Chapter Eight

1946 And The Beginning of The Cold War

As his brother Sam expressed it, "Bill was a different person when he returned home from the war." Living with death will do that. In the first days of his return the only thing on his mind was his pledge to Dick Steele to take responsibility for Esther and the Steele children. Beyond that, he had no firm idea of what he would do. Although his commitment to the cause, if not to all the players, was undiminished, he knew he did not wish to resume his position as a Communist Party functionary. When C.S. Jackson asked him to take on the job of staff representative of the United Electrical Workers (UE) for the Hamilton region, he was of two minds. Once hooked, it was a job he would stay with for nearly 20 years.

The UE was one of half a dozen or so Communist-led industrial unions. Within that group, the UE president, C.S. Jackson, was the leading figure and he was clearly regarded as Enemy Number One by the union mainstream attached to the CCF. In the words of his biographer, Doug Smith, Jackson was at once brilliant, tyrannical, and vindictive: "He had a tremendous taste for battle." "He fought with his parents, his bosses, his fellow unionists, his wives, his children, his comrades (especially with his comrades), the UE staff, the Canadian state and social democrats in the labour movement... particularly David Lewis, Charlie Millard and Eugene Forsey." Very soon Bill Walsh was one of Jackson's targets, and ultimately he would be one of his many victims. But the first decade of his employment with UE was mainly occupied with survival of the union. With the union under constant attack, internal solidarity and tolerance was the order of the day.

For unions and companies alike, 1946 was dominated by a coordinated strike wave the likes of which had not been seen since 1918-1919. The 1946 strike wave was centred in Hamilton, then the industrial capital of Canada. While the main focus of the campaign was the Steelworkers strike at the Steel Company of Canada (Stelco), Westinghouse workers repre-
sent by UE played a role that labour historians have never fully appreciated. More to the point of this biography, the outcome of the strike wave was certainly affected by a behind-the-scenes conflict between Bill Walsh and his CCF Steelworker nemesis, Larry Sefton.

In his book, 1005: Political Life in A Union Local, author Bill Freeman concedes that "the Communists played an important role in maintaining a spirit of militancy in Hamilton..." He goes on to say, "it is clear, though, that they played a secondary role in the strike and that the political benefits of the struggle went to the CCF faction within the union." Of the latter, there can be no doubt; but to describe the Communists' role as secondary is less certain and at the least needs to be qualified.

A New Era

Bill Walsh had been overseas for barely three years, but in those years Canadian society experienced a shift in its social and political axis, and an industrial miracle. Whole new industries sprung up out of nowhere. The federal government created dozens of Crown Corporations to lead the way. Steel production doubled; employment in the aircraft industry rose from 1,000 to 55,000; Canada became the world’s second largest producer of hydroelectric power, aluminum, and cargo ships. No country in the world produced more nickel, asbestos, or newsprint. By 1945 Canada, with a population of only 11.5 million, had suddenly become one of the world’s foremost industrial powers. For the first time since World War I, there was a shortage of labour, producing a shift in the balance of class forces.

An aroused working class demanded secure jobs, better wages and working conditions, shorter working hours, unemployment insurance, universal pensions, and publicly funded health care. Workers flocked to unions and in 1943 one out of three of them had gone on strike, mainly for union recognition. In Ontario in 1943 the socialist CCF passed both the Liberals and the Tories in public opinion polls and formed the official opposition winning 34 seats, only four less than the Tories. A public opinion poll taken towards the end of 1943 showed that Canadians were more reform-minded than either the Americans or the British. In 1944 the CCF emerged victorious in Saskatchewan, forming the first social democratic government in North America. The prestige of the re-named Labour Progressive Party, propelled in part by Canadian admiration for the Soviet Union’s heroic role during the war and its own calls for all-out prosecution of the fight against fascism, reached a new high water mark. It also enjoyed some electoral gains. For the first time ever, a Communist was elected to the federal parliament when Fred Rose won a bi-election in the Montréal-Cartier
riding. Also for the first time, the Communists elected two members to the Ontario legislature, J.B. Salsberg and A.A. Macleod.

In the midst of these results, Prime Minister Mackenzie King was advised by the Chairman of the Bank of Canada, Graham Tower, that post-war workers would “likely face unemployment with far more resentment, to put it mildly, than what was displayed during the Depression years. In the interest of peace, order and good government,” he warned, Ottawa must “assume full responsibility” for maintaining employment and providing some form of income security. The wily King was prepared for this circumstance. Against the tide of popular mobilization, he had written in his diary a few years earlier, “the most we can do is to go only sufficiently far with it as to prevent the power of Government passing to those who would go much farther, and holding the situation where it can be remedied in the future, should conditions improve.” This is exactly what he did. To stop the stampede to the Left, he adopted a minimalist welfare state program: unemployment insurance, family allowance, and veterans’ benefits, with the promise of improved pensions and public health insurance some time in the future. He forced employers to recognize any union that won a majority in a government-supervised vote, and he committed his government to maintaining “a high and stable level of employment and income,” and to incurring deficits when unemployment threatened.

When, from his vantage point, conditions did improve, King placed the promised comprehensive health system on the shelf where it stayed for the next 20 years, pensions remained restricted and slight, and federal and provincial governments passed laws that restricted labour’s rights and freedoms. C.D. Howe, the Minister responsible for reconstruction, dismantled most of the Crown corporations, selling off their assets to private enterprise at grossly deflated prices.

The Cold War was extremely useful in reversing the atmosphere that prevailed during and immediately after World War II. By acting as persistent apologists for the Soviet Union, the Communists seemed bent on confirming that they were in fact nothing more than “toadies” of Moscow. But in the new atmosphere of fear and loathing that quickly emerged, all forms of left-wing ideology were painted with the same brush as that applied to the Communists. There was no little irony in this, for in a real sense, CCFers were in many instances the first Cold Warriors, their no-holds-barred campaign against the Communists for leadership of the burgeoning labour movement dating all the way back to the late 1930s. But no matter how zealously the CCF joined in the anti-Communist hysteria, it was unable to escape being branded by the same right-wing forces. The post-war election campaigns conducted by the Tories, the media, and the employer classes were particularly vicious, and the CCF lost most of the political
ground it had so temporarily gained. Not surprisingly, Communists were
turfed out of office too, but their losses in the labour movement would be
far more damaging to them. Though they managed to retain control of a
few unions and maintained a presence in some others, the Cold War cost
them access to their working-class constituency, without which they were
nearly indistinguishable from garden variety Left-wing sects.

Strike City, 1946

Within minutes of landing at Halifax harbour in December 1945, Bill Walsh
had his first job offer. Colonel John Pangman, on hand to greet him and
other soldiers from the Essex Scottish Regiment, pulled him aside. “I’ve
been waiting to see you, Bill. I’ve been put in charge of the Maritime District
and I’ve got a job for you. I’d like to make you my intelligence officer. The
pay’s good and the work conditions are excellent.” Though taken by
surprise, Walsh turned him down flat.

A troop train carried him to Windsor for discharge and a civic welcome.
The crowds were so thick that the Essex Scottish could not even parade up
Oulette Street. After a brief visit in Montréal, Bill went to Toronto. His first
stop was the national office of the United Electrical Workers union where
Esther Steele worked as secretary. “It was a happy reunion,” he says, “but
also sad.” Esther introduced him to the national officers. He instantly liked
George Harris and he recognized Ross Russell as the same Russell Green-
berg whom he had met in Montréal ten or so years earlier, inquiring about
the prospects of a Jew managing department stores in Russia. C.S. Jackson,
national president of UE offered him a job with the union, but at this point
he was reluctant to commit himself.

“So you finally found time to come to the Party,” Sam Carr, Director of
Organization, joked with him when he dropped into the Party office a few
days later. “Which Party are you talking about?” Walsh teased back, “The
Communist Party of Canada, the Communist Labour Total War Commit­
tee, or the Labour Progressive Party? You’ve changed names three times in
five years!”

“Smart Alec — all you service guys are big shots now,” Carr replied.

“Settle down, Sam, I’ve come here for a specific purpose.” He told Carr
about the discussions in London and asked that a meeting be set up with
Tim Buck and whichever of the soldiers were free to attend. Two or three
weeks later, Carr asked him to come to the Finnish Hall in the east end of
Toronto: “We want the war veterans to be there.” Thinking that this was
the meeting he had asked for, Walsh called up some of the others to make
sure they would be there. “When are we going to have our meeting?” he
remembered asking Carr following Tim Buck’s speech praising “our war heroes”. “You’ve just had it,” Carr responded. There was no meeting and there never would be.

Both Bill and Esther felt the social pressure from their friends to marry. “Everybody expected it. Everybody wanted it,” Walsh recalled, “but I didn’t have to be pushed. Dick had asked me to take care of Esther and the boys, but that didn’t necessarily mean marriage. I decided I wanted to marry Esther.” According to her friends, Esther was ambivalent at first, partly because of her concern that the twins, now age five, might not accept Bill as a father. Whereas he seemed to need the security of a life-time partner, Esther had come to enjoy her independence. Besides, as a wife of a union organizer she knew she would take second place to the job. It was only settled, both of them agree, when Johnny blurted out, “I want you for my daddy, uncle Bill.” The wedding, a private affair, took place in March. In the meantime, C.S. Jackson had asked him if he would drop in on the UE office in Hamilton, where Westinghouse did most of its production. “We have certification there, but almost no members. Could you look at it and write me up a report?”

In accordance with the war imposed Order-in-Council PC 1003, the so-called Magna Carta of Canadian labour, any union was to be granted automatic recognition if it won majority support in a government-sponsored vote. It also promised collective bargaining, conciliation, and the right to strike. Westinghouse workers had voted overwhelmingly for the UE in spring 1944, but 18 months later only 200 of 3,800 plant workers had signed union cards. This situation was common enough among the industrial unions granted recognition towards the end of World War II. Equally common was the failure to negotiate a contract. An appointed conciliation board could not get union and management to even sit down in the same room. It was the conciliation board that wrote up the first UE-Westinghouse contract and it was signed separately in the respective offices of the company and the union. It was a one-year contract that denied both the dues check-off and compulsory union membership, gave no paid statutory holidays, no health plan, and allowed for no wage increase since wages were still fixed by wartime regulations.

In practical terms, except for the fact that the union was no longer a clandestine organization within the plant, little had changed with PC 1003. The union was recognized in name, but not in practice. Stewards still had to collect union dues personally, foremen acted as arbitrarily as ever, few grievances were settled, and the owners carried on as if the union did not exist. As far as they were concerned, any dilution of their authority over the conditions of work and the terms of employment was a violation of property rights. Whether or not unions would exercise any degree of control over
management decisions would only be determined in the next round of negotiations, outside the restrictions of wartime regulations. Both sides were poised for a major showdown.

“We had just won the war, freed the world from fascism and to advance to a new social order and good times for all,” Bill Walsh offered, putting the period in context. “There was a whole new spirit in the world. Returning soldiers were looking for jobs but they weren’t going to sit around waiting for handouts. They talked with new authority. They had been through hell and they weren’t going to accept the world they had left behind — including the depression wages still being paid at Westinghouse and the other big companies.”

The CIO unions set up a Wage Coordinating Committee to break through the wage freeze and to coordinate strike action, while on the ground local coordinating committees were being set up. The one in Hamilton included the three main unions there — Steelworkers, UE, and the Rubberworkers — and some smaller unions. The plants they represented were very large. Westinghouse employed up to 6000, the Steel Company of Canada 10,000, and Firestone 1,500. These were the largest plants in each of these industries, so the outcome in Hamilton was bound to have consequences for trade unionism across the country.

Autoworkers had already won a major breakthrough following a dramatic strike at the Ford plant in Windsor. Justice Ivan Rand’s arbitration ruling granted the union dues check-off. “I consider it entirely equitable,” Rand wrote, “that all employees should be required to shoulder their portion of the burden of expense for administering the law of their employment, the union contract; they must take the burden along with the benefit.” This was the Rand formula. It provided for voluntary membership in the bargaining unit. Not all workers in a plant had to join the certified union, but payment of dues was compulsory, giving the union the kind of financial security it needed. The Ford strike set the pattern for the automobile industry, but its gains were not automatically extended to other industries.

As in all the other disputes in this period there had been a clash over strategy between Communist and CCF trade unionists. Congress leaders were not enthusiastic about having a strike. Millard, still bitter about being defeated by George Burt for the UAW leadership, warned that the strike was showing signs of being run by Communists. C.S. Jackson supported a call from the UAW Ford local to hold a one-day sympathy strike, and the Westinghouse local of UE went out on 8 November, much to the chagrin of Congress leaders who were upset at the prospect of an illegal sympathy strike. The Congress held wage strategy sessions throughout the spring of 1946 without, however, the participation of the UE, whose leaders, C.S.
Jackson and George Harris, had been censored for their anti-Congress statements during the Ford strike. The committee recommended that unions put forward their wage demands by 1 May, and quickly obtain strike mandates. Mass strikes in key industries, it hoped, would draw swift government intervention, leading to short strikes and good settlements.

"The main centre for the strike wave was bound to be Hamilton," Walsh explained. "We had the main steel company, the main electrical plant and one of the main rubberworker plants. But the employers knew our unions were weak. That's why it became so urgent to organize them. All the contracts were coming up for renewal and everyone sensed there was going to be a battle." Employers were seeking to render the unions ineffective, if they could not get rid of them completely. The unions, on the other hand, were out to establish a permanent place for themselves in the workplace.

Walsh reported what he had found to Jackson. The organization of UE at the two Westinghouse plants on Barton Street and on Longwood Row was very shaky. The man in charge, Lou Franko, a good in-plant leader, was a poor organizer and administrator. Jackson asked Walsh to take on the job as UE representative for Hamilton and surrounding area.

Esther decided to remain in Toronto. She knew how UE staff was shifted from place to place. There was no telling how long Bill would be located in Hamilton. In the meantime she continued to rent 211 Spadina, the only home the boys had ever known. Their day-care was close by, and Esther had a good job, a rich social life, and lots of friends in Toronto — mostly among union staff, the Party, and the United Jewish People's Order. Walsh commuted to Toronto weekends when he could get away, which wasn't often, at least through 1946. Not until 1949 did Esther and the twins finally move to Hamilton. Hershel Wolofsky had just died and left Bill $3000, a sum they'd use to purchase a tiny four-room house on Archibald, in the industrial part of Hamilton.

Signing up members to UE Local 504 was the main order of business for Walsh. A strike vote looked increasingly inevitable and was coming up fast. Each day workers entering both Westinghouse plants were handed a new leaflet Walsh had drafted the night before. Amazingly, this became a practice he continued throughout his career at UE. There were frequent labour rallies downtown and in Woodlands Park, right across from the Barton Street plant. Drawing on his experience organizing the rubber workers in Kitchener, Walsh made special efforts to sign up workers in the crucial tool area. By the time the strike vote deadline arrived, 1800 of the 4000 Westinghouse workers had signed membership cards. It became obvious that only by inviting non-members to vote could the union obtain the majority it was seeking. This was the strategy Walsh recommended, and though it was an unusual one, it was accepted.
Across industries demands were fairly uniform. UE Local 504 called for compulsory check-off, a 25 cents an hour wage increase, a 40 hour week, time-and-a-half for overtime, and increased vacations. It submitted its demands on 15 May. Westinghouse countered with 7.5 cents an hour and no improvement on the other major issues. An overwhelming strike vote brought an 8.5 cent an hour offer along with two paid holidays, two weeks vacation after five years, and voluntary check-off. Jackson, who handled the negotiations, recommended that the offer be turned down. So many workers turned up at the 4 July meeting that it was too crowded to take a vote, and the meeting was shifted to Woodlands Park. The result was overwhelming. The UE struck on 5 July, with a majority of Westinghouse's 4000 employees on the picket line, one of the biggest picket lines in Canadian history.

Westinghouse made no move to bring in replacement workers. Both management and union were waiting to see if the strike wave was really going to happen. They both knew that Steelworker Local 1005 would be the one to set the pattern in Hamilton and across the country. From the start UE and Steel were mutually suspicious. Even as the CCL was in the midst of setting up the wage coordinating committee, Charlie Millard held a meeting with Hamilton Steelworkers adopting 19.5 cents as the targeted wage increase, a demand that was at once denounced as weak and divisive by C.S. Jackson, and as outrageous by Stelco President Hugh Hilton. On 14 May, his offer of 5.5 cents drew an overwhelming strike vote by the workforce holding union cards, about half of the 6000 Stelco employees. Steel's vacillation in setting a strike deadline further disturbed UE leaders.

A UE rally at Woodlands Park heard Eamond Park, Communications Director of the Steelworkers, declare “our workers will be with you in a few days.” But as the days passed with Stelco workers remaining on the job, Walsh increasingly began to think that Steel might not strike. “There was a schedule worked out by the CCL coordinating committee. They were supposed to come out on 8 July three days after us. We came out on time and so did the Rubberworkers. By this time we had a strike wave all across the country. But everybody was waiting for Local 1005 to join us. They had their date and it was called off, and they had a second date and it was called off. They said they were having meetings with the company and with government officials. But each time they called off the strike the workers began to feel demoralized. Not just their workers, but all the workers in the area and likely around the country. If they didn't deliver, it would make it hard for us to deliver.”

Just hours before the 8 July deadline, three steel companies, Stelco, Algoma Steel Mills, and Dominion Steel Company (Dosco) were placed under the authority of a federal government controller. Any person who
refused to work for him would be subject to a daily fine, and union leaders
to a five-year prison sentence. This was the ostensible reason for the delay
as Charlie Millard, Canadian Director of the Steelworkers, held last-minute
meetings with Stelco president Hugh Hilton, in an attempt to head off a
strike. Would the Steelworkers vote to defy the law and go on strike? The
membership met on 14 July at the Playhouse Cinema on Sherman Avenue
North to decide. Ultimately, they decided to strike. A reporter for the
*Hamilton Spectator* described the scene: "Suddenly the doors opened, the
crowd came out of the theatre and they all marched north on Sherman
Avenue to Burlington, and right to the Wilcox Gate. The strike was on!"

By now nearly one out of five workers in the city of Hamilton was on
strike. On the first morning of the steel strike, UE organized a mass meeting
at Woodlands Park. Walsh described the moment. "We paraded down, UE
workers, rubber workers, steel workers and lots of other people. The UE
sound truck led the way, blaring ‘Solidarity Forever’ and picking up
supporters all through working class district of Hamilton until the march
was several thousand strong as it approached Stelco’s main gates on Wilcox
Street. All of a sudden somebody yelled, ‘there’s scabs inside’, and there
were. Stelco had every intention of keeping their plant running. All the
postponements gave them more time to prepare. They built an airstrip and
hired extra help, moved in 2,000 cots from the Kenilworth barracks and
lots of food. Hundreds of people broke ranks and made for the wire fences
the company had built around the plant. Dozens were already climbing over
the fences to get into the plant and haul out the scabs when Millard grabbed
the UE mike. ‘This is Charles Millard of the union speaking,’ he said. ‘This
is not the way we do things. I want all you people to climb back over those
fences. We must keep our heads. We can’t have any violence. We have to be
disciplined.’ The workers would have grabbed every one of those scabs out
of there. There were hundreds at the fences and hundreds more behind
them. We didn’t plan this part of the action but it would have crippled the
company’s plan of keeping the plant producing. Unfortunately, the strikers
obeyed Millard."

Since all of the other struck plants were shut down tight, the entire focus
was the Stelco picket line. It averaged 500 to 1,000 people through each
day. Local merchants donated large quantities of supplies to striking
families. Farmers gave whole fields of crops. On 17 July, Hamilton mayor
Sam Lawrence, a CCFer and former president of the Hamilton Labour
Council, marched at the head of a parade chaired by Bill Walsh. Woody
Guthrie and Pete Seeger came to town to give a concert. Meanwhile the
company had hired boats and planes to bring in the materials it needed to
keep the plant going, including food and supplies for the scabs. Local 1005
counteracted by hiring a light plane to leaflet the plant. Aerial dogfights broke
out over the picket line with opposing pilots trying to force the other away from the plant. There were also skirmishes on the waters of Hamilton Bay. Early in the strike Walsh contacted a bootlegger he had met in the Guelph jailhouse, who agreed to sell his motor launch to the union. It had been used as a rum-runner in the prohibition days. Rechristened “The Whisper”, it was the fastest boat on the bay. Day and night through the course of the strike whenever a company boat approached the Stelco dock to unload “The Whisper” chased it out onto the lake or tried to swamp it.

A Commando Squad of young union militants went to the homes of workers still in the plant and painted the word “SCAB” in ten foot high letters on their walls. On some nights a few dozen Squad members would cut through the barbed wire and charge over to the sleeping quarters, smash in the windows, and toss in a few firebombs. The Squad regularly harassed scabs attempting to enter the plant at night, beating them with rubber hoses and stripping them naked. On 2 August, City of Hamilton controller Nora Frances Henderson, who said she deplored the “state of lawlessness” in the city, announced that she intended to test her right to enter the plant. When she appeared before the picket line and demanded to be let into the plant, the strikers stood aside and let her through. But by the time she reached the plant gate women picketers had seen to it that she was dripping in spit.

The evening before a special meeting of City Council was called to bring some law and order to the scene, Bill Walsh drafted this leaflet:

BE AT CITY HALL TONIGHT
To help the companies in their fight to smash the strikers and the unions, Controller Henderson is:
1) Trying to deny families of strikers their right to relief.
2) Trying to get Provincial and Mounted Police brought into Hamilton. Tonight, Thursday, City Council will meet to decide these matters. Exercise your democratic right to:
1) Contact your Alderman and Controllers and tell them what you think of these matters.
2) Come to City Hall tonight and see how they vote.
RELIEF FOR STRIKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN NEED
KEEP THE OUTSIDE POLICE OUTSIDE. THEY CAUSE TROUBLE WHEN THEY COME IN.

When thousands of strikers and their supporters converged on City Hall they found all the seats in the chamber already occupied by office workers and managers of the city’s struck plants. They jammed the galleries and filled the stairwells and the halls, with still thousands more packed into the narrow canyons of streets surrounding the City Hall, carrying placards and singing “Solidarity Forever.” After four hours of debate, highlighted by
Chief of Police Joseph Crocker's assurance that there were no serious problems on the picket lines, Council voted nine to seven that provincial police were not needed. But it also vetoed relief for strikers and their families. On the way out of City Hall, the strikers cheered Mayor Sam Lawrence and Labour Progressive Controller Helen Anderson who had led the debate on behalf of the strikers. When Nora Francis Henderson appeared she was met with jeers and taunts and a chorus of "We'll hang Nora Francis from a sour apple tree." Matters appeared to be getting out of hand as she crossed the square and entered her car. A crowd began to rock the car and it looked for a moment as if it might turn it over.

The next day the Steelworkers, concerned about their public image, issued this public statement: "We wish to make it explicitly clear that the demonstration at the city hall last night was in no way organized by the Steelworkers Union. The organization of the crowd emanated not from the union movement of the city, but from the Labour Progressive Party." The UE was unapologetic. Local President Al Stratford, himself a CCFer, told the Hamilton Spectator, "the people of Hamilton have nothing to be ashamed about. Controller Nora Francis Henderson lost a few locks of her hair. You won a great victory with your demonstration of solidarity."

Walsh's opposite number in the Steelworkers was Larry Sefton. In 1945 Millard had sent Sefton to Hamilton to become area supervisor of the Steelworkers, with the specific task of wiping out the Communist influence in the union. Only 28 years old, Sefton, with his dashing good looks and dynamic personality, proved to be a capable opponent for Bill Walsh. Sefton was a hard-rock miner from Kirkland Lake who had just led an important strike there while taking on the Communist-led Mine Mill and Smelter Union. It did not take him long to organize a CCF group and oust the Communists from leadership positions in Local 1005. But the Communist contingent still maintained some presence within the local.

As area representatives of the two largest unions involved in the strike, Sefton and Walsh were often called in by the civic authorities to speak for their unions. One such occasion was 19 August, when Mayor Lawrence yielded to pressure to call a meeting of the Police Commission to deal with alleged violence on the picket line. In addition to the local magistrate and Chief of Police Joseph Crocker, Mayor Lawrence invited Sefton and Walsh to the meeting, along with the vice-president of Stelco who had to be flown out of the plant in a helicopter.

Bill Walsh has this recollection of the meeting: "First the company man insisted that the Hamilton police force couldn't handle the situations. He made a plea that provincial police be brought in to regain law and order. Sam Lawrence, in the chair, turned to the Chief: 'Joe, are your people having any trouble maintaining law and order?' 'No,' replied the Police
Chief. 'Everything is under control.' 'Are you short of men? Do you need reinforcements?' asked Lawrence. 'No, we're handling the situation.' 'Well, gentlemen,' said Lawrence to the other members of the Police Commission, 'you heard what the chief said. As far as I'm concerned, there's no more to be said. We won't be needing outside police.'

He was bringing down the gavel to adjourn the meeting when Larry Sefton spoke up. "Mr. Mayor, I would like to say a few words." He was duly introduced. "I want to thank you for your show of confidence in our union and I give you my word of honour that there will be no interference with anybody wanting to go in or out of the plant."

"I was shocked," Walsh remembered, "and so was the Mayor. As an old-time trade unionist, he knew the importance of keeping the picket line closed. Until then, we had kept it closed and the Police Commission had just agreed to leave things as they were. We walked out of the building and were on the City Hall steps when I turned to Larry and said 'What the hell are you trying to do? Why did you just promise to open the lines?' I was livid. That was the end of the strike. And it wasn't just his strike; it was the whole strike movement across the country. Everybody knew there would be no settlement anywhere until Stelco settled. Now Sefton says to me, 'Don't give me any of that. I know what you Communists want. You want blood running down the gutters of Hamilton. Well, I'm not getting into that game.' An hour later instructions had gone out to the picket line not to stop anybody or anything going in or out. And that's what happened. Scabs and trucks were going in and out. Some of the strikers were setting up to go back to work. The picket line just collapsed."

"That night I went out and got the best guys I could find from all three unions and we met in somebody's basement to make a plan for the next morning. We got on the phone and went knocking on doors and by early morning we had five or six hundred people at the Wilcox gate. By 8 or 9 o'clock hundreds more started flocking to the gates from nearby homes. Now the company decided to challenge the picket line. An enormous diesel loaded with steel rails and I-beams geared down Wilcox Street, about a half mile long. A line of police walked slowly in front of the truck, urging the crowd to keep on moving, and the truck crept forward in low gear. By this time a young Steelworker had taken the mike from the union tent and he began speaking in an even voice saying things like 'alright fellas; I want you to stand there in the middle of the road when this truck comes and slow it down — that's right, slow it down.' The police line met the forward line of the strikers. The strikers didn't give an inch but the diesel crept forward right into the backs of the police. 'Alright now' said this the young Steelworker, 'lean, push, make it stop — now let him come to you — now lean back — now everybody stand, now move forward, push him back.' This guy
was tremendous. He was like a coach in a tug-of-war. We pushed this truck all the way back up Wilcox Street with the police getting squashed against the radiator and front fender of the truck. The diesel tried a few more times, but each time we stopped it. The company tested the line over the next few days and a number of strikers were arrested, but the line held.

"It was at this point that Police Chief Joe Crocker, forced by a vote at City Hall, called in the Ontario Provincial Police and the RCMP. When we knew the police were coming in from all over, we devised a new tactic. We organized a parade of war vets from the Woodlands Park through the industrial side of town, to the Kenilworth barracks, and from there to the gates of Stelco. We carried banners and we had the sound truck singing: 'If the cops got in the way, We're going to roll right over them, Roll right over them, Roll right over them, We're going to roll the union on.'

"As we marched down Barton Street, more veterans came out to join us wearing their medals or berets. They streamed out of the veteran halls that had been converted into training centres. The night before we had leafleted these places, addressing them as Workers in Uniform and urging them to join us. They did, in the thousands, including some military bands. The outside police never showed up that day and they never showed up at all. But that parade was the beginning of the end of the strike."

The strike went on into September and there were continuous attacks on the homes of strikebreakers, some incidents on Hamilton Bay, and occasional skirmishes on the picket lines. On 1 October the workers at Stelco voted to settle. UE settled three weeks later. The workers got a modest wage increase of 13.5 cents. Altogether, the 1946 campaign won an additional $64 million in wages for 223,000 workers. More importantly, the unions got a large measure of union security with the automatic dues check-off. But the precise terms of the settlement were less important than what it meant for the long term outcome for trade unionism and collective bargaining in Canada. There is no doubt that after the war the owners of Canadian industry manoeuvred unions into strike positions, believing that they could starve workers into submission and break the new industrial unions before they got firmly established. Their failure to achieve this objective amounted to a union victory. Henceforth, most industrial corporations recognized that in their relationships with employees they had to accommodate themselves to the presence of unions.

The Stelco strike gave the Steelworkers a reputation for militancy that, according to Bill Walsh, they never deserved. Clearly the Communist forces in Hamilton bolstered the union when it began to falter, and where necessary they circumvented its leaders. In this respect the Stelco strike was similar to the Ford strike in Windsor a year earlier. However important the Communists may have been to sustaining the Stelco strike, the political
beneficiaries were the CCFers. Their hold on the union became so firmly established during this period, that to this day the Steelworkers remain a bastion of NDP support within the labour movement. As for the union itself, Millard was right in claiming that the Stelco victory “set the Steelworkers on its expansionary course,” for within a short time they were the largest union in Canada.

Over the next few years, CCF leaders within the CIO unions led a campaign to purge these unions of all Communist influence. For the most part they succeeded, and where they failed, as in the case of the UE, they had the unions expelled from the Congress of Labour.

Opening Shots In The Cold War

The public rhetoric over Canada’s political environment was now rapidly changing. In 1944 Toronto had adopted the city of Stalingrad and a banner hung over the entrance to Toronto’s City Hall with a portrait of Churchill at one end and Stalin at the other end. From the beginning, though, western leaders saw this as a temporary alliance. In Canada government leaders and the RCMP had always regarded Communism as a greater threat than fascism. But in 1945 the public rhetoric had the Soviets as our “northern neighbour” with the Liberal Party accepting Communist offers to help support Liberal candidates in the upcoming elections. In the “Spirit of Teheran”, the LPP called for a “Liberal-Labour Coalition” in the 1945 Ontario provincial election as well as in the federal election. In addition to nominating some of its own candidates, the LPP joined the Liberal Party to support four leaders of the UAW who ran as Lib-Lab candidates in Windsor ridings. The Communists held on to their two seats in Toronto, but they took enough votes in some CCF-held ridings to assure victory for Tory candidates. Altogether the CCF lost 26 of the seats it had previously held. In the federal election, the LPP re-elected Fred Rose in Montréal-Cartier by a large majority and again cost the CCF seats, although the CCF nevertheless managed to elect 28 members to Parliament, up from eight in 1940. Both parties received all-time high votes, 832,000 for the CCF and 116,000 for the LPP.

This novel, if tenuous and marginal, place in the mainstream of Canadian politics ended abruptly on 5 September 1945, the day Igor Gouzenko, a cipher clerk in the Soviet embassy, defected. Four months later thirteen Communists were arrested and charged with spying for the Soviet Union. The same day the second report of the Royal Commission on Espionage was released — 15 March 1946 — Fred Rose was arrested. The Commission report was sensational. It was crammed with theories about an enormous
clandestine conspiracy masterminded by the Soviet Union and involving hundreds of Canadians who had converted to Communism and turned traitor against their own country.

The USSR had been a war-time ally of Canada's when it established an intelligence agency in its Ottawa embassy to collect political and military information, and this was part of the arrested Party members defence. They were collecting information that would help an ally with its defences at a time when it was threatened with total defeat, information they had every reason to expect, though it was being denied them by the Canadian government. Helping the Soviet Union did not imply betrayal, they insisted. All of this was to no avail, nor did it matter that none of the information transmitted to the Soviet Union was sensitive or vital. Ultimately, 20 communists were accused of Offences under the Official Secrets Act and publicly named as spies. Nine were convicted. Fred Rose and Sam Carr, who set up the network, were sentenced to six years imprisonment, and they were abandoned by both the USSR and the CPC. The Soviet government denied that its ambassador was involved, and the CPC denied any knowledge of a spy network.

In her book about the post-war spy trials, *The Strangest Dream*, author Merrily Weisbord summarized the meaning and importance of this episode to the future of the Communist Party. Weisbord claimed:

> The Canadian Communist Party's tie to the Soviet Union had begun to strangle the baby. The fact that Fred Rose, the most visible Canadian Communist, was collaborating with Soviet agents proved the dual allegiance of the Communist Party and served as a focus in the ideological war for the hearts and minds of English-speaking peoples. Despite the small number of Canadian communists who had given information to the Soviet Union, the trials were used not only to reveal the worst, but also to smear the best in the movement. They proved so effective as propaganda that even today political discourse in North America has not recovered its freedom.

The trial of Fred Rose was the first of the many spy trials that was to include, among others, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the US. These trials put the Communists in a defensive mode which they were never able to reverse.

While the Government of Canada did not impose loyalty tests on its employees, it began vigorous screening led by the RCMP. Civil servants were called upon to assist by maintaining a "constant vigilance of their office associates." For nearly a decade through to the mid-1950s, tens of thousands of public employees were subjected to security screening. By 1955 the RCMP had active files on 21,000 individuals and 2,300 organizations, most of them trade unions. Cultural workers in organizations like the National
Film Board were subject to a witch hunt, along with university professors, and every city had its own “Red Squad.” In Québec the Duplessis government dusted off the infamous 1937 Padlock Law (An Act to Protect the Province Against Communistic Propaganda) which allowed the state to imprison anyone caught publishing or distributing Communist material.

Bill Walsh was in the midst of the 1946 Hamilton strike wave when the espionage trials were being played out. Like most Communists, he regarded the espionage charges as the opening shot of the Cold War, and as blown way out of proportion — more a matter of stupidity on the part of Fred Rose and Sam Carr than a betrayal of Canada. It no doubt had an immediate effect on the atmosphere during the strike, particularly the increasingly bitter relations between himself and the Steelworkers leaders. But that hostility went back a long way, reflecting the traditional rivalry between Communists and social democrats for leadership of the working class and control of their unions. It was a rivalry that only temporarily subsided during World War II and that absorbed increasing time and energy until 1951 when the job of “cleaning out the Commies” was all but complete.

Party School

The summer 1947 Party School, six weeks of classes on the labour theory of value, internationalism, imperialism, class, and leadership was held at the Finnish Campsite in Sudbury. The Marshall Plan had just been announced in Washington, ostensibly to promote European economic recovery, but really to shore up a free enterprise alternative to the growing popularity of socialism. Further east, Stalin was consolidating control over the new People’s Democracies. Walsh was not sure why he had been asked to attend. He hoped it would give him an opportunity to discuss the questions that had been concerning him. The outcome couldn’t have been more different.

In the midst of the School, he was called back to Hamilton to attend to what was going to become a frequent occurrence, a challenge to the leadership of the Westinghouse local of the UE by a CCF group calling themselves the “New Dealers”. As the School drew to a close, private interviews were arranged with the national leader Tim Buck and Stanley Ryerson, the School Director. “It was at this time that I finally had an opportunity to raise some of the problems that had been bothering me,” Walsh related. “I told them about our meetings in London and how we wanted a session with the national leader where we could let our hair down, say what was on our minds without fear of being censored. Questions about our frequent reversals of party line as in the case of the World War II and
how it damaged our credibility with the working class, about our Lib-Lab policy and how angry it made us feel that our Party was supporting Mackenzie King, how it was bothering me that in the 1920s and 30s the soldier’s oath in the Red Army used to be “for socialism and brotherhood of all mankind” and now it was “for the motherland” or some such thing.

“Tim seemed not at all disturbed by these sorts of questions. He even seemed supportive, admitting that these were important questions and he put in the odd question or comment. I was disappointed in the answers he gave. He repeated the standard Party line. I wasn’t satisfied but I didn’t persist. With the Party under attack from all quarters those days, to persist might be taken as a sign of disloyalty. And I thought that was the end of the matter.” But that wasn’t the end of the matter. As with all Party schools, this one ended with a criticism/self-criticism session led by the School Director. When Walsh’s turn came, Ryerson was brutal. Difficult enough to take were his barbs at Bill’s vanity and pride. “But I was shocked that when I finally had an opportunity to voice these questions that had concerned me for some time, that my asking them was interpreted as an example of my vanity. I was told that some of these questions were still not resolved by the greatest Marxist theoreticians in the international Communist movement and here I was insisting on answers. Furthermore, according to him, I hadn’t accepted the answers provided by the top officer of the Party. I was so devastated that I was unable to rise to my feet, let alone defend myself. All I could do was deny that I had disbelieved our Party leader.”

This humiliating scene flashed before him time and again on the drive back to Hamilton. He winced at the memory of Ryerson’s every word and tried to imagine different endings to the scene with himself springing immediately to his feet:

Since when is it disloyal in this Party to seek answers to questions that are important to a comrade. Even the national leader concedes that my questions are legitimate, legitimate enough for them to be debated by the top echelons of the international movement. Since when does the Party of scientific socialism refuse to review questions of strategy and substance. Even in the days of the bloody civil war the Bolsheviks debated the issues. There was no evasion, no intimidation, no hiding behind questions of personality, loyalty or vanity.

But he could not erase that scene from his memory. He felt shamed, puzzled by Tim Buck, and furious at Stanley Ryerson. And he argued weakly with himself. “How was I to know that my questions are not yet resolved, that they are still being thrashed out at the highest levels, even by Stalin himself? But even so, does this mean that an ordinary Party member like myself can’t discuss them or even raise questions about them?”
It was around this time, shortly after settling back to work, that he experienced his first serious health battle with ulcers. The pain was severe enough that he had to be rushed to the hospital. Lying in his hospital bed, he contemplated his future. “I remember deciding that I had better drop these questions that were regarded as delicate matters and just go on doing my work. So long as the atmosphere in the union permitted me to do this in an effective way, I could live with it. I was not prepared to quit the Party or my job with UE, which I knew amounted to the same thing, because not long after the School ended, C.S. Jackson let me know that he agreed with the criticisms made of me at the School. This also angered me since we had been told that these criticism/self-criticism sessions were confidential, strictly for the purpose of helping comrades overcome their shortcomings.”

UE Politics — Opening Rounds

Almost from the beginning, Walsh felt some antagonism from C.S. Jackson, not unusual as Jackson was antagonistic toward many of his staff and fellow officers. He singled them out as opportunists, using their positions to get ahead in life; if not opportunists, they were police agents; if not police agents, Communists using the union merely as vehicle to advance the Party position. As for Walsh, Jackson regarded him as an egomaniac who had to make everything he did look large and everything everybody else did look small — always trying to show that he was more clever, a superior negotiator, a better organizer. Walsh’s manner triggered something in Jackson, and he had his own ways of striking back.

An early example of the fractious nature of their relationship occurred after completion of the 1948 negotiations in which Westinghouse workers won a pay increase substantially higher than Stelco workers, who until then had always set the wage pace in Hamilton. At a regular meeting of the leading Party group that functioned semi-officially in the UE under the name the National Staff Committee, Walsh expressed the view that Westinghouse workers were being held back by the ineffective leadership of the United Steelworkers local at Stelco. What was needed was a militant opposition group inside the Stelco local. If necessary the Party should put a man in there to organize the opposition. “Hell, it wouldn’t be hard,” he insisted. “The right-wing leadership isn’t nearly as well entrenched as we give them credit for. They’ve got feet of clay. They’re weak. We could easily knock them over.” The leading officers were not convinced. Ross Russell added the clincher: “Besides, the Party doesn’t have the money to hire an organizer there.”
"You're missing the whole point," Walsh persisted. "By challenging the Steel leadership and maybe taking it over, we'll take the heat off ourselves and get better settlements for our members. As for the money, hell, compared to guys in the Party we get large salaries and they work harder than we do. We can all chip in to handle the expenses for a while. It's our duty as revolutionaries and comrades." It was at this point that Jackson exploded. "Look, Walsh, I pay my dues to the Party, ten dollars a month and I give generous contributions besides. There's a limit. Pretty soon you'll have to be a millionaire to belong to this Party. Don't make a hero of yourself, Walsh. Not at my expense. You're no better a revolutionary than the rest of us. If you don't think so, ask Salsberg or Kashton."

Salsberg agreed. "I know. Before you were working for the Party and we paid you eight dollars a week when we paid you anything at all. Now you're working for the UE and they pay you something like $25 and you think it's an awful lot. Well, it isn't. You can't expect these men to pay for an organizer out of their own pocket and they're right, the Party can't afford it either."

These run-ins with Jackson were not frequent because most of the time they had very little to do with each other. Walsh's work kept him mainly in the Westinghouse chain while Jackson was more concerned with General Electric as well as being the UE national president. The National Staff Committee, comprised of Jackson, Harris, and Russell, the three national officers, and a few of the key regional representatives, met only to discuss critical situations. "We generally regarded ourselves as the Party faction of the union on a national scale," Walsh remarked of the Staff Committee. "Our meetings would usually be confined to union matters, but sometimes it broadened to include discussions on Party campaigns like the peace issue and sometimes we had discussions on what was our job as Party people who were elected as union leaders or employed as union staff persons. I don't know for sure, but I think the three UE national officers or some of them would meet with top Party persons prior to our faction meetings, but it was very rare that this would happen with the group as a whole."

Jackson himself always insisted that Communists who were leaders of UE were required to put the union before the Party. "We start from the position of what is best for the members of the union," he told Jim Turk who was interviewing him for a book. "If a political campaign conducted by the Party is not germane to that principle we make it quite clear that we are the ones who make the decisions, not the Communist Party." Jackson, who was a closet member of the CPC, had his disagreements with "the guys downtown," as he disparagingly referred to Party headquarters. These would sometimes be fought out in the Staff Committee. "George [Harris] would come in after a central executive meeting of the Party where a decision had been made to go down a certain direction. Then the discussion would take place among
the three officers and then the internal fights would take place," claimed Frank Piserchia, a non-Communist staffer interviewed by Doug Smith for his biography of Jackson. As Smith remarks, these fights were about more than whether or not to go along with a Party decision. They were part of an on-going power struggle between Jackson and Harris. Most of it was ego. Jackson was jealous of Harris who was widely admired by UE members. Not coincidentally, Jackson let it be known to some, that he suspected Harris of being an RCMP agent, an accusation that appears unlikely.

About the conduct of National Staff Committee meetings, Walsh remarked that:

Jackson insisted we reach a consensus. Disagreements were talked out until a consensus emerged. From that time on no minority opinions were tolerated. Sometimes the debates were very sharp and only the officers would take part and the staff men like myself would keep quiet. Sometimes we would take part but when we did we would be sharply attacked by Jackson so we would retreat into our shells again. As a generalization, I would say that as long as the union as a whole was under attack, we worked together well to beat off the attack. When things were more quiet, it was not so harmonious.

One thing that bothered me most was the way a staff person who had for some time being regarded as an excellent comrade, even held up as an example for the rest of us, was all of a sudden fired and we were then told that he had always been a petty bourgeois; that he was a no-good-son-of-a-bitch; or that he was sick or gone off his rocker. And usually we never saw the fellow again. At about the same time or not long after being fired or being forced out of the UE they were out of the Party as well. Over the years I was in the UE there were at least a dozen or so that this happened to. It was very unusual for anybody to speak up about these people. We were told by the top officers that the guy was no good for this or that reason and who were we to question them. It was like what happened in the days of the purges in the Soviet Union when so many former leaders of the revolution were condemned and often executed and very few if any stood up to question what had happened to them.

Civil Wars Within Canadian Labour

Up until the mid 1950s at least, the UE was under severe attack, all the more so since C.S. Jackson had emerged as the most vocal, persistent, and effective critic of the Canadian Congress of Labour, and the leader of the "left" opposition within it. The proceedings of the 1948 Congress convention gave every indication that the UE's days in the Congress were num-
bered. With the Berlin blockade and the coup d'état in Czechoslovakia still freshly imprinted on their minds, delegates were caught up in a frenzy of anti-communism.

The convention opened up with Congress President Mosher calling upon all unions to “free themselves from Communist leadership,” and culminated in Secretary-Treasurer Pat Conroy’s fervent appeal that if the trade union movement is “to live, if it wants to grow and flourish, if it wants to preserve its right to think and plan and if it wants to get on with the job of bringing security and freedom for the great mass of the workers,” then the unions “must clean the communists out of their locals and out of the trade union movement.” On behalf of an already weakened opposition, Jackson gave back as much as he got. He damned the Congress’s refusal to support another coordinated wage campaign, attacked its foreign policy in backing the Marshall Plan, which was bound to de-industrialize Canada and turn the “country into a raw material supply base for American big business,” and he especially condemned open raiding of UE locals, red-baiting tactics, name-calling, and other “slanderous attacks.”

It was at this convention that Mine-Mill was suspended and that George Burt of the Autoworkers broke from the Communist group within his union. Despite the Left’s diminished ranks, Jackson could still muster 154 votes to Mosher’s 564 in the election for president, but at the 1949 convention, an overwhelming margin of delegates voted to uphold a decision taken that year to suspend the UE leadership from the CCL. A year later the UE itself was suspended. Despite ousting the UE, it proved a difficult task to persuade UE members to join the rival International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE), created to take its place. The UE held its own against the combined forces of the CIO, the CCL, Steel, the IUE, the CCF, the media, and the churches. While Communists in every other union were ousted from positions of leadership, the UE membership never failed to back their leaders, despite all the external pressure to do so. And, with a few minor exceptions, the UE managed to beat back raids by the Steelworkers and the IUE. Politics had little to do with it. UE leaders were seen to be competent and honest, and good negotiators. They communicated regularly with their members and made a point of attending all meetings of the locals.

Throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s the leadership’s CCF opponents alternated their strategy, sometimes challenging for leadership of the locals, sometimes directly seeking to take locals out of the UE. At the Westinghouse shops in Hamilton, the anti-Communist group in Local 504 called itself the New Deal Committee. Alf Stratford, who had helped organize the local, was for a time a member of the New Deal group. “Better no union at all than a Communist-led union,” was the message he got from David Lewis, who was at the centre of the drive to oust Communists from
trade unions. In any event, Stratford, then president of Local 504, promptly quit the New Deal Committee.

Because of American immigration laws which barred Communists from leaving or entering the US, the UE in Canada operated almost totally independent of its international headquarters in the United States. This proved to be a favourable circumstance, since the Canadian union was much stronger than its US counterpart.

An autumn 1948 radio broadcast given by Walsh, part of a weekly series he prepared on behalf of the UE, illustrates the way he responded to these outside pressures. This one was presented just after US government authorities had refused permission to nine UE delegates to attend a convention of the international union held in New York. Among those barred was C.S. Jackson.

Walsh's radio address reported:

The authorities' actions in regard to C.S. Jackson were spectacular of course. They deliberately allowed him to proceed to New York and in the meantime notified their officials in the city to be ready and waiting to seize him, while conveniently arranging for newsreel and newspaper photographers to be on the scene. All very spectacular with hints of international intrigue, espionage, iron curtain and what not.

... Oh yes, the big industrialists know they can count on the press and radio as well as on the government to carry their anti-labour activities. But even this is not enough to convince workers. So they fall back on the oldest devices in history. They search out Judas Iscariot among the workers themselves. They search out the weaklings who have compromised themselves with the employers and carry on the employers' propaganda. They search out those who would stab their fellow workers in the back for the modern equivalent of thirty pieces of silver — a better job — a little higher rate — freedom to wander about the plant. And of course there are some misguided workers who carry the boss-inspired poison for no personal gain who imagine they 'thought it all by themselves'.

These constitute the most dangerous weapon against the working class, sometimes succeeding where the boss himself has failed, where the government and the courts have failed and where the press and radio have only partially succeeded. And that's precisely what happened last night not far from Hamilton when in a meeting of a hundred people a decision was made to disaffiliate from the UE and to throw in the lot of almost seven hundred workers not present with another union, the United Steel Workers.

I am sure that the United Steel Workers union will not have gained morally or otherwise from this move. It's quite certain that the workers of English Electric in St. Catherines, the plant in question, will lose. If the owners are able to get off paying their employees less by the
confusion and division that has been created, then other workers in other plants will find it harder to win gains from their own employers.

Is it not time that the family of labour present to the employers a united front? How much higher does the cost of living have to rise before some union officials are prepared to sink their petty political and partisan attitudes in the interest of serving the working people who have honoured them by installing them in office? How many more workers must be arrested and sentenced to jail from picket lines — seamen, textile workers, rubber workers and, yes, steel workers — before some trade union officials realize that when employers are out to smash the labour movement, they will not spare even those splitters and red-baiters who helped them bring about disintegration?

In 1947 the United States Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which banned Communists from holding union office and at the same time limited the right of unions to organize and strike. Though there was much pressure to follow suit, the Canadian government did not pass equivalent legislation, just as it refused to follow the US and West Germany in outlawing the Communist Party. It seemed unnecessary for it to intervene in union affairs because zealous Cold War CCFers, so anxious to demonstrate that they were free of any Red taint, accomplished the task for them. It appeared as if trade union leaders and the Liberal government had entered into a tacit agreement: if the unions would expel the Communists, thereby relieving the government from having to do so, the government would not bow to business pressure to introduce the anti-union provisions of Taft-Hartley.

Purged From The “House Of Labour”

By the end of this tumultuous decade, the Communist Party was on a political slide from which it would never recover. Its membership, which had reached a high of about 23,000 in 1946, dropped steadily over the next decade before suffering a near total collapse after Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 revelations. The Party lost its leadership role in many of the unions it had helped create. In the few instances where this had not occurred such as in the UE, the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, and the United Fishermen, the entire union was purged from the “house of labour.” Communist leadership was replaced by CCF activists, who were then able to move the Congress to endorse the CCF as the party of labour. This was part of the three-phase strategy worked out by David Lewis and doggedly implemented in conjunction with Charlie Millard and other CCF trade union stalwarts. First, get rid of the Communists; second win over the unions; third, make the CCF a mass-based party.
The CCF also purged its own membership of individuals who supported Communist positions on the Marshall Plan, NATO, and other issues. Bob Carlin was one prominent member purged from the CCF. A very popular member of the provincial legislature for Sudbury, Carlin had led the Mine-Mill drive to organize the International Nickel Company. He was told that “his loyalty” to the Communist group in his union had “become incompatible with his position as a CCF member of the legislature.”

It would have been hard to sustain an argument that the CPC ever posed a threat to the government of Canada. Notwithstanding all the hysteria manufactured to justify the extreme measures taken to destroy the Party, there is no evidence that its leaders ever advocated or discussed, let alone attempted, to overthrow the Canadian state. For Canadian Communists, revolution was always a distant goal and they had no notion of how it was to come about. Their actual activities were hardly subversive. Besides running for political office, they consisted of organizing demonstrations, petitions and marches, communicating information in leaflets, newspapers and publications, and helping workers and the poor organize themselves. Nor was there anything subversive about the conduct of Communist trade unionists. As Bill Walsh often complained, in their function as trade unionists, Party members avoided even talking about socialism. Norman Penner, himself a Communist leader until leaving the Party as part of the 1956 exodus, provided this explanation of the attack on Communist trade unionists:

The defeat of the Communists did not take place as a result of demands by the rank and file. In fact there were no trade union objectives at stake. The Communists were good militant trade union leaders and activists. They were pursued ... for Cold War objectives. It involved at different times the U.S. and Canadian governments, collusion between CCF and Liberal union leaders, and between the international officers of the major American unions and their Canadian affiliates. No holds were barred: laws were set aside or broken, the anti-Communist union officers launched massive raids.

He could have added that the intimidation employed to purge the Communists often exceeded anything to be found in Communist-led unions.

The long term impact of the purges was substantial. The elimination of the Communist element removed one of the barriers set up by conservative trade union leaders to merge the two labour centres into what in 1956 was to become the Canadian Labour Congress. By the same token, the purges served to silence dissent in the labour movement. Substantive policy debates at conventions and council meetings all but disappeared. And, with so much energy and expenses being directed at removing officers, expelling and
raiding unions, and healing the legacy of hate and bitterness that all this caused among a divided membership, unions were in a weaker position to press their bargaining demands, and the growth of union membership fell off. CCFers were able to gain control over most of the industrial unions although they were never successful in persuading their members to vote CCF. And, however much the CCF tried to distance itself from the Communists, among the general public the CCF was still regarded as the bearer of a foreign ideology. It lost electoral ground all through the 1950s, while the Liberal Party easily took on the mantle of moderate welfare statism.

By far the greatest impact of the purges was borne by the Communists. For them trade unions were the single most important vehicle to develop class consciousness among working people, which in turn was regarded by them as the most elemental step in the struggle to build a socialist society. Being marginalized or banished from playing a leadership role in unions was a total disaster. "The labour movement was, in a sense, their workers' parliament," write Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, "and they behaved like an opposition party. In the labour movement as nowhere else, the Communists were visible agitators, calling for radical changes in Canadian society and attracting the enmity of business leaders, conservative politicians and union rivals." For Communists, being barred from labour conventions was akin to barring scholars from libraries and scientists from laboratories.

Though the UE and the United Fishermen managed to hang on as independent unions, the long term effect was severe. It put the UE in a survival mode for the rest of its existence. The national leaders were determined to avoid initiatives that had any risks attached to them. This conservatism underlay a number of the major strategy disagreements that Bill Walsh was to experience throughout his career at UE. And this atmosphere was to contribute to the already paranoiac tendencies of its national president, C.S. Jackson.

Notes

1Doug Smith, Cold Warrior (St. John's 1997), 3.
2Bill Freeman, 1005: Political Life of a Local Union (Toronto 1982), 62.
3James Struthers, No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941 (Toronto 1982), 206.
4Struthers, No Fault of Their Own, 191.
5Cited in Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Working People (Ottawa 1980), 186.
6Freeman, 1005: Political Life in a Union, 68.
7Merrily Weisbord, The Strangest Dream (Montréal 1994), 175.
9 Smith, *Cold Warrior*, 104.
12 UE Brief to the Investigating Committee of the Canadian Congress of Labour, 14 April 1949.
13 Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour*, 100.
14 Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism, the Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1983), 222-3.
15 Whitaker and Marcuse, *Cold War Canada*, 316.