"When I joined the Young Communist League during the depression years more than 35 years ago," his statement began, "I believed that only socialism is the answer to depressions, race hatred, chauvinism, antisemitism, fascism and war — that socialism would open the door to a golden era for the people of the world, including me.

I believed it during the terrible defeats in Germany when the Nazis took over and crushed the Party, when the Popular Front in France was defeated, when the Spanish Republic was destroyed. I was shocked by all these events and many more, but I still believed it, and did so during the most confusing period of Munich, the Soviet pact with Nazi Germany. We were for the war in the first few days, that is, the war against Nazi Germany. Then we were against it, calling for the withdrawal of Canadian troops and defeat of our own bourgeoisie, then we were all-out for the war against Nazi Germany after Hitler crushed France and attacked the Soviet Union.

I believed in it when old bolsheviks were liquidated in the Soviet Union, many of them after making confessions of all kinds, others by simply disappearing. After all the top leaders of the CPSU condemned these people as betrayers, as agents of the capitalists and even as allies of the Nazis. And the party in Canada fully agreed with these purges — and we believed what our leaders told us. If I had doubts and reservations, I didn’t express them. After all, the enemies of the party were making capital out of these purges — and to express any doubt would be a mark of disloyalty. I did have doubts, but I didn’t express them — not even to my closest comrades. When anybody else, outside the party sought to engage me in discussions on these matters — I defended the party position, condemned those who had been condemned by the purges in the Soviet Union. And I did this in the post-war years too, when new purges took place, including so many people in the field, the writers, artists — the Jewish doctors, and so on.

It is not that there weren’t differences and debates and sometimes very sharp arguments on some questions, like the best way to fight evictions of
unemployed from their homes; what kind of unemployed organizations to set up; how to work within the trade unions and how to build them; attitudes towards the CCF; how to work within what we used to call the language organizations; the press; the youth and so on. In fact, we used to have endless discussions and arguments on such matters.

I had differences of opinion on such questions and others. And we'd argue them out. Sometimes I was convinced by the arguments of other comrades. Sometimes I wasn't. But the things we all agreed on — the basic things — were far more important than what we didn't agree on. And there was a feeling of comradeship, of crusading, of friendship — we were all in the same situation pretty well — pretty poor, and never too sure there would be meals the next day. But when a comrade had nothing, you put him up with you and shared what you had with him. You felt you belonged to something big and grand and that you shared these beliefs and feelings with others.

With regard to differences, even if you were not convinced, and a decision was made contrary to what you believed, you didn't consider this so important. After all, sometimes with the passage of time the matter would become clarified one way or another. Other times, with the passage of time, the issue became less important or not important at all. And anyway, the things that my comrades and I agreed on, were so much more weighty and so much more important than what we disagreed on — and the atmosphere was warm and friendly. And as long as that comradely atmosphere was there so you could discuss and argue out things with people you respected and loved — the other things didn't seem to matter so much.

Even in the internment camp with 60 or so Canadian communists locked up together for a long period of time. We were with each other, close together 24 hours a day, day after day. We would discuss all kinds of things, political, personal, the most intimate personal things and the most intimate thoughts — but nobody ever questioned the bigger things. Nobody ever expressed any doubts about the general position of the Canadian Party, and nobody expressed the least doubt about anything at all that was being done in the Soviet Union. Certainly I never participated in or heard of any such discussions. I felt that to do so would be treason. Mind you, I harboured in my mind some doubts about the purges, about all those who used to be regarded as wonderful people and who were later labeled as traitors and disgraced and executed. But you didn't express anything about it. I can't speak for others, of course, but I would be surprised if they didn't also feel the same way.

Even my best friend, Dick Steele, with whom I went to school together in Montreal, we worked together and studies together in the USA, we hitchhiked through Europe together and into the Soviet Union, we shared
and shared alike for many years. We joined the YCL and Party together. We became party organizers at the same time in Canada, and we still roomed together even though we were of course, assigned to different areas, we could talk about everything, and he was the warmest most dedicated man I ever knew as well as one of the most capable. No matter what problems there were, we could always discuss them and we both felt satisfied and improved as a result of these discussions. But even with Dick, we had no discussion on such things as the purges, except that we both took the very same position as others — that the purges were fully correct, fully justified, and absolutely necessary in the interests of keeping the party pure and strong and eliminating spies and enemies who had been uncovered through the vigilance of Stalin, the special party and state organs for the investigating and ferreting out of such enemies.

So, on questions like this, we fully agreed with the official position, or, if we had doubts, we certainly didn’t let anybody know, not even your closest friend. Not even your wife who was in the party with you. But we had differences on many other questions, some of them were not so important, but from the arguments you would think that the arriving at a correct decision would make all the difference as to whether we were going to erect the barricades in the revolutionary struggle this year, or would have to wait a lot longer. And although there were some I was closer to than others, and one or two I never learned to like, by and large, I felt a solidarity and friendship with all my comrades, and I had no doubts that they felt the same way to the collective and to me as part of the collective.

Mind you, two years in jail and internment camp, and almost three years in the army, as a soldier during most of the second front — especially during this period as a front line infantry man — the death of several of my closest friends in the fighting. All these things combined to bring my doubts closer to the surface. But my loyalty remained deep and I smothered my doubts, and considered it necessary to defend every position.

I think it was only after the fighting in Europe stopped in May 1945 that some of the comrades who survived and were stationed not too far from each other get together a couple of times, while waiting to be transferred to the Pacific front. The comrades, including me, began to talk about the need for a change in the Party in Canada. We had heard about the Liberal-Labour coalition that the Party was championing, and it didn’t sit well with us, although again we were all very reluctant to speak openly about our disagreement on this key line, while at the same time being very critical of other things about the Party about which we heard, or received letters, or gathered from some of the European comrades.

We had a sort of general idea that when we were back in Canada we would try to get the Party to convene us together where we could frankly and
openly state our dissatisfactions and our views, on many question. We tried, but we never did get such a meeting. Instead, many of the army veterans were brought together to a banquet — a big affair somewhere in Toronto, where we heard speeches praising us for our individual and collective accomplishments in the armed forces, and so on. Some of us spoke to this or that leading person of our dissatisfaction with this arrangement, but of course, we were now scattered, and that was the end of it. Some of these comrades are now out of the Party, some are still in.

Although there was hope for the new world, there was also a lot of cynicism. Personally I was a lot older and sadder man. My mother had died while I was in jail, my wife had died, my first wife, Anne Weir, shortly after. My very closest friends Dick Steel and Muni Erlich had been killed in the war, only a few years after other close friends had been killed in Spain — these names won't mean much to most of you, but they were wonderful people Jack Steele, Izzie Kupchik and Jakob Loch, Milton Rapaport — and these had been close personal friends as well as comrades. I wasn't the only one who had lost friends, of course, we were all in the same boat, more or less, and maybe we looked to each other for new friendships and new warmth. I don't know. But I do know, I shall never completely get over the deaths, as likely is also the situation with some of you too, I don't know. Those things aren't talked about.

Just as I was being demobilized from the Army, I was asked to do some work for UE in Hamilton. This was approved by the then National Organizer of the Party, and I came here in February 1946.

The Union was still very small then — a couple of hundred paid up members in Westinghouse, and a couple of other small plants were in the Union. Those were the days when the immediate post-war boom in union growth and militancy was taking place — it was still before Churchill's Fulton Missouri "iron curtain speech" which is generally regarded as the real beginning of the cold war.

My home was in Toronto and I was rooming in Hamilton. I spent my time here trying to build up the Union to preserve it for the big strikes that took place that summer. We also tried to recruit a few people into the Party — I must say, mainly on the basis of a militant union position in the first place, and to get allies in the internal fight in which one or two former party people were aligned with others in fighting against the leadership of the UE.

We were able to build things up inside the Union and to take an important part in the strike wave that occurred in Canada and in Hamilton. Those strikes, as you know, played a big part in the post war developments in the trade union movement. The labour movement generally marks the beginning of real growth and the break-through of unions as starting from
the winning of the Stelco strike in 1946 — and I think this is justified. And therefore the top leaders of steel were in general given credit for this great contribution — in spite of things they did later which were less popular. But what is known to very few people is how the Stelco strike was on the verge of being lost — and how it was a few union people, including a few party people who got together and decided on the bold moves that mobilized thousands of workers — closed the picket line, mobilized more thousands of people, including war veterans to defy the police — and thereby through this mass action, paved the way to winning the strike at Stelco, Firestone and Westinghouse, and the rest of the strikes in Canada at that time, and thus turned back the post-war boss offensive against the unions and gave the unions a great push forward.

As I said, I lived in Toronto and worked in Hamilton, and naturally I tried to get home whenever I could. I don’t know if it was ever discussed with the Local comrades that I would be working here. I don’t think it was, because it all happened so quickly. In fact, originally I was only supposed to work here for a couple of weeks to look into the UE situation here and give my opinions to CS Jackson, the top officer. You see, I was due to come to Hamilton to get my demobilization from the Army, and that’s how it came about.

Whether the comrades resented the fact that they were not consulted, I don’t know. Whether they resented that I didn’t spend much time in party work, I don’t know. In fact, there was some question as to whether I should be in a Hamilton unit or not since, as I said, my home was Toronto. In addition, I was trying to restore myself to civilian life, trying to do the big job to which I was assigned in the Union after being away from such work for years, trying to be a husband to my newly wed wife and a good stepfather to the young boys who orphaned by the death of Dick Steele — and likely I was very uncomfortable about some of the things bothering my mind that had come close to the surface during the war years and which I had hoped there would be some opportunity for discussing with the leading comrades in the party, along with some of the other comrades who were veterans of the war and some of whom also had serious questions. Whatever the reasons, I never felt any warmth from the top comrades here towards me. I felt like an outsider and felt resented, and there were a number of incidents then that helped to make me feel that way. On the other hand the comrades might have felt that I was keeping aloof — since I soon was aware that there were strong resentments between the top comrades here and the top officers of UE — and that I didn’t want to associate too closely here. I don’t know how much of this was involved. I know that I felt uncomfortable and hoped that things would improve and get ironed out.
During the next year or two after the strike, the work continued hectic. The Gouzenko trials had taken place, Fred Rose was arrested, other comrades had been put on trial as spies, the cold war was getting worse and worse here and in the world, comrades who had been elected to public office were being red-baited and defeated. I was up to my ears, as were other comrades, in fights within the union, trying to beat back the anti-communists forces and to build the union at the same time. The work was hard enough, that between it and my trips home, I was occupied full time. If I had differences, I always felt these could be argued out, and so far as the doubts on the bigger questions was concerned, I was trying to get to go to some Party School where I figured there would be some opportunity.

Well I did get to a Party school about that time. It was the only one I ever got to go to and it lasted for about 6 weeks or so, although I was taken out for a week or two to attend to some union work back here in Hamilton. Towards the end of the school we had interviews with the national leader of the Party, where we were to discuss anything we had in mind.

It was at that time I raised some of the problems that had been bothering me. I told how some of the other war veterans in the party had also had some things on their minds and had hoped for a session together with him where we could let our hair down — just say what was on our minds without worrying about whether this would be considered heresy if said under other circumstances. Such things as why World War II was first a people’s just war — and how we could get into that position before the working people of Canada — and about the Soviet German Pact. I don’t know how many other questions I raised, but such things as: these bothered me: In the 1920’s and 1930’s in the Soviet Union, the red army soldiers oath had been “For socialism and brotherhood of all making, I pledge my life even unto death...” But during World War II, and for sometime before this, I don’t remember, it was changed to “For my motherland, and so on.” And soldiers went into charges shouting for this motherland, for Stalin, and so on. How we had once prided ourselves on our internationalism, but during the War, we had come to condemn Germany and Germans and were impatient with anybody who sought to make any distinctions — and how had this come about. How we had applauded at the Atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — or had simply reported it without criticism.

As I said, I don’t know which of these I raised or if there were others too. I do know that I sought to make the point that while these things genuinely disturbed me and I wanted answers, that I believed in the main principles of a scientific marxist revolutionary socialism for Canada.

I think likely Tim said these were big questions and they couldn’t all be dealt with at the time, and likely he also dealt with some rights then and there, as well as with some others.
However I was startled a short time later when, in the period of criticism and self criticism that occurred at the conclusion of the school, I was severely reprimanded by the top officer of the party at the school, for having sought answers to these questions. Some of these questions, it was said, are still not resolved on the theoretical level by the International Communist movement, and here I was trying to get answers. Furthermore I hadn't accepted Tim's explanations, and this indicated I didn't believe in the top officer of the Party — maybe even I was calling him a liar, and so on, and so on.

Some of the other criticisms that this opened up, with respect to my tendency to overconfidence, to pride or vanity, were also made and had substance to them. But I was shocked that when finally I had an opportunity to voice some of the problems that had been bothering me under the most difficult conditions of party illegality, imprisonment, and warfare — I now sought answers, and wasn't content to forget them. It was the first time I had ever heard that such things were unresolved in the top circles of the International Communist movement. I hadn't even known they were being discussed.

This criticism of me was so acute and all-embracing that it rendered me quite unprepared and incapable of reacting. I found myself denying that I had disbelieved the top leader of the party, instead of insisting that it was not disloyal to seek answers to problems that had been bothering me.

In fact, after the school I became pretty sick, and had my first serious battle with an ulcerated condition. I think, I also became sort of intimidated and went into some kind of a shell. I guess I thought it better to continue to accept without question as I had in the old days, rather than to ask questions or raise doubts about what some obviously regarded as delicate matters that are not supposed to be spoken of. I remember thinking “Well, if these things are being discussed by the top echelons of communists in the world, then what’s wrong with me discussing them too, or asking questions about them.” I remember also thinking, that I’d better keep quiet about it, and just go on doing my work. So long as there could be debates on immediate day to day matters, so long as the atmosphere reasonably permitted this, it was good enough.

By the way, years later, sometime after the 20th Congress, the leading comrade who had made that devastating criticisms of me at the school, he visited me at home. He told me he had been wrong in what he did — that he had gone overboard in his characterization of me and that, as I recall, likely he too had been a product of the methods of work in the party that had been typical of the Stalin period which was exposed by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress. The comrade I’m talking about is Stanley Ryerson — and I always had a respect for him before that and certainly a greater respect and affection for him since then.
Not long after the Party school, since it looked as though my work would continue in Hamilton, and because of my health problem, and perhaps because the Hamilton leading committee wanted this — I don't really recall for sure — it was decided my family ought to move into Hamilton from Toronto. This we did in, I believe it was 1949, when Esther left her job in the National Office of UE, and moved to Hamilton with our two boys where we set up house in the east end of the city.

Now there was one other little incident flowing out of the school that is worth noting. I was given to understand that the characterizations or periods of criticisms were strictly confidential within the school and for the purpose of helping the person to overcome his shortcomings. I was therefore much surprised when in a meeting of the top people of the UE — that is the National Officers of the UE and some of the top staff people, all in the Party, the officers revealed they had been told about the characterization of me. Jackson let me know he agreed with the criticisms of me made at the school.

I think that should lead me into matters regarding the question of relationships within the UE, particularly during the past few years, because while these don't explain what happened that has brought about the present situation, they are part of the important background.

Just going back very briefly: In the internment camp where we had 60 to 70 communists, besides our prison work, we also had our own educationals, sing songs, we wrote and performed plays, some of the more talented people wrote songs, we played games like volleyball and we played cards and we shared food parcels, most of us did, when these were allowed in. All in all, we had good comradeship and conducted ourselves very well. One person with whom I had almost nothing to do was Jackson. He sort of kept to himself more than the others. I had known him a little in the mid 1930's when Dick Steele was in charge of Steel for the party, Jackson in charge of UE, and I was in charge of the rubber industry for the party. However, I hadn't had much to do with him.

I do know that I was only in the UE a very short time, when I knew he was antagonistic to me, or at least didn't like me. It was just small things, but they added up. Most of the time we had very little to do with each other, since my work pretty well kept me in the Westinghouse chain while he was more directly concerned with the GE chain as well as being national president.

We had a leading party group which functioned semi-officially within the union. It was called various names at various times, but it was generally made up of the three national officers, Jackson, Harris and Russell and a few of the key union representatives. It was at these meetings that we would look over the critical situations in the Union from the point of views, mainly
of where we were being attacked, and we would engage in a certain amount of collective work to plan and meet the offensive. Our work would usually be with respect to the Union, but sometimes it broadened out to include discussions on general campaigns of the party.

Sometimes the fights were very sharp and only the officers would take part and the outside staff men like myself and the others would keep quiet, no matter how much the officers tried to get us involved. Sometimes we would take part, but we would be sharply attacked by the top officer, so we would retreat into our shells again.

As a generalization, I would say, as long as the Union as a whole was under attack, we tended to get together and work together to beat off the attack. But when things were more quiet, things were not harmonious at all.

One thing that used to bother me most of all was that a person who had for some time been regarded as an excellent comrade working full time for the Union, sometimes he was held up as an example to the rest of us, all of a sudden we would be told that he was a no good son-of-a-gun — and I’m now using polite language. That he had always been a petty bourgeois; that he lacked guts; that he was only working for himself or with cliques; and so on and so on. Usually we were told this after the fellow was let off the staff, usually we never saw the fellow again.

Now a lot of these people had been in the Party before coming on UE staff, but most of them, almost all of them, usually were out of the party about the same time or not long after going off UE staff. (John Wigdor, Len Harris, Jack Kennedy, Jim Napier, Jeff Hurley, Bill Campbell, Jack Taylor, Pete Hunter, Ellis Blair — who is in the Party now. And there were others.) Sometimes we were told the guy had gone off his rocker. Sometimes we were told he was sick. The odd one was severely attacked but later we were told it’s OK and he is OK now, and he remained on staff, like Jack Bettes, Bobby Ward, and so on.

It was very unusual for anybody to speak up about these people, to defend them, even though they had previously been regarded as such good people. I personally did speak up a few times, but not too strongly I must admit. 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 so many of the people in the Soviet union and later in other of the socialist countries who were condemned and often executed, and very few if any people stood up for them, or if they did so, it was not very strongly. Maybe some of these people did turn, maybe some were too sick to continue — but the point is, we didn’t know anything except what we were told, as a rule, and all kinds of people formerly considered excellent were now considered no good and let out — on the basis of the say-so of a top officer.
I'm going ahead of my story now, but I just want to say that when I left the UE staff a little more than two years ago, whether you say I quit or was fired, Party people didn't question me either. For a long time not a single Party person asked me why I was no longer on staff, or what I intended to do for a living, or could they be of some help. Quite a few progressive people asked me and some offered me suggestions as to work, and some told me they could lend me money if I needed it, which I didn't, a number of other union people approached me the same way to find out what happened, and to ask what I intend to do, or to offer help in some way. All in all, there were about 40 people either phoned, or dropped into my place, or sent me a note. But you know, none of them were Party people. And this bothered me. It made me think that we in the Party are so accustomed to not asking questions when a member is set aside — of just taking some leading persons word for it, that it extends right to the kind of situations I described earlier and it extended to me in the first period after my separation from UE.