VIVID IMPRESSIONS of the first ILO Conference I attended in Geneva in 1952 have remained with me through the years, though I little knew at the time how deeply they would later relate to my life and career. This was the largest such conference ever held, 700 delegates from 60 countries, many in flowing colourful native dress. They talked in many languages of how to improve the living and working conditions of people throughout the world. It was a new sensation and I felt as though I was intimately surrounded by the whole world.

The Canadian delegation reflected the tripartite nature of the ILO, namely representative of government, employers, and labour. M.M. MacLean, Assistant Deputy Minister of Labour, and Paul Goulet, Assistant to the Deputy Minister and Director of the ILO branch, were the government nominees. Harry Taylor represented the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, and I was the labour delegate.

Paul Goulet, a very efficient yet kind person, helped me in an almost fatherly fashion to understand better the nature of the ILO, its programmes, and the issues that would come before the conference. He also told me that, while it was not mandatory, it was customary for delegates to address the general session on the report of the Director General, who at that time was David Morse. If I wished to speak, I should submit my name in advance. Having never before declined an invitation to speak, I seized the opportunity, rather surprising Goulet with my haste.

For several nights I worked, carefully preparing my speech. Finally my turn came, and when my name was called I suddenly became quite nervous, remaining in my place for several long seconds. When my name was called the second time, I got up and during the long walk to the rostrum the tension eased.

I have a record of my address. In part I said:

I regret that the Report gives little cause for rejoicing insofar as present world conditions are concerned. It is indeed, sad to read the following lines in the introduction to the Report: "I would like to be able to say that the world is in a better condition today than it was a year ago, that the danger of war has been eliminated, that the devotion of vast resources to rearmament has ended, and that nations are able to give all their attention to overcoming the real enemies of man: poverty, ignorance, disease and inhuman living conditions. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Unfortunately indeed; and yet, while this is the actual situation, reality is not without hope, and hope is not without optimism. Nations are still discussing their differences, and as long as they are sitting around the table, engaged in what we call collective bargaining, there may yet come about lasting collective security.

I then went on to talk about economic conditions in Canada.

When the conference ended I have become convinced that Canadian workers should know more about the ILO, and that we, as labour educators, could do
something about this. However, it was some time before we introduced discussion on the ILO into the TLC's educational programme, and even then our efforts were not very productive. We just did not know how to relate the objectives and work of the ILO to the concerns and interests of Canadian workers in a manner that would be both interesting and meaningful.

Another opportunity for me to learn about the ILO came in 1958 when the ILO and the Asian Labour Education Centre of the University of the Philippines arranged a joint conference on labour education to be held in the Philippines. I was invited to participate. This was a valuable experience, enabling me to learn more about the technical aspects of the organization's activities, and to become acquainted with the labour movement and its leaders in that part of the world.

I was a great admirer of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India, and, before I left Canada, I tried to arrange through the Department of External Affairs to make a courtesy call on Nehru after the conference ended. About a week after I arrived in the Philippines I was advised that such arrangements had been made. As this was simply a courtesy call, our discussion was by no means epic, but one thing he said has remained with me ever since. Referring to a number of rather serious strikes then taking place in India, he commented: “You know, I certainly agree that all workers should have the right to strike.” He paused, and then with a slight sigh added: “But I wish they would not exercise that right so often in India.”

Then, in 1960, there came an excellent opportunity to explore methods of teaching workers about the ILO. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announced a World Conference on Adult Education to be held in Montreal in October 1960. I anticipated that a number of labour educators from the United States and Canada would attend, as well as representatives from the ILO. I thought they would most likely be prepared to spend a few additional days at a workshop to discuss and design an ILO teaching programme.

After clearing the idea with the Congress officers and the National Education Advisory Committee, I wrote Albert Guigui, chief of the ILO's Industrial Workers' Division, with the suggestion. He replied that the ILO was happy to accept the invitation to be a joint sponsor with the CLC. The workshop was held at St. Agathe des Monts with 35 participants and five observers. Ways and means of conveying information about the ILO were discussed. This was the first venture of its kind in the history of the ILO Workers' Education Programme, and it appeared to meet a need. While the ILO's activities in this field were mainly devoted to the developing countries, the workshop provided an opportunity to meet some of the workers' educational needs in industrially-advanced countries and led the way to similar programmes in other areas of the world.

This resulted in improvements in our teaching methods and the creating of greater interest in the ILO. “Teaching Workers About the ILO” became a regular feature in the ILO's programme.

In 1965 I attended an ILO international meeting of labour education consultants and was honoured in being elected chairman.

Autumn 1966 marked the beginning of a still deeper involvement in ILO affairs, one that eventually led to significant changes in my life. Earlier that year John
Simonds, a CLC Vice-President, had gone to Trinidad and Tobago on a mission for ICFTU. The labour movement there was seriously divided and in disarray. Simonds had been asked to assist in trying to effect improvements.

During his stay the Minister of Labour and some of the union leaders told him of their plans to establish a labour college. They had asked the ILO to designate a person to undertake the project, but no name had been forthcoming. Simonds told them of my work in establishing the Labour College of Canada and suggested I would be a suitable person, if satisfactory arrangements could be made. As a result of these discussions, I received an invitation from the ILO to undertake the assignment. After some exchanges of correspondence between the ILO and the CLC I was granted a year's leave of absence. Some of my Congress duties were, meantime, to be assumed by Link Bishop, the CLC's Educational Director in Ontario.

I arrived in Port-of-Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago, 19 August 1966, and the following day met with Jim Adams, the Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Labour, similar to our Deputy Minister. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the framework for a college had already been established. A committee, representative of government, labour, and employers, had been at work examining ways and means for developing labour education activities on a more organized and permanent basis.

Their recommendations included:

1) That a permanent labour education centre be established and named the Cipriani Labour College. (Arthur Andrew Cipriani, 1875-1945, was one of the nation's early crusaders for social justice and enlightened legislation.)

2) That the objectives of the College be to provide trade union training and workers' education, to conduct courses, seminars, and other such activities in the field of industrial relations, and to undertake research into problems affecting labour and industrial relations.

3) That a Board of Governors be established, consisting of five representatives of the trade union movement; the Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Labour; the Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Education and Culture; a representative of the University of the West Indies; and two public-spirited citizens selected by the government, one of whom to be chairman.

4) That the government provide the basic funds for the operation of the College.

5) That an official request be made to the ILO to assign a labour education specialist to assist in the technicalities and details that had to be worked out before the College could become operational.

With these basic decisions agreed upon, my first responsibility was to design the programme, engage teaching staff, and obtain reading material for the students. I considered it helpful to identify the social framework within which the programme would be developed. I listed the following principles:

1) That the trade unions constitute an integral part of democratic society, and that their existence and development is socially desirable.

2) That collective bargaining is a logical and effective process in a free democracy.
3) That conflict of interest between employers and workers can be harmonized by mature and well-informed management and unions, particularly where they are assisted by enlightened labour legislation.

4) That industry, both private and public, must operate efficiently and profitably.

5) That the interests of management and labour must be compatible with the interests of all, and that both have responsibilities to the nation.

In order to carry out these principles an academic programme was prepared consisting of two two-month day courses, two five-month evening courses, eight two-week day courses and 18 weekend schools throughout the country. These courses were conducted at various levels of union responsibility.

The subject material included Labour's role and activities in economic development, basic economics, industrial relations, labour legislation in the Caribbean, writing a collective agreement, Caribbean and world labour history, and instructor training.

The Board of Governors readily accepted this approach and, after a series of meetings, the College began to take shape. It opened 19 October 1966, two months after my arrival. I had become very impressed with the kindness and co-operation of many people in all sectors of society. The press reported favourable on our efforts, and it seemed everyone supported us and wished us well. This kindness and attention and the natural beauty of this tropical country influenced my somewhat-romanticized but factual account of the opening including a report I sent to the ILO headquarters, describing the scene:

The stately old house in a quiet, elite residential area of Port-of-Spain was ceremoniously decorated and freshly painted in soft azure, coral and yellow. Under the shade of a twisted avocado tree, rooted in the centre of the manicured lawn, a band dressed in gay uniforms, played familiar tunes.

Inside some 200 people crowded the building to its limits. As the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Dr. Eric Williams, and the Governor General, Sir Solomon Hocher, arrived in their shiny black limousines, they were greeted by a white-helmeted guard of honour. It was a colourful spectacle.

The Prime Minister delivered the inaugural address, saying in part:

As I declare open this College to the memory of Captain Arthur Cipriani, let us hope that from it will come men and women educated in the requirements of good trade union membership and disciplined and efficient leadership, so that they may be better able to play their part in overcoming the problems which confront us as we seek the social and economic betterment of the nation.

The Cipriani Labour College was formally launched.

During my work in Trinidad and Tobago I came to know all the labour leaders in the country. Two of them, Daniel Critchlow and Selbin John, were the presidents of separate public employees' unions. I thought it was unfortunate that, in such a
small country, there should be two unions in the same field, and, although I realized
this was far beyond my terms of reference, I decided to try to bring them together.

First, I spoke to the two presidents separately about the idea of a merger. Each
said he would be quite happy with such a move, but neither wanted to take the
initiative. I suggested I would be glad to preside over a small unpublicized meeting
of the organizations. They agreed and shortly afterward I convened a meeting of
the three top officers of each of the organizations. It was evident from our first
discussion that the possibility of a merger was there, although there remained the
question of assignment of officers and staff. We continued the discussions for
several weeks, during which time the matter of a constitution arose. I undertook to
assist in the drafting; but this proved more difficult than I anticipated. On more than
one occasion, one or the other union walked out a meeting because of disagreement.
And, in fact, as chairman of the committee, I also walked out on occasion, telling
the representatives that, unless they were more serious about the merger, I would
have nothing more to do with it.

In due course, agreement was reached. The discussions had been conducted
secretly, because we did not want to give publicity to matters that were still under
discussion. However, before the matters were finalized, and before we were ready
to give publicity to our talks, the Daily Chronicle learned about our meetings and
gave the matter full coverage. The article referred to “an expatriate, who initiated
the unity move.” It was, of course, known that I was the “expatriate,” but for some
reason I was not named.

Shortly after a convention was arranged, and the two public employees’ unions
merged, becoming the largest trade union in the country. When I visited Trinidad
and Tobago in 1977, I was pleased to find the union doing exceedingly well. The
government, however, was annoyed with me for assisting in uniting the two unions,
and my contract was not extended for another period, as had originally been
planned. Nevertheless, I was delighted in playing a part in the merger. A month
later I undertook a mission to Guyana, with a view to establishing a labour college
there.

While I was in Trinidad and Tobago I had been visited by the Secretary of the
Trade Union Council of Guyana, J.H. Pollydore. He wanted to learn about the
structure, programme, and funding of the Cipriani Labour College. He told me that
about two years earlier they had established a labour institute in Guyana. It was
named after Nat Critchlow, a former waterfront worker, labour leader, and political
crusader. Administered by the Trade Union Council, it was funded mainly by the
American Institute for Free Labour Development (AIFLD), a body established by
the AFL-CIO in the early 1960s to develop workers’ educational activities through
programmes financed by the United States government. I did not take seriously
rumours that some of this funding came from the Central Intelligence Agency.

Pollydore said that, for a variety of reasons, the Critchlow Institute had not been
able to develop an effective programme, and he wondered whether, when I finished
my assignment in Trinidad and Tobago, I would be interested in going to Guyana
to assist them. I quickly assured him that I would be interested, but arrangements
would have to be made with the ILO and the CLC. I was not too optimistic about
this possibility, but Pollydore seemed to know how to go about it. After various exchanges of correspondence, arrangements were completed and it was agreed that I would assume my new post in Guyana in September 1967.

At Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, I moved into a rambling old house built on stilts by the sea, where my wife later joined me. Within a few days of my arrival discussions began with trade union and government officials as to how best to reshape and redirect the Critchlow Labour Institute. People were most co-operative and supportive. Among them were the Minister of Labour and Social Services, the Honourable Claude A. Merryman, his Permanent Secretary, F.G. Taharally, the President and Secretary of the Trade Union Council, Richard Ishmawl, and Joseph Pollydore.

I wanted to know what they regarded as the weaknesses and shortcomings of the Institute, what their expectations were, and how the programme could be improved. From my Trinidad and Tobago experience I was well aware of the sensitivity of the people involved, and I directed my attention to the future, rather than the past. Soon our talks identified concrete objectives and plans for a reconstructed labour education centre. We prepared new by-laws with a preamble which called for a broadening of the administration through the involvement of representatives from the government, the University of Guyana, the public and others. The academic programme was to be conducted on two levels, elementary and advanced, with courses ranging from weekend seminars in areas outside Georgetown, to a two-month full-time course at the College.

We decided to carry on with the courses already planned and begin the new programme with a two-month course commencing in January 1968. Meanwhile there was a great deal of preparatory work to be done: selecting teaching staff, obtaining text books, preparing course outlines, recruiting and screening students, engaging office staff, and a host of other things. The three fundamental and most-urgent matters were obtaining adequate funds, appointing a principal, and finding a suitable home for the College.

On the matter of finance, the government agreed to increase its contribution from $10,000 a year to $25,000, and the Trade Union Council undertook to increase its financial contribution substantially. The appointment of a principal was left to a later date, while I was asked to assume the immediate responsibility of that position. Without requesting the ILO for authorization to act in such a capacity, which I should have done, I accepted.

The matter of quarters was more complicated. We were meeting in a small Transport Workers’ Union hall in an antiquated waterfront building, reminiscent of some Canadian labour temples of the 1930s. On one occasion I met with Pollydore and George DePeane, on whom I often relied for advice and assistance. DePeane was a competent and enthusiastic young labour leader who was very popular, and who became a highly respected ILO representative in the Caribbean. At this meeting I asked where the new College was to be housed. I was told: “Here.” I found it hard to believe — the room was far too small and, rather impatiently I’m afraid, I said bluntly that it simply would not do.

Slowly, quietly, and I suspect rather sadly, Pollydore said: “But, Brother Max,
this is the only space we have.”

I undertook to discuss the matter with the Minister of Labour. When I did he explained to me that the government’s own ministries were scattered in old houses around the city, and the government was in no position to provide permanent facilities for the College. There was, however, a house assigned to one ministry that was not in use, and that could be made available to the College for a six-month period. I quickly accepted, and so the College began its activities in quarters that were reasonably adequate, but definitely temporary.

One day, as I was scouting the city for a more permanent home, I came across a large vacant lot opposite a new technical school. As I stood looking at the land where cows and sheep were grazing, I imagined I saw a beautiful complex of buildings rising from the tall grass, a new home for the labour movement of Guyana and the Critchlow Labour College. I thought that, with careful planning and considerable effort, the dream might be realized.

The first step was to obtain the endorsement of the Trade Union Council. When I met with the officers I outlined the proposal, not forgetting to say that the accommodation would be for both the College and the Trade Union Council. Their reaction was almost predictable. Thinking that I could get the money from the ILO or some other such source they were momentarily delighted. But, when I explained that I could not possibly do that, their mood changed.

I said that, in my opinion, if the project were to be realized, it should be a truly Guyanese effort, designed by a Guyanese architect, built by Guyanese workers, using as much indigenous material as possible, and financed by the people of Guyana. Seeing the doubtful expression on the faces of some of the officers, I quickly added that I would undertake to raise some of the money from outside sources and would participate in a financial drive in Guyana.

I think my somewhat impassioned presentation impressed most of the officers, but Winslow Carrington of the Transport Workers’ Union, who later became Minister of Labour, had serious doubts. He spoke to me in an almost fatherly manner: “Brother Max, I certainly appreciate your enthusiasm; but you have been here only a few weeks. You don’t know this country well. Most of our people are very poor, and raising money here, even for such a worthy cause as the Critchlow Labour College, would be very difficult. I tell you, my good brother, the effort may very well break your heart.”

I could not resist the temptation, giving what I believed was an appropriate reply, even if it were a bit dramatic: “Brother Carrington, trying to raise money for the Critchlow building and not succeeding will not, I assure you, break my heart; but not trying at all may.”

I went on to say that I was somewhat familiar with the government’s efforts to encourage Guyanese people to undertake “self-help” projects, several of which had recently been reported in the press. The Critchlow Labour College campaign would definitely be in that category. Finally the TUC officers agreed to endorse and support a campaign to raise funds.

The next step was a meeting with an architect. George Henry was a talented and imaginative young Guyanese who had been trained in England. I went to see
him and told him our need, explaining that we had no funds to commence construction, nor even to pay him. I added that I was unable even to give assurance that he would be the chosen architect, for this was a decision for the Board of Governors. His handsome face broke into a broad smile, and he asked: “Mr. Swerdlow, what do I get out of this if I make the initial plans and not get the job?”

“If that happens George, I assure you that you will have the eternal gratitude of the saints in heaven,” I replied.

He bent over his desk and laughed heartily for a long time. When he straightened up he spoke: “You know Max, in the years I have been a professional architect, no one has offered me a deal such as you have. I can’t possibly refuse you.”

George Henry and I became good friends the first time we met. In the months that followed we spent a great deal of time together, at all hours of the day and night, planning, dreaming, and arguing about designs. We agreed that, as this was the first project of its kind in the history of Guyana, it should not just meet our educational requirements, but should also be a thing of beauty.

While he was working on his drawings, I turned my attention to obtaining the land, which was Crown property. I knew the Minister of Labour, Claude Merryman, quite well and asked him to arrange a meeting with the Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham. At the same time I asked George Henry for some preliminary plans.

When we met I spread the multi-coloured drawing across the Prime Minister’s desk, saying: “Mr. Prime Minister, you give us the land and we will give you this building.” He looked at the plans for a long time, as though he was examining every square inch. He seemed impressed with both the design and our confidence; and turning to Pollydore, said he saw no great difficulty, but he would have to determine whether there were other plans for the property.

Then he turned to me: “Mr. Swerdlow, I see this building plan includes the construction of a cafeteria, is that justified? Would the Labour College have sufficient students to justify the construction and maintenance of a cafeteria?”

I knew that, sooner or later, someone would ask that question, but I did not anticipate it from the Prime Minister. I was grateful he raised it because I felt I had an ace up my sleeve.

“Mr. Prime Minister,” I said, “the number of students in the College would, perhaps, not justify the cost of a cafeteria; but right across the road is your technical school, with an enrolment of more than 300 students, and there is not cafeteria of any kind there, or even nearby. Is it not realistic to assume that many of those students would be happy to walk across the road to our cafeteria? This is one of the reasons we hope to get this property. If we do, it would be good for our College and for your technical school.”

The Prime Minister laughed and made a slight bow, as if acknowledging good planning. After a few drinks of rum and ginger we left. A few days later Pollydore received a message from the Prime Minister’s office saying the land was ours.

Now it was time to begin raising money for actual construction. As this was to be a labour centre it was only reasonable to expect the unions to be the first to make substantial contributions; but the Trade Union Council did not have “substantial funds.” To overcome this difficulty we devised a plan that was far more effective
than a cheque from the TUC. George Henry designed a certificate with an architectural sketch of the College, and an inscription saying that the holder of the certificate had contributed at least one dollar toward the construction of the building.

We printed 50,000, one for each member of the trade union movement in Guyana, and every union took as many certificates as it had members. These were sold in factories, offices, and the field; and members proudly displayed them in their homes. Thus, the Trade Union Council fulfilled its commitment, raising $50,000. Equally important, union members were made to feel, in a very real sense, that they had made a contribution to the construction of a new home for their labour movement.

An important factor in fund-raising was keeping the public informed, and I established a good relationship with the city editor of the country's only daily newspaper, *The Daily Graphic*. Accounts of our progress appeared regularly.

The next step was to approach industry for contributions. We realized that a good selling point would be a provision enabling companies to write off their contributions for tax purposes because the College was an educational undertaking. Through the Minister of Finance this was arranged, and a public announcement was made that contributions to the Critchlow Labour College would be tax deductible.

I then planned to approach the Demerara Bauxite Company, the country's largest industry, which was a subsidiary of the Aluminum Company of Canada (ALCAN). R.E. Powell, Chairman of the Labour College of Canada, was a director of ALCAN, and so I telephoned him in Montreal. I told him briefly of our campaign and my intention to approach Demerara for a contribution. I asked if he would be willing to use his influence with the company to ensure we received a "substantial" contribution. After a moment of silence, he characteristically asked: "What do you want?" I quickly replied: "Ten thousand dollars." Again there was silence, and then he asked when I was seeing the company. I asked when I should; and with a chuckle he suggested, "two or three days." I thanked him and when I met the Demerara officials I had little difficulty obtaining a cheque for $10,000, especially as it was tax-deductible.

The momentum of our drive was increasing almost daily. I visited as many companies as I could, large and small, and accepted contributions of cash or building materials. Cash donations went from $100 all the way up to $45,000. The government had not only contributed land, but had also provided a large quantity of lumber from its own sawmill. Other contributions of building material included 100 feet of galvanized pipe, 3,500 bags of cement, $10,000 worth of lumber, $4,000 worth of paint, windows, electrical fixtures, and many similar materials.

The largest contribution received, and one which displayed a good deal of business acumen, was $45,000 from Banks Breweries, earmarked to cover the cost of the cafeteria. I thought that, as the cafeteria would serve beer, among other beverages, Banks was a logical company to approach for a sizable contribution. Armed with a complete set of plans I arranged to meet the owner and general manager, Peter D’Aguir. He was impressed with the plans and assured me his
company would make a contribution. I said I not only hoped for a contribution, I hoped the company would finance the $45,000 cost of the cafeteria.

He seemed surprised, and said a donation of that proportion would set a dangerous precedent for appeals from other institutions. I pointed out the goodwill and favourable publicity that would result and said the company’s support would be permanently recorded by a plaque on the cafeteria wall. Finally, I pointed out that the workers were the brewery’s best customers.

He then said that the final decision would rest with the company’s Board of Directors, and that he would place our request before the directors.

“Will you personally support our request?” I asked.

“I am quite sympathetic, but I must think a little more about the implications of this kind of a commitment,” he said.

I felt this was not too reassuring, and asked if I might appear before the Board. I was surprised at how quickly he agreed.

When the day came the meeting was held in a small, unpretentious, and smoke-filled room at the brewery. When I entered I had a feeling that the matter had already been discussed. I gave some background information on the College, its programme, and its contribution to labour-management relations in Guyana. I explained our need for suitable facilities and our plans for the future. The ten or twelve men around the table listened politely and attentively. I then unrolled the architectural plans on the table, saying: “Gentlemen, this is the cafeteria I am asking you to build.”

They looked at the plans with evident interest, and then one of the directors spoke: “Mr. Swerdlow, as you know, we are a business firm. Good will and publicity, as you say, is important to us, but do you really believe we could get more publicity and goodwill if we gave $45,000 rather than the $10,000 as the Demerara Bauxite Company gave you?”

Momentarily, I was hard-pressed for a reply to what seemed like a logical question. Then an idea sparked my mind. “Sir, of course you are a business concern; then I will make you a business proposition. You give us the $45,000 and in return I will give you an agreement from the Critchlow Labour College that for the first five years the cafeteria is open no other than Banks beer will be sold there.”

There was dead silence in the room. The directors had not expected a business proposition, and frankly I had not gone to the meeting with one. I was asked to wait outside while they discussed the proposal. About half an hour later I was called in, and I immediately knew, from their smiling faces, that the proposition had been accepted. I was told that this was the case, and formal details would be worked out.

I was confident that I would have no difficulty getting the five-year commitment from the College. Although different brands of beer were imported, Banks was the only brewing company in Guyana, and its employees were members of the trade union movement. When I returned to Guyana in 1977, some eight years later, Banks beer was still the only brand sold in the cafeteria.

By January 1968, some three months after we began our financial campaign, we had commitments for cash or building materials amounting to about $200,000, roughly two-thirds of the estimated total cost. On 2 February we had a ground-
breaking ceremony.

Plans for the complex included: five administrative offices, two of which would be for the Trade Union Council; three classrooms; a students' common room; the cafeteria, with seating for 100; a library; a dormitory to accommodate 40 students; and an auditorium to seat about 350. The auditorium was to be the show-piece of the complex. I encouraged George Henry to give his talent full freedom, and he did. The room was circular, with a high cathedral-like ceiling and massive exposed steel rafters painted black. Part of the wall was all glass, with doors opening on an inner courtyard. Opposite was a wall built of a variety of carefully-selected Guyana hardwoods. The auditorium was intended to be a multi-purpose room, available for conferences, theatrical performances, and other cultural activities. Thus the facilities would extend well beyond our purely labour-educational needs and would contribute significantly to the life of the whole community.

Arrangements with a local building contractor were completed in early June, but before he took possession, we arranged a symbolic ceremony marking our "self-help" efforts. Students from the College, with some other trade unionists, brought picks and shovels and started digging trenches for the foundation of the first building. Our two days of voluntary work gained us a great deal of newspaper publicity as well as effecting some savings.

Naturally, progress in the construction was not without its difficulties. Sometimes material was not delivered on time, or key tradesmen were not immediately available, or the architect was not on hand. At one point there was a dispute between the contractor and his employees over the matter of overtime. It was settled when we agreed to make additional money available to meet the workers' demands. Despite all this, the workers knew the purpose of the project and they worked hard and conscientiously, so progress was steady.

But there was one incident that nearly destroyed our whole undertaking and threatened to shatter our dream. Soon after construction commenced, I had occasion to go to Jamaica for a few days to attend a conference. When I returned, my wife and the government's chief conciliation officer were at the airport to meet me. As we drove home my wife told me there was "some bad news," but that I should not get too upset. She explained: "Someone has given a story to the press saying that there was a fraud of $7,000 at the Critchlow Labour College. The police are investigating and have seized all the books and financial records from Pollydore."

It had been front page news in the Daily Graphic. At first I was shocked, and then angry. Disregarding the hours of the night, as soon as we arrived home I began telephoning, but no one knew where the story originated.

Early the next morning the Chief of Police telephoned, asking if he could come to my home to discuss the matter. I was most anxious to talk to him, and a short time later he arrived, a tall, handsome black man, with curly white hair. He immediately told me that I was not a suspect. I almost choked on the coffee I was drinking, and told him with obvious sarcasm that I was greatly relieved. He said he expected the investigation would be completed within a few days and our records would then be returned. I tried to be as polite and self-composed as I could, but it was difficult.
Our conversation went something like this: “Chief, is it customary for your department to launch a formal investigation in such cases?”

“Normally, perhaps not,” he said; “but this case is different. You see the Critchlow Labour College has been soliciting money and building supplies from public institutions, and when someone alleges that such funds were improperly or fraudulently used, it is our duty to investigate.”

“Could you tell me who made the charges?”

“No.”

“Then any Tom, Dick or Harry can telephone the police and make unfounded allegations and you at once begin an investigation?”

He looked at me, as though he was sending me a message: “Mr. Swerdlow, it is not quite as simple as you make it out to be. I assure you the allegations in this case were not made by a Tom, a Dick or a Harry. When a well-known person makes that kind of a charge we have to investigate. Don’t you see?”

I had a feeling that he had slipped, accidentally or intentionally. “A well-known person” was the first indication we had as to who might have made the allegations, but there was still nothing tangible to go by. We turned our attention to trying to remedy the damage that had been done.

We held an emergency meeting of the College Board of Governors. Pollydore reported that, with the exception of one lump sum cheque to the contractor, there had been no payments made from the fund. No one had any idea who started the rumour, or where the $7,000 figure came from. The Board issued a public statement declaring:

We can only assume that an unwarranted and malicious statement was made by a most irresponsible person who is not connected with the College, but who motivated the police investigation and false sensational reports in the press.

It is understandable that the public, and particularly those who have so generously contributed to the College, should become concerned. We again categorically deny the alleged fraud of $7,000 in the light of what we know, and can only hope that the irresponsibility which caused this development will not mar public confidence in the College. If it does, the nation will ultimately be the loser. We are determined not to let this happen.

At my request The Daily Graphic gave the statement the same front page prominence it had given the original report. We also engaged a chartered accountant to prepare a detailed financial statement which was made public and sent to all contributors. In a few days the police returned our books with a brief statement saying their investigation had shown the charges to be unsubstantiated and false.

The eventual explanation would have been humorous, had the affair not been so serious. It appeared that a high-ranking government official was doing some construction work at his home, and late one evening he visited our building site and helped himself to seven bags of cement. The night watchman told someone about the incident. This someone told someone else, who told someone else, and so on. By the time the story reached the person who made the false charges, the seven bags of cement had become $7,000.
Soon the affair was forgotten, and no longer talked about. I realized, for the first time, why the ILO did not like their representatives to become involved in financial campaigns, and after Guyana I never did so again.

By early July 1968, my assignment had only three months to go. We were making good progress without academic programmes, but I regretted that much of the building construction was not going to be completed before it was time for me to leave. The Minister of Labour raised the possibility of a one-year extension assignment. I told him I would be more than delighted, but it depended on the ILO and the CLC. He said he would approach the ILO, and I undertook to write the CLC. I sent the congress a report of our activities and asked for both an extension of my leave of absence and a $5,000 contribution to the College. In due course I received both the extension and the cheque.

By October 1969, the administration building, with its classrooms, offices, and a common room, was completed and we moved from the temporary location to our permanent home. There were some continuing problems with construction, but, one way or another, we managed to overcome them.

There was, however, an unexpected personal development when I received a letter from Paul Chu, Chief of the Workers’ Education Branch of the ILO, asking if I would be interested in a three-year assignment in Asia. My wife and I discussed the offer for hours and hours, because there were so many unanswered questions. The prospect was exciting and challenging, but I could hardly expect the Canadian Labour Congress to grant a further leave of absence. I was already 50 years of age, and if I left the Congress and the ILO assignment terminated after three years, I would be in a difficult position. Above all there was the consideration of my family.

Eventually I went to Geneva to discuss the matter, and, as a result, received a letter from the ILO stating that, providing funds were available at the conclusion of the three-year term, my contract would be extended for further two years. On that basis I accepted the offer, with the provision that I would remain in Guyana until at least May, when I expected most of the building contracts would be completed.

From Geneva I flew to Canada for a few days, to explain my situation to the Congress. I admitted I was taking a chance, but Bill Dodge, then the Secretary-Treasurer, assured me that if my ILO contract was not extended past three years, the Congress would feel obligated to re-employ me in some capacity. I was greatly relieved by this friendly and generous attitude.

Back in Guyana another problem had been solved when Dr. Harold Brotman, a most dedicated and competent young man, accepted the position of acting principal of the College.

Once, as I stood in the entrance hall that led to the auditorium, I noticed a blank wall, some thirty feet in length and ten feet in height. It occurred to me that this would be an ideal location for a colourful mural. I discussed the idea with George Henry, who responded with his unusual enthusiasm, and with some of the Governors. There was general support, and agreement that a suitable theme would be the history of the labour movement in Guyana. We decided to hold a contest for the design and execution by a Guyanese artist. A committee including media and university people was appointed to act as judges, and we received five submissions.
I think I had assumed the artist finally chosen would be a black male. However, the unanimous choice was Leila Locke, a young white Englishwoman who was married to a black Guyanese. We discussed her fee, which she set at $2,000, with the College providing the necessary scaffolding. This could have been financed by the College, but we decided instead to approach one of the country's leading retailers, T. Gebdes Grant, a company we had not approached in our earlier financial campaign. The company readily agreed to cover the cost of the mural.

Leila Locke was a quiet, unassuming, tireless artist. She usually worked in the evening, after the construction crew had left, often continuing until midnight. I sometimes watched her, and was fascinated by their technique. Gradually the images emerged, resembling the powerful figures seen in the paintings of Orozco, the great Mexican painter. Six weeks later we were able to stand back and admire Mrs. Locke's graphic painting. Telling, as it does, the history of labour in Guyana, Mrs. Locke's own description of her work is of interest.

This mural illustrates in general terms the development of the labour movement in Guyana, from the days of slavery to the present time.

In the beginning one sees the plantation owner dominating the slaves by force. It is they who worked in his house and on the plantation, clearing the land, digging the drainage canals and reaping the crops of sugar and cotton. Child labour is represented by the boy leading a heavily laden donkey. Immediately above the donkey is a scene taken from a contemporary painting of the passing of the Emancipation Bill at the public building. A slave owner is riding in his horse and carriage, driven by his house slaves. Further along are two women hoeing a plot of sugar cane. They are followed by the arrival of indentured immigrant sugar workers.

The colour in the mural is sombre to begin with, gradually brightening as the workers successfully educate for better conditions. Still the white overseer is there to give orders and to direct. The people are able to own land and plant crops, such as rice, and are raised from the level of total manual labour to greater skills with the start of the use of machinery on the land and in industry.

Next, there is an area in the mural where dock workers load bags of sugar, followed by two men marching with placards, symbolizing the beginning of the trade union movement.

Finally, the present day labour situation is seen as being one where the individual worker is at last receiving fair treatment with improved working facilities and opportunities for both men and women.

Early in 1969 the ILO advised me that they wanted me to assume my new responsibilities in Asia as soon as possible. I realized that I had already been in Guyana for 16 months, well beyond the original assignment of one year. Yet I felt I should be allowed to remain until at least most of the project was completed, which I estimated to be shortly after May Day. We then planned to have the traditional May Day-Labour Day parade terminate on the College grounds, followed by opening ceremonies in the college auditorium. My wife, Anne, and I joined several thousand workers in the long march to the College. The workers were not exactly marching with the precision of a military parade: they were a laughing, happy, banner-carrying crowd on their way to their
own new labour centre.

The opening ceremonies took place in the evening. While the auditorium was designed to accommodate only 350, there was a crowd of some 750 packed into the auditorium and the adjoining courtyard.

Charles Holmes, the resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), described the scene in his official report:

After the sessions were over, everyone was invited to walk around the building, and drinks were served from the College cafeteria. Among the centres of attraction was the lounge, a very handsome room walled with Guyanese wood, which the Board of Governors of the College announced had been named "The Swerdlow Room."

Greetings were received from a number of unions outside Guyana, and from other sources, including Paul Hoffman, administrator of the United Nations Development Programme. His message was particularly significant because he rarely sent messages on such occasions. After extending greetings to all involved in the College, he continued:

Critchlow Labour College is unique, or very nearly so, in the developing world. It is proper that it should now be able to live in a handsome and functional home, of which any country would be proud.

I should like to send friendly greetings to our brother organization, the ILO, whose association and appointment of Mr. Max Swerdlow has done so much to make today's celebration possible.

Although the United Nations Development Programme has not participated in the creation of Critchlow Labour College, I do not speak from the sidelines. The UNDP is heavily engaged with the ILO as the executing agency in over $300,000,000 (U.S.) worth of projects of the advancement of labour in the developing world.

The dedication of Critchlow Labour College will surely be among the most important events of this year of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ILO.

The Government of Guyana, the TUC, and the private firms and individuals of this country may well be proud of having stretched so high to set a mark for others to attempt to reach.

Prime Minister Forbes Burnham gave the main address and declared the building open. For me, the ceremony was deeply emotional, and a never-to-be-forgotten experience. When the Chairman of the Board of Governors announced that the common room was to be designated as "The Swerdlow Room," tears welled in my eyes. The event was the realization of a dream that had not even been a dream the year before. Yet, I did not regard all this as a personal triumph. I doubt very much if the same could have been accomplished in so short a time in any other country. The success of my mission was due to the nation-wide spirit of self-help and co-operation that prevailed in Guyana at that time. I had enjoyed working with the people, transcending geographic boundaries. Together we had broadened horizons, opened new vistas, and created opportunities which would enrich the lives of workers for years to come.

The Guyana Graphic in a lead editorial, described the event held on May Day
as "most significant and appropriate." Referring to the College being named after one of the country's great labour leaders, the editorial continued:

It is consistent with Critchlow's belief in compromise that a Canadian, in the person of Mr. Max Swerdlow, has done so much to make the construction of the college an accomplished fact. Mr. Swerdlow, who arrived in Guyana in 1957, has shown a dedication to the College in particular and labour in general, which is exemplary in a developing nation such as Guyana, where such virtues are among the qualities which are most relevant in developing national conduct.

On our way to the airport, we had the taxi driver go by way of the College, and there we stopped for a moment, seeing the reality of the dream we had shared. Leaving Guyana was an emotional experience. Once we were airborne I could hardly wait for the hostess to serve drinks. I took two double gin and tonics and then reclined, slowly, ever so slowly, beginning to relax. Anne, who understood my mood, was silent.

My thoughts drifted in many directions: the anxiety about my new assignment in Asia, the uncertainty of my continued employment, the difficulties, joys, and indeed the privilege of having participated in building the Critchlow Labour College.

As we moved further and further from Guyana my thoughts drifted from the College. It was not unusual for me to quickly become emotionally detached from a completed project and become preoccupied with the new involvement. I took my new "Terms of Reference" from my briefcase and, for the first time since I had received them, I began to seriously examine my responsibilities in the vast region of my Asian assignment.

My official title was "ILO Regional Advisor on Workers' Education in Asia." My responsibilities, in broad general terms, were "to assist trade unions in Asian countries to initiate and develop workers' education activities." The region consisted of 21 countries.

But, as I read the terms of reference, I had no idea and could not possibly visualize the immensity and the profound diversity of that region. It was only after working there for several years that I began to better understand the complexities of the area. I remained in Asia for more than seven years, and when I left in 1975, I wrote in part:

Asia is half of humanity. The Region (ILO) encompasses twenty-one countries of marked contrast. Some are developed democracies, others are governed by martial law. Some live in peace, others are at war. Some countries are amongst the richest in the world, others are poorest. Millions live in large modern cities and work in highly mechanized industries, and many more millions live in isolated villages on subsistence agriculture. In these small communities customs, values, attitudes based on centuries of cultural and sociological traditions, are deep rooted. To such people, the progress of the 20th century is often obscure and irrelevant. Many are with hope and determination for a better and more meaningful life, and many others without hope live in the shadows of the past.
Although I knew very little about Asia in the beginning, I realized that working there would not be the same as it had been in the Caribbean. I anticipated some difficulties, disappointments and frustrations. Nevertheless, I really believed, and indeed was committed to making a worthy contribution to workers’ education and the labour movement in Asia. I accepted the assignment with deep enthusiasm and a sense of adventure of great magnitude.

Those were my thoughts on the flight from Guyana to Canada in May 1969. Then, for some strange reason, I recalled my last ride in a box car on May Day 1934. Those thirty-five elapsed years seemed a long, long time ago.