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??FROM- George MacEachern's Autobiography "I Joined the Unemployed Union in 1931" Early in the Depression a small group, headed by Dan MacKay, who had been active on the plant council, started an organization of unemployed. They hired a hall at Whitney Pier and, in no time, had a membership of two hundred or more. Their meetings always found the hall full. In its early days the new organization distinguished itself by its militant fight against evictions. On notice, the unemployed would arrive in numbers at the scene of an eviction, enter the house that was being cleared out by the sheriff's deputies and sit on the furniture. In the case of furniture already on the street they would carry it back into the house and keep it there. This may not have been the sole reason for evictions being suspended but it certainly was a contributing factor. I was unemployed for a few weeks before I joined the unemployed union in 1931. I went there, not so much on my own volition as because a young fellow in the neighbourhood asked me to go down with him. I went down and joined up and immediately got on a committee. I certainly didn't look for it; I didn't have that much experience or confidence. But as it turned out, I gained experience and eventually I served one term as a chairman of the unemployed union and one as recording secretary. One of my first activities in the union was on a committee set up to try to get milk for the children. I soon learned a little more about how those in responsible positions were able to insulate themselves from our problems. The situation was that the farmers just couldn't afford to bring their milk to town to give it away so they had to give it to the pigs and our people had to do without it because we had no money to buy it and the authorities certainly wouldn't provide it. This is where I first met Harry Davis. Harry and I went to visit the politicians and the Red Cross and whoever we thought might be able to help, but there was nobody that was able to help. We saw Finlay MacDonald who was the federal Conservative member. Of course, he deplored the fact that children had no milk while milk had to be wasted by the farmers. But he warned us against any violent action because the government would only cut us off at the Strait of Canso and we'd all starve. This didn't impress Harry and myself very much, but he advised us to go to the Red Cross, that they had undertaken the responsibility. We saw the president or secretary of the Red Cross, a nice lady, a little elderly, and we told her what our problem was--that the kids had no milk. We had made a survey to see just how badly milk was needed and the most extreme case we found was one family of ten had a pint of milk coming a day. The woman of the house was tubercular and we had some pretty sad stories of the condition of our people. We saw the Red Cross and this lady told us there was nothing they could do. They had put on a drive and they had only raised \$350 or \$375. At least half of that had to go to Halifax to the provincial office and they had bought a pair of spectacles for a girl going to school and a couple of things like that and they had no money left. I guess I probably lost my temper. I didn't get really violent but I asked her if she knew the harm the Red Cross were doing to the children in taking responsibility. This was government responsibility and our people had the right to eat. I told her the Red

Cross were only being used as a buffer between the hungry and the government. Her response was that they were doing the best they could and she said, "You have no socks on." I said, "I don't wear socks," which was quite true, because I got used to being without socks for that matter. She said that there was some that her late husband had and she'd be glad to give them to me. I didn't want the socks. We weren't looking for socks, we were looking for milk. And then she had some clothes and a cane that might fit Harry Davis, but Harry, too, wasn't awfully concerned. Harry had been crippled in the Drumheller mine years before and he had a very bad limp, but he certainly didn't want a cane, especially when we were looking for milk. This was something new for me, coming up against people that could do things and coming away with only excuses or sympathy which wasn't an awful lot of good to our people. We had nothing to show for our efforts other than bitter experience. I had been for some time pretty well worked up at the way the people were being used and the complete disregard for such a thing as comfort and in some cases for health itself, and life for that matter. It didn't seem to make one damn bit of difference whether you died from neglect or not, and some did die. I remember one fellow in particular, he lived in the same row of shacks as a couple of old friends of mine and he got sick. His friends sent for the city health officer and he came down and advised them that there was nothing wrong with the man that some good food and warm clothing wouldn't fix. But he didn't get the good food and he didn't get the warm clothing and his income be-

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