

Always Emulate Norman Bethune

Speech by a representative of the Alive Production Collective on the fortieth anniversary of Norman Bethune's death, November 13, 1979.

Norman Bethune died forty years ago today. When he died he was forty-nine years old. If he was alive today, he would be eighty-nine years old. We could use an eighty-nine year old like Norman Bethune here today. *(Laughter)*

One of the problems in our work is that we are only a few people. We generate interest amongst a large number of people but when it comes to hard and firm commitment, we are only a few.

Another problem in our work is that *the few* are only young. A lot of the people in whom we have generated interest are older people. Nonetheless, we are short of veterans in our work. From an eighty-nine year old veteran of revolutionary work, like Norman Bethune, were he alive today, we could take a lot of direction and guidance.

There are a number of other Communists who we could use today if they had lived longer — J.B. McLachlan, Fergus McKean, these kind of people. We need them. However, all these ones seem to have died somehow.

What have we got? We've got people who were Communists in the 1930's, or who, at least, went by the name of Communists, like William Kashtan. William Kashtan managed to live. *(Laughter)* Too bad. *(Laughter)*

William Kashtan is the head of the Revisionist Party in Canada. What's his relationship to Bethune? We've told this story before. Bethune went to join the anti-fascist fight in Spain. When he was there he faced bureaucracy amongst the people in the hierarchy of the anti-fascist movement. He said: How can there be bureaucracy standing in the way of saving lives and winning the anti-fascist fight? He railed against it. By this time the Communist Party of Canada had strong influences of revisionism in its leadership and when he railed against the counter-productive bureaucracy in Spain, his organization sent a delegation to bring Bethune home. He was causing too much trouble in Spain! One of the people in this little delegation was William Kashtan.

WORKING CLASS POEM Brian Burch

Yes
we write poetry too,
when we can find the time.

We too
think of love
of some mythical type
even if our hands are raw
and our skin's turning grey.

And,
occasionally,
we may even want to change the world.

Remember us —
you who sit in those nice university offices
and decide what good poetry is.

Poetry must live
and not rot
in some cryptic textbook.

Words are our blood.
They show our dreams
and strength and fears
and don't exist
to paint pretty pictures
for an uncalloused hand.

Since we don't have the eighty-nine year old Communist veteran, Norman Bethune, sitting here and since we don't want to learn anything from William Kashtan *(Laughter)* we have to learn from Bethune's memory. We wrote in the note announcing this speech that we would examine Bethune's outlook and his method.

In terms of outlook one thing that can be said about Bethune is that he was daring. As just mentioned, we're young people — the committed core that we have are young people. We don't have the older people, the veterans, close to our work to take direction and guidance from. Bethune never was a young revolutionary. Bethune became a Communist in December 1935, when he was in his forties. More than the first forty years of his life were taken up with something other than revolution. It was only a few short years that he was actually a revolutionary. He made quite a mark on the world in the few short years and those years began with quite a thing — becoming a Communist at that age. You can imagine yourself being forty-five years old and deciding to take on the responsibility of being a Communist. Bethune called being a Communist an honour. There's no doubt that taking up Communism as he did at forty-five years old is daring as well as an honour.

Besides being daring, Bethune learned from the people. We know very well that Bethune taught the people. We hear a lot about that. He also learned from the people. This is a big lesson we can learn from Norman Bethune.

If, as we say, we are not to learn from the likes of Kashtan, who are we to learn from? We don't know many of the things we need to know. We have to learn them from the people. Bethune learned from the people. We can learn that from him.

In terms of ideology, Bethune had remarkable insight. In the late 1930's, Mao Zedong was not at all well known around the world. Norman Bethune not only knew Mao Zedong, having actually met him, but he knew the significance of Mao Zedong Thought. In the 1930's — just think about that! In his entry in his diary shortly after he arrived in Yanan and met Mao Zedong, Bethune wrote, "I now know why Mao impresses everyone who meets him the way he does. The man is a giant! He is one of the great men of our world." During the time Bethune was in China he wrote reports, often on a monthly basis, addressed personally to Mao Zedong. He wasn't required to do so. Organizational discipline demanded he give reports to his immediate commander. It was largely a matter of his choice to write reports to Mao Zedong. He so chose because he recognized the significance of Chairman Mao and of Mao Zedong Thought.

Mao Zedong Thought is the ideology we follow. We can learn the correctness of that orientation from Norman Bethune also.

Norman Bethune recognized Mao Zedong's significance but, as witness one of the readings here today, Mao Zedong also recognized Bethune's significance. This is quite something. Think about it. Norman Bethune is definitely the Communist from Canada who is the most famous throughout the world. However, he is probably the most famous *Canadian* period, never mind *Canadian Communist*. He is one of the best known heroes amongst the people of the most populous nation of the world. In Canada, Norman Bethune is not very widely talked about officially and so he's not very well known. In China Bethune is talked about all the time. They have feature length movies about him — the same way we have Robert Redford movie biographies about the Sundance Kid, *(Laughter)* they have movies about Norman Bethune. He is a subject of their comic books, their literary works, their art. Besides being a subject in their culture, Bethune is a model in their ideological works — a man to learn from, to emulate. He is certainly

famous in China, then.

Norman Bethune is famous throughout the world. This is partially because of Mao Zedong's commemorative essay which was read aloud here. That is one of the most well known essays Mao wrote. Revolutionaries and other people the world over know Bethune as a great man.

This is a matter of pride for us. We, as revolutionaries, and we, as Canadians, should take Bethune's renown as a definite matter of pride. We should also understand that it is not a matter of coincidence that Norman Bethune recognized the greatness of Mao Zedong. It wasn't just a lucky guess he made. There was actual great worth in Mao Zedong Thought and Bethune saw the actual great worth. The significance of Mao Zedong Thought is still there today and we can see the significance. Certain characters try to tell us we're wrong to see the significance or that there is no significance there to see. We have to learn from Norman Bethune to counter that trend.

In the same way, it wasn't just a matter of coincidence that Mao Zedong recognized the greatness of Norman Bethune. The same certain characters try to tell us we should forget Bethune or that Norman Bethune wasn't great. We reject that trend for those words, too.

Thinking about Norman Bethune is to think about what a great person he was, what a monumental figure he is in history. As a result, we tend to think he was something extra special. Definitely he was great but he wasn't all that unique in many ways. There were a lot of Communists in Canada in the 1920's and the 1930's who were a lot like Bethune. There were other Canadian Communists of whom we should be equally proud. It's of key importance to emphasize this because we're not just talking off the top of our heads when we talk about revolution. We're not talking through our hats when we talk about making fundamental change in Canadian society.

If we believe that Norman Bethune was a unique figure, we won't really try very hard to be like him. If we see that he was like a number of other Communists in the 1920's and 1930's, if we see that these revolutionaries were shaped by the objective conditions in Canada, then we can acknowledge that we live in that same society and we can easily be convinced that our people can generate revolutionaries like Norman Bethune today. This, we have to learn very concretely. Perhaps Bethune is the best known of these Communists — some others of them are quite well known to us also — but there were many of them and there can be a real force of these true hard-working revolutionaries again.

If we're going to emulate Norman Bethune in practice, if we're going to try to be like him, we have to answer the question: What was his method of work? How do we get to be like him? What method should we follow that he followed?

Bethune was trained in medicine. He was quite a brilliant doctor. The standard version of his story from the bourgeoisie goes that he was trained as a doctor and then treated his valuable knowledge frivolously until in his later years he suddenly realized he should really fulfil his great potential, his medical genius and he set about doing that. In actual fact, his interest didn't just show itself at a certain, late stage. It was as described in this poem that was read aloud: when he was a little child he began pursuing this interest and through university he was a star student — perhaps this is where this "arrogance" they speak of came from. Seriously, perhaps his "arrogance" came from the fact that he had such genius and could do so little with it to help people in a society such as we live in.

In his medical pursuits Bethune developed attitudes that are very, very useful to a revolutionary. One, he developed a strong capacity for scientific analysis. In solving medical problems he had to employ the scientific method, he had to look at things in a very down-to-earth, material way. When you hear this reading that was given of "The Wounds", when you hear the thoughts that went through his mind as he worked on some of the wounded soldiers during China's liberation war, you realize what a down-to-earth

materialist person he was. He looked materially at people's wounds, at people's medical ills, at people's problems. This wasn't just developed in China or after he became a Communist. The class focus, perhaps, came up only in his later years. The materialist outlook, he had from early on. His scientific analysis, he had from early on. We need this. We should learn it from Bethune.

Norman Bethune's powerful scientific approach to medicine is such that it must even be recognized by the bourgeois medical circles. We tend to think first and foremost of Norman Bethune as a revolutionary. We only think secondarily of him as a doctor. However, he was a world famous doctor as well as a widely known revolutionary. He was one of the leading experts on tuberculosis and one of the leading chest surgeons in the world before he became a Communist.

Bethune was a great innovator in medical technique. As mentioned in the poem that was read aloud, he had tuberculosis himself. He was in a sanatorium and he read in a medical journal about a new theory for treatment of TB — if you have tuberculosis in a lung, the method called for collapsing the lung so it is not used but is given a rest and cures itself. Air is pumped into the cavity around the lung to ensure it doesn't re-inflate itself before the cure is complete. From his own knowledge, Bethune thought this theory would work. He went to the sanatorium doctors to demand that they perform this operation on him. They replied that it was too new a method, too shaky a proposition since it hadn't been tried and proved yet. Bethune in turn replied that the operation was going to be performed on him because he knew it would be successful and because the alternative to this experimental method was for him to die. Eventually, the doctors agreed. In the short time of two months, Bethune was completely cured.

Once while his lung was collapsed the problem came up as to whether blood in the lungs would be revealed by X rays. So, Bethune withdrew blood from his arm, poked a syringe into his own side, injecting the blood into himself and then had himself X rayed. He was always his own willing guinea pig in developing the method which would save himself and other TB victims, and which

THE OPPRESSED WOMAN

My country, ever suffering,
Ever longing to be free
From foreign rule, always in tears...

O, oppressed woman
Think and ponder,
You have long been oppressed
Subject to foreign rule.
Why don't you defend yourself?
Your children are starving
Your youngest wails,
Can you bear to see them suffering?
Why don't you rise up?
If you are truly a mother who feels and cares?

Let us resolutely resist
the greedy imperialist
that for so long has kept
womanhood in subjugation.
We are completely enslaved
Freedom itself has been enslaved,
We had pursued for a long time
Democracy that liberty brings.
Let us advance the class struggle
Steel our hearts Discard Timidity.

O, toiling women
Fight with all your might Dare to struggle,
Dare to win

O, women workers, and peasant women,
Unite and fight for
National Democracy!

made other doctors nervous in their conservatism.

After this he became a world famous surgeon in the field of curing TB by practicing and developing the same method he had forced to be performed on himself. It became a widely accepted and widely practiced method. It is a method still used today.

Bethune also invented his own medical instruments. Many of these became widely accepted and used also. Many are still used today. You can find them in use in the Guelph Hospital. These instruments are used in chest surgery, treatment of tuberculosis, amongst other things.

The story behind the invention of one of those medical instruments is quite well known. The instrument is the Bethune Rib Shears. Doctors have trouble poking around inside people's chests because of the rib cage. Having to work around the ribs was hard. Cutting through them was slow and the worry was that the person was being left open too long — the longer a person was left open, the more prone they were to infection. This is a problem in any kind of surgery.

Bethune thought if he could get by the ribs quicker, he would do better. Existing instruments for the purpose did the job clumsily. So, Bethune tried to design a better instrument that would do a quick and exacting job. Apparently he got his inspiration one day when he put his shoes in for repair. He watched the shoemaker cutting away nails from the old soles of various pairs of shoes. Bethune said, "Hey! Give me those!" (Laughter) He developed the "vicious tool", "a gift from the United Shoe Machinery Company to

the operating theatre", by lengthening the handles for more cutting leverage, by blunting the points, by employing a stiffer steel and by putting on rubber grips. Thus, the shoemaker's tool became "a nice, shiny rib shears that will simply sing through the ribs." This became a widely used medical instrument.

Bethune invented many medical instruments, eventually credited with over one hundred inventions. These were the kinds of things he was famous for before he became a Communist.

What we see in these points from Norman Bethune's life, how he developed his way of thinking, how he developed a materialist approach to problems, how developed the basic attitude of being a problem solver — not being stopped when he faced problems but keeping going until he solved them — how he developed a scientific analysis, is we see that he went through a process of development. This is something we quite often lose sight of in our own political work. People in our work can lose sight of the fact that what we're doing is a process. We can forget we're not at the beginning of the process — our work has some history already. We're certainly not at the end of the process — the largest part of the development of revolution has yet to come. We are just at a point in the process.

Various individuals might lose sight of this at any time. We look at a person such as Norman Bethune and we tend to look at him with a similar one sidedness except we tend to concentrate only on his revolutionary successes where we see only our own weaknesses. We look only at the year and a half that Bethune spent in China before he died. Or we look at the time he spent in Spain as an anti-fascist fighter. Or we look at the time he spent in Montreal as a Communist Party member and a doctor.

We don't always acknowledge that Bethune went through a process and the process started long before he became a Communist. We don't always keep uppermost in our minds that even after he became a Communist he was faced with very big contradictions in his life. It wasn't all smooth sailing. He developed as a great revolutionary figure in face of adversity not because there was no adversity, not because it was easy for him to do so.

Bethune's medical renown brought him the position of the Head of the Department of Chest Surgery in hospitals in Detroit and Montreal. The Montreal hospital was the north-end Sacre Coeur Hospital. It was a French-speaking facility. The French-speaking community in Quebec is traditionally Catholic. The hospital he worked in after 1933 was a Catholic hospital. Of course, after he became a Party member he ran into constant dilemmas and got flak because he was a Communist head of a department of surgery in a Catholic hospital. (Laughter) He was constantly under pressure. He was hassled. He wanted to practice medicine, to cure people. He was asked instead to defend his politics, to defend the fact that he was amongst the most prominent and highly paid surgeons in North America but spent the lion's share of his salary on the cultural development of slum children. There were those who thought one couldn't cure people in a Catholic hospital if one had Communist beliefs.

Clearly, these would all be intense contradictions in his personal life. Listen to his superior when Bethune was just a surgeon, not a head of a department, at Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital, "I never really liked him; our outlook on life was too dissimilar." All the while, colleagues in medicine the world over acknowledge he knew a lot and was a great doctor, a great surgeon. Different political beliefs became the issue, however. The astounding statement of many others in the medical profession was: He's an O.K. doctor but I'd rather have a two-bit doctor who goes to church every Sunday (Laughter) or who supports our status quo. We can learn from Bethune to press forward in revolutionary work despite the toll it takes in personal life.

Bethune took up in his practice a slogan popular in those times, in the 1930's and '40's but especially around the Spanish Civil War: Go where the need is greatest. Thus, if the need in the anti-fascist fight was greatest in Spain, one was to go to Spain and fight there. If you couldn't fight the fascist Axis in Canada at a certain moment, you were to go where you could fight it. The idea was that if you waited

TEMPERING GEORGE STEFFLER

We	started	discussion
knowing	the	process
would	be	struggle
in	the	hope
that	things	could
be	resolved	openly.
I	told	you
it	would	not
be	very	easy
to	pursue	all.
"What	you	did
is	very	wrong."
And	you	cried.
I	pressed	on.
And	you	cried.
I	asked	you
"Is	that	it?"
And	you	said
"No,	I	want ...
demand	it	all,
Truth	must	triumph!"
And	I	felt
so	very	proud
of	your	determination!
Truth	is	hard
facts	are	many
struggle	rages	on.
Clarity	is	won
unity	criticism	unity.
Tears	are	gone.
We	finish	discussing
spirits	newly	kindled
tempered	and	strong
our	focus	fixed.
We	work	to
serve	the	people.

for the fascist Axis to get to Canada so that you could fight it here, it would be too late — it'll be too strong to defeat.

Sometimes people take a one-sided view, saying, "Shouldn't we emulate Bethune by going where the need is greatest?" Then, we hear, "Isn't the need greatest in the Third World? With my revolutionary consciousness, wouldn't I be better to train as a doctor and work in Africa, Asia or South America? Or perhaps to specifically pick some 'hot spot', like Kampuchea?" We've heard this often and we've heard it for a long time. When the government of Allende was overthrown in Chile through a fascist coup, we heard from idealistic youth, "If Chile turns into another Spain, will you go and fight?" We can see now it is quite a comical question because Chile didn't develop into another Spain with international brigades fighting the Republican anti-fascist battles. It seemed quite hypothetical even then. However, the point is that we responded, "No, we wouldn't go. The best way we can assist the Chilean people in making their revolution is to make revolution in Canada." We have another slogan, you see?

Revolution may seem a more immediate proposition in a place like Chile, especially when it is a 'hot spot'. Similarly, it may seem so in the rest of South America or in Africa, or in Asia. We should leave all that to the Chilean people and to the South American people, the African people, the Asian people. We assure you, they will all leave the Canadian revolution to us.

In order to emulate Norman Bethune, should we train as doctors and go to Kampuchea to join the Khmer Rouge fighting in the jungles? We don't think that's what emulating Norman Bethune means. We don't take up Bethune's life that literally.

There are things we can take quite literally, though. Another slogan Bethune had was, "Learn while you work." When he went to China, he taught revolutionaries to be medical workers in such a way that they performed medicine while they actually learned technique. He didn't stand on formality. He himself was trained in a system where he did years of learning in the abstract before he did any work in practice. He didn't insist that his students do the same. He was the pioneer in China who said if there is some medicine that can be learned in three months, why not learn it and get about doing it? Why wait years before you practice that for the first time? This is the whole theory behind the present medical system in China known as "barefoot doctors."

We think "learn while you work" is a very good slogan for our revolutionary organization. This is a slogan we apply literally. We don't put people who want to do revolutionary work through six or seven years of training to become the most ardent cadre in theory. We give them a little bit of training and then we give them a little bit of work to do. They take responsibility for the amount of work they are capable of as they become capable. Then, we give them a little bit more training as they do their first tasks, so that they can take on a little more work and responsibility. This is our actual theory. This is our actual practice.

We apply the slogan "Learn while you work" quite literally, to such an extent that it irritates some people.

Bethune was a fantastic teacher. We can learn this from him. He was a better teacher than anyone we know. He had the style one always hears that the greatest teachers have. He was willing to pass on every scrap of knowledge he had. He kept no knowledge as his

private property. He was willing to pass on as much of it to any individual student he had who wanted it.

Norman Bethune was willing to not be the centre himself. He was willing to create other centres. Because he had the best pool of medical knowledge when he first arrived in China, because he was the most experienced and skilled doctor the Chinese revolutionaries had, he tended to be the centre. Everybody turned to him. He had to do everything. He had to perform surgery. He had to train medical personnel. He had to write the medical textbooks. He had to design the instruments. Quite often he had to do carpentry work in hospitals they built. He tended to be the centre in that way. However, he didn't insist on being the centre, he didn't want people to rely on one individual as the centre. He strove very hard to set up many little centres, lots of self-reliant units. He often said to people if you feel you can't do what I do as an individual yourself, then why don't three of you do what I do.

Bethune insisted that "little leaders" be created to successfully develop revolution. Why wait for these big leaders on high to do everything for you or to tell you what is proper to do? There's no reason to wait for the nod from great leaders. You are a leader yourself even if you but lead yourself.

This is a very important concept for us. Generalizing, popularizing, multiplying the successes in revolutionary work relies on the creation of many who will lead in applying our model successes more and more widely. We call for this same releasing of initiative. Don't rely on one or two experts in medicine to tend to the medical needs of all China, Bethune said. The medical needs were so vast that one could not rely on one or two experts. If they did, they wouldn't get the results they wanted. So, you may as well rely on the broad ranks of those who aren't so well trained in order to get more of the needs fulfilled, Bethune taught.

When we look at the question of the medical needs in pre-liberation China, it seems like a phenomenally dark proposition. China was known as "the sick man of Asia". Bethune was faced with a vast and difficult task. There was so much sickness and hunger. There were so many wounds from war. There was so little established medical care and what existed was so elitist. Very, very difficult. We think, "There can't be anything that is as hard as that proposition of bringing health care to the people of China, which faced Bethune." Then, we say, "Oh no, there is one thing as difficult — making revolution in Canada." (Laughter) For all the lack of medical care there was in pre-Liberation Chinese society, there seems to be the same degree of a lack in cultivation of political consciousness amongst Canadians. We have to go out and toil in the same way that Bethune did, although we're not working in exactly the same field of revolutionary endeavour. Neither the enormity nor the difficulty of the task stopped Bethune. It shouldn't stop us.

Norman Bethune had the good spirit known as "going against the tide". This is another thing we can learn from him. He went against the tide from a revolutionary perspective. We know people who go against the tide with something other than a revolutionary orientation. We know people who go against the tide in a non-revolutionary way. Bethune went against the tide in a revolutionary way.

In April, 1936 Bethune astounded established circles by issuing in



front of a meeting sponsored by a medical society a call for socialized medicine. They couldn't believe it. Others made speeches against his call. The get-rich-quick doctors thought he was threatening the whole underpinnings of their lives. (Laughter) He was. (Laughter) He spoke his contention "that the function of Medicine is greater than the maintenance of the doctor's position, that the security of the people's health is our primary duty, and that our human rights are above professional privileges." A profound piece of common-sense reasoning.

Bethune went against the tide by visiting the Soviet Union. He was invited to a medical Congress in Leningrad during the summer of 1935. He took the opportunity to see how socialized medicine worked in practice. He wasn't yet a member of the Communist Party, although he was a social activist in the working class neighbourhoods. Bethune couldn't believe how wonderful what he saw in the Soviet Union was. When he returned he spoke with such enthusiasm in place of his usual harsh judgements that people said about him then as they say about friends of China now. Speaking with contempt, they say, "They go over there and they come back and they tell us it's a dream world over there." (Laughter) Apparently Bethune was the same type of giddy character when he arrived back from the Soviet Union. He thought it was just great. He began making speeches in this country in favour of the Soviet system, which of course wasn't too popular amongst the established politicians and medical circles.

When Norman Bethune went to fight in Spain, this was going against the tide. When he joined the Communist Party, he was going against the tide. In Spain, he went against the tide — this is why William Kashtan was sent to bring him home. He went against the tide even in his own circles. Wherever he saw that wrong was being done, whether it was being done in the name of Communism, in the name of the anti-fascist fight, or whether it was being done in a name that opposed the revolutionary fight. He opposed it just as hard either way. He went against the tide in a way that should be emulated.

Here's a lesson that we have learned from Bethune and is a big part of our work. He looked at everything that needed to be done and he humbly said, "I can't do it all but I can create a model." Of course, if the model works and is taken up by many others in practice, between the person who makes the model and the others, it can all be done.

For example, when he got to Spain he looked at what needed to be done and asked himself, "What can I do? Can I mend all the soldiers who are wounded in the anti-fascist fight? Can I cure all the Republican forces of their sicknesses?" He answered himself, "No."

Could he have set up enough hospitals that they could all be cured? No. Could he have trained medical personnel fast enough that they could all be cured? No. "But I can create a model. I can create a model medical team." So, he created a model medical team and he created a model approach. He proposed that the way to save more Republican soldiers' lives, the medical team should work closer to the battle front. Further, the team should have blood transfusion facilities almost right at the front. This is the unit he created — the unit to bring blood to the battlefield. Thus, instead of soldiers dying for a need of dearly valuable blood on the way from the front to a hospital that was thirty or forty miles from the front they could get the transfusions of blood right there. He had the blood in refrigerators mounted inside a small truck and he had the surgeon right there, himself, and the medical assistants right there, who he had recruited himself. He made a model medical team and a model of this medical activity of blood transfusion at the front.

Bethune saved a lot of lives this way; which was the aspect of revolutionary work he was supposed to pay attention to. In the matter that we are supposed to pay attention to — creating a situation of revolution in Canada — we can learn from Bethune directly. We learn a lot from him in this. We are involved in creating models. We ask ourselves, "Can our group make revolution in Canada?" Anybody sitting in the room tonight has only to look around the room and they'll laugh if the answer we give that question is "Yes". How can we? How can we make revolution in a society of twenty-four million people with such a small group as is the audience sitting in the room tonight? We here can't do it. We can do something — we can create a model, an actual practical model, which actually changes things for a certain number of people and which if applied by other people in other parts of the country will in sum create revolution. Our model can inspire people in other parts of the country to do something similar, as well as organize people locally. It will perhaps give other people something practical to apply.

Another lesson from Bethune that is important to many in our work comes from the fact that he was a professional, a doctor. We don't have many professionals organized in or around our group. Some people get angry with us when the question of pursuing a profession comes up. These people often say, "I'm for revolution and what I'm going to do is train as a doctor. Then the revolution will have a doctor." Perhaps they speak of being a lawyer or a professor or a this-that-and-the-other-thing rather than of being a doctor. They suggest all kinds of professions that the revolution needs.

They don't at all like the standard answer we give them: The

Of Service To The People

Abrupt call to life.
Sudden blow of flesh on flesh
invades the silence
of a small Ontario town.
Struggling cry escapes the quivering lips;
the reddish, preacher's son awakes.

Gravenhurst, only the focal point
for future travels,
linking a myriad of northern towns
into a mosaic of familiarity.
Family's religious pilgrimages
lead them finally to Toronto.

At eight, well-travelled boy develops interests;
young hands, eager but as yet unskilled,
begin to probe for scientific secrets.
Countless experiments performed
on unwilling household flies and chicken bones,
propel him to future investigations.

University offers him medicinal pursuits.
Unafraid of soil and the strains of labour
he takes on many different jobs to pay his way.
Fireman, reporter, teacher, lumberjack
all serve to infuse his outlook
with an awareness and knowledge of people.

World War comes, the first bloody encounter,
and it calls him to enlist.
As stretcherbearer he breathes death first hand.
Little glory and much waste!
The horror, like ammonia, strongly appalls him.
Wounds mercifully invalid him home.

Recovering, he serves as doctor in Europe
until yearning independent practice
his pathway turns to industrial Detroit.
Here lessons are quickly learned that
those who truly need his help
are those who cannot pay the bills.

revolution doesn't need doctors as much as it needs organizers. If you take the years it would take you to become a doctor to train yourself as an organizer, at the end of those years you'll be able to organize whole hospitals full of doctors. Nobody is getting shot now; we don't particularly need a doctor in the ranks. There are many people to be organized, who we need to organize, who we have a duty to organize. What we need now is revolutionary organizers.

The people who don't like that answer, who want to pursue a profession, turn to Bethune's example saying, "What about him?" We won't fault Bethune as a highly skilled doctor, that's for sure. Two things about Bethune: one, he was fully trained as a doctor before he ever came in contact with revolutionary activity; two, he was a professional but he wasn't a careerist. We can learn from him in this in a big way.

Bethune didn't train as a doctor for the revolution. He trained as a doctor to make big money and to carry on the petty-bourgeois traditions of his family. This is the actual fact. This changed during the process of his development, certainly. When he came to believe in revolution, he turned the skills he already had to the service of revolution. He had the skills then already. He had the professional training.

When you examine the way he applied his medical skills as he developed a social consciousness, you see he wasn't a careerist. He was willing to apply his medical skills in service of the people even in the most adverse conditions for him personally. He gave up the chance to have a prestigious medical practice, to make himself wealthy. He stayed away from that by choice. He didn't pursue personal comfort. All these attitudes came before Spain and China as well, while he practiced in Canada and the U.S. He first set up practice in a Detroit working class area. After a while he would treat his patients in the working class areas of Detroit and Montreal for free or for low fees but he would travel across town to service a practice amongst well-to-do people in order to earn the money he lived on. This 50-50 type of medical practice shows he didn't have a careerist mentality. Even very early on he decided he wanted to earn only enough money to live, so that he could spend his time actually curing sickness. Any extra money he made in Montreal he turned over to projects to give children from the poverty-stricken neighbourhoods a place to develop cultural skills. Bethune thought it very important that people have a cultural life.

Bethune had no professional training in literature yet he wrote really good poetry and great prose. He was trained with only a couple of formal lessons as a painter yet he painted expertly. His paintings are acclaimed by art experts. One of the gifts exchanged

between Canada and the People's Republic of China was given by McGill University in 1971 — it was a self-portrait that Bethune painted, which is very skillfully done.

The importance of developing culture in pursuing revolution is something we learn from Bethune. "No careerism" is also something we can learn from him, although some people tell us we should learn from Bethune that we should all spend years at University, training to be professionals.

Something else we can learn by examining the life of Norman Bethune is the way the bourgeoisie is willing to distort a person's life, a revolutionary's successes. Bethune had the support of the Canadian people when he was alive. This is something that is obscured. Bethune is *less* known in Canada now than he was when he was alive. When he returned from Spain, he went on a speaking tour across Canada to raise funds for the anti-fascist fighters. His name was already such a household word that when he arrived at the train station in Toronto and Montreal, there were thousands and thousands of people there to greet him. Crowd numbers at meetings he addressed were reported in the established press as over 5,000, over 10,000 and over 15,000 people. In a place like Winnipeg over 1,800 came out to see him. Wherever he went in Canada — he addressed 47 meetings in two months, including two in the U.S. — large crowds turned out to hear him speak.

We told the story in our May Day speech of an older man we met who told us he had been a revolutionary in the 1930's. We could be kind of casual when he said that. Then, he told us he went to Spain to fight with the Mac-Paps. Interest started to pick up — harder to be casual about that. He told us he had lived some distance away from Kirkland Lake when "I heard Bethune was going to speak there. I started out to walk to Kirkland Lake." It was in the middle of a bad storm in autumn. He had to walk all night in the cold and stormy weather up in Northern Ontario where there are few roads. It was well over 20 miles. It took him eight hours to get there. He heard Bethune speak. He immediately decided he was going to join the Mac-Paps. He walked back home to prepare himself to fight in Spain. He was so inspired by what Bethune had said that he talked his brother and his best friend into going with him. *(Laughter)*

Recently we heard another story. An older woman who lives in Guelph was saying that she remembers when Norman Bethune left to go to fight in Spain. It wasn't just recently with the stories about Norman Bethune when he was in China that he first entered her consciousness. He first entered her consciousness long before he was in China, even before he was in Spain. At the time Norman Bethune left to go to Spain, she remembers hearing the story. She was sixteen years old at the time and she was quite jealous because

John Gilliam

Superficial lives of monetary success
greet him at his office door.

Rich patients have no fear of sickness.

It is the reality of the poor,
and his inability to meet their needs,
that continue to plague him.

Results of his arduous labour,
calling on the poor at all hours
both day and night,
leaves him weak and physically broken.
Tuberculosis invades the failing body.
Sanatorium invites him for much needed rest.

Disease condemns him to slow death
yet he refuses to give in.
Information, amassed and quickly digested
nets an answer and he demands treatment. Refused.
Hesitantly then, self-operation is carefully performed,
collapsed lung brings him new life.

This triumph metes out new discoveries.
Work now demands improvement.
As surgeon he develops many skills,
old techniques fall prey to new.
Giving guidance, incurables are now cured
the hopeless given new hope.

Medical progress, now simply not enough.
Need to know the world burns bright.
Confusing terminology removed like cancerous sore.
Terms, once empty, take on different meanings;
Emblazon his mind with fresh determination.

Similar views exchanged and gladly shared,
voyage to the Soviet Union made
and new concepts eagerly brought back.
He speaks of truth on his return,
the need for man to welcome change,
Communists receive him into the Party.

she wanted to go too. She was upset to think she couldn't go with Norman Bethune because she was too young and, of course, because a woman wouldn't have been allowed to go anyway.

Bethune was in the popular consciousness then. He had the support of the people when he was alive but in the thirty years after his death we couldn't come to know about Bethune unless it was in hearing about him by some "underground" means. Unless you knew some "subversive revolutionaries", you knew nothing about him. We just knew distortions of his life. We just knew distortions of his work. We just had this general impression that for about a year before he died he got kind of excited about a fad called revolution and it killed him anyway. (Laughter)

The fact is that for years before he died he was known in Canada, he was known to the people. He was popular amongst the people. He was popular because he was going against the tide. He was popular because he was an anti-fascist fighter. He was popular because he was a Communist.

The distortions have changed a little in the past five to eight years, since the People's Republic of China succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with Canada. They have not changed in essence, however, nor have they changed much. We can learn that the bourgeois media image that is given to what we are doing — fighting for revolution — is very much a down-playing of the actual worth of the activity.

Bethune is perhaps best known for his internationalism. People sometimes find it contradictory when we say: We uphold Norman Bethune as a great proletarian internationalist. They respond, "I thought Alive was all for Canada. I thought Alive was nationalistic, not internationalist." Wasn't Bethune for Canada? Wasn't Bethune for revolution in our country? Wasn't he a member of the revolutionary organization in Canada? Sure! He was. Certainly, he went to fight in China, he went to fight in Spain, he was willing to fight in the U.S., but he also fought in Canada.

Bethune was willing to do what the organization asked him to do. This is a key point. Where did Norman Bethune's proletarian internationalism stem from? Was it a feeling that leapt into his heart in some mysterious fashion? Did it come to him on a whim one day? No. It was taught to him by the revolutionary organization. Norman Bethune went to Spain at the request of his Party. It wasn't his personal whim. He went to China at the request made jointly by his Party and the U.S. Party. This is important. This is where the proletarian internationalism of Norman Bethune stems from — following the discipline of the organization.

This is what proletarian internationalism is — the unity between the revolutionary purpose of the proletariat in various countries, the commonness of purpose from one country to the next. To emulate Norman Bethune's proletarian internationalism doesn't mean we should go to another country to fight. It does mean that

when he went to other countries he was fighting the same struggle as he would fight here. Then, obviously, to stay and fight here is to fight the same struggle as Bethune fought in Spain and China.

This is the point in our answer when people juxtapose Spain against Canada in Bethune's experience or Chile against Canada more recently. The people who fought with the Mac-Paps didn't resent and still don't resent the people who stayed to fight the class war here in Canada. To fight the strike struggles here, to organize for the revolutionary organization here was seen as part of the same fight. We have to see things in the same way. Yes, we're nationalistic — fiercely so. We're very patriotic, very proud. However, we also have an internationalist outlook. There is an internationalist focus to our work also. It is quite a contradiction to be told, "You think about nothing but Canada," on the one hand and on the other hand to hear, "You guys are head over heels in love with China, you don't talk about anything else." (Laughter)

There is no contradiction between supporting revolution for your own people and supporting revolution for other people. This is what our nationalism is. This is what our internationalism is. The two are one and the same. We support what is going on in China for exactly the same reason that we propose revolution in Canada. The same can be seen in Bethune's practice.

We can learn much from Norman Bethune. He had a great capacity for hard work. It's hard for us to think of staying awake for one hundred and fifteen hours but Bethune used to make a practice of standing at the operating table, working for those lengths of time. He made a habit of self-sacrifice. He performed operations in the midst of battles, in towns under siege. He had fantastic optimism that didn't allow him to stop.

Bethune had intense self-discipline. We hear often about how getting involved in revolution makes for uproar in a person's personal life. Norman Bethune had all kinds of turmoil in his personal life. He married and divorced and remarried and divorced and remarried the same woman. They kept on having uproar in their relationship. Apparently shortly before he died his wife's name was still on his lips, though he hadn't seen her for almost two years and hadn't been married to her for six. This is one kind of turmoil in personal life that Bethune went through.

We often hear that it is hard to be a revolutionary because revolutionaries take principled stands and these stands sometimes go counter to one's family upbringing. Bethune came from a religious family. His father was a church minister. He overcame all that. He didn't get hung up on the fact that his parents might feel he was going against the teachings of the Bible if he propagated Communism, if he went to fight fascism in Spain, if he went to support revolution in China. What was good for the majority was what he was interested in, not what was good for his specific family.

Involvement in revolution means your "social life" entirely

One remembered moment of oppression
he views one day in Montreal
when truncheon wielding cops dispel protestors.
Consciousness is molded with the masses.
Shoulder to shoulder he vows more struggle
for the unemployed and long forgotten.

With awareness still acute
an awakened desire to fight for health,
for people's rights and mankind's freedom,
he steps onto the soil of Spain
expressing solidarity for this struggle,
ready to remove the rearing fascists' heads.

Despite the heavy constant bombings,
the merciless attacks of vulturous metal birds,
he finds the people strong and fearless.
Better to die on our feet
than to live on our knees,
the chant he joins wholeheartedly in chorus.

Contributions to the people's efforts increase.
Mobile blood transfusions burst forward
providing life for fighters at the front.
Many people answer needed calls for blood
supplying it like spring-fed, flowing water
Two thousand every minute and more!

War of life and death continues.
Gray-haired doctor, always with the people
speaks words of hope, encouragement
toughens his own fighting resolve,
confident of the coming long-term success.
Freedom just a scalpel's length away.

Destruction, sorrow, does not evade his eyes.
Binding wounds he works long hours.
In momentary lulls that silence noise
he vows to steel himself more
to obliterate his weaknesses.
To live as the selfless soldier lives.

deteriorates. It just dries up because none of your friends like you anymore. The old friends taunt you and won't have anything to do with you anymore. They say, "Oh, you're so serious. You're all for revolution. You can't talk about anything else. You're a fanatic." A funny thing is that they said the same thing about Norman Bethune. Since the "friends" who turn on those taking up revolution today usually do so because of a conservatism that comes from some degree of a privileged position — they come from a well off family, they want to pursue a career, and so on — it's easy to conceive of Bethune having to go through the same thing. A lot of his friends were in highbrow medical circles, highbrow cultural circles. It's obvious that when he began to speak for social change that they considered it just a passing fad. When he got involved in Communism, they laughed. They taunted him. However, he stood firm in face of their taunts. He didn't cast off their friendship. He didn't refuse to talk to them. He still wrote them letters when he was in Spain, even when he was in China. Neither did he compromise his principles in order to maintain association with them. In the correspondence he did write is information about Communism, the struggle for national liberation. He didn't keep his views a secret.

One of the funny things about Bethune is his great humility. The bourgeoisie talks about how fiercely arrogant he was, how he had such huge arrogance. He was exactly the opposite — he was such a humble person. In November 1938, when Bethune arrived in one area of China where he worked — having made a months' long journey inside China and having visited Yanan for three weeks and having worked to establish the first Chinese revolutionary hospital — he toured the medical facilities, inspecting the wounded. At one point he looked at the way a soldier's leg wound had been poorly cared for and he became outraged. "Who is responsible for this case?" A doctor named Fong stepped forward saying, "I am." Bethune raged that he would have to amputate. "You are responsible for the fact that he will lose his leg.... How could you permit the wound to get into such a state? How is it you failed to use splints? ... It is not only negligence — it is complete disregard for the patient's welfare.... I don't understand how we can call ourselves doctors and be so casual about our wounded.... What if we are negligent? Then somebody pays with a leg, a life.... Tell me, Dr. Fong — what university did you graduate from?" Apparently Bethune had quite a fierce temper and a sharp tongue and he let it all go on this man. He made him feel like quite a worm.

Later his interpreter told Bethune he agreed with the assessment that the man was "no doctor." Bethune replied, "I mean he is *no good* as a doctor." The interpreter said, "He is no doctor." Bethune countered, "Any man fresh out of university would have handled that leg wound better than he did."

Then, the interpreter told Bethune Dr. Fong's story. He had

never been trained as a doctor. "He taught himself to read and write by asking questions of others. First he was a guard. When he learned reading and writing he became a nurse. Then a head nurse. Then watching the doctors in the operating room he became a surgeon by experience."

When Bethune heard of this he was quite choked up. He actually began to curse himself. He felt like crying. How could he be so arrogant? Here he was, so used to well painted, well equipped surgery facilities in big modern hospitals in Western cities and here in the middle of the impoverished Chinese countryside a doctor who taught himself to read and who learned only by experience with no formal training, "forgot" to put a man's leg in splints because in the first place he never heard that's what was supposed to be done. "And I'm telling him what to do?" Bethune went to Fong and made self-criticism. He realized that of the two, in a certain way, Fong was the better doctor. Bethune knew a lot more than Fong but it was because he had a lot of opportunity. If he had the lack of opportunity that Fong had would he know as much as the self-trained doctor? He asked Fong to teach him in the spirit of the axiom, "You teach the people only when you become their pupil." Well, he broke his interpreter up with emotion and he broke up Fong. Bethune took Fong into his medical unit to teach him. Fong said, "I recognize my responsibility in the case of the soldier... I have a son... perhaps someday when he grows up this son of a peasant will be able to go to school. I shall do everything to give him the opportunity to study that I have not had. Perhaps he will be a fine doctor to make up for me." Bethune replied, "Make a fine surgeon of *yourself*, comrade — that will be the best example for him to follow."

This is the kind of arrogance that Norman Bethune had. We say this is the kind of arrogance we should all have! A great humility! We're with Fong who ended the conversation saying he would teach his son "to follow a better example — the example of Norman Bethune."

When we say that we should emulate Norman Bethune, we're not talking in the abstract. We're not saying we should dress like Norman Bethune. We're not saying we should take a trip to China. We're not saying we should live at least part of our lives in Montreal, or Detroit, or Gravenhurst. We're not saying we should join the Communist Party of Canada and do what that organization tells us to do — nobody should do what that outfit tells them to do today because it's Revisionist! *(Laughter and applause)*

However, if we look at Norman Bethune's life more deeply there are a lot of things we can learn. We reject the superficial emulation of Bethune but there are more profound lessons to be learned. In those profound ways, we should emulate Norman Bethune. If we do emulate Norman Bethune, we *will* make revolution in Canada. *(Applause)*

Work extends like tendons in Madrid
blanketing the hellish central front.
Whenever needs arise
relief of medicine or the words of hope
familiar figure hovers stealthily
pain fleeing at his every turn.

Concerned leaders soon approach him
asking him to return home
and return he does, with spirit,
passing knowledge of the war world-wide
telling people of the liberating fight
and the need to lend an international hand.

Jubilant throngs grasp his purpose
as he turns from street to street
words are spoken of necessity,
words he has come to believe in,
words opposed to the bloodshed
created by a profit-seeking hoard.

Spurning capitalist created murder
eyes turn solemnly to the east
to where he thinks he can be more useful.
Struggle by the millions had commenced
future hope was rushing in,
new prosperity and peace for man the vision.

Tragedy of war apparent here as well.
Immersion in the anti-Japanese campaign.
Boxcar refugees meet his slow advances
as the long journey to the camp begins.
Fascist bombers scream arrival overhead
as he wends his way onward.

Three hundred miles of gruelling travel
will bring him to Yanan.
Harassment, an inescapable reality
of the Eighth Route Army's steady push.
Finally the last great hill is mounted
and the framework of New China seen.