations. In the irreverent phrase of the Last Post magazine, the Waffle group's attacks on the union leadership were like "farting in church." Dennis
McDermott of the Autoworkers and Lynn Williams of the Steelworkers were the first to call for the expulsion of the Waffle from the NDP.

There was a lot of personal venom — both ways. The party establishment, especially those with a long history in the labour movement, saw the Waffle challenge as a reincarnation of the old battles with the communists. And some did not hesitate to borrow the old smear tactics they had mastered twenty years earlier. It was an over reaction. Even David Lewis argued against the take-no-prisoners solution that his son Stephen Lewis, provincial leader of the NDP, bought hook, line, and sinker from the international unions.

The end came on 24 June in an Orillia high school gym. It was here at a provincial council meeting that Stephen Lewis declared that the name, the group, the public identity of the Waffle group were in violation of the party constitution. “I too wish to fight for a free Canada but without the Waffle forever an encumbrance around my neck,” he declared. Barely a year earlier Jim Laxer, a 28-year old sessional lecturer at Queen’s University, had placed second to David Lewis in a bid for the NDP federal leadership. Throughout the four ballots, Laxer actually garnered at least as many, if not more riding votes than Lewis, but very few union delegate votes, which had gone overwhelmingly to Lewis. Now the Waffle’s affair with the NDP was terminated.

The NDP paid a high price when it expelled the Waffles. It turned off a generation of activists and never did regain the intellectual vigour that made the NDP a lively venue for a time. As David Lewis was to remark some years later, “When the Waffle left the NDP, most of the brains left with them.”

When Bob Laxer asked Walsh to join the Waffle, he readily agreed. It felt good to be back in politics again. He admired the circle of young academics like Mel Watkins and Jim Laxer that gave the Waffle its public leadership. Yes, he would help Bob Laxer set up a Waffle Labour caucus. Yes, he would sit on the Ontario Waffle Steering committee.

As busy as he was through this period — in Ottawa working with the postal workers, in Sudbury preparing Mine-Mill for the 1972 negotiations with Falconbridge, and handling dozens of arbitration cases for various unions in southern Ontario — Walsh was more actively involved in politics than he had been for years. On 4 March 1971, he found himself sharing a platform in Hamilton with Jim Laxer, Waffle’s candidate in the federal NDP leadership race. On 3 April he was speaking on plant closures in London along with Mel Watkins. On 15 May he was delivering a talk to the Waffle Labour Committee on trade union strategy. On 26 June he was working out a Waffle strategy for the Ontario Federation of Labour annual convention. In August he was helping organize a Waffle support conference in
Brantford for Kent Rowley's striking Textpack workers. By January 1972 he was chairing a session of the Waffle's Auto Pact conference in Windsor.

From the start Walsh disagreed with the basic premise of the Waffle — that the NDP could actually be transformed into a party that would one day build a socialist Canada. And he was always uncomfortable with the Waffle's nationalism. But its analysis of Canada's dependent economy was sound, he thought, and he agreed with the Waffle Manifesto's pronouncement that "capitalism must be replaced by socialism, by national planning and by public ownership of the means of production." Wherever things were heading, he believed that the Waffle could be a vital force, even if its only effect was to help develop a greater socialist consciousness among workers both inside and outside the NDP.

The Waffle Labour Caucus had an active core of 25, mainly veteran socialists, in the industrial unions from Windsor to Sudbury. They were never strong enough to organize caucuses in union locals, but the Labour Caucus did provide a political focus and strategic programme that its members could take into their locals. Political leadership within the Labour Caucus usually came from Bob Laxer. The priority Bob Laxer gave to independent unionism never sat well with Walsh. The "right-wing establishment has no stomach for the struggle to free Canada from the American Empire," said a pamphlet Laxer wrote, *A Socialist Program for Canadian Trade Unionists.* While it never went so far as to promote Kent Rowley's brand of break away unionism, it called for "completely sovereign and independent Canadian unions." Its tabloid, distributed at the Ontario Federation of Labour, urged "the Canadian working class to free itself from the permanent political shackles" and from having "some of its most important decisions requiring the formal agreement of Washington or Detroit...." Walsh found this strident tone offensive, the attacks upon the union brass heavy-handed and simplistic, and the language often jargonistic. But the initiative lay with others and he contented himself with trying to moderate the attacks.

When the provincial council of the NDP voted to ban the Waffle movement, Walsh went along with the majority of the Waffle remnants who voted to establish a non-electoral Movement for an Independent Socialist Canada (MISC). He continued to work actively in the Labour Caucus, although its presence in union locals diminished considerably now that it operated outside the NDP. A year and a half later he again went along with the majority to form a new party, although he was not among the optimists. Unable to overcome internal divisions, the project died after a dismal result in the July 1974 federal election.

As the official opposition within the NDP, the Waffle contained many disparate elements that managed to tolerate each other because they shared
a common enemy, the tepid party establishment. Outside the NDP, these divisions could not be contained. The tensions between socialism and nationalism, and between the original founders and a group of younger upstarts, shattered the fledging organization. The Waffle had polarized and split into two groups: the "ultra-nationalists" and the "ultra-leftists," with the interface between independence and socialism lost in the heat and bitterness of the debate. Criticism of the Laxer leadership was attributed to "branch-plant radicalism" and "an Americanized, mini-left anti-nationalist sectarianism." The Laxer leadership, in turn, was attacked as putting forth vague classless slogans during the election campaign and turning the Waffle movement into the left-wing of a nationalist movement alongside the likes of Liberals Walter Gordon and Eric Kierans. An October meeting in Ottawa was scheduled to try to sort things out.

By the time the October 1974 finale took place, both sides had succeeded in becoming as outlandish as the caricatures of them drawn by their rivals. Having been inactive most of the year, Bill Walsh was unaware of how bitter the rivalry had become. Throughout that weekend he and some of the other trade unionists attempted to play the role of mediator, but to no avail. In the end, Laxer walked out of the meeting in disgust, his main proposals having been defeated by his younger leftist rivals. That was the end of the Waffle. Walsh eventually resumed his membership in the NDP and remained somewhat active at the constituency level.

The Arbitrator

After 1973 much of Walsh's time was spent acting as the union nominee on three panel arbitration boards. This may sound dull after a career on the front lines but, as Larry Robbins, a Walsh protegé put it to me, "he made that position very special. A lot of union nominees held to the view that they were there in a judicial role and therefore should be neutral. They took a hands-off approach. For Bill, there could be no neutrality for a union nominee. He was there to represent the union. Neutrality was a sham."

A lot of what he did involved grievance arbitration, but his greatest contribution in this field lay in so-called interest arbitration, particularly with the nurses. Many Ontario government employees and their unions were denied the right to strike by legislation. When they could not reach a settlement with their employers, an arbitration board was established to impose a collective agreement. On these panel boards, the union and employer would each name their respective nominee. The chairperson would be mutually selected, or failing that, would be government-appointed. In all arbitration cases, the employer and union would each present their
arguments before the board and call in witnesses as required. On the basis of the evidence or arguments presented, the nominees’ job was to persuade the chairperson of the merits of their respective sides.

While acting as an arbitrator, Walsh worked very closely with the individual presenting the union’s brief to the board. “When he had the time,” Robbins explained, “Bill would go through our briefs line by line and pick them apart. Some people resented him because his criticism could be brutal. But he was rarely wrong, and as he always reminded us, his own efforts with the chairman depended almost exclusively on what was contained in our briefs so as far as he was concerned we had to get it right!”

Everyone who worked with Walsh was struck by the intensity of his work habits. He would catnap twenty minutes during the day and get by with three or four hours sleep at night. “By the way he worked I was shocked to find out that he was already past 65 when I first got to know him in the mid-1970s,” says Robbins. “He would travel days on end and he could be away weeks on the road. He always seemed to have arranged two or three meetings on every trip. In the early evening, we would motor down to a nearby city for an arbitration hearing set for the following morning. As soon as we settled into the hotel, he would set up shop in the bar to discuss some grievance case or another that he was involved in. Typically, he would be up to 1 or 2 a.m. meeting with various individuals. But by 6 a.m. he would be up and by 7 he would have gone for a walk and read the morning paper.”

Rose Betcherman related another story that illustrates the point. Working into the early hours one morning in the early 1980s, Walsh had been reviewing a draft of an award she had prepared as chair of a board he had been sitting on. The draft upset him very much, so much so that he called her to talk about it. There was nothing unusual about this except that it was by then 3 a.m! He was so engrossed in the work that he had lost all track of time. Betcherman admitted that if it had been anyone else, she would have torn strips off him.

“He had a tremendous influence on the chair,” says Robbins. “He was sharp, knowledgeable, and he had integrity. He could cite labour arbitration cases to the month and the page, sometimes word for word. ‘But the real secret of his success,’ in Robbins’ view, ‘was the effort he put into his cases. He did way more preparation than anybody else, wrote everything out including how he was going to deal with a board chair. It was like a chess game for him. This is why he was so exacting to work with. He would go through drafts of our briefs in painstaking detail, and it really bothered him if our work was at all shoddy.” Added Paul Middleton, another Walsh protégé who worked for him in 1973-4, “Our goal in life was to get through an arbitration without a Bill Walsh post-mortem.”
After 1973 much of Walsh’s work was connected with the Ontario nurses. His introduction to the nurses arose from his work with Mine-Mill in Sudbury where, in 1972, the Provincial Member of the Legislature, Eli Martel, asked him if he would represent three nurses who had been fired a year earlier from St. Joseph’s Hospital. In this instance there was no collective agreement and a so-called consent arbitration process was put into place, with a single arbitrator who was to hear representations on behalf of the hospital and the three nurses. Shortly thereafter, Anne Gribben, Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), asked Walsh to act as the nominee for the nurses on interest and grievance arbitration panels. This was only shortly after the Ontario Hospital Association was certified as a collective bargaining agent for the nurses. Up to then they had no union. They had a professional association, the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA), but because the Association also represented nurse managers, the Supreme Court ruled that it would be a conflict of interest for the association to engage in collective bargaining.

Representing the nurses almost became a full time job for Walsh. The nurse’s union would be the first to acknowledge that it was largely through his efforts that nurses wages jumped from a paltry $7000 in the mid-1970s to $50,000 by 1991, and that benefits and working conditions that had been non-existent now met the industrial standard.

Walsh also did some educational work for ONA. With his story-telling ability, he proved to be a superb teacher, weaving in his own extensive experience and the principles of a class conscious trade unionism. But ONA leaders felt threatened by his presentation. They wanted him as their nominee but they avoided inviting him to participate further in their educational sessions. He did give a series of lectures for McMaster University’s Labour Studies and elsewhere.
Epilogue

In the early 1980s Walsh handed over most of his business to Union Consulting Services, which had been set up by a handful of young men that had worked with him over the previous five years. He continued to represent those clients that insisted upon it and he remained active as a union arbitrator until the early 1990s, by which time he was over 80 years old. In 1984 a testimonial dinner was held in his honour attended by his union clients, board chairmen, and some management representatives. He has been honoured as well by the Ontario Nurses Association and by various professional groups. The UE was the one union never to have honoured him or even recognize his twenty-year contribution. Understandably, he would always feel bitter about this.

The only group of individuals whose mention brought what I would describe as a derisive response from Walsh was Charlie Millard, Larry Sefton, and the Steelworker crowd, circa the 1940s and 1950s. But except for C.S. Jackson and the UE experience, Walsh bore very few resentments. Nor were there many regrets. Specifically, he never regretted joining the Communist Party, even after the Soviet experiment lay in ruins and the socialist movement was in shambles. If he had the choice, I know he would do it all over again. The trip to the Soviet Union remained the highlight of his life, a story he would tell and re-tell with only the slightest prompting.

His fondest days in the Communist Party were in the 1930s. He was never able to recreate that feeling of warmth and comradeship after the war: partly because of the death of his best friends, Dick Steele and Muni Ehrlich, partly because he never felt the same spirit of friendliness and ease with the Hamilton branch, partly because of the toxic atmosphere in the UE, and partly because there were issues that dogged him which he never felt free to raise. Of course the atmosphere within the Party everywhere had changed. The Cold War and the spy scandals pushed the Party into a defensive mode. The struggle to survive superseded the struggle to challenge the system. Even moral victories, let alone real ones, were hard to come by. The gusto and the joyfulfulness of an earlier time were replaced by an air of grimness. There was less tolerance than ever for questioning the
leadership, let alone policy or dogma. With the Khrushchev revelations, the Party lost whatever small energy it had retained.

Perhaps, had he not been employed by the UE, Walsh may have quit the Party then, or even before — although in my opinion this is most unlikely and he firmly denied it. In any case, having come into open conflict with the leadership of the UE, he could have no future with the CP. At most, however, he suffered an emotional disillusionment, never an intellectual one. Still alive while these last words were being written, Walsh never abandoned his own faith that a more equitable, democratic, and just society would one day replace capitalism in Canada and throughout the world.

As I met with him at length in the summer of 1994, and for a brief visit again in 1997, I thought he seemed serene and content, despite suffering from severe melanoma on his ear that required a major operation. In fact, the surgeon had made the decision that Bill was too old to operate on, but after he got to know him changed his mind. His cheerful disposition and positive outlook on life no doubt played a major role in his recovery.

Somehow, Walsh made the adjustment to a life of leisure as well as he had all the other adjustments in his life. As so often happens in old age, renewing acquaintances with old friends and family became an important part of his life. There were many Wolofsky family reunions, including visits to Montréal and visits to see Sheri in British Columbia. Esther was his constant companion and care-giver, a role she obviously took great pleasure in. "I've been very happy with Esther," he said to me the last time we met. "I have the highest regard for her. She's honest and genuine, just an excellent person and she's been a wonderful wife and friend to me."

Notes

2 As we know now, Jim Tester’s prophesy came true. The Canadian labour movement today is largely Canadian-based and there have been many different roads. In the 1990s Local 598 became part of the Canadian Automobile Workers, which itself broke away from the United Automobile Workers in 1985 and proceeded to attract many unions into its fold including the UE.
3 James Laxer, In Search of a New Left (Toronto 1996), 151.