

Research Report No. 64

A Noble Cause Betrayed... but Hope Lives On

**Pages from a Political Life:
Memoirs of a Former Ukrainian Canadian Communist**

by John Boyd

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press
University of Alberta
Edmonton 1999

Occasional Research Reports

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Contents

Part 1: My 38 Years (1930-1968) of Working Full Time in the Communist Movement	7
Part 2: Why I Left the Communist Party (My Letter to the Central Executive Committee)	43
Part 3: More Questions about Ukraine and Ukrainians	46
Part 4: My Reply to the Denunciatory Statement of the AUUC National Executive Committee	64
Part 5: More Questions about the Communist Party	68
Part 6: My Report on the 1968 Events in Czechoslovakia	72



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Preface

The following pages are in lieu of a political autobiography. They are, in fact, an edited and upgraded transcript of a series of interviews I gave at the end of 1996 as part of a nation-wide project sponsored by the Cecil-Ross Society. The project consisted of taped interviews with former members of the Communist Party of Canada and people who in one way or another were associated with the Party. By the end of 1998, some 450 such interviews had been recorded.

The Cecil-Ross Society is a group of former members of the Communist Party, who, after they left the Party in December 1992, constituted themselves as trustees of the assets that at one time belonged to the Party.

The interviews were conducted and taped by Rick Stow, a broadcaster, journalist and labour historian. I have rearranged some of the questions for better continuity and have added the text of three relevant documents.

I am grateful to Mr. Stow and the Cecil-Ross Society for providing me with a copy of the tapes and to my son Zane for transcribing them, thus enabling me to edit them. I am especially grateful to my long-time dear friend and colleague, Olga Dzatko, for the excellent job she did in copy-editing the first edition, which, together with the correction of several errors of fact, made it possible to produce this second, revised and much improved, edition.

If time and my health permit, I hope one day to put together a more extensive version of my memoirs, which would very likely incorporate much of what is on these pages. Meanwhile, I am publishing some of my recollections — and thoughts contained in this form — essentially covering the part of my life that was spent in the Communist movement — for some of my former colleagues and friends and others who may be interested.

— John Boyd

Part 1

My 38 Years (1930-1968) of Working Full Time in the Communist Movement

*Q.: Let's start with some of the sociological questions.
Where and when you were born?*

I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, on January 26, 1913, into the family of John and Helen Boychuk; I was the first-born. My maternal grandfather, Todor Popowich, came to Canada with his family in 1899 from the province of Bukovyna in the region of Western Ukraine that was then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He came with his second wife (his first wife died while giving birth to my mother). My mother was then five years old; her brother was ten.

My grandfather was a tall, handsome and strong man who had served in the Austrian cavalry. He was given a homestead of 160 acres and worked very hard at clearing the land until 1918, when he was stricken by rheumatoid arthritis. He spent 25 years in bed crippled by the disease — they didn't have penicillin or antibiotics in those days — and died in 1943 at the age of 83. There were no males in the family, so the farm had to be run by his wife and four daughters. They lived in poverty all their lives and never ever reached a well-off status.

My father came to Canada in 1908 at the age of 23. He came from the Western Ukrainian province of Halychyna (Galicia), then likewise a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. To work his way to Canada he worked in a coal mine in Germany, so when he landed in Canada they sent him to work in a coal mine in Hosmer, B.C., where he worked for two years.

By the way, Todor Popowich was not related to Matthew Popowich, the Ukrainian Communist leader. Just as my father, John Boychuk, was not related to the John Boychuk who was a leading Ukrainian Communist in Toronto and one of the eight Communist leaders imprisoned in the 1930s. Boychuk and Popowich are common Ukrainian names. My mother's maiden name was Skoreyko; there was a Skoreyko in Alberta who

was elected as a Liberal Member of Parliament in the 1920s and was apparently a distant cousin.

My father active in politics

My father was very active in politics all his life. Back in the old country his parents managed to send him to school, and while he didn't get much beyond the elementary grades, he did get to read and write well. During his teen years he used to read newspapers to the illiterate peasants in the village library and became involved in radical peasant party politics and the struggle against national and economic oppression. So when he came to Canada, he was already quite politically minded. In Hosmer, he was active in the miners' union and helped to organize a Socialist Party branch.

In 1911, he left Hosmer and came to Edmonton, where he and his cousin, John Semeniuk, opened a grocery store. They were doing fairly well, but in 1912 there was an economic recession and they went bankrupt. But he got to like working as a store clerk and got a job in a general store in the town of Vegreville, which served the local population and farmers in the surrounding area. The store was a co-op run by Peter Zvarich, who later became a prominent leader in the Ukrainian community. Father was a very good clerk, so Zvarich kept him on in spite of his socialist politics.

An ardent proselytizer

He was an ardent proselytizer. He would wrap up a farmer's purchases in a socialist newspaper, then talk about the articles with him on his next visit. Indeed, my father was a proselytizer all his life; he spent all his spare time reading, agitating and selling left-wing literature and did so right up until his final years.

In Edmonton and Vegreville he was very active in the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, often attending regional and national conventions in Edmonton and

Winnipeg. Incidentally, William Rodney in his book, *Soldiers of the International*, wrote that the John Boychuk in Toronto had been active in the mining town of Hosmer, B.C. He mixed him up with my father. The other Boychuk was a tailor.

My mother was a very strong-willed woman. Since my father spent a great deal of time in politics, she had much to do with keeping the family together. In the very early years, before we moved to Ontario in the mid-1920s, she was quite active politically: during World War I she helped to distribute anti-war leaflets illegally. But after the 1930s she ceased to be active, except for taking part in some of the cultural and social activity of the Ukrainian community. She wasn't alienated against the movement on political grounds but because my father's involvement caused him to give less time to the family than she thought he should have. He worked very hard, both at earning a living and at outdoor jobs around the house. But he did not spend much time with the family.

In politics from childhood

As you can see, I was exposed to politics at a very early age. My father and mother used to get me to recite poems, in Ukrainian, when I was only five or six. They always picked radical and socialist poems, so I imbibed them even before I knew what many of the words meant. I recall two coloured posters I saw in our home when I was about five. One showed ordinary Russian workers and peasants with ropes tied to a statue of the tsar, which they were pulling down. When I asked my father what it meant, he said it depicted the February Revolution in 1917, when the people first rose up against the tsar. The irony is that some 40 years later I saw a news photo from Budapest showing Hungarians pulling down a statue of Stalin.

The other poster showed a coloured painting featuring four huge plates. On the top plate stood the Russian tsar and his family and entourage. It was held up by members of the aristocracy standing on a slightly larger plate, which in turn was held up by a larger group made up of bankers, merchants, manufacturers, landlords and leaders of the church. That plate was held up by a still larger group of teachers, doctors, nurses, clergy and other professionals. At the very bottom, on the ground, holding up the entire structure, were scores of ordinary men, women, and children, grimy workers and peasants. My father and mother explained that to me also. It was my introduction to the class system of

society. So as early as five and six I became aware that the rich were supported by the poor.

Father jailed and “exiled”

During World War I, my father was very active in the anti-war movement, especially among the farmers, for which he was arrested and sentenced in 1918 to three years in prison. I remember visiting him in jail when I was about five, his hands manacled to a chair. A few months into his sentence, Matthew Popowich came to Vegreville from Winnipeg, together with Joe Knight, one of the leaders of the Socialist Party in the United States. They hired a lawyer and got my father off on a suspended sentence, but with the proviso that he leave Alberta, which meant he was exiled from Alberta. He left his family in Vegreville and went to Vancouver, where he found work and spent all his spare time peddling socialist literature.

In the 1920s, besides belonging to the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, my father also joined the “Wobblies” (the Industrial Workers of the World). To this day I remember seeing the red IWW membership card and asking him to explain to me what it was.

My father and my mother didn't get along too well in their personal lives. They split up many times, but got together again mainly for the sake of the children, which was the norm in those days. So when my father went to Vancouver, my mother took the children and went to Fernie, B.C., to work as a cook and general housekeeper for a group of bachelor miners living in a co-op.

Started school at seven

It was in Fernie, in 1920, that I first went to school, starting Grade 1 at the age of seven. I never went to a kindergarten, or any pre-school program, but I had been taught to read and write in both Ukrainian and English by my parents, so I was able to cope. I stayed in that school for only three or four months, because by then my father had come back from Vancouver and the family moved to the village of Lavoy, not far from Vegreville, where my father got a job as a clerk in a general store. We had a small home across the street from the store, with a cow and a few chickens, and lived there till 1923, when my father lost his job. Unable to find any work there, he took a cattle train east. When he got to Kapuskasing, Ontario, he learned that a paper mill was being built there, so he stopped

and was hired as a labourer.

When that job was finished he went to Montreal. He didn't have much luck there but found out that jobs were available in the town of Thorold, in the Niagara Peninsula, where they were digging a new Welland Canal and where there were three paper mills. He did get a job in one of the paper mills and then asked the family to join him. So in late fall of 1923, my mother took her four children — myself, my sister Natalie, my brother Ronny and my brother Terry, who was still an infant — and traveled by train across already snow-bound prairie provinces and down through Ontario. I vaguely recall that it was a pretty rough trip, in one of those old colonial coaches with wooden seats, that lasted four days.

In Thorold, I had to resume my studies in a new school. And this is where I had my first experience with discrimination. While the town had quite a few Ukrainians and Italians, who lived largely in separate neighbourhoods, almost like ghettos, its population was largely of Anglo-Saxon origin. And although I lived in the Ukrainian part of the town, I was assigned to a school that was attended almost exclusively by children of Anglo-Saxon descent, and while I was a very good student — I stood first in class every year and every term — socially I wasn't accepted. Because of my ethnic name and my father's reputation as a socialist — "Bolshevik" was the term used then — I was ostracized by some of the teachers and most of the students. Later, when I went to high school, I felt that prejudice even more.

Elected branch president at 13

But I was also very active beyond the school. I attended Ukrainian language classes and learned to play the mandolin and violin (I recall playing Beethoven's *Minuet in G* on the violin at a concert in front of about 50 or 60 people). Through all my teen years I was the leading player in the mandolin orchestra and leading male dancer in the Ukrainian folk dance group.

These activities took place in the local Ukrainian Labour Temple, a community centre run by the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA). After World War II, the name was changed to the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC).

In 1926, when the ULFTA organized a youth section branch, I joined and became its first chairperson. At that time there was also a Communist Party branch there and its leaders were also told to organize

a branch of the Young Communist League. They did and it was made up entirely of Ukrainians.

Because I was politically very keen and active, they wanted me to join also. But I was only 13, and the YCL constitution said you had to be 16. So they took the matter up with Stewart Smith, who was then national secretary of the YCL, and he came down from Toronto and ruled that an exception be made in my case. So I joined both the ULFTA Youth Section and the YCL and was active in politics and in the cultural field. I also did very well in my high school studies and even played quarterback on the school's football team.

In the spring of 1930, the high-school authorities decided to organize a unit of military cadets and made it compulsory for all the boys to join. When I said I didn't want to join, it caused quite a hubbub. The school principal called me in and I said I had no choice, that if I continued to refuse I would be expelled, even though I was one of the top students. I had decided to take a stand and make a "cause célèbre" of it, but it never got that far.

To political school at 17

By sheer coincidence, the ULFTA was then organizing what they called a Higher Educational Course, but really a national political school, to be held in Winnipeg. In subsequent years these ULFTA courses were only partly political and mostly cultural (teaching Ukrainian language and music to prepare teachers for their Ukrainian schools), but this first one was mainly political. The ULFTA branches across the country were asked to nominate students and the Thorold branch suggested me. Although I was only 17, I was accepted. So midway through Grade 11, early that spring, I left school. Throughout my early high-school years I had my heart set on eventually going to university, but I also knew that if I stood my ground I would be expelled. At the same time, the prospect of going to a political school appealed to me very much. In retrospect, maybe it was the wrong thing to do; I don't know. But it definitely changed my life.

Going to Winnipeg also meant leaving home, most likely for good. It was my first trip away from home, but fortunately I was accompanied by John Navis and John Stokaluk, who were traveling from Toronto to Winnipeg at the time and decided to take me along. The school was held in Parkdale, not far from Winnipeg, and lasted six months. It was led by Matthew Popowich. The curriculum included Ukrainian grammar,

history and geography and, of course, political economy and Marxism. It wasn't Marxism-Leninism yet, that came a few years later, a concoction of Stalin. But it did include some works by Marx and Lenin and books on history and political economy.

To give you another example of how early I was involved in political ideas, when I was only 15 years old I read Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*, in Ukrainian, and Engels's *Origin of the Family* in English. I was so taken by what I found in them that then and there I decided that I would spend my life working for socialism. My father was then subscribing to and peddling *Inprecor*, the monthly bulletin of the Communist International, which carried articles and speeches by such prominent world Communist leaders as Bukharin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Ercoli, Thaelmann and Palme Dutt and reports on revolutionary movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. I was fascinated and ate it up. That's why I jumped at the chance to go to a political school. Attending that six-month course further strengthened my resolve to become active in the Communist movement, at that time the Ukrainian sector of it.

Now I should mention something that happened at the conclusion of that course. After the course was finished, the leaders of the ULFTA decided, obviously in agreement with the leaders of the Communist Party in Moscow and Kyiv, that they would send four of its graduates for advanced study in Ukraine — three-year courses in politics, as well as Ukrainian language, literature and history. Without my knowing about it, they had chosen Peter Prokop, Tom Chopowick, Bill Zinkevich and myself. But they first had to have their decision approved by the Party leadership.

The Party says "No"

When they did, they got a telegram from Bill Kashtan, who was then national secretary of the Young Communist League, saying I should not be included, that I was still very young and should get more experience in the movement before being sent abroad. When Navis and Popowich replied that they didn't agree and insisted on including me, Stewart Smith and Tim Buck came to Winnipeg soon after and put additional pressure on them. This time they didn't use the argument that I was inexperienced; they said they wanted me for work "in the Anglo-Saxon field." And they added that "he'll get his chance for political education later; we'll send him to the Lenin School in Moscow." The Ukrains-

nian leaders finally gave in. They proposed to send Michael Korol instead, but the Party leaders said they wanted him for Anglo-Saxon work too. So then they finally settled on Michael Seychuk.

I knew nothing about this at the time. Nobody had discussed it with me. I found out about it much later from John Navis. It was quite an eye-opener for me on the methods the party leaders used, how they shifted and moved people around without even discussing the matter with them.

By freight train to Toronto

After I completed the course, I took a freight train to Toronto. This was in 1930 and there weren't very many unemployed traveling the freight trains as yet, so the railway police were quite active in trying to stop them from doing so. But there were a lot of chaps we used to call "hobos," drifters who had been "riding the rods" throughout the 1920s, who taught us younger fellows a lot about how to ride the freight cars, how to board them properly "on the run" outside the railway yards, how to avoid the railway cops, and so on. For me, the trip was quite an adventure. I recall how on the first day, just as we were approaching Fort William, now Thunder Bay, I watched in horror as a young fellow, trying to catch a speeding train, slipped and fell and had his legs cut off at the thighs. It was a shocking experience. I made two more such trips in the next two years.

National youth secretary

When I got to Toronto, I didn't go back to visit my folks in Thorold. I decided to stay in Toronto and look for a job. I got one in a cap factory owned by Sam Harris, a party member, and I bunked (actually shared a bed) for a couple of months with Nick Oleniuk, an active Ukrainian party member. I was active briefly in the branch of the Youth Section of the ULFTA, in cultural activity and a gym class, and also joined a YCL branch. This was in the winter of 1930-31. Early in 1931, at the request of the ULFTA leadership, I went to Winnipeg to take over the editorship of the Ukrainian youth magazine *Boiova molod* (Militant Youth) and that summer, at the ULFTA convention in July, I was elected national secretary of the Youth Section.

It was at that convention, in 1931, that the Party insisted that the ULFTA make a big turn in its policies and orientation, "a turn to the class struggle," as it was

called, about which I'll have more to say later.

I was national secretary and editor for only two years. And thereby hangs another story. Early in 1933, it was decided that I should make a national tour, visiting most of the Youth Section branches so as to become more acquainted with the organization. So in mid-January of that year, just before my 20th birthday, I started the western part of my tour from Regina, then continued to Moose Jaw, Saskatoon and points beyond.

Incidentally, it was during my visit to the rural Saskatchewan community of Kleczkowski (its name has since changed) that I first met Bill Kardash, who was then an active member of the ULFTA Youth Section and of the Farmers' Unity League. He wasn't a Communist Party member yet, but he joined soon after and subsequently was sent to the Lenin School in Moscow. From there he went to Spain to join the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, where he lost a leg, and on his return to Canada became one of the Party leaders in Manitoba. Our paths didn't cross much after that first visit, except at Party conventions and central committee meetings.

It was on that tour, while visiting the city of Lethbridge in Alberta, that I met Gladys Kuchurian, the daughter of a Ukrainian coal miner and his wife, both of whom were active Communists. I fell in love with her, truly "at first sight," and promised to come back to see her. Miraculously, because of the way events subsequently developed, four months later I did go to Alberta and did see her and we got married.

Speaker at May Day demo

My tour of Western Canada ended at the end of April and immediately on my return to Winnipeg I was asked to be one of the speakers at that year's May Day demonstration. Some fifteen thousand people assembled in the city's Market Square. This was before loudspeakers came into being, so the speakers spoke from three separate trucks in different parts of the square. On the truck with me was Joe Forkin, the Communist alderman, who spoke on behalf of the Party; I spoke from the Young Communist League and Norman Penner from the Young Pioneers.

After May Day, I continued with the eastern part of my tour, starting in Kenora, through Fort William and Port Arthur, and winding up in Toronto and Montreal. In Montreal there was a Young Communist League convention at the time and there I learned that the Party and YCL leadership had decided, again without discuss-

ing it with me beforehand, that I should no longer be National Secretary of the Youth Section, and instead be the YCL organizer in Alberta. And this just after I had got to really know the Youth Section by putting in two years of work and making an extensive tour of its branches! So back I went to the ULFTA convention held that July, resigned my position as National Secretary of the Youth Section and proceeded to Alberta. Misha Korol was elected in my place. And this after the Party leaders had said they wanted him to work in the "Anglo-Saxon field."

Inspired by Communist idea

Q.: When did your parents first hear about the Party after it was formed in 1921, when did you hear about it, and what was the attitude in your family to its formation?

My father joined right away, in Alberta. When he came to Ontario in 1923, he joined the local branch in Thorold. And I, as I said earlier, joined the Young Communist League in 1926 at the age of 13. To me, already at that age, the Communist International was the thing. I had great hopes for the Communist Party. It was only later that I began to see some of the Party's negative aspects, especially its rigidity and disallowance of dissent. I didn't see it because I thought that democratic centralism was okay. During those early years I was very enamoured of the movement, as was my father. It was all part of the euphoria of those days. At May Day demonstrations we carried banners with slogans that we thought would attract people to join. At the time, I didn't see how narrow and unrealistic many of those slogans were.

Move to "Bolshevization"

Q.: I suppose if you took a historical reading of that period, it was sort of like the post-Trotsky "Bolshevization plan" that Stalin initiated in the Soviet Party. And Stewart Smith, after he came back from the Lenin School in the late 1920s, was one of the agents charged with instituting a Canadian version of it, was he not?

I have painful feelings about those changes. My first encounter with them was in 1931. As I told you earlier, when I came back from the ULFTA's six-month course in Winnipeg in 1930, I lived briefly with Nick Oleniuk, a very bright, understanding and compassion-

ate man who had been a member of the illegal Communist Party in the part of Western Ukraine that was under Romanian rule and came to Canada after he was threatened with imprisonment for his activities. He had been a medical student but had to leave without graduating. He was also a very able actor and drama director in the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Toronto. Because he was politically very active, he joined the Communist Party soon after he came to Canada. Early in the 1930s, during the big debate in the Party as to whether Stalin or Trotsky was right, he and several other members of the ULFTA sided with Trotsky; the group included William Bosovich, a leading member of the ULFTA branch in Toronto. When the Party expelled Maurice Spector, the leader of the Trotskyist faction, the Ukrainian group that sided with him was expelled also.

A shocking action

Within days of their expulsion from the Party, at the direction of the party fraction, a meeting of the ULFTA branch was called and all the members who had been expelled from the Party were also expelled from the ULFTA. In retrospect, it was a horrible thing to do but it's an example of how the Party operated. To me it was quite a shocker at the time. I was saddened by the fact that Oleniuk and the others, all brilliant and active people, were no longer in the organization. But I accepted it, believing that the Party leaders knew what was right. Oleniuk and I remained friends, however, even though our paths did not cross often. Years later, after my return from Czechoslovakia, we resumed a very warm and close friendship.

This was the time when there was a hardening of the Party line. It came on orders from Moscow and was immediately implemented in the Party branches, in the Party-led trade unions, in the ethnic organizations, and throughout the Party's policies. It was also at this time that the Party leaders began referring to the Social-Democrats as "social fascists," and the CCF became the "enemy."

I recall how in Calgary in 1933, at a big rally of the unemployed in the local arena, Harvey Murphy referred to the CCF leaders as the "Cocofeds." It was his way of mocking them. Instead of finding ways of cooperating with them and trying to win them over as allies in the fight against capitalism, there was a denigration of the CCF as " betrayers of the working class." I recall how it bothered me during election campaigns to hear CCF candidates — for example, A. A. Heaps, in

Winnipeg — denounced in much the same way as the Tories and Liberals were. Although I accepted it as Party policy, I wasn't comfortable with it. I often inwardly squirmed when there were violent attacks on individuals like J. S. Woodsworth, M. J. Coldwell and T. C. Douglas. It was only in 1935, after the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, that a shift in tactics came about, which I welcomed.

Ethnic groups were Party's base

Q.: What were the largest ethnic groups in the Party in the early 1930s?

Ironically, the ethnic composition of the Canadian Party's membership was, at the same time, both its strength and its weakness. Its strength was that from its very beginning it had an immediate base made up of Ukrainian, Finnish and Jewish immigrants, many of whom came to this country either as socialists or radicals. Most of the Ukrainians in the Party also belonged to the ULFTA, later the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians; the Finns belonged to the Finnish Organization of Canada, and the Jews to the Labour League, later the United Jewish People's Order. They were the base of the Party, in that order: the Ukrainians were the largest group, the Finns next, then the Jews. There was only a handful of Anglo-Saxons, most of them British immigrants, very few Canadian-born. Many of them were in the leadership, others were very active and dedicated rank-and-file members. The foreign-born provided the Party with both a financial and an organizational base: they donated generously and helped to collect funds, distributed leaflets, attended meetings and did numerous ordinary tasks.

Many of them were active builders of the steel-workers, autoworkers and other industrial unions. Because of language difficulties, few of them rose to leadership in these unions, but they were very active rank-and-filers. Peter Krawchuk, in his book, *Our History: The Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Movement in Canada, 1907-1991*, cites how in Windsor there was a branch of the ULFTA made up entirely of auto workers. But this wasn't duplicated anywhere else in the country. Most of them were eventually fired and blacklisted for their activity, some were deported, and the rest became unemployed. Many of these were active in the big unemployed movement that mushroomed in the 1930s.

But this was also the Party's weakness, because it

began to rely on this base to the point where it wasn't giving enough attention to the native Canadians — I don't mean the Aboriginals, but the native-born Canadians of Anglo-Saxon descent and the French Canadians. This segment of the population was sadly neglected. The Party leaders often spoke of the need to work in what they called the "Anglo-Saxon" field — but it was never really an all-out effort; invariably they took the easier route and relied on the Ukrainians, Finns and Jews. It also gave a negative image of the Party to many Canadians.

I remember my close friend Bert Whyte — I'll mention later how he figured in my life — telling me how he felt when he first came to Toronto from British Columbia in the mid-1930s, after a stint in the so-called "relief camps" for single unemployed men. Apparently, while he was in those camps, some old-timer had "sown the seeds of socialism" in his mind. Inspired by his new-found purpose in life, he came to Toronto, hoping the Party could use his skills as a journalist (he had been a reporter on the *Kingston-Whig Standard*). Years later he told me: "My God, John, when I first came to Toronto and attended several Party meetings, I found that it was all Ukrainians, Finns and Jews, and a few Limeys. I almost said, 'To hell with it!' but I was gripped with the idea of socialism." So he stayed and became very active.

In Party's image

Then the Party made the mistake around 1930 — again on orders from the Comintern — of making the ethnic organizations under its leadership very much like the Party, with much the same discipline. For example, if a member of the ULFTA (and in the early days of the AUUC) didn't come to meetings or wasn't very active, often somebody from the party fraction would go to that member and in a reprimanding tone ask: "How come you're not coming to meetings?" It was this kind of attitude and approach that eventually drove many people out of the ethnic organizations.

There is also the fact that a CCFer, or later an NDPer, couldn't really have belonged to the ULFTA and later the AUUC. Not because there was anything in the constitution preventing it. It's just that if he were to have, let us say, criticized the Soviet Union or condemned Stalin's policies, he would have been ostracized. And my father would probably have been among the first to ask for his expulsion. There was a very rigid pro-Soviet, pro-Communist atmosphere within the

ethnic organizations generated by the dedicated Party members in those organizations. It started around 1931 and by the end of that decade became almost an obsession.

Changed my name in 1933

Q.: So did you indeed take the assignment of working toward building the Party among the Anglo-Saxons?

Yes, for a while, in 1933, when I was made organizer of the Young Communist League in Alberta. That is when I took on the name Boyd (I changed it legally in 1941). I did it at the suggestion of the Party leaders, as did many other active Ukrainian party members: John Vyviersky became John Weir, Tom Chopowick became Tom Chapman, Dan Chomitsky of Winnipeg became Dan Holmes and Joe Bilinsky of Sudbury became Joe Billings. His son is Greg Billings. When I became organizer of the Young Communist League in Alberta, it was supposed to be for Anglo-Saxon work. The irony is that the Party membership in Alberta was about 90 percent Ukrainian. (There were a few Finns around in Sylvan Lake). It was the same in Saskatchewan.

This was a time of big unemployed struggles in Alberta. Families fighting for "relief," or what we now call welfare. Big demonstrations and mass protest meetings. And some Anglo-Canadians did join the Party. There was the Rankin family, which was very active. There was John O'Sullivan, a delightful old-timer, who had been a socialist in Ireland. He helped to recruit some members. It was a tough battle. I recall one incident while I was YCL organizer in Calgary. There was this bright young man who was ticked off against the system, but was an ardent Catholic. I had many arguments and discussions with him and finally did convince him to join the YCL. But he didn't stay long. The image of the Party was not one that was exactly conducive to the Anglo-Saxons, to the native-born Canadians. At a YCL meeting of, let's say, ten members, seven would be children of Ukrainian party or ULFTA members and three would be of Anglo-Saxon origin. There was the feeling that it was a movement of foreigners, so it was an uphill battle all the way.

Difficult days

Q.: How many hours a week would you say you put in

on a job like that?

Not many. Advocating left-wing ideas was never easy in this country, so it wasn't a 40- or 50-hour a week job. And most of the time I didn't get paid. There was nothing to pay me with. I had just got married that summer. It was 1933. At first I left my wife at her home in Lethbridge, while I went to Calgary to do my job as an organizer. She subsequently joined me in Calgary so we could live together. Things were rough for us financially, so her father and mother helped us out for quite a while by sending us food (mainly vegetables and bread) from Lethbridge. At one point, however, it got so bad that my wife had to go and stay with her parents in Lethbridge, where she got a part-time job teaching a mandolin orchestra.

In Calgary, meanwhile, things got really rough. I recall one incident that might give you an idea of the conditions I had to work under. One day I was standing on the corner of 8th Avenue and Centre Street (that's like Queen and Yonge in Toronto) and perhaps because I hadn't had any breakfast and because the noon-day sun hit me, I fainted. Which caused a bit of a stir in the Party. At that time Harvey Murphy and John Stokaluk were both living quite well on union salaries. So some Party members said, "Hey, how come you guys are doing okay and here's the YCL organizer who doesn't have enough to eat?" After that things improved a lot. Money was found to pay me. I also became a bit bolder in asking for help.

I lose my shyness

Q.: Where did that money come from? From Party funds? From the miners' union?

I believe Stokaluk and Murphy found the money. The Party certainly didn't have any.

Let me explain what I meant when I said I became a bit bolder in asking for help. I was on the shy side in my younger years, but after that episode I lost a lot of that shyness. I knew many Ukrainians in Calgary — families like the Chitrenkys, Wusyks, Skulskys, Kizemas and others — so I explained to them that I was getting only eight dollars a week, if and when that was available, and asked them if they could help by having me over for supper once in a while. They all gladly did.

I recall another odd experience. At one point that year the Party tried to organize a strike in the Burns meat-packing plant in Calgary, which turned into a real

schemozzle. The Party had only three or four members working in the plant, so it decided to get all the unemployed Party members (as well as a few who were not in the Party) to help out: to distribute leaflets at the plant gate and beef up the picket line. The strike was called, but on the morning of the strike no leaflets and no picket line! What happened was that on the evening before the strike, all of us fellows who were going to participate gathered in a small hall. There was some drinking and shooting the breeze, then at bedtime all lay down on sleeping bags or blankets and set the alarm clock for 5:00 a.m. so that we could be at the plant gate for six. But something went wrong and the alarm clock didn't go off. We woke up at eight o'clock, far too late for the picket line, which was a painful lesson for all of us about responsibility.

While in Calgary as a YCL organizer, I also did some work with the Ukrainians in the cultural field: giving lectures, leading discussion groups and the like. I also traveled to Edmonton, Lethbridge and some of the rural centres.

Editor of *Young Worker*

My assignment in Alberta didn't last long; one year to be exact. In the fall of 1934, I was asked to come to Toronto to take over the editorship of the *Young Worker*. Stanley Ryerson, who had just graduated from the Sorbonne, was editing it for a while, but the Party wanted him for more important work. So they asked me to take over. I had been an editor of a Ukrainian youth magazine in Winnipeg, so I guess they thought I'd be able to do the job. That, of course, started a whole new chapter in my life; from then on I was an editor for most of my time in the Party.

I came to Toronto in September, 1934, and my wife followed a few months later, in the spring of 1935. But 1935 was the year the Seventh Congress of the Communist International had met, as a result of which there were some important shifts in party policies. In attitude towards the CCF, for example. Not basic, really, but for public consumption at least. It was also the year when the Canadian Youth Congress was organized.

One of the things the Party tried to do was to transform the *Young Worker* from an official organ of the YCL to a broader publication. We tried to get the CCYM (Canadian Commonwealth Youth Movement — the CCF's youth wing) to be involved. Murray Cotterill was their representative.

Q.: I understand Cotterill later became a PR and advance man for Charlie Millard. What's your assessment of Cotterill in the period you worked with him? And what indication might there have been of a subsequent shift to the opportunist duties? Was he a careerist? Or what?

Yes, he did come across as an arrogant sort of know-it-all. I suppose there was a careerist in there somewhere. He played along with the idea of getting together with the Communists to put out a left-wing magazine, but that didn't last long. The truth is he didn't trust us and we didn't trust him. It was a somewhat artificial effort to carry through the Comintern's Seventh Congress line of building a united front. But I think it was a tongue-in-cheek exercise for both sides. I only met Cotterill twice while we were planning the magazine we called *Advance*. We produced only two issues of it and then it fizzled out. It was replaced by *New Advance*, which was edited by Robert Laxer, and that didn't last long, either. Eventually, another more successful magazine, *Challenge*, was launched and it made a serious effort to broaden its appeal to young people.

I formally join the Party

In 1935 I formally joined the Communist Party. That was also the year that the Party launched a daily newspaper, the *Daily Clarion*, with Leslie Morris as editor, and I was asked to join the staff. Which was quite a step up for me. The staff included: Ed Cecil-Smith, who later joined the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in Spain; William Brown Forbes, who left the Party at the outbreak of the war and became editor of the magazine *Editor and Publisher* and a highly respected figure among Canadian journalists; Carl Dair, who eventually became Canada's most renowned typographer-designer; Bert Whyte, who was a Party journalist for most of his life, chiefly in Beijing and Moscow; Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon, who later co-authored the book *The Scalpel, the Sword*; Mike Fenwick, who later left the Party and became an organizer for the Steelworkers' Union; Jack Smaller, who became the owner of a small steel company; Beatrice Ferneyhough; Edna Clark, wife of Jack Clark, one-time editor of *The Furrow*; and others.

Before long, the *Daily Clarion* fizzled out and was reduced to a weekly. Whyte and I stayed on the weekly right up until after the war broke out in 1939. We were

the last two editors, and in the final weeks played cat-and-mouse with the detectives who were coming around with orders to close the paper. Without showing up at the office, we would turn the copy over to the workers at Eveready Printers, who were mostly Party members, and in that way put out a couple of issues before it was eventually banned. This was the time when the infamous Comintern order came, asking the Party to change its attitude to the war.

I am sent to Winnipeg

After the *Clarion* was closed down, the Party's underground leadership ordered my wife and me to go to Winnipeg, where I was assigned to work for the People's Co-operative. But I didn't know, until we got to Winnipeg, that they wanted us to live in a house in south Winnipeg — far from north Winnipeg, which was the Communist enclave — and that the house would be used as one of the headquarters for the Party's underground work and for illegal drop-off addresses. We shared the house with Margaret, former mate of James Litterick, then the Manitoba Party leader, and later Margaret Halina, who was one of the underground captains. This was while I worked at the Co-op. I did some work in the office, but it was really a make-do job. It was, of course, very foolish for me to be working openly in the Co-op and living in a place that was being used for illegal Party work.

I worked at the Co-op in Winnipeg through 1940. Then, in the spring of 1941, the Party leadership decided I should become manager of a creamery the Co-op had just purchased. It was located in the town of Minnedosa, in the heart of a right-wing Tory rural area in western Manitoba. For its first few months the creamery was managed by Emil Miller, a former YCL leader from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Not only was Miller a Communist, but also a German Jew. So when the war broke out it became obvious he had to go into hiding. His wife, Octavia Kraikiwska, a young Ukrainian woman originally from Edmonton, stayed on as manager for a while until they found a replacement. Because we wound up with no place to stay, my wife Gladys went back home to Alberta for a while and I found a cot in the home of Myron Kostyniuk in north Winnipeg for the few days until I would have to go to Minnedosa.

A close call

The official opening of the creamery was scheduled for July 1st, so I left the day before. Well, it so happened that that night the RCMP carried out mass raids throughout Winnipeg and arrested more than a dozen Party leaders and activists, who were subsequently interned. Kostyniuk was one of them. Had I stayed there another night, I too would have been picked up. Instead, I wound up in Minnedosa. My wife joined me soon after and together we managed the creamery for a whole year. It was quite an experience. I learned a lot about the dairy business: testing cream and the mechanics of making butter, dealing with the farmers who were bringing in the cream, and handling the retail end of it.

Because it was a very conservative area, we had to mind our p's and q's. And there were many interesting moments. I joined the local Chamber of Commerce and the Elks Club, of all things. I also learned to play golf and even played a couple of rounds with the local RCMP officer. Meanwhile they were looking for me. But they were looking for a Boychuk. Indeed, I was told later that one of the chaps they interned was an immigrant named Boychuk. When they asked him if he had been an editor of the *Young Worker*, he didn't know what they were talking about. So they realized they had the wrong man. I learned later that Tom McEwen, who was in the underground leadership of the Party then, was very critical of my being in Minnedosa, saying: "How come Boyd is out there working in a creamery? He should be involved in the class struggle, in the fight against the class enemy." But I also heard that nothing came of it.

Back to Toronto

I spent about a year and half in Minnedosa, until the summer of 1942, when I got orders to come to Toronto to join the staff of the *Canadian Tribune* as business manager. Ted Herman, who had occupied that position, had joined the army and was sent overseas and I was to take his place. We learned soon after that he was one of the first Canadians killed. Besides being manager I also helped with the editing. A. A. MacLeod was the editor and Harry Fistell his assistant. This was the time when Dorise Neilsen was elected to Parliament on a peace ticket. Soon after, I was replaced as business manager and went to work exclusively on the editorial side. I stayed with the *Tribune* until after Leslie Morris came out of hiding and took over as editor. That was

the time when Nathan Cohen joined the editorial staff. He had been with the *Glace Bay Gazette* in Nova Scotia. Later he became a renowned drama critic for the *Toronto Star*.

Q.: How well regarded was the Tribune, in the wider Canadian journalistic community, as a source for news over the time frame of your association with it?

There were times when it was regarded quite highly. But this was mitigated by the fact that it did carry Soviet directives or what was regarded as Soviet propaganda. I believe it gained more support after the 20th Congress, when it published Khrushchev's historic speech and there was the beginning of a broader approach by the editors. But after 1956 it lost some of that and never reached far beyond the immediate Party supporters.

In 1943, on my 30th birthday, Gladys went into the maternity ward of the old Mount Sinai Hospital, and in the early morning of the following day our daughter, Bonnie Kathleen, was born.

Elected trustee and join army

On Jan. 1, 1944, I was elected to the Toronto Board of Education, along with Edna Ryerson. That was in the heyday of the Party's electoral victories in Toronto, when Salsberg and MacLeod and Stewart Smith were elected. But I left the Board in mid-term (actually late spring) to join the army. That was by a decision of the Party.

At my request I was assigned to the Signal Corps., which took me to Vimy, the permanent army camp in Kingston, Ontario. There I completed my basic training, following which I was promoted to lance-corporal and then corporal. One of the chaps who was in basic training with me at the time was Jack Shadbolt, who eventually became a renowned Canadian artist.

Soon after completing my basic training, I had an interesting experience. I was called into the Army Examiner's office (until then I didn't even know what an army examiner was), who told me, "Corporal Boyd, you have to leave Vimy, you have to leave Signals." I said, "Why?" And he replied, "I'm not at liberty to tell you why, but you have to go." When I asked where to, he said, "Well, you're too old for infantry and your category is too high for the medical corps, so you have to go either into the Artillery or the Armoured Corps (tanks), but not its reconnaissance section." He had his papers opened up on the desk in front of him and while

he was talking I could see the words "Signalman Boyd" and "non-sensitive" underlined in red. Having worked in printshops, I was quite adept at reading upside down and quickly put two and two together, but pretended I didn't know. He said, "You have to go into a non-sensitive unit." When I asked, "Why?" he again replied, "I'm not at liberty to tell you." So I said, "I know why; it's because of my politics." To which he said, "Well, that can be your interpretation." When I asked when I had to go, he said, "Immediately." And when I asked, "To whom can I protest?" he replied, "In the army you can't protest, you can complain." So I said, "Well, who do I complain to?" And he said, "To the Adjutant-General in Ottawa." "But that'll take time," I said. "Regrettably, yes," he said, "but you have to go."

Saved by a case of measles

Somewhat despondent, I went back to my hut and lo and behold, found out that the fellow in the bunk next to me had the measles, which meant that the entire hut of some 40 men had to be quarantined for six weeks. Talk about luck! So I sat down and wrote a long letter — a really long letter — to the Adjutant-General in Ottawa. I explained that I had never ever been arrested, never contravened any laws, that I was elected to the Toronto Board of Education, but left it to join the army. I said I knew that I was being transferred because of my politics, but could not understand the reasoning behind it. Without naming names, I said that I knew of other members of the Communist Party, some of whom had even been interned, who served in Signals in that very camp and were subsequently sent overseas. I said I preferred to stay in Signal Corps. Well, before the quarantine was over, the examiner called me in again and told me I could stay.

It also happened that while I was there I was in close contact with Carl Birchard and Sid Dillick, who were in the Medical Corps and stationed in nearby Kingston. We used to meet once in a while over a couple of beers in a pub or restaurant. When I told them about my experience with the army examiner, they said that they had access to records and would find out what it was all about. When they did, they learned that besides all the data about my Party and ULFTA activities, the files also contained the information that my father had been arrested in 1918 for anti-war work, sentenced to three years in jail, then granted a suspended sentence on condition that he leave the province.

Carl and Sid explained my particular experience this

way: documents of all new recruits go to the RCMP, where there may be as many as forty or fifty officers processing them. If your document happens to go to a fellow who's somewhat progressive or liberal-minded, you're okay. But if it's handled by some bigoted right-wing jerk, you've had it. And nobody there is likely to question or review that decision or take your side. Anyway, I was glad to know I wasn't going to be sent to Camp Petawawa, where the Royal Canadian Artillery was stationed.

Editor of army magazine

There was yet another unusual thing that happened to me there. Signal Corps had a monthly magazine called *The Signalman*, which had been the organ of the permanent force there since the 1920s. It was a very formal, stuffy type of publication, a hold-over from the spit-and-polish days of the peacetime army. It was sold once a month on pay parade, where the soldiers were asked to pay twenty-five cents for it. Some bought it, but many didn't bother. At the time, it was being edited by a chap who I later found out had been a member of the NDP. But he was also an alcoholic, and apparently one morning they found him dead drunk in the printshop in Kingston while putting an issue to bed. So they fired him. Immediately there was a posting that they needed an editor for the *Signalman* and asking those with journalistic experience to apply. So I did. One of the chaps in line with me, waiting to be interviewed, was Dennis Braithwaite, who subsequently was a columnist for the *Toronto Telegram*. But I was called before him. Whether he was interviewed after me I don't know, but I got the job.

So I took over the editorship of the *Signalman* and held that post until I got discharged from the army. I revamped the magazine, brightened it up, put a lot of risqué jokes and cartoons in it. A very able cartoonist in the camp created a character we called the Vimy Wolf, a girl-chasing wolf in a soldier's uniform, who proved to be very popular and got the soldiers buying the magazine. But I also put in some good serious editorials about the war and about postwar issues.

"He's a Communist!"

At one point, I was told that at a meeting in the officers' mess, a major raised the matter of the magazine and said: "I hear that the *Signalman* is being edited by a Communist. I think we should get rid of him." To

which the camp commandant, a Col. Malek, said, "I don't give a damn if he is a Communist. He's doing a good job; the magazine has never been as popular even in peacetime. As long as he's not bringing politics into it, it's all right with me."

My headquarters for the magazine was the camp library, and because I had a lot of time on my hands I launched a project that turned out to be very popular. Every day at noon I put up a large sheet of newsprint on the wall, just near the entrance to the corporals' and sergeants' messes, on which, with a marker, I printed out the day's news briefs from the war front and from Canada. I knew that most of the fellows didn't read newspapers or even listen to the news on the radio. Many of them didn't know what the hell was going on in the world. That project, too, lasted till I was discharged.

In 1945, while I was in Kingston, my son Kim was born in Toronto. I couldn't be there for his birth, but saw him soon after on my next weekend leave.

Before I left the army, I had dreamed of not going back into full-time work in the Party. I wanted to get into the commercial art field and work in the Party only in my spare time, as others did. But it was an idle hope; I was roped back in very quickly. The Party at that time decided to propagate 16 mm. Soviet films, for which they established a company called New World Films, making me its manager. We showed the films in different ethnic halls and in the odd union hall.

A difficult choice

On my return from the army, I became active in the Ukrainian field again, in my spare time. At one point, I was asked to edit an English section in the Ukrainian paper for the Canadian-born; from half to two-thirds of a page in large format. I put out several issues. Apparently they were grooming me to become editor of a new paper, the *Ukrainian Canadian*, they were planning to put out. But I didn't know that, they didn't tell me, because I wasn't part of the leadership then.

In 1946, the Party decided to launch a daily paper, the *Daily Tribune*, which presented a new problem. Jack Stewart was assigned to edit it, and when picking the new staff he wanted me on it. When the Ukrainians heard about it, they said, "No, we want him." This is when I found out they wanted me to be editor of the new paper. This put me in a bind. The Ukrainian and Party leaders argued about it, again, as on previous occasions, without my participation, and were dead-

locked. Finally John Boychuk, in his usual sly way, suggested they leave it to me to decide. Which, as I said, put me in a dilemma. I was very intrigued by the idea of working on a daily newspaper. Don't forget, this was in the heyday of the Party's activity, and we didn't know what the future was going to bring. So I opted for the Party paper. The Ukrainians never forgave me for that.

A learning experience

Working on the daily was a wonderful learning experience. Jack Stewart had been one of the editors of the *Toronto Star Weekly*, so I learned a great deal from him. We had a great time planning the paper, creating a style book, putting out the first issue, and so on. But the paper lasted only six months. This was the time of the Gouzenko exposure and Churchill's speech in Fulton, Missouri, which marked the beginning of the Cold War. But I continued on the editorial staff of the weekly paper through 1947. On Jan. 1, 1947, I was again elected to the Board of Education, along with Edna Ryerson. But when I ran again a year later, I was defeated, and only Edna got in.

In the spring of 1948, the Party organized a six-month political school, which was held near Sudbury, and I was one of those chosen to attend it.

Q.: On the topic of Party schools. You attended an earlier one. I've seen some of the subjects taught at the later ones, and they seemed to be rote repetitions of Stalin. How do you compare them?

I believe I can make a comparison, although the two schools were 18 years apart. The Ukrainian school, as I mentioned earlier, was a six-month course led solely by Matthew Popowich, who was a very able and a very interesting lecturer. We did study Ukrainian grammar and the history and geography of Ukraine, but the rest was pretty well all on politics. There weren't very many text-books from the Soviet Union then, so we studied from those that were available in Canada. In any case, Popowich knew enough about these topics to acquaint us with the works of Marx and Engels and some of the writings of Lenin.

The Party school in 1948 was led by Stanley Ryerson, Leslie Morris and Tim Buck. It was attended by a dozen or more younger Party members, most of whom had just served in the army during the war. It was really a course to train a pleiad of new Party leaders for the post-war period. It included people like

Bill Ross, Bert Whyte, Norman Penner, Sam Walsh, Nigel Morgan, Maurice Rush, Danielle Cousinier, Leah Roback, Bill Tuomi, Terry Levis, and several others. We studied mainly from the textbooks *History of the CPSU* and *Marxism-Leninism* (both of which had been authored by Stalin) and books by Marx and Engels, including the *Communist Manifesto*. We also spent some time on the history and problems of trade unionism and on Communist Party policies.

Q.: At which one do you feel you learned more?

Without a doubt, at the 1948 school. The subjects were more far-ranging and the quality of instruction was far superior. Ryerson was a very good teacher. Buck taught Leninism, and he was very good, too, largely because of his phenomenal memory, which enabled him to know his subject. I recall one humorous incident. During one of his lectures, he was quoting from memory and said, "Lenin in such and such a chapter said so and so." And Bert Whyte, being the irreverent smart-ass he was, asked: "What page?" We all laughed, but Buck said, "Just a minute, it'll come to me," and a few minutes later he said, "It was on page 192, in the bottom paragraph." He had this awesome photographic memory, as did Peter Krawchuk.

Secretary of Slav Committee

It was in the fall of 1948 that, under the direction of the Party, the Canadian Slav Committee was organized and I was appointed executive secretary. This was a federated body made up of representatives of eight left-wing and Party-controlled ethnic organizations: Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Slovak, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Yugoslav and Carpatho-Russian. This was a national body, but there were also local committees, except that they did not have paid secretaries.

It was a big movement, born during the euphoria of victory in the war and the part played in it by the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian and Russian left-wing organizations were particularly upbeat and at the height of their successes. I must say, however, that I had mixed feelings about it. I was all for the unity of the Slav people, but as a Communist I also wondered why this was confined to the Slavs, why others were not included, especially in Canada, where the Party led fairly strong Finnish, Jewish and Hungarian organizations. Why were they not included? It bothered me a bit. But I went along with the idea, since it was Slav unity that helped to win the war. Much later, I realized,

and documents have since shown, that this was all on the instructions of Moscow. There was a Slav committee in Moscow and in each of the Slavic countries. It was all a part of Stalin's overall plans in the event of another war. He wanted Slav unity — just in case.

Concerts and folk art

I went into this new assignment with both feet. It was a very successful venture, exciting and pleasant because it had to do with the songs, music, dances and culture of all the Slavic peoples. Each of the eight participating organizations contributed to the financing of its operation. This consisted mainly of my salary as executive secretary and office expenses. Whatever functions were undertaken — concerts and so on — were likewise covered by the organizations. We organized huge concerts in Massey Hall, and when that proved not big enough, held one at the CNE Coliseum. We also organized huge all-Slav picnics and an exhibit of Slavic folk art acquired from the Slav countries — embroidery, ceramics and graphic art — which we eventually took on a tour across the country. We also held a large all-Slav Congress to which representatives from the Slavic countries were invited. Some of them were refused visas and therefore could not attend. I should add that there was a similar movement launched in the United States and an American Slav Congress held.

In the spring of 1949, our son Zane was born.

To Sheffield and Warsaw

As a representative of the Slav Committee, I attended the 1950 World Peace Congress, which was supposed to be held in Sheffield, England, but was quickly shifted to Warsaw when the British government refused visas to most of the delegates from the Communist-controlled countries. In Warsaw, a large printing plant that was being built was quickly converted into an assembly hall to accommodate the congress. Other delegates from Canada included Joe Zuken, the Communist school trustee from Winnipeg, Misha Korol from the AUUC, and Karl Kettola from the Finnish organization. After the congress I made a quick tour of Poland. It was right after the war, so much of the country was in ruins, especially Warsaw. Then I was invited by the Slav Committee in Moscow to make my first visit to the Soviet Union. This included a tour of several areas, including Ukraine. I also traveled to

Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, where I acquired a variety of folk art and musical records for an eventual exhibit.

A trip to China

In 1952, again as a representative of the Slav Committee, I attended the Peace Congress of the Pacific Rim countries, which was held in Peking. At that time the leaders of the Canadian Peace Congress included James Endicott and his wife, Mary, Bruce Mickleburgh, Mary Jennison, and Ray and Kay Gardner. (Ray was an executive editor on the *Toronto Daily Star* and Kay was a Ukrainian girl, originally from Edmonton, and is currently a member of the Toronto City Council).

Our Canadian delegation of 12 was quite mixed. It included the Endicotts and the Gardners, Ted Baxter, who represented a religious group, Eva Sanderson, a CCF activist, Ethel Nielsen, a retired music teacher, and Gérard Filion, who was then the publisher of *Le Devoir* in Quebec. He subsequently became president of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, and later was also involved in a dredging scandal in Toronto and Montreal. We travelled from Moscow across Siberia to China. This was still in the days of propeller planes, not jets, and we had to make four overnight stops across Siberia — in Omsk, Khabarovsk, Irkutsk on Lake Baikal, and in Ulan Bator, the capital of Outer Mongolia, before landing in what was then called Peking. While stopping in each of the Siberian cities, we were struck by the terrible poverty and inferior service. Mind you, this was not long after the war, so some of it was understandable, but a lot of it wasn't, especially the bureaucracy and the cavalier attitude to people.

Our stop in Irkutsk happened to be just before the 19th Congress of the CPSU was scheduled to begin in Moscow, so when we stopped at Irkutsk it happened to be at the same time as the big Chinese delegation to the Congress was stopping there. As a result, they closed the airport hotel where we were staying and didn't allow anybody to even look out the windows, although I did manage to take a peek and watch the honour guard ceremony on the airport tarmac. But there was some consternation and panic among the passengers, because they weren't told what was happening; everything just tightened up. Two hours later it was all over.

We meet Mao and Chou En-lai

Like everyone else who went, I was very enthusiastic about that trip to China. It was just three years after the so-called Mao revolution, so there was a lot of euphoria and enthusiasm. The Congress was, of course, very well organized and well orchestrated. There was one particularly exciting moment when the Indian delegation of some fifty people demonstratively entered the hall and during a prolonged standing ovation was greeted by children bearing flowers. It was genuine enthusiasm for the delegates of both nations, but I'm sure the leaders were more pragmatic about it, because it was not long after that China and India were involved in a border war. At one point, during the Congress banquet, Mao Zedong, Chou En-lai and Chu The, a veteran of the Long March, came to our table and exchanged toasts.

After the Congress, the Canadian delegates were taken on a month-long tour of China. Filion and I didn't join them, because we had to go back to Canada. I went back, because I got a cable asking me to do so, even though there really was no urgent need for me to do so. In retrospect, though, it was for the best, because I would have been away from the family for too long, causing an even greater hardship for my wife.

Tour of Soviet artists

Because this was the height of the Cold War, no impresarios were inviting Soviet artists to come to this continent. So on Moscow's initiative, arrangements were made for the first group of Soviet artists to come to Canada. And because I was deeply involved with concerts and Slavic culture, I was put in charge of their concert tour. The group included Leonid Kogan, who was then considered the third most important violinist in the world, after David Oistrakh and Jascha Heifetz, a ballet duo, a pianist, a theatre director, two accompanists, and a journalist, who was also the translator. We were all quite certain that the journalist was also very likely the KGB man.

For me, the entire project was both an exciting experience and a great challenge, because I had to book all the halls across the country, prepare all the publicity, contact the media, book the hotels and travel arrangements, and be the m.c. at all the concerts from Montreal to Vancouver.

Because of the success of that tour, they asked me to organize the concert for Mstislav Rostropovich on

his first visit to Canada. He wasn't very well known here then. The only people who had heard about him were the cellists. So when we organized the concert for him at the Eaton Auditorium in Toronto, the hall was only a little more than half-full and was made up mainly of a few cellists and left-wing ethnic Canadians, mainly Russians and Ukrainians. But he got very good reviews, so that on his subsequent trip, this time organized by an impresario, he filled Massey Hall.

A year later, I was also asked to organize a concert for the Polish pianist Czerny-Stefńska in Massey Hall. In 1956, I helped to organize Paul Robeson's last concert in Toronto, in which the Party also had a hand. I worked on that project with two other Party members, Leo Claver, of Toronto, and "Binky" Marks, of Montreal. Robeson filled Massey Hall to capacity.

The Slav Committee lasted almost ten years, from 1948 to 1957.

Moscow tried to recruit me

Another thing I should tell you about is the way some of the people in Moscow and in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa tried to get me involved in some of their intelligence activity, chiefly in gathering information. Most of it was of a general nature about Canadian society, but they were obviously also interested in the Party and its members, because over the post-war years Soviet embassy people asked me on three separate occasions for my biography — a detailed biography — which I supplied. And I know others were also asked. They tried to involve me during some of my earlier trips to the Soviet Union, before the exposure of Stalin's crimes, and they might have succeeded, because I was, after all, a very loyal Communist, and an ardent supporter of the Soviet Union. But soon after I began to have many doubts and reservations. It so happened, however, that in 1956, after the split in the party, I was elected to the National Executive Committee. And apparently after the Gouzenko affair in 1946 the higher-ups in Soviet intelligence had agreed to keep their hands off Party members who were on the Nationalal Committee.

Why I didn't quit in 1956

Speaking of 1956, I often ask myself why I didn't leave the Party at the time of the split. I certainly felt very much like doing so at the time. I agreed with most of the criticisms that were made by MacLeod, Salsberg,

Penner, Binder and Edna Ryerson, and especially John Stewart, whom I admired and respected very much. I was very much on their side in the arguments that were presented, although I also felt badly about the fact that the Party was being rent asunder. I was with them ideologically, but I found it hard to actually leave the Party. It would have been a heart-wrenching experience for me. All my family, including my wife's side of it, were loyal Communists, especially my father, who had been an ardent Communist all his life. I would have been renounced by my family and close friends and become a virtual pariah among them. An indication of that was that after the events in Czechoslovakia there was a painful split in the family, wherein my wife's sister didn't speak or write to her for a long time.

The other reason was that I was anxious to preserve Party unity. I thought that perhaps the Party could still be saved, and I had great hopes that with Leslie Morris in the leadership it could change. It was a false hope, of course, but it was there. So I went along. I was elected to the National Executive and was still was very much under the influence of the ideology that prevailed in the Party at that time.

I should add that after 1956 my attitude to the Party changed considerably. I became much more critical of its policies in discussions. I questioned a lot of things. The one positive thing was Morris's leadership. I had great hopes, because he tried to change the Party, to improve the Party, to make it more Canadian. Unfortunately, he died soon after that. Later, I realized that he could not have succeeded.

A nervous breakdown

In 1958, however, I became quite ill with severe stomach problems and numerous other ailments, which eventually was diagnosed as a nervous breakdown. So the Party leadership arranged to have me go to the Soviet Union for treatment. I was sent to Sochi, in the Caucasus mountain region, for 28 days — that's the usual term — but my symptoms were so severe that they kept me there for 40 days. In Sochi I met a young man from Hungary, Karol Erdelj, who turned out to be the personal secretary of Janos Kádár, the Hungarian Party leader. We got along very well, and before we parted, he said, "Why don't you visit Hungary?" I told him I wasn't scheduled to, but he said, "Just say the word and we can arrange it, and I'll meet you." I decided to take him up on it, and when I got back to Moscow I told the Party officials about the offer.

Arrangements were made, and on my way back to Canada I stopped in Hungary for a few days. I was shown around Budapest and environs and, since this was only two years after the revolution there, I was also told a lot about how and why it happened, both the official and unofficial versions.

Editor of Canadian Tribune

When I returned home, in the fall of 1958, Leslie Morris asked if I would be willing to take on the job of editing the *Canadian Tribune*. Nelson Clarke was the editor at the time, but they wanted him to be National Organizer. I was somewhat taken aback by the offer and a bit frightened by it. I thought it was too big a challenge; I didn't think I could handle it. But Morris kept twisting my arm and telling me that he and the other members on the committee would give me all the help I needed. So I took it on. And I was editor for nine consecutive years, longer than anybody else, except perhaps for Morris, who had served longer, but only two or three years at a time. Nobody else had served that long a stretch, from 1958 to 1967.

In the beginning I found it a greater challenge than I had anticipated. For the first two years I worked every weekday, all of Saturday and half of Sunday, to make sure I could cope. But I had good people on the staff. There was Greg Billings, Bert Whyte (between his stints in Peking and Moscow), and others. And I received a lot of support from Morris, when he was leader of the Party, but after he died and Kashtan took over it became very difficult. Kashtan wanted to control and have a say in everything that was done. For example, when I'd be in doubt about some serious problem or issue, I'd phone Stanley Ryerson or Nelson Clarke or Bill Kashtan, sometimes all three, to get their opinion or advice. Invariably, if Kashtan found out that I didn't take his advice he would raise the matter with me, sometimes quite sharply. Which really pissed me off. Finally, as I gained more confidence, I said to hell with it, I'm not going to consult anyone, I'm going to go by what I think and let the chips fall where they may. And I told Kashtan that. That's when they decided to make me a member of the Secretariat, so that every week they could discuss what should go into the next issue of the *Tribune* and thus have more control over it.

Party leaders disturbed

Another example. One summer I came back from

my vacation to find Bert Whyte and Greg Billings in the office along with a young fellow we had hired for the summer as a reporter. He was from Quebec, although he wasn't French Canadian. As I walked in, Bert said to me, "I think we have a problem. Take a look at this." And he showed me the proof of a full-page feature, an interview the young reporter had with Phil Ochs, the young U.S. singer and songwriter, who was popular at the time. At one point in the interview, Ochs was giving his opinions about the different political trends in his country during a certain period, and when he was asked, "What about the Communist Party?" he said, "Oh, it was irrelevant." I read the full interview and said, "I don't see anything wrong with it. Those are Ochs's views. Just add a footnote saying these are his views and not necessarily those of the *Tribune*." So we published it. And that's when the "shit hit the fan." The Party leaders criticized me for it. Just like in the Soviet Union, I thought, you had to conform.

Just after U.S. President Kennedy was assassinated, I wrote an editorial on Kennedy in which I tried to give a balanced picture and not be totally negative. I quoted some of the things Kennedy said not long before he died, especially a speech he made in California in which he said there was a need for more dialogue and cooperation between nations instead of confrontation and hinted at the need for some rapprochement with Castro's Cuba. I wrote that this was an indication perhaps of some new trends, which was proved later, of course, when Nixon went to China. Again I was sharply criticized for it by some; on the other hand, some thought it was good.

My trip to Cuba

During my stint on the *Canadian Tribune*, I had the opportunity to make two trips abroad. On January 1st, 1961, Bill Sydney and I were in Havana as representatives of the Party at the celebration of the second anniversary of the new Cuban revolution. We had a bit of trouble getting there because, although flights from Toronto to Havana at that time made a refueling stop in New York, we weren't allowed to take one of them, because we were on the list of those who were barred from entry into the United States. So we had to take the roundabout route via Mexico, which was pleasant enough, because it gave us a chance to be in Mexico City during Christmas week, a worthwhile experience in its own right. We did note also that at the airport, like all the other passengers to Havana, we were

photographed before boarding, presumably for the FBI or the CIA.

Those were heady and exuberant days in Cuba. Only two years had passed since Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionaries had driven triumphantly into Havana after their five-year guerrilla struggle against the regime of the dictator Batista. During those two years, many new positive changes were introduced, changes that most of the population, especially the working poor, enthusiastically welcomed: slum shanties were bulldozed and sturdy modern individual homes and apartment buildings constructed to house their former occupants; a social safety network that gave special attention to the elderly, the sick and otherwise disadvantaged was implemented; that very year was declared the Year Against Illiteracy, during which young people were to sent out to teach all citizens, especially the seniors, how to read and write.

The demonstration in Havana lasted most of the day, since more than half a million people took part in the marchpast in front of the dignitaries and guests on the podium and then jammed the huge Plaza of the Revolution to hear Fidel Castro speak. He spoke for an hour, which we were told was his shortest speech yet, since prior to that his speeches had lasted as long as five and six hours.

Fidel and Che on the podium

On the podium with Castro was Che Guevara, Fidel's brother Raúl, and several other members of the original revolutionary group that landed on the shores of Cuba in 1956. It included also several leading members of the Communist Party of Cuba, like Blas Roca, its general secretary, the two Escalante brothers, and Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, the editor of the newspaper *Granma*. You see, after Castro came to power, he made a power-sharing arrangement with the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Directorate, a student anarchist organization, so the leaders of the three centres worked together in what was called the Integrated Revolutionary Organization, and Aníbal Escalante, one of the Communist Party leaders, was made its organizational secretary. This in spite of the fact that earlier, when Castro and his colleagues first landed in Cuba on the ship "Granma," the Communist Party considered them "liberal adventurers" and didn't think they would get anywhere. Not long after the landing, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez joined the Castro group and was with them until their victory.

After the demonstration, I had an interview with Rodriguez, and he related to me some of his experiences and shared with me some of the problems he had as editor of *Granma*. The irony is that three months after that celebration, Aníbal Escalante and a large group of his colleagues were charged with taking orders from Moscow and trying to place their men in key positions in the new government — virtually spying for Moscow. Later they were tried and convicted. Escalante was sentenced to 15 years, and 36 members of the group were given sentences ranging from 12 years in prison to two years' house detention.

Another trip to Moscow

In 1962, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Pravda*, the Soviet Communist Party central organ, the editors of all Communist Party newspapers were invited to Moscow to take part in celebrating that event. And for this event, Moscow pulled out all stops, so to speak. First there was a ceremonial gathering in the Kremlin's ornate and luxurious St. George's Hall at which almost all the editors were invited to give toasts, and which seemed to go on forever. This was followed by a sumptuous banquet at which Nikita Khrushchev made an hour-long off-the-cuff speech, prior to which we were told not to take notes. In the speech he lauded the achievements of the Soviet Union, related how it was helping out the third world, and boasted of its military advances and of the "surprises" it had for U.S. imperialism. He didn't say what those surprises were, but since this was just a few months before the Cuban missile crisis, he must have had the secretly installed missiles there in mind.

My interview with Khrushchev

While the toasts were being delivered in St. George's Hall, I found myself sitting next to Khrushchev's wife and had a nice chat with her in Ukrainian. Also sitting nearby was the old civil war hero and Stalin's faithful toady, Voroshilov. Khrushchev's wife introduced me to him and we chatted briefly, but when I spoke to him in Ukrainian, he replied in Russian, even though he is supposed to be a Ukrainian. Later, I was told I could have 10 minutes with Khrushchev (I don't know who had suggested it), which was a very pleasant experience. We spoke to each other in Ukrainian, he asked me a lot of questions about the life of Ukrainians in Canada and was surprised that I spoke Ukrainian as

well as I did, even though I was born in Canada. The next day all the editors were taken on a cruise on the Volga, which included a visit to a nuclear plant.

As I said, I had held this job for nine consecutive years and was pretty tired — not only physically, of the day-in-day-out of putting out the paper, but also of the continuing hassle I had with the Party leadership, especially with Kashtan.

Assignment to Prague

It so happened that early in 1967, Norman Freed was completing his stint as Canadian party representative on the editorial board of the *World Marxist Review* in Prague, Czechoslovakia. When I heard about it, I immediately asked if I could replace him. I had no idea what it would be like; I just wanted to get away from the *Tribune*. I told the Party leadership that I had served faithfully on that job for nine years and thought I deserved a break, and they agreed, so in August of 1967 my wife and I left for Czechoslovakia.

Now, I should tell you that although I didn't know the Czech language, I managed better than most because it is a Slavic language. Knowing Ukrainian well, Russian fairly well and a bit of Polish, helped. We quickly got acclimatized, because Gladys and I soon made some very good friends.

John Gibbons

One of them was John Gibbons, the representative of the British Communist Party, who had been there from the very start of the magazine. In fact, his status there went much further back than that. He had gone to the Soviet Union, along with his wife and two children, as a correspondent of the *Daily Worker* in 1939, just before the war broke out. So he spent the entire war period there; his wife and kids were sent beyond the Urals while he stayed in Moscow. When the war was over, however, instead of going back home to London, he was asked to be his Party's representative on another publication.

As you may recall, after the war Stalin abolished the Communist International and replaced it with the Communist Information Bureau, or the Cominform, as it became known. The Cominform launched a newspaper called *For Lasting Peace and People's Democracy*, which was published in Belgrade. So John went there. The Canadian party's representative then was Annie Buller. When Stalin denounced and broke ties with

Tito, however, the publication was given 24 hours' notice to move to Bucharest, and John went there.

A few years later, Moscow decided to change the publication from a newspaper to a magazine called *Problems of Peace and Socialism*. Its editorial offices were in Prague, but its various editions were printed in different countries. The English edition was called *World Marxist Review* and was printed in Canada. So this time John Gibbons went to Prague. In other words, he spent most of his adult life as a journalist in four Communist countries. He was there when Alf Dewhurst and Norman Freed each represented the Canadian party on the editorial board, and he warmly welcomed me. He was a marvelous person, a very knowledgeable and compassionate human being. We became very close friends.

Molly Perlman

The other person was Molly Perlman, who worked on the magazine as a translator from Russian into English. She was truly a veteran of the Communist movement. She came to Moscow in 1918 as a young girl with her mother from South Africa. She worked for the Comintern as a translator and secretary through the 1920s and 1930s, then for the Party's Central Committee through the entire Stalin period. She was very knowledgeable, very wise, and "street smart" in the political sense. Gladys and I became very close friends with her. She too was very helpful and told us a great deal about what had been and was going on in the Soviet Union.

The Wheelers

We also made friends with the Wheelers — George and Eleanor Wheeler from the United States — who had been living in Prague since the end of the war. George had been in the U.S. Army and, as an economist (a professor of economics), was sent into Germany to help rebuild it after the war. How he got to Prague is an interesting story.

While in Germany, he was serving under General Lucius Clay, who was deputy director of the War Rehabilitation and Reconstruction department. They both got along very well. One day Clay called George into his office and said: "I got orders from Washington that I should get rid of you because you're a Communist. But you're doing a good job, so to hell with them!" A few months later he called him in and said,

"They're still pressing me. But I say screw them." The third time, almost a year later, he finally said: "George, my job is on the line. I guess I have to let you go."

So George left the Army. However, instead of returning to his home in Washington state, he decided to go to Prague and help the new Czechoslovakia. He joined the Academy of Sciences there and wrote a couple of books. He never learned to speak Czech, but his wife, Eleanor, did. His family grew up there, and he stayed in Prague until 1969, even though because of his opposition to the invasion he was *persona non grata*. Through the Wheelers we got to know several other left-wing Americans who were there as journalists and professors.

Reform movement is born

Through this circle of friends, which quickly expanded, I was able to find out very quickly what was going on. And what was going on, as early as August, the month I arrived, was that a reform movement was developing. It started mainly with the journalists, writers and artists. They were, of course, denounced in the Party press as "bourgeois elements" and "enemies of socialism." But through the fall months this movement quickly broadened out to include other members of society, including workers and rank-and-file members of the Communist Party. By November, it included the majority of the Party leadership.

Meanwhile, the Moscow press was denouncing many of the things that were being written and said in Czechoslovakia. And the Soviet Party was becoming very alarmed at what was happening, especially since it was all being endorsed by the leaders of the Czechoslovak Party. So much so that by December — actually on December 25th — Leonid Brezhnev flew in from Moscow to attend a special plenary meeting of the Party's central committee. They met behind closed doors, and it was subsequently reported that heated discussions had taken place, but after the meeting Brezhnev publicly announced that everything was fine, that the Soviet Party had full confidence in the Czechoslovak Party leadership, because it had things under control. They had to put on that kind of front, of course, but as subsequent events proved, they were really very alarmed at what was happening.

Action Program

By January, the general secretary of the Czechoslo-

vak party, Antonín Novotný, was compelled to resign — that was how rapidly and how far the reform movement was progressing. By March, the Party's Action Program was advanced, a marvelous document that guaranteed all citizens the right of free speech and assembly, the right to travel abroad, a free press, and numerous other democratic rights. The leaders of the Soviet Union and the so-called people's democracies — men like East Germany's Ulbricht and Poland's Gomułka — were horrified by this development. It would have been so infectious.

Learning Czech — fast

There was another thing that prompted me to learn Czech fast. In Czechoslovakia there were several newspapers besides the Communist Party's *Rudé právo*: a Catholic paper, a Social-Democratic paper, the Peasant Party paper, a trade-union paper, and one or two others. While they carried different articles, they were required to publish the press releases of the Czech news agency, CTK, which made for somewhat bland reading. But during the reform movement, especially after January, every paper started writing whatever it wanted to. And people were buying three, four, five papers to get the different points of view. It was a sort of novelty. I was doing the same. I got myself a Czech dictionary and began laboriously translating the contents of each of the papers to find out what was happening.

I also attended the many big meetings that were being held almost every other day in huge arenas, some as big as Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens. At first the audiences were made up largely of young people, especially students, but eventually were attended by everyone. At these meetings, Party leaders like Alexander Dubček, Joseph Smrkovský, Oldřich Černík and František Kriegel, and writers like Ota Šik and Ludvík Vaculík spoke to enthusiastic audiences. Dubček is, of course, well known for his part in those events. Smrkovský was a highly respected old-timer who led the underground resistance movement against the Nazis in Prague, a real hero. Kriegel was a Czech Jew, a surgeon and a veteran of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. These leaders were very popular and had a great following. They gave inspiring speeches about their plans to build "socialism with a human face." I tried to have as many of those speeches translated for me as possible by the people who accompanied me.

Prague Spring

In March, I wrote an article to the *Canadian Tribune*, my first major report back to Canada on the reform movement, which I titled "Spring Comes to Czechoslovakia," and which, I explained in the opening paragraph, was "not only the meteorological spring, but a political spring." That article, I was told later, caused quite a sensation here in Canada. Tom Morris was the editor and Phyllis Clarke his assistant. After they decided to publish it, the Party leaders — Buck and the others — said it was heresy, that it was playing into the hands of the anti-Soviet elements.

My stay in Czechoslovakia was an inspiring and enlightening experience. It changed my life in many ways. First, living in a Communist country, I was able to see its pros and cons. More important, I met and worked with representatives from Communist parties in many other countries, from whom I learned a great deal. But I learned most, perhaps, from individual Russians and Czechs, both those who worked on the magazine and others.

Barriers to progress

Early in our stay there, actually the first week, we met a young chap, Michael Lash, a former Canadian. His father and mother were immigrants from Slovakia who had spent many years in Canada. When, after the war, they decided to go back to the new Communist Slovakia, he went with them. A recent graduate from the University of Toronto, he eventually became a professor of nuclear physics at Charles University in Prague.

One of the first things I asked him when we met was, "Michael, what is really the matter with things here? Why isn't there more economic progress?" His answer was, "John, more than anything else it's the bureaucracy. Let me give you an example. An ordinary worker in a chemical plant, let us say, has an idea for improving production. First he has to clear the idea with his immediate supervisor; he can't bypass him and go right to the top. If his immediate superior is an ignorant jerk and doesn't think much of the idea, he won't move it up higher. If, after a lot of time-consuming hassle, he does, the same kind of delay takes place on the next rung up the latter, and the next. But let's say that finally, after perhaps months of delay, it does get to the very top, to the plant management. That's not the end of it. It then has to go to the Party committee,

whose members likely know nothing about the chemical plant's production problems and either sit on it and delay it further or stymie it for some silly reason. So it can take as long as a year or two to get through, if it gets through at all. Often the worker who came up with the idea just says, to hell with it. There are so many such barriers, so much red tape, it's like in the army or worse."

That opened my eyes somewhat. Later I learned that the problems in the Soviet Union were even worse. I learned this especially from the Soviet men and women who worked on the magazine with me, and also during my own trips to the Soviet Union.

Visits with the Whytes

Over the years, prior to and during my stay in Prague, I made several visits to the Soviet Union. During three of them I visited Bert Whyte and his wife, Monica, twice when Bert was a *Canadian Tribune* correspondent and once when he was free-lancing. They were both disparaging of the regime, but went along because they were both living comfortably and didn't particularly want to come back to Canada. Bert liked his duty-free scotch and cigars and never bothered to learn Russian, because Monica spoke Russian very well. But they told me many things that opened my eyes to the flaws in the regime.

From Prague I wrote many articles and letters — articles to the *Tribune* and letters to my family. Events were moving swiftly. There was a lot of tension in the air. Recriminations in the Soviet press, rumors, negotiations between Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders. In June and July there were Soviet army manoeuvres near the Czechoslovak border, which the Soviet leaders said had nothing to do with the events in that country, but the Czechoslovak leaders knew otherwise. They did not expect any military action; they thought it was just pressure, but a few did think that it was an extreme possibility.

On a delegation to Romania

It was around July of that year that there was another interesting event in my life. Some months earlier, the Romanian Communist Party had invited the Canadian Party to send a delegation to visit their country. So the Party's central executive committee decided to send one that summer; a delegation of seven, headed by Tim Buck. When I learned about it from the

Central Executive Committee minutes I received, I immediately wrote back to Toronto and asked: why was I not considered? After all, I was a member of the Executive Committee and, since I was in Prague, it wouldn't entail any extra costs, so they included me. It was an eye-opening experience.

The delegation toured most of Romania — nothing off the beaten path, of course — met various officials and had two meetings with President Nicolae Ceaușescu. The latter were quite enlightening, because they revealed some of the differences among the world Communist leaders. At one point, when the question of the split between the Soviet and Chinese leaders came up, Ceaușescu told the delegation that he thought that the Chinese were 25 percent to blame and the Russians 75 percent. On the situation in Czechoslovakia, he said he sided with the Czechoslovak leaders. All of which raised eyebrows in the delegation, especially with Buck.

A task in Budapest

Just about that time I had yet another interesting experience. The Communist parties were preparing to hold a world congress sometime that fall and were drafting a variety of documents for it. The meeting didn't take place, of course, because of what happened in Czechoslovakia. But I was asked to go to Budapest to help prepare the draft documents. Gladys went with me and traveled around Hungary while I was working.

After I finished working on those documents, Gladys and I took a holiday. We visited nearby Vienna, where we bumped into Stanley and Millie Ryerson. Stanley was there attending a world congress of historians. Then we spent two weeks on the renowned Lake Balaton in the heart of Hungary. One evening, while at a resort restaurant there, I was surprised to find sitting at the next table Karol Erdelj, the young fellow I had met in Sochi, the personal secretary to Kádár. After exchanging greetings, he called me aside and said: "We agree with what the Czechs are trying to do. We hope they win. We support them, but not like the rope that supports a hanging man. We have to be very tactful about it." But of course they didn't support them in the end.

A phone call from Kashtan

After I got back from Budapest, in the latter part of July I got a phone call from Bill Kashtan. He was calling from Bulgaria, where he and his wife had just

completed a month-long vacation. He said he had been invited to come to Moscow and wondered whether, in light of what was happening in Czechoslovakia, it might not be useful to drop in on Prague. I replied that it would be most desirable, because it would give him a chance to learn first-hand about the situation there and find out from the Czechoslovak leaders themselves what their differences with the Soviet leaders were. I said also that I could alert the Prague party leaders about his visit. I was really expecting him to come. I even told the editor of the magazine and John Gibbons and others that he was coming. A few days later, however, I received another phone call from him, this time from Moscow. He said: "The Soviet comrades suggested that I should not go to Prague but come straight to Moscow." Then he added: "And they suggested that you come and meet me here in Moscow." When I asked, "When?" he said, "Right away. Get on a plane tomorrow."

Incidentally, the same thing happened with Henry Winston, at that time an Afro-American leader of the Communist Party of the United States. He was making a trip to Moscow at about the same time and stopped in Berlin on the way, but even though the Czechoslovak party leaders invited him to visit Prague, he did not do so; he went straight to Moscow, undoubtedly on the advice of the Moscow leaders.

An ominous comment

So I acquired a visa next day and flew to Moscow. There Kashtan and a Soviet Central Committee representative tried to convince me that what was happening in Czechoslovakia was a counter-revolution and I shouldn't support it. But I said, "Look, I've been there. I've seen what is going on. There's nothing counter-revolutionary about it. It's a genuine reform movement." So they didn't get anywhere with me. Next morning, Kashtan and his wife were taking a plane back to Canada, and I was asked to come to the airport. We got to the airport at 6:00 a.m. where, while we were having the usual VIP breakfast, the Soviet party official again tried, as tactfully as he could, to win me over to their side and again got nowhere.

After breakfast we all went out on the tarmac and saw the Kashtans off, at which point he turned to me and said, "We didn't want Bill to go to Prague, because we didn't know whether our tanks would be there at the time." This was in July, a month before the eventual invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21st. The

significance of the remark didn't really hit me until later, when the tanks really did come. I suppose that in my mind the idea of such an invasion was just unthinkable.

As for the actual invasion on August 21, there are so many things I could say about it, how the Soviet troops behaved, how the people reacted, and so on. I won't go into details about it now.

Party leaders divided

It soon became evident that the invasion caused shock, consternation, confusion and division within the world Communist movement. I was particularly interested in what effect it had within the Party in Canada. The first thing I heard was that at its first meeting in the latter part of August, the National Executive Committee was split, six to six, on the issue. But that was because Buck and a few other members were away on their summer vacations. The next thing I heard was that a meeting of the National Committee was slated for October and that preceding it a pre-plenum discussion bulletin would be published in which members would have a chance to voice their opinions.

So I wrote a lengthy article (some 16 single-spaced legal-size pages) and sent it to Toronto. (*See text of my letter on p. 72.*)

But it wasn't published. Buck ruled that there were so many articles that they couldn't possibly publish all of them before October, so they discontinued the bulletin. Fortunately, according to the rules set up when *World Marxist Review* was founded, Party representatives on the magazine had a right to attend conventions and important plenary meetings and have their fare paid. So, knowing that I was going to attend the Central Committee meeting, I didn't feel so badly about it.

Crucial meeting in Toronto

The meeting in Toronto had two points on the agenda, the main one being the events in Czechoslovakia. Kashtan introduced this topic with a half-hour report, following which it was announced that in the discussion members would be limited to fifteen minutes. I got up and said, "I wrote a long item for the discussion bulletin that wasn't published, now I'm asked to limit myself to 15 minutes. There's no way I can do it." So it was agreed unanimously that I be given all the time I wanted. I took the report I had sent earlier, condensed it a bit, and used that as the basis of

my speech. I spoke for an hour.

When I had finished, there was a mixed reaction of applause and boos. Some, like Stanley Ryerson, Joshua Gershman and Rae Murphy, came up and shook my hand. Mark Frank, on the other hand, said: "John, we read all that in the *Toronto Telegram*." And Les Hunt said, "That's a lot of bullshit." The discussion that followed was split the same way, with Buck toeing the Soviet line all the way. At the end of the meeting, Stanley Ryerson, Rae Murphy and I spontaneously resigned from the Central Committee.

Before taking the plane back to Prague, I told Kashtan that I wasn't able to return to Canada until the following summer, that we had acquired a lot of stuff and had made plans to come back by ship. "In that case," he said, "we'd like you to sign a document stating that you won't be opposing the Party line while you're there." I told him I wasn't planning to fight the Party from across the ocean, so I signed.

We stayed in Czechoslovakia until the following August. And it was a good experience, because I was able to see what was happening after the pro-Soviet leaders took over. I also learned a lot more about what had really happened just prior to and during the invasion. The facts gradually came out, in great detail, facts I cannot go into detail about now. I did write a couple of articles for the *Canadian Tribune*, but only those that dealt with non-controversial topics were published.

My offer to Ukrainians turned down

Gladys and I came back to Toronto on Labour Day, 1969. Since I wasn't going to work for the Party anymore, I knew I no longer had a job. I decided to try the Ukrainians. All the leaders of the left-wing Ukrainian organizations, with two or three exceptions, had opposed the Party's stand on Czechoslovakia. Indeed, after the episode with the Party delegation to the Soviet Union on the Russification of Ukraine, they did not take direction from the Party leadership so readily. But they retained their membership in and ties with the Party. So I went to Peter Prokop, who was then president of the AUUC and head of the Ukrainian Party committee, and said to him: "Now that I'm no longer working full-time for the Party, perhaps there's something I can do in the Ukrainian field." And he said, "Well, Comrade Boyd (through all the years he never ever called me John — always Comrade Boyd), the fact that you are no longer in the Party can present some difficulties for us." That was enough for me. Perhaps if

I had written formally to a committee or gone to someone else, things might have been different. I don't know. I just said, "That's okay, I understand," and left.

Editor at Southam

I decided to apply for a job in the publishing field. I wrote letters to *Maclean's*, Southam and the Weekly Newspaper Association, in which I said that I had over 30 years' experience in editing, citing the various things I had done: reporting, copy-editing, proofreading, layout, and so on. However, I added, there's one problem: all this was in the Communist movement. I then told them about my two-year stint in Czechoslovakia and how that had led to my break with the Communist Party. But, I said, if they could use my experience, I'd be glad to discuss the matter with them. I did get a call from Southam, their business and trade magazine section, and after one brief interview got a job as editor of a magazine called *Hospital Administration in Canada*.

On the first day I came to work for Southam I was taken around to be introduced to the various editors and departments. The director of the art department at Southam at the time was Mike Lukas. I knew him very well, because he was one of the younger leaders of the Carpatho-Russian Society, an active member of the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society and, of course, a staunch member of the Communist Party. When we came to the art department and Lukas was told that I had been hired, his jaw dropped in surprise. After we exchanged greetings, he immediately said to me: "John, let's meet for lunch."

"I saw the fascists!"

You see, Lukas was born in the eastern part of Slovakia and came to Canada as a child. He had visited both the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia many times over the years, and it so happened that he had been visiting the Soviet Union the previous summer and was crossing the border into Czechoslovakia by train precisely on August 21st, the very day that country was invaded by the Soviet armed forces. Being a hard-line Communist, he was of course a supporter of the Soviet invasion. So when we sat down to lunch, he said to me, "John, how can you take the stand you did? I was there and I saw the fascists resisting the Soviet army." To which I replied, "I was there, too, Michael. And those weren't fascists, they were ordinary Slovak citizens." I

told him much more about what I had witnessed and heard, and he didn't get very far with me.

Southam hired me on a trial basis, but within a couple of months I was taken on permanent staff, got an increase in salary, and within a few years became virtually the dean of the editors there. Because to me the job was a breeze. I had all kinds of editorial and technical help that I never had working on Party publications. I stayed with Southam for seven years.

I formally resign from the Party

On Feb. 13, 1970, I got a letter from Alf Dewhurst, writing on behalf of the Party leadership, in which he wrote:

"Dear John: It was brought to the attention of the Secretariat last Wednesday that you have dropped your membership in the Downtown club. As a result, I was instructed to ascertain from you whether we are to understand this as meaning that you have dropped your membership. Taking into account the many years you have held membership in the Party and the years you were a member of the Central Committee and its Executive, we would appreciate hearing from you directly as to how you view your continued membership in the Party. Would you be so good as to drop us a line in this connection or, better still, arrange to have a talk with some of the members of the Secretariat."

So I immediately wrote back a lengthy letter to the Central Executive Committee in which I said that I had indeed dropped my membership in the Party, and set out the reasons why. (*See text of letter p. 43*).

I should add that not long after the plenum at which three of us resigned from the Central Committee, the Party formally expelled Stanley Ryerson and announced it publicly. So I wasn't surprised to learn that after I wrote my letter there were some individuals in the Party who said, "How come John Boyd was allowed to leave just like that? He should have been expelled."

This letter is one of the documents relating to my leaving the Party. Previous to that was the 16-page letter I had sent from Prague and on which I based my speech to the Central Committee meeting. I also wrote letters from Prague to Helen Weir and other family members. I also have all kinds of letters from John Gibbons written to me after I left Prague. These I hope to incorporate in my memoirs, if I ever get around to writing them.

This ended my association with the Party.

More about the invasion

Q.: After you got back to Czechoslovakia you heard some stories about the invasion that you said you could recount. What are some of the things that you heard?

Yes, there were a lot of stories about what had gone on during the invasion that many of us didn't know before. You see, the Soviet invasion was on August 21st, and the Central Committee plenum was early in October. I had heard and read a few things immediately after the invasion, some of which I mentioned in my speech. But then I learned much more from October 1968 to August 1969. Some of it I read in various documents, some I got by word of mouth. Details about how the Czech leaders were taken to Moscow, how they were treated there, and what happened after they came back. Details about how during the invasion Soviet officers arrested a number of Czech leaders and kept them confined, because they didn't know what to do with them; they had to check first with the Soviet ambassador in Prague, which took several hours. And about what happened in the interim, while they were waiting for instructions. I lived through some of those weeks and months after the invasion, after the hard-line Czech leaders took over, and learned how some of the people who had been in the reform movement were dealt with. Recently I read Alexander Dubček's autobiography, a fascinating book he titled *Hope Dies Last*, which confirms much of what I had heard.

Opponents of reform silent

Q.: Was there a current in the Czechoslovak party that was opposed to the reforms that were taking place? And before the invasion, how big would that current have been?

Actually, the enthusiasm for the reforms was so overwhelming that the few who were opposed didn't dare come out. That's why, for example, when the Soviet authorities said that they received a letter for help signed by 25 Czechoslovak leaders, none of them were named. Dubček and his colleagues knew who they were, as did many others. They included such names as Gustav Husák, Alois Indra, Vasil Bil'ák, a Ukrainian from eastern Slovakia, and a score more. They were known to be in total disagreement with the reform leaders.

But they didn't come out openly with their opposition. They didn't publish anything against the proposed

reforms, didn't question them publicly, because the enthusiasm of the public — and the party rank and file — was so great they didn't dare. They would have been swamped, ridiculed, ostracized. So they did their work in an underhanded way. They're the ones that sent a letter — through the Soviet ambassador in Prague — appealing to the Soviet authorities for help. They came out with their opposition only in the Presidium (or Politburo) of the Party and only on the very eve of the invasion, which only they knew was going to take place. They wanted to take over the leadership, of course, and eventually they did. But first the then leadership had to be taken to Moscow, virtually in handcuffs, and undergo three or four days of arm-twisting before they could come back to Prague.

That meeting in Moscow did, of course, include some of those who were in opposition. The Soviets made sure of that. Also included, however, was a young reformer, Zdeněk Mlynář, who used subterfuge to get there. He hadn't been arrested because he was a new member of the reform leadership. He pretended that he was on their side, and they took him to Moscow. Then it turned out that he was a Dubček supporter. There were many, many more interesting incidents like these.

Another interesting and ironical aspect of the events of that August is that one of the reasons the Soviet leaders gave to justify their military action was that they wanted to protect Czechoslovakia from military action by the West. Yet they didn't send any troops to the borders at all; only into Prague and other cities; they knew the Czechoslovak army was there to protect the borders.

My ties with Ukrainians broken

After I left the Party, I still retained my membership in the Ukrainian organization, but not in an active way. After all, I was busy being an editor at Southam, and later elsewhere, so I was only peripherally involved, mostly attending concerts and other cultural events. But even this eventually presented some problems. My wife, Gladys, was an active member of the Ukrainian Mandolin Orchestra and my brother, Ronny, was a founding member of the Ukrainian Male Chorus, both of them at the time under the direction of Eugene Dolny.

When, in 1971, on the initiative of Eugene Dolny and others, the chorus and orchestra decided to break away from under the tutelage of the AUUC and form the independent Shevchenko Musical Ensemble, it

caused quite a stir. Because I supported this move, I became a *persona non grata* with the AUUC leadership along with all the others. Indeed, I was charged with being the "ideological leader" of that group, which wasn't true: I was simply a very active supporter and close friend of most of its members. They all knew me very well; I spent most of my life in the organization and knew many of them from childhood.

Later, my ties with the AUUC were actually severed by a set of somewhat related events. During the post-war years I was often called upon to deliver eulogies at the funeral services or memorial meetings for members of the movement who had died, chiefly in the Ukrainian sector. In September 1979, the National Shevchenko Musical Ensemble Guild held a meeting in memory of Helen Weir, and I was asked to deliver the eulogy. In my eulogy I included some mildly critical remarks about the attitude some leading members of the movement had displayed towards her, something she had requested be done. Although I did not mention any names, the remarks were directed more at the Party leaders than any others; nevertheless, the leaders of the AUUC took offence.

A denunciatory statement

At its meeting two weeks later, the National Executive Committee of the AUUC issued a vituperative statement condemning me for my action and promptly had it published in both Ukrainian and English. Although I had been a member of the organization since my childhood years and served for many years on its leading committees, I was not invited to appear before a leading body (local or national) to present my side of the story or "explain my actions," so to speak (as had been the practice in the ULFTA and AUUC through all the years). I was simply denounced and virtually excommunicated. Although for a while I debated whether to do so, I eventually sent a lengthy letter to the National Executive Committee outlining my views on this matter. Not only did I not get a reply, but I was told that members of the National Committee in other parts of the country did not see it. (*See text of my letter on p. 43.*)

Editing Our History

In 1994, however, I did become involved again in a different way. Peter Krawchuk had just written his book on the history of the Ukrainian left-wing organiza-

tions. He had it translated by Mary Skrypnyk, and was looking for someone to edit it. When the two or three individuals he had asked declined, he asked whether I would consider doing it. I said I would, provided I was paid at least a minimum amount for my work. I quoted a price much less than I had been charging for other books I had edited during that period.

So Krawchuk went back to the committee and proposed my name. He told me the proposal was met with surprise by some of the members, and one of them even said, "What? With his attitude to the AUUC?" To which Krawchuk replied, "What do you mean? What kind of attitude? He hasn't been an enemy of the AUUC; he gave a couple of lectures to your branch meeting some time ago and you all liked it." Which ended the matter, and I undertook the job. Mind you, there was opposition from a few individuals, not only to my editing but to some of the book's contents, particularly where it was critical of the Communist Party's role in controlling the Ukrainian organizations.

About Kashtan's election

Q.: I'm interested in the process of how William Kashtan was selected as Party leader after Leslie Morris's death. You were on the National Executive Committee at the time. Who would have been the other contenders? And who supported which potential leader?

After Morris died there was quite a dilemma about whom to put up for leadership. Buck proposed Nigel Morgan. But there weren't very many others who could be considered. George Harris was mentioned, but he had been a member of the RCMP at one time, so it was thought this could be against him. I think he would have been a fairly good leader. Harry Hunter was also mentioned, but he was considered rather weak ideologically. Most of us, in private conservation, thought that while Morgan had charisma, was a good public speaker and presented a good image, he would have been just a flunky for Buck. He would simply have done Buck's bidding, and we knew how much Buck wanted to be in control. He had been the Party Secretary for over 40 years. Indeed, he used to talk about how he was competing with Maurice Thorez of France as to who would be Party secretary longer. And he had been very reluctant to give up the position to Morris. After Morris died, he couldn't very well propose to be secretary again, although later we learned that Moscow had wanted him back, obviously because he had proven to

be very trustworthy and amenable. So Morgan was the other nominee. Finally, to the regret of many of us later, we all backed Kashtan rather than have Morgan. And to our surprise, when the election took place, Buck cast the lone vote for Morgan.

Moscow not pleased

So Kashtan was elected. And here's a strange sidelight on this event. On one of my trips to the Soviet Union soon after that, Sergei Molochkov, one of the staff members of the Central Committee, asked me: "How come you guys picked a Jew to be the secretary?" And I replied, "Well, it was unanimous, or almost unanimous. Only one person voted against it." And he said, "You should have picked Nigel Morgan, or even Tim Buck, if necessary." He told me how they tried hard to get Tim Buck to go back as general secretary. But it didn't work, of course. That kind of floored me a bit, I must say.

Kashtan became secretary not long after I took on the job as editor of the *Canadian Tribune*. And as editor, I very quickly found out what kind of leader he was. He insisted on having everything done exactly the way he wanted it. No independent thinking was tolerated.

There were several leading members who rebelled against his leadership, Nelson Clarke and Norman Brudy, for example. I did it in my own way on the *Tribune*. Rae Murphy and Tom Morris were real mavericks who frequently challenged Kashtan in the National Executive. But Kashtan asserted himself very effectively as a hard-liner and used his position to ride roughshod over any efforts (and there were many) to challenge some of his policies.

Q.: So, in a sense, when Kashtan was initially chosen he was not really a compromise candidate, but the alternative to Tim Buck, asserting his control in a different manner. You say there were some challenges to his style in the early days. Would you say the Czechoslovak events put an end to those challenges? Do you think that's what was used to consolidate his control here in Canada?

Oh, yes. When Stanley Ryerson, Rae Murphy and I resigned from the Central Committee at that 1968 meeting, to all intents and purposes it meant that we resigned from the Party, although I didn't resign formally until later, when I came back from Czechoslovakia. Actually, after that meeting I no longer consid-

ered myself a member of the Party. Nor did Ryerson or Murphy, I am sure.

Kashtan's control of finances

There's another important factor that had a bearing on Kashtan's leadership. Through all the years Buck was Secretary, and even during Morris's brief term, Kashtan was always the Party Treasurer. He held the purse strings, so to speak, and was very hush-hush about it. His close aides in this work through all the years were Bill Sydney, Misha Cohen and Oscar Kogan. Sometimes only two of them, sometimes all three. Sydney especially was his right-hand man in handling the finances. Not only, as I said, was everything hush-hush, but nobody ever got a financial report at conventions or even at Central Committee meetings. Buck knew what was happening, of course; he left everything to Kashtan, who kept him informed of what he felt Buck had to know. When Morris became Secretary, he wanted little or nothing to do with the finances; he too left it all to Kashtan, even more than Buck did.

Things were brought to a head just before the split in 1956, when Harry Binder was brought into the Toronto office from Montreal for a while. He was the first to raise a whole series of questions: What is the state of finances? Who's controlling them? Do the Central Committee members know, or is it just Kashtan, and a few others? He challenged the entire set-up and said that the Party finances should be open to members of the Central Committee at least, if not to the convention. But Binder left after the split. Interestingly, when Kashtan took over as secretary he didn't appoint a treasurer; he continued to control the purse strings, along with the same two or three individuals. So he had total control of the Party's ideological, administrative and financial affairs. Rae Murphy and Tom Morris did raise some questions about it, but he managed to keep the finances pretty well under his control.

Morris was obvious choice

Q.: There is the matter of how Leslie Morris was picked to be general secretary. I understand that Buck's health was in question, or he was led to believe that he wasn't as well as he might have liked to have been. And then it was decided that he would step down. Had Morris always been groomed to be General Secretary? Or was he the logical choice? Or how was he selected?

I don't think he was groomed, because until 1956 Stewart Smith had pretensions to the leadership, and there may have been others. But I'm quite sure that even before 1956, if it had come to a choice between the two of them, let's say in case of Buck's death, the majority of members would have preferred Morris over Smith. Who else was there? Before that there was Sam Carr, but he was out of the picture after the Gouzenko affair and the passport forgery fiasco.

Incidentally, I learned recently from Krawchuk that when Carr was in hiding in the United States during the war, he asked Moscow if he could go to stay in the Soviet Union, but they refused. They offered instead to send him to China, but he wouldn't buy that. In retrospect, of course, had he gone to the Soviet Union, he likely wouldn't have been alive for very long after that, because of what Stalin was doing. But he did come back, faced the music, so to speak, and served a term in jail.

On the other hand, Fred Rose, the lone Communist elected to the House of Commons after the war, who was also arrested along with Carr and sentenced to six years, chose to be deported to Poland rather than serve his sentence. Much to his regret, it turned out, because when I saw him in Poland in 1950, he told me he wished he had chosen to serve his sentence and be in Canada after that.

Buck's interference

Morris wasn't really groomed for the job, but he was the obvious choice. As to whether Buck stepped down voluntarily or was asked to step down, I don't know, because I wasn't in the leadership then. I believe that after 1956 the challenge came from within the National Executive; the majority felt that it was time for a change. After Morris did take over, however, there was a problem. I was on the National Executive then and recall how at one meeting, when Buck wasn't there, Morris told us that he found it difficult to do his job as secretary. He explained that Buck had been Secretary for so long, "ran the show" for so long, that he could not avoid sort of constantly "looking over his shoulder" and interfering, not directly but indirectly, with how he tried to do things. That's when we decided to send Buck to Moscow for a while, for a rest, then have him visit some of the parties in Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

A startling speech

That was the time, too, that at one Central Committee meeting Morris made that excellent "off-the-cuff" speech about the kind of party he thought was needed in Canada. He reviewed the many mistakes the Party had made and was making in its methods and policies, and at one point asked: "Is the kind of Party that was created by Lenin in 1903, in backward tsarist Russia, in illegal conditions, an underground Party with a military style of leadership and so on, the kind of Party we need in Canada? Should it not be more Canadian in its format and style, one that conforms with the way Canadians view political parties?"

He was, of course, raising the whole question of how the Canadian Party was in so many ways copying the Russian Party. And he cited some of the changes the Italian Party was making. Everybody at that meeting was very enthusiastic about the a new type of Party he projected. Buck was away at the time, but when he got back soon after that and heard about the speech, he severely criticized Morris for it, apparently in private first, then alluded to it at the Executive Committee meeting. Obviously, Moscow must have heard about it too, and didn't like it either. So Morris toned things down a bit after that. And of course he didn't last very long after that because of his cancer.

Q.: Could Morris have won that battle if he had lived?

I don't think so, because Buck was very strongly against it. Mind you, I think it would have been a big battle, because Morris would have had many supporters. Another factor working against him was that Moscow's influence was still very strong. An example of that is what happened after the Ukrainian delegation made its report, how the Soviet Party tried to have it rejected or changed drastically; they fought on that issue viciously.

I often wonder what stand Leslie Morris would have taken on the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia had he lived and stayed on as leader. It's hard to say, really, because he had always been a faithful supporter of the Party's general line, but I think that in the end he would have favoured the Czechoslovak Party's line, because he was very much against the direction from Moscow and the Party's subservience to Moscow, even though he might not have put it in exactly those terms. He was very much against copying the Soviet party.

Copying the Soviet Party

Most of the parties copied the Soviet Party, but some copied it more than others. The Canadian Party was among the worst, with the exception perhaps of the East German. The Czechoslovak Party, before 1967-68, also copied the Soviet Union slavishly. For example, when Khrushchev brought in the new educational system in the Soviet Union, changing everything, the Czechs did exactly the same thing. Which was one of their tragic errors. The people were very much against it.

You must understand that Czechoslovakia had an educational system that was second to none in Europe. As a matter of fact, Jan Komenský (he was also known by his Latin name, Comenius) founded the school system of Bohemia, with its elementary and secondary schools and various small colleges, which worked very well. So well, in fact, that he was invited to England, where he founded the system they have had there since, and on which our public school system in Canada and the United States is based.

You can imagine how the people of Czechoslovakia felt when the Party suddenly abolished that system and brought in the new, untried Soviet system. One can imagine how the alumni of all those colleges must have felt. The irony is that not long after, the Soviet educational authorities found out that the new system wasn't working and reverted back to the old forms.

The Czechoslovak Party did many other silly and stupid things like that. For example, they changed the names of many streets in Czechoslovakia. Important streets that were there for centuries and figured in history, in novels and in the lives of the people — streets on which people were born and died, courted, made love and married — were summarily changed by party bureaucrats. Many of the streets were renamed after Russian party leaders. For example, a very important thoroughfare was named Zhdanov Avenue, after Andrei Zhdanov, one of Stalin's henchmen, and an important square was renamed October Revolution Square.

A silly change

I remember getting into a violent argument with a Russian in Prague over another silly change. The salutation Czechs have used over the centuries when meeting someone, or when parting, was "z Bohem" (literally, "with God"). In 1948, when the Communists

seized power, they decided to change it to "čest práci" (literally, "glory to labour"). Many people, especially the old-timers, the senior citizens, resented this and didn't go along with it. Party members and supporters conformed, of course, as did others, even if they didn't agree, because you were suspect if you didn't. I argued that this was silly. After all, I said, "adieu" in French means "to God," and "goodbye" in English is a contraction of "God be with you," and similarly in many other languages. What would happen, I asked, if the Communist Party in France came to power and suddenly proposed to abolish "adieu"? There were so many other examples of how the Czechoslovak party tried to out-Soviet the Soviet Party.

This was one of the reasons for the rapid rise of the reform movement in 1967. When the Communists took power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, in what was essentially a bloodless coup, many people resented it. Nevertheless, it is said that anywhere from 50 to 70 percent of the population either supported the Communists or were at least willing to give them a chance. Yet over the next 20 years, by 1968, practically all of that support had eroded. Precisely because of the many stupid, undemocratic actions and policies of the Communists. That's why when the protests against the regime and calls for reform were started by writers and journalists in the summer of 1967, they were quickly joined by the rank-and-file members of the Party and soon after even by most of the Party's leadership.

Why the movement collapsed

Q.: Let us deal with some analytical questions. Why, in your opinion, did the international Communist movement generally, and the Party in Canada specifically, collapse?

In my view, it goes back quite far — I would say to Lenin's time. I believe that most of what Marx said was very applicable in his time. And that most of the theoretical postulates of Marxism are still valid today. Lenin undertook to adapt — or, as we were told, "creatively adapt" — Marxism to the "era of imperialism." But in doing so, I think he went overboard in many areas. For example, he made the "dictatorship of the proletariat" one of the main theoretical and tactical pillars of the Third International and thereby of the Communist Parties. Essentially it meant doing away with the democratic content of socialism.

It is interesting to note that Marx and Engels used

the term only once and never made it an important point in any of their writings. Robert Laxer, who was for a time a leading Party member in Toronto, dealt with this very effectively in the manuscript of a book he is currently writing:

"Marx was not the first to describe capitalists as the new ruling class to which he contrasted a possible new proletarian ruling class, a concept which issued from the French workers in the revolution in 1848. Marx then posed the dictatorship of the proletariat in contrast to that of the dictatorship of the big industrialists. And he used the terms 'government' and 'dictatorship' without much distinction and somewhat offhandedly. He disregards at that stage the immaturity of democracy or universal suffrage, whether those who had dictated or the government had received their power by democratic means. The term 'democracy' appears neither in the U.S. Constitution nor in the Bill of Declaration of Human Rights in the U.S. or France. And this vagueness in Marxist formulation, which was the product of the immature status of democracy or universal suffrage, has been a source of fierce debate in the socialist movement and of much horror practiced in Leninist Communism, falsely attributed to Marx."

Dictatorship by whom?

When Marx used the term "dictatorship of the proletariat," he meant it in the sense of a dictatorship of the "have-nots" as opposed to the then existing dictatorship of the "haves." But the way Lenin applied it after the Revolution in 1917, and even more so the way Stalin applied it after he came to power, it was not a dictatorship of the proletariat but a dictatorship of the Party. And not even of the Party but of the elite of the Party, its top leadership. The irony is that prior to and during the revolution the Bolsheviks advanced the slogan "All Power to the Soviets," which meant the rule of the local and regional councils, but as soon as they consolidated their power it was the Party that took over.

Nor did Lenin's advancement of "democratic centralism" as another pillar of Communist Party practice meet the historic test, because there was always more centralism than democracy. The input of the people below, the rank and file, was always very weak or non-existent in the Communist movement. Moreover, when the Third International was formed under Lenin's leadership, it established the famed 21 Points, which each party that wanted to join had to accept and abide by. While this was done with the aim of bringing unity

to the new Communist movement, in effect it also meant that all the Parties had to submit to the leadership of the Russian Communists, who dominated the International.

Russians dominated

I recall this vividly, because as a teen-ager I was very interested in politics, especially the Communist movement. But these Russian leaders, including Lenin, made many errors. For one thing, they were mistakenly convinced that the time was ripe for a world revolution. They believed that the Russian Revolution would before long be followed by a revolution in Germany and perhaps Hungary, and then quickly spread elsewhere. It was a purely subjective conclusion, not based on any hard evidence. I read with avid interest each issue of *Inprecor*, the monthly bulletin of the Communist International, and noticed that although international leaders like Ercoli of Italy, Thaelmann of Germany, and Thorez of France played an important part, the Russian leaders, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Manuilsky and others, dominated the scene. And because under the 21 Points the Communist parties had to follow the Comintern directives, this often led to some pretty negative features in many countries, including Canada.

People had little say

Another factor was that in the Soviet Union the people down below had very little input in running the country. Increasingly, the direction for everything always came from the top, especially under Stalin, when bureaucracy reached its extreme limits and proved the truth of Lord Acton's observation that "All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

In the early years after the revolution there were efforts to observe some semblance of democracy within the Party. For example, a manager of the factory and a worker on the factory floor could both be members of the Party. In the factory they had one kind of relationship, but at the Party branch meeting they were supposed to be equal, with each having the right to criticize the other freely. In the beginning that right was observed, but very soon after it got to the point where, if a rank-and-file Party member criticized the manager of the factory, the latter had many ways of getting even with the former and usually did. More and more, the managers of factories, chairmen of collective farms and especially the Party leaders at each level surrounded

themselves with yes-men and toadies who did their bidding. As a result, there developed a hierarchy of power cliques that extended from the smallest village to the Politburo to the supreme leader.

In my view, the main weakness in the “socialism” that was instituted in Soviet Russia and in the Communist movement throughout the world was the lack of democracy. It was the Achilles’ heel of what they called “real socialism,” but in actuality was anything but real.

Another big factor in the failure of Soviet-style socialism was the so-called national question, which I touched on earlier. With the gradual denigration of national cultures, what was once a tsarist “prison-house of nations,” eventually became a Soviet empire, in which the Russian language was dominant and the dogma of Marxism-Leninism ruled.

Great-nation chauvinism?

Q.: On that last point, about Russian chauvinism. It has been said that Russians are extremely xenophobic and that now, with no Soviet Union, there is a resurgence of this concept that the Slavic soul has to be purified by going through all of these trials and tribulations. This is what some nationalists have expressed to me. And that's an interesting point in history. But why is it different? What sets the Russians apart in the psychological make-up of the culture that would appear to give them this right to ordain their own supremacy?

I'm not sure, but it likely goes back to the Russian empire and the way Russians dominated the area for centuries. It's much the same as with China. The Chinese leaders also play down the minorities, regard them as second-rate, as with Tibet, for example. The English, too, during the long period of the British Empire, revealed some of these characteristics: towards India, Ireland and their many colonies. I don't think it is inherent biologically, it's a result of a certain historical development.

Comintern's role

Q.: You mentioned how the Parties had to follow the directives of the Comintern and its 21 Points. From the accounts of the early history of the Party in Canada that I can recall, the Comintern's will was imposed on it from the very beginning. One of them, as the Canadian Party was endeavouring to formulate its position, was whether Canada was a nation or a colony and

whether it was a colony of Britain or the United States. And where in that milieu did Quebec fit? Until about 1925 there was some fairly serious debate in the Canadian Party around these concepts, after which the Comintern apparently intervened and said: this is how we view your country and this is the theory that you should take. The other intervention that followed soon after was the so-called “Bolshevization” of the Party, wherein the various ethnic sections were no longer affiliated to the Party by virtue of their own existence; membership had to be on an individual basis. In retrospect, that may have been a mistake. Can I get your comment on either or both of these?

In those early years the Comintern imposed a variety of policies and tactics on the Party, policies and tactics that were essentially foreign and did not originate from within the Party. One side effect was that these gave the Party a “foreign” image. It was bad enough that in the eyes of most ordinary Canadians the Party was made up largely of Ukrainians, Finns and Jews — which it was — but this was intensified by some of the things the Party did.

Let me cite some examples. When I was a young teenager and a member of the YCL, during some of my first days in Toronto, in the late fall of 1930, I recall that an order came from the Comintern to “industrialize” the Party, to turn it more to industry. That rather than just have so-called territorial clubs there should be industrial or factory clubs. The idea was that Party members who worked in factories should try to recruit and set up such clubs, but also, where possible, the Party should send members into the factories to recruit others and form such clubs. The YCL in Toronto took this directive to heart and ordered a couple of its members to get a job in the York Knitting Mills factory at Queen and Ossington. The conditions in the factory were very bad, of course, wages were very low and the hours long.

There certainly was a need for a union. But our two YCL members were “revolutionaries in a hurry.” Instead of working there for several months and gradually getting to know the workers and the conditions better, they got a few of the young people worked up about the low wages and poor conditions, which wasn't difficult to do, and opted for an early strike. They put out a leaflet that described the poor wages and terrible working conditions and called on the workers to come out on strike. But at the bottom of the leaflet they wound up with the slogan, “For a Soviet Canada!”

Even as a young and naïve teenager, I knew that was not a very bright thing to do.

More on Soviet influence

Another example. When Lenin School graduates like Sam Carr and John Weir returned from Moscow, they were very gung-ho. They had also picked up a lot of Soviet ideas and customs, like Russian revolutionary songs. And they began teaching some of these to the YCL members at campfires and at social gatherings. Some of them were sung in the original Russian, some were translated, and some were sung in both versions. One of them comes to mind. The translated version went:

*Banker and boss hate the red Soviet star
Gladly they'd build a new throne for the tsar
But from the steppes to the dark British sea
Lenin's Red Army brings victory.*

(Chorus)

*So, workers, close your ranks
Keep firm and steady
For the workers' cause
Your bayonets bright
For workers' Russia, for Soviet Canada
Get ready for the last fierce fight.*

Incidentally, that first verse was originally a Civil War song that said, "Trotsky's Red Army brings victory," but that was not mentioned. And where the translated words in that song say, "Lenin's Red army brings victory," the original Russian words were, *Krasnaia armiiia vsekh sil'nei* (The Red Army is strongest of them all). In retrospect, one can't help wondering what a young Canadian who came to one of those socials and listened to those songs — one who was not Ukrainian, Russian or Jewish, and not seized with revolutionary fervour as we were, but just interested in socialist ideas — what he or she thought of it, what impression it left. It's no wonder that not many members were recruited.

Young Pioneers

Yet another example of Soviet influence (and "foreign" in the eyes of most Canadians) was the way in the early 1930s the Party organized branches of the Young Pioneers for children. It was all Soviet-style: the same red neckerchiefs, the same upraised-arm salute, the same slogan "Always Ready," from the Russian

bud' gotov. In some cases these things were done on instructions from the Comintern, but in many cases it was simply Canadian Party leaders copying what the Russians were doing.

All this was part of what gave the Party a foreign image, as were all the stories about Moscow gold, which, we were told by the Party leaders, was capitalist propaganda. Much later, of course, while I was still a member, I learned that a great deal of the Party's work was funded by Moscow. I recall how immediately after the war, in 1945 and 1946, there was a big campaign to raise funds for launching the *Daily Tribune*. Funds were collected from all over Canada, and many people gave generously. But there was no way they could have collected as much money as was needed to start that paper. The Party claimed publicly that they did, but not all the sources of the funds were given. It was all hidden, of course, not only from the public at large but from the Party members as well.

Anticipating revolution

There was much talk in those early years about world revolution, because there was much talk about it by the leaders of the Comintern. The concept of world revolution being relatively imminent was prevalent for quite some time. Buck used to say, in his speeches throughout the 1930s and even after the war, that there could be a revolution within 10 or 15 years. Sam Carr, while delivering greetings from the Party to a Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association convention in 1931, told the delegates that they were heading for a Soviet Canada within a decade or so.

Q.: Did you expect, then, that sometime by the end of the 1930s or by the early 1940s we would indeed have a Soviet Canada? And how, functioning with that premise, did that affect your style of work?

Well, we believed it, so we were on a high. And because we believed it, it was something inspiring, something to look forward to, ignoring the fact that most people did not share our beliefs. Moreover, while there was general talk about the fact that imperialism brings war, none of the Party leaders predicted the world war that came by the end of the decade (although Trotsky did warn as early as 1934-35 that war was imminent). Instead, there was talk about the world going Communist. Indeed, Stalin's right-hand man, Molotov, declared at one point that "All roads lead to communism."

At the time, I believed this, because I wanted it to be true. I came into the movement inspired with this idea of socialism, of a world socialist revolution, of Communism. The Soviet Union to me was an example of a new world, not knowing what was really going on there. Let me say, however, that had there been real democracy after the 1917 revolution, the Soviet Union could have been an example of a better society. Even with its difficulties and many of its negative features, the Soviet Union was, in its earlier years, an inspiration to many, especially the people in the colonial world, a hope that they could raise their standard of living. Although at first we regarded talk about the lack of democracy there as "bourgeois propaganda," it gradually became more and more evident that in fact it was a dictatorship.

What kind of democracy?

I know that in the Party we used to make the point that "bourgeois democracy" wasn't really democracy. But I believe it was wrong to take that approach. It was right to point to the many flaws in our Western style of democracy, but we should also have pointed out its merits, especially as compared with other regimes, including that of the Soviet Union. When you look at the rights and freedoms that do exist, like the Magna Carta and the right of *habeas corpus*, as flawed and as false as much of our democracy is, much of it is also genuine and certainly superior to what exists elsewhere. I believe this is yet another reason why the Soviet Union didn't succeed in winning over more people than it did and why eventually it lost most of its support.

It is true that some of the Soviet Union's achievements in the earlier years and during and immediately following the war attracted and won over many of the world's cultural leaders. But that eroded totally after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, when Stalin's crimes were exposed and people found out that most of the negative things that had been reported about the Soviet Union by the capitalist media were not just right-wing propaganda. That's why there was such a big let-down.

On capitalist propaganda

Q.: You have mentioned the capitalist press and its role, but am I getting from you that it was more the subjective things — the failure to implement this or the misinterpretation of that — that caused the collapse, rather than all of the capitalist propaganda against the

Soviet Union, the arms race and the capitalist efforts to undermine the Soviet Union. How would you factor these as far as relative influence is concerned?

They were both at play. There is no question that the capitalist media played a big role. Before the Cold War they succeeded in portraying many aspects of the Soviet regime in a negative light, much of which many people considered propaganda: the fact that the Soviet Union was a closed society; that Soviet people couldn't readily leave their country; that foreigners were suspect and under constant surveillance; the closed society aspect of it — essentially the lack of democracy.

In retrospect, the Soviet military played a very strong role, too, even though we weren't fully aware of it, as does the military in every country. And of course there was the role of Stalin. He dominated and controlled everything: Soviet foreign policy, the Comintern, even the policies of the Communist Parties in the different countries. Earlier I mentioned how in the 1930s, Stalin and the Comintern ordered the Parties to step up their attacks on the social democrats, calling them "social fascists" and labeling them as hand-maidens of capitalism.

This is not to say that there shouldn't have been any criticism of the social democrats and the Second International. But what was done was done in such a blatant and vicious way. When the CCF was founded in Canada, the Communist Party immediately attacked it and its leaders. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the Comintern established the World Federation of Trade Unions, a centre for the Communist-led unions that the Parties were directed to create as an opposition to trade unions led largely by the social democrats and left-liberal elements. In Canada, the Workers' Unity League coordinated this task. The WUL did some good things, organizing the unorganized workers, leading the struggles of the unemployed, etc. But a great deal of enmity and disunity was also created within the working class in the process. I think that, historically speaking, it was more a negative than a positive factor.

Lack of democracy

Yes, the capitalist propaganda against the Soviet Union and the Communist movement was very strong and played an important role, but I still think that the lack of democracy was the main factor in the failure of the Soviet regime. This was proven later during the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia. The Action Program

put out by the Party at that time had as its main features such concepts as: freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of the press, the right to travel. This is what people in all the Communist countries wanted. When the ordinary Russians heard about the Action Program (via the grapevine and the *samizdat*), they were very hopeful. But had it gone through, it would have been very infectious. That's why the Soviet leaders had to stop it.

Democracy also includes the right to organize and belong to trade unions and freedom for trade unions. We were always told that the workers in the Soviet Union were free, that they ran the country. But it soon became clear that this was not so, that the workers there didn't have the right to strike and really had little or no say in running their economy, much less their country.

Most people know that the word *soviet* in Russian means council. Yet the Party leaders used to talk about a Soviet Canada, which was stupid, since it only added to the "foreign" image many Canadians had of the Party.

When the decline began

Q.: When do you think the Communist Party ceased to have an impact on Canadian political life?

I think it began with the start of the Cold War, but really impacted after the exposure of Stalin's crimes. It took another big drop in the Gorbachev period and after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Each of these contributed to a change in people's attitude towards the Communist Party. Belief in its lofty goals (many of which, it turned out, were used for false and fraudulent ends) dwindled rapidly and disappeared. All of it left a lot of confusion and questioning in the minds of honest, progressive-thinking Canadians.

About Party and prestige

Q.: I'm going to come at this from a different angle. The Party did at one time have the attitude of labeling the CCF as social-fascist, then, a little later, of critical support for the NDP. But it was always hoping that eventually the workers in the CCF would be won over, that, I guess as Lenin predicted, the more knowledge they got, the more naturally they would become Communist. A number of those on the left who weren't members of the Party had a high regard for it because of its discipline, because they thought democratic centralism was a good idea, and they probably were

impressed by some aspects of vanguardism. So if the Party didn't create prestige for itself but was accorded some prestige by friends on the left, how do you explain that phenomenon?

Well, I know that in France and in some other countries in Europe many leading artists, writers and scientists favoured the Party because of its lofty ideals. And many of them did indeed think there was a need for a disciplined party that knew what its goal was. Yet at the same time the Party's dogmatism and sectarianism worked against that. Indeed, the whole idea of a vanguard party, in my view, is wrong. The Trotskyists too called themselves the vanguard party. And the social democrats have always considered themselves the vanguard party, even though they didn't use the term; they have always felt that they were the ones who were going to lead the people to a better society and pooh-poohed the pretensions of the Communists, the Trotskyists, and the others.

So it still comes back to how the Communists saw themselves. If they were supposed to be the true carriers of scientific socialism, the onus was on them to find the ways, effective ways, of bringing together all those who were willing to fight against capitalism, rather than contribute to dividing them by a confrontational approach. When the Communists, prior to and even after the war, talked about a united front with the social democrats, in many cases it was tongue-in-cheek. When they talked about a "united front from below," in their minds it was a tactic wherein they would have little to do with the leaders but hoped that they would be able to win over their rank and file to their side. I think that most rank-and-file members of the Party sincerely believed in the tactic, but I also believe that there was a lot of cynicism about it in the leadership.

A matter of method

Q.: If we could touch on that matter of socialism for a second. Capitalism is not universal in its methodology or its application. There are various forms of capital that, especially today, compete for world dominance. Initially there was only the one situation where a country evolved its particular form of socialism, while the period after World War I was marked by the lack of success of other advocates of socialism — in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Only one model developed, without comparators, for a number of years. Had there been more success following World War I, we

might have had a diversity of models to pick from and perhaps more success. From as far back as 1903, as you say, there have been bitter debates about this in the socialist microcosm, as it were. But because there was no sort of stage where these models could develop more fully, by having governments, we won't know.

There is, of course, the fact that in many cases the subjective factor came into these debates. The differences were genuine, there were real debates on policy, tactics, and so on, yet in retrospect they ought to have found ways of differing while still fighting the class enemy, ways of fighting the class enemy together.

Now, I know that's somewhat idealistic and is easier said than done. But I believe everyone on the Left didn't really try hard enough to get consensus. Regrettably, there were a lot of power struggles among the Parties and within each Party, as well as within the international Communist movement, each faction or group claiming it had the right policies and the others were wrong, off the track, or off the "line." One could liken it to a dispute within a family; sometimes there can be serious, even violent, differences, but for the sake of maintaining the family unit, its members do stick together. This may not be the best analogy, but the fact is that for all these Parties and groups and factions on the Left, the main enemy was capitalism.

Very often, each side, and sometimes there were three sides, of the left wing, made the other side the enemy, as Stalin did, when for a time, prior to 1935, he got the Parties to consider the social democrats worse than, or at best equal to, the class enemy. The Social Democrats, of course, were no better in their attitude to the Communists. That is what I meant when I said that the split on the Left was one of history's great tragedies. The irony is that the right pro-capitalist groups have often been divided on all kinds of issues, but they always managed to be united and act in unison in opposing socialism or any socialist ideas.

Was collapse inevitable?

Q.: Do you think the collapse of the Communist movement was inevitable, and if so, why?

Historically speaking, yes. Because the non-democratic, overly bureaucratic nature of the regime led to the point where it no longer had the support of the people; it couldn't function, couldn't grow, just as eventually it wasn't able to in the Soviet Union.

For decades, the Communist parties took their

direction from the Comintern (the 21 Points) and subsequently from the Soviet leaders in Moscow, and were subjected to their errors and non-democratic methods. They also became subjects of Stalin's foreign policy. For example, the successes of the united front between the Socialists and Communists in France and Italy were suddenly cut short by Stalin, because his foreign policy changed, and the Communist Parties in both countries (and others) were made to go back to their previous policy of working alone. The Canadian Party likewise was very subservient to the Soviet Union. As a result, no criticism of the Soviet Union was tolerated, which had its repercussions. And this was extended to the ethnic organizations controlled by the Party.

Moscow's hold very powerful

Q.: Could anything have been done to prevent that?

I don't think so. Because any effort to change things would have been resisted and denounced by Moscow. That's why the leaders of the Party always did what Moscow would approve and resisted anything they thought the leaders in Moscow might disapprove of. And Kashtan was the best example of that. After 1968, leading members of the Party like Nelson Clarke and Norman Brudy, for example, were squeezed out of the leadership because they were critical of the Party's policies and of the Soviet Union, as were those who challenged the Party's policies earlier, in 1956.

And it was really difficult to shake off the hold Moscow had on the Party, indeed on all the Parties. For example, when I was in Prague, this question came up in a conversation I had with the representative of the Italian Party on the magazine. He said to me: "Look, John, our leaders — our top leaders, Togliatti before and Berlinguer now and others — would go to Moscow and talk to the Russian leaders behind closed doors. And they'd tell them what, in their opinion, they were doing wrong, what they considered harmful, or what policies wouldn't go over in Italy. But they would simply ignore us and keep on doing what they thought was right. So we were put in the awkward and unenviable position: if we criticized them, we'd be joining the anti-Soviet bandwagon; if we didn't, we were tarred with their brush." That is why, he explained, the Italian and Spanish Parties eventually broke away from the Moscow line and established what became known as "Euro-Communism," much to the chagrin of Moscow

and the hard-liners in other parties, like the Canadian Party's Kashtan.

More negative than positive

Q.: Do you think, overall, the Party's negative features outweighed its contributions?

That's difficult to say. I liken it somewhat to the fact that the Soviet people did a lot of wonderful things in spite of Stalin. There were some great things done here by the Communists who were in the trade unions and in all kinds of movements. Great things were done in the name of the Communist Party for Canada and its people. But overall, I think there were too many negative features. And they are the chief reason why the Party didn't succeed.

During the defeat of fascism, in which the Soviet Union played a decisive part, and in the first few years after the war, there was a euphoria, an upsurge in the Communist Party and the left-wing movement; in many countries Communists were elected to office, including a few in Canada. But that didn't last long. There was the Gouzenko affair and its aftermath, the start of the Cold War and the McCarthy period. In many instances the capitalist media told the truth about matters the Communist movement wanted suppressed and were therefore very successful in painting a negative picture of the Communist Party and its sectarian, dogmatic methods — methods that were not readily acceptable to most Canadians.

Start with where people are

I believe you have to start from where the people are. You can't impose your policies without regard to what people are ready to accept. That's why those who in their views are to the left of the NDP, for example, should be very tactful about how they criticize the NDP. It should be done in a way that does not alienate those people who are supporting the NDP. I'm not saying they should not criticize the NDP. It's *how* they do it.

Through all history, the Communists were always very critical of the Social Democrats, but in a way that was very negative and subjective. The classic example was in Germany before Hitler. Both the Communists and the Social Democrats allowed the fight between themselves to supersede the fight against fascism. Trotsky, while in exile, spoke out against these tactics and denounced their intransigence on more than one

occasion. And he was right.

But this same negative attitude to the Social Democrats still persists today, even among some of those on the Left who broke with the Communist Party. Again, I don't want to be misunderstood: I'm not saying that Bob Rae and his government, for example, should not have been criticized. He certainly deserved criticism for many of the things he did, and didn't do. But it should have been done in a way that convinces and wins over the NDP members, including Rae's supporters, rather than alienating them.

My attitude to the Party today

Q.: How would you describe your attitude to the Communist Party of Canada as it exists today? Would you say it is supportive, sympathetic, indifferent or hostile?

Regrettably, somewhere between indifferent and hostile, because, from what I've seen of their activities and program, I think they have learned nothing, or almost nothing, from the events that have taken place. They're still as sectarian, dogmatic and rigid in their attitude as the Party always was.

Lessons for the future

Q.: What do you see as the true value and best outcome of this interview survey?

My main hope is that the young people of the future who want to study Marxism, who want to see a strong, viable left-wing pro-socialist movement, will hear or read these interviews and draw lessons from them. What form that future will take is hard to say, but I do know that some new thinking will be required to achieve it. I think it is very important to have a record of the way different people thought about the Party, how it affected them, how it influenced their lives.

The Communist movement in Canada, despite all its negative aspects, did have many positive effects on the history of the labour movement, and on the history of Canada generally. Especially the role played by of the hundreds of rank-and-file members and supporters of the Party, including those in the ethnic organizations. They also left a legacy. Their children and grandchildren were imbued with many of the ideas and ideals of the movement, which they are now passing on in the various institutions and communities to which they

belong, as well as to their children and grandchildren.

Marx's theories still valid

Q.: Let's deal with another aspect — scientific socialism. If indeed Marxism is a social science, one should be able to look at any given situation with a set of analytical tools one has been given and be able to objectively assess the variables and predict an outcome. What are the positive and negative aspects of Marxism? And is the application I've just mentioned one of them?

I think that most of what Marx and Engels projected in their time — the theory especially — is still valid. Certainly the principles they adopted for the fight against the capitalist system still apply.

We were told that Lenin adapted Marxism to the age of imperialism. Well, aside from the mistakes he made in doing so and the even greater mistakes his successors made in trying to apply his theories, the fact is that the world has changed greatly since Lenin's time. The age of imperialism is now the age of the transnational corporations, which ignore entire governments and nations to achieve their goals. Many things have changed, including the character of the working

class. In the 1920s and 1930s, for example, the Party was able to put out a leaflet "to the workers" and it would speak in almost the same language to the ditch-digger and the carpenter, except perhaps the photoengraver or the railway engineer, who were then the elite of the working class. Today you can't talk about workers in the same way. Only a small percentage of the population, for example, is engaged in manufacturing. There are many more categories of workers.

I think that the Left generally — this includes the Communists and the NDP — are not sufficiently taking into account the big changes that are now taking place in the world — the new technological and communication revolutions and their impact on society — and are therefore not changing with the times.

I haven't got the answers, of course, but I am convinced that future Marxists and students of scientific socialism will have to do some serious new thinking about the nature of the capitalist world today — the global corporate system. It will require new approaches, new ways of talking to people, new ways of projecting and interpreting Marxist principles for today's times.

Part 2

Why I Left the Communist Party (My Letter to the Central Executive Committee)

Feb. 18, 1970

To the Central Executive Committee,
Communist Party of Canada,
Toronto, Ontario.

Yes, I have dropped my membership in the Communist Party. After long and careful consideration I came to the conclusion that I can no longer belong to:

1. a Party that condoned and continues to condone the terrible injustices and crimes that were committed *and are still being committed to this day* in Czechoslovakia — all in the name of “Marxism-Leninism,” “democratic centralism” and “proletarian internationalism.”

2. a Party that condones the distortions of socialist democracy and socialist legality that have been taking place and are continuing to take place in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries *since* the 20th Congress of the CPSU — likewise in the name of “Marxism-Leninism,” etc.

(This conclusion is based not only on sources that are available to everyone, but also, and mainly, from what I learned from a score or so of Soviet Communists and foreign Communists who have lived in the Soviet Union, with whom I worked in Prague, as well as a few I met in Moscow. Some of them were old-time members of the CPSU, some new; all of them highly knowledgeable in their fields. They described the situation much more sharply and much more harshly than I do. Significantly, most of the information given to me by these Soviet persons was given individually, when alone, very seldom when there were two or more present).

3. a Party whose leadership remains silent when anti-Semitism is used to advance a particular policy or

interest — as, for example, in the propaganda seeking to establish that counter-revolution had gained the upper hand in Czechoslovakia. (Why did not anyone in the leadership of the Canadian Party denounce or criticize or even seek to correct the lie, one of a dozen at least, in Dyson Carter's own version of a “white book” — *Whatever Happened in Czechoslovakia?* — that Jiri Hajek was a Jew, whose real name was Karpeles? Why didn't the *Canadian Tribune* publish, as the London *Morning Star* did, the statement Hajek issued denouncing the canard, which first appeared in *Izvestia*, and its slimy purpose? Was it because it happened to be at the same time, grist for the mill of the “official” line? And hasn't the same attitude of silence been taken towards, or mealy-mouthed attempts made to explain, the ill-disguised efforts recently in Czechoslovakia and earlier in Poland, to exploit anti-Semitism in the Party's inner struggle by concocting charges of Zionism against devoted and dedicated life-long veteran Communists?).

4. a Party (and this is true of most other Communist Parties today) in which a small group at the top — often influenced strongly by one or two individuals, and even more often by the top clique of the Party of another country — is the sole and final arbiter of who in the Party is a “left-sectarian dogmatist” and who is a “right-wing revisionist.” Strangely enough, in spite of constant references to “two dangers,” regardless of which is the greatest at any given time, there doesn't seem to be any record of anyone in the Party ever having been denounced or disciplined, much less expelled, for left-sectarianism or dogmatism. For example, even though the Central Committee of the present Communist Party of Czechoslovakia proclaimed in a resolution at its November 1968 plenary meeting that there is a need to fight both dangers, to this day no one has yet been denounced or disciplined for left-

sectarianism or dogmatism. But the screws sure have been turned against anyone even suspected of leaning towards so-called revisionism. Is it at all perhaps because those doing the labeling and categorizing, denouncing and hounding and expelling, in Canada and Czechoslovakia, are the real left-sectarians and dogmatists?

5. a Party in which members who gave years of selfless devotion and work "for the cause" and have not abandoned their dedication to socialism can be treated by their lifelong colleagues almost as "class enemies," simply because they strongly uphold views they sincerely believe in on certain important issues. Their only recourse, apparently, under the present arbitrary and convenient interpretation of "democratic centralism" is to clam up and conform or get out.

Apropos this last point, I recently have had some personal experiences that would appear to be relevant:

a) a top executive officer of the Party told me on my return that I could not express to my fellow-members in the Party my views and feelings about what I saw and experienced in Czechoslovakia, because this would be in contravention of the convention decisions and thus harmful to the Party. (I haven't worked in the YCL and Party for over 40 years to have my mind and my conscience muzzled that easily.)

b) a Party member holding a responsible post told a member of my family while I was still in Prague that I am an "imperialist agent" because of my views about what happened in Czechoslovakia.

c) a highly placed, responsible member (I went to some trouble to find out who) informed a *Toronto Telegram* reporter after I declined to stand for the Central Committee that I'm flirting with the Trotskyists — a deliberate lie. Why? I hold no brief for the Trotskyists. While I consider the overwhelming majority of them every bit as sincere in the desire for socialism as are most members of the Communist Party, I also find they are every bit as sectarian, as dogmatic, as cliché-minded, and as irrelevant to the real Canadian scene as are all-too-many members of the Communist Party. If they have a "plus" it is in fact that they have been able to attract a large number of young people to the cause of socialism.

d) a leading member has been peddling the story that the job I now have had been arranged for me even before I left Prague. Since this is an outright lie, what purpose could it have other than to discredit me among my friends?

I realize that these latter charges involve the actions of individuals and not the Party as a whole. But I find this readiness to brand as an enemy anyone who holds a sharply different view on a major issue, or issues, all too symptomatic of an attitude throughout the Party. (The last convention was a good example of this. So is the manner in which those who are now in the "driver's seat" in the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia are dealing with those who don't agree with their "official" policy. Likewise, what they did to those who opposed them, including good veteran Communists, to get into the driver's seat).

Let me make one thing clear: in spite of all the above, I have not given up my ideals, the ideals for which I worked all my life. I still believe in socialism, but genuine socialism, "socialism with a human face," as the Czechoslovak Communists so aptly described it, with all that that implies.

However, I do not see how the Communist Party of Canada, as it is now constituted, with its present policies and above all its *methods*, can be instrumental in advancing the Canadian people to socialism. I believe that somehow, eventually, the coming generation or generations of revolutionaries and forward-looking and thinking people will achieve that goal; but only as they are able to rid the present movement (and the regimes in the socialist countries) of most of the present injustices, weaknesses and evils: dogmatism, sectarianism, and above all bureaucratic elitism, which is such a damper on the potential in the socialist world today.

While I've had criticism of, and reservations about, some of these injustices, weaknesses and evils in the past (those I knew about) I was willing to rationalize, to overlook them in the interests of the greater common goal, to see them as flaws in the movement in the socialist world, flaws which eventually could and would be fought against and eliminated. My two-year stay in Czechoslovakia — what I saw there, what I learned from the representatives of other Parties and most of all from 15 to 20 Soviet Communists with whom I worked and whom I got to know intimately and whose confidence I gained — all this convinced me that it is a pretty frustrating hope.

Certainly in the Party in Canada it is. Were I in the Italian, Spanish or British Party, to name a few, no doubt I would still be a member, for I find myself in agreement with their policies, their approach, and their thinking, as I know them from the documents and

articles that I read, but even more from conversations I had with their leading people. I find that the leaders and members of these Parties share the critical views that I have and they hope to fight through for them. But there is no room for these views in the Canadian Party — and, unfortunately, as yet in too many other Communist Parties.

As I made clear in my letter to the convention and in subsequent conversations with Bill Kashtan, I have never had and do not have any intention of publicly proclaiming my differences with the Party or making a public issue of them. This is why, when I decided to

drop my membership, I simply told the secretary of my former club that I would no longer pay dues or attend meetings, without giving any reasons. I thought this would be the best for all concerned.

In reply to your letter, I have tried here for the first time to briefly outline some of these reasons. But I have no desire to get into any discussions, polemics or debate about them. With this letter, therefore, I consider the matter closed.

Yours sincerely,
John Boyd

Part 3

More Questions about Ukraine and Ukrainians

On Ukraine in early 1917

Q.: In Our History, Krawchuk tells of the period from March 28 to May 31, 1917, when members of the former Ukrainian Social Democratic Party had expressed their support for the declared government of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Kyiv. What do you know about the events in Ukraine in the post-revolutionary period until the situation stabilized with the Soviet government?

I'm not very well acquainted with the facts in this case, except the little that I read about those events. I understand that the urge for an independent Ukraine was very strong through all the centuries. So when in the February 1917 revolution in Russia the tsar was overthrown, a Ukrainian Central Council was formed in Kyiv that included all the parties and groups that were for independence. But the council was eventually torn by discord. When after the October revolution this discord continued, the Bolshevik faction on the council broke away and unilaterally proclaimed Ukraine a Soviet republic. The Ukrainian Social Democrats in Canada then switched their allegiance to the new Soviet regime. It should be said that for several years there was an upsurge of national freedom and national culture in Soviet Ukraine, but this was quickly squelched beginning around 1928, after Stalin came to power.

Right-Left split deepens

Q.: As we know, there were divisions within the Ukrainian community. Prior to the choice of supporting two governments in Ukraine after the revolution, how did the developments in Ukraine affect the relations between the two sides?

For a while both sides supported the efforts to create an independent Ukraine. But the so-called

nationalists in Canada — the religious and right-wing sector — were against the Bolsheviks from the very start. When the split in Ukraine took place, they took the side of those who were fighting the Bolsheviks. The left-wing organizations supported the Soviet regime in Ukraine. Actually, that is when the split in the Ukrainian Canadian community deepened sharply and irrevocably; there was no looking back on either side, no give and take. After the Ukrainian People's Republic government fell apart, its leaders went into exile, some to Vienna, others to Paris or Berlin. As far as the nationalists here were concerned, they continued their fight for an independent Ukrainian state.

Q.: How were the Ukrainian people in Canada informed of the developments in Ukraine in this period?

Each side in the community here had its newspapers. The nationalist papers published what the general media carried, as well as whatever news they could get directly from the exiles, mostly from Vienna and Paris. The Communist side carried whatever they could get from Moscow and Kyiv, from newspapers, by short-wave radio and from letters.

Anti-socialist drive

Q.: The Ukrainian Social Democratic Party was banned in March 1917. What were the reasons?

Chiefly because after 1917 they were considered Bolsheviks, or supporters of Russia's Bolsheviks. The Ukrainian nationalist leaders had a lot of influence in Liberal and Conservative party circles, so they were able to denounce the socialist-led Ukrainian organizations as Bolshevik, godless, etc. (Krawchuk cites how these leaders told government and educational officials that these organizations were teaching children to be godless.) That is how they helped to get the Social Democratic Party banned. Moreover, they exploited the

fact that the socialists were against the war. As I told you earlier, my father, who was an active socialist, was arrested and jailed for his anti-war activity. Many others were, too. Earlier, of course, thousands of Ukrainians, whether they were socialists or not, were interned. They were considered enemy aliens because they originally came from the part of Ukraine that was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Government officials at that time — whether Liberal or Conservative — were very jingoistic, and if you weren't an ardent supporter of the British Empire, or of the war, you were a "Bolshevik."

Ukrainians form own section

Q.: I found a difference of interpretation between Krawchuk and the Ukrainian Canadian historian Orest Martynowych. Krawchuk refers to the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party as a separate political party and Martynowych portrays it as a section of the Social Democratic Party of Canada. According to Martynowych, it was in the SDPC that the protocols for this federalist structure of affiliation of what he calls the language sections were evolved, protocols that I guess were non-transferable to the Communist Party and ULFTA relationship later. What can you tell me about this earlier relationship between the Social Democratic Party of Canada and the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party? How did those associations form the basis of what evolved later?

Since I was just a kid then, I don't know anything about this from personal experience, only from what I have read. I don't think Martynowych is quite as knowledgeable on this point as Krawchuk is. As far as I can gather, there was a Socialist Party of Canada and also a Social Democratic Party, both led largely by Anglo-Saxons. The Ukrainians, Finns and Jews who joined the latter soon decided to form their own separate sections, chiefly for language reasons. They wanted to conduct their meetings and business in their own language, and they found it difficult to read minutes and other materials from the national office.

They also didn't like to be seen as just flunkies of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, without having much say. They felt they had some very good leaders of their own, like Matthew Popowich among the Ukrainians and John Ahlqvist among the Finns. They wanted to run their own show, without necessarily breaking away, but with some autonomy. The Anglo-Saxon leaders of both parties couldn't see this need,

didn't appreciate the problems the immigrants had, so it was a source of some discord. Later, when the Communist Party was founded, many in the leadership similarly fought against Ukrainian and Finnish sections of the Party. Eventually the latter had to give in, but to a greater or lesser degree there were problems with this right up until about 1928.

Tsarist and Austrian oppression

Q.: I am interested in the political background of your parents in western Ukraine. Because of a superficial understanding, perhaps, some might think that the eastern part of Ukraine, having been ruled by the tsar, was always the more radical section of the country. Maybe you could describe the character of the opposition to the Austro-Hungarian regime in western Ukraine and what sort of ideological basis that largely stemmed from.

The Ukrainians were oppressed economically, socially and culturally in both areas. In eastern Ukraine, in tsarist Russia, they were regarded as *malorosy* or Little Russians, and any manifestations of cultural expression were vigorously suppressed, often by exile to Siberia. In western Ukraine, the Austro-Hungarian Empire did tolerate the use of the Ukrainian language, publication of papers and meetings in *chytalni* (reading rooms), like the one where my father as a young lad used to read papers to the neighbouring peasants, but kept these under strict limits.

In eastern Ukraine, peasants who sought to escape economic oppression travelled to other parts of the Russian Empire. In western Ukraine, the peasants had very little land, and many of them were landless. Those who did have some land usually had to divide it among their sons, so eventually more and more people lived on such small plots of land that they could not survive. That is why so many of them emigrated to Brazil, Argentina, Canada and the United States at the end of the last century and early in this one.

Socialists form ULFTA

Q.: It is my understanding that, before the ULFTA was required to "Bolshevize" or whatever, if you were a member of the ULFTA you were almost automatically considered to be a Party member, because you belonged to a group that was federated with the Party, but after the "Bolshevization" period, membership was

required to be on an individual basis. Am I correct?

Not quite. For a better understanding of this, one really should go back to the early years of the Ukrainian community. Krawchuk deals with this at length in *Our History*. The Ukrainian immigrants were divided into two camps from the time they first came to Canada between those who were religious and conservative in their views and those who were non-believers and had socialist or radical leanings. The division has remained to this day.

In 1918, the socialist-minded members of the community formed a cultural organization, the Ukrainian Labour Temple Association (ULTA), which eventually was renamed the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA). Gradually, the members of the ULFTA, through the influence of the press and the propaganda work of its leaders, became more and more pro-socialist. But most people who joined the ULFTA did so largely for cultural reasons. (By the way, the same thing was happening in the Finnish community.) That's the way it was in the ULFTA in the early years. There were members who were socialists, but there were even more members who were at best only supporters of the socialists and who were in the ULFTA mainly for cultural reasons. They chose the ULFTA because they didn't want to go to church and considered the other Ukrainian organizations too right-wing.

Party influence increases

When, in 1921, the Communist Party was formed, many of the more ardent socialist-minded members of the ULFTA, like my father, joined the Party and became active in both organizations. The Party thus had great influence in the cultural organization. In the early 1930s, however, it took a big leap, so to speak, when, at the direction of the Communist International, it brought in a policy of "Bolshevizing" the ethnic cultural organizations under its influence. They called it a "turn to the class struggle."

What this did was to make the ULFTA virtually an auxiliary of the Party, especially in helping it to raise funds. While the ULFTA retained its main character as a cultural organization, there actually were elements in the Party, especially in the 1920s, who wanted to abolish the ULFTA. They said that the main attention should be directed towards class struggle, that on the eve of world revolution we don't need people putting

on plays and folk operettas; we need people on the picket lines. Those were the extreme views, of course, but the Ukrainian leaders had to contend with them.

The "double burden"

The leaders of the Party began putting more and more pressure on its Ukrainian members, such as establishing quotas on the amount of money they were expected to raise for the Party organ, *The Worker*, and later for other Party projects and campaigns. Because the Party had only the ethnic organizations as its base, it had to draw on them as the chief resources for its activities. The members of these cultural organizations, including non-Party members, were counted on to support (financially and otherwise) the Party press, the Party's election campaigns, the peace movement, and numerous other projects. People like my father, for example, would go to non-Party members in the ULFTA and say, "Help us in supporting the Party's work." And the people gave, generously. But for the Party members in the ULFTA this meant they were carrying what they called a "double burden," because they also had to support their own cultural organizations.

In effect, it made the ULFTA much more a Communist organization, rather than just Communist-led. This is how the transformation took place. In its early years, most of the leaders of the ULFTA were Communist Party members, but there were many who were not. For example, in a branch executive or committee of, say, seven members, two or three would be party members, the rest non-Party. After 1931, however, when party members met as "Party fractions", or caucuses, in which they decided how they would carry through the Party line, more and more it was the Party members who were expected to "carry the ball," so to speak, to serve on the committees and take on responsibilities. Also, more and more members were recruited into the Party. As a result, by the end of the 1930s, most of the executives and committees were made up largely of Party members. And quite a few non-Party people were either shunted aside or bowed out. Many non-Party people became less active, and a number of them left. There was a sort of silent resentment among some of them against what was happening.

Appeal to Comintern

During the late 1920s, Popowich and Navis had

numerous battles with the Party leaders on this issue. They were opposed to making their cultural ethnic organization more and more like the Party. Eventually, the Ukrainian National Fraction Bureau decided to do something about it. This bureau coordinated and directed the work of the Party fractions in the ULFTA branches, under the overall direction of the national Party leadership, of course. The National Fraction Bureau sent a formal resolution to the Comintern, complaining against some of the things the Party leadership was doing.

Following the "turn," the pressure on both the Ukrainian members in the Party and on the non-Party people in the organizations to help fund Party activities became even greater. As a result, more and more non-Party members began to sort of take a back seat, confining themselves to taking part in cultural work, while others eventually drifted away and left the organization. It is true that for a time, especially during the 1930s, the Ukrainian left-wing organizations grew, but I believe they could have grown three or four times as fast, especially in recruiting more non-political, non-Party people, had there been a different policy, less Party direction and interference; if the Party members in the organization had worked in a more tactful, less aggressive way to recruit within a broader base. Later, of course, the organization began dwindling more rapidly, especially after the exposure of the Stalin crimes at the 20th Congress of the CPSU.

More Party pressure

Q.: Did the "Bolshevization" lead to a constitutional requirement within the ULFTA, or later within the AUUC, that executive members had to be members of the Communist Party, or what sort of informal arrangement developed out of the pressures of that period?

No, there were no such constitutional changes or requirements. There wasn't anything in the constitution of the ULFTA that said you had to be a Party member. It was simply the way things were done. For example, as Krawchuk mentions, at the 1931 ULFTA national convention, at which the "turn" was made, Sam Carr attended as a guest delegate from the Communist Party. He spoke to the convention delegates — a real revolutionary speech — and was elected to the Presidium, even though he wasn't a member of the ULFTA. Banners around the convention hall proclaimed: "We are making a turn onto the path of general revolutionary

class struggle!" and "Away with right and left opportunism!" and so on. That convention also elected an honorary Presidium, which included the name of Tim Buck. At the subsequent convention, in 1932, the convention again elected an honorary presidium, and this time it included Josef Stalin, Ernst Thaelmann, Harry Pollitt, Maurice Thorez and others. That's just the way it was done; there was nothing that was changed constitutionally.

Fractions take charge

Q.: I want to spend some time on the relationship between the Communist Party and the ULFTA. I don't see it clarified in my mind by reading what Krawchuk has to say about it. In some of the examples, he says: "The Ukrainian Communists had their own section of the Communist Party led by John Navis, which had its own National Bureau, and periodically published a bulletin." Now, this is the Communist Party in its underground phase, before the Workers' Party of Canada came into being. Then he says: "The Workers' Party adopted a Communist platform, decided to unite with the Communist International, and Finnish, Jewish and Ukrainian sections of that party were formed." Now the ULFTA (or the ULTA, as it was at that time) endorsed the Workers' Party and, he says, "in time, the boundary between the work of the Ukrainian section of the Workers' Party and that of the ULTA gradually began to disappear." Then he says, "When, in 1924, the Communist Party began to function as a legal organization, the Ukrainian section of the Workers' Party of Canada was disbanded and its members, most of whom were at the same time members of the ULTA and the WBA, became Party members." And then he goes on to say, "At this time, in every locality where a ULFTA and/or WBA branch existed, a Party fraction or caucus was formed, made up of members of those organizations who were also members of the Party." It's a little confusing. I don't suppose there was any formal flow chart designed to say, "This shall happen" and "This is the hierarchy." But do you think, because of all of the structures and because most of the players overlapped, that perhaps that itself contributed to the Party's desire to consolidate the situation?

No, I don't think so. It's true that he doesn't make it very clear. The way I understand it happened is that the Ukrainian Party members in the localities met in Ukrainian Party branches for the purpose of discussing

Party business. Those Ukrainian Party members who were also members of the ULFTA (which would be most of them) met as a Ukrainian fraction to discuss their work in the ULFTA. At that time Party members were still a minority in the ULFTA branches. So you'd have a situation, for an example, where in a medium-size branch of, say, 30 members, six would belong to the Party. Those six would meet periodically as a Party branch to discuss Party business, such as raising funds for *The Worker* or distributing Party leaflets, but they would also meet as a fraction to discuss some of the things that should be done in the ULFTA. Then, of course, they would have a ULFTA branch meeting, where they would meet together with the other members.

Wearing three hats

It did get confusing at times, because two or three leading members in a branch would often be wearing two or three hats: their Party hat, their fraction hat, and their ULFTA hat. And I'm sure that to some of the non-Party people it not only was confusing but must have appeared somewhat bizarre.

But this is also why Ukrainian Party members felt that they were carrying a double burden. One could argue that this had its positive side in that it actively drew many ULFTA members into such Party activity as building unions, supporting strikes, etc. But it also, as I said earlier, had a negative side in that the Party members spent less time bringing in more people who were primarily interested in belonging to a cultural rather than a political organization. So while the organization did grow, in my view it could have grown much more had there been a broader approach, had it not become so blatantly identified as a "Communist" organization in its methods and policies. There were many members and supporters of the ULFTA who did not want to join the Party or identify themselves with the Party so closely. There were many aspects about the movement at that time that confused them or they didn't like: the news stories in the media about the crimes and injustices and undemocratic practices in the Soviet Union, which the Party members and supporters rejected as capitalist propaganda, but which other members were not so sure about. Nor did they like some of the bureaucratic and arbitrary methods and practices of the leaders in the Party and the Ukrainian organization. That is why over the years many of them became less and less active and many simply drifted

away.

Why Youth Section was opposed

Q.: Krawchuk mentions that at one time the Party opposed the ULFTA setting up its own youth section. It wanted young Ukrainians to belong to the Young Pioneers or the YCL. Yet you say that you belonged to both. So, it would appear that this controversy predated your membership in both organizations, but what do you recall surrounding discussions on whether Ukrainians should have their own youth section or not?

Yes, I did belong to both, but even though I was then only thirteen, I saw the difference between the two organizations. But there were non-Ukrainian Party members who were asking: "Why do we need both? We really don't need the Youth Section. Especially since they conduct their meetings in English anyway." Let's not forget that the Ukrainians, along with the Finns and Jews, were the mainstay of the Party. So for these people it meant that if the Ukrainian members were busy building a Youth Section, they wouldn't be building the YCL. I'm simplifying it a bit, but that's the way it was. That is what Krawchuk alludes to, because the matter was raised officially in high places — to the consternation and anger of the Ukrainians. And I think they were right to be angry.

Opposition not ideological

Q.: In the debate as to whether the ULFTA would come more under the Party's control versus having more autonomy, which Krawchuk's book portrayed as a debate between the Party's central executive and the Ukrainian National Fraction Bureau, who took what side? Who lobbied for the dominance of each opinion?

Actually, the top leaders among the Ukrainians were pretty well united. Only a handful of Ukrainian Party members sided with the Party leadership. These included John Weir (Ivan Vyviersky) — this was when he was still very young and before he went to the Lenin School in Moscow — and Dan Holmes (Dan Chomitsky), who worked in the Ukrainian printshop in Winnipeg. The Ukrainian leaders were all unanimous in declaring that the Party was wrong in trying to lead the Ukrainian organizations away from their cultural work and turn more to political work. They said there should be a division between the work of the Communists in the Party and the work of the Communists in the

ULFTA, where they would exercise their influence, which they were doing right from the beginning anyway. Leading members like Popowich and Shatulsky did all kinds of socialist and propaganda work along with their work in the ULFTA. But the Party leadership wanted the entire organization to be more political, more oriented "to the class struggle." That is why they called it making "the turn."

But they weren't talking as much about the Party making a turn, because there weren't very many members outside of those in the ethnic groups, although there was talk about the need to "turn to industrial work." And the pressure was very strong. Krawchuk relates how at the ULFTA conventions in the early 1930s, Sam Carr and Leslie Morris would come and speak openly to the delegates on behalf of the Party. In their speeches they called on the delegates to "turn to the class struggle" and said things like, "when we the workers take power," implying that the revolution was just around the corner.

Many Party leaders and members — and I was one of them — truly believed what the leaders of the Communist International were saying: that world revolution was on the agenda and it would come sooner rather than later. That is why they could tell the Party members and followers that they had to be prepared and direct all their energies, all their organizations, toward making that possible, ignoring the fact that a revolution in Canada was not going to be made or led by a small Party that was overwhelmingly made up of Ukrainian, Finnish and Jewish immigrants. The tragedy is that those ideas really originated in Europe, especially in Moscow.

Why they gave in

When the Ukrainian National Fraction Bureau sent its resolution to the Comintern, the latter was going to discuss it without a representative of the Bureau present to plead its case. Only after the Bureau protested did the Comintern agree to have John Navis present. Without Navis there would have been even less debate. But still, the Bureau lost. Navis was pressured until he finally decided to give in. Even so, the Comintern sent representatives to make sure that the line was carried out.

In retrospect, one can understand why it happened. For the Ukrainian leaders to refuse to knuckle under would have meant creating a major split in the left-wing sector of the Ukrainian community. Individuals

like John Weir, especially after 1931, would have led a rump Ukrainian organization that would have carried out the Party line. And those who remained in the ULFTA and WBA would have been faced with a dilemma. They wouldn't have wanted to join the nationalist, right-wing organizations (and probably wouldn't have been accepted if they did), because they still believed in what was being done or being tried in the Soviet Union in those early years. The irony is that the Ukrainian leaders didn't disagree with the Party ideologically, but rather with its bureaucratic methods, especially its interference in their work in the cultural organizations. I told you earlier how leaders of the Italian Party were frustrated because Moscow leaders refused to listen to their suggestions and criticism. If that was true in the 1960s, imagine how less likely they would have been to listen to some Ukrainian Communists from Canada in the 1920s.

John Weir's role

Q.: What was unique about John Weir that caused him to side with the Party leadership against the Ukrainian fraction bureau? Was it his stint in the Lenin School? How did he become one of the members of that group?

I believe his training at the Lenin School had a lot to do with it. It had a similar effect on most of its early graduates. On Stewart Smith and Sam Carr, for example, although not as much perhaps on Leslie Morris. All three, Smith, Carr and Weir, had very big egos — each in a different way, as is true of most egos. Each had the idea that he understood Marxism better than anyone else. Each was also convinced by his training that the revolution was on the agenda. So when the Comintern said the ULFTA was not on the path of class struggle, Weir was one of those who truly believed that. His ego was big enough to believe that he knew better than Popowich what the true path to the revolution was. Certainly he thought he was intellectually superior to Popowich, Navis, Shatulsky or any of the others; even Myroslav Irchan, who was a brilliant and talented author, playwright and journalist. Indeed, when Irchan later went to the Soviet Union and was subsequently shot by Stalin's executioners, Weir was one of the first in Canada to say: "Well, if he was shot there must have been a good reason. They know what they're doing there."

Soviet repressions not questioned

There was another incident along these lines that defined the kind of person he was. His wife, Helen, had an uncle, Sylvester Kuchurian, who left with a score or more other Ukrainian Canadians in the 1920s to help build a commune in the "new socialist Ukraine." In the early 1930s, he and all the other members of the commune were arrested and eventually shot by the Stalin regime because they had been abroad. But before he was shot he wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, a successful farmer near Lethbridge, in which he said: "Please get in touch with the leaders of the Communist Party in Calgary and remind them that I was a Party member in Lethbridge and would they please send me a letter or some kind of document to prove that I was." The brother-in-law went to Calgary to see Weir, who was then the Party organizer for Alberta, and pleaded with him to provide such a document. To which Weir replied: "If he was arrested, it must have been for a good reason." And he refused to do anything. That was typical of him. He was a very able and talented journalist and writer, with a poetic bent. He knew the Ukrainian language very well and translated many works of Shevchenko and other Ukrainian poets and writers. But he had an ego like you wouldn't believe.

Coping with wives

It should be noted that John had three wives in his life, since this has a bearing on his Party life and is an indication of the kind of person he was.

To explain this, I'd better go back a bit. As I told you earlier, in the late 1920s the Party sent him to Winnipeg to sort of "keep an eye on the Ukrainians." While there he met Alice Salyga, who was a member of the Ukrainian Girls' Mandolin Orchestra, and they established a relationship. Not long after that he was sent to the Lenin School in Moscow, which kept him there for a period of some three years. While there he fell in love with and married Edya, a young Russian woman of Jewish origin, and they had a daughter, whom they called Emma. When he had to leave, however, the Party wouldn't allow him to take his wife and infant daughter back to Canada, so he left her there. On his return to Canada he was made Party organizer in Alberta, so on his way there he picked up Alice Salyga in Winnipeg and brought her with him to Calgary.

Not long after, he visited the city of Lethbridge on

Party business and stayed there for several weeks. There he met Helen Kuchurian, the younger sister of Gladys, who three years later would become my wife (although I didn't know that at the time). Helen was a beautiful platinum blonde young girl, just barely past sixteen; he was a very handsome matinee idol type, so he had no problem in attracting her. When he found out she was pregnant, he decided to take her back with him to Calgary, much against her parents' wishes, by the way. And this without their knowing at the time that she was pregnant. When he got back to Calgary, he told Alice he was marrying Helen and asked her to move out, which she did. She married a chap named Hiram Coulter and took the name Ellen Coulter. Both of them were active members of the CCF, and later the NDP, in Calgary for many years.

Soon after their arrival in Calgary, Helen had an abortion and they settled down as husband and wife. A year later they were legally married. During the first years they got along quite well, although it was the kind of relationship where she idolized him as a Party leader, and for him she was a beautiful doll of a wife. Gradually, however, his arrogance and vanity got in the way and eventually became unbearable. After the war broke out he was one of the Party leaders who were interned. While he was interned, Helen became active in the movement to free him and the other internees. Working as a banquet waitress, she joined the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union and soon after became one of its business agents. With her winning personality, charm and organizational abilities, she became one of the Party leaders in her own right, and not just "the wife of John Weir."

Relationship worsens

When John came out of internment, he found it difficult to accept the new, more mature person Helen had become. So their relationship worsened. They quarreled more frequently and became more embittered toward each other. I know all this because Gladys and I lived together with Helen and John, and all our children shared flats or duplex apartments for many years. At one point their relationship got so bad that Buck told her, "Why don't you leave him?" And she would say, "What would people say?" and "Oh, it would hurt his career in the Party."

During this period Helen was very active in the peace movement and in the international left-wing women's movement. She took several trips to Europe,

including the Soviet Union. She knew about John's first wife, Edya, so each time she went to Moscow she would bring gifts for her and her daughter, Emma, and eventually her granddaughter. Later, when John Weir was the *Canadian Tribune* correspondent in Moscow, he lived with Edya.

Eventually, the marriage ended. But it wasn't by mutual agreement. John came briefly to Toronto one day and simply announced to Helen that he was going back to Moscow and was taking his mother with him. The irony is that she didn't leave him earlier because "it might hurt his career," yet when he decided to go back to Moscow he just up and left.

Another interesting sidelight: at the height of the Stalin repressions, Edya was jailed for some three years. The reasons? For one thing, she was a Jew, but her chief crime was that she had had contact with foreigners. And who were the foreigners? Her husband, John Weir, Leslie Morris, and others. That was the time when Stalin was jailing anybody who had been abroad or had contact with foreigners, including most of the Soviet citizens who had fought in the Spanish Civil War and thousands of returned war prisoners after World War II.

Effects of Party pressures

Q.: We have mentioned some of the people who were involved in this process of "Bolshevization" between 1928 and 1931. Were the events in this process largely determined at conventions of the ULFTA, or were there other forums at which they were manifest?

Not at the conventions of the ULFTA as such, although, as Krawchuk recalls, the characters of the conventions themselves changed after 1931, when the Party called for a "turn to the class struggle." The actual decisions were reached at fraction meetings, made up of the delegates who were Party members.

There was a great deal of anger and militancy among the people, so it wasn't all that difficult to get most of the members of the ULFTA and WBA to move in a more militant and left-oriented direction. This is when many non-Party people joined the Party. But there was also a great deal of pressure on the members of the ULFTA and WBA, especially by those who were in the Party and by the Party leadership itself, which had a negative effect on those who were less active, who weren't all that enthusiastic about the turn to class struggle; they chose to stand on the sidelines, so to

speak, to become less active. Many non-Party people who had been active on committees dropped out. But they stayed on in the organization, or stayed on as supporters, because they weren't ready to join the nationalist organizations or the religious groups.

About "bourgeois tendencies"

Q.: Some of the criticisms that Party leaders made in those early years concerned the "bourgeois tendencies" in both the ULFTA and the Workers' Benevolent Association. The latter was likened to a social reformist institution, because they said it promoted the idea that workers could ameliorate rather than change the system by their own actions. The other criticism I recall most about the ULFTA was that its education was "bourgeois." How much truth was there in that analysis?

No truth whatsoever. Rather they reflected the very sectarian and narrow attitudes in the Party at that time. You see, for someone who was very political, who because of his or her convictions was very gung-ho about the class struggle, as I was, politics was a priority. But for others, love of music, song and drama were more important. If they liked acting, they wanted to be in a drama group; if they loved to sing, they wanted to belong to a choir. The problem was that some extremists in the Party looked on these things as bourgeois. Krawchuk in his book gives an example: when a ULFTA mandolin orchestra in Regina played "God Save the King" at the opening of a concert they gave in a theatre, the local Party leaders condemned the Ukrainian Party members for it, saying they were catering to capitalist culture. They chose to ignore the fact that the theatre's rental contract required the lessee to start or end each performance with the national anthem. As for the attitude to the WBA, some Party members did charge that it taught workers to depend on the capitalist system. Indeed, John Weir exemplified this. When someone would ask him, "Don't you carry any insurance?" he would reply, "The working class is my insurance. The revolution is my insurance."

Those were some of the attitudes within the Party prior to 1931. After that fight with the Comintern, however, while the Ukrainian leaders had to knuckle under on most counts, they did win the concession that, after all, these were cultural organizations and some attention had to be given to cultural work, but with the proviso that it "serve the class struggle." So the Party leaders toned down their attacks on the Ukrainian

leaders — but at the price of having their organizations serve the Party more directly and more fully, which they did, of course, right through until the late 1960s.

No time for the arts

I should add that the Party leaders had much the same attitude to Party members participating in the arts. Fairly late in my Party career, I became painfully aware that a very active member of the Party, especially a leader or one holding a full-time position, could not take up any of the arts as a hobby. For example, if while I was in full-time work in the Party, let's say in the late 1940s or 1950s, I had wanted to take up painting, I couldn't have done so; it would have been considered a bourgeois frill. And this applied to all branches of art: singing in a choir, playing in an orchestra, belonging to a ballet or folk dance group. A professional artist could join the Party, of course, and a number of them did. Invariably they were asked to contribute their work for the Party, which was okay. But for someone else to take time out for one of the arts would have been considered a waste of time, time away from the class struggle.

All my life I wanted to take up painting, but didn't dare. Not because somebody told me not to; I myself had been conditioned to believe that it would mean taking time away from the "more important things" I was doing for the Party.

That kind of attitude was very prevalent among the very dedicated Party people. We were all "for the revolution." Anything that took people away from the class struggle was a disservice to the cause. In those earlier years, even Party members like John Weir frowned on Ukrainians producing songs and plays, including folk plays, that had no "class content," plays that "didn't lead people to struggle." Weir didn't go all the way with this line; he knew enough not to condemn all Ukrainian culture. He was a highly cultured man who knew and enjoyed reading Shevchenko's work. And Shevchenko's work had a lot of revolutionary ideas. But there were many other renowned Ukrainian authors whose work didn't have any revolutionary content, yet are still considered classical examples of Ukrainian art and culture.

Nationalism and chauvinism

Q.: These critical attitudes remind me of something that Lenin himself criticized. If one says this is "bourgeois"

or that's "social reformist," it's almost as if the criticism is made from a left-wing, Communist point of view, a kind of "infantile disorder." How would you assess Stalin's ideological perspective vis-à-vis that of Lenin? Would you say he was more to the Left?

Oh, certainly. Let's not forget that early after the revolution Lenin warned against the danger of both bourgeois nationalism and Russian national chauvinism. And he added that the bigger danger was Russian national chauvinism, because he knew that the Russians were the dominant nation and were in the ruling position. He was right, of course. During the Stalin regime and even after it, nobody ever put any emphasis on — or dared to bring up — the problem of Russian chauvinism. Because all too many of the people who were in positions of power were Russian chauvinists, and often anti-Semites too. They looked for bourgeois nationalism in everything the Ukrainian Communists did, but didn't look at themselves for any evidence of Russian chauvinism.

The irony is that Stalin was supposed to have produced the definitive work on the national question, which included a definition of what constitutes a nation. Mind you, I'm sure he didn't produce it alone; it was very likely a collective effort for which he took the credit. In any case, it turned out to be just theory. For a while they applied it to some degree, so that for a few short years after the Revolution there was a flourishing of Ukrainian culture, but after Stalin came to power, not only were those principles not applied, they were totally distorted. Russian chauvinism reigned supreme.

Assimilation encouraged

People were told that Russian was no longer just the language of the Russians, but the language of the Soviet people. The process of assimilation was speeded up, especially among the Ukrainians and Belarusians, because their languages are closest to Russian in form. It was more difficult to impose the Russian language on the people of Georgia and Tadzhikistan or Estonia and Latvia. They did, of course, make Russian the working language. And to a large extent they succeeded, because technological and economic factors played a part. Young people in Ukraine, for example, were more likely to learn Russian, because they knew they could wind up working in Murmansk, Vladivostok or the Urals. It was difficult to fight against that, because there was a need for a common language. And the

Russian chauvinists took full advantage of that. As a result, most people in Ukraine, especially the young and those in the big urban centres, spoke Russian rather than Ukrainian.

In Ukraine and Belarus, not only was assimilation encouraged and the Russian language ardently promoted, but their native languages were discouraged and put down as "village languages." By the Brezhnev era, thousands of Ukrainian schools were totally wiped out.

A classic example was how, immediately after the war, this matter was handled in Western Ukraine. In 1939, Western Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union. But unlike Eastern Ukraine, where all the people knew Russian, the people of Western Ukraine had little or no knowledge of Russian. They were never part of Russia. For centuries their land belonged to Austria, then Poland, Romania, or Czechoslovakia. So, when Western Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union, Moscow sent many Russians to help administer the area. Then you'd have a situation where some old Ukrainian peasant woman would come into an office and start speaking to the person in charge in Ukrainian. To which the Russian administrator would arrogantly reply: "Why don't you speak in the universally understood language?"

Effects of Russification

This problem of Russification of the Ukrainian people over several decades still has its repercussions. After Ukraine declared its independence in 1991, Ukrainian was declared the working language. There was no dispute about that. But there are still many Russians in Ukraine, especially in the eastern part, who, while they agree that the working language should be Ukrainian, want Russian to be given equal status.

That, of course, would be unacceptable. The Russian language has been so dominant, has permeated everything for so long, that Ukrainian now has an uphill battle as it is. For example, because to date practically all technical books were printed in Russian, the government now has to start printing them in Ukrainian. And most of the movies are still in Russian. Giving Russian equal status would mean that Ukrainian would have a truly difficult time becoming the operating language in the country. The irony is that Ukraine, like Russia, now also has the problem that too many of the movies being shown are American. From what I hear, they're drowning out even the Russian movies.

Comintern intervention

Q.: Krawchuk goes into a lot of detail about the ULFTA — or at least the Party fraction of the ULFTA — being involved in discussions with the Comintern between 1928 and 1931. The Party's official history doesn't go into this much. It basically claims that one member of the Comintern was sent to Canada to arbitrate the situation in 1931. Is it your understanding that the lengthy discussions were only between the ULFTA and the Central Executive, or were there similar protracted discussions and debate in the Finnish and the Jewish sections of the Party that also involved the Comintern?

Definitely with the Finnish section. I don't know about the Jewish sector. The Comintern sent more than one representative, and more than once, despite what the official Party history says. Delegations of two or three were sent on several occasions. On at least one occasion, it was a Finn. The leader of the Finnish Organization at that time was John Ahlqvist. He was very loyal to the Party, indeed, was one of its founding members, but he had serious differences with the Party leadership, unlike Tom Hill, at that time a youth leader among the Finns, who faithfully followed the Party line. Ahlqvist, Popowich and Navis were of the same opinion: that you have to build the Party, but it was also important to have a strong cultural organization. So these discussions with the Comintern definitely included the Finns.

Mind you, overall, the Finns were more hard-line, more pro-Party than the Ukrainians, and their organization became even more like the Party than did the Ukrainian, although probably not much more. I don't know how that affected the Finnish community, but there was one big difference: the Ukrainian community had the Soviet regime in Ukraine to deal with and was split on that issue.

Speaking of the split in these two communities, it should be noted that in each instance both the left-wing and the right-wing organizations had only a portion of each community. The majority of Ukrainians and Finns in Canada did not belong to these organizations, and some were only supporters. They were either apolitical or just mildly political. Even today, both the mainstream and the left-wing Ukrainian organizations have only a portion of the community. They certainly have very few young people, chiefly because of the inroads assimilation has made.

Mechanistic control

Q.: One person who was observing the protracted debate in the Party in the period from 1928 to 1931 was Matthew Shatulsky. Krawchuk calls his observations an insightful appraisal, basically summing them up as saying it was a fight for direct mechanical control. Would you agree that the fight was more for this mechanistic control, or was it grounded in ideological differences?

That's hard to say. I would lean more to mechanistic control. Because there weren't really any great ideological differences on the need for socialism, on the need to fight capitalism. It was more on what form the fight for those goals should take. The Ukrainian leaders thought there was a need for a cultural organization, which was proven by history, while some Party leaders considered the cultural organizations secondary; indeed, that what was needed was to meld these people into one socialist organization, preferably the Communist Party. But there is no way that the mass of progressive-minded, left-leaning Ukrainians or Finns would have all gone into the Communist Party. That's why in those early years the Ukrainian and Finnish leaders in the Party argued that a cultural organization was needed for the people in their communities. And in the end they won out.

Documents invaluable

Q.: Krawchuk cites the John Navis papers as being instrumental in helping with the book. The particular instance was to document Matthew Popowich's change of attitude from one supporting the increased Party influence over the ULFTA to one opposing it. But how valuable would the Navis papers be in documenting this period?

Very valuable. Both Navis's papers and Shatulsky's. Popowich was not liked by the Party leadership because he was his own man, wasn't a faithful and unquestioning follower; he had to be convinced. And he had strong opinions. It's true that later he had certain disagreements with the other Ukrainian leaders, but the documents dealing with the period when they were fighting the Party or resisting the Party are very authentic. They are copies of the actual documents that were sent to the Comintern. Navis didn't write a lot, but Popowich and Shatulsky did. Some of Shatulsky's hand-written notes were translated in Krawchuk's book.

Krawchuk has sent most of his papers, something like 80 boxes, to the National Archives in Ottawa and the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum of Alberta. But he told me just recently that he has kept most of Navis's handwritten documents and will ask his daughter, Larissa Stavroff, to take charge of them.

Effects of "labeling"

Q.: I'm interested in the practice of labeling. Krawchuk is quite critical of it. He says that in the process of the "turn to the left" the ULFTA was accused of "immigrant tailism," and all Ukrainian nationalist organizations were "fascist." He calls it a narcosis. How effective was labeling in stifling intelligent debate over that period from 1928 to 1931?

Labeling is always stifling. And labeling someone you do not agree with has always been a common weapon in politics. In this case, the dispute with the Ukrainians, the recrimination and labeling didn't last long. The Party realized fairly early — I think by the mid-30s for sure — that the ethnic organizations were an important resource base, a resource to maintain and nurture. Some Party leaders were aware of this sooner than others. John Weir was one of them, although he always sided with the Party leadership. Leslie Morris was another. Others, largely Anglo-Saxons and what I call anglicized Jews, said, "To hell with this nationalist culture. The class struggle is the important thing."

When I say anglicized Jews, I mean those who weren't active in the Jewish organization. The Jews in the Party weren't religious, of course, but they were divided into two groups. Most of them wanted to belong to a Jewish organization — for the language, for the culture, and so on. But there were a few — who for want of a better term I call "anglicized" or more assimilated — people like Harvey Murphy or Maurice Spector, who didn't want to have anything to do with a Jewish cultural organization. Then there were people like Norman Freed, Oscar Kogan and Bill Sydney, who were members of the organization but weren't active in it; they gave all their time to Party work. There were a few Ukrainians in this category too — people like Paul Pauk, for example, and in their earlier years Bill Harasym and John Eileen — who did not belong to the Ukrainian organization; they were busy either in trade union or Party work.

I kept my ties with Ukrainians

I myself was very active in the Ukrainian organization in the earlier years, but I was also always very active in the YCL or the Party. Later, I was active in the Ukrainian organization only to the extent my Party work allowed me to be. Some of the Ukrainian leaders thought that I was devoted more to the Party than to work with the Ukrainians, although I was always a member of the ULFTA and later the AUUC until the mid-1970s. And I always took an interest in what was happening in the Ukrainian community. My wife was a member of the mandolin orchestra and was also a Party member. But there were not many like me who were very active in both. There were quite a few Party members who held Party cards but worked mainly in an ethnic organization. There were others, not as many, who just held a membership card in the ULFTA but were mainly active in a trade union or in the Party or one of the other Party-led organizations.

Yes, some of us were singled out to try to build the Party among the Anglo-Saxons. But we were handicapped. You must realize that there was a lot of bigotry in those days. That's why, when I was working in the YCL and in the Party, I changed my name. With my Ukrainian name I had two strikes against me. Some might argue that people who were interested in socialism wouldn't be bothered by that. The trouble was that you first had to get them interested in socialism. But discrimination wasn't new to me; I had experienced it in my school years.

About Lenin School graduates

We didn't succeed much in winning Anglo-Saxons, not because we didn't try, but because of the image the Party had among the people. As I've already mentioned, there was its overwhelmingly ethnic composition. And the mainstream press added to it by portraying the Party as Russian, plus "foreign agents," "Moscow gold," and all that.

Let me give you another example that relates to what I've been saying. In the earlier years, the Party sent its promising younger members to the Lenin School in Moscow, for two or three-year stints. In 1928, Stewart Smith was the first, followed by Sam Carr, Leslie Morris and John Weir. Later there were some who were sent for six-month periods: Harvey Murphy, Charlie Weir, Bill Kardash and a few others. Still later, they decided to send young people of Anglo-

Saxon origin, YCL members like Dot May, Bill Croft, Stan Buchanan and others. The irony is that none of them stayed in the Party after coming back. Not a single one. I don't know what it was. Partly, I think, it was what they saw happening there, economically, politically and culturally. And the way the Party operated probably turned them off too. In any case, after they came back every one of them either eased out or dropped out of the Party. It all confirms the fact that the Party had a foreign rather than a Canadian image, that in a lot of things we did we copied the Soviet Party.

And that was true in most of the Parties. The Italians and Spaniards were among the first to do something about it. That was the basis of what they called Euro-communism. The Italians said they wanted their methods to be more acceptable to their people. They also said something that was unique for Communists to say at the time: "We Communists don't have all the answers; there are Catholics who are just as dedicated to changing the system. They have some ideas and some answers, so we have to work together." I believe it was the lack of that kind of broader approach that was one of the roots of the Communist failures.

About Communist arrogance

There was also what I would call a kind of Communist arrogance in many members of the Party. It was born of the concept that said: "We are Marxists; Marxism has the answers to all the questions; therefore, we have the answers to all questions." And everybody else was off base, not up to it, or a "revisionist." I'm putting it crudely, I know, but looking back I recall so many instances where this Communist arrogance was at play. The problem is that it was felt by the people. If you think you have all the answers, first thing you know you're talking down, lecturing to people, even while genuinely trying to convince them. It doesn't come across well when you're trying to get people to join the Party. I think that permeated a lot of the Party work, Party thinking.

The Lobay episode

Q.: How important was Danylo Lobay and the group that was formed around him? And how many people did they attract?

Lobay was a card-carrying Party member but not a dedicated Communist. He bought into the ideology, but

he wasn't enthusiastic or fanatical about it. He was also somewhat of a dilettante. He would never do anything like distribute leaflets or march in a demonstration. But he was a very able editor. Like a lot of other people during those years, he heard about the famine in Ukraine and other crimes being committed by the Stalin regime. He heard about how Ukrainian culture that flourished after the Civil War in Russia until about 1928 was suddenly being set back, being stifled. He began talking about it and was joined by other members in the ULFTA. In those days, however, to be critical of the Soviet Union in the Party or the ULFTA was a dangerous thing to do; one had to be very careful. But he accepted the challenge. This was happening at the very time the Party was pressuring its ethnic organizations to make the big "turn to the class struggle." So it is not surprising that they were quickly labeled as traitors, agents of capitalism, etc. After all, even the 1967 delegation that went to investigate Russification in Ukraine was labeled and vilified after it made a negative report.

He was accused by some of being "the other side of Trotskyism," but he wasn't anything close to being a Trotskyist. When he and his followers were drummed out of the ULFTA, they did publish their own paper for a while and were accepted by the right-wing Ukrainian groups. But they didn't last very long. Later, of course, their criticism was shown to have been valid.

Lobay and his followers were denounced and I went along with that, but, looking back, I'm sure that a lot of people who had similar doubts and were confused about what was happening in Ukraine simply chose not to question things too much and just kept their mouths shut.

Conforming to the Party line

Q.: You said earlier that after 1931 the Party's control of the Ukrainian organizations became more obsessive. Can you give an example that would indicate it was consolidated to a greater degree in the late 1930s?

Again, it was not blatant control, with somebody forcing them to do something they didn't want to. Once Popowich and Navis and the others had their arms twisted and knuckled under, they decided to go down the Party line all the way. At times they became "holier than the Pope" and very quickly condemned any criticism of the Soviet Union. As Krawchuk points out, when some of the Ukrainian authors and other cultural

leaders were shot during the Stalin regime, they took the Soviet side and said there must have been a good reason for it. And when there were reports in the nationalist papers and the mainstream media of famine in Ukraine, they sloughed it off as capitalist propaganda. They simply went along with the Soviet line, as did the entire Party. There was no reason for the Party to apply any special pressure, because ideologically the Ukrainian leadership and most of the membership was going along with the Party on pretty well everything.

Italian Party compared

Apropos all this, I recall an interesting thing that happened once when I was on the National Executive Committee. As I mentioned earlier, at one point Buck made a tour of several parties in Europe and Australia. On his return, he made a report to the National Committee, and while speaking about what he found in Italy, at one point he said: "You know, comrades, we have made some big mistakes in the way we organized our Party and how we dealt with our mass organizations [that's how the Party then referred to the ethnic organizations]. We made them too much like the Party." He went on to explain: "In Italy I found the Party's structure much looser. In the Italian Party, individuals who just carry a Party card and attend the odd meeting are considered members. Nobody asks them to collect funds or do this or that. The kind of members we have are regarded there as the *active*. They have about a million members, but the majority of them just carry a Party card and vote for Communist candidates. That's about all that's asked of them. Our ethnic organizations also have much the same kind of discipline." It was the only time we ever heard Buck say that. I suppose it showed that some sort of change was taking place. But by this time, these organizations were beginning to resent the way the Party was controlling them.

How control was implemented

Over the years, the Party developed a system for implementing this control. Because the Ukrainians were the largest group, there was always at least one Ukrainian member on the National Executive and always several on the National Committee. The Party also always had someone on its National Executive in charge of ethnic organizations, or national groups, as the Party used to call them. Early after the war it was

Paul Philips, then for a long time it was Misha Cohen. This representative from the National Executive would be in contact with the leaders of each of the national groups: pass along directives from the Party centre, tell them what the Party wanted done. Very often he would attend meetings of the group's Party committee. If there was any resistance to a particular directive or policy, this would be reported to the Executive, which would then discuss how and what kind of pressure should be applied. Besides that, before the convention of each ethnic organization, the Party wanted to know who was being nominated for its leadership. If they disapproved of someone, they would let it be known. But there weren't many such cases. In earlier years, both Party and non-Party members were elected to the leadership, but eventually it was always Party members who were nominated and elected. That is also how the Party was able to take firmer control. It was somewhat subtle, but not very.

"We don't need a commissar"

One of the problems was that most of the Ukrainian leaders were veteran members of the Party, ideologically developed and organizationally experienced. They resented having someone like Misha Cohen sit in on their Party committee and tell them what to do and not to do, or question some of their decisions. They didn't think it was necessary. For a long time they accepted it, but by the mid-1960s, especially after the delegation to Ukraine and the events in Czechoslovakia, they rebelled and refused to have a representative from the Party attend their meetings and to have to report to him. They said, in effect: we have a Party committee; we will report to the National Executive either directly or through our representative on the National Committee what decisions we have made. We don't need a "commissar" to come and tell us what to do. Eventually, even reporting to the National Executive was abandoned.

Q.: At the start of World War II, the ULFTA was banned and its properties seized at the same time as the Communist Party was outlawed. Is it your understanding that the Canadian government took the initiative because of the interrelation of the two groups, or did the government take it in a context similar to that of World War I, when they made ethnic groups propaganda victims?

No, they knew all about the hand-in-glove relation-

ship these organizations had with the Party; that they were fully controlled by the Party; that some of their leaders were members of the Party's National Executive Committee. All these Communist-led organizations were put on one level.

Launching a parcel business

Q.: Beyond the voluntary and the de facto loyalties the Ukrainian leaders had to the Party, were there financial arrangements that helped to solidify their place in the Communist family, so to speak?

One of the big sources of financial support for the Party by the Ukrainians was the parcel business set up after the war. Because so much of the Soviet Union was destroyed in the war, there was much poverty in the villages. And Ukrainian Canadians who had relatives in Ukraine wanted to help them. So, by an arrangement with Moscow, and with the help of the Party, a parcel business was founded.

An interesting sidelight, related to me by Krawchuk, is that originally a Canadian Jewish businessman named Bernstein went to the Soviet Union soon after the war with the aim of establishing such a parcel business. His liaison or intermediary was Paul Phillips. Apparently the Party leaders were hoping they would be able to make an arrangement whereby they could get a part of the action. Soon after, however, a Soviet embassy representative came to the Ukrainians and said: "Look, there's a bid being made by a businessman for a parcel firm. His name is Bernstein. Do you want a Bernstein dealing with parcels from your people? Why don't you take hold of it?" When Phillips heard about it, he tried to get Jack Cowan and the Ukrainians to form such a firm together. Cowan was a successful Jewish businessman, a long-time active Party member, who had a lot to do with the Party's financial affair. But the Ukrainians wouldn't agree to that; they proposed to take it on themselves.

Apparently there was a bit of a tiff about it, but finally the Party leadership agreed. So they formed a firm called Ukrainska Knyha, which means "Ukrainian Book." I personally thought it was a poor choice for a name, that one more acceptable in both English and Ukrainian would have been better, but I had no input in that.

How the Party was helped

The new firm was established and quickly proved

to be very successful. It was very profitable. However, when the Party (and Moscow) agreed that the Ukrainians should run it, it was with the proviso that the Party would get something out of it. And the Ukrainians agreed to that. The company was set up with a board of directors of twelve, all Ukrainian Party members. Stanley Ziniuk was appointed manager and Peter Prokop treasurer. I know many of the details, because for a while my wife was on the board.

But they did some things in such a primitive way. For example, if Buck would ask the firm for, let's say, \$120,000, Prokop would then ask each of the twelve directors to withdraw \$10,000 in cash from their accounts (each account had the same amount), for which he'd give each of them a receipt; then he'd turn over the total amount in cash to Buck. One wondered why this rigmarole? The RCMP sure knew what the hell was happening; they weren't fooling anyone. But suggestions from some of the board members that things could be done differently, more subtly, fell on deaf ears. Buck called on them time and time again. He knew they were making big money. And while the Ukrainians were glad to help, they eventually thought the pressure was getting excessive.

No major differences

Q.: Were there any great differences between the Ukrainians and the Party from 1931 to the 20th Congress of the CPSU?

Not really. During the 1930s, the main thing they resented was the double burden that was put on their members, which I've already mentioned. After that, the first difference came when the war broke out. Like a lot of other Party members, the Ukrainians resented the about-turn the Comintern made in opposing the war against Hitler. They were confused, didn't understand it and didn't like it. Being disciplined Party members, they didn't fight it, but neither did they carry out the order. They didn't publish the Comintern resolution. After the war, one of the many problems that arose was the fact that the Soviet regime wouldn't allow Ukrainians to visit their villages. That was the beginning of many protests and complaints about what was happening in Soviet Ukraine, which eventually led to the sending of the Party delegation, which I spoke about earlier.

Frustrations with Moscow

Let me cite another example of the kind of frustration the Ukrainians used to run into. Around about the late 1950s or early 1960s, the Party decided to send a delegation of veteran Party members, old-timers, to visit the Soviet Union. The delegation was headed by Kashtan and included a couple of Ukrainians, one of whom was A. Kachmar, a very loyal, dedicated Party member who was a leader of the ULFTA branch in East Toronto for many years. When the delegation arrived in Moscow and was asked what they would like to see, Kachmar said he would very much like to pay a visit to the village in Western Ukraine where he was born. He had not been there since he left for Canada as a young man. He was told that would not be a problem and that everything would be arranged. (He didn't know, of course, that the Soviet authorities always said that).

The delegation travelled all over the Soviet Union, and each time Kachmar asked about his visit to the village, he was always assured there was no problem. Finally, near the end of the tour, he was told: "There is some difficulty with your visiting the village, but we can bring your relatives to visit you here in Kyiv." At which point Kachmar, a very mild-mannered man, summoned up the courage to tell them, in effect: "Through all these years I have faithfully devoted my life to the Party. If, after that, all I can do is meet my relatives here for an hour in Kyiv, forget it." Which impressed many of the Ukrainians there very much, they were very touched, but of course it didn't go over so well with the Party officials in charge of the tour.

Why Ukrainians stayed in 1956

Q.: In Krawchuk's book I didn't see anything about the role the Ukrainian Party leaders played in reversing the changes from the 1957 convention, where Stewart Smith, J. B. Salsberg, Norman Penner and others got some constitutional changes after challenging the leadership of Tim Buck and some of his other colleagues. Other accounts have the Ukrainians playing a pivotal role in reasserting Buck's control and the subsequent constitutional reversals of the 1959 convention. Would you think that winning that support would be a matter of isolated dialogue with the individual members who happened to be Ukrainian? Or was it a group decision to support Tim Buck? What are your recollections of that process and the role the Ukrainians

ans played?

Strangely, I never bothered to analyze or ask why the Ukrainian leadership did not choose to leave in 1956. They were certainly sympathetic to some of the criticism of the Soviet Union, but I guess they didn't think it was enough reason to leave the Party. I believe it would be true to say that in 1956 it was largely leading Party members who left. Relatively few rank-and-file members did. Perhaps the Ukrainian leaders sensed that the rank-and-file members wouldn't have gone for a break with the Party leadership and decided against any such move. They didn't leave then, even though they were shocked by the revelations at the 20th Congress and had serious questions about Party methods in the Soviet Union.

Mind you, there were extremists among them. Bill Kardash, for one. I was on the editorial board of the *Canadian Tribune* when its editor, Jack Stewart, decided to publish the text of the speech Khrushchev delivered to a closed session of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, which had been printed in the *New York Times* and which some Party leaders immediately labeled as not authentic and capitalist propaganda. Kardash was one of the first. He sent a telegram to the *Canadian Tribune* raising hell about it. The other Ukrainians didn't support him on that. They believed the speech was authentic.

How delegation originated

Q.: It was while you were in Czechoslovakia that a Party delegation went to the Soviet Union to investigate Russification in Ukraine.

Yes. Actually the idea for such a delegation was first discussed while I was still in Canada in the spring of 1967. When the Ukrainians first came up with the idea, the Party leaders said: your best bet would be to send a Party delegation; if you went there from the AUUC you wouldn't get to first base. Which was true, of course. As it turned out, even the Party delegation ran into a lot of resistance. So an official Party delegation was agreed upon, comprising two non-Ukrainians, Tim Buck from Toronto and Bill Ross from Winnipeg, and four Ukrainians: Peter Krawchuk, Anthony Biletsky, George Solomon and Bill Harasym. After the delegation returned, it prepared a report and submitted it to the Central Committee, which endorsed it almost unanimously and decided to have it printed in Ukrainian and English. Well, the "shit hit the fan" in Moscow.

They didn't like it. And they pressured both Kashtan and Buck to change it, actually to withdraw it. But the Central Committee couldn't agree to a withdrawal, so they came to a compromise and decided to "accept it as information." There was a lot of foofarah about that in Moscow and in Kyiv, as well as in the Party leadership and among the Ukrainians here. Much later, the Party rescinded its earlier motion and voted to accept it, much to the chagrin of Moscow and Kyiv.

Delegation had big impact

Q.: The Kyiv report was important to the Ukrainian Canadian community. And yet its story covered as a very protracted time frame, because it actually wasn't reversed by the Party until 1989. How open was the Soviet Union to the idea of receiving fraternal party delegations sent with a mandate to investigate conditions?

They weren't at all. They sort of had to, since a Party secretary headed the delegation. They tried in all kinds of ways to sabotage it or make things difficult for it. But they couldn't, especially because Krawchuk in particular was very firm and knew how to confront and deal with some of Ukraine's Party leaders. He knew their background and methods. So while it might have been easy for them to fool Buck with some statements, Krawchuk had all the facts. He knew both chapter and verse, and with his photographic memory was able to confront them with concrete data and examples.

Q.: How significant is it that in 1989 the leadership apologized for the Ukrainian delegation report? What's the significance, within the Party, of receiving an apology for any issue?

I don't think it was very significant. By the time the apology reached Moscow, it was the Gorbachev era and the Soviet Union was beginning to fall apart. Nevertheless, the apology was balm for the soul of the Ukrainian leaders and a blow to the hard-liners.

About apologies

Q.: Let's continue with the wider issue of getting an apology, or of being rehabilitated. In the culture of the Communist world, people were sometimes rehabilitated 60 years after their death. Somebody would say, "Oh, well, on further investigation we've decided that this person was all right, or in retrospect we are sorry." And it always has some level of cultural significance.

I'd like to get your comment on that aspect of the culture of the Party.

Personally, I'm not too impressed with apologies. Maybe, historically, posthumous rehabilitation adds something. But I don't think it really achieves anything.

Q.: I'll give you another example. At the Party's 28th convention, the Party's stand on the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia was on the agenda to be discussed and perhaps reversed. I assume it was important to Tom Morris and others to have it on the agenda. But because of procedural wrangling it was never dealt with. Yet the fact that it wasn't dealt with was perhaps a harbinger of the split in the Party, because the issue was never resolved even in retrospect. That's what I'm getting at, as to the cultural significance of reversals.

You're right, it probably meant a lot to people like Tom Morris. It would have proven him right, as it would have for me, except that by this time I was no longer in the Party, so it didn't matter to me. Nor will it have the same significance to young people 20 years from now. It will be just one of many things that happened — mistakes and what not — during the Party's history. When you see that people like Paul Pauk and others in the Party still approve of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, well, they would also have been against having it on the agenda.

About the Ukrainian community

Q.: You mentioned that, for the most part, both the left-wing and the nationalist Ukrainian organizations represented, or now represent, only a small percentage of the wider Ukrainian community. But through the decades from the 1920s to the 1980s, how does that dynamic change? What would be the relative size of each?

As far as the early years are concerned, I would have to hazard a guess. It depends on a lot of factors. During those years most of the Ukrainians lived in what could be called ghettos in the cities and in rural areas where they constituted a large percentage of the population. Let's take Alberta, where I grew up. There was a large area east, northeast and southeast of Edmonton that was settled largely by Ukrainian farmers who had originally been granted homesteads at the turn of the century. Ukrainians in those communities made up as much as 90 percent of the population. There was the odd Romanian or Pole. The reeve, bank manager, postmaster, station agent and the general store owner

would all be Anglo-Saxon or French Canadian. In time, Ukrainians did occupy some of these positions and eventually, after putting up a fight for them, even had their own Ukrainian schools. For many years, the people spoke mostly Ukrainian, except for the young people, who began to speak more English. And this was true also of the Finnish communities across Canada.

Ethnic "ghettos" in cities

The situation was different in the cities and towns, where, as I said, for a long time there were ghettos of different ethnic groups. Take the town of Thorold, in the Niagara Peninsula, where I lived from ages 10 to 17. It was at that time a very Tory, predominantly Anglo-Saxon town. But there was an Italian ghetto made up of Italian immigrants who were brought in to dig the new Welland Canal and two ghettos called Thorold Park and Thorold South, settled largely by Ukrainians, most of whom worked in the town's three paper mills. In Winnipeg, the Ukrainians were largely concentrated in the north end of the city. In Toronto, there were basically three Ukrainian settlements: in the central area roughly between Queen and College and Bathurst and Ossington, in West Toronto (the area around Dundas and Dupont streets), and in East Toronto (around Ontario and Dundas streets).

But there were cities, towns, mining camps, rural areas and isolated communities all over Canada where there would be only one Ukrainian family living, or perhaps three or four, but not enough to constitute a community. These did not belong to any Ukrainian organization; at best they subscribed to a Ukrainian newspaper.

Majority don't belong

But to come back to your question, my guess would be that anywhere from one-third to one-half of the Ukrainian Canadian population, if not more, did not belong to any organization. Many of these did go to a Ukrainian church, where there were enough of them to constitute a parish. But many couldn't even do that. Today, with assimilation making rapid inroads among the young people, this section of the community that doesn't belong to any Ukrainian organization is growing larger and larger. It has affected the left-wing organizations to a greater degree than the right-wing ones, because the post-war immigrants, including the displaced persons who left Ukraine or the refugee camps

of Central Europe and came to Canada, joined only the nationalist organizations, not the AUUC. As a result, these organizations have more members who speak Ukrainian.

Today, there are very few young people in the AUUC. When an AUUC function is held, with very few exceptions most of those attending are in their 70s or 80s, a handful are in their 40s or 50s, and practically none are in their 20s.

Community rapidly dwindling

The number of young people in the nationalist organizations is also dwindling, but at not quite the same rate. Because of the influence of the more recent immigrants, these organizations are doing more about keeping the Ukrainian language alive. The left-wing Ukrainian organizations have very few members under 30 or 40 who speak Ukrainian well. I'm of the first generation of Canadian-born, so my Ukrainian is quite good, although it's rusty, because I don't use it much. But there are very few people of the second and third generation in the AUUC who have a good knowledge of Ukrainian. The AUUC did send some of its younger leading people to Ukraine to study, so these few did learn the language to a degree. But very few of the rank and file, the ordinary members, can speak, read or write Ukrainian. How long the Ukrainian community in Canada will last is hard to say. It is dwindling fast and the changes being brought about by the computer age will speed up the process even more.

Q.: Given the demographic crisis in the Ukrainian organization, is there an effort among the membership to avoid taking political sides, such as that which occurred in its most recent manifestation in 1992 with the split in the Party?

Not really, because there are very few Party members in the organization now. Here you have to understand something else that happened. After that Party delegation to Ukraine and after the events in Czechoslovakia, the ties with the Party were weakened drastically, and after the 1992 split in the Party they were completely broken. When the Ukrainian organizations were large and thriving, the Party leadership insisted that there be some strong representation from the ethnic groups on all the leading Party bodies, especially the Ukrainians. Now there is no representation and, as I just said, only two or three Party members in leading positions in the Ukrainian organization. Mind you, there

still is some political drifting and vacillating. For example, when Krawchuk wrote *Our History*, there were some members who were against publishing some of the things in it. They were hesitant about exposing the Party's role in the Ukrainian organization. But they were outnumbered; the majority said, "Let's tell it like it was."

Q.: From reading Our History, I think the review of the AUUC's history that was adopted at its November 1989 convention is a pretty balanced assessment made in a critical spirit. Do you think the AUUC has succeeded in coming to grips with its past?

Not really. Mainly because I think there still are different views on how to assess the past. I believe the majority of the AUUC's present leadership accepts Krawchuk's assessment. But there still are a few who question whether he should have gone as far as he did on Party control.

What the Ukrainian leadership is now lacking is any realistic vision for the future, a realistic idea of where they're going and what to expect. That's largely because the future is impossible to predict. Some want to sort of keep the AUUC going as is, disregarding the fact that times have changed very drastically; that they do not have young people — whom the mainstream Ukrainian organizations, with a few exceptions, do not have, either — and that the technological and communications revolution has speeded up the process of assimilation even more than anyone ever anticipated. I remember years ago how both in the Ukrainian organization and in the Party we used to talk about the assimilation process, that it was an objective and inevitable process, but that we should resist it as long as we could. I think that has gone by the board, and the entire policy of multiculturalism is undergoing drastic changes since it was launched almost 40 years ago.

Part 4

My Reply to the Denunciatory Statement of the AUUC National Executive Committee

Following is the letter I sent AUUC leaders after they issued a statement denouncing me without giving me an opportunity to present my position. My letter was not made known to the members, and I received no reply.

December 27, 1979.

To the members of the National Executive Committee,
Association of United Ukrainian Canadians,
Toronto, Ontario.

This is my somewhat belated response to at least some of the calumnies and calculated distortions of fact contained in your statement of Sept. 18. Belated, partly because I have been unusually busy during the past three months, but mainly because I debated for a long time whether to bother with a reply at all, convinced as I am that it will fall on deaf ears. I decided to do so regardless — for the record.

Although I anticipated a negative reaction to my eulogy to Helen Weir, I must say that I did not expect it would take the venomous and vituperative form it did, surpassing even the statement of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party in this regard. On reflection, however, I realized that it was symptomatic of the malaise that currently afflicts the AUUC leadership.

Several weeks ago, before your statement was translated into English, I showed a copy of the Communist Party's statement to a friend of mine, an astute and discerning person, a physician by profession, who has had no relationship to either the Communist Party or the AUUC and could therefore be quite objective. His comment was: "Whoever wrote that statement is paranoid." And I said: "If you think that statement is

paranoid, you should see the AUUC's!" For, indeed, that it is; and whoever drafted it is obviously paranoid on the subject. But more on this later; first, let me comment on a few of the points dealt with in your statement:

1. Nobody suggested that insufficient tribute or a lack of respect was paid by the AUUC and its press to Helen Weir after her death. What I (and others) were critical of was the attitude towards her before she died. I cannot begin to describe to you how bitter Helen felt about this attitude and in her final days in the hospital she expressed herself very vehemently about it. After all, it was common knowledge that she was terminally ill with cancer for over a year before she died. That is why she was making all those trips abroad, as her "last fling." And she was in the hospital with her final bout of illness for two months. Where was the friendship and respect shown her during all that time? She felt very hurt and bitter about it during those final weeks and it was because her family (her children and her sister) saw this that they wanted her feelings made known. And because I was witness to it also, I gladly agreed.

Incidentally, during the past year or two the AUUC press has carried full page (and longer) tributes to some of its active and leading women who had worked for 25 years or more in the organization — all richly deserved. Surely, when it was known that Helen was terminally ill, some sort of tribute could have been paid to her publicly while she was still alive. Failing that, at least some acknowledgement and appreciation could have been paid to her in person during her illness by some of the leading people with whom she had worked for so long — in a visit to the hospital, a letter, a card or even a phone call. Doing it after she was dead is not quite the same!

2. There was no suggestion that anyone from the

AUUC leadership was instrumental in preventing Helen from getting that medal from the Soviet Union. That was directed quite clearly at her "former friends" in the Communist Party leadership, who *did* intervene. Nor did I "add" the representative of the Soviet embassy. I simply stated the fact that a leading member of the Communist Party approached Helen "on behalf of the Soviet embassy." Which is true. He certainly did not ask her about it on his own behalf, for his own satisfaction. Obviously it is considered heresy or sacrilege by the Communist Party leaders (and apparently the AUUC's) to suggest that Soviet government officials would or could ever act (or fail to act) on some matter on the advice or recommendation of the leaders of the Communist Party in Canada. Yet we all know that this was not the first time it happened — nor the last. But apparently we must not say it publicly, must we?

3. And speaking of the medal... If Helen was so highly respected and her past contributions so highly valued by the AUUC leadership, why did not someone from the NEC intervene with the Soviet authorities (unofficially, if necessary) to find out why she was denied it? As Helen mentioned on more than one occasion, and repeated it during her final days in the hospital, "If it had been someone in the NEC of the AUUC who had received such a telegram and then failed to get the medal, you can be sure there would have been a lot of questions asked — in the embassy and elsewhere." In retrospect Helen was sorry she had not pursued the matter of the medal herself soon after it was denied her, but personal and business problems at that time prompted her to put it off. She had hoped some day to get to Moscow and enquire from the Soviet Women's Committee about the matter herself, even after she first had cancer, but her final bout of illness thwarted her plan. But she was very bitter that none of her one-time colleagues spoke up on her behalf and she personally asked her children and me to make sure that all her friends knew how she felt. Where and how was this to be done? Published in the *Canadian Tribune* or the *Ukrainian Canadian*?

Incidentally, why in your statement do you refer to the medal "she is supposed to have received" (*malab otrymaty*) rather than "was to have received" (*mala otrymaty*)? Was this calculated to still leave some doubt about it? To avoid any conclusion by readers across Canada (and even more so abroad) that the NEC was in any way confirming the fact that she had been awarded the medal but did not get it?

4. The same sort of innuendos and half truths abound throughout the statement. I did not "weave in" the events in Czechoslovakia and the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Lenin. I mentioned the former only in passing when I said that "In her heart and mind Helen remained a Communist to her dying day, even though she dropped her membership in the party some 10 years before — soon after the tragic events in Czechoslovakia in 1968" and the latter when I referred to the medal, which was awarded "on the occasion of the centenary of Lenin's birth." (This, incidentally, was the ploy used in the Communist Party's statement — which did not even mention the medal. I had naively hoped that perhaps the AUUC leadership was above this kind of dishonesty).

In your eagerness to identify with the Communist Party's statement you also assert that my remarks were intended to "whitewash" myself (the Party used the term "refurbish his image"). Both statements make no sense whatsoever, even for your purpose of finding yet another means of slandering me. If I am out to "white-wash" myself or "refurbish my image," who am I doing it for? When and how was my image tarnished? From whose point of view? And how would my remarks have brightened it?

5. Another example where you calculatingly exploit the public's ignorance of the facts is your reference to my eulogy at Tony Kay's funeral. I deliberately sent Peter Krawchuk the text of my remarks soon after the event to refute the same kind of distortions that were being circulated at that time. In spite of that your statement repeats them. In speaking of Tony's boundless energy right up to his final days, I said that "He did, of course, now and then, talk about his eventual retirement, but wasn't really ready for it. He was a man of too much energy to retire. So when a few weeks ago he was told he would have to retire from his job when he reached 65 this coming July, he took it quite hard. His mind, of course, told him he would have to accept it, but apparently his heart could not."

That older people get heart attacks on the eve of or soon after forced retirement is an established medical fact. Only someone carrying on a vendetta or with slander in mind could conclude from these remarks that I accused the AUUC of "causing his death."

You also seek to brand me with evasiveness and irresponsibility by taking out of context and distorting my remarks that "I was told" and "I was so informed." The fact is that in each case I *was* told by the family

what they wanted me to say. But this did not mean or imply that I don't stand by what I said. On the contrary, I take full responsibility for what I said. I should add that what I said was considerably toned down from what I personally would like to have said had it been in other than a public place.

Yes, on all counts yours is a paranoid statement. But this is not surprising. It is born of the paranoia that characterizes the attitude of your committee (particularly three or four of its members) towards the Shevchenko Musical Ensemble and the Guild. There really is no valid reason for the present impasse and inimical relations between the AUUC leadership and the Ensemble.

How did matters reach such an impasse? Clearly, when the Ensemble and its supporters voted by an overwhelming majority to become an independent body, and could not be convinced otherwise, that was the time when the AUUC leadership (no matter how they disagreed with it or did not like it) should have taken a sober, mature and objective attitude and accepted the reality of the situation, rather than say "they're all out of step except us." A change had taken place and the wise course would have been to accept that change and adapt to it. Had such a realistic and objective course been taken, a modus vivendi could have been worked out between the two organizations. They could have existed separately as does the WBA and more recently the Senior Club in Toronto, and forms of cooperation could have been found and developed. Instead, a few leading AUUC individuals (whose egos would not permit them to back down) insisted on retaining control — or else. In so doing, they lost contact with several hundred second and third generation Ukrainian Canadians in Toronto, Hamilton and the surrounding area. These several hundred people, by the way, were raised in the AUUC milieu and always had and continue to have a friendly attitude toward and great respect for the AUUC.

That is why it is an utter fabrication to say, as your statement does, that the Guild leadership, from its earliest days, has been the source of "various gossip and insinuations directed against the NEC and the entire organization." This is simply not true. There were and are, of course, some sharp and bitter criticisms of individual members of the NEC by individual Guild members (which, incidentally, have been very much reciprocated). Even these were existent in the earlier days in only a mild form but have grown and devel-

oped chiefly as a result of the intransigence and hostile attitude of some of the NEC members towards the Ensemble and their stubborn insistence that the Ensemble must yield to their point of view. But there never was anything except the warmest feeling and respect for the AUUC as a whole and a continuing universal regret that close and friendly relations between the two organizations do not exist.

For a long time I personally had tried to get both sides to reach some sort of compromise but it eventually became obvious that as far as some influential NEC members were concerned it was "knuckle under" or else.

This stubbornness and intransigence by a few NEC members gradually developed into hostility and eventually into a paranoid attitude. They could not transmit this hostility to all the rank and file members who were able to see the work of the Ensemble first-hand, but were able to alienate the members in the other parts of Canada by misrepresenting and distorting the aims and purposes and work of the Ensemble — much as has been done in your statement about the memorial meeting for Helen Weir. This hostility has been built up to a point where a provincial secretary of the AUUC could tell a member of the Ensemble (an old acquaintance from away back) that "you're all a bunch of CIA agents!" And the wife of an NEC member told Helen to her face that "you people (in the Ensemble) are worse than the Ukrainian nationalists!" Another person closely associated with the leadership, speaking of Helen, was quoted as saying, "She is not the same person ever since she went to the Party school in Moscow." (Which was not taken kindly by Helen when she heard of it, I can tell you).

All this, I repeat, stems from the fact that a few individuals in the NEC insisted (and continue to insist) that only their way is right. Any suggestions, of course, that perhaps there could be another way are unacceptable. Just as any serious challenge or criticism of a chosen policy of the AUUC leadership becomes heresy. (When, for example, was the last time that *Life and Word* or the *Ukrainian Canadian* carried a letter to the editor critical of an AUUC policy or of something written in the paper?) This attitude has been, and still is, all too prevalent in the Soviet Union, in most Communist Parties (including Canada's) and has spilled over into many of the organizations in which Communist Party members play a leading role. It is reflected in the Communist Party's statement about the memorial

meeting to Helen Weir, wherein my remarks, by some convoluted logic, were branded as anti-Soviet, anti-Party and even anti-working-class. Viewed historically, this style or method of leadership is really nothing new. It has developed and has become characteristic of the Communist movement over the past few decades and all of us at one time or another were (and some still are) guilty of practising it. It is a continuation — in milder form, of course — of the methods used by our one-time idol, "Uncle Joe," who had the "advantage" of dealing with those who disagreed with him (even mildly) not only by denouncing them but by eliminating them physically. Eventually he too became paranoid about anyone who did not accept his way. This is the logic of such an attitude.

While I, too, was once a practitioner (and sometimes a victim) of this method of "leadership," when I was a part of the "establishment" (by the way, why are you people so afraid of that term?) I am happy to say, as did Helen Weir, that I stopped being a docile conformist some time back. Perhaps that is why I, like Helen, was for a time not fully accepted as part of the "establishment" and eventually not at all. I think it wasn't at all accidental that after my return from Prague I was never invited officially by any AUUC body — not even once — to discuss what kind of a role, if any, I might play somewhere in the Ukrainian movement, after having served in it for most of my life. Of course, I surmised that the fact that I had dropped my membership in the Communist Party might have had something to do with it. Theoretically, I know it ought not matter, but there is the practical side to consider, for it could at times prove to be embarrassing. After all, how many ex-members of the Party are there in the AUUC leadership? (Helen, too, was convinced that her dropping out of the Party had much to do with the changed attitude towards her — why there wasn't the same warmth and sincerity — and the reason why nobody took the trouble to intervene on her behalf about the medal. In this she probably had a point).

Despite these attitudes, throughout the 10 years since I returned from Prague, I retained my membership in the AUUC with at least some equanimity and satisfaction, in earlier years even with some hope that eventually it might develop into something more substantial, until — as in the case of many other members — the unreasonable and hostile attitude towards the Ensemble and Guild made my membership in the AUUC less than comfortable or pleasant. Now,

with the publication of your abusive and defamatory statement I find my membership in the AUUC no longer compatible either with my principles or my sense of personal dignity. And so, after being in the AUUC and its predecessors for 53 years (I joined the Youth Section of the ULFTA in 1926 at age 13), a good many of those years in the leadership (I became national secretary of the Youth Section in 1931), I have decided to discontinue my membership.

All of the above is solely by way of setting out some of my views and feelings on record. Because I do not believe that with the attitudes currently prevalent in your committee a dialogue that would lead to anything fruitful is possible, I am not at all interested in receiving a reply.

With fond memories of one-time mutual respect and of pleasant associations in days gone by, I remain,

Yours sincerely,
John Boyd

Part 5

More Questions about the Communist Party

Early shifts in allegiance

Q.: Joe Knight, who helped to get your father off on a suspended sentence and “exiled” to B.C. — I heard that at one time he was a speaker and an organizer for the One Big Union in Northern Ontario. He went to Cobalt, I understand, and helped to convince people they should join the OBU rather than remain in the Western Federation of Miners. Apparently there was a lot of crossover between the various radical organizations in that era. A person would be, say, a member of the Socialist Party of Canada and then leave and become a sort of organizer for the One Big Union. It seems, in retrospect, almost like flirtation, waiting for the good idea to come along. Or was it more consistency and just that the next vehicle was a better expression of the people’s aspirations? What caused these shifts in allegiance? Can I get you to comment on that?

Really, I only know a bit from what I read or heard from different people. I know that before the Party was formed in 1921 and especially before 1928, there was more of this crossover. My father, for example, was a member of the Social Democratic Party but also carried a card from the IWW (the International Workers of the World). I think there was more of an acceptance of people crossing over or working together. But when the Communist Party came into being, and especially after the Comintern took more of a hand in directing things, it put an end to all that. Any flirtation with any other group or union was frowned upon and actually forbidden.

A one-sided view

Q.: I’d like to come back to something we discussed earlier. Even though you were young, you were politically cognizant, active, and read a lot. What do you recall about the Stalin-Trotsky debates in the interna-

tional context as far as getting news of those? And in the Canadian context, were both positions thoroughly discussed, or did one hear only a one-sided interpretation of what was going on?

Oh, it was definitely one-sided. As I said, I read *Inprecor*, the Communist International periodical, regularly through the late 1920s and into the late 1930s. And I accepted everything in it as gospel. When the series of Moscow trials were reported verbatim, even though it was startling to learn that leaders like Bukharin or Zinoviev had “confessed” to these horrible crimes, I accepted it. It was not until after the exposure of Stalin that I realized there was something fundamentally wrong, and later, after I lived for two years in Czechoslovakia, I found out what it was. But until then, yes, I just accepted what the leaders told us, especially after a lifetime of following them and looking to them for guidance, as if they were oracles. I didn’t begin to question things until much later.

It was a gradual erosion, a gradual process of disillusionment, not only because of what was happening in the Soviet Union, but also because of the methods that were used by the Party leaders. I told you earlier about how, on the Party’s orders, I wasn’t sent to Ukraine. The important thing is that, regardless of whether I should or shouldn’t have gone, it was done without my even knowing about it, without my being consulted. Or the fact that the Party leaders decided arbitrarily and suddenly that I should no longer be National Secretary of the Youth Section of the ULFTA. Again, without discussing it with me beforehand, without taking into account that I had spent two years getting to know that organization, but, most important, ignoring the fact that this was a cultural organization with its own constitution and the right to make its own decisions. And there were many other incidents like that.

That is the way the Party leaders dealt with people,

and even more ruthlessly if they questioned or opposed Party policy. It was largely this lack of democracy, this lack of a humane approach to people working for the same cause that began to erode my dedication to the Party, my faith in the Party. I began to realize that there was something wrong.

Blind acceptance

Q.: You say that reading Bukharin had been an early influence on you, and yet you accepted his confession as an act of faith. How did you reconcile what you had read of his ideas with the trial? Did you have any internal anguish over that?

Yes. Not anguish so much, perhaps, as shock and bewilderment about how he and the others could have “gone off the rails,” so to speak. That is the way it was presented to us, of course. It was presented as a betrayal, as part of the “onslaught of imperialism,” and they “confessed” to being agents of imperialism. It was a blind and unthinking acceptance of what Stalin and his prosecutor Vyshinsky said about them. That was our weakness, of course, in not questioning enough what was said and done. It was difficult to comprehend, so you went on “faith”: you either accepted that and stayed with the Party or you didn’t and left the Party, as some did. I stayed — in retrospect, to my regret.

Q.: With the denunciation of Trotsky, some people did leave the Party. Because Bukharin did have some intellectual and ideological stature, even though perhaps not as much as Trotsky, were there people in the Party who became disillusioned after his trial and left?

There might have been members who would have split hairs that way — who said, “Well, I go along with the criticism of Trotsky, but Bukharin, that’s the last straw” — but I wasn’t aware of them. They were all lumped in our minds — actually by Stalin and Vyshinsky — as enemies of the Party, enemies of Communism. Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, and all the others were put into one bag, even though there were distinctions in the trials: they weren’t all tried en masse, but rather in groups, gradually. No, I think most people just lumped them all together as enemies of the Party.

Both sides used propaganda

Q.: This is more an observation than a question. In his book, Krawchuk writes: “It’s well-known that after 1922 the Soviet Union had a network of propagandists

and agitators like no other state in the history of civilization.” I guess we can accept that. But I was surprised that it was used as it was, that because it had this network, they succeeded in brainwashing the people who were adherents of the ideology. I think that is how he meant it. But to compare it to the process of societal control under advanced capitalism, I think there is no comparison, because under advanced capitalism the control is far, far more sophisticated.

I think he overstated it for effect. He shouldn’t have said “like no other state.” Perhaps equal to, or almost equal to, the United States would have been better. But there’s no question that Moscow did have a network bigger than that of any country outside the United States.

I don’t know if you’ve ever read *The Red Orchestra*. It’s a marvelous book. Stanley Ryerson recommended it to me years ago. It tells the story of Leopold Trepper, a dedicated Communist Jew in Poland, who during the war organized a radio network in Western Europe, mainly France and Belgium, to supply information for Moscow. His staff was made up of dedicated Communists, sympathizers and a few paid agents. He was very successful.

The book tells the gripping story of how he operated, how he had to evade the German army, which constantly sought to zero in on his portable broadcasting stations. All his messages to Moscow had to be sent every day by secret code to Moscow. It gives an example of how his superiors in Moscow, who had never been outside the Soviet Union, didn’t understand the West and how that affected his efforts.

One of the rules Moscow imposed on the operation was that you had to report every single move you made that day, down to the tiniest detail. In one of these reports he told Moscow how he went to Hamburg, illegally of course, and came back. Following which he got a blast: “How come you didn’t include an account of how you got a passport to go to Hamburg?” When he replied that one didn’t need a passport within the country, they didn’t believe him. You needed an internal passport to travel from city to city in the Soviet Union, so they assumed he was hiding something and threatened him.

He was also forbidden to make contact with the underground French Communist Party, which was a major player in the Resistance movement. When at one point, in a life-or-death emergency he just had to, and did, he got hell for it. They simply would not accept his

explanations. Three times he was caught, jailed and nearly executed, but managed to escape.

After the war, Trepper went to Moscow, expecting to be recognized for his heroic efforts. Instead, he was put in jail by Stalin, where he spent the next 18 years. You see, he was Polish, and a Jew, and had been in contact with foreigners. After serving his 18-year term, Trepper returned to Poland only to find that anti-Semitism was so rampant that his sons had left and gone to London. Trepper joined them and died there. The *Toronto Globe and Mail* carried an item about his death at the time.

Tragedy of disunity

Q.: With the CCF being formed in 1933 and the Party leadership imprisoned in Kingston, how well was the Party able to function? Did throwing the Communist leaders in jail help to kickstart the CCF? Did it retard the Party's work with the unemployed at all?

Actually, the jailing of the Communist leaders only spurred many people to greater activity in the Party. Within a short time a secondary layer of leaders developed, and they provided the leadership that was required. As for the CCF, its creation was part of the leftward swing of the people against the system. Unfortunately, it was also the time when the Communist Party began labeling the Social Democrats, the CCF leaders, as “social reformists” and even “social fascists,” as being no better than the capitalists, that they were really helping capitalism to survive, etc.

This battle was a two-way street, of course. The CCF leaders were in turn attacking and denigrating the Communists. It was part of the world-wide struggle between the Social Democrats in the Second International and the Communist Parties in the Third International. Many workers at the time were very enthusiastic about the newly created CCF and could not understand this division in the Left. It wasn't at all helpful in the battle against capitalism.

I believe that one of the greatest tragedies of this century is the fact that those on the left wing — the people who wanted socialism, who wanted to replace capitalism — were disunited, could not unite, from as far back as 1903 or from the founding of the Third International in 1919. As was proven later, that same split prevented them from stopping fascism early enough. And it continued to this day. This disunity also enabled capitalism to continue to carry out its agenda

and to win all kinds of battles to date, even though eventually they are not likely to win the war.

Attempt to rehabilitate Stalin

Q.: A couple more things. I was told by one of the leading Ukrainians I interviewed that at one point there was an attempt in the Canadian Party to restore Stalin, to say, okay, he did some horrible things, but he also did some good things. The Ukrainians would have none of it, and that was the end of it. Do you have any knowledge of when that happened and how it was dealt with?

Yes, it was when I was in the National Executive, while Kashtan was the leader of the Party and Brezhnev was in power in Moscow. It came in the form of a message from the CPSU, gently suggesting that there should be more of a balance in evaluating Stalin's role in history, etc. The executive was divided on the matter, but the proposal died after the leaders of all the various ethnic groups in the Party adamantly opposed the idea.

There probably would have been more support for the idea among some of the rank-and-file members. Many people — I think my father would have been among them — found it very difficult to write off Stalin or condemn him. Indeed, there is a publication called *Northern Compass*, that Mike Lucas puts out, which blatantly still reveres and praises Stalin and doesn't even want to consider any negative aspects of his regime. I saw an issue of this publication earlier this year and I understand it's still being published. So they must have some followers. They're very much like the Soviet Communists led by Ziuganov, who are totally uncritical of Stalin.

A noble cause betrayed

As I said earlier, the Soviet Union did many great things, but these were done in spite of Stalin. Most of the people in the Soviet Union, including most of the rank-and-file Party members, were sincere, genuinely dedicated to a better system of society. In criticizing the Party, I don't reject the great things that were done, and the ideals to which the entire membership and the entire Party aspired. In spite of the sectarian methods and dogmatic approaches that persisted within the Party — and still persist among the few who are still in the Party — even though I am no longer a member, I still believe in genuine socialism.

The goal of socialism was a noble cause, but it was

betrayed by people who were primarily interested in power, people who distorted and besmirched that cause and used it to achieve their ends. I am confident that future generations will find ways to challenge the rule of global corporate capitalism. But it won't be done by the dogmatic and sectarian theories and methods of the past. That's why I talk about the need for a totally new approach by the Left today. How to challenge the capitalist system in the present new era is a big challenge that requires new theoretical study and new approaches.

Party's first secretary

Q.: I was unaware, for example, that Tom Burpee was the first national secretary and that he was replaced by William Moriarty and then by Jack Macdonald. I always thought Macdonald was secretary from day one. What do you remember about Burpee and Moriarty?

Not much, really. After all, I was only about eight years old then. I did meet Tom Burpee a few times and I knew his wife, Helen, who lived to a ripe old age. She was Helen Sutcliffe originally.

Q.: Krawchuk says that they were replaced or suggests they didn't have a stable leadership that was well versed in the Marxist theory of scientific socialism. But I don't know that we can say there ever was a leader who was well versed in the Marxist theory.

I agree, but I think it's relative. Macdonald and Buck probably had more knowledge of it than Burpee. And I was told that Moriarty was very bright.

Q.: Of all of the leaders, would you say that Buck had the most knowledge of Marxist theory?

That is very doubtful. I was told that Maurice Spector had more theoretical background. And more education. That is why he was an effective editor. Buck was essentially self-taught. What he did have was a phenomenal memory. Whenever he prepared a speech, he would write it out by hand, and in the course of doing so would memorize it, retain all the facts. So when he delivered his speech he rarely had to refer to his notes, because he could remember them. I think he acquired his knowledge of Marxist theory from books that way before he became Party secretary. Macdonald also was a self-taught worker.

Part 6

My Report on the 1968 Events in Czechoslovakia

This is the letter I sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada on Sept. 18, 1968. It was sent as a contribution to the discussion bulletin on the events in Czechoslovakia that was to be published prior to the meeting of the Central Committee in October. The letter never saw the light of day. Through the intervention of Tim Buck and William Kashtan it was decided to discontinue the bulletin after two issues, "due to space limitations." At the time the letter was written I did not know that I would be attending the Sept. 18 meeting. When I did, I used about two-thirds of this letter in the hour-long speech I made to the meeting as my contribution to the discussion.

To the members of the Central Committee,
Communist Party of Canada:

First, let me apologize for the length of this letter. It is the most important document I have written in my life. I therefore ask your indulgence. Involved in this letter are all the hopes and ideals I have worked for and stood for throughout the 36 years I have been a full-time worker in our movement. I ask you to read it with the same seriousness with which I am writing it.

It is regrettable that the CEC of our party was unable to come out with a more forthright and clear-cut statement condemning the August 21 military intervention in Czechoslovakia for what it was: a monumental folly and a travesty on socialism. Regrettable, but in a way understandable, for although the action was a glaring violation of all principles governing relations between socialist states and Communist parties, and although there have been other moments in history when friends and advocates of socialism have been cruelly misled by statements and actions of the leaders of the Soviet Union and other socialist states, many people still sought desperately for some sort of rational

explanation of the action.

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The TASS statement on the day of the intervention declared that (1) the party and government leaders of Czechoslovakia asked for "urgent assistance....including assistance with armed forces" and (2) that "this request was brought about by the threat....emanating from the counter-revolutionary forces which have entered into a collusion with foreign forces hostile to socialism." Neither of these statements is true. There was no imminent threat of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia. The overwhelming majority of the Czechoslovak communists, leaders and rank and file, did not think so at the time — and they do not think so now. Significantly, the communique issued after the talks between Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders on Aug 26 makes no mention of any "counter-revolutionary threat." The Czechoslovaks did not, would not and do not now agree to any such characterization.

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What are the criteria for declaring there is a counter-revolution or the threat of a counter-revolution in a country? For the leaders of some of the socialist countries an article in a newspaper criticizing or attacking the Communist Party or certain government policies of one of the socialist states, or a few voices (sometimes even one voice) raised in opposition are grounds for crying "counter-revolution" or declaring there is a counter-revolutionary threat. Even criticism by Communists or honest and sincere patriots of socialist Czechoslovakia, because they were sometimes expressed in angry and bitter terms, were branded as counter-revolutionary.

But the Czechoslovak Communists had a different approach and different evaluation of these voices of

opposition. In a three-hour interview with Rae Murphy and me on August 8, Jan Kolar, a Central Committee member of the Czechoslovak Party, said: "What basis is there for claiming that Czechoslovakia faces the threat of counter-revolution? Not one Communist has been killed, not one party official has been physically assaulted. The press, radio and TV are in the hands of the Communists (granted some of them are in what we call the right wing in our party). Our army and police are in full command of public order and prepared for any eventuality. Surely this is far from being a counter-revolution."

* * *

There were and are, of course, anti-socialist and anti-Soviet elements in the country, aided and abetted by the CIA and similar forces (there are also such, by the way, in the GDR, Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union). But the Czechoslovak leaders always admitted that there were such elements. They always pointed out, however, that these were not large groups or strata of the population but individuals, who were not in any positions of power and influence and would not be allowed to get into any such positions. Nevertheless, they were quite ready and able to deal with them if they ever presented a threat. Indeed, they often made it clear that should ideological means of fighting these elements prove to be inadequate and any kind of emergency arose the government and the party were ready to use force.

The Czechoslovak Communists, however, always differentiated between the conscious anti-socialist elements, who wanted to turn Czechoslovakia back to the pre-198 and pre-1939 days and honest citizens, including many Communists, who because of the excesses of the Novotny regime were very critical of the party and its leaders. Some of these were very bitter and some went to extremes. But although many of these people were confused and wrong they were not in favour of a return to capitalism. They wanted, as many of them put it, a "better" socialism, a "more humane," "more democratic" socialism. The Czechoslovak party leaders understood this and refused to brand them as "agents of imperialism" or "counter-revolutionaries" or to lump them into one camp with the conscious anti-socialist, truly counter-revolutionary elements.

* * *

The Czechoslovak Party had its finger very much on the pulse of the people. It knew that much of the

dissatisfaction was a "blowing off steam" by hundreds of thousands of workers and people generally after more than two decades of bureaucracy, violations of people's rights and distortions of socialist democracy. That there would be extremes and excesses in such a situation was inevitable but the Party was determined not to return to the old pre-January methods to eliminate them. The main point is that they differentiated between the honest elements who were confused, angry, bitter and highly critical and those who wanted to return to capitalism or were consciously serving the enemy. On the other hand, the Soviet press (and that of the other four powers) lumped all the voices of opposition into one camp and almost anyone who was "anti" or didn't conform was labelled a counter-revolutionary, indeed, is still being so labelled.

It is being said that the threat of counter-revolution was very real and very near. In the United Nations Security Council and in the Soviet and other newspapers, statements were made that the Warsaw Pact powers had "irrefutable proof" that a take-over by the counter-revolutionaries in Czechoslovakia with the assistance of "outside imperialist forces" was imminent. No such proof has as yet been produced.

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How imminent was the threat? It took only four hours for the near half-million troops to occupy all the strategic points in Czechoslovakia. Surely the leadership of the Czechoslovak party wasn't that close to losing control of the government or being overthrown by a coup! And if the threat was that imminent and the proof of its existence so irrefutable, isn't it strange that the majority of the Czechoslovak leaders could not be convinced of it? Why, for example, could they not convince President Svoboda, an old general knowledgeable in military problems, a fearless patriot of his country, a devoted Communist? Or Dubcek, or Cernik, or Smrkovsky? Why couldn't they convince these men at least enough to win their agreement for the presence of foreign troops? And if the threat of counter-revolution wasn't just hours or days away, why the rush? Why couldn't they, for example, have recalled the Bratislava meeting or even an emergency meeting of all the Communist parties in Europe?

* * *

We are told that the Czechoslovak leaders themselves, indeed the majority, called for the foreign troops — a claim categorically denied by the Czechoslovak

government and Party leaders. If they did and if they were a majority, why did they not come forward and identify themselves? If in the beginning they were afraid, why didn't they come forward after they had the protection of the foreign troops? Why is it that to this date nobody has named any of these leaders? No, there was no such demand from the Czechoslovak leadership at any time. In any case, whether there was a last-minute plea by a handful of individuals in the Czechoslovak Party leadership who were opposed to the policies of the majority is of secondary importance. The fact is that an operation such as the one that was carried out within four hours in the early morning of August 21 wasn't organized in the last minute. It had been planned not weeks but months before. Thus, while it is true that there were counter-revolutionary elements and imperialist forces hard at work in Czechoslovakia in the past months, seeking to use the situation that had developed to their own advantage, the claim that the intervention was made necessary because Czechoslovakia was threatened by counter-revolution simply does not stand up.

Perhaps it is because the "irrefutable proof" of counter-revolution was not so irrefutable that a *Pravda* correspondent, S. Kovalev, came out (three weeks after the intervention!) with the theory that it was a "peaceful counter-revolution." There need not be killings and physical assaults on people to constitute a counter-revolution, he wrote. There can also be a "peaceful" or "quiet" counter-revolution. The tactics of such a peaceful counter-revolution, we are told, "consists of references to the need for 'improving' socialism." Demands for "democratization" and for "a more democratic socialism" are also included. By painting a detailed imaginary picture of how such a "peaceful" counter-revolution could develop, step by step, the *Pravda* writer creates the impression that this is precisely what was going to take place in Czechoslovakia and what the intervention prevented.

At least one flaw in this "theory" is that there is hardly a single person in Czechoslovakia today who can be persuaded to believe that there was such a threat or that the intervention was justified. And was it necessary to send almost half a million troops and 7,500 tanks into a country the size of New York state, with a population of 1½ million, to crush a "peaceful" counter-revolution? If a counter-revolution, peaceful or otherwise, was imminent and so extensive and well organized, why is it that no one has been able to pinpoint

precisely who these counter-revolutionaries are and expose them? Why haven't the leaders of this counter-revolution been named? Why is it that to date not a single counter-revolutionary has been arrested? Surely if, as is claimed, there are some 0,000 armed revolutionaries in the country at least a few of them could have been produced by now.

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The entire picture of the situation in Czechoslovakia over the past several months has been also confused and distorted by another factor: the role imperialism and its forces have played in it and around it and the way this fact has been used by those who have opposed the democratization process in Czechoslovakia.

That the capitalist powers would use the differences that arose among the Czechoslovak Communists, supported by the majority of the Communist Parties of the world, was inevitable and should have caused no surprise or alarm to Marxists. But by applying a primitive kind of logic, some Communists argued that if the Western powers are supporting the Czechoslovak Communists, this is proof that they are "on the wrong track." The GDR leaders were particularly prone to using this argument. Every time a West German newspaper or radio station quoted a speech or an article from Czechoslovakia this was further evidence that the West German "revanchists" were master-minding events there.

The more this happened, of course, the more the Western powers joined in "backing" the Czechoslovak leaders, hoping thereby to widen and deepen the split — and they have been quite successful. This primitive logic took its crudest form when a leading Bulgarian Communist told me (this was at the time that Dubcek had been taken away and nobody knew where he was): "Dubcek is a counter-revolutionary. It's a good thing we've got rid of him." This kind of "black and white," "who's not with us is against us" approach has in one form or another permeated scores of articles and statements written about the Czechoslovak events. This kind of approach and the premise that "the Soviet comrades can't possibly be wrong" or "we have to stand by the Soviet Union no matter what" has also motivated many of those Parties that have endorsed the intervention. In this respect it is interesting to note that the intervention was endorsed mainly by those Parties that have had the least contact with the Czechoslovak Party, whose leaders did not visit and have talks with

the Czechoslovak leaders, especially in the last few months, and who therefore had little or no first-hand knowledge of the situation in this country.

If one starts out from the standpoint that the leaders of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries involved were correct in all these events, that they made no serious errors, that "there must be something to it if the leaders of five socialist countries say so," then the problem becomes relatively simple: there was a threat of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia, the security of the socialist world was threatened, therefore any and every action necessary was justified. I, for one, cannot, do not and will not accept this precept.

* * *

What are the reasons that prompted the leaders of the Soviet and the other Warsaw Pact powers to take the drastic step they did? To understand this one must go back to the January plenum of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee, when the majority of the committee ousted Novotny and a number of his supporters from leadership, broke with the policies the old leadership had pursued and charted a new course, which became known as the "democratization process," the aims of which were summarized in the Party's Action Program.

The leaders in Moscow, Berlin and Warsaw opposed this new path taken by the Czechoslovak Communists from the very outset. The leaders in Budapest and Sofia joined later. Despite their claims at the time that they supported the decisions of the January and May plenums, those who carefully followed what was written in the press and what was said by the leaders in these countries were able to notice that at first this support was only formal and lukewarm at best; very soon after, it became obvious that the course the Czechoslovak leaders had charted was being fundamentally opposed.

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The press of the five Warsaw Pact powers during the past nine months was the best indicator of this opposition and the escalation of that opposition right up to the August 21 military intervention. The decisions of the January plenum were only perfunctorily reported; the speeches of Dubcek, Smrkovsky and Cernik were reported by quoting only those sections with which the editors agreed and omitting important passages with which they did not agree. So obvious was this to the Communists in Prague, who would read both *Rude*

Pravo and *Pravda*, that they were embarrassed. A major speech of Dubcek, for example, was very briefly reported (only carefully selected passages) yet only a short while later a speech by Gomulka in Warsaw was carried by *Pravda* in full, taking two full pages. The Action Program, a lengthy and highly important and historic document, was confined to a quarter page and the selections most carefully chosen. A representative from one of the European parties commented that "it must have been edited by a surgeon." Even in the *World Marxist Review* the first articles on the events, and decisions in Czechoslovakia were published only in May (and that not without some difficult manoeuvring), while the Action Program, which many parties wanted as quickly as possible, wasn't printed in the magazine's *Information Bulletin* until late July, and that only in a limited edition in Prague. It wasn't sent to Canada for reprinting in the English edition. It was obvious, even to the not very astute political observer, that the leaders in Moscow and the other Warsaw Pact capitals did not approve of the course the Czechoslovak Communists had embarked upon.

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Eventually, especially after talks in Dresden and Moscow failed to divert the Czechoslovak leaders from their course, one began to note a mounting campaign of attacks, at first somewhat guarded and subtle but gradually more open and direct, against various individuals and publications in Czechoslovakia. Some of these were justified criticisms of extremist views, although all too often in an inimical tone that is used against enemies rather than confused or misguided friends. Some of them crossed the border of journalistic ethics and good taste. An article in the May issue of *Sovetskaya Rossia*, for example, attacking Czechoslovakia's first president, Tomas Masaryk, was not only crude in its language and approach but a distortion of history. It completely failed to take into account the national feelings of the people of Czechoslovakia, what Masaryk still means to them; and thus caused a great deal of resentment in the country at a time when subversive forces were working overtime to arouse anti-Soviet sentiment. The articles became more critical and more one-sided. Fewer and fewer materials were published from the speeches of the Czechoslovak leaders and from the statements and documents of the Party's leading bodies. There was little or no attempt to differentiate these from the views of the extremist anti-

socialist elements that were attacked.

As the pressure on the Czechoslovak leaders mounted, the Warsaw Pact powers, to justify their chosen course and policy, began to resort to more and more exaggerations, half-truths and outright falsification. News that a small arms cache was found near the German border — in suspiciously strange and provocative circumstances only half concealed in a culvert under a bridge (and after an anonymous telephone tip) — was picked up within hours and broadcast widely. A day later, the Bulgarian press carried a story that "many arms caches have been found all over Czechoslovakia." This was reprinted and broadcast in all the Warsaw Pact countries so that millions got the impression that Czechoslovakia was almost an armed counter-revolutionary camp. Next day, the Czechoslovak government officially denied that other arms caches had been found. But the denial wasn't printed in the press of the other countries.

Much was made of the stories that thousands of Western and particularly West German tourists were flooding into Czechoslovakia and even that German and American soldiers disguised as civilians had infiltrated the entire country. No proof of this later charge was provided then or since. (That there were and are CIA agents and West German agents in Czechoslovakia — of that there is no doubt; they are also present in every other Warsaw Pact country). On June 2, the Czechoslovak news agency CTK published official statistics showing the number of tourists that had come into the country up to that point in the season. The figures showed: the number of tourists as compared with the same period in the previous year grew by 20 percent, but most of the increase was from the socialist countries; only 22 percent were from capitalist countries, a drop percentage-wise compared to 1965; all the other socialist countries had a larger number of tourists from the West on a per capita basis. For every tourist from West Germany there were .5 from the GDR and for every tourist from Austria there were three from Hungary. Needless to say, none of this was reported in the press of the socialist countries. Scores of additional examples of such distortion and outright fabrication can be provided (I have retained clippings of some of the most glaring ones).

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After the January plenum of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee the parties of the Warsaw

Pact countries resigned themselves to the fact that Novotny had been removed and would have to be written off. But those who had supported Novotny and his policies were not written off. There was a conscious effort in these countries to push to the fore those individuals whom the Czechoslovak Party members considered as "conservative" but whom the Soviet press kept referring to (and still does) as the "healthy elements" in the party. This was perhaps most flagrantly done in the publication by the July 30 *Pravda* of a letter it had received from 99 workers of a Prague auto plant in which they tried to portray the public's concern over the fact that the Warsaw Pact troops that had been on manoeuvres had long overstayed their departure date as an official or semi-official campaign against the Soviet Union. The letter itself was not so significant one way or another. What was interesting was the play *Pravda* had given it: spread over a quarter page, complete with facsimile signatures (the liberal space given as compared with that given to Dubcek's speeches or the Action Program was not lost on the Czechoslovak Communists). And the letter was signed by 99 workers in a plant that employs ,500 workers, most of whom would not have endorsed it, especially its tone and implications. Of the 99 signators, about a third had already retired and the letter itself was published just as the plant closed down for a two-week summer holiday. Nor had the signators discussed the problem taken up in their letter either in their plant party branch or in their trade union.

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It would be wrong, of course, to say that there wasn't cause for some criticism of the Czechoslovak Party (this could very well be said of all Parties) or that the Czechoslovak leaders had not made or were not making mistakes. They were. Some they were aware of and admitted, others not. It is true, for example, that there were times in these months when they were not fighting back hard enough against some of the anti-socialist elements; they said as much at the May plenum of their central committee. When asked (at the aforementioned August 8 interview and on other occasions) why this was so they gave a number of reasons. One reason was that after January there was quite a violent reaction among the people to the long period of wrong leadership and excesses of the Novotny regime. Some of the voices of dissatisfaction and criticism were in the Party itself and among workers

who had been the closest supporters of the Party. In the face of this violent reaction and this mood, many Party activists felt compromised, especially when they'd find the workers throwing up the Party's past to them. Many activists were also not experienced in fighting back ideologically; they had always left it up to the "fellows on top" to do that. The main reason, however, why little was or could be done, they explained, was that the leadership was divided and therefore did not have the confidence of the membership. There was a relatively small "left" or "conservative" group and a small right-wing group (which was more influential than its small number because many of its members were linked with the mass media). The overwhelming majority, they claimed, was in what they called the "centre," led by Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Cernik and others. They felt quite certain that the scheduled 14th Congress of the party would be able to isolate both the left and right wings and consolidate the party around the latter group.

But to the leaders of the Warsaw Pact parties the victory and consolidation of the "centre" led by Dubcek et all would not have been satisfactory. This so-called "centre" was the main motivating force of the democratization process and the Action Program. Those whom the Czechoslovak Communists considered as "centrists," Moscow, Berlin and the other three capitals considered as revisionists, right-wing opportunists or apologists for and abettors of the counter-revolutionaries. Indeed, at one time or another Dubcek and his colleagues have been called all of these in the press of these capitals.

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The pressure on the Czechoslovak leadership to abandon its policies started quite early. It began in earnest at the Dresden meeting of the Warsaw Pact powers (without Romania). It then continued at the meeting of the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders in Moscow. When these two meetings failed to get the Czechoslovak leaders to change their course, the five powers held a meeting in Moscow without them. At this meeting for the first time military intervention was openly discussed when it was reportedly demanded by the leaders of the GDR and Poland. The Soviet leaders were divided on the proposal and when the leaders of Hungary and Bulgaria opposed it, the proposal was shelved. It is interesting to note here that at the end of June, following the meeting between the Czechoslovak and Hungarian leaders in Budapest, three different highly placed officials in Hungary told me personally

that while the Hungarian leaders were critical of some of the weaknesses and errors which in their opinion the Czechoslovak leaders had displayed, in the main they were supporting their efforts and felt that the Czechoslovak party was doing a service both to its own country and the cause of socialism. One of them added: "Our support is genuine and sincere. We don't want to support them like a rope supports a hanging man." But a few days after Dubcek's visit to Budapest the Hungarian leaders were invited to Moscow. After that they changed their attitude to the Czechoslovak Party quite drastically and adopted a much harder line.

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The Czechoslovak leaders found out, of course, that military intervention had been discussed at the meeting to which they had not been invited. Is it any wonder that when they were invited to a similar meeting in Warsaw they refused to come? The story of that meeting and the "to-be-forgotten" Warsaw letter that resulted are both well known. Following that meeting the press of all five Warsaw Pact powers pulled out all stops and published a flood of articles and commentary on Czechoslovakia which continued right up to the Cierna nad Tisou meeting. The atmosphere that had been built up was such that on the eve of Cierna many Communists in both Moscow and Prague expected the worst. Many of the conversations in both capitals in those days began with: "Do you think there will be intervention?"

Incidentally, the Czechoslovak Communists had been alerted about a possible military intervention long before the meeting of five. Some of them said that the first mention of that possibility was as far back as last February. In any case, this advance knowledge explains why the Czechs and Slovaks were prepared with a network of secret radio stations (which by the way, were manned almost entirely by Party members working in two shifts round the clock) as well as facilities for underground newspapers, shop papers, leaflets, etc.

But during the week before Cierna an interesting phenomenon took place in Czechoslovakia. The people all over the country sensed that at Cierna their leaders were going to be put under tremendous pressure and they rallied around them in the greatest outpouring of unity in Czechoslovakia's history. Naturally, all kinds of anti-socialist and anti-Soviet elements joined in this upsurge (and the enemy agents were hard at work). But instead of seeing this unity for what it really was, the

leaders of the Warsaw Pact powers interpreted it as unity based on anti-Sovietism. They saw and heard the few expressions of anti-Sovietism, but failed to see that the overwhelming majority were united around the Communist Party and its leaders.

At Cierna the pressure put on the Czechoslovak leaders was truly great. The meeting was expected to last two days; it lasted four: We all know the results of that meeting and the Bratislava meeting that followed. Like everyone else, I was very enthusiastic about Cierna and Bratislava and I so wrote in my fourth article in the *Tribune*. But I have since altered my view of these meetings considerably. It is obvious that once the Soviet leaders had again failed to convince the Czechoslovak leaders, the communique at Bratislava (which really didn't say anything concrete or new) became nothing more than a cynical cover-up for action that had already been planned in just such an eventuality. As a matter of fact, I personally have first-hand knowledge that the possibility of military intervention on the weekend immediately after Cierna had been considered by the Soviet leaders. This means that the intervention had been planned prior to Cierna and Bratislava — just in case — and obviously decided upon and consummated in the weeks after.

The leaders of the Warsaw Pact powers who decided on the intervention doubtless expected different results than they got. Based obviously on false information — and poor judgment — they believed that the majority of the Czechoslovak Communists and large sections of the population, especially the working class, once they were provided with an opportunity, would drop the "right-wing opportunist" and "revisionist" leaders (Dubcek et al) and turn to the "healthy elements." (It is said the Soviet leaders expected at least 50 percent of the population to welcome and endorse their action). The first days of the military intervention proved how utterly wrong they were; the days since have only confirmed their miscalculations.

Many of the details about what happened in Czechoslovakia in those first days are known to you: the statements made by some of the leaders while they still were able; what the press wrote before it was closed down; the role of the clandestine radio stations all over the country; the verbal clashes and debates between the people and the tank crews, etc. Not all of it by any means was as presented by the capitalist press but much of it was, and certainly the photos tell quite a lot. I had the misfortune of being on holiday in

Hungary on August 21 so I have only got my picture of those first days from the leading Communists of the various parties here who witnessed those tragic events. But while in Hungary I did have my ears glued to the radio and heard round-the-clock broadcasts in Czech and Slovak by the so-called Legal Free Radio stations and I can vouch for the fact that, contrary to what the Warsaw Pact press wrote, they played a most positive role in calling on the people to maintain calm and not lend themselves to provocation. (Here I exclude, of course, the Czech and Slovak broadcasts from Austria, Western Germany, Voice of America, etc.). I have also had access to information from very highly placed authoritative sources here about some of the events in those first few days after August 21.

It simply is not true that the majority of the party presidium called for intervention. As the proclamation by President Svoboda and those authoritative bodies that remained on the first day of the intervention declared: no authorized party or government body asked for intervention. The facts are as follows:

The Party presidium had been meeting on the evening of August 20. Just before midnight one of the members walked in from a phone call and informed the meeting that foreign troops had crossed the borders. The meeting continued. About 3.00 a.m. Soviet troops forced their way into the meeting room, arrested most of the members and took them away at gun-point. Dubcek was handcuffed, put on the floor of a military transport plane and taken to Moscow. The others, including Premier Cernik and Josef Smrkovsky, were taken to Poland, then to Trans-Carpathian Ukraine and later likewise to Moscow.

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During the day of August 21, one of the commanders of the Warsaw Pact forces, Gen. Pavlovsky, and a "conservative" member of the presidium, Alois Indra, visited President Svoboda and told him they had with them a document containing the resignation of the government, signed by Premier Cernik. The president told them that he can accept the resignation of the government only from the premier personally (Cernik was then under arrest; the document was a forgery). Then the president was visited by the Soviet ambassador, Chervonenko, accompanied by Indra, Kolder, Svestka and several other conservative members of the presidium. Svoboda declared that he had nothing to discuss with them and that if he was to have any talks

it would be only with the highest officials of the Soviet party and government. He then contacted Moscow by telephone and said he would come there for talks but only on condition that Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky and Kriegel were present. He also asked that Indra, Kolder and Svestka be there so that a full picture would be obtained.

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Svoboda was presented with a plan for the creation of a new "revolutionary government." He was shown a list of names of those who would be included in the new government. Svoboda was to be head of the government and first secretary of the party. It was also proposed to form a new "revolutionary tribunal" which would try Dubcek, Cernik, Smrkovsky and other "revisionists." Svoboda categorically rejected the proposal. Then the Soviet leaders declared they would name a government without any further talks. Svoboda then threatened to take his own life if the Soviet leaders would not agree to talk with him and his colleagues ("And nobody will believe that it was suicide," he added). He demanded that all the interned members of the Czechoslovak leadership be present for the discussion. The Soviet side agreed but chose first to meet with each one individually. Cernik offered physical resistance and was brought in on a stretcher. Dubcek, who had been manhandled after his arrest, also was ill and required medical attention. Kriegel likewise.

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The day after the intervention (August 22) and before Svoboda had arrived in Moscow, *Pravda* carried a long article (two full pages) titled "Defense of Socialism — an International Duty," setting out what in its view was the background to and the reasons for the military intervention. It is a model "case for the prosecution" but to those of us who have lived in Prague, followed closely both the Soviet and Czech press over the past nine months, read the statements, articles and speeches of the Czechoslovak Party leaders and felt the mood of the people, the *Pravda* article simply didn't ring true. And it certainly didn't square with the facts. As I have said, it's a good "case for the prosecution" such as had been presented to the world at the time of the 1937 trials in Moscow, the excommunication of Tito in 1948 or the trials against Slansky and his colleagues in Prague in the 1950s, all of them wrapped up in very "convincing" argumentation, with suitable quotations from Lenin, and in the name of lofty aims

and ideals. This article had already written off Dubcek and his colleagues as right wing opportunists and abettors of the counter revolutionaries.

During the talks, the Soviet side made it extremely difficult for all on the Czechoslovak side except Svoboda to take part, threatening, lecturing and heckling them as they spoke. Dubcek was several times branded as a traitor by the Soviet side. In the course of the talks the Soviet leaders tried very hard to get agreement on the formation of a government made up of the "conservative" members or the acceptance of some form of protectorate. Even the alternative of making Czechoslovakia a part of the USSR was discussed. The discussion also revealed a considerable difference of opinion within the politbureau of the CPSU.

On the first day the Czechoslovak leaders kept rejecting the Soviet proposals. On the second day they drafted their proposals which the Soviet side rejected. On the third day, Zdenek Mlynar, one of the secretaries of the Czechoslovak Party's presidium and its youngest member, arrived from Prague and gave his colleagues an objective picture of the situation back home. (To get to Moscow he pretended he had switched sides after the semi-illegal 14th Party Congress and was now a "conservative"). His arrival and presence considerably strengthened the determination of his colleagues to maintain their stand. On the fourth day the two sides worked out the compromise contained in the final communiqué, the terms of which have been made public.

Thus the talks in Moscow, like those in Cierna, did not go off quite the way the Soviet leaders expected. They had to back down, accept most of the Czechoslovak leaders whom they had written off and come to a compromise with them. The latter returned to Prague to what Dubcek in his first speech to the people called "the reality which is dependent not only on our will."

The Czechoslovak Communists and their people now face an infinitely more difficult job than they faced last January when they started out on their course of making some very necessary changes in their Party and in their country. We can only hope that they will find it within themselves to succeed. Perhaps, in the light of all that has happened, we should also hope that they will be allowed to succeed.

* * *

But now we come back to the question: What led the leaders of the five socialist countries, in the first place the Soviet Union, to make this most disastrous error in the history of the world Communist movement? I believe there are two reasons, which in one way or another have been implicit in statements made by a number of Parties both after the intervention and during the events leading up to it. I think they can be summed up as:

(1) An utterly wrong concept of, and approach to, the problem of democracy; and (2) A mistaken estimation or misjudgment of the relationship of world forces today.

The problem of the concept of democracy in most of the socialist countries to date is too big a problem to discuss in detail here. It is one of the key questions relating to our party's program and to the image of socialism we present to the people. To take but one example, freedom of information: to this day readers of the Soviet press (and of the other four countries) haven't been told that the Italian, French, British, Japanese and a host of other Communist Parties oppose the intervention, much less given a chance to read quotations from their statements. Many people know, of course, from foreign broadcasts and other sources — but not from their own information media. One could cite hundreds of other examples: from freedom of the press to the right of habeas corpus and a fair trial, to the problem of intellectual and cultural freedom, to the right of travel, to the inviolability of personal mail, to the right to dissent and so on down the line. Those who have lived for any length of time in these countries (not just visiting them as tourists or as VIPs on a delegation) know first hand what is involved.

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The fact is that in the 50 years of the Soviet Union's existence there have been extremely few periods in which genuine socialist democracy in all its aspects could be fully developed. After centuries of tsarist autocracy came the 1917 revolution; then followed a brief period of military communism, the Civil War, the shooting of Lenin and the "tightening up" that resulted, the period of forced collectivization and intensive industrialization, the threat of fascism, the 1937 Moscow trials, the war, the difficult years of the Stalin cult, the excommunication of Tito. With such a background it is no wonder there exists in the Soviet Union today an entirely different approach to democra-

cy than, let us say, in Britain or in Canada.

Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, has a greater historical background of democratic traditions than any other socialist country. The Czechoslovak Communist Party is the only Party in a socialist country which, prior to coming to power, was a legal mass Party working for many years in a bourgeois democracy and winning its influence among the people on the basis of a struggle for greater democracy than what the Czechs and Slovaks already had compared to other countries. It is on this background that there was such a universal rejection of the methods of Novotny, including the slavish copying of Soviet methods and practises (under the worthy but much abused slogan "The Soviet Union — Our Example") and it is on this background that one has to see the democratization process and the Action Program. It is also on this background that one has to see the fears in Moscow of the varied expressions of criticism, dissent and opposition — opposition which to the Czechoslovak and many Western Communists was nothing to get excited about, particularly since the Czechoslovak leaders were quite certain that they had the confidence and support of the overwhelming mass of the people for the reforms they proposed.

* * *

Speaking of democracy, one cannot fail to mention also the inadequacy and in some cases the utter lack of inner party democracy in the socialist countries. My one year of close association and work with Soviet and other representatives from socialist countries has made me much more acutely and painfully aware of this. Democratic centralism in these Parties is almost totally a one-way street. Here too one could cite scores of examples. An editorial worker on a Party journal who in the course of his work expresses a disagreement with or criticism of some aspects of his Party's policy, especially if it means clashing with his superior (even though both are Party members) can find himself off the staff on two hours notice and the "misdemeanor" held as a black mark against him for the rest of his career. Many of the practises followed by the Czechoslovak Party under Novotny are still very much in effect in all the socialist countries.

As an example of the difference in approach let us take the now famous document issued by a group of Communist and non-Communist intellectuals titled *Two Thousand Words*. Immediately upon the appearance of this document, leaders in Moscow and Berlin raised the

cry of "counter-revolution" and to this day it is Exhibit No.1 in their charge that counter-revolution was rampant in Czechoslovakia. The presidium of the Czechoslovak Party likewise condemned this document at the time. But it is significant that in the opening paragraph of its criticism the presidium used the phrase "regardless of the intentions of its authors" and then went on to say how and why the document was harmful. The fact is that the Czechoslovak Party leaders knew that this document was not written by avowed "agents of imperialism" but by confused and misguided persons who resorted to harmful extremist ideas and proposals to achieve their aims. Such an approach, of course, is heresy to the leaders in Moscow and Berlin.

The Soviet leaders' mistaken estimation of the relationship of world forces, according to Luigi Longo, the Italian Communist leader, has led them to the concept that "the socialist states of Europe today are a sort of beleaguered fortress" and that "the strengthening of existing blocs is a precondition of progress." It was on the background of this kind of concept that the Soviet leaders viewed the developments in Czechoslovakia since January.

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It is not accidental that only three months after launching the democratization process in Czechoslovakia, that the Central Committee of the CPSU at its April plenum came out with the thesis that imperialism was now engaged in a new ideological offensive to undermine the socialist world and that this required a general "tightening up" on all fronts, "iron discipline" within the parties, a rejection of the bridge building between East and West, etc.

Unquestionably, the West has stepped up its ideological offensive (although one could argue that there has never been a let-up in capitalism's ideological war; it goes on constantly) but the question is: how should Communists in both the socialist and capitalist countries meet this offensive of the West? It can be met by going on an ideological counter offensive, by extending the ideological dialogue with the people under the influence of capitalist ideology, by using the bridges between East and West to carry forward our ideas knowing that truth is on our side; or it can be met by a still greater isolation of the people in the socialist countries from the ideas circulating in the capitalist world, by a tightening up of discipline, by greater limitations on democracy in general and inner party democracy in

particular.

The leaders of the CPSU chose the latter course. One had only to read the Soviet press after last April (and soon after the press of Berlin, Warsaw and Sofia) to note the great difference and those who live in these countries (and I have had the opportunity of speaking intimately with many of them) noted the difference even more sharply. Individuals are once again being put in prison for such "crimes" as telling political jokes; being found with a typewritten manuscript of a Solzhenitsyn novel automatically gets you five years (a number of such cases); hundreds have been expelled from the Soviet Communist party for expressing agreement with the democratization process in Czechoslovakia; contacts with foreigners are again discouraged; people are afraid again to express themselves on certain questions, especially if more than two are present. There has been a tightening on the cultural front, with scores of scheduled plays and movie scripts suddenly taken off the shelves as part of a struggle against "Western bourgeois influences." One could go on and on.

Thus, on the basis of mistaken views, a mistaken estimation and therefore a mistaken policy, the leaders of the most important and decisive section of our movement have committed an irreparable blunder and confronted their comrades and supporters throughout the world (indeed, the world itself) with a most tragic situation.

* * *

What now for our movement, for our Party in Canada? Basing ourselves on the "new reality," our Party, like most Parties, could not say much more than it did immediately after the communique following the Moscow talks: express the hope that this would be the beginning of a normalization of the situation. But the matter by no means ends there. The developments around the Czechoslovak events during the past 10 months, and even more so the intervention itself, have raised many questions and confronted us with some grave problems. I would like to present a few of them here as I see them.

We have said often that one cannot export revolution or impose socialism on a people; that we cannot expect to see socialism established in Canada, for example, until the majority of our people want it and support the struggle for it. If this is true, can one export or impose a political line or policy? There certainly has

been an attempt to impose a particular line on the Party and people of Czechoslovakia in spite of the claim of the Warsaw Pact powers that they "do not intend to interfere in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs."

We Communists have always emphasized the need to take into account the opinion and feelings of the people. There was nothing of the kind in Czechoslovakia. The opposition of the Czech and Slovak people to the intervention is universal. You see it, you feel it all around you no matter whom you talk to: old, young, worker, intellectual, Communist, non-Communist, and they don't hesitate to show or express their feelings. It is doubtful if one citizen in 50,000 is in favour of the action taken. Yet in the face of this, anyone who opposes the presence of the Warsaw Pact troops is described in the Soviet press as a counter-revolutionary or an abettor of counter-revolution. (Incidentally, the descriptions by the Soviet press of how their troops were and are being "welcomed" are utter fabrications that have been embarrassing to the foreign Communists who are working in Czechoslovakia.)

The Czechoslovak press, radio and TV have been told that they must not refer to the presence of the Warsaw Pact troops as an "occupation" or the troops themselves as "occupation troops." But nobody (not even party members in conversation) calls it anything else than *okupace* and the troops as *okupanty*. The troops are not just hated, they are despised. If they stay here a decade they will never win the friendship of the people. The tragedy is that of all the peoples in the socialist countries of Europe (with the exception of Bulgaria, for historic reasons) the Czech and Slovak peoples had the warmest and closest fraternal feelings toward the Soviet peoples, and certainly the least inimical. All this has been destroyed for a generation at least. Which is just what the few anti-Soviet elements here and their abettors abroad wanted.

Linked with this is another question that needs an answer: What gives a Party (or Parties) the moral right to impose its line on another? Or to dictate (or try to dictate as has been done in Czechoslovakia with some success) to another Party, not to speak of an entire people, who its leaders shall or shall not be? Does it depend on the size of the Party? Its military might? Its own conviction that it is right and the other wrong? If so, let us for the sake of argument imagine a most unlikely situation: that the Chinese leaders have overwhelming military superiority over the Soviet Union and they declare that the Soviet leaders are "revision-

ists," that they "have taken the capitalist road" and that they "are in league with U.S. imperialism" (charges that are no more true than that the Czechoslovak leaders are revisionists who were taking their country out of the socialist camp or letting it be taken over by counter-revolution); then suppose they proceeded to occupy Soviet Siberia (or perhaps all of the Soviet Union) in order to "save it for the cause of world socialism." Ridiculous? But I'm sure that under such circumstances the Chinese would issue statements and articles that would present a very "convincing" case.

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At the plenary meeting of the Czechoslovak Party's Central Committee on August 31, Dubcek had this to say:

"In evaluating the political development in our country during that period (since January), our party did not take into account the dark and real power of international factors, including views held with regard to our situation by the states with whom we are united in the Warsaw Pact.

"We did not always take sufficient note of the strategic and general interests of the USSR and the other four members of the Warsaw Pact as a real, objectively existing and limiting factor of the possible pace and form of our own political development.

"In the past, there occurred a diminution of the confidence of the CPSU leadership in the ability of our party's leadership to solve the problems which had arisen. One of the principal tasks is to disperse this lack of confidence."

The press of the Warsaw Pact powers quoted this speech to show that the Czechoslovak leaders had erred and were now admitting it. But if you study this passage carefully you will see that what Dubcek was also saying was that the Czechoslovak party has learned (very bitterly, of course) that it could not proceed with the policy it chose without the approval of the Soviet and the other four parties. A number of questions arise: How are Communists in socialist countries going to work for improving socialism, doing away with weaknesses and even getting rid of entrenched bureaucracy if any effort in this direction is branded as counter-revolution, albeit a "peaceful" kind? Or do they have to wait for approval of the establishment itself or even a superior Party? Or is it perhaps that the set-up in the socialist countries is perfect and needs no improvement? If a larger or stronger Party has the moral right

to "correct" errors of another Party by unilateral action up to and including force, what can smaller Parties do if and when they think a larger Party has made or is making a mistake or is pursuing a policy that is harmful to the cause of socialism?

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Many Czechoslovak Communists put forward the following argument: During the past several months the Soviet and other parties did not hesitate to speak out openly against many of the policies and ideas of the Czechoslovak Party and eventually did not stop at intervening physically. But why did they not find it necessary to speak out and intervene against the policies followed by Novotny and his colleagues? In Berlin I was told: "The Czechs themselves are to blame for the economic and political mess they are in. For some time we have watched them carrying out policies that were leading them into difficulties." But why didn't they protest and intervene then? And if they did, why didn't they do it effectively enough? The answer, one would have given before, was because they did not want to interfere in the affairs of a fraternal Party. But now it is clear there was another reason. Apparently to some people dogmatism and bureaucracy are not such a great threat to socialism. There was no intervention because the methods and forms of leadership followed by the Novotny regime are very much akin to those pursued in most if not all the other socialist countries. It is precisely because the democratization process launched by the Czechoslovak Party was aimed at doing away with such methods, thereby endangering the entire set-up and way of life of the "establishment" in each of these countries, that it was so vigorously, and eventually so violently opposed.

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Some other problems relating to democracy under socialism have now been very sharply raised to the fore. For example, the problem of freedom of speech, press and assembly. The Soviet Union and at least three other Warsaw Pact powers from the very outset opposed the abolition of censorship in Czechoslovakia (Hungary joined quite a bit later), even though, it should be noted, the Czechoslovak Party had never proposed that the press would be unrestrictedly opened to known and avowed enemies of socialism. Now censorship has been reimposed and if the Soviet Union and the other powers have their way it will stay that way. As is known, the conditions imposed on the

Czechoslovak leaders in this respect are quite sweeping. They include: no use of the word "occupation"; no mention of the effect of the intervention on the economy of the country; no criticism of the Soviet Union or other socialist countries or their Parties; no reprinting of news, articles or statements from the foreign press that are critical of these countries and Parties; no mention of any killings or other incidents involving the occupying troops. (There have been many such incidents — some 70 killed to date and hundreds wounded. In this respect the ruling is very one-sided, for while the Soviet press can and does report the shootings of their soldiers, the Czechoslovak press cannot report either these same shootings or shootings of their civilians).

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The question this brings up is: Does this mean that no socialist country can ever abolish censorship as long as capitalism exists without at best inviting the reprobation of the other socialist countries, or worse? Does this mean that the model for all socialist countries, as far as, let us say, press freedom is concerned shall be the Soviet, GDR, Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian press?

This problem has an important bearing on the program of each Communist Party and merits serious consideration and study. Similar programmatic questions arise in connection with other aspects of the Czechoslovak Party's Action Program: how does the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" express itself 20 years after the working class takes power? How does the Party assert its leading role among the people? And many others. Had these questions been debated and argued out on a theoretical basis, in a friendly atmosphere, all Communists everywhere would have benefitted. Resolving them (or rather trying to resolve them) by military measures has dealt a shattering blow to the world Communist movement from which it will be a long time recovering.

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There are many other aspects of the past year's events in Czechoslovakia I would like to discuss and many questions arising from these events that I would like to pose for discussion by our Party, but I will confine myself to what I have written here. If I have sounded very sharp in my criticism it is because that is how I feel and because it is what the present situation demands.

I am sure that to the overwhelming majority of the members of our Party I do not have to prove my many

years of devotion to the Soviet Union, my lifetime understanding of the contribution and sacrifices the Soviet Communists and the Soviet people have made to the cause of world progress or of the Soviet Union's decisive importance to the future of socialism and world peace. And this in spite of the tragic errors of the past and the weaknesses and shortcomings that still exist. But I do not consider it either a betrayal of, or doing harm to, the Soviet Union and its people to criticize the tragic and unforgivable errors made by its leaders during the past few months, any more than was opposition to and the eventual exposure of the cult of Stalin.

The capitalist world is using and will use the intervention to mount a still greater anti-Soviet campaign. We must dissociate ourselves from this campaign. But neither can we any longer remain silent when we believe that errors that harm or jeopardize our common goal have been or are being committed. August 21 brutally put an end to any justification there may have been in the past for the Communists of the world to hold back such criticism.

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From August 21 our movement, internationally and in each country, will never be the same. The problem we now face is whether we will allow this tragedy to destroy it or whether we will draw the necessary lessons to make it a viable and effective factor in the life of our country. I believe we can because I believe that true, creative Marxism was, is and will continue to be the key to the progress of our country and of mankind. But I believe also that to make our movement viable we have to face up to some hard truths.

We have to admit that both internationally and within each party, including ours, there are important differences. We have to stop glossing over these differences, pretending they don't exist, trying to put on a front of unity where there is no unity.

We have to recognize that both in our international movement and within each Party, including ours, there are today two different approaches to our problems: one is the dogmatic, hide-bound, conservative approach that tends to base itself on the past, stubbornly clings to the methods and practices of the past, goes along "on faith" and turns a blind eye to our flaws and mistakes and a deaf ear to unpleasant criticism. The other is the open, free, progressive, constantly searching, creative approach that seeks to adapt the great ideas and principles of our movement to the very new conditions of our changed (and changing) world, that recognizes no gods and therefore no sacred truths or commandments. Essentially, these two different approaches are at the heart of the recent events in Czechoslovakia.

Irreparable damage has been done to the international Communist movement and the cause of socialism. We face difficult days ahead. We can still salvage some of the fruits of our work of years past and see the horizon more clearly — but only if we adopt an open-minded, free and creative approach in all our work and come out forthrightly for a return to the true principles and ideas of Marxism, to the struggle for a genuine, humane and democratic socialism.

John Boyd
September 15, 1968

