CHAPTER TEN
The Labour College of Canada

It is natural that labour's main educational interest should be directed to meeting specific trade union needs. The idea of a permanent labour educational centre, with a fairly advanced curriculum, had long been a dream of the labour movement in Canada. It became a reality in 1963 when the Labour College of Canada was established as an independent institution, through the co-operation of the University of Montreal, McGill University, and the CLC. It had long been recognized that there was increasing need within the movement for sustained basic studies in the humanities and social sciences, as well as advanced specialized instruction in the theory and practice of trade unionism. For as social, economic, and political problems arise, multiply, and become more complex, the need for the training and education of present and future union leaders increases proportionately.

Talk of establishing a Labour College dated all the way back to 1886. In that year Brian Lynch, a Knights of Labor delegate from Toronto, sponsored a motion to introduce an educational programme in the union movement in Canada. At the 1911 convention of the TLC, a motion was adopted calling for the establishment of a Labour College. Then, almost half a century later, the convention of the CLC held in Winnipeg in 1958 gave unanimous support to a resolution instructing the Congress officers to "explore the possibility of establishing a Labour College, in co-operation with an appropriate university." The long-cherished dream might at long last be realized.

As the Congress Director of Education when the resolution was passed, I knew I would have the privilege and honour of being closely involved in the realization of such a college, and, indeed, be one of its founders. I was very excited about being connected with such an innovative project, reflecting many of my personal ideals and aspirations. The fact that so many people before had seen the importance and value of a Labour College reinforced my own conviction of its necessity. It had the blessing of our predecessors and now the consent of our contemporaries.

In the excitement and enthusiasm of those first affirmative actions I did not, and indeed could not, anticipate the endless negotiations, the reticence of many of the people involved, the skepticism of others, and the frustrations. I did not foresee the five long years of meetings and negotiations, persuading, wrangling, sometimes compromising, and always impatiently waiting for all the jigsaw pieces of this complex undertaking to fall in place. Many times during those five years I felt discouraged and unhappy about the slow and tedious progress. It was difficult for me to understand why an idea that seemed to me to have so many advantages would not be immediately and unconditionally accepted. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the dejection and the stumbling blocks, I deeply believed that one day, in my lifetime, the Labour College of Canada would become a reality.

The idea of such a college had been rekindled and began to germinate in my mind about a year after the merger. Gradually its shape and form began to mould,
and I tried to assess the possibilities of success and the consequences of failure. I wondered when, and with whom, I should discuss it. Finally I decided to raise the matter first at a meeting of the CLC Education Advisory Committee in fall 1957, just prior to the CLC’s Winnipeg convention.

The committee members, all labour educators in their respective unions, reacted most enthusiastically. They included: Gower Markle, United Steelworkers; John Whitehouse, Textile Workers’ Union of America; Bert Hepworth, CBRE; and Alan Schroeder, UAW. They, with others, shared my views about the need and timeliness of such a college. John Whitehouse, who was a graduate of Ruskin College, an institute of this type in England, spoke with particular eloquence and characteristic enthusiasm in support. There was no question in the minds of the committee members about labour support, and some proposed concrete steps that the CLC Education Department should take in pursuit of the project.

I told the committee that, before discussing the subject with the Congress officers, I wanted to have their reaction and recommendations. The committee then decided unanimously to ask the officers and the Congress Executive Council: “To give serious and favourable consideration to the establishment of a Labour College, if possible in co-operation with an appropriate university.”

Shortly after that meeting I discussed the recommendation with Stanley Knowles, who was at that time an Executive Vice-President of the congress. His first reaction was encouraging but cautious. Knowing Stanley well, I did not expect an electrifying outburst of enthusiasm. He pondered for a while and finally said he liked the idea and supported it in principle. Slowly, he began to ask a number of specific and cogent questions. He wanted to know how the college would be structured, who would be eligible to attend, where it would be located, how much it would cost to operate, where the funds would come from and, finally, what would be the responsibility of the Canadian Labour Congress. At that point I could give only cautious answers.

My next move was to approach the other Congress officers. I recall that my first discussion with them was rather frustrating. As I entered the boardroom I sensed that they seemed to be preoccupied with other urgent matters. They certainly did not show the same enthusiasm as had members of the Educational Advisory Committee, yet I could not expect that. I remember well President Jodoin’s opening remark as I sat down: “Well Max, what are you getting us into now?” But there was no hostility in his voice; he asked the question in his usual kind and friendly manner.

As I outlined my concept of the college, I was unable to judge what impression I was making. I had the feeling that I was not being very convincing. President Jodoin was looking at me with a noncommittal expression. Secretary-Treasurer Donald MacDonald did not look at me at all. He continued writing and seemed detached from the proceedings. Executive Vice-President Bill Dodge sat reclined in his chair, watching me with expressionless eyes. Only in Stanley Knowles’ expression did I see support and encouragement. Even before I concluded my presentation, I felt that the timing of the meeting was not right, and that I could not expect the much-needed support.
Following my presentation, President Jodoin said that the idea was very interesting and, if the Congress were to promote it and become fully involved, it would mean a considerable commitment. Consequently, before supporting the idea, even in principle, the officers would have to give the matter a great deal of serious consideration. He concluded by saying that, in due course, I would be asked to meet with them again for a more detailed discussion. On this optimistic note I was about to leave, when he called me back. "Max," he said, "You stated your case very well." I thanked him and left. I knew he sensed my disappointment.

Some weeks later I learned from Stanley Knowles that the officers did indeed support the idea of a Labour College, but they had serious doubts about the support the college would receive from the labour movement. It was this uncertainty that was the key factor in their reluctance officially to endorse the college, thus allowing me to campaign for its establishment.

Months later, when the Congress convention was held in Winnipeg, in June 1958, the Congress officers still had not made a decision. I then decided on another approach, which I discussed with Gower Markle, who was also at the convention. We prepared a resolution calling on the officers to explore the possibility of establishing a college. We then conspired with one of the delegates, Jimmy Graham of the Carpenters' Union, to sponsor the resolution by submitting it to the resolutions committee. That body moved concurrence and the resolution was adopted by the convention unanimously.

I was thrilled and excited. Markle and I realized that, for the first time, we, the present generation of labour educators, had positive and unequivocal support for a Labour College, because the "Parliament of Labour," as Congress conventions were sometimes described, had so decided. That was it!

In the following months I drafted a memorandum for my own guidance, setting out various aspects of the undertaking, including the structure, the budget, the curriculum, and other matters. Having no previous experience with such an institution, I wanted all aspects to evolve from discussions. I relied on the Education Advisory Committee, as well as others, for guidance and assistance in the preparation of a concrete and comprehensive outline of the project.

Once the CLC approved my memorandum in principle in 1959, I began what proved to be a long and often frustrating trek to universities. Beginning with President Davidson Dunton of Carleton University in Ottawa, I reviewed the background of the CLC's decision to promote a Labour College. I gave an overview of the educational programmes conducted within the labour movement and explained the need for a permanent institution for advanced education and training. I then invited Carleton University to become associated with the college.

Dr. Dunton expressed interest and asked what was expected from the university in terms of financial obligations, facilities, and participation. I explained that we did not expect the university to contribute money, but we would like the university to nominate a number of people to serve on the Board of Governors, which would be responsible for the entire operation of the college. We also expected the university to play a leading role in designing and guiding the academic programme. Finally, we expected the university to supply the necessary physical plant.
Dr. Dunton said he regarded our request as very important, but he worried about possible complications. He said he would consider the matter carefully and would discuss it with his colleagues. I felt our first meeting concluded on a friendly and hopeful note.

Not having heard from him after several months, I arranged a second meeting. At that time Dr. Dunton was particularly interested in knowing just what the responsibility of the CLC would be, and to what extent it would be involved in college affairs. He gave the impression of being concerned that the Congress would dominate the whole operation. I explained that the Labour College was intended to be an independent educational institution. The CLC, like the university, would designate representatives to the Board of Governors. The CLC would undertake to raise the necessary funds. Moreover, if the university wanted equal representation on the Board, or even more, I saw no difficulty with such an arrangement.

He seemed satisfied with my explanation and suggested I meet with Dean James A. Gibson of the Faculty of Arts and Science for a more-detailed discussion. Two or three months later we finally met, then we met again, and again. In November 1959 we managed to agree on a joint memorandum to be submitted to the Carleton University and the Congress. It stated in part:

Carleton University undertakes to teach certain agreed-upon courses. It shall assign instructors for and determine the contents of such courses. The balance of the programme shall be taught by the Labour College. It shall determine the content of such courses and recruit teaching personnel. The Labour College will also be fully responsible for the administration, recruiting of students, fund raising, etc., for the College. The full scheduled programme shall be conducted on the University Campus. However, activities not regularly scheduled may be held outside the University Campus.

In other words, the programme was to be divided, with the University and the College teaching their respective agreed-upon parts of the programme, and the College responsible for all College affairs. This was not the best kind of arrangement. Nevertheless, I reluctantly agreed in order to get the College off the ground. When I presented the memorandum to the Congress officers they did not seem very happy about it. I then suggested that I try to arrange a meeting of a high-level committee of Carleton with the Congress officers.

Early in February 1960 such a meeting took place. Carleton was represented by Dr. Dunton, Dr. Gibson, Professor John Porter, and Professor Gordon Scott. The CLC was represented by Donald MacDonald, Stanley Knowles, Norman Dowd, and myself. After about an hour and a half of inconclusive discussion, Dr. Dunton said he would send us a letter in which he would state specifically the university's position concerning possible involvement.

On 16 February 1960, I received a letter from Dr. Gibson which read in part:

I think I ought to report to you that within the University Committee which has been following the proposed Labour College question there are still strong views on two particular points:
1) We are concerned with what the October 5, 1959, memorandum described as a divided programme. In the minds of my colleagues this is not a joint programme, and they are, therefore, understandably concerned with what the form or direction of a divided programme may eventually be; and, in particular, the responsibility of the Director proposed to be appointed from the CLC side.

2) The simplest administrative provision for a divided programme would be the physical separation of the two parts of the programme (as the October 5, 1959, memorandum suggests), preferably separation in time. Though this is the simplest provision, it may not be the best; all I would like you to know is that some among my colleagues are insistent upon this separation, and I feel there will have to be some meeting of minds upon this point before we can resolve some other questions which hinge upon it.

Needless to say, we were somewhat shocked by Carleton’s insistence on a “physical separation” of the programme. Donald MacDonald, like all of us, was outraged at the idea that Labour College students could attend sessions for which Carleton would be responsible on the university campus, but, sessions on trade unionism, for which the College would assume responsibility, would have to be given off campus.

After more than a year of discussions with Carleton University, during which my hopes sometimes rose and sometimes fell, this last Carleton letter was a deep disappointment. We did not meet again.

In retrospect, I had the impression that in some respects Carleton wanted to co-operate with the CLC, but, as this was the first time that the labour movement in Canada had approached a university jointly to sponsor a labour college, the university was seriously concerned about possible repercussions from its corporate contributors.

After the termination of discussions with Carleton University the Education Advisory Committee recommended that I approach the University of Western Ontario in London. I was not as enthusiastic about a possible association with Western as were some of the other committee members, but, as the university was located in a highly unionized area, I went along with the recommendation.

When I met with President James Hall of Western, I outlined our ideas concerning the college, including its purpose, programme, structure, finances, and other matters. I emphasized that we neither expected nor wanted the college to be an integral part of the university structure, nor even to have an association similar to that existing between Ruskin College and Oxford University in England. I explained what we believed to be a suitable association and invited Western’s participation in the joint project.

Dr. Hall said a Labour College in Canada was an excellent idea and should certainly be encouraged. He had some reservations, however, about its practicality, and indeed the usefulness of a university-labour joint project. He believed it would be more advantageous to the labour movement if the college were administered by the CLC alone. Nevertheless, he said he would discuss the matter with other university officials. His personal view, however, was that for the time being the University of Western Ontario should not become involved. While he did not
attempt to justify or explain his opinion, it was quite clear and forthright. I accepted his view in the same spirit that it was expressed.

When we decided to approach Western we had obviously overlooked the fact that the Labour College was to be a bilingual institution. Had we made arrangements with Western it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct the programme effectively in both French and English. For our purpose that was not the right university, and perhaps this too was one of the reasons for Dr. Hall’s reticence.

During the many months of discussions with the universities, my department was preoccupied with a wide range of activities, and so, after my experience with the University of Western Ontario, the matter of the Labour College was again shelved, much to my chagrin. I was becoming quite discouraged with the reluctance of university officials. In the fall of 1960, however, I resumed my efforts to find a university that would be willing to co-operate with us. I arranged to meet Professor H.D. Woods, the Dean of Industrial Relations at McGill University in Montreal. He had been recognized for a number of years as an authority in the field of industrial relations and was trusted by most people in the labour movement, and well-regarded for his honesty, fairness, and objectivity. He listened to my explanation of our plans and hopes and of the discussions with Carleton and Western. He showed keen and concentrated interest and when I concluded I saw he was absorbed in thought. He was silent for a long time.

Then, leaning forward in his chair and looking directly at me, he said: “Max, the idea of a Labour College in Canada is fascinating. I would like to see McGill associated with such a college. I am more than willing to try to see this realized.” He continued, explaining that McGill’s association with the college would first have to be approved by the University’s Board of Governors. He undertook to discuss the matter with Professor J.R. Mallory, Head of the Political Science Department, who, he thought, would co-operate.

Our first discussion ended on that note. I was elated, for this was the first encouraging and unequivocal expression of support that I had received from a university official in almost two years.

Several weeks later Professor Woods, Professor Mallory, who had agreed to work with us, and I met. Among other matters we discussed their recommendation that the University of Montreal be also invited to become a participant. They pointed out that the location of the college in Montreal, and the collaboration of both a French-speaking and an English-speaking university would make possible a completely bilingual and bicultural institution. I readily agreed, knowing the officers of the Congress would support such an idea. Professor Woods undertook to discuss the matter with Professor Gilles Beausoleil, Director of Industrial Relations at the University of Montreal.

Early in November 1960, I met with Professors Woods, Mallory, and Beausoleil. We realized that if the two universities were to consider becoming involved they would require an outline of what the Labour College was all about. We proceeded, somewhat laboriously, to draft such an outline. This included all the main aspects of the college — its purpose, structure, budget, staff, and other
matters. It was a significant document, and constituted the first comprehensive outline drafted in concrete terms, thus setting the whole affair in focus. The outline served not only as a basis of discussion by the universities, the Congress, and others, but it was also used extensively in the fund-raising and recruiting campaigns in the two years preceding the opening of the college.

When the document was completed, we agreed that we would discuss it with our respective institutions and then try to arrange a meeting of the heads of the two universities with the officers of the Congress. I suggested to President Jodoin that he send invitations for such a meeting, and in due course it was held on 11 November 1960 at the Cercle Universitaire in Montreal. From McGill University came Principal Cyril James, James Mallory, Michael Oliver, and Edward Webster. From the University of Montreal: Monsignor René Lussier, Philippe Garigue, Maurice Bouchard, Jean Réal Cardin, and André Raynauld. From the CLC: Claude Jodoin, Donald MacDonald, Stanley Knowles, William Dodge, and myself.

I was delighted with the representation, but the meeting was by no means smooth sailing for those of us who were so anxious to get an agreement and have the college launched. The discussion was very friendly, informal, and at times even jovial; yet I felt the presence of some strain. Basically, the universities really wanted to co-operate, I was sure of that, but they were not sure about the advisability and practicality of establishing an autonomous Labour College at that time. They were concerned, among other things, about the estimated high cost of running the college and they questioned the degree of support that would come from the trade union movement. Nevertheless, I believe that meeting contributed, perhaps more than any other, to the eventual launching and development of the college. The various views of the participants contributed significantly to the eventual establishment of the Labour College of Canada.

Claude Jodoin presided. He stated that the object of the meeting was to study and discuss the possible creation of a Labour College, following the work of the committee formed the previous year, representing the three institutions. He asked Professor Mallory to report for the committee.

After giving a detailed report on the background, Mallory summed up the committee’s views as follows:

The committee felt that it is essential that the Labour College be constituted as an autonomous entity, largely independent of the institutions founding it. The universities would assume responsibility in academic matters and in supplying staff; the CLC, for its part, would be responsible for assuring enrollment and securing finances. The College would be administered by the Board of Governors, composed of three representatives named by McGill University, three by the University of Montreal, and four by the CLC. The founding institutions would thus retain a certain control, but only indirectly through the right to appoint to the Board. The Board, on the other hand, would be responsible for the policy and administration of the College. The Board would name a permanent administrative officer with whom would co-operate, according to university traditions, the academic senate made up of the faculty.
In conclusion, he pointed out that the Labour College which was envisaged could be seen as a unique, original, and truly national institution. He then suggested that a continuing committee was necessary to speed the establishment of the college.

Dr. James said he was struck by the high cost of the project. He felt he should state explicitly that McGill could not contribute financially. He wanted to know from Claude Jodoin whether he was confident about raising the necessary funds. Given the high cost, Dr. James said it seemed to him that other similar but less costly methods for achieving the objective should be examined. He wondered whether it would not be possible to use existing facilities in the universities, and to have special courses prepared to meet the CLC’s needs. Such a procedure, he said, would obviously cost less.

President Jodoin replied that he saw this meeting only as a first step in the realization of our goals. We wished to know first if the universities were willing to collaborate with us in an educational exercise for the benefit of our members. We did not feel that it was possible at this time to fix the final form which these activities might take. Personally, I was not very happy with his reply, as I saw no need to question the willingness of the universities to collaborate. I felt that the discussions we had had with them for almost a year, and the report of the University-CLC Committee, were ample confirmation of that. However, I said nothing at that stage.

Monsignor Lussier said that the University of Montreal was ready to collaborate in the work of developing and training leadership, there should be no doubt from the outset of the university’s intentions. An excerpt from the minutes reads:

He stated that he, nevertheless, shared some of the concerns of Dr. James. He had asked the representatives of the University of Montreal on the Labour College Committee if the existing facilities of the university, and especially the present organization of extension work, could not fill the needs of the CLC adequately. If this were the case, he continued, the two main obstacles which he could see in the way of founding a Labour College would be avoided: (a) the high cost of the enterprise, and (b) the dispersion of the efforts of the university professors involved.

The minutes continued:

Dr. James said that he would add to what Monsignor Lussier had just stated that there were additional difficulties raised by the prospect of courses during the daytime, throughout the academic year, which would involve the presence on the campus, and in the lecture halls of students who did not have the same academic standing as regular students.

This observation by Dr. James was dumbfounding. Once again it was intimated that a trade unionist would just not fit into a university environment. Carleton University had expressed a similar view. However, I did not realize that other university people shared Dr. James’ opinion. No one commented on it, but I spoke up, feeling the discussion was developing outside the main issues. I underlined clearly that it was impossible to create a truly-national, permanent institution, such
as we desired, without agreeing to the Labour College formula. On the other hand, we had to know the exact details of the project before it could be placed before our membership. This was why we could not, at that time, estimate precisely the support we would receive from our members.

Dr. James observed that he had already mentioned that the Labour College could be seen as taking a number of forms. Monsignor Lussier added that a number of approaches could be studied, but basically the question was one of finance. Other participants expressed their views, most of which were peripheral to the basic issue, seeking an acceptable alternative. Finally Donald MacDonald brought the discussion into focus. The minutes recorded:

Mr. MacDonald expressed the deep interest of the CLC in the Labour College. There was no question of whether or not the College would come into being. It would undoubtedly be founded some day, if not now then later. What required immediate attention, therefore, was the question of whether or not the present was the appropriate time for a decision, and if current conditions were favourable to its founding. The CLC was quite convinced that the College should be set up. But its attitude was that it was best to walk before attempting to run. Was the scheme presented to the meeting the best one? He did not know. But one thing, he felt, was certain. The CLC could not found the College on its own; it needed the co-operation of the universities in one way or another. The CLC was ready to assume financial responsibility for the College; it would pay whatever it would cost. But, in spite of his great respect for Principal James, and his long experience, Mr. MacDonald could not see how the Principal's conception of the College could be realized unless the objective of a permanent national institution was accepted. Once the CLC was assured of the collaboration of the universities, it could go to its members and try to get their support. The purpose of the present meeting, as he saw it, was to agree, if possible, on the principles of, first, university co-operation in the Labour College project; and, second on the appropriateness of continuing to work toward this through a committee.

Donald MacDonald expressed his views in a clear, precise, and most agreeable fashion. As he spoke I could feel the impact he was making on others and I was delighted with his contribution. Professor Oliver agreed with MacDonald's understanding of the objective of the meeting. It seemed necessary, he said, to know whether the proposed structure of the Labour College was acceptable. Dr. James said MacDonald was asking the meeting to choose the most difficult path. An autonomous college raised a number of difficulties in regard to the existing regulations of the universities. At McGill, he said, only the Board of Governors had the power to admit students, to appoint faculty, and to approve curriculum.

Monsignor Lussier said his university's support for the proposed college, in whatever form, was assured. Finally, Claude Jodoin referred to the terms of reference of the University-CLC Committee, and suggested the committee be empowered to explore and study all the different proposals which had been made at the meeting. His suggestion was accepted and the meeting adjourned.

A few days later I was asked to meet with the officers. We reviewed some of the reservations expressed by Principal James and Rector Lussier. Jodoin asked whether we should, in fact, rule out a more modest project, perhaps some compro-
mise between the Labour College formula and some of the alternatives suggested by the universities.

I shook my head emphatically, saying: "No, no, no." I pointed out that the memorandum on the college, which had been submitted to the Congress and the universities, was the product of a lengthy analysis and discussion with the representatives of the universities. The fact that the university principals had asked that consideration be given to alternatives did not necessarily mean that they rejected the original formula.

"Moreover, Mr. President," I went on, "your mandate from the 1958 convention calls for the establishment of an identifiable Labour College and not some kind of University-CLC joint educational scheme."

"But," interjected Donald MacDonald, "your own estimated cost of running the College is very high; where will the money come from? You say it will come from our unions, and perhaps some provincial governments. Well, I have strong reservations about this."

"I'm afraid I don't share your views," I replied, somewhat impatiently, "but that is not important. What is important is that we make the approach to our unions. Mr. President, we will never know what response we will get from our affiliates until we approach them. We will never know. Let me try."

I am sure it was obvious to the officers that I did not favour a compromise formula. I was adamant in the pursuit of this long-cherished dream and I felt very deeply about it. They could have overruled my obstinate position, but they did not. They could have instructed me to negotiate a more modest arrangement, but they did not. I think they sensed my commitment, and for the first time I knew I had their full support.

The joint committee then met several times. We examined the alternative proposals which had been made by Principal James and Rector Lussier, but we decided to stay with the original formula, although we did make some technical changes. The final draft was then submitted to the two universities and the Congress for approval.

It was not until June 1961 that the universities made the positions known. When the University-CLC Committee met, Professor Mallory reported that the project had been considered by both the Senate and the Board of Governors at McGill. He had personally presented the project to the Senate, which welcomed and approved it. The Board of Governors had also approved the scheme, but with a few additional technical conditions which were accepted without difficulty.

Professor Raynauld reported for the University of Montreal. He said that, in the course of any discussions on the proposal, a new element had emerged, namely the absence of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU). This was the Quebec-based central body of what had originally been a "confessional" type organization, then known as the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL). Although he was instructed to report that the university approved the college project, it asked (I could only assume as a condition of support) that the CNTU be invited to participate. He said Dean Garigue had been instructed to meet with CNTU representatives to ascertain their interest. When he met Jean Marchand,
President of the CNTU, and Fernand Jolicoeur, the Director of Education, Marchand had greeted him with: "I have been expecting you for the past two years." Dean Garigue said Marchand expressed some concern that the CNTU had not been invited to participate earlier. Raynauld concluded that it was possible the University of Montreal would not approve the scheme if in doing so it risked public criticism from Marchand and the CNTU.

This was, indeed, a new element. We had never considered inviting the CNTU to join the project, nor were we aware of their interest. I had no objection to their participation, but I had no idea what the reaction of the Congress officers would be. Nevertheless, I agreed with the committee's recommendation that the CNTU be invited to meet with the committee on the following day if possible.

The next day Oliver and I met with Jean Marchand and Fernand Jolicoeur. Marchand expressed surprise that the proposal had been drafted without any consultation with the CNTU. He said it had first been called to his attention by a visit from Dean Garigue. Because they had not been involved earlier, it was impossible for him to express an official point of view, which would commit his executive committee. However, he was willing to proceed as if the CNTU's approval had been given, and he asked Jolicoeur to take part in the meetings of our committee, as though he were an official delegate. I was satisfied with his conditional support.

When I reported to the Congress officers, I was pleasantly surprised that they agreed to the CNTU's participation without question. With that problem solved, both universities endorsed the original concept of the Labour College. In the months that followed the Joint Committee expanded and refined the original memorandum. We then asked the universities and the Congress to nominate their representatives to the Board of Governors, which we proposed should meet for the first time 31 January 1961.

The Board was composed of 19 members — five from McGill University, five from the University of Montreal, six from the CLC, and three from the CNTU. It was a very prestigious group consisting of three industrialists, a judge, six professors, and nine trade unionists. At the first meeting officers were chosen unanimously: R.E. Powell, Chairman; Justice André Montpetit, Co-chairman and Chairman of the Executive Committee; Stanley Knowles, Vice-Chairman; Max Swerdlov, Registrar; Fernand Jolicoeur, Recording Secretary.


The fact that R.E. Powell undertook to be chairman was both interesting and remarkable. He was the Chancellor of McGill, but better known as an extremely prominent industrialist and a pioneer in the aluminum industry, both in Canada and throughout the world. He was the chief architect and driving force behind the Aluminum Company of Canada (ALCAN) projects at Arvida, Quebec, and Kitimat, B.C., the two largest aluminum smelters in the world. What was even more
remarkable was that the trade unionists on the board, all of whom were national leaders, supported Powell's nomination.

He was a good chairman. Although 76 years of age, he seldom, if ever, missed a meeting or an important college function. In those formative years, when many difficult problems came before the Board, his judgment and guidance was always well-balanced and objective. He presided over meetings in a reasoned, dignified and efficient manner. It soon became apparent to all of us that he very sincerely wanted the college to succeed. I recall when, after the first meeting of the Board of Governors, I walked with him to his car, he said: "I believe this college is not only good for your trade unions, it is also good for my university."

In my capacity as registrar I saw him frequently and I never had any difficulty in doing so. Once, when I was in his well-appointed office discussing some college problems, he leaned back in his chair and stared at me with his gray, searching eyes. Then, as if he had not heard a word I said, he smiled and commented: "Max, you must have been quite a radical in your youth." "No sir," I quickly replied, "I was not just a radical, I was a communist." We both laughed; I think he appreciated the remark.

On another occasion, when we were looking for a full-time principal for the College, someone recommended a person at Ruskin College in England, who wanted to come to Canada. None of us knew the man. Powell said he would make some enquiries and several weeks later he called me to his office and told me that he had some information about the prospective principal, explaining: "I think he is somewhat to the left of Wilson (the Labour Prime Minister), but he is a good man. If he is interested in the post it is all right with me." For various reasons the man did not come.

In our fund-raising campaigns I never approached ALCAN for a contribution, nor did we receive one unsolicited. I did approach Powell once with regard to financing. This was at a time when we desperately needed operating funds. After a meeting of the Board of Governors, just before the members left, I went to Powell and quietly told him of my financial problem. I said I needed $3,000 as soon as possible, and asked if he had any suggestions.

He was silent for a moment, and then said: "I think I have a suggestion; let me try." He called over Notman and McLagan, the two other industrialists on the Board, and he said: "Look here, Max needs $3,000 right now. I am giving him $1,000. Will you each give him $1,000?" They agreed and that was all there was to it. It was really not a question he asked his fellow governors; it sounded more like a challenge. Several days later I received the money.

R.E. Powell was chairman of the Board of Governors for seven years, and then, because of failing health, he relinquished the position at the age of 83. He died in 1973 in his 86th year.

A portion of his obituary read:

As the first chairman of the (Labour) College in 1962 he worked with Max Swerdlow of the Canadian Labour Congress, Dean H.D. Woods of McGill, Judge André Montpetit, Hon. Jean Marchand then of the CNTU, and J.G. Notman to establish this institution of higher
Mr. Powell served as chairman of the Labour College for seven years, fervent in this belief that labour-management relations could be improved through broader educational opportunities, not only for management staffs, but also for union leaders.

I am more than glad to have known and worked with the first chairman of the Labour College of Canada, R.E. Powell.

At the first meeting of the Board of Governors, we finalized a number of issues regarding the college structure, programme, and staff. What remained was the launching of a national campaign to raise our objective of $240,000 to cover the anticipated cost of operating the college and granting scholarships for the first three years. We referred to these years as the experimental period.

As registrar, it was my responsibility to raise the money. I was confident we would be supported because we had a good cause, and so I undertook the task happily. I planned the campaign with some precision. First, I listed the unions that already had educational programmes within their own institution. Experience led me to believe that such unions would be the first to support the college, both with grants and by financing their own participants. As our campaign progressed, this assessment proved correct.

Secondly, bearing in mind our objective of $240,000, I listed the specific amount I would request from each of the prospective contributors, or the very small unions. I knew the Steelworkers and Auto Workers would contribute generously, as they did. In the case of the small unions, I just did not know their financial resources, and so I gladly accepted whatever they contributed, which in some cases was as low as $10 or $25 for each of the first three years.

I also approached the federal and provincial governments for contributions of specific amounts. I met with the federal Minister of Labour Milton Gregg and received the amount I requested. I followed this up with meetings with almost all the provincial ministers of labour and education. In Ontario and Nova Scotia, I also met with the Premiers.

In those days there were some in the labour movement who were a bit critical of us for asking governments to make financial contributions to our educational activities. They believed that governments would not allocate funds unconditionally without some "strings." They also thought government donors might want to influence the direction of the college and the substance of the programme, maintaining that "he who pays the piper calls the tune."

I never held that view. I believed government funds were public funds and should be allocated to all types of education. It was, in fact, incumbent upon a government to allocate some funds to worker education.

There is some personal gratification in knowing that this position has now been universally accepted, at least in countries where free trade unions exist. Today there is no difference of opinion on whether or not to accept government money for worker education. In fact, in many cases, the view is that generally, governments are not giving enough to support such activities. In my experience, in soliciting funds for the College, governments have never placed any conditions or "strings,"
not even accountability, on the contribution. I did not approach any industries for contributions, but I did ask a few industries to provide scholarships to enable their employees to attend the college.

The financial campaign began with a circular letter signed by CLC President Claude Jodoin and Secretary-Treasurer Donald MacDonald. This was sent to all affiliated central bodies and unions, requesting support through the sponsorship of students and by financial contributions. I then undertook a tour across Canada, speaking to as many organizations as possible. It took about two months to visit the main centres, coast to coast.

Both unions and governments responded admirably. Most trade union publications, and in many cases the daily press, carried accounts of the college. The campaign succeeded beyond our expectations and we far exceeded our objective. The launching of the college was now assured.

Our original plan for the first eight-week term was to have two classes: one in the French language with a minimum of 15 students, and one in the English language with a maximum of 30 students. There were to be five fields of study: economics, history, political science, sociology, and trade unionism in theory and practice. We planned to grant ten scholarships of $1,000 each. When the college opened on 3 June 1963, there were 32 French language and 53 English language students, and the college disbursed $19,000 in scholarships.

The opening ceremony was an emotional and momentous occasion for those of us who had worked so hard toward the establishment of the college. As the programme progressed I thought of the many events and trials over the previous five years. Now all our hopes and some of our misgivings were crystalized in this historic event. I felt something new had been added to Canadian education in general, while expanding the horizons and creating a place specifically dedicated to labour education in Canada.

As we sat on the platform I was extremely happy, excited, and even triumphant. Surrounded by officers and students, here at last were the tangible results of our efforts. It was a very important moment, not only in my career and my personal life, and I could hardly prevent a lump rising in my throat when President Jodoin said in his address: "Max Swerdlow never doubted the possibility of establishing the Labour College. His perseverance, more than that of any other single individual, has brought this dream to reality."

When I got up to speak I had great difficulty containing my emotions. The opening ceremonies concluded with a gala reception and the Labour College of Canada formally came into being.

The administration was made up of eleven professors, a number of guest lecturers, the registrar, two office secretaries, two co-principals, and an assistant to the principals and a librarian. In addition, there was the Board of Governors, the Executive Committee, the Administrative Committee, and 26 Labour College representatives, most of whom were engaged at universities across the country, who interviewed and evaluated student applicants.

One of the difficulties in completing the college structure was finding a suitably qualified principal. We were fortunate that Dean Woods and Gilles Beausoleil
agreed to be co-principals for the first term despite their heavy loads in their own universities. In the meantime we continued a search for someone to fill the post on a full-time basis.

At a meeting of the Board of Governors someone recommended we approach Pierre Trudeau of the University of Montreal as a person who might be interested. I contacted him and we arranged to meet for lunch in the Hunt Club at the Mount Royal Hotel. He knew, of course, that I wanted to speak to him about the Labour College, but he did not know that, on behalf of the Board of Governors, I would offer him the position of principal at an annual salary of $12,000.

As I proceeded to explain the programme and objectives of the college, the people who were on the Board of Governors, the support we were receiving, and other details, his expressive eyes were constantly fixed on me. He listened attentively, sometimes nodding his head in approval, other times gently smiling. Throughout my full explanation he did not interrupt once. I concluded with the invitation to become principal, mentioning, of course, the salary.

After that I had another gin and tonic and while we proceeded with our meal we talked about a variety of things, but not about my offer. I thought he might be interested, otherwise he would have said so right away, but I was wrong. He told me that he quite familiar with the college from newspaper accounts and from some of his colleagues and that he very much liked the whole concept. Then he was silent for a time. When he resumed, he said he very much appreciated the offer, and that under other circumstances he would certainly accept, but he could not at that time. He explained that Premier Duplessis had prevented him from teaching at the university for a number of years. At the time of our meeting, he had been back for only about a year and he wanted to continue his career at the university.

Naturally, I was sorry he did not accept our offer, but I was much impressed with his precise, lucid, yet warm explanation. He spoke softly, but with vibrance; his words seemed to roll out so eloquently and yet so simply. When he finished I was almost hypnotized and at a loss for words. I told him I fully understood the reason for his decision, and I did not pursue the matter further. Had Pierre Elliot Trudeau accepted our offer, the history of Canada would probably have been different.

Professors Woods and Beausoleil continued as part-time principals during the second term in 1964, and then we engaged Professor Fernand Martin of the University of Montreal as the first full-time principal in 1965. His academic background in economics, his deep interest in social problems, and his interest and enthusiasm for the college made him a unanimous choice.

Shortly after the first session an interesting development took place. Prior to the establishment of the college the Canadian Labour Congress had been asked by the Department of External Affairs to undertake a six month training programme for a few foreign trade unionists who would be fully financed by the Colombo Plan. The CLC agreed, and I was asked to take charge of the programme.

In the first year, two trade unionists came from India, and in the second year four came from Malaysia. Although the External Aid Office was willing to support a greater number, not many were able to take six months off their jobs to come and
study in Canada. When the Labour College became operational, I approached the External Aid Officer with the recommendation that foreign trade union students be invited to attend the college for the regular session of two months, and then visit industrial centres for another month. The recommendation was accepted and we made the arrangements regarding finances, invitations, post-college programmes, and other matters.

The second session of the college, commencing in March 1964, was attended by 19 foreign trade unionists from the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Each subsequent year the number of foreign students increased. Unfortunately the programme was discontinued in 1968.

The international flavour created by the presence of students from many lands and cultures helped Canadians develop much broader perspectives with respect to their own problems. Canadians were surprised and impressed by how much the foreign students knew about Canada, its history, culture, and people, and how little they themselves knew about the countries from which these foreign students came. It was indeed a revealing experience.

Some years later, when I was working in the Caribbean, I met many of the former Labour College students. When I visited some in their homes, they were proud to show me their college graduation certificate, framed and hung in a prominent place.

Another interesting arrangement we made was a travel fellowship scheme. Before the inauguration of the college I approached a representative of the British Council, which stimulated cultural exchanges and provided scholarships for study in Britain. I enquired about the possibility of the council awarding travel scholarships to at least one French-speaking and one English-speaking student, who received the highest graduation mark in their respective classes. I explained that the purpose of the scholarships would be to have the winning students tour England and France for several weeks to study industrial relations and become acquainted with the labour movements of those countries.

The British Council representative liked the idea and said he believed arrangements for such a fellowship could be made. He undertook to discuss the proposal with the cultural attache of the French Embassy in order to ascertain their willingness to make this a joint British-French effort. One would be supported by the British Council to tour England for six weeks, and the other, supported by the French Embassy, to tour France for a similar period. I was delighted to make this announcement at the inauguration ceremonies. The first two scholarship winners were Jean Beaudry and Len Waller, both of the United Steelworkers. They travelled to Europe in fall 1963.

Many of our foreign students said their visits to various centres after the Labour College sessions were among the highlights of their stay in Canada. There they had the opportunity to visit industries, talk with management personnel, and meet with trade union leaders, as well as with members and their families. However, some students experienced less commendable situations. One student wrote about a Canadian union representative who accompanied his group as follows:
Eventually, we were in the city of Sault Ste. Marie with this representative. I could not allow his following remarks to go unheeded, for we had, for the previous four days, overlooked many similar remarks and, we being in the company of others at the time, feared that our continued silence and politeness might be understood. I quote his remarks: "Look at the state of Great Britain today, she is dragging her ass because of her generosity to Africa and those places to bring some sort of civility there. Let America, Britain and such countries pull out their investment in Africa and the West Indies and immediately these places will return to cannibalism."

Our foreign student had a proposal of how to deal with this matter:

In the light of this apparently poorly informed representative, I would wish to strongly recommend that he be given a stint at the Labour College of Canada, and placed in a room at the university campus between an African and a West Indian. His day-to-day association and discussion with the Colombo Plan students might, I hope, change his outlook.

The student's report continued with two more unfortunate examples. The first was a remark by the manager of a radio station:

How do you feel, having to adapt yourselves at short notice to the Canadian way of attire, especially having to wear shoes and be called upon to keep them on for the greater part of the day?

And the second came from an industrialist during a discussion on the investment potentials of Trinidad and Tobago:

What part of Africa is Trinidad and Tobago?

But, apart from a few such "flea bites," the students' comments about these trips were very favourable.

In a group with such diverse backgrounds, problems and incidents were bound to arise. I want to mention only a few. One involved a Canadian who applied to attend the college two years in succession, and each year was turned down by the Labour College representative in his area on the ground that he did not have the academic qualifications to cope with the programme. When he applied the third year I was so impressed with his persistence that I argued with the Selection Committee in support of admitting him. In the end the committee reluctantly accepted the application. At the end of the term, when the student's final papers were marked, he failed to receive a passing mark. He tried, I know he did, but he just could not make the grade; it was beyond him. I never argued a similar case again.

Another time we had a case involving one of the foreign students. After his examination papers were marked it became clear that he did not pass, and so would not receive a graduation certificate. A day or two prior to the graduation ceremony I decided to inform him of the situation in order to avoid an unpleasant situation. I tried to explain, as gently as I could, but he seemed absolutely shattered. "But," he
said, "I can’t go back to my country without a diploma. I received so much publicity on being selected to come to Canada; how can I return a failure?"

He was emotionally shocked. What to do? I arranged to meet with professors who had marked his papers and I told them of my meeting with the student. The professors insisted that the marks were given in all honesty, and they had no wish to change them. I asked whether they would object to the student having a second try, but this time through an oral test which I would give. I know I did not fool them for a moment, but they agreed. On the morning of the graduation day I gave the student an oral test which lasted about an hour. In my judgement the student passed, and so he received his certificate.

There was another situation in the 1964 session which threatened to erupt into the open on graduation day. This involved the continued absence from classes of two students. When it became known that all students would receive graduation certificates, there was an undercurrent of protest by a number of the students, both Canadian and foreign. Some insisted that their protest be brought into the open at the time of the graduation ceremony. One foreign student who shared this view but did not want to create an unpleasant situation, described the resolution of the affair in these words:

An unpleasant situation in the presence of invited guests, press, radio and TV, was only avoided through the timely intervention and discussion by another Colombo Plan student and I, with others, over the days immediately prior to graduation day. We agreed on a compromise with the protesting students, whereby they would allow the graduation and presentation of certificates to come off without incident; and that they would bring their grievances to the attention of the Board of Governors of the Labour College and the Canadian Labour Congress in their respective reports. Whether they have, in fact, made mention of this in their reports I am not in a position to say. What I do know is that the graduation ceremonies went off without incident.

I was, of course, familiar with the problem, but I did not try to influence the students’ planned action one way or the other. It was only when the students, staff, and guests were already gathered that I was informed of the compromise. I was proud of their wise and balanced decision, which I am sure was motivated by their deep interest and concern for the Labour College of Canada.

As in other similar institutions there were a number of incidents in the college, but most were pleasant and happy experiences. In the succeeding years the college continued to grow and improve and change, but it never lost sight of its mission, nor did it dilute the purpose for which it was established.

In 1969 I undertook a long-term assignment in Asia with the International Labour Organization, and I relinquished my post with the CLC. In 1977, when I was stationed in the Barbados, I received an invitation to attend the ceremonies marking the 15th anniversary of the college. I was happy to be invited, but also rather shocked to realize that so many years had passed so quickly. I arrived in Montreal the day before the event and returned to the Barbados the day after.

At McGill University there were only a few old timers who I knew, some were
students of the 1960s and a few were CLC officials. The students of the 1977 term were a new generation of trade unionists. I felt almost lost in that familiar, yet so strange, environment as I sat on the platform and was introduced as the first registrar. Several speakers also referred to me kindly.

As I observed the ceremonies with deep nostalgia, I was sure that the interest and excitement which had prevailed at the inauguration of the college in 1963 was very much in evidence 15 years later. I also recalled an observation made to me at the inauguration by one of the students, and which I have often repeated. After he had received his certificate, and with distinction, I approached him and told him that I had clearance from the CLC to offer him the position of Congress education representative in Quebec. He was both surprised and pleased. He spoke to his wife, who was with him, and after a brief moment they jointly and happily agreed to accept our offer. After we agreed upon some details I asked: “Aren’t you happy we found you here?” He did not reply for a moment, and then, with a distant look in his eyes, he said, “Brother Max, of course I am happy that I was found here, but I am much happier that here I found myself.”

Is that not what the Labour College in Canada is all about?