Walsh moved to Toronto in the winter of 1934. The shabby offices of the National Employment Bureau were filled with men who sat on wooden benches, waiting. Men? Most were boys still in their teens, the rest old before their time.

I don't want your millions, mister,
I don't want your diamond ring
All I want is the right to live, mister,
Give me back my job again.
I don't want your Rolls-Royce, mister,
I don't want your pleasure yacht,
All I want is food for my babies;
Give me my old job back.
We worked to build this country mister,
While you enjoyed a life of ease.
You've stolen all that we built, mister;
Now our children starve and freeze.
(Words by Jim Garland put to the tune of “Greenback Dollars,” 1932.)

The Great Depression may have just peaked but one out of every seven workers was still without work and there were still over a million on relief. Reliefers made their weekly visits to the House of Industry, an old grey stone building used as a food-distribution agency by the city’s Welfare Department. In Toronto, where relief payments were relatively high, the weekly food allowance for a family of seven was $6.93. The relief diet: beans, rolled oats, potatoes, cabbage, flour, a treat of peanut butter or apple butter. Some shoved the paper bag of provisions into an old army kitbag or suitcase to avoid the stigma of being on relief. Some were refused groceries until they completed a few hours of work, chopping logs or sluicing down the floors. Workfare, we call it today.
Unemployed men were easily recognized. Home haircuts ragged around the edges, shirt collar and cuffs carefully turned to put the frayed edges inside, shoes seen happier days.

I'm spending my nights at the flophouse
I'm spending my days on the street
I'm looking for work and I find none;
I wish I had something to eat.
Soup, soup They give me a bowl of soup.
Soup, soup They give me a bowl of soup.
(Words by Joe Glazer put to the tune of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," 1945.)

But the Depression world of soup kitchens, dust storms, relief vouchers, and work camps had their opposite. Movies and magazines sold anyone a diversion for five or ten cents a trip. Radio pushed dreams too: Lux, "The only cure for dishpan hands," Canada Dry — "its gingervating." Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Rudee Vallee, Edgar Bergan, and Charlie McCarthy filled the airwaves and empty time, as did "The Happy Gang," "The Lone Ranger," "Fibber McGee and Molly," "Pepper Young's Family," and "Ma Perkins." King Clancy, Howie Morenz and Eddie Shore, superstars on ice, joined with Dizzy Dean, Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig on the baseball diamond, and Joe Louis, Max Baer and Jim Braddock in the ring to amuse a jaded world.

Popular monthlies romanticized the great loves of make-believe heroes and heroines. The pulp magazines printed on cheap greyish paper made their appearance under titles like "Ranch Romance," "Love," and "Fantastic Adventure." Tattered copies of pulps with Tarzan, a Mountie, voluptuous half-nudes, or science fiction illustrations on the covers sat in the packs of thousands of itinerant workers who roamed the country seeking the better times and better places depicted in the stories. New fantasy comic strips appeared in the dailies: "Little Orphan Annie," "Tarzan," "Popeye," "L'il Abner." Blackstone the Magician hypnotized his audience on stages throughout Canada. Easy money schemes proliferated with cash prizes, all expense trips, radios and much else, promised something for nothing and enticed millions who could afford little more than the basics and often not even that.

The Yanks had their Hollywood, Shirley Temple, and Empire State Building; but Canadians had their Quints. The Dionne Quintuplets were everywhere, from decals on children's radios, to advertisements for syrup, to starring roles in the movies. They were the biggest tourist attraction Ontario had ever seen. Real estate values soared in the little northern town of Callendar where they were born. Money spent by tourists in the town
amounted to $50 million in 1934 alone. Pennants, post cards, story books, blotters, pens, and a host of other souvenir items were sold to thousands of eager parents who each day made the pilgrimage to the Dionne farm. Recognizing the commercial possibilities, Ontario's Hepburn government passed the Dionne Quintuplet Act, making the children the property of the state.¹

For the 24 year-old Bill Walsh all these were sideshows designed to distract those without a political consciousness from the real action. The real show was the organization of unions among the workers and the unemployed, the fight to repeal Section 98, and to win converts to the cause.

May Day 1934

May Day, 1934. Posters plastered walls, vacant storefronts, fences, and lamp posts. Posters announced "ALL OUT for May Day — Labour’s Day of Protest and Celebration. ALL OUT. May 1, 2:30 Riverside Park. MARCH TO QUEENS’ PARK 7:00 p.m. at the Colliseum."

Thousands of workers and their families marched west on Gerard:

Arise Ye Prisoners of Starvation' Arise ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation A better world’s in birth.”
Seven thousand strong, banners high:
"MASS UNITY FOR THE RIGHT TO STRIKE,
UNITE AND ORGANIZE”.

Across Yonge they moved and north on University, red flags waving:

No more tradition's chains shall bind us Arise ye slaves, no more enthral
The earth shall rise on new foundations, We have been naught, we shall be all
’Tis the final conflict
Let each stand in his place
The international Soviet
Shall be the human race.

Nine thousand gathered at the Colliseum — Germans, Ukranians, Jews, Bulgarians. The occasional Anglo-Saxon. The Jewish People’s Choir led the singing:

“We meet today in freedom’s cause
And raise our voices high,
We join our hands in union strong
To battle or to die.
Hold the fort, for we are coming
Union men be strong
Side by side we battle onwards,
Victory will come.”

First speaker of the day was the Reverend A.E. Smith, secretary of the Canadian Labour Defense League. Tall, deep-voiced, eloquent: “If there is one thing more potent on this May the First, than any other year, it is that of fear. The ruling class is afraid. It is afraid of the working class.” The crowd roared its approval. Now Smith intoned: “We must drive that fear deeper into the consciousness.” More cheers. Students chanted: “One, two, three, Young Communists are we, Fighting for the working class against the Bourgeoisie.”

Dispersed throughout the coliseum were over a dozen detectives from the city of Toronto, plain clothes division. Their faces said, “We know this crowd well — we know how to handle them. Don’t get too rowdy, comrade, or we’ll have you off to jail or deport you. Damn foreigners.” A uniformed man approached the platform. Many in the crowd recognized him — Sargeant of Detectives William Nursey of the infamous Red Squad, the same man who had arrested Reverend Smith some months before on charges of sedition. Sargeant Nursey leaned over to Smith: “Be careful what you say or you’ll end up back in jail.”

Boos and hisses filled the room as Smith relayed the message to the crowd. “No policeman will dictate what I can or cannot say,” he shouted. There were more cheers, more speeches and revolutionary greetings, among others “to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its outstanding leader Comrade Stalin”; and another “to the Red Army, the greatest bulwark for peace in the world.”

Right arm raised, Reverend Smith ended the rally, pointing to the large banner behind him on which was painted a red outline of the Canadian Dominion bearing in yellow paint “Soviet Canada” and the hammer and sickle. “A Soviet government will be built in this country. Forward to the Soviet Union of Canada.”

The crowd chanted: “A Soviet Canada, a Soviet Canada.” And again, with clenched right hands raised in allegiance, nine thousand voices rose to a crescendo in the chorus of “The Internationale”:

Arise ye prisoners of starvation
Arise ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation,
A better world's in birth.
'Tis the final conflict Let each stand in his place.

Bill Walsh, the newly appointed Educational Director of the Needle Trades Union stood with the rest, right hand extended, fist clenched.

Crisis At Fenelon Falls

The office of the Industrial Union of Needle Trades sat at Grange and Spadina, smack in the middle of Toronto's garment district. It was also the centre of Jewish life in Toronto, with kosher butcher shops, bakeries, delicatessens, haberdasheries, Yiddish theatre, synagogues, and parochial schools. Orators challenged the system on street corners up and down the avenue. A year or so earlier, 15,000 people, all the needle trades, over 50 Jewish organizations and some others gathered at Clarence Square and marched up the Avenue protesting the rise of anti-semitism in Germany.

Garment workers, when they could find employment, made only $600 to $700 a year. To bring up a family at what the Department of Labour called minimum health and decency cost $1,300 in Toronto. Walsh helped with grievances and instructed shop stewards. Joshua Gershman and Charlie Sims told him what to do.

Late that summer a letter arrived at the union office from the little town of Fenelon Falls. At the time the union office stood near empty with the entire staff gone to Montréal to lead a general strike of dress-makers. Only Walsh and Esther Silver, the pert and popular union secretary were on duty. Written by an employee of a company called Shields Sporting Goods, the letter described how the workers at the company had been briefly organized by the Workers' Unity League in Toronto. To escape the union, Shields had made a deal with the town of Fenelon Falls for a free building and free hydro and had gone about hiring young women from the neighbouring farms for $3.00 a week. "If anyone needs a union," the letter said, "it's these girls. They're really getting the treatment from Shields. He should be taught a lesson."

"What do we do?" Bill asked Esther. "Better wait till the others get back," she suggested. This was not the advice he was looking for, for he saw this as his chance to do some organizing. "I'm going," he announced. The next day he rode the train to Lindsay, switching to another that took him to Fenelon Falls. On the train he looked over a manual that Charlie Sims had given him a while back on how to conduct a strike.
No Dogs Or Jews Allowed

That's what the sign on the station wall said. Not a very friendly introduction, Bill mused, but he had not expected a red carpet. Just before lunch he approached the factory gate, sauntered up to a cluster of women sitting around eating lunch, and introduced himself. "I'm from the union. I want to help you improve your wages. Can we have a meeting to talk about it?"

Bill asked.

Union was a foreign word in those parts but the workers were easily persuaded. Someone said she could arrange to get the dance hall that evening. "Don't worry, we'll all be there. We gotta do something about this place. It's not just the wages, ya know. There's no fresh water and the toilets aren't fit for human use."

"I didn't waste the afternoon," Bill remembers. "I dropped in on storekeepers to ask them about Shields, telling them I was from the union and asking what they thought. Union talk scared them, of course, but they admitted that the wages were terrible. Waiting for an opening, I recalled Point Eight from Charlie Sim's pamphlet, 'if they get higher wages they can spend more money in the town. That means more sales for you.' They were still suspicious but at least they weren't hostile."

"Point Ten on Charlie's list was 'get to a typewriter.' The only typewriter in the town belonged to the local newspaper, The Fenelon Falls Times. The proprietor was not particularly friendly, but he agreed. It was an ancient affair, operating on strings. 'Belongs to a museum,' I remember saying to myself, but I typed out a few demands for the meeting and got permission to use the typewriter again in the morning."

"At least seventy-five or eighty people showed up for the meeting, young men and women in their late teens, buzzing with excitement and anticipation. They had never been to a meeting like this before. Neither had I, but I had read Charlie's pamphlet. I explained the background: Shields used to operate in Toronto and underpaid his workers there. They formed a union and forced him to pay higher wages so he closed down the plant and set up in Fenelon Falls because nobody knows about unions here and the town offered him a rent-free building and free hydro. "Now what are we going to do about it?"

"String the bastard up."

"Run him out of town."

"No, no, that's not the way. That won't help you. What we have to do is to organize."

"Organize. What's that?"

"I recalled a fable from my boyhood that came in handy. It was about the man on his deathbed who calls in his seven sons and talks to them about
their inheritance. He hands them each a twig and tells the boys to break them. Then he gathers the bunch of twigs and instructs them again to break them. They can't. Now he says, 'this is what I am bestowing on you as your inheritance: in unity there is strength which cannot be broken.'"

"Now I said, look you people, here's the point. If this was working hours now and you were all here instead of being in the factory, Mr. Shields, for all the money he has and all the free hydro and the free building, he couldn't operate, and if he can't operate, he can't make a cent. Now you'd be in a position to deal with him."

"You could see the lights go on. I could see and hear from the murmurs that they were with me. They wanted to know where to begin. What was the first step."

'We draw up demands,' I said. 'I have some of them here. I'm going to read them to you. wages — $8.00 a week; a water cooler inside the plant; separate toilets for men and women'."

"Those are good,' one woman yelled out, 'but what about Mr. Shield's beard, the way he stands behind us and pushes against us.'" "And the way he pinches,' another chimed in." "Okay, okay, we'll put that in our demands too,' I said. These points were not in Charlie's pamphlets," Bill chortled, relating the story, but he agreed. They elected a committee, one person from each department in the shop. They went into action the next morning, just as soon as I got the demands on paper in contract form. Another visit to The Fenelon Times fixed that.

"At 10:00 a.m. the next day, the committee, along with myself, presented the contract to Shields. 'What's this?' he said. 'A contract? What's going on here? Get out, get out. You'll never get me to agree to that'."

"The committee walked out and brought out the entire plant. Shields was flabbergasted. The people were excited about what they had done. Once they were all out and assembled outside the plant I told them, 'You know what a picket fence does? It keeps people out. Well, we're going to set up a picket line around this plant to keep people out. We have a word for anyone who crosses the picket line. We call them scabs.'"

"They set up committees — a picket committee, a provisions committee, a public relations committee, a sports committee. I explained what each one does. And I taught them songs like 'Hold the Fort', and 'On the Line, On the Line, Come Picket on the Picket Line,'"

"Late that afternoon a messenger came out of the plant and said that Mr. Shields wanted to see me. He would see the union organizer. 'What about the committee?' I said. 'Only the organizer.'"

"Tell him no. I won't see him without the committee.' That's according to Professor Sims, lesson number thirteen. Next day Shields sent out the word. He would see the committee."
"But when we got inside he took me aside. 'I want to show you something. I want to show you what these people do to me,' he said, and he pointed to some folded up leather jackets. There were hundreds of them piled from the floor to the ceiling and he pulled some out. 'Look at this, look at this, look what they are doing to me. You understand. This is not cloth, when you sew cloth and you make mistakes, you take the stitches out and then you resew them, but not leather. They are ruined. I can't fix them. Absolutely ruined. Hundreds and hundreds of these. And I should pay these people? They are ruining my material and I'm teaching them how to work and you want me to pay them Toronto wages?' I said that we weren't asking for Toronto wages. Then he got awfully vague, something about it being worth a lot to him not to have all these troubles.

'What do you mean it's worth a lot to you?' I said. 'What's it worth?'

'Five hundred,' he said. So I said, 'Okay, give me a cheque.' He said 'no, not a cheque. I'll give you cash. You think I'm born yesterday? Cash $500.'"

That night Bill related the story about the bribe. The workers were ready to tear the plant apart. But Shields relented. The next day he signed the demands. Bill put a phone call through to Toronto. He had no cards to sign the workers into the union! That night, union president Max Dolgoy came out to Fenelon Falls. Bill introduced him to the crowd as the national president of their union. The cards were passed out and signed. The workers had a union and their first collective agreement. Dolgoy was delighted. Union victories were scarce these days. "Bill," he said on the way home, "you're a hero of labour; from now on you're a union organizer."

Not long after this he was sent out to Hamilton to organize 80 employees of a company called Victoria Leather Jacket. Jim Beattie was the Workers' Unity man in Hamilton. Beattie had been trying, with little success, to get something going with the steel workers in the city. Walsh went through the routine that was becoming quite familiar to him. Quick hit and run factory gate meetings at lunch time to plant the first seeds; followed up by home and talk to workers who seem friendly; frequenting local restaurants to pick up plant gossip; scouring Party memberships to find someone who worked in the plant or whose second cousin worked in the plant. He set up an office on King, the main street in town. Meetings were called, demands drawn up, committees elected. In the depth of the Depression, no company willingly negotiated with a union, let alone one just organized by the Communists.

"Out, get the hell out," they were told. And they got the hell out. It was another Workers' Unity League strike. Strike funds were unheard of back then. To feed the strikers, Walsh scrounged around for food and money from party members and friendly unions. Then in January, Muni Erlich, party organizer for southern Ontario, called him at the union office. "Bill," he said. "You were appointed party organizer of West Toronto last night."
Walsh was in seventh heaven. Not just a member of the party, but a party organizer. What next?

“When do I report?”

“When do you mean tomorrow? We’re in the middle of a strike. I can’t just leave.”

“We’ll put someone else in charge.”

They agreed on Jim Beattie and Bill introduced him to the striking workers before taking off.

Bill recalls the events of the next day as they were related to him. “The next morning Jim was in charge down on the picket line and that’s the morning the company decided to bring scabs in. They were led by a local thug called Gula and a few of his cronies who were hired to break up the strike. Now maybe they were expecting me, but what they got was Jim Beattie and he was a big guy, slim but very powerfully built and he loved a fight. He said to Gula, ‘Where do you think you’re going?’ He said, ‘I’m going into the plant. Outta my way.’ ‘You’re not going into the plant,’ says Jim, ‘there’s a strike going on here’.”

“Gula pulled out a revolver and said, ‘Get outta my way punk. Come on boys.’ Jim, quick as a bunny, lunged in, slugged him on the chin and yanked the gun out of his hand. Soon there was a general melee. The police showed up and Jim was arrested along with Gula. He got two years less a day while the gangster was off scot-free.”

“Damn it,” Beattie said when I visited him in Hamilton’s city jail. ‘You must have figured it. The first bloody day you leave, I take over and in come the goons and I get arrested.’ I always felt bad about that and wondered if Jim Beattie held a grudge against me. Years later I was assured he didn’t.”

Section Organizer

Section organizer, heart of the party organization, meant Walsh like other section organizers were responsible for dozens of neighbourhood branches and, wherever the Party had a few members in plants, for industry units. And responsible for Party-affiliated mass organizations, or “fronts” as they were sometimes called, like the Unemployment Councils, the Tenant Councils and the League Against War and Fascism. Beyond this, the section organizer was responsible for carrying out party activity in non-affiliated organizations, like trade unions, but also PTAs and cultural, ethnic, and community organizations. Cells, comprised of party members, needed to be established in every organization Communists created or joined. Under the guidance of the section organizer, Party members would meet to plan
their work, which meant ensuring that the Party line was carried into and hopefully adopted by the various organizations.

By this means small groups of Party members, coordinated from above, could gain influence far out of proportion to their numbers. It was a brilliant organizational structure. In the 1960s the New Left prescribed a process they called “the long march through the institutions.” The Old Left was doing it with considerable effect 30 years earlier.

Even moderately active Party members belonged to three or four front organizations, attended endless meetings, leafleted, organized demonstrations and parades, gathered signatures on petitions, and sold the Clarion. Wherever a group of unemployed or striking workers gathered together to protest — on street corners, in pool halls, in work camps — a party organizer appeared to direct the conversation towards organizing against the boss and against the system. The Communists were on the march. There were still less than 8,000 members in all, but hundreds more were joining each month and at least another 100,000 were members of organizations in one way or another affiliated with the Communists. Besides Party members were thousands more sympathizers, ready to help out with money and other contributions.

Few had the time or the interest to read the classical writings of Communism. It was never doctrine that attracted most of them to the Party in the first place. They joined it because they believed it to be the most effective way to fight for the unemployed and organize the unorganized, and fight evictions, or because they believed it to be the most effective way to combat racism, anti-Semitism or fascism. No less than 17,000 people filled Maple Leaf Gardens to applaud Tim Buck’s release from jail. “They were not shooting at Tim Buck in Kingston,” Buck said about the recent attempt on his life. “They were shooting at the working class.” For Buck and the Communists the identification between the two was complete and irrefutable. “If they will do such a thing to try to stop the growth of a comparatively small party, what will the Canadian bourgeois not do when they see their power slipping from them, when they see the workers growing stronger and stronger? Do you think they will say, ‘Let us sit down and vote about it?’ Not at all. They will try to follow the examples of Germany.” Then, shaking his fist in the face of the government, Tim Buck defied the police to arrest the whole crowd under section 98. The crowd went wild.

Tim Buck, true folk hero, was certainly a hero to the still impressionable Bill Walsh. Within the Party, Buck was a subject of unrepressed adulation. Leslie Morris titled his 1939 tract on Party history The Story of Tim Buck’s Party. A Party newspaper article written in 1945 gushed: “Comrade Buck, if he had pursued the arts he would have been one of the great ones; he had the qualities which could have made him a great surgeon; he could
have become a very clever lawyer; in science he could have been one of those who travelled the starry road to the atom bomb."

Then there was Stewart Smith, child prodigy of the Party, son of the Reverend A.E. Smith, on the political bureau since the age of seventeen, decisive, intellectual, even brilliant — so it was widely said; Sam Carr, heavily accented, the party theoretician and a powerful orator; Joe Salsberg, suave, clever, already a major influence in the labour movement, only a decade earlier a youth leader of the Labour Zionists; Bill Kashton, quiet, hard-working, national secretary of the YCL; Charlie Sims, cursing, rambling, the Political Bureau's hard-rock miner; Peter Hunter, rambunctious, humorous, Toronto secretary of the YCL; Norman Freed, born bureaucrat, typical of the petty tyrants that were drawn like magnets to the Communist Party; and Muni Ehrlich, district organizer, outgoing, warm, dark-eyed, loved by all but especially by Party women.

Most gratifying of all for Bill was that Moe Kosowatsky was there too. Just back from Moscow, Dick Steele, as he now called himself, had been appointed section organizer of the other side of Toronto. Partners once again and once again inseparable. They roomed together, worked together, planned together, ran off pamphlets till three in the morning while analyzing the latest news from the USSR, and up again at six to help with the distribution.

In Canada as in Russia, few were more devoted to the cause than these two. They accepted each and every doctrine enunciated by the Party as an article of faith, taking for granted anything coming from the top leadership. The Purge Trials, as they came to be known, had begun in December 1934, reaching a crescendo over the next few years. On trumped-up charges of treason, terrorist plots, including plots to murder Stalin himself, Stalin accused and his courts convicted first one than another of the old Bolshevik leaders. Victims included an ex-premier, several vice-premiers, two chiefs of the Comintern, the head of the trade unions, the Chief of the General Staff, and most Soviet ambassadors in Europe and Asia. The cream of Soviet revolutionary society was being liquidated. But, "apart from what our people said they said, we never sought to hear what our critics had to say," Bill Walsh later remarked about this orgy of violence.

For young men like Bill Walsh and Dick Steele every day was a marvelous adventure, their minds occupied from morning to night with one project or another. They were on an incredible high. They had their hands "on the throttle of history," as it used to be said. Their view of the world was positive and hopeful. There was no room in it for doubt. They lived and breathed the Party. The movement was their total world, their whole identity. They carried it with them in every conversation, no matter how trivial, and in everything they did whether it was shopping for food, going to a concert,
Life In The Party

“What do I do?” Bill asked Muni Ehrlich, first chance he got. “Well, a section organizer is responsible for membership, dues payments, neighbourhood events, industrial action, shop units, activity in the mass organization, and everything else,” Muni replied, laughing uproariously. “Seriously,” Ehrlich explained, “There are some problems you will face. Do you know Ukrainian? Finnish? Hungarian? Yiddish? Only Yiddish? That’s too bad because these are the languages most of our comrades speak on the western side of the city. Now there is a real problem with them. You see, they have party factions in their language groups — which is fine. They have wonderful picnics, sports activities, concerts. But they bury themselves there. You understand? Our Finnish comrades, our Ukranian comrades, the Bulgarians — they refuse to draw the masses of workers, their own people, into our struggles. They keep them isolated. This is one problem. Another big problem is that we must organize units in the workshops. The factory must be our stronghold. I’m sure you know that. The best elements among the workers, the forward elements, those are the ones we must recruit to our cause.” This was what Bill has been waiting for. Building communism among the workers. “Okay, how do we go about doing it?” he asked.

“We organize around immediate grievances. That is the starting point. From there it leads the workers to higher struggles, the struggle against the system. I can’t spell it out for you in any more detail than that. Your job is to find ways of adapting the party’s campaigns to the conditions in the plants. Easier said than done, but there are ways. Factory meetings, shop papers. You have to learn about all this. Very important. The shop papers have to represent the mind of the workers. Did you ever see Lenin’s leaflets? Study them. Lenin was a master, a craftsman. Short articles, simple, in the language of the worker, about grievances in the shop and connecting from there to our program.”

“O.K. Any more advice?” Walsh asked. “There’s one more thing. You know about our Trade Union Commission? Any problem you have about union work you see Joe Salsberg. On other party matters you see me.”

Not long after receiving Ehrlich’s advice, Bill found himself in the middle of a squabble inside the Bulgarian faction. As was their practice, he and Dick Steele sat in their rented room on Bathurst Street near Huron,
reviewing their day's activities and mapping out plans for the next day. As Bill nodded off to sleep, he heard some news that grabbed his attention.

"I did a very hard thing today, Bill. I had to expel Dimoff from the party."

"You mean Dimoff, the only comrade we have on the Toronto Labour Council?"

"The same. The Bulgarian faction laid charges against him. They don't amount to much, but what's behind it is that he's having an affair with the young wife of an older comrade. You know how handsome Dimoff is. Well she went for him. The old man is an influential member of the Bulgarian faction. You can understand the problem. There was nothing else I could do."

"Well, we have to do something," Bill said. "Without Dimoff we have no one on the Toronto Labour Council. The Bulgarian faction is your responsibility. The Labour Council is mine. You can't expel him. We had better get hold of Muni and J.B. and call a meeting."

The next evening the entire Bulgarian faction turned out at a packed meeting at the Bulgarian National Hall on Ontario Street. Muni Ehrlich took the chair with Bill Walsh and Dick Steele on either side. "Now let's get down to the bottom of this," he said. "What are the charges against Comrade Dimoff?"

"The charges are grave," the faction secretary replied. Murmurs of assent emerged from the audience. "We charge Dimoff with three violations: sabotaging the party press, escaping the class struggle, and adopting anti-Leninism in his approach to the woman question."

"Well, let's hear the evidence," Ehrlich instructed.

"You see, comrades, every year we have a campaign to raise funds for our newspaper, Borba you know, the Bulgarian Communist paper. Comrade Dimoff has been the champion money-raiser since two or three years ago. This year another comrade challenged him to a socialist competition. Comrade Dimoff accepted the challenge but he lost the competition."

"This is sabotaging the party press?" Bill asked. Ehrlich nudged him to stay calm.

"And escaping the class struggle? What lies behind this charge?" Ehrlich queried.

"Comrade Dimoff wants to visit the Soviet Union. We told him, 'comrade, they don't need you in the Soviet Union. We need you here. This is where the class struggle is.' He won't listen. So we charge him with trying to escape the class struggle." At this point, Dimoff, who had sat quietly, intervened.

"But comrades, I was selected as a delegate to the USSR because I raised the most money for our organization."
Bill was beside himself, Dick also ready to explode. The charges were mere camouflage. But Ehrlich persisted. "And what of the final charge, that comrade Dimoff has an anti-Leninist approach to women?"

"When comrade Lenin addressed this question speaking to the Young Communist League," the faction secretary began, "he said the popular expression among young communists is that having sex is like drinking a glass of water. It is a bodily need. You drink it down like you drink a glass of water. You know what comrade Lenin said about this. He said 'maybe sex is like a glass of water but how many glasses of water can you drink? Just as you wouldn't want your lips to be on a glass muddied by other peoples' lips, the same is true about a sexual relationship. He said 'sex is not really like a drink of water. There is much more to it than that. You don't drink from a dirty glass and you don't drink too much water.' Now comrades, that's what Lenin said and we have evidence that comrade Dimoff here hasn't learned that. His sexual appetite for another man's wife is disrupting our work."

Amidst the shouts of anger from the assembled, once again the accused rose to defend himself. "But this is not the Canadian way. She never saw this man before they were married. He brought her over as a bride. It was the only way they would let her into Canada. I have nothing against the comrade, but their marriage has never been real. She only lived with him for a few months. We are not having an affair, only holding hands. But we love each other and we want to be married."

The chairs began to fly. Dimoff was not without supporters among the younger men. The woman was a mere 20 years old to the elderly comrade's 61 years. The leaders withdrew to a corner of the hall. A compromise was reached. Dimoff's expulsion from the Bulgarian organization stood and he was not to see the girl for at least six months. Nor was he to set foot in Little Bulgaria. But his expulsion from the Party was withdrawn for, as Ehrlich explained it, party factions have no jurisdiction over disciplining party members. Only party branches can do that.

Bill was pleased with the outcome but not amused by the whole affair. Personal differences must never be allowed to get in the way of Party work. It was rare enough for a foreign language comrade to rise to a leading position in the trade union movement. To expel such a man on some petty conflict, no matter how it was dressed in abstract principles of Marxism-Leninism, was unthinkable to him. Yet, he would see this sort of thing again and again, and experience it himself in his final days in the Party.
Fighting Evictions

Bill Walsh took pride in the fact that Toronto West, his section, had the most members and was the most active of any in the entire country. But neither Muni Ehrlich nor regional director Norman Freed were satisfied. Freed, in particular, was a constant irritant.

Walsh regarded him as a gas bag. Looking back at it many years later, he reflected, “It was usually the good talkers who seemed to get into positions in our organizations. The people who did the work and kept the organizations going rarely managed to get positions that carried recognition and prestige.”

Evictions for non-payment of rent and mortgages were commonplace, especially in the Cabbagetown district of Dick Steele’s section. Those days people held the bailiff even more unpopular than the tax man. Little wonder! When intimidation failed to remove delinquent tenants, bailiffs hurled them into the street along with their furniture. Dick and the other organizers developed a counter-attack against this. They organized squads of neighbours to block the bailiff’s entry, return the furniture, and hook up the power where it had been cut off. The scene never ended there, of course. Soon the sheriff arrived with his deputy, a court order, and — if they expected trouble — a squad of police. Dick Steele would not be so easily defeated.

“So what if he’s got a court order,” he shouted, “we’ll stop him from delivering it. We’ll show the people what can be done.” In an earlier encounter at one such location at 10 Midland Place the local Unemployment Association had confronted the bailiff’s party. It didn’t take long for the constabulary to show up armed with crow bars, smashing their way into the premises and clashing with the people for several minutes before beating a retreat when neighbours from the upstairs threatened to pour boiling water on them. Waving the court order in his hands, the sheriff said, “I’ve got my duty to perform. This family has got to remove itself from these premises. Here’s the court order, signed by His Majesty’s Government.”

The crowd moved in — hissing, booing, and heil hitlering the sheriff. “Do you mean that you need this piece of paper to evict these people?” Dick asked. Before waiting for the response he dove in, grabbed the piece of paper and made a run for it, taking off with the papers up the street. The sheriff and his deputy stood frozen in their tracks, dumb-founded. “Here, you can’t do that. That’s theft.” By the time they ran after him, Dick had disappeared. Back safely in his room he admitted to Bill, “I know they’ll bring in another court order tomorrow or the next day or next week. We’ll just have to find another way to stall them. I’ve even been able to get some of the sheriff’s men to hold off. They’re not all fascists. Sooner or later,
though, these people will probably be evicted. But in the meantime we've shown them something about fighting back, about defending themselves."

"That was the whole point," Bill explained many years later. "If only we showed the people that they didn't have to take it, didn't have to be afraid of the cops or the man with that piece of paper in his hand, that sticking together they could get somewhere. We believed that if enough people took on the local authorities, someday soon they would be ready to take on the state."

Praise From Tim Buck

That summer they read in the papers that the traditional military tattoo was about to take place. They developed a plan. Copying the official program from the newspaper and mimeographing it onto 8-1/2 x 14 paper, folded over, they put out their message on the inside. Taking off from Rudyard Kipling's Charge of the Light Brigade:

Half a League, half a league,
Half a league onward
Onto the valley of death
Rode the six hundred

Their message read, "Surely we in this day and age have learned the lesson of the six hundred. They never returned from the valley of death. We, united with the working class, march the other way. To the valley of life."

As the soldiers mingled in the fields before the parade began, the agent-provocateurs distributed copies of the programs with their own message on the inside. Had not Lenin himself said that before the revolution could be launched the soldiers must be on the side of the proletariat? Before they were discovered and chased away, they managed to hand out over a thousand copies.

Others besides Norman Freed had noticed the style of their work. That fall at a party convention, Tim Buck himself pulled out the military tattoo leaflet. "Here is an example of the daring I am talking about, comrades," he said, "Imaginative, effective, spectacular work, comrade Freed."

Without embarrassment Freed stood up and took a bow. Bill and Dick could only snicker. Only ten days earlier Freed had bawled them out for not having cleared their plans with them. "If you had, I would not have agreed to it. It is an embarrassment to the party. Sheer adventurism."
It was at this conference that the new course for a united front against fascism was first announced. Fascism was the last stage of capitalism, Tim Buck told party delegates, spelling out the new strategy:

Nothing must be done to scare those elements of the middle class and the bourgeoisie that might be willing to ally themselves with the Soviet Union to combat the German revenge-seekers and Japanese expansionists. Once Fascism is defeated and the defence of the USSR is secure we prepare the transition from the defensive to the offensive against capitalism, steering towards the organization of a mass political strike.

This strategy of building a popular front was adopted by Communist Parties across the world as part of a new turn emerging from the Comintern.

A One World Party

Since its founding in 1921, the Communist Party of Canada was intertwined with a world-wide organization centred in Moscow. Contrary to commonly held belief, it was never the case that Canadian and other Communists submitted as "foreign agents" to the Comintern and indirectly to Soviet control. They gave themselves freely because they saw themselves as part of a world movement. And they sincerely believed that solidarity with the Soviet Union, as they defined it, enhanced the position of "progressive forces" everywhere.

In March 1919, within six months of their revolution, the Bolsheviks established the Communist International, the Comintern. It was to be the "one world party" for revolutionaries all over the world. This world Communist Party would be directed by an Executive Committee headquartered in Moscow. All national parties who sought the Communist franchise were obliged to subordinate themselves to it. Its decisions were binding on all sections, as the national parties were called, and had to be promptly carried out. Indirectly, to be sure, it selected the leaders of each national party and purged them at will. It could expel members in any "section", or entire national sections, even against the will of the majority of its members — and did.

"The victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is assured," Lenin had proclaimed, in closing the First Congress of the Comintern. But the Communist Party could fulfill its mission "only if its organization is as centralized as possible, if iron discipline prevails and if the party centre ... is equipped with the most comprehensive powers." The "comprehensive powers" were understood to be held in descending order, from the execu-
tive committee of the Comintern at the top, to the Central Committees of each of the national sections, to the provincial or state central committees, municipal committees right down to the neighbourhood and factory committees. Each committee was omnipotent in relation to those below it and impotent in relation to those above it.

All of this was spelled out in the Twenty-One Conditions of Admission to the Communist International that national parties had to agree to unconditionally. It was a world-wide structure, adopted from the one that had been so successful in the Bolshevik Party itself. The underlying principle was democratic centralism: All members were required to study, discuss, and vote on policy matters. The results were distilled and implemented by the Party centre. Once its decision was made, members were bound by it, whether or not they personally agreed with it. Thus the whole party organization was focused on implementing party policy, unimpaired by inner-party disputes.

In practice, almost from the beginning, political decisions were made at the centre and merely passed on to those below. Most policy discussion amounted to a contest to see who could best anticipate changes in the party line before they were actually declared. Once declared, the task at each level of the party structure was to discover the best way of putting it into effect. The democratic aspects of the process were also to soon disappear. Differences of opinion could lead to factions and factions to splits. With party unity the number one priority, divergent opinions were not tolerated. It was not enough for the minority to accept the will of the majority. There was no room for a minority. They either had to think like the majority or found themselves hounded out.

The model, adopted from the days of pre-revolutionary Russia, had at least some applicability in Canada. As in old Russia where the Bolshevik Party had been banned, the Canadian Party too was banned for most of its first 25 years of existence. Even when it was a legal party after World War II, it was under constant police surveillance, infiltrated by informers, and subject to a not too subtle witch-hunt.

From the outset the self-proclaimed task of the International was "to organize joint action by the proletariat of the different countries to pursue one goal: the overthrow of capitalism ... and the establishment of an international Soviet republic." While the USSR, being the first Soviet republic, was accorded an important role in the process, at the beginning it was not given the pivotal role. The leaders of the revolution were convinced that socialism could not succeed in backward Russia without the economic support of the industrially advanced countries of Europe.

After Lenin died and Stalin consolidated his power as the new head of the Soviet state, he reversed this long-held belief. He pronounced that
socialism could indeed be achieved in one country, especially one as large and resource-rich as the USSR. With this declaration the single most important task of Communist parties everywhere became defending the USSR. Building socialism in the USSR would be a beacon for the working class of all lands, the principle factor of their emancipation. Everything done there, both its internal policies and its external ones, was seen to be identical with the interests of socialism worldwide. Hence, all Communist parties were to subordinate their interests to those of the USSR — whatever the costs in terms of their own immediate success.

In 1929 Party members around the world were informed that capitalism was about to collapse; Europe was “entering a new phase of revolutionary upsurge”; it was “class against class.” With this pronouncement, Stalin launched an attack against the “right” opposition in his midst and, through the Comintern, hurled the international apparatus of the party against social democratic and labour parties in their various countries. These were seen as the most dangerous potential accomplices in any armed intervention against the USSR.

In Canada as elsewhere the tiny Communist Party, having spent the better part of the first decade of its existence bringing together most of the revolutionary Left under its leadership, proceeded to purge many of its founding leaders as representatives of the “right” opposition. It launched bitter attacks against the recently founded Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), calling the rival social democratic organization social fascists, and pulled out of mainstream trade unions to form their own trade union organization, the Workers’ Unity League.

**Popular Front Days**

Hitler’s victory in Germany caused a 180-degree turn in Soviet policy and therefore in the strategies of Communist Parties everywhere. Germany, it was by then clear, was preparing for a war against the Soviet Union and all efforts were turned towards building a common front with other groups against fascism. Yesterday the revolution was just around the corner. But for those misleaders, the social democrats, the working class was ready for it. Now the revolution was temporarily postponed and these misleaders were to be embraced as comrades and allies.

Lenin’s *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* was dusted off and became the guide to action once again. Writing in 1920, Lenin had ridiculed those Communists who argued against participating in “bourgeois parliaments” and the trade unionists who tried to set up their own unions which, while ideologically correct, were small, ineffective, and isolated from the
The Workers' Unity League was dissolved by the same process it was created — a decision from Moscow. Though they were not consulted, Canadian Communists were quite happy to give up the WUL and merge their unions with the mainstream. They wished nothing more than to become part of the mass movement, begun in the US, but certain to sweep Canada too. As it happened, the Communists not only became part of the mass movement, they often led it. There is no doubt, for example, that it was the Communists that led the movement of the unemployed, so much so that Prime Minister Bennett, in the words of historian Norman Penner, "[made] the actions and grievances of the unemployed a contest between him, personally, and the Communist Party." When, in the fall of 1935, the Bennett government was defeated, Penner added, "the Communist Party took the credit ... and it was justified in doing so."2

In the spirit of the so-called Popular Front, the Communists called for mutual cooperation between themselves and the previously despised CCF. Not surprisingly, CCF leaders refused all offers to work together. Having been vilified as "class collaborators" and "social fascists" only a few years before, they were naturally suspicious of these appeals. In any event, whatever trust that was gained over the years would be undermined again and again by the twists and turns of Communist Party policy as it strained to keep step with the twists and turns emanating from Moscow.

From the very start the CCF was able to attract far broader support from the general public. By the end of the 1930s they were the official opposition in the legislatures of Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan. In Ontario they were winning a respectable fifteen per cent of the vote and they were able to elect several representatives to the federal House of Commons.

The Communist Party also enjoyed some success. After years of being illegal, working underground, and with little presence and less credibility, in the mid-1930s it was beginning to grow by leaps and bounds. Party membership doubled between 1935 and 1937, rising from 7,400 to 15,000. By 1937 the CPC was signing up 300 new members a month. Just as important, numerous others were involved in one or other of the Party's front groups, not yet willing or ready to become members.

Ever since R.B. Bennett, the reigning Conservative Prime Minister, began his series of radio broadcasts in January 1935, proclaiming his own New Deal, everyone knew a federal election was coming. Bennett had tried everything he knew to protect industry and property: raising tariffs by 50
per cent; throwing agitators in jail or deporting them; banning the Communist Party; and forcing single unemployed men into labour camps. But the economy failed to recover and the agitation only grew. Alarmingly. Concluding that Canadian capitalism had to be reformed or it would be overthrown, in his final hour he offered unemployment insurance, minimum wage legislation, marketing boards, standards for working conditions, and more. Few people believed in his political conversion. Many of his own followers did not share his new-found belief that capitalism needed major surgery.

The Liberal opposition offered little by way of a program. Why bother? The Depression had already defeated the Tories. It was “King or Chaos,” they said. The CCF faced its first national election. “It is a fight between those who stand for capitalism and those who oppose it,” they boldly proclaimed. Social Creditors, just elected in Alberta, offered a simple panacea: crank up the money-machine. Another new party, the Reconstructionists, was led by H.H. Stevens, who had recently left Bennett’s cabinet. They put their faith in fair wages, fair taxes, fair competition, and fair profits. The Communists abandoned their demand for “a Soviet Canada and a revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ government.” They made moderate economic proposals for immediate reforms like unemployment insurance, repeal of Section 98 of the Criminal Code, and demands to “fight for peace.”

The slogan on the banner adorning the Spadina committee rooms of Joe Salsberg read: “VOTE SALSBERG.” “FIGHT FOR THE UNITY OF THE WORKING CLASS.” “ELECT A MAJORITY OF CCF OR COMMUNIST CANDIDATES.” The CCF candidate had been approached to withdraw in his favour. Meeting in a little coffee shop on Harbord off Spadina, Salsberg’s campaign manager, Bill Walsh, offered CCF organizer, Ted Jolliffe, reciprocity in other ridings. But the CCF refused all cooperation in Spadina constituency or anywhere else. Their attitude was simple: “The Communists are the kiss of death.” Interestingly enough, two years later during the 1937 Ontario elections, David Lewis, no doubt haunted by the fact that warfare between Communists and socialists had allowed Hitler to take power in Germany, was prepared to withdraw the CCF candidate from Toronto’s St. Andrews riding so as to leave the field to Joe Salsberg. For this gesture Lewis was roundly rebuked by CCF leader J.S. Woodsworth.

The Agit-prop team produced a short play in which a magic potion was given to the politicians to make them tell the truth. The chorus was set to the tune of “The Man in the Flying Trapeze.”
Bennett, Bennett, Give me your answer true,
If you're elected, What are you going to do?
Once I'm elected I'll show you my scorn
I'll tax every rag on the tattered and torn
I'll make every man wish he'd never been born
For the workers I love to betray.
I'll put every Communist head in a sling
I'll squash every union out flat
And the socialism I promised to bring
I'll just forget about that
Oh I shout the hot air with the greatest of ease
And once I'm elected with other MP's
You'll find that I'm only a hunk of cheese
For the workers I love to betray.
These politicians are just as you say
Rich men and grafters and men who betray
Vote not for windbags who give you the gas
Vote for the men of the working class
Elect a man who fought
Election time or not
To help your struggles to exist
So kick out Bennett and all his senate
And mark your ballot Communist.

In the middle of the campaign, H.H. Stevens and the Reconstruction Party made their big play in Toronto, a public rally. To the Communists this was the party of insipid fascism. Walsh and Steele worked out a plan to sow confusion in the ranks — the old army tattoo routine.

On the back side of the official program, they delivered the Communist message, and beneath it a series of questions the audience could ask Stevens, the main speaker. Along with a handful of comrades they walked up and down the aisles handing out their programs. They had only a few copies left when a patron came out on the stage: “Ladies and Gentlemen, somebody here is putting out misleading literature. It appears to be the program of this meeting and it is not. It is full of communist propaganda.” The rowdies threw up all that was left of the pamphlets, flying down the aisles as they were chased out of the building. The meeting turned out to be a shambles, with hecklers making good use of the questions listed on the back of the “program.”

More importantly, the election was a disaster for the Conservatives and Bennett. They lost 687,000 votes. The Liberals gained only 162,000 but won a convincing majority. A large number of votes, a quarter of the four million votes cast, went to one or another of the anti-establishment parties, but the Communists picked up only 31,150 of them in the 15 ridings they
contested. "We have nothing to apologize for," Tim Buck told the delegates at the November 1935 Plenum of the Party's Central Committee, "but we must recognize the terrific burden that we carried from our sectarian past."

Anne Weir

It was in the midst of the municipal elections only a few months later that Bill Walsh met his true love. At the time he was managing Salsberg's campaign for Alderman and John Weir's campaign for schoolboard in Ward Four. Walsh developed his own approach for the Salsberg campaign. Besides canvassing door-to-door, he arranged meetings with community organizations, paying special attention to the needle trade workers, many of whom lived in the riding, and he prepared radio scripts for the candidate. "Years later J.B. used to kid me about those radio broadcasts," he recounted. "The ward was very mixed, poor on the south side, rich on the north side which included the Casa Loma. I had him talk about the fingers, the rich sections are like fingers stretching into the homes of the poor. He kidded me about it for years."

"You Bill Walsh? I'm here to give you a hand with Johnny's campaign."
The fair-haired young beauty threw off her words in absolute self-confidence.
"I'm Walsh." To himself, "God, is she for real?" Heart pounding.
"Well, what do you want me to do?"
He put her to work folding pamphlets.
An hour later she complained. "Is this all you have for me?"
"What do you want to do?"
"Well, electioneering, canvassing, speaking to people. You're the manager, not I!"
She got her way. Bill Walsh was smitten. But, as he described himself back then, "When it came to girls I was very shy. I had already traveled around the world but I was still very bashful and awkward. It was days later before I asked her if I could walk her home and I thought that was very bold of me."

Her name was Anne Weir. Unlike himself, she was of working-class background and of Ukrainian origin. The entire Weir family was wrapped up in the Party. One brother John was running for school board and sat on the central committee. Her other brother, Charlie, was also a Party organizer. Her parents were Party people and she was in the midst of getting a divorce from a Party official located in Cleveland, Ohio, from where she had only recently returned.

She was chatty and unpretentious and as forward as Bill was bashful. "She was fair-haired and quite tall for those days, about 5'4"," he says about her.
"When I introduced her to my friends in Montréal, I said 'she's very bright, you know.' They listened to me and then they said 'yes, and she's very pretty.' It was almost as though I was avoiding saying that, but they just wanted it put on the record. She was socially more experienced than I. And Anne could drink a bit. I never drank in those days. And she smoked."

Five years after they met, in a letter written to her from jail, Bill Walsh described his feelings on that eventful day.

I don't know whether I'll ever be able to adequately understand just what happened to me when first I saw you and heard you speak to me. If it was 'love at first sight' then it definitely took a long time to manifest itself to me. What was it then? For I know my heart skipped a few beats and I was 'interested' in you and conscious (or unconscious perhaps) that on no account must I let you dash off as you seemed bent on doing. Did I 'fall' for your 'looks'? Certainly not in the ordinary sense. For I had met pretty girls before and not felt that urgent drive to get to know them better, to see them often, to be in their company. If anything, I had been reticent in their presence, and sort of mentally on my guard (against what, goodness knows!) and generally welcomed any opportunity that offered itself to part from their presence. Then what was it made me think up a fib faster than I possibly could at any other time just so you wouldn't fly out of my sight? I don't know exactly, but I've thought of it quite often since being jailed. Some day I'll perhaps know the answer.

It's doubtful that he ever did find the answer but in speaking of Anne, even 50 years later, he would become misty-eyed and a hushed, reverent tone would creep into his voice. A full two months passed before Bill got up the nerve to kiss Anne. Proud of what he thought was his great conquest, only later did he discover that on the very first day they met Anne had said to her brother John, "I just met your new brother-in-law." Bill laughed heartily when relating this story. "They used to kid me about this for years."

Soon they were living "free union" in a little room on Beverley Street off College, sharing bath and wash-stand with a student next door. Anne worked as a waitress in a nearby restaurant. Good thing too because you couldn't get by on eight dollars a week, which was the salary Bill got as Party organizer — when he got paid at all. With Anne marking the bills he got the occasional 65 cent meal for 15 cents. Sleeping late some mornings to avoid the luxury of breakfasts and walking rather than wasting a nickel on the street car also helped them survive.

Anne was wise to Party life and Bill recalled her cautioning him that some things were not as they seemed: She warned him against Stewart Smith in particular. "Tim is no god," she said of Tim Buck, "and neither are the others. Their personal lives aren't as pure as they like to make out." As a
matter of fact, Lenin’s instruction to “not drink out of a dirty glass” was heeded by most Party members. “Fooling around” was severely censored. Because the movement was a network of interlocking lives, anything but puritanical lifestyles would have been a threat to it. Tim Buck had a mistress and some other Party leaders had lovers, but these indiscretions were kept secret. Knowing how Bill idealized Buck and the others, Anne tried to cushion the shock by bringing him down gently.

Early in the new year Bill was called into the main Party office where Joe Salsberg and Stewart Smith told him they were transferring him to Kitchener. They said they needed someone who could work independently and away from the centre. “Kitchener! I was panic-stricken,” he remembers. “It sounded a thousand miles away. What about Anne? There was no questioning the directives. The Party assigned me a new post. Of course I had to go. The night I broke the news to Anne I was practically in tears.”

“Aren’t you going to take me along?” Anne asked, as casual as ever.

“What do you mean, take you along? Can I?”

“You try not to, you big nincompoop.”

“It hadn’t occurred to me that Anne could come too. It wasn’t part of my conversation with Salsberg. That’s how naive I was!”

Notes