The size of the labour movement today often disguises its relatively tiny roots in the decades of my earliest activity. For example, when I first visited Percy Bengough at the Ottawa headquarters of the TLC, the office consisted of only the chief himself as full-time President, a part-time secretary-treasurer (Arthur Daoust), an office manager (Arthur Hemming), and two stenographers, one of whom was Bengough’s private secretary. I became the TLC’s first full-time organizer, although Carl Berg in Edmonton was occasionally on the payroll as a western organizer. In the early 1950s Leslie Wismer was added to the staff.

The small size of the movement made many of its leaders seem larger than life and this was particularly true in Quebec. Some of the personalities who stand out in my memory are worthy of further description.

Raoul Trepanier

When I first began attending meetings of the Montreal Trades and Labour Council the chairman was Raoul Trepanier, a member of the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway, Electric, and Motor Coach Employees. I was very impressed with him. A heavily built man of medium height, he had a short, thick neck, a full mouth, and blue-gray eyes. He conducted the meetings with authority, dignity, and formality. Whether he was presiding or mingling with the delegates, he looked massive, solid, and strong. He spoke clearly and slowly with a deep voice. He was a man of balanced temperament and never ruffled.

I learned a great deal from him. However heated the discussion might become, he summarized the differences succinctly and factually, and then asked the delegates to vote. He always liked to maintain as much harmony as possible, even when the debate became particularly hostile.

He knew parliamentary procedure well and applied the rules fairly but firmly, being quick to interrupt any speaker who tried to circumvent the rules. His attitude toward new or younger delegates was more flexible. He took the position that young delegates, lacking experience, should be given a chance to learn, and the council was a good place for that.

My colleague, Adrienne Villeneuve, has described Raoul Trepanier in these words:

He impressed me so much that, in fact, he became my teacher, without my knowing it. I followed him for many years, analyzing and admiring the way he handled the difficult issues that were being debated. He had a sharp analytical mind. He was a master at identifying and separating the most salient features in a given situation and in putting the question to the delegates. Generally he was supported by the Council.
I never knew Raoul Trepanier to support or be aligned with any particular group in the Council. I never heard him embarrass or humiliate a delegate when he was speaking. I never heard him say anything derogatory about anyone. It seemed to me that he was a man without prejudice or malice.

ARTHUR MARTEL

ARTHUR MARTEL, the Canadian Vice-President of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, was also a remarkable man. I knew him well, but there was one aspect that I did not know until Adrienne Villeneuve told me:

If there was ever a self-made man, it was Arthur Martel. He could neither read nor write. I knew him well and often travelled with him. Sometimes he asked me to read his ticket or his mail. He never had a pencil and paper, and never took notes. He just reclined in his chair, usually with his eyes closed, and listened. He had a computerized mind and retained details of discussion.

Arthur Martel was a colourful personality. He was of average height, with a roguish lined face, with small eyes that were always sharp, but at the same time provocative and mischievous. He dressed casually and always looked like a typical worker. The exception, and one that seemed a contradiction of his personality, was an impressive diamond ring which he wore. He spoke both French and English fluently. His humour was never flippant; it was direct, pointed, and always had meaning.

I recall that he once stood for office in the Quebec Federation of Labour. Though he was respected and highly regarded by most of those who knew him, he was never elected to any important position except that of Vice-President of his own union. At that convention he was defeated, and after the vote the candidates were offered the opportunity of going to the platform to make a statement. Arthur Martel walked slowly to the front. From the platform he looked at the audience for a minute, and then, in perfect English, he said: “Friends, you have made your choice, that is good enough for me. I know that you have made a serious mistake. May God have mercy on your souls.”

Ideologically and philosophically he was conservative. On one occasion, when a Quebec Federation of Labour convention was discussing legislation to provide more paid holidays, he spoke passionately against the resolution on these grounds.

If the government is going to enact this kind of legislation, then you will ask them to enact more legislation, and soon you will be completely relying on the government to improve working conditions for our members. At that point, my friends, collective bargaining will be meaningless.

While he had some support, the resolution was accepted by a large majority of the delegates. His conservative attitude was out of line with the younger trade unionists. He lived in the past, could not understand the present, nor see the future.

Arthur Martel remained active to the age of 80 and died when he was 85.
THE FUTURE OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT was being fashioned by younger trade unionists, one of whom was Alphage Bodoin of the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway, Electric, and Motor Coach Employees. He eventually became president of the Quebec Federation of Labour.

Alphage Bodoin was a man of mystery; little was known about him. He was neither admired nor disliked, and he had few personal friends, although I considered myself one of them. He was a man of average height, slightly built, and might be regarded as handsome. By nature he was very serious and gave the impression of never being very happy. When he occasionally smiled, it seemed to be an effort. He had a phobia about germs and microbes and tried to avoid touching things with his bare hands. He dressed immaculately and never appeared untidy or unshaven. He loved big cars and his proudest possession was his own, which he described as his living room and bedroom.

He was very positive in his approaches. For instance, once when the Quebec Government was about to amend the Labour Code, and when delegates to a convention were almost unanimously opposed to the revisions, Bodoin warned them:

Our official position will be decided by your vote, there is no question about that. But, before you vote let’s look at the positive aspects of these amendments, for I believe there are some provisions that are positive.

He went on to cite the sections which he considered not bad and warned that there was a danger of “throwing out the baby with the bath water.” He took the position that, while the government should be made aware of the Federation’s objections, it should also be told of the provisions which had labour’s support.

Such was his attitude toward many contentious issues. He did not mind, from time to time, taking an unpopular position. He had a pragmatic approach and the courage to express his views, even if they were not popular. He was elected president of the Federation on the basis of his personal strength and unique personality. He never had a “political machine.” Personally, I always supported him and campaigned for him, though he never asked me to, nor did he ever enquire about his chances of being elected.

AFTER THE DEATH OF ALPHAGE BODOIN, Roger Provost became president of the Quebec Federation of Labour. He had joined the labour movement as an organizer for the Millinery Workers’ Union, Local 49, and then became a representative for the United Textile Workers of America. He was a man of average height, slim, and quite handsome. He was fluent in both French and English and had a charming, almost debonair, manner. He was popular and highly respected.

Adrienne Villeneuve described him thus:
Roger Provost was an intellectual. He spoke like a university professor, but if you looked at his hands, you would swear they were the hands of a plumber. His speeches were well constructed and articulately delivered. He had an extraordinarily well co-ordinated mind and a quick wit. Unlike Alphage Bodoin, when he lost an issue that was then; there was no vindictiveness in him.

At one point he was an unsuccessful candidate for the CCF in a general election. He died young, at the age of 42.

From the first time I first joined the labour movement, I was impressed with the leaders, people like Raoul Trepanier, Alphage Bodoin, Roger Provost, Claude Jodoin and others. All were dedicated men, committed to the labour movement, and, above all, they were good human beings.

The Quebec labour movement was, of course, even more divided than the English Canadian. In addition to the unfortunate battle between the TLC and CLC unions, there were also the Catholic unions to contend with. Nevertheless my two major experiences of union raiding involved TLC-CLC conflict.

**UNION RAIDING**

One of the Quebec industries in which we accomplished near total organization was meat packing. In all the other provinces the major meat packing plants were organized by the United Packinghouse Workers (CCL-CIO). In 1946 in Quebec we set up what we ambitiously called the National Council, composed of our meat packing locals in Quebec. In addition to other activities, we planned “inviting” the packinghouse workers in other provinces to leave the UPWA and join our National Council, thus becoming part of the Trades and Labour Congress rather than the Canadian Congress of Labour.

In fall 1946, I urged President Bengough to allow us to go to Edmonton to extend the “invitation” to workers in Canada Packers and Swift. He was not enthusiastic, calling it “a raiding venture,” and somewhat sarcastically asking whether there were no unorganized workers in Quebec who needed a union. Obviously there were, I said, but not in the meat packing industry. I argued that so long as the meat packing unions in the TLC were confined to Quebec, we would be subject to the collective agreements negotiated by the much larger and more powerful UPWA. Sooner or later we would lose our locals to them, as it would be in their best interest to raid us. With some reluctance and obvious misgiving, Percy Bengough finally authorized me to go ahead.

I went to Edmonton with Rémi Duquette. We had been there only two or three weeks when President Bengough telephoned ordering us back to St. Jérôme post-haste: our Dominion Rubber Local 144 was being raided.

“By whom?” I asked. “By your friend Paul Fournier,” he replied. I was shocked. Paul Fournier was a colleague who had often assisted me in organizing campaigns. Moreover, he was the assistant manager of my own union, the United Hatters. In addition he had, in some mysterious manner, become the Canadian representative of the Distillery Workers’ International Union, which was also affiliated to the TLC. His Distillery Union had a collective agreement with Seagram’s Distillery, and with
a small local in the Dominion Rubber Company at Montreal, but he had at no time been given jurisdiction in the rubber industry. But this did not prevent Paul Fournier from claiming jurisdiction for the Dominion Rubber workers at St. Jérôme. The irony of the situation was that, while I was trying to raid a competing union from the other Congress, our union was being raided by one of our affiliates.

At St. Jérôme we found that the president and secretary of our local, as well as several members of the executive board, had joined the Distillery Workers and were trying to recruit others. We also learned that Fournier had been in St. Jérôme about two weeks, meeting with some of our officers and convincing them that their best interests would be served if the Montreal and St. Jérôme plants of Dominion Rubber were in the same union.

Those of our officers who had not joined him were confused and discouraged by these developments. They could not understand how or why one union, affiliated to a national labour federation, could raid another union, chartered by the same federation. They were waiting for guidance and leadership from us.

I telephoned President Bengough, bringing him up to date on the situation and explaining that I wanted to fight the Fournier raid, even if it meant a jurisdictional dispute with one of our affiliates.

"Hell," he said, "there will be no jurisdictional dispute between Paul Fournier and the Congress. That bloke has not and will not be given jurisdiction over rubber workers." Then he added a quip to the effect that "booze and rubber don't mix." I told him that, if we wanted to retain our local and recoup the loyalty of those who had resigned, two things were necessary: a carefully designed campaign that would progressively lead to that objective and the employment of a full-time business agent at St. Jérôme to head up the campaign. He pointed out that we already had two organizers in Montreal.

"Yes," I responded, "But in my opinion the situation requires someone on the scene all the time. Furthermore, if we should lose the Dominion Rubber local, we may also lose the Regent Knitting Mill local, but if we retain our rubber local, then our overall membership in St. Jérôme, together with groups a full-time business agent may organize, will more than justify the expenditure."

He hesitated and I was conscious of his uncertainty and reluctance to agree to another staff member. I rather expected him to say that he had not been elected to preside over the liquidation of the Congress treasury. I quickly added: "Chief, give me the ammunition and I'll finish the job." Finally, he simply said, "OK."

We called together a small group of our local's remaining officers and I told them of my conversation with the President of the Congress, and our determination to maintain our legal status as the bargaining agent because the Distillery Workers had no justifiable claim on the jurisdiction. Someone suggested a special emergency membership meeting. This was a step I would normally have supported, but on this occasion I was opposed. I reasoned that if we could be sure of a large attendance, it would enhance our position, on the other hand, if only a small number attended there could be a damaging reaction. The risk was too great, and, at the same time, calling such a meeting might give the impression that we were in a serious predicament.
Rather, I suggested our strategy should be to not treat the raid too seriously, but to regard it as little more than a flea bite. Since we were established as the legal bargaining agent with a contract that did not expire for another four months, we should continue to conduct our affairs as usual. We should appoint a president and secretary to act until an election for these posts could be held at a regular membership meeting. We should also appoint a business agent, preferably an employee of the plant. Finally, these actions and decisions should be conveyed to the membership. The group accepted these suggestions.

There were a number of proposals for the position of business agent, one of whom was Paul Émile Dalpe, a quality inspector at the plant. He was supported unanimously, and when I interviewed him the following day, I immediately realized that he was the man for the job. About 27 years of age, he had a reasonably good educational background and an agile mind, responding quickly and positively. He was an impressive speaker in both languages and was popular in the plant, having been active on behalf of the union in its efforts to organize the clerical employees, who were outside our local.

When I offered him the job, he indicated he was interested, but wanted to know how long it would last. I explained the situation and the likelihood of a Labour Board vote, and I continued:

"If we win the vote, you win the job. If we lost he vote...."
"Then I lose the job," he quickly interjected.
"That's right," I said.

He accepted the offer with enthusiasm and determination, regardless of the uncertainty of his continued employment.

A day or two after he joined our staff we issued an announcement criticizing the raiding attempts of the Distillery Workers. We referred to the union officers who had quit their union post without any notice or explanation, and then urged workers to leave our union. We did not denounce them, rather saying they had been misled by all kinds of irresponsible promises. We expressed regret that those who had held top union positions for more than three years had seen fit to attempt to destroy what they had helped build. We also said that, as we were the sole bargaining agent, we would continue looking after the workers' daily problems in accordance with the contract as we had always done. We announced the names of the temporary officers and Dalpe's appointment as business agent. We concluded with Percy Bengough's remark about booze and rubber not mixing.

Instead of handing circulars out at the plant gate, we posted them on the bulletin boards in all departments. This was our right under the union contract, and it was not available to Fournier, who had to remain outside the plant gate. It was evidence that we were "in" and he was "out." The announcement was widely discussed and President Bengough's "mixer" statement created a greater reaction than we expected. Many not only regarded it as humorous, but also questioned the logic of joining a distillery union.

The next step was to demonstrate that we were continuing our normal bargaining relationship with the company. I arranged to meet with the plant manager, Clarence Headcraft, to introduce our new officers and business agent. I also wanted
to discuss a suitable timetable for our forthcoming negotiations for a new agreement.

"Aren’t you having some trouble with Mr. Fournier?" Headcraft asked.

"No." I replied. "He may be in some difficulty with us. We are the recognized bargaining union in your plant, and we remain so until another union officially and legally replaces us. So, until such time, we will continue to exercise our normal responsibilities."

We then agreed on a date for the meeting. When we entered Headcraft’s office he had greeted us with his usual nervous, twitching smile. He was a short, energetic man, who always seemed under great stress. He generally spoke in loud, animated, and clipped phrases. Our discussions were, as usual, conducted in English, although with one or two exceptions none of the union officers spoke or understood English. In deference to them the bilingual personnel officer, Forbes Kennedy, gave a rough translation of the remarks.

Throughout this period of inter-union rivalry the company lived up to its legal obligation to our union. On the day of our meeting with Headcraft there was more than the usual discussion and excitement in the plant. The meeting certainly strengthened our position.

But shortly after there was an unexpected and shocking development. Fournier managed to obtain a court order in the form of an interlocutory injunction preventing our union from having any contractual dealings with the company or receiving union dues, which were collected by checkoff. When Paul Dalpe telephoned to tell me the injunction had been served, I was stunned. I could hardly believe that a union representative would obtain an injunction against another union, a tactic employed by anti-union companies against unions. It was a practice that was generally condemned by the labour movement, with strong demands that court injunctions not be allowed in industrial disputes.

In many years in the labour movement, no single event affected me more deeply than that injunction. I was outraged, scandalized, and ashamed that one of my colleagues would stoop to such a level. After I spoke with Dalpe I remember sitting brooding in my office, and saying to myself: "How could he, how could he, that son-of-a-bitch."

With our lawyer, Guy Merrill Desaulnier, I rushed off to St. Jérôme and met with our union officers. Desaulnier read the conditions of the injunction and explained that the court had put a temporary restraint on our bargaining rights because Fournier had claimed that the Distillery Workers, and not our TLC local, represented a majority of the employees. The injunction specified that a court hearing would be held shortly to ascertain which of the two unions actually represented a majority.

With this development I saw a good opportunity for calling a membership meeting. In a few hours we prepared a circular and distributed it at the plant gate, informing the workers that, because of the injunction which Fournier had obtained, our union was temporarily prevented from representing them when they had grievances or complaints. Also, negotiations for a new contract were for the time being suspended. We announced a membership meeting at which the situation would be fully explained. The meeting would also discuss demands which we
would present to the company in the forthcoming negotiations.

Normally, a meeting at which a new contract is to be discussed is well attended, and we hoped that would be the case. We were not disappointed; the auditorium above the fire hall was solidly packed. Desaulnier, in his customary meticulous manner, explained the meaning and condition of the injunction. Understandingly, he made no personal observations regarding the merits of the injunctions and his explanation was confined solely to the legal aspects.

Paul Dalpe, on the other hand, made a fiery and articulate speech. He pointed out that, as of the day the injunction was served, and so long as it remained in effect, no union officer, no shop steward could represent the workers. Anyone who had a grievance could have to handle it himself. "And who is responsible for that?" he shouted. All negotiations for a new contract were suspended. "And who is responsible for that?" he asked again. "And who gains by all this? The company. And who loses by all this? You and you and you and all the workers in Dominion."

It was the best, and certainly the most effective speech I ever heard him make. He succeeded in reaching the workers' minds and at the same time touched their hearts. Cheers and applause punctuated his speech, becoming increasingly loud and more frequent. I believed we had reached a significant turning point in our campaign to retain the local. As I observed the reaction of the members, it became apparent that the more than 500 people present were outraged by the injunction affair.

Strangely, discussion on the new contract began with little enthusiasm. It was obvious that the workers were not in a very receptive mood to consider contractual questions. We suggested that departmental meetings be convened later to go over suggestions for the new contract. When the meeting adjourned, small groups gathered to talk about the situation. I was convinced that we had a solid core of support.

While we waited for the court hearing, we held small meetings of representatives of the different departments. Even there the main topic of interest was the injunction and the difficulties it had created. In the meantime Fournier applied to the Department of Labour for the certification of his union. The court hearing was finally held in September with Judge Cousineau presiding. Desaulnier was our lawyer and Fournier was represented by André Montpetit. Some years later, both lawyers became distinguished judges, and Montpetit represented the University of Montreal on the Board of Governors of the Labour College of Canada and was chairman of the Executive Committee.

At one of the sittings there was an unfortunate incident which has remained with me all my life. During a recess I walked over to where Montpetit was sitting. I knew him well as he had acted as chairman of arbitration boards, and I regarded him as a very honourable and ethical person. Now he was involved in a deal that was not kosher, and he knew it. I said: "André, you don’t give a damn who you defend, do you?"

He did not reply, but slowly he turned to face me. In his narrowed 'yes' and the slight twitch of his mouth, I saw the deep wound my remarks had made. He got up from his chair, turned his back on me, and walked away without a word. I realized
at once that my remark was stupid and unforgivable. I don’t know what possessed me to make it, other than a pent-up feeling that moved me to hit out at something or someone. Why I was questioning his integrity I do not know. I felt ashamed, and ready to run away and hide. When I regained my senses I approached him again, and holding out my hand apologized for my remark. He seemed to sense my shame and regret, and being a kind man he smiled, shook my hand, and simply said: “Max, don’t take life so seriously.”

After several sessions the hearings ended and Judge Cousineau took the case under consideration. To the best of my knowledge a decision has yet to be rendered, some 40 years later.

In October 1946 we were advised that the Department of Labour would conduct a vote among the employees to determine which of the two unions they wanted to represent them. The days leading up to this vote were tense. We formed a number of small groups to visit their fellow workers in their homes, urging them to vote for our union. We were also fortunate in having a number of energetic women who campaigned for us tirelessly.

I never took a vote for granted, and although our officers were fairly confident of the result, I was less certain. I felt that the vote would be close, at best, and it still could go either way. I kept encouraging our people not to slacken their efforts. Dalpe was at the plant gate morning, noon, and evening, beaming confidence. On the day of the vote I was in my room in the Lapointe Hotel, nervous, impatient, and feeling the first symptoms of a stomach ulcer.

Finally, when the ballots were counted, the result was decisive: we won with a substantial majority. Our supporters came running out of the plant laughing, shouting, and congratulating each other. Dalpe and I were there greeting and thanking them for their support. Those who we knew had not supported us we befriended. Everyone was happy that the division in the plant, the squabbles and arguments, had finally ended. That night we celebrated at the Lapointe Hotel, and no union celebration in St. Jérôme since has exceeded the merriment of that night.

The following day, when I became physically and emotionally able, I telephoned President Bengough to tell him the result. He was naturally pleased. The vote automatically terminated the restraints on our bargaining rights. We resumed negotiations and eventually signed a new agreement. Soon the union settled down to normal activities. Paul Dalpe remained in his post for several years, and then resigned for personal reasons. He was replaced by Marcel Charbonneau, who was a member of our Executive Committee. Charbonneau was not as effervescent as Dalpe, but he was a very intelligent, serious man. His sincerity and deep belief in the labour movement and in human rights was recognized by all who knew him. He died at his post as a TLC organizer for St. Jérôme when he was only 40 years of age. He was a competent, humble, good man and he was greatly missed.

The union remained active as a chartered local of the TLC until the 1956 merger of the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour. It then became part of the United Rubber Workers’ International Union, an affiliate of the CLC.

I want to add a footnote to that memorable event in St. Jérôme in 1946. From
all I have written about Paul Fournier the reader may conclude that he was some
kind of a sinister and miserable character. A character he was, but sinister or
miserable he was not. In fact he was a charming, colourful, and even flamboyant
kind of a person. He may not have known the heroic virtues of life, but he loved
life intensely and he had great capacity for living boldly and sometimes defiantly.
He was reasonably competent in his work as a union official and was always ready
to help colleagues. Yet he was impatient and sometimes impetuous: the machine-
gun delivery of his words sometimes preceded his thoughts. He remained a
colleague and friend until the day he died in his early 50s.

MURDOCHVILLE

MURDOCHVILLE is a community that was carved out of the wilderness in the heart
of the Gaspé Peninsula. The Gaspé Copper Mine, a subsidiary of Noranda Mines,
is located just outside the town.

Shortly after the company began operating, in the early 1950s, the United
Steelworkers of America (CCL-CIO) began organizing the workers. A majority
signed up and the union applied to the Quebec Labour Board for certification. The
company opposed the application on the ground that it was not yet in full produc­
tion. The Board supported the company’s position and rejected the application.

Several months later one of the employees came to my office in Montreal. He
told me he wanted to see the workers organized and he would be glad to assist us
in establishing a union. He wanted to know if the TLC would be interested. He told
me about the Steelworkers’ efforts, and said that after the rejection of their
application the organizers had left, and had not been heard of since. After a long
discussion I told him I would discuss the matter with the Congress and would be
in touch with him shortly.

I had mixed feelings about becoming involved. There were several problems:
first, I personally could not undertake such a campaign, as I was shortly to be
transferred to the TLC headquarters in Ottawa, and the three other organizers in
Quebec were fully involved in other organizing activities. Secondly, the anti-union
reputation of Noranda Mines was well-known, and I was sure the company would
make every effort to block us. Finally, what if the Steelworkers were to return to
Murdochville in the course of the campaign? In those days the TLC did not provide
funds for organizing activities. Beyond such expenses as travelling for organizers,
there was quite simply no additional money available.

I knew all too well that we could not possibly cope with a determined opposition
by the company and a concentrated drive by the Steelworkers. I pondered these
problems for several days. The fact was that I was not so much concerned about
being opposed by the company, or the political influence which I knew the company
could exercise. Rather, I was very much concerned about the possibility of getting
into a battle with the Steelworkers. Yet I had no way of knowing whether they
would return.

Finally, I decided to recommend to President Bengough that we undertake a
campaign at Gaspé Copper. What intrigued me most about the challenge was the
imminent development of a frontier community. I had a romantic notion about the
birth of a new town, visualizing powerful machines cutting roads and streets out of the wilderness, laying water mains and sewage drains, erecting buildings and houses, putting up power lines. With all this I could see a stream of people coming with new hopes and dreams for a better life. Of course I wanted to organize the miners, but I also wanted to know and feel the excitement of the birth of a new community.

When I met President Bengough, I naturally did not express these sentiments. I gave him a detailed account of the situation, the experience of the Steelworkers, and the request I had from the Gaspé miners. I recommended that we undertake the drive, assigning Bernard Boulanger, who was stationed in Quebec City, as organizer. As usual Bengough listened very attentively to my full explanation, but when he began to blink and reached for another cigarette I knew he was becoming a bit impatient, and that I had not convinced him. He asked me exactly where Murdochville was, and when I told him he asked if it was not too far.

"Too far from where?" I asked. "Chief, ten years ago when you designated the Province of Quebec as my territory I'm sure you meant the whole province, not only part of it. Murdochville and the Gaspé Copper Mine are in Quebec, and I respectfully recommend that we try to organize these workers."

Then my romantic sentiments about the new town emerged. I talked about the possibility of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of construction workers being involved in the development. I suggested we could invite the building trade unions to go to Murdochville and we could help them organize. I was speaking rapidly, carried away by my enthusiasm. When I finally stopped, there was silence. The President got out of his chair and paced his office several times. Then he sat down in a chair next to me, and spoke slowly:

"Max, I don't want to take the wind out of your sails, but let me ask you, if Noranda defeated the United Steelworkers of America, what makes you think they will not defeat you?"

"We will never know if we don't try," I said.
"What if you get into a clash with the company?"
"If I'm not able to handle it I'll come to you for help."
"When you do I'll not be of much help," he warned. "You know that we just don't have the means to support strikes or pay legal fees or arbitration board expenses."

"Of course, I do," I said, "but I don't see a strike situation yet. In fact I have no idea if we can succeed in signing up a majority of the workers, but if we do, and if the company pulls political strings to prevent us from becoming certified, then we too can pull some strings."

"What do you mean?"
"Well, I believe in that kind of a setting the only one in the government to talk to would be Premier Duplessis."
"What makes you think you can see Premier Duplessis?"
"I can't, but you can," I replied.
I knew he did not expect that observation. He blinked again, furrowed his brow, and seemed about to say something, but I went on:
"Chief, I don't mean that some deal should be made with Duplessis. I mean that if we actually succeed in organizing a majority of the workers and apply for certification in full compliance with the law, then we can ask the Premier to use his good offices to assure that our application will not be denied."

"Max, I am dubious about seeing Duplessis on such an issue," he said after a long pause.

"Of course we are assuming that Duplessis would have to be seen," I said. "On the other hand it may not come to that. If he does have to be seen, then I respectfully suggest that you would not see him on the issue of our application for certification. I believe you could quite legitimately be in Quebec City on Congress business and arrange a courtesy call on the Premier. I think, from what I know of him, and with the help of the Minister of Labour, Duplessis would be very happy to receive you. In the course of the conversation you could, en passant, mention the Murdochville affair, and then see what happens.

The President smiled, and then pointing a long finger at me said: "You really want to organize that mine, don't you Max?"

"Yes, Chief."

"Go ahead," he said.

I asked Bernard Boulanger to go to Murdochville to see what contacts he could make and to determine the general situation with regard to organizing. He returned about a week later and said that, although he had not been allowed to go near the mine site, he had seen a number of workers in their homes. He said some were eager to join the union, but others were apprehensive about the chances of a union being established. With some caution he said he thought we should initiate a campaign. I suggested he arrange his affairs in Quebec City and then return to Murdochville as soon as it was convenient. About two weeks after he arrived back in Murdochville he telephoned to tell me he had signed up about 100 members and was ready to apply to the Congress for a local union charter. I thought he had done exceedingly well in such a short time and I congratulated him.

When Boulanger's application for a charter was received at Congress headquarters it caused some eyebrow-raising. He had named the union "The International Union of Mine Workers in Gaspé." Never had a TLC federally-chartered union been called "international." Nevertheless, because of the peculiar situation in Quebec, the charter was so inscribed, and Federal Local number 245 was born.

Slowly but steadily more and more workers joined. When the first membership meeting was called I went and also asked Fred Doucet, a TLC organizer at Fredericton, N.B., to attend. Since there were no hotels or motels, we stayed at a fishing camp at York Lake, some six miles from the mine site.

The meeting was held in an old shack that belonged to one of the building contractors, and it was better attended than we anticipated. The following day I returned to Ottawa, where I was then located as the director of organization and education.

Doucet remained for a few days, assisting Boulanger. Three months later, when a majority had joined, we applied for certification. Several weeks went by, and then we were stunned when we were advised that the Board had rejected our application.
I spoke to the labour representative on the Board, Marcel Franq. He assured me there were no irregularities, but said we were two cards short of an overall majority. It would have been simple to sign up two more members, but it didn’t work that way. Once our application was rejected we would have to make a new application, and this meant signing all new cards for submission to the Board. Having come so close we decided to renew our campaign and began signing the members on new cards. We told them of the Board’s decision and our determination to continue our efforts to win bargaining rights. In the meantime some of the workers had left and others had come. Getting them to sign new cards was not easy. They had signed Steelworkers’ cards, then they signed TLC cards, and now we were asking them to sign yet another card. Some were disenchanted with unions, others were discouraged, and still others felt that as long as the company and the government were determined to keep a union out of the Gaspé they would succeed, for the present at least. The workers’ morale was low, but we continued with our campaign. Victor Trudeau, our organizer in Montreal, assisted Boulanger as much as possible.

The campaign progressed slowly, and I thought the time had come to exercise some political pressure. I discussed the matter with President Bengough. He said he would be willing to arrange a meeting with Premier Duplessis, but only after we actually obtained a majority and filed a new application for certification. I agreed.

We increased the momentum of the drive, holding more meetings, and distributing more circulars. Trudeau and Boulanger spent more time in the area. It took about four months to sign up what we knew was a substantial majority, and it was in February 1954 that we made a second application for certification. In the meantime arrangements were made for President Bengough to pay a courtesy call on Premier Duplessis in Quebec City, and I accompanied him. This was the first time they had met, and the Premier was cordial, talkative, and characteristically jovial. He had a quick mind and an extraordinary sense of humour, particularly on political issues and personalities.

I cannot recall that any serious issues or situations were discussed. Neither the Premier nor the President raised any subject that tended to be controversial, although there were many such in Quebec at the time. It was mainly small talk.

After about half an hour President Bengough felt it was time to leave, and he got around to the new copper mine at Murdochville, casually mentioning that the Congress staff had been trying to organize the workers there for the past six months, and that an application for certification had been filed with the Labour Board. He then turned to me, as though he was not quite sure, and asked:

“Max, we did file an application, did we not?”

“Yes,” I said, and then looking at the Premier, continued, “In fact this is our second application, Mr. Premier. When we first applied some four months ago we did not, apparently, quite have an overall majority. We renewed our efforts and this time we are absolutely sure we have a substantial majority of the workers signed up.”

Addressing the Premier, President Bengough commented: “I don’t anticipate any problem for our union to be certified.” It was more of a question than a
statement of fact. The Premier asked whether we had heard from the Board, and when we said we had not, he offered to try to determine from Judge Horace Boivin, the chairman, whether the application had been considered. In a few minutes he had Judge Boivin on the telephone and, speaking English, I am sure out of courtesy to us, said:

“Mr. Bengough, you know, the President of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, and his representative in Quebec (he either forgot or could not pronounce my name) are in my office. They are interested in knowing whether you have already considered their application for certification for the copper mine in the Gaspé.”

He listened for a few minutes and then asked: “The application will be considered this week?” I was not sure whether it was a question or a command. He thanked the judge for the information and hung up. Looking at us with his sharp but smiling eyes, he remarked: “I am very pleased to have such an honourable and kind gentleman as Judge Boivin as chairman of our Labour Board.”

President Bengough thanked the Premier for the information. The Premier thanked the President for dropping in. We shook hands and left. On 26 May 1954, we were advised that the International Union of Mine Workers in Gaspé has been certified as the exclusive bargaining agency. There was never any doubt in my mind that a good majority of the workers had joined the union, but I was equally convinced that our courtesy call on Premier Duplessis helped considerably in getting the certification.

Shortly after we received the official certification, we arranged to begin negotiating the first collective agreement for the Gaspé miners. The local union officers, with Boulanger and myself, met with the local plant manager, a Mr. Bressendon. Our first meeting was not a very happy experience. Although we did not expect the company to receive us with open arms, we did expect common courtesy and a reasonable effort to negotiate an agreement in good faith.

We soon found our expectations on both counts were unfounded. Bressendon did not, or could not, agree to the most inconsequential clauses in our proposed contract. As we slowly read our proposals, clause by clause, there were long periods of silence as we waited for the company’s reaction. In fact there was no reaction. He would finally say: “We will have to think about that.”

In fact, Bressendon seemed bored and disinterested in the whole exercise. When I finally finished reading the contract, he repeated that he would have to discuss it further and give it a great deal of thought. He would let us know in due course. When I wanted to arrange a date for another bargaining session he said he could not agree on a date at that time. He would let the local union president know when it would be convenient for the company to meet with us.

It had become obvious very early in the so-called bargaining session that Bressendon lacked any authority whatsoever. I had the feeling that he had been instructed from Toronto neither to agree nor to bargain. I suspected that even his cool and indifferent behaviour was a prearranged scenario.

I then decided to by-pass Bressendon and meet with the company general manager in Toronto, a Mr. Porrit. That meeting began in an unusual and disturbing
manner. When I entered his office he was at his desk writing. I naturally expected
that he would at least acknowledge my presence, and perhaps even shake hands.
He did neither. As I stood in front of his desk he spoke in a mumble without even
lifting his eyes: “I’ll be with you in a minute, Mr. Swerdlow.”

He continued writing and did not even ask me to sit down. I just stood in front
of his desk, feeling very silly, and, in fact, insulted. My mind flashed back to the
company’s similar behaviour in the Gaspé about two week earlier, and I concluded
the company was playing the same kind of psychological game in both Gaspé and
Toronto. I was angry, damn angry, but I contained my emotions. Above all, I wanted
a collective agreement, and so I swallowed my pride, at least up to a point.

After a few minutes Porrit put aside his writing and looked up at me. I didn’t
wait for him to ask me to sit down, I just pulled a chair over to his desk and sat
down. I do not have any record of that meeting, but I recall that conversation vividly.
I spoke politely, but directly, and with firmness. I told him that it was my opinion
that any further meetings or negotiations with Bressendon at Gaspé would be a
waste of time — both his and mine. I continued: “I know that in such matters as
union contracts he does only what you instruct him to do, and so why don’t we
negotiate now, at least on the main issues? If we reach an agreement then we can
go through the motions of negotiation when I return to Gaspé. Mr. Porrit, as you
are the general manager of Gaspé, you must be a practical man. I, as director of
organization and education for the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, regard
myself to be a practical person. Then why don’t we cut out the playing around, and
let us try to agree on a contract that we can both live with?”

He did not reply immediately. He just stared at me with a rather puzzled look.
I don’t think he expected either my attitude or my proposition. Then, much to my
surprise, his deadpan expression gave way to a faint, but not unpleasant smile, and
he spoke. “All right Mr. Swerdlow, let’s negotiate.”

We made a short list of union demands, and then began to discuss them, with
the understanding that anything I agreed to would be subject to approval by the
union in Gaspé. He had no quarrel with that condition.

We compromised on a number of clauses, such as seniority and a grievance
procedure. On our demand for a wage increase and more paid holidays he was not
ready to give a definite figure, but he felt we could reach agreement on both matters.
However, on our demand for the Rand Formula, which would provide a check-off
of union dues by all employees, union and non-union, covered by the agreement,
he was adamantly opposed. I presented all the well-known arguments in support
of the formula, and he, in turn, presented the usual management arguments in
opposition. His main point was that the Gaspé operation was in the process of
building its permanent labour force, and therefore, for some time there would
continue to be a steady turnover of employees. Consequently, the company felt it
could not be tied down by the Rand Formula.

“If we dropped our demand for the Rand Formula, would you agree to a
check-off of union dues?” I asked.

“No,” he replied emphatically.

“In that case, we have no choice but to submit our entire contract to arbitration,”
I said.

"If that is your choice, go ahead."

"What about wages?"

He stared at me for a moment before he replied.

"Mr. Swerdlow, drop your demand for the Rand Formula and the check-off of union dues and I believe you will accept our offer on the matter of wages."

I told him there was no chance in hell that we would drop our demand for, at the least, the check-off. Nevertheless, I would discuss this with the President of the Congress and with the Gaspé workers, but first I would have to have a figure on wages and holidays. He said he would get in touch with me in a few days, and that was the end of our meeting.

Several days later he telephoned me and said that Bressendon had been authorized to state the company's position on wages and holidays, as well as other contractual issues, but, under no circumstance would they concede in any way, shape, or form to the Rand Formula or a check-off.

I asked whether the offer Bressendon would make was the company's final offer, or whether there was room for negotiation. He answered: "Mr. Swerdlow, I believe that you are a practical man, as you said, and will accept our offer. Consequently, I see no reason for making several offers and wasting a lot of time bargaining. I just want you to bear in mind that everything is negotiable, except — and I repeat — the matter of the check-off of union dues."

I telephoned Boulanger and told him to arrange a meeting with Bressendon. When we met he was only slightly more cordial than he had been at the first session. He made a few concessions on some contractual clauses, but rejected other clauses without making any recommendation. He offered a general wage increase of 15 cents an hour and five paid holidays. When he finished outlining the company's offer he quietly added: "Gentlemen, the company's offer is a package deal on a two-year agreement. As far as we are concerned there is no need for further discussion. If you accept the package, we can sign a collective agreement; if you don't, then you can do what you think best."

He folded his papers, as if to indicate that the session had ended. What arrogance, I thought. I tried to negotiate. I asked for what reason the company rejected several clauses which I pointed to. He replied that the company had "good reasons." Try as I would, I could not move him. Finally, as I was both frustrated and impatient, I said: "You make an offer, and then you say, 'Take it or leave it.' Surely this is not negotiating in good faith." He replied: "I wouldn't say, Mr. Swerdlow, that we are not negotiating in good faith. Certainly we are. On the other hand, you are quite right in your remark about taking it or leaving it."

I knew of course, that he had no authority but to follow the instructions he had received from the head office, and that any further discussion would be futile. I said I would submit the offer to our members and would be in touch with the company as soon as the membership reached a decision.

We hurriedly convened a meeting that same evening. For the first time in more than ten years of negotiating I was recommending acceptance of a company's final offer, and I was not very happy about it. I was quite satisfied with the wage offer
and the holidays, but not with most of the other clauses, and particularly the absence of any form of union security. Considering the sprawling nature of the mining operation, I knew that the collection of union dues would be very difficult, and I realized that if the dues were not collected the union would be hard pressed to carry on its work.

But what options did we have? If we had the means we would have gone to arbitration, and I think we would have a more favourable decision on a number of the issues, but we did not have the means. On the matter of wages, I doubted whether we could have got more. Furthermore, had we received a very good decision, and should the company reject it, as I suspected they would, we were not in a position to strike.

I consoled myself by reasoning that, after all, this was our first contract, and we had succeeded in establishing bargaining rights in the Gaspé when, before us the powerful Steelworkers’ Union had failed. I thought legal bargaining rights were paramount, and that eventually, we would improve the agreement. When I concluded my report and recommendation to the members, they voted to accept the company’s package. The first collective agreement in the Gaspé was signed a few days after the meeting.

In the months that followed the local union officers were more or less left to carry on with union activities as best they could. From time to time they called on our organizers when they felt they needed assistance, but generally the local was not a very viable operation. In the meantime the merger of the two Congresses to form the Canadian Labour Congress was pending. Before our two-year agreement was up for renewal we made arrangement with Pat Burke and Bob Levesque, the Quebec Director and Organizer of the Steelworkers, to transfer the Gaspé local to their union.

What followed, including a long and bitter strike, has been amply recorded. Some who have written about these events have failed to mention that the Trades and Labour Congress was, in fact, the first to establish a union in the Gaspé. It has also been written: “A year later the International Union of Mine Employees, newly chartered by the TLC, arrived on the scene, apparently with the support of the company and government, since it rapidly obtained certification and a two-year agreement.”

Obviously, the author of that quotation did not know the facts, nor did he take the trouble to ascertain them. The result was his unkind and completely false accusation. I never pretended to be proud of the agreement I signed in Gaspé Copper. Nevertheless, our union finally was established, became recognized, and collective bargaining began.