CHAPTER EIGHT
The International Spirit

The scope of our activities in the international field expanded rapidly following the merger. From the time I first attended an International Labour Organization (ILO) conference at Geneva in 1952, I had become increasingly convinced of the importance of Canadian educational officials establishing links with their counterparts in other countries. This opportunity for the labour movement in Canada has seldom, if ever, been illustrated so clearly as it was in the Banff International Seminar of 1957.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and its Latin division (ORIT) readily accepted our invitation to co-operate in sponsoring the seminar. William Kensley, the ICFTU representative at the United Nations, was designated to work with us in directing the programme.

The theme was the interdependence of the economically-developed countries and the underdeveloped countries. Seventy-five delegates from 30 countries took part. The countries represented were: Argentina, Aruba, Austria, Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rice, Cuba, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Italy, Jamaica, Malaya, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Poland (in exile), Singapore, Spain (in exile), Sweden, Trinidad, Tunisia, Uruguay, United States, and Venezuela (in exile).

The sessions at the Banff School of Fine Arts were intense and sometimes spirited. Although a great deal of attention was naturally given to trade union matters, there was also considerable discussion and emphasis on broad issues of understanding among the people of all the countries represented.

The seminar commenced at Banff, where most of the formal sessions were held. The programme continued in Toronto and concluded in Montreal. All this obviously required a great deal of effort in establishing an effective organization. The complex arrangements and services required were efficiently provided and carried out by a number of dedicated trade unionists across the country.

Bill Kensley and I readily agreed on our respective responsibilities; generally he would guide the substance of the programme, and I would oversee the organizational arrangements. All the proceedings were simultaneously translated by one of three professional English-Spanish translators who were brought from Mexico. Gordon Wilkinson, the CLC Regional Director of Education, directed the office staff of three English and two Spanish secretaries, who often worked far into the night to cope with the volume of work.

Gower Markle, Educational Director of the United Steelworkers, and Bert Hepworth, Educational Director of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, were in charge of the preparation of daily resumés of lectures and discussions. These were prepared in both English and Spanish, mimeographed and distributed to the students daily. This was greatly appreciated. Bob Smeal of the British Columbia Federation of Labour was responsible for tape recording all the proceed-
ings. Joe Miyazawa, Education and Research Director for the International Woodworkers, looked after a multitude of details connected with transportation and solved many problems in a most efficient manner.

During the time that I was CLC Director of Education I knew of no labour education seminar that received wider press coverage. Jack Williams, Public Relations Director of the CLC, was in charge of publicity. Part of his report read:

A staff representative of The Canadian Press, which serves all Canadian dailies, the majority of radio stations, and the CBC, and which feeds Canadian news to the Associated Press and Reuters had a staff man at Banff for the first four days and another for the last three days. We took a press clipping service and to date we have received 185 clippings from Canadian dailies. They are still coming in and do not include any quantity of clippings of stories carried when students made post-Banff visits to various centres. Undoubtedly these visits resulted in local coverage. From Banff we issued twelve general press releases on particular talks or discussions. In addition, background sheets were prepared on: (1) the Seminar in general; (2) the Vancouver programme on the arrival of the group from Latin America; (3) the Toronto visit; and (4) the Montreal visit. Our mailing list for press releases was 214, including some twenty-three papers to which students requested mailing, and some twenty foreign correspondents located in New York.

At the outset of the Seminar a Students' Council was elected, consisting of nine representatives from various countries. Wesley Wainright, Jamaica, Paul Koch, Austria, and Timothy Ogum, Ghana, were responsible for the publication of a daily bulletin which reflected the activities of the day and published announcements. The bulletin was usually distributed at breakfast and was read with both interest and amusement. The Students' Council was responsible for all social activities and also dealt with personal problems that arose from time to time.

Funding the Seminar presented difficulties. There were problems raising the necessary funds from the labour movement in Canada, and, as this was our first such effort, we had difficulty establishing a projected cost. In addition, we were not sure what the response of our unions would be. We anticipated that participants from Europe would be financed by their own organizations, but we knew that participants from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as from Asia and Africa, would have to be fully subsidized. As best as we were able, we estimated the cost of their transportation, their two week stay at Banff, transportation to eastern Canada, and the overall cost of the seminar.

Our plans to raise the required finances included various methods. First, a general appeal for contributions was sent to all provincial federations, labour councils, and individual unions. Secondly, an approach to some of the larger unions asking them to finance one or more scholarships for a trade unionist employed in their industry, or one similar, in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean. We were very pleased with the number of unions that accepted what one union officer called "an innovative suggestion." Thirdly, we requested contributions from the ICFTU and the ILO.

The overall response to our financial appeal from Canadian unions was most gratifying, indeed we over-subscribed our estimated requirement. In my report to the CLC Executive Council, I stated:

It will be noted that, with the exception of the ILO and ICFTU contributions of $5,000
each, the balance was raised in Canada. After paying all expenses and making allowance for outstanding commitments, there is still a balance. Brother Bill Kemsley and I recommend that this amount go to the ICFTU Solidarity Fund, designated for educational purposes, and more particularly for future ICFTU International Seminars.

The first three days at Banff were devoted to an examination of the state of trade unions in various countries. Bell Kemsley led off with a review of the global scene. John Connor of the AFL-CIO and Ralph Showalter of the United Auto Workers reviewed the situation in the United States. Bert Hepworth and I reported on the Canadian scene.

The trade union situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the social, economic, and political complexities of the region, were reviewed by Ricardo Temoche, Director of the Trade Union School at Lima, Peru, and Manuel Mendez, Education Director of ORIT. Ken Sterling of Jamaica also spoke on the situation in the Caribbean. Paul Koch of Austria and M. Massetti of Italy, with Bertel Broms of Sweden, led the discussion on the European situation. J.C. Dixit, India, and S.M. Zafar, Pakistan, spoke on the situation in Asia. Timothy Ogum, Ghana, and Michael Labinjo, Nigeria, discussed the African situation.

Among the seminar participants were several who were living in exile because of the opposition of their governments to the free trade union movement. Roman Stefanowski and Edward Glowacki spoke of the Polish trade unions in exile, and Pedro Velex on behalf of the Spanish trade unions.

Economic assistance to Third World countries was naturally a high-priority subject, and leading the discussion were three well-qualified speakers: Nik Cavell, Canadian administrator of the Colombo Plan, Dr. Edgar McInnis, president of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, and Philip Stuchen, an economist with the Department of Trade and Commerce. The speakers said that Canada was well aware of the urgent need for increased support for underdeveloped countries. Stuchen stressed the fact that social stability in many countries depended on the kind and amount of assistance they received. McInnis spoke particularly of the situation in Africa, south of the Sahara. He said there was a great need for everything: capital, education, markets for both raw materials and manufactured goods, communications, public health education, and hydro power.

Nik Cavell read a paper on wide ranging problems in Asia. He argued:

The needs of the whole area are so colossal, the wants of the people so many and varied, that one can only hope in a short presentation to mention some of the most obvious. We must remember the recent history of most of Asia. Great changes have taken place in the last few years. In India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Indonesia, and the French Indies strong nationalist movements fought for freedom from the colonial powers then governing them.

When, eventually, freedom was obtained these nationalist — and in many cases revolutionary — movements had to be turned into responsible administrations. Unfortunately, what makes a successful revolutionary movement is unlikely to make a settled day-to-day administration; and in many of these countries the sorting out process is not yet by any means over. This results in the instability in government of which we find so many examples in the South-East Asia area. In some of these countries satisfactory constitutions have not yet
evolved. It is also not unnatural that leaders of revolutionary movements should themselves find it a little difficult to settle down as really democratic Prime Ministers.

The discussion that followed these three presentations evoked some pointed comments, particularly from foreign participants. Some said they were fully familiar with the complexities and hardships in their own area, but they were anxious to know what plans Canada, and other western nations, had for extending greater economic assistance to the poor nations. Other delegates agreed, arguing, rather delicately, that their countries were poor because of centuries of colonial rule. One participant took exception to Cavell’s remark about revolutionary leaders finding it “a little difficult to settle down as really democratic Prime Ministers.” I thought this participant misunderstood Cavell’s observation. However, I also believed Cavell underestimated the sensitiveness of some foreign participants to even the mildest form of criticism of their leaders.

Discussion on this subject, together with the previous three days examination of the trade union situation in various countries, was very revealing and productive. It enabled all of us to know much better the world we were living in and to appreciate better the vital necessity of recognizing global inter-dependence.

The three top-ranking officers of the Canadian Labour Congress visited the seminar. President Claude Jodoin formally welcomed the visitors to Canada. He referred to the new spirit of unity, established in the trade union movement in Canada through the merger which had taken place the previous year. He also spoke of the possibilities and responsibilities of the newly-created CLC, and gave assurance that international relations would be high on the CLC’s agenda.

Secretary-Treasurer Donald MacDonald declared that the CLC fully supported the ICFTU’s stated purpose of “bread, peace, and freedom for all.” He said those who believed in these principles should work for their fulfillment through the international trade union movement.

Executive Vice-President Gordon Cushing outlined the wide range of CLC representation on various boards and commissions as well as private institutions. He emphasized the importance the CLC placed on education. Other speakers from universities, governments, and trade unions dealt with various aspects of the world’s problems: the growth in population, agricultural difficulties, the growing imbalance between the rich and the poor nations, and the increasing East-West tension with all its ominous possibilities.

But, of all the numerous speakers who addressed the Seminar, none attracted the public attention given Charles Millard, the ICFTU’s Director of Organization. Millard was a Canadian trade unionist with a distinguished record. He had been prominently involved in the earliest days of the United Auto Workers in Canada and was one of the founders of the United Steelworkers, becoming Canadian Director of that union. In 1956 he had resigned from that position to work with the ICFTU on a world-wide basis. Throughout his career he had been extremely active politically. Not only was he one of the most ardent advocates of direct political action by unions in Canada, but he became personally involved, serving two terms in the Ontario Legislature as a member of the Co-operative Commonwealth
Federation (CCF), the forerunner of the NDP.

The part of his address to the Seminar that created what came to be known as "The Charlie Millard Affair" dealt with unions and politics. In retrospect it may be regarded as "a tempest in a teapot," but, because of Millard's status, it caused quite a stir at the time. The misinterpretation of his remarks demonstrated the complexities of union-political relationships, particularly under the varied conditions prevailing in some countries and confronting fledgling unions.

In the course of his presentation, Millard said:

The labour movement must be independent and responsible only to its membership. Labour unions must not permit themselves to be used or exploited by political parties, nor should unions permit paternalism from governments or employers. Unscrupulous politicians must not be permitted to use unions as tools for their personal ambitions. Unions, however, must take political action and make independent demands on political parties and governments.

The following day newspapers across the country gave prominence to reports of the address, suggesting that Millard was advising the trade union movement in Canada to steer clear of endorsing a political party, a position completely at variance with that of a large part of the union movement in Canada, and to the cause to which Millard had personally contributed so much.

The Calgary Herald, for example, headed their report: "Politics Out for Unions." The account went on to say that Millard had warned of "the danger of unions becoming too closely tied to political parties." Moreover, it said, Millard in a subsequent interview had gone still further and had suggested that, perhaps, the time had come for Canadian labour to stop automatically supporting the CCF.

This was a complete misrepresentation of his remarks, and Millard wrote The Canadian Press, which had distributed the report, complaining that it had given "a completely distorted impression of what I had actually said." He pointed out that two-thirds of the students at the Seminar were "from unions in their infancy, a good many struggling for their very existence." He said he had told the Seminar that political action was "a must for trade unions," but the form such action should take "must be made by the unions themselves, not imposed by a political party, or a government or any outside agency." He said further that he had warned of "paper unions," created by politicians "on the make," and of paternalistic relations between unions, political parties, and governments. As far as the Canadian situation was concerned, he said he saw no reason to change the position he had followed consistently for twenty years.

The "Millard Affair" pointed up the problems faced by many trade unionists in developing countries. Millard's well-known views on political action by unions were also the views and principles of all free trade union movements in the western democratic countries. However, not all unions, regardless of their association with the ICFTU, functioned in democratic societies. In the more than seven years that I worked for the ILO in Asia, I found that in one country every major political party had its own trade union centre. In another country, the full-time president of the
Union federation was on the company payroll, paid the salary he had received before he became president. In still another country, the government built a large modern headquarters for the national trade union congress. And in another small country the government provided funds to the union so that it could function well.

In such cases it would be naive, I believe, to say that the governments or political parties did not exercise some degree of influence and control over the affairs of the trade union movement. Yet some Asian union officers argued that without some government support they could not maintain their organizations. In reality, in some Third World countries, the temptation for unions to accept outside support transcends the principle of independence and free trade unionism, as it is understood by unions in democratic countries.

Today, government assistance to some trade union activities, such as education, is accepted, but when government assistance becomes dependent on labour support for government policies, then the labour movement becomes subservient to the government, and by degrees loses its independence and social usefulness.

That, I believe, is what Millard was talking about.

At the conclusion of the Banff programme three buses carried the students to Calgary, from where they dispersed for several days to industrial centres in the east. There they stayed in the homes of Canadian workers, many being guests of unions that had sponsored their scholarship. Local labour councils arranged programmes that included visits to industries, attending union meetings, giving press interviews, and in, at least one case, walking a picket line.

Many students later reported that these visits were one of the highlights of their Canadian experience. Although at times language was somewhat of a problem, it was never a barrier to the spontaneous friendship that quickly developed with their union brothers and sisters. It was an equally happy experience for their hosts, with whom a number of students later carried on correspondence.

After the buses left Banff, my wife and I, with several maintenance employees, were the only occupants of the school. That afternoon I walked aimlessly toward the auditorium where the Seminar had been held. As I entered I saw the rows of tables with small, colourful national flags beside the printed cards that identified the participants. At the rear was the stage from which panelists and other speakers had addressed the students. On the walls hung bright banners with popular union slogans printed in bold red and black letters.

Alone in that desolate silence, I became absorbed in pleasant memories of the previous two weeks. Soon I became engulfed in strangely mixed feelings, satisfied with the success of the seminar, yet a little sad that it had ended. Working with such dedicated people had been a happy experience. From the moment the first group from Latin America set foot in Vancouver, we had enjoyed a high degree of co-operation from fellow trade unionists across the country. At Vancouver they had been greeted by Percy Bengough, as honorary president of the CLC. The British Columbia Federation of Labour and the Vancouver and District Labour Council were gracious hosts for three days, taking the visitors on tours of the city and visits to industrial establishments.

The day after the departure of the students from Banff we left for Toronto, where
the group reassembled. The first day of the Toronto programme was an open-house session with trade unionists from the area invited to visit with the seminar students. On the second day the students reported on their experiences in visiting Canadian homes and industries. That evening they were entertained at a banquet given by the federal government, with Labour Minister Michael Starr as the main speaker.

On 29 September the group moved to Montreal, where they were guests at a dinner given by the City of Montreal. CLC Vice-President Roger Provost, a member of the Montreal Municipal Council, presided. They were also entertained at a luncheon given by the Jewish Labour Committee.

Then, on 1 October, the foreign students left Canada, flying in many directions to many countries. They took with them a new understanding and appreciation of the solidarity of the trade union movement, in a truly international sense, and they left their Canadian brothers and sisters with new insights into that phenomenon.