CHAPTER ONE
Riding the Freight

The train was out of Regina, bound for Montreal, and I had a box car all to myself. It was not the first time I had travelled this way; but this time it was different. It was the end of April 1934, May Day was near and, since I was about 15, I had always taken part in celebrations of that international labour holiday.

Now, at the age of 19, I was lonely and felt somewhat guilty. I thought back to the May Day rallies I had attended in Winnipeg, Regina, and other centres. I missed the fiery speeches and the cheers of the crowds. The rallies had, for me, been a source of inner strength, challenge, and defiance. These were the Hungry Thirties, and I was one of thousands who were aimlessly "riding the rods," "sleeping in jungles," and walking the streets in search of work and food, or just chasing rainbows.

But I had stars in my eyes and I refused to accept the deprived and meaningless life of so many around me. I was aware of the injustices of the social system, and I blamed capitalism — the greed of the rich and the indifference and callousness of politicians. I was a rebel, but a rebel with a cause.

As the train rolled along, images of the past unfolded with all their excitements, difficulties, and adventures. This was what had shaped, and would continue to shape, the tapestry of my life.

I was born in Odessa, Russia, in 1915, at a time when my family was caught in the turmoil and disorder between the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Before the war my grandmother, uncles, and aunt had emigrated to the United States. My parents and grandfather were to follow; but when the war broke out, immigration into the United States was restricted, and they were unable to leave.

Both my parents were performers in the Jewish theatre, and my father was particularly talented. When I was about two, and my brother one, my father was drafted into the Russian army and sent to the Austrian front, where he was taken prisoner and held until the end of hostilities in 1918. He then returned to Odessa and resumed his efforts to get our family to America. My grandfather had decided to remain in Russia.

Finally, in the summer of 1923, we left Odessa for Bremen, Germany, from where we were to sail to the United States. At Bremen we were taken to a quarantine compound on the outskirts of the city. Surrounded by a high stone wall, the compound comprised several dormitories, each housing about 75 men, women, and children. They slept in double-decked bunks and ate from long uncovered tables in a common room that also served as a recreation hall. We soon learned there were hundreds like us, waiting their turn to sail.

Soon after we arrived we were told that only my father could be admitted to the United States. He qualified since most of his family was already there. My mother, brothers, and I would have to wait until immigration regulations were
eased. My parents were deeply depressed. The question was whether my father should go on alone, or wait with us; for how long we did not know. They agonized over this for several days and finally decided he should go. The rest of us began to adjust to a monotonous, uneventful but reasonably secure life in "The Quarantine."

Shortly after my father arrived in the United States he was engaged by the Jewish Art Theatre in New York. He wrote us regularly, but was unable to tell us when we might join him. In one of his letters he said he was going on a tour of several American and Canadian cities. It was several months before we heard from him again, and then the letter came from Canada. He wrote that after an engagement in Winnipeg he had run into complications with the United States immigration authorities and had been refused readmission. As a result he had decided to remain in Winnipeg as a landed immigrant, and, at the same time, he had applied for permission to bring us to Canada.

This was one more disturbing surprise. We had heard a great deal about the promised land of the United States, but Canada was completely unknown to us. We thought it might be months, or even years, before we were permitted to enter this strange country, and we slowly became resigned to an unpredictable future.

In 1923 I celebrated my eighth birthday, and my mother arranged for me to attend a public school in Bremen. This was a new experience, and I liked it. I made friends with some German children and quickly learned to speak their language, in addition to the Russian and Yiddish I already knew. I vividly remember the teacher, Herr Schwartz. He was a man of about 30 years, always well groomed and immaculately dressed. He spoke in short, crisp, and precise sentences, but not in a commanding manner.

He was serious and business-like, even with children of our age. A strict disciplinarian, he expected his students to be alert and to refrain from unnecessary conversation. He often held a long bamboo stick, which he threatened to use on anyone who misbehaved, though he never did. He would, however, slam it on the desk in front of an offending student, and the deafening sound frightened the whole class into deadly silence, at least for a time. His worst punishment was to seize the offender's sideburn and pull it, often lifting the student with it.

The periods I found most interesting were those in which he read to us — the epic tales of Siegfried, Karl May's stories of North American Indians, and Edgar Rice Burroughs' adventures of Tarzan were the best I liked going to school, particularly because it provided an opportunity to escape from the confines of "The Quarantine."

Finally, in late 1925, we received the welcome news that our application had been accepted and we should be ready to sail for Canada on short notice. We left Bremen just before Christmas and arrived at Halifax 3 January 1926. From there we went by train to Winnipeg, where we joined my father and settled. We had become Canadians, almost by accident.

My brother and I were quickly enrolled in a school where we made rapid progress in English, just as quickly forgetting the Russian and German languages. At first I did well at school, even skipping some grades, but by the time I reached Grade Eight, the highest of my formal education, I was, at thirteen, the oldest in the class.
For about two years I studied the violin with an acquaintance of the family, and then my father arranged for me to study under John Waterhouse, the founder and conductor of the Winnipeg String Orchestra, and the most prominent music teacher in the city. After about a year he asked me if I would like to play in the second violin section of his orchestra. It was a great honour, and of course I accepted. For several weeks I studied the music that was to be on the programme, and my parents were proud that their son should play in such a large orchestra. It was, however, not only my first, but also my last appearance.

After school hours I attended a Jewish parochial school. My parents wanted me to study Jewish literature and culture, and, above all, not to forget the Jewish language. At the Workmen’s Circle School, an offshoot of the socialist movement in Europe, I studied both classical and contemporary Jewish literature, and was introduced to several political “isms” including Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, anarchism and others. I suspect these were subjects that my father did not anticipate I would study.

It was traditional among Jewish families that when their eldest son reached the age of 13, his bar mitzvah, marking his arrival at manhood, should be the cause of a celebration. And so, some months before my thirteenth birthday, my parents began making plans. I stopped going to the Workmen’s Circle School and began new studies in a Chader, or Rabbinical School. There I was instructed in the Jewish religion, the Hebrew language, and undertook the preparation of a speech in Hebrew to be delivered at my bar mitzvah. Every morning, before going to school, I attended service in the synagogue.

My bar mitzvah took place 1 March 1928, with my parents and friends gathering at the synagogue to participate in my initiation into manhood. I wore a new three-piece suit, had my own prayer shawl, and carried the small box containing Hebrew texts, known as phylactery. The ceremony went off smoothly and my Hebrew speech was well received. The festivities that followed were brief and modest. Most of the guests had a drink of whiskey or wine and a piece of cake. They shook hands with me and my father and then left.

As of that day I was no longer a boy; I was a man, a mature adult. Yet I did not feel different. It seemed that I had been an adult for a long time. Much had contributed to making me a rather serious young man: the trauma of hunger in Russia, the anxiety of life in the Bremen Quarantine, the separation of our family, the dramatic change of life in the new world, learning new languages, and the theatrical life-style of my parents, which I disliked.

The days immediately following my bar mitzvah were uneventful. I stopped going to the Hebrew School, but went to the Workmen’s Circle and the public school, as well as continuing my musical studies. Then, in 1929, the Great Depression began to unfold. The Jewish Theatre in Winnipeg closed, and my parents were unemployed. My father found part-time work painting houses. I left school and gave up music to be his helper; but the two of us could not earn enough to support the family and we went on relief. The weekly parcel of food we received, with the little we earned painting, provided for the family’s basic needs. But after a few months the painting contractor told us there was no more work, and we were
once again all unemployed. My father had no skill, apart from acting, nor could he easily learn another trade. Nevertheless, a tailor friend offered to teach him tailoring. He was to work for a month without pay, and then he would be on a piece-work rate, paid according to his production. He accepted the offer.

By 1930 the Depression had become devastating. At 15 I was neither in school nor at work. One day as I walked aimlessly past the Market Square, behind the Winnipeg City Hall, I saw a crowd gathered around a truck from which a man was speaking, emphasizing his points by vigorously waving his arms. This was one of the almost daily rallies of the unemployed. I joined the crowd and listened to one speaker after another. I was impressed. They were accusing, demanding, defying, and challenging the government and authorities. They argued that the appalling conditions to which the unemployed were subject were inherent to the capitalist system, which had to be wiped out. They pleaded for unity among workers to join in this militant struggle.

All of this seemed to me to make sense, and I attended more and more rallies, soon getting to know some of the activists in the unemployed movement. One day I was asked if I would help in handing out circulars on the street, and I readily agreed. I went to the Workers' Centre, which was in an old converted church building. There I was given a supply of circulars and set out with an older fellow. As we handed out the leaflets, we occasionally engaged in conversation about the unemployed movement or the discredited capitalist system. I liked the experience and frequently went to the Centre and took part in leafleting.

Then one of the leaders asked me if I would be willing to speak at a street corner meeting "as a representative of the unemployed youth." I was surprised and told him I had never spoken publicly; but he urged me on, assuring me that I would do well, and so I agreed. A few days later, standing on a corner in the north end of Winnipeg, I forgot most of what I had so carefully memorized, and so I began repeating what I had so often heard others say. I felt the little crowd around was sympathetic and supportive, and I was quite excited at my apparent success. After that I spoke at several street corner meetings and sometimes addressed Market Square rallies. Thus, I became an activist in the unemployment movement and a regular visitor to the Workers' Centre.

Some of the young people I came to know identified themselves as members of the Young Communist League, or the YCL as it was called. I liked most of them: their ideas, their spirit, and their commitment to what seemed to me to be a very worthy cause. One day one of them approached me, saying: "Comrade, would you like join the YCL?" I enthusiastically accepted, and so became a Young Communist.

In the three years I was a member of the YCL, I never held a designated position, nor did I have any specific responsibility. I was a volunteer activist, doing what had to be done. One day I would distribute literature, another day organize a street corner meeting, occasionally be on a picket line supporting striking workers; but, above all, I loved to speak to the large crowds in the Market Square.

My father's job as an apprentice tailor was short-lived. He found the work incomprehensible and depressing. He simply could not learn the trade. In 1931 there was a modest revival of the Jewish Theatre in Montreal, and he was offered
a job, which he happily accepted. The rest of our family remained in Winnipeg, existing on the relief provided by the Welfare Department.

My life had become a boring routine. I was in the doldrums and restless, wanting a more significant role in "the class struggle"; but, above all, wanting a paying job. In Winnipeg that was hopeless, and so I decided to go to Toronto, where I was told "the action" was. At the Winnipeg stockyard I managed to arrange to go east on a cattle train, riding in the caboose in return for helping to feed the cattle.

The train moved slowly, stopping frequently to unload cattle or feed them. I had to help herd the cattle into the corrals beside the tracks. We were scheduled to stop for several hours at White River, Ontario, and, after finishing my chores, I wandered down the street beside the tracks. On one side were several buildings, one with the familiar red triangle and the letters YMCA. I entered and found a large comfortable looking room. There were several large old arm chairs and a fireplace with some logs burning. A player piano was tuned to one of Chopin's nocturnes. There was no one else in the room and the chairs were inviting. I sat down, and comforted by the warmth and the music I was soon asleep. When I awoke there were more logs on the fire and the music had stopped; but there was still no one there. I walked back to the train.

Years later, as a union official, I often travelled by train and whenever I passed White River I never failed to look for the "Y" across the tracks. I never forgot the town, and the impression of security and warmth I had sensed in it.

Finally, I arrived in Toronto. At first I stayed with some people I knew, but after a week I was on my own. Getting a job, even in return for just room and board, was hopeless. Unaware that some church missions, the Salvation Army, and soup kitchens provided food and shelter, I devised my own system for survival. I soon realized that buildings under construction provided a place to sleep. Obtaining food was more difficult. Several times I tried begging or bumming, but it was a degrading experience, and I gave it up for another method. In those days people who could afford it had milk and bread delivered to their homes and left at the door early in the morning. Along quiet streets I would take a bottle of milk from one door and a loaf of bread from another. I never did this when there was only one bottle or one loaf. I managed to eat and my conscience did not bother me.

One damp and cold day I found the Toronto Reference Library on College Street and I went in to warm up. Seeing the racks of books I took one to look at while I sat down at a long table. Soon I was no longer cold. Several days later I went back and that time selected a book on early philosophy. I read with increasing interest and on subsequent visits began to make notes and search the dictionary for the meaning of words that were new to me. While I stayed in Toronto, the Reference Library became my sanctuary and my university — the only university I ever attended.

Another discovery was that the Salvation Army on Jarvis Street provided facilities for washing clothes. After several weeks of sleeping in dust and roaming the streets, my clothes had become very dirty, to say the least, and so I was glad to go to the "Sally Ann" to do my washing. There I learned of the existence of soup kitchens and other places where I could get food. An elderly man was next to me
washing his clothes. We struck up a conversation and he offered to take me to these places; he was obviously an experienced "line-stander." We went first to a soup kitchen that was to be open for an hour, and we waited patiently. When it opened we were among the first to receive our grub, which we downed quickly so we could rush to another soup kitchen for a second helping. In the evening my friend took me to the Parliament Mission on Parliament Street. There, with many others, we were given sandwiches and weak cocoa, and then allowed to sleep on the floor. It was not bad, compared to other places where I had slept; at least it was not as cold.

At this point I had given up looking for work, and I spent several weeks eating in soup kitchens, sleeping at the Mission, washing my clothes at the Salvation Army, and reading in the Reference Library. Then I decided to go to Windsor, which was at least warmer than Toronto; and there I ran into double luck. First, I got a job in a large department store as a shoe salesman, working for a month during a bankruptcy sale. Secondly, I found the job had certain advantages. When a sale was made we took the customer's money to the cashier. If there were a number of people in the store and a customer gave me the correct change, I got in the habit of putting the money in my pocket and immediately serving another customer. Sometimes I seemed to forget to give the first customer's money to the cashier, and during the month I did very well indeed. My next job was at a gas station washing cars, but this lasted only two weeks and was not as lucrative. Soon, I was again unemployed.

One day in Windsor I attended a meeting at which the unemployed were voicing their protests and demands. A minor disturbance developed and the police charged in to disperse the crowd. A number of people were arrested, and, as I was standing at the foot of the platform, I was among them. We were charged with disturbing the peace. At the police station I gave an assumed name and said I was 20 years old, although actually I was only 17. I doubt whether the officer believed me. The next day a man who identified himself as a welfare officer came to see me and offered to help. He assured me he was not a police officer, and said I could speak to him in complete confidence. He questioned the name I had given and my age, and finally I told him the truth.

The following day I was released and told to go directly to the City Hall to see the Mayor, David Croll, a man who later became well known in labour circles as Ontario's Minister of Labour, and still later as a member of the Senate. Mayor Croll seemed to know all about me and my father and where we lived. Sternly, but kindly, he told me to go home. He said he had arranged for my transportation to Winnipeg on a cattle train, and said I should be at the stockyard that afternoon. As I was about to leave he took a five dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to me, emphasizing: "Be sure to leave today, and when you get to Winnipeg get in touch with Alderman Gray and inform him of your return." I assured him I would. That night I left Windsor; but I did not return to Winnipeg, instead I went to Montreal where my parents had moved.

In Montreal I got a job in a ladies' hat factory. The pay was three dollars for the first week, and then an additional dollar a week. Understandably I took the job, but after the sixth week there were no more additional dollars. This was before a union was established in the industry. I worked hard and learned the trade fairly quickly.
In Montreal I became acquainted with a few Young Communist League members, but saw them only occasionally. Then the hat factory closed, and once more I was out of work. But, for the first time, I did not mind; I was anxious to return to Winnipeg and again become involved in the workers' movement. And so I went west.

Shortly after I arrived back in Winnipeg, in spring 1932, I was fortunate enough to get a job with a furrier. I rented a small attic room in the home of a family named Harrison and settled down. For several months life was much improved. I liked my job and visited the Workers' Centre regularly to see my comrades.

I was happy in the Harrison's home. They were a third generation Ukrainian-Canadian family; besides the parents there were four sons and two daughters. The eldest of the two girls was Anne. I liked her, and thought she liked me. We soon became good friends and sometimes I invited her downtown to the Workers' Centre. We talked a good deal, and although she was still in high school, she was quite well aware of the problems of unemployment. We shared similar views about the world we were living in. It was the beginning of a life-long relationship. Two years later, in 1934, we were married.

The legacy of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, the large number of unemployed, the dismal provisions of public relief, and the widespread cosmopolitan background of its citizens made the Winnipeg of 1932 a city of militant protest. Mass rallies, demonstrations, and strikes were almost daily events, and I took part. One day, when I was not working, I joined a picket line of strikers at the Wellwood Box Factory. I recall the boss sitting at the factory gate with a shot gun across his knees. He had an ominous appearance and I was sure he was quite prepared to use his gun.

On one occasion during the strike the police arrived to escort a group of scabs into the plant. This had happened before, but this time we were determined not to let them in. A fight erupted and I was among those seized by the police. As we were being herded to the paddy wagon I suddenly remembered that my jacket pockets were full of stones; and I realized I might be charged with "carrying concealed weapons." Thinking fast I took off my coat and, making sure a policeman heard me, handed it to one of the strikers, asking him to take it to my mother. Once more I was charged with disturbing the peace. In the jail cells that night we sang such songs as "Hold the Fort" and "The Red Flag" loud and clear.

A day or two later we were taken to court and lined up before Judge Stubbs. He questioned each man, but in a patient and kindly manner. When it came my turn he looked at me over his spectacles for what seemed a long time, and then spoke:

"Young man, are you employed in the Wellwood Box Factory?" he asked.
"No sir," I replied.
"If you are not employed in the factory you were not on strike, then why were you on the picket line?"
"I was supporting the strikers."
"Were you disturbing the peace?"
"No sir," I replied, rather emphatically.

He paused, wrote something in a book, looked at me again, and then, rather
impatiently, ruled “Case dismissed.” In later years Judge Stubbs left the bench and became active in politics, running as a candidate for the CCF.

After a few months I was laid off by the furrier, and, unable to pay my rent, I planned on going to stay at the Workers’ Centre. Ma Harrison would hear nothing of this; her husband was the only one working, but she insisted I keep my room and eat with the family, and I gratefully accepted her kindness.

In fall 1932 I was still without a job and Bill Ross, a leader of the Young Communist League, asked if I would be willing to go to Arborg, some 60 miles north of Winnipeg, to assist farmers in preventing the sale of farms by public auction for non-payment of land taxes. This was a time when the farmers of western Canada were the victims of economic conditions. Long periods of drought, very depressed prices for farm products, and the lack of credit to buy seed or cattle feed, all made it impossible for them to pay their taxes, and so their farms were being seized and sold by auction. In the hope of helping them I agreed to go.

For a time I worked on an Arborg farm, then one day it was announced that a farm in the neighborhood was to be sold for taxes. The farmer for whom I was working became highly incensed at such brutal treatment. He assembled his farm hands and told us something had to be done to stop such sales. He had a plan and instructed us to go around and ask farmers nearby to attend the auction, prepared to help block the sale, one way or another.

When the day came, the auction room was packed with farmers who were sympathetic to the victim and determined to give their support. Soon the auctioneer arrived, a short neatly-dressed man wearing a bowler hat. With him was a tall, young, Royal Canadian Mounted Police constable, wearing the traditional scarlet. Just as the auctioneer was about to begin my employer took the floor. Speaking Ukrainian, he waved his arms and pointed an accusing finger, first at the auctioneer and then at the constable. He went on for about 15 minutes, urging the farmers not to make a bid on the property. The farmers were delighted; they applauded and cheered. The auctioneer understood Ukrainian, but the constable did not understand a word of what was going on.

I was at the back of the room, and as soon as my employer finished I spoke in English. There were loud and long cheers. One farmer tried unsuccessfully to make himself heard; but his words were lost. The auctioneer tried to speak, but the noise was too much for him. Finally, he picked up his briefcase and, still accompanied by the constable, left the hall. The cheers were even louder than before and the sale was called off.

Encouraged by this victory, it was decided to organize a protest march to Winnipeg to present the farmers’ grievances to Premier John Bracken. Having shown some initiative in the affair of the sale, I was invited to be a member of a committee of three to organize and lead the march. I was both thrilled and honoured by such a challenging responsibility. After all, I was practically a stranger in the community and very young. It was the first time I had held such a leadership role, and with some emotion I accepted. I believed deeply that the march was a significant step in the farmers’ struggle for justice.

We spent the next few days organizing support and making plans with all the
precision of a military operation. On the day of the march about 50 farmers assembled, some with knapsacks on their backs and others carrying bags. Members of their families were there to see them off. The youngest of the marchers was 16 and the oldest 70. There was a great deal of excitement as we lined up, five abreast, and started the long trek.

We planned to walk about 20 miles a day, and stop at designated places to rest, eat, and sleep. We received generous contributions of food and these supplies, with blankets and personal belongings, were carried in a truck which I had managed to borrow. The truck went ahead to complete arrangements for eating and sleeping. Usually, farm women along the way prepared a hot meal. Some of us slept in nearby homes and others on the floor of the building in which we were fed. Every morning there was a hot breakfast of boiled potatoes, chunks of bacon, homemade bread, and coffee, a typical breakfast for farmers in the area. The noon meal and snacks were prepared by the group in the truck. As we marched along the road, we were joined by other farmers, and when we reached Winnipeg on the sixth day our delegation had grown to over 100.

On the grounds of the Manitoba legislative building a large crowd had gathered to greet us. There was much shouting, hand-shaking, and the usual speeches, including fiery addresses by Bill Ross and Joe Forkin. My memory is hazy about what happened after. A delegation met the Premier; but I was not a member. In some ways I was satisfied to be one of the crowd and happy with my part in such a memorable adventure, but in other ways I was disappointed to have been passed over.

After the farmers' march I was once more at a loose end and decided to go to Regina with Harry Binder who was moving there as a full-time YCL organizer. The YCL gave me the names of some comrades who might help me find work. On the way there I had a rather amusing experience. I caught a freight train leaving Winnipeg and found an empty box car, which I crawled in. Knowing the danger of being locked in, I jammed the door so it could not be shut from the outside. Then I wrapped myself in a blanket and fell asleep. The next thing I knew was that the train had stopped at some prairie station, and there was a loud voice shouting at me. "Hey, what the hell are you doing here? Get out."

I crawled out to be confronted by the weather-beaten red face of a railway policeman. He shouted at me again, and I told him I was sleeping. "I don't want to see you around here again, now get out," he shouted.

I responded in my most reasonable voice: "Officer, if you would be kind enough not to look at me, you would not see me." As he turned and walked away I thought I caught the glimmer of a faint smile; in any event, he did not look back, and as the train began to move I climbed back into the box car.

There was no work in Regina, and so I went to Saskatoon, then to Moose Jaw, and after that to a farm in Donavon, Saskatchewan. This was an area that had been hit by a long devastating drought. The farmer I went to see about work told me his two sons had gone to the city looking for work. There were chores to be done and I could have room and board for helping, but there was no money. About three weeks later his sons returned and so I left. The farmer gave me a few dollars to tide me over, and back in Regina I rented a small room from one of the comrades.
Once again I started looking for work; but there was none. It was early 1933, and at the age of 18 I was just one of hundreds of young men who were drifting about the country. My spirit was weakening and my enthusiasm diminishing. With only public school education and no trade there were no prospects for work, despite the assurances of politicians that "prosperity is just around the corner."

During this time, as a spectator, I attended the founding convention of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) held in Regina in July 1933. There, despite some confusion in my mind, I listened with great interest to the speeches of J.S. Woodsworth, M.J. Coldwell, T.C. Douglas, and others. Slowly, I began to realize that there were views regarding solutions to the great social problems other than those I held.

Then, one day, I was asked to meet with some of the Young Communist League leaders, including my friend, Harry Binder. There were four of them at the meeting, and they seemed unusually serious. The atmosphere in the room was ominous. Without any preliminary remarks one of them asked if I had any contact with Trotskyites, needless to say, I was surprised at the question.

"Why do you ask me that?" I asked.

"We have reason to believe that you are associating with Trotskyites, or that you are one of them," another accused me.

I denied this emphatically. They then asked if I had been reading Trotskyite literature, and again I denied it.

There was a brief silence as the comrades looked at each other. I realized I was facing some sort of a trial, and I did not like it at all. Slowly, Harry Binder opened his briefcase and took out a copy of the publication The Militant, the official organ of the Trotskyite organization in the United States. Triumphanty, he held it up for all to see, and then, turning to me, said: "Comrade, this was found in your room."

I had completely forgotten that I had just received the paper from a Montreal friend. When it arrived I had put it on the bureau in my room, and had not given it another thought. I was terribly embarrassed at having denied reading Trotskyite literature. The newspaper was mine, and the fact that I had not read it was hardly believable. But what if I had read it? Surely that would not make me a Trotskyite. The comrades were not convinced. They thought I was lying, and finally they told me that, in the opinion of the Young Communist League, I was "a Trotskyite and a Revisionist," and thus "an enemy of the working class." There was no place for me in the YCL.

I was shocked. I had a faint idea of what a Trotskyite was, but no idea of what being terms "a Revisionist" implied; and being called "an enemy of the working class" upset me terribly. Young, impressionistic, and idealistic, I was disappointed that my comrades, who knew so much more about the world than I did, and to whom I looked for guidance and inspiration, should call me "an enemy of the working class."

In any event, my association with the YCL had ended. I left the meeting confused and sad. A few days later I climbed aboard a box car and headed for Montreal. As the incidents and experiences of my life began to unfold a kind of emotional reflex, both sentimental and anger, welled up inside me.