It was the depression — a third of the population of Montreal was on direct relief. Bethune saw his chance. In 1935, he opened a free clinic for the unemployed. The same year he examined socialized medicine in the Soviet Union and returned to organize the Montreal Group for the Security of the People's Health. Next year he joined the Communist Party.

Private profit had to be removed from medicine, he wrote. "All health is public, socialized medicine and the abolition or restriction of private practice would seem to be the realistic solution... There is a rich man's tuberculosis and a poor man's — The rich man recovers and the poor man dies."

Bethune became interested in the Spanish civil war. In the fall of 1936, he volunteered to go to Spain. People were bleeding to death from wounds, he reacted by developing quickly a mobile blood transfusion service. Within a month it was in operation. The soldiers were treated where they fell with blood collected from the city people and transported to the battle fields.

"The morning we were to open, we looked out the window and there was this extraordinary lineup — hundreds and hundreds of people were lining up to give their blood."

Back in Canada in the summer of 1937, he began a cross-country speaking and fund-raising tour.

On to China

It was at this time that still another war broke out, and this would change his life. The Japanese invaded China, and in January 1938, sponsored by the China Aid Council, he went to the provisional capital of Hanknow to wait passage to Yenan, the Communist headquarters. Chairman Mao Tse-tung was in Yenan. He met Bethune and asked him to supervise the Eighth Route Army Base Hospital. But Bethune said no, he wanted to go right to the front.