

THE MOUNTAIN BOOKS

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PREFACE

The depression of the 1930's confronted Canadians with shrinking markets, falling prices, a drought-stricken Prairie region and mass unemployment. Consequently there was an enormous burden of relief and welfare. Financial support from the Dominion was needed in all areas, but since not all areas were affected equally some required more assistance than others. The federal government gave grants and loans to the provinces to assist with relief costs and in some cases increased provincial subsidies. To alleviate distress the Dominion also carried on a public works program and established relief camps for single men.

Not everyone viewed the depression in the same way. In 1930 the Workers' Unity League was established to organize labour into "revolutionary unions" for the struggle against capitalism. The League worked under the assumption that a time of crisis was favorable both in terms of the expansion of the League and the onslaught on the existing system.

At the mid point of the 1930's several hundred men on the initiative of a union established in the relief camps by the Workers' Unity League left these camps in British Columbia. After two months in Vancouver they started on a trek to Ottawa to present six demands to the government. They were stopped in Regina. On July 1, 1935 a riot, which has been termed

the Regina Riot, broke out in the city. Although some writers have referred briefly to this event a detailed study has not been made. The writer hopes to make a small contribution to the examination of the events of the 1930's by examining the Regina Riot.

The main purpose of this study is to trace the events which culminated in a serious riot. The examination is primarily concerned with a study of the events in an attempt to explain why there was a Regina Riot. Although the riot was related to the broader problems of the depression and government policies in coping with the depression, these aspects are touched upon only to the extent that they related specifically to the events surrounding the riot. Relief camps are discussed, but it is outside the scope of this study to make a detailed evaluation of this or any other type of relief measure.

Although the leader of the trek was an avowed Communist and the organization in the camps had been established by a Communist organization, the question of Communism in the 1930's is not examined except where it applies specifically to the events of this study.

The movement of the men out of the camps to Vancouver and their stay in Vancouver involved to a greater or lesser degree the striking relief camp men, the municipal, provincial and federal governments, as did the trek eastward. The decisions and actions of each are examined.

The trek was stopped in Regina by the federal government. That very important decision resulted in a confrontation of the strikers and the federal government and also involved in the dispute the provincial government. The events of this period are examined, along with the incidents that touched off the actual riot. Finally the inquiry into the riot and the eventual disposition of the relief camps are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

RELIEF CAMPS, RELIEF CAMP WORKERS' UNION AND EVENTS IN VANCOUVER

Of the many problems of the depression a very serious one was unemployment and the magnitude of the relief required. Constitutionally relief was a matter which belonged to the provinces. The number of unemployed made it impossible for the provinces, and within the provinces the municipalities, to meet the situation; financial assistance was given by the federal government. The Dominion government assisted in several relief measures, and one form of assistance was to assume gradually the care of the single homeless physically fit men. The method of caring for these men was to establish relief camps where sustenance and employment were provided. The operation of federal relief camps was intended to reduce the provincial relief burdens, to provide food and shelter for a particular class of unemployed, to carry out projects beneficial to the country which would not have been ordinarily undertaken at that time¹ and to provide temporary employment in order to maintain the health and efficiency of the youth of Canada until they could be absorbed into

¹Archives of Saskatchewan, Regina Riot Inquiry Commission, Report, Vol. II, Report of the MacDonalld Commission, pp. 6-7. The MacDonalld Commission was appointed by the federal government on April 1, 1935 to investigate conditions in the camps. (hereafter the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission will be cited as RRIC)

industry.²

Although federally operated relief camps were located in all provinces, except Prince Edward Island, the trek to Ottawa which culminated in the Regina Riot originated at the camps in British Columbia. These had been established by the provincial government with federal financial assistance³ in September, 1931 to provide work, mainly on road construction, for the unemployed. Single men were paid \$2.00 and married men \$2.80 per day with 85 cents being deducted for board. Almost immediately the lack of funds forced the province to discontinue this scheme; instead the camps were used to provide food and shelter for single men only; no wages were paid and no work was required. Early in 1932 with further financial assistance from the Dominion government the men in the camps were given an allowance of \$7.50 per month.

In the fall of 1932 the Dominion government became more directly involved in the care of the single homeless unemployed. British Columbia and the three Prairie Provinces told the federal government that they could not maintain non-residents. British Columbia, especially, complained

²Canada, Department of Labour, Report of the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief, 1935, p. 8. (hereafter the Report will be cited as Report of the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief)

³As provided for in the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act, Statutes of Canada, 1931, 21-22 George V, c. 58.

that the milder climate caused transients to flock into the province. It was agreed that the province would establish a commission to administer the camps where the single homeless were to be provided with food, clothing, fuel and shelter, the expense to be borne by the Dominion government up to 40 cents a day, and were to be employed on useful work.⁴ Meanwhile in October of 1932 the Dominion government began its own projects for the single homeless; the Department of National Defence, because it had the necessary organization and personnel, was authorized to establish relief camps to employ up to 2,000 single men for the winter.⁵ This program was gradually expanded and after June, 1933 most of the relief camps in British Columbia were operated by the Department of National Defence. The system of caring for the single homeless, physically fit men in relief camps at Dominion expense operated by the Department continued;⁶ on March 31, 1935 the camps in British Columbia housed 6,000 men,⁷ almost

⁴Report of the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief, 1933, pp. 4-5.

⁵Canada, Department of National Defence, Report of the Department of National Defence, 1933, p. 59; Report of the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief, 1935, p. 37.

⁶Camps were also operated by the Department of the Interior in national parks; these were fewer in number than those operated by the Department of National Defence. Report of the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief, 1935, pp. 36-37.

⁷RRIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of the MacDonald Commission, p. 19.

a third of the 20,359 men⁸ in the camps across the Dominion.

Single homeless unemployed sent to the camps in British Columbia were those who had arrived in the province after May 1, 1931 and who were medically fit for camp work. Upon application at an office of the Employment Service of Canada, a man was given a medical examination and provided with free transportation to a camp. In the camp the men received shelter, clothing and food, and an allowance of 20 cents for each day worked; the main projects in British Columbia were road construction and work on airports. Medical and dental attention, a free issue of tobacco, as well as recreational facilities, were provided.⁹ In December, 1933 arrangements were made with the Department of Education of British Columbia to provide correspondence courses and in several camps schools were established.¹⁰ In order to maintain discipline the regulations of the Department of National Defence provided that individuals could be discharged for "cause". One such cause was involvement in organizing a committee of workers and in the strikes that sometimes followed. According to the regulations of the department only individuals

⁸Report of the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief, 1935, p. 38.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Gazette, 1935, pp. 324-25. (hereafter cited as Labour Gazette)

could lay complaints before the foreman; organized committees were not permitted to do so, nor were camp inmates allowed to air grievances at public meetings or by letters to the press.¹¹ In the two years prior to April 1935, out of 1,539 men who had been evicted, 1,093 were reinstated.¹² Those whom the officials considered incorrigible agitators and trouble-makers were refused reinstatement; to these the term "black-listed" was applied.

One reason the camps had been established was to provide relief for a particular group of individuals; a commission¹³ which investigated the camps in April, 1935 found that this function had been reasonably carried out. However, the commissioners also found that life in the camps had created discontent. The absence of wages made it impossible for the men to leave the camps for periods of time. Many of the men trained in various trades and professions were unsuited for camp life or the type of work required; many of the men were under twenty-one and had probably never been gainfully employed. The isolation of the camps and consequent removal from community life, the difficulty of learning of employment

¹¹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 110, Department of National Defence Rules Regarding Complaints.

¹²RRIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of the MacDonald Commission, p. 8.

¹³The MacDonald Commission, appointed by the federal government. The members were W. A. MacDonald, C. J. McHattie, Rev. E. D. Braden.

opportunities and the rare employment of men from relief camps all meant "that a fixed idea prevails among the men that they are deemed unsuitable for employment, and are shunned by those seeking workmen."¹⁴ As a result of these conditions and circumstances the men became indifferent or openly rebellious.¹⁵ The life in relief camps created an attitude among the men which, whether it appeared as indifference or rebellion, was a manifestation of the feeling of futility engendered by the depression and the only method of relief available. This attitude also created a situation conducive to the activities of any organization which wished to channel and intensify the grievances; such an organization was the Relief Camp Workers' Union.

The British Columbia Relief Camp Workers' Union was organized and chartered in November, 1932 by the Workers' Unity League. The Workers' Unity League, a communist organization with headquarters in Toronto, was organized in January, 1930. It was originally an affiliate of the Red International of Labor Unions¹⁶ with headquarters at Moscow but this connection was apparently severed at the Second Congress of the

¹⁴RRIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of the MacDonalld Commission, p. 24.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 23, 24, 26.

¹⁶RRIC, Exhibits, no. 305, Relief Camp Workers' Union card.

Workers' Unity League because in the words of one member of the League "it raised the red bogey"¹⁷ and caused fear of the organization. The function of the Workers' Unity League, a revolutionary trades union center, was to organize workers into industrial unions. As opposed to arbitration and conciliation, the strike -- and if possible the general strike -- was their main method in the struggle against capitalism. The League boasted in 1933 that it had organized twenty-eight strikes and had been involved in the rest of the forty-eight strikes that had taken place in Canada in the last year.¹⁸ In 1935 the Workers' Unity League reported 24,086 members.¹⁹ An affiliate, the British Columbia Relief Camp Workers' Union, had by mid-1934 become part of a national organization which claimed in 1935 to have branches in British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta and Nova Scotia.²⁰ The connection between the Relief Camp Workers' Union (B.C. District) and the Workers' Unity League went beyond the initial organization; Relief Camp Workers' Union conferences were attended by delegates of the League; monthly reports were sent to the

¹⁷RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 10, p. 38.

¹⁸RRIC, Exhibits, no. 275, Workers' Unity, March, 1933.

¹⁹Labour Gazette, 1935, p. 1003.

²⁰RRIC, Exhibits, no. 4, Relief Camp Worker, March 19, 1935; Ibid., no. 277, Unity, January, 1935.

League; the Relief Camp Workers' Union had to order "working class literature" from the League; eventually the trek to Ottawa was led by the district organizer for the League in British Columbia, Arthur H. Evans.

The aims of the Relief Camp Workers' Union, B.C. District, as set out in the constitution were:

To organize all relief camp workers into the Union. To promote and lead the struggles of the relief camp workers for a higher standard of living. To rely upon the principles of Trade Unionism and the democratic decisions of the membership to forward our policy of struggle and if need be, to use the form of strike if so decided. To actively support all measures that will give the right of franchise to all camp workers. To give assistance to all workers in their struggles for Non-Contributory Unemployment Insurance, adequate old age pensions, compensation for disability, etc. In the spirit of the Trade Union movement to resist all efforts to enforce our participation in Imperialist War.²¹

The language in which the aims were phrased was more moderate and less Marxian than the draft constitution drawn up in the fall of 1934 which included the following statement of purposes:

To work in the spirit of working class consciousness and international proletarian solidarity with all sections of the working class in struggling against the impositions of capitalist exploitation in this and other countries. To constitute an integral part of the Revolutionary Trade Union movement in the final struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' government.²²

²¹Ibid., no. 294, Constitution of Relief Camp Workers' Union, B.C. District, Adopted as amended at Kamloops Conference, March, 1935.

²²Ibid., no. 118, Relief Camp Worker, September 1, 1934.

In general it may be said that the activities of the Relief Camp Workers' Union were directed to the specific end of improving conditions in relief camps and to the broader aim of advancing the working class struggle against capitalism.

When the camps in British Columbia were transferred from provincial to dominion control under the Department of National Defence the officials of the union claimed that efforts to "subdue the militancy of the single worker had been intensified".²³ Many strikes took place over the winter of 1933-1934 and although the Union did not take credit for all the strikes, some being spontaneous, the editor believed the policy outlined in the Union paper had been followed in many cases.²⁴

In 1934 a concerted drive to increase union strength and force a change in camp conditions was commenced. In August a provincial conference of the Relief Camp Workers' Union, the first since the Department of National Defence had taken over the camps, was held at which a program "for rallying the relief camp workers to militant struggle"²⁵ was set out. The program included work and wages, workmen's compensation, the recognition of organized committees and the removal of military control. These demands were presented to the government at Victoria on December 7, 1934 in conjunction with

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

those of other unemployed organizations. To back up the demands of the delegation a strike was called in the camps. In line with the regulations, camp officials evicted the strikers. The evicted men, plus others who walked out, congregated in Vancouver where their members were augmented by the unemployed there. Two hundred and fifty men originally left the camps;²⁶ this number grew in Vancouver during the last three weeks in December to about 1,400,²⁷ approximately half of which were from the camps and the remaining half were unemployed from Vancouver. This was a small number in comparison to the six or seven thousand in the camps. The chief demand of the strikers in Vancouver was the abolition of the system of blacklisting.

Their arrival in Vancouver prompted the provincial authorities, in order to prevent disturbances, to grant relief for one week to give the strikers time to apply for reinstatement in the camps -- something they had at that time no intention of doing. At the request of the federal government²⁸ the provincial government refused to extend relief beyond the week. An impasse quickly developed. The strikers refused

²⁶Vancouver Sun, December 12, 1934.

²⁷Ibid., January 3, 1935.

²⁸Prime Minister Bennett's telegram to the Premier of British Columbia was printed in Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Official Report of Debates, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 14-15. (hereafter cited as House of Commons, Debates)

to go back to the camps until their demand for abolition of blacklisting was granted. The provincial authorities could not grant their demand because it was a problem for the Department of National Defence. They would not grant relief because they were quick to realize that if it were granted the strikers would be unlikely to return to the camps and the city could be flooded with men from the camps if they believed they could secure relief in Vancouver. At the same time T. D. Pattullo, Premier of British Columbia, declared that the government at Ottawa was responsible for the care of the single homeless men.²⁹ On the other hand the federal government refused to take any action. Relief was available to the men in the camps; if they left the camps the provincial government was responsible for the relief of the men.³⁰ Meanwhile the civic authorities in Vancouver, afraid of disturbances, granted relief for short periods of time; the strikers were also assisted by private donations.

The strike was finally ended when a compromise solution which was accepted by the strikers on January 2 was arrived at in a series of meetings involving civic authorities, the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, strikers, local M.L.A.'s and M.P.'s (acting as private individuals) and provincial officials. It was agreed that the provincial

²⁹Vancouver Sun, December 18, 1934, December 21, 1934.

³⁰House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 14-15.

government would request the Dominion Government to investigate the blacklist system and general conditions in the camps; the strikers would apply for reinstatement in the camps; those whom the Department of National Defence refused to accept would be provided with relief by the province until the investigation was completed.³¹

By January 17, 1935, of the 867 applications for reinstatement including those of 748 men who had been discharged or walked out in December, 628 had been approved, 86 rejected and 153 held for further inquiry.³² The provincial government's request for an investigation was turned down by the federal government because

No investigation is necessary for the press and citizens have been invited to visit these camps ever since they have been established³³

and because

. . . the provincial government has been requested to send representatives into any or all of the camps and make up its own mind whether there is room for an investigation or not. So far as my knowledge goes, that investigation has not so far taken place.³⁴

The Relief Camp Workers' Union manifested less concern for the promised commission of investigation and more concern for their own failure to achieve any gains in December.

³¹Vancouver Sun, December 28, 1934, December 29, 1934, January 3, 1935; RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 13, pp. 83-84.

³²Bennett's telegram to the Premier of British Columbia in House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 14-15.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., Vol. II, p. 1411.

Steps were taken to prevent a future failure. In February the Provincial Bureau of the Union announced an intensified organizational campaign with the establishment of sub-district offices.

The necessity [for these offices] was realized very forcefully during the Relief Camp Strike in December when success depended on quick, concerted action, and much of the militancy was wasted because of slow, clumsy manoeuvres caused by the lack of link-up in districts.³⁵

On the suggestion of the Workers' Unity League executive in Vancouver a conference of delegates of the Relief Camp Workers' Union was convened in Kamloops in March of 1935. Arthur H. Evans was present as a delegate from the Workers' Unity League.³⁶ At this meeting seven demands, similar to those of December, were formulated.

1. That work and wages be instituted at the minimum rate of 50 cents per hour for unskilled workers and trade union rates for all skilled work on the basis of a six-hour day, five day week, with a minimum of twenty work days per month.
2. That all workers working in Camps be covered by the compensation Act and that adequate first aid supplies be carried on the job at all times.
3. That the National Defence and all military control of camps with its system of black-listing where men are cut off from all means of livelihood, be abolished.
4. That democratically elected Committees be recognized in every camp.

³⁵ERIC, Exhibits, no. 4, Relief Camp Worker, February 7, 1935.

³⁶ERIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 7, p. 64.

5. That there be instituted a system of non-contributory unemployment insurance based on the "Workers' Bill of Social and Unemployment Insurance".
6. That all workers be given their democratic right to vote.
7. That section 98 of the Criminal Code, Sections 41 and 42 of the Immigration Act, Vagrancy laws and all antiworking class laws be repealed.³⁷

These demands were based partly on dissatisfaction with the camps as they were operated, but more specifically were directed at government policy for the relief of the single homeless. Work and wages was the most important demand as far as the union was concerned; as Evans was later to say, it was a question of "work and wages", and not "hotcakes and foremen".

To secure these demands the "form of struggle" decided upon at the suggestion of Evans was a walkout -- on a designated day the men would leave the camps and go into Vancouver. He believed this would be more effective than a strike and would enable the men to arouse public support by

³⁷RRIC, Exhibits, no. 4, Relief Camp Worker, March 19, 1935. The provincial Workmen's Compensation Act did not apply to these men in federal relief camps, but a disabled man was granted compensation by a special federal order-in-council. RRIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of the MacDonald Commission, pp. 27-28. The men were sometimes disfranchised by circumstances. Residence in a relief camp did not disqualify a man from voting. Dominion Franchise Act, Statutes of Canada, 1934, 24-25 George V, c. 51, s. 3. However, a camp was not considered a residence and in order to vote a man returned to the place where his name appeared on the voters' list. Although there was provision in the Dominion Elections Act for an absentee ballot, it did not apply to men in relief camps. Statutes of Canada, 1934, 24-25 George V, c. 50, s. 99-100.

demonstrations in the towns on the way to Vancouver. Evans held out the possibility of a protest strike by affiliates of the Workers' Unity League.³⁸ Having laid the plans, the officials of the Relief Camp Workers' Union used the time until the walkout, scheduled for April 4, in carrying out a twofold campaign of strengthening the organization in the camps and districts and of organizational work at headquarters in Vancouver, where an attempt was made to draw other labour organizations into the coming struggle.

On April 1, four days before the scheduled walkout, the Dominion Government appointed the MacDonald Commission to investigate the conditions in the camps and the complaints with respect to the administration and management of the camps in British Columbia operated by the Department of National Defence.³⁹ The federal government, because of the complaints and the refusal of the government of British Columbia to investigate,⁴⁰ but more probably because of the impending walkout, had decided to conduct its own investigation. If the federal authorities hoped to stop the walkout they were disappointed. As far as Evans was concerned the appointment of a commission was of no value because it was intended only to "sabotage" the walkout without rectifying any grievances⁴¹

³⁸ERIC, Exhibits, no. 4, Relief Camp Worker, March 19, 1935.

³⁹ERIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of the MacDonald Commission, p. 5.

⁴⁰House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. III, p. 2278.

⁴¹ERIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 7, pp. 106-107.

and because the scope of the inquiry did not include investigation of the seven demands. If the federal government hoped to win public support by informing "the public of conditions obtaining in the camps"⁴² it was too late. By the time the report was tabled in the House of Commons on June 11, approximately 1,500 relief camp strikers were on their way to Ottawa to present their view of the "slave camps". The epithet "slave camp" was coined by the strikers because they were forced to work for 20 cents a day.

On April 3 and 4 the scheduled walkout took place; the relief camp strikers converged on Vancouver where they were joined by blacklisted men and single unemployed of Vancouver to make a total of approximately 1,600 men,⁴³ still far from being a complete walkout. The men were divided into four divisions, each with its own executive, according to the districts they had left. The executive of the strikers as a whole was vested in a Strike Committee of 80 consisting of the officials of the divisions. In order to prevent the plans of the strikers from becoming known to the authorities a Strategy Committee of five, one person from each division and Evans, was set up.

The aims of the strikers were twofold: to force the authorities to settle the seven demands and to secure relief

⁴²House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. III, p. 2278.

⁴³ERIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 7, p. 107.

pending negotiations on the demands. To secure these aims they pursued a course of moderate militant action -- demonstrations and parades -- as well as publicity to secure public support, both moral and financial. The strikers under the direction of the Strategy Committee held an unauthorized tag day, spoke at mass meetings, marched through downtown streets and department stores in what were termed "nuisance parades", interviewed civic and provincial authorities to demand relief and their assistance to open negotiations with Ottawa, issued publicity bulletins and sent resolutions to officials of the federal government.

On the principle that more could be gained with a "united front" backing the demands, the Relief Camp Workers' Union organized a conference for April 7 to which various organizations most likely to be sympathetic to their goals were called. Forty-two organizations from among C.C.F. clubs, trade unions, foreign language organizations, the Communist Party, Workers' Unity League and the Canadian Labour Defence League were represented.⁴⁴ An Action Committee was established to assist the camp workers in their strike. Evans, who represented the Workers' Unity League, became Chairman of the Publicity Committee of the Action Committee. This Committee carried on mass meetings, issued publicity material, solicited moral and financial support from trade unions and

⁴⁴ RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 7, pp. 120-121.

sent resolutions to the provincial and federal governments. Attempts were also made to arrange a two hour general strike with a suggestion for a twenty-four hour general strike to follow,⁴⁵ neither of which materialized. The longshoremen did stage sympathy strikes on April 29 and May 1.⁴⁶

The reaction of the authorities was much the same as it had been in December except the men were not granted relief on their arrival. The civic authorities who had to contend with the presence of the men could not, of course, grant their demands and they were unable financially to grant relief pending negotiations. On the other hand they wanted at all costs to avoid a clash with the strikers; therefore they treated them as ordinary citizens and not as a group with a grievance.⁴⁷ The provincial government was interviewed by a delegation sent by the Action Committee on April 12. The officials informed the delegation that it was impossible to grant the demands, especially work with wages, without federal assistance and it was therefore a federal problem.⁴⁸

Grote Stirling, Minister of National Defence, reiterated the view of the federal government that "Our work is one

⁴⁵RRIC, Exhibits, no. 106, Minutes of Action Committee Meeting.

⁴⁶Vancouver Sun, April 30, 1935, May 1, 1935.

⁴⁷RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 51, pp. 4, 10.

⁴⁸RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 7, pp. 126-127; Vancouver Sun, April 13, 1935.

of assistance, not one of substitution, of the task devolving upon the provincial government."⁴⁹ Relief was provided to the men in the camps, he pointed out, and

as soon as these men leave the camps which have been under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Defence they pass beyond the charge of the dominion government and are again the charge of the provincial government.⁵⁰

At the same time Stirling blamed "subversive organizations whose one object is the destruction of law and order in the country"⁵¹ for the unrest in the camps. He declared that there was evidence of a widespread and well organized plot to destroy the camps. As far as the conditions in the camps were concerned the government, of course, was prepared to correct abuses and institute improvements⁵² within its present policy. The government was not prepared, however, to change the policy and provide work with wages.

The first serious disturbance occurred in Vancouver on April 23.⁵³ Three parades were formed to demonstrate in

⁴⁹House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. II, p. 1410; also pp. 1413, 2020, 2035.

⁵⁰Ibid., Vol. III, p. 2596.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 2252.

⁵²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 273.

⁵³RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 5, p. 24.

Spencer's, Woodward's and Hudson's Bay Company department stores.⁵⁴ To avoid trouble, Col. W. W. Foster, Chief of Police, who had information as to what was to take place, advised the stores to lock their doors as soon as they saw the men approaching. Spencer's and Woodward's did so; the Hudson's Bay Company did not and the strikers paraded through the store. At the request of the manager the police attempted to get the men to leave; a disturbance broke out between the police and the strikers. Several of the police were injured⁵⁵ and \$2,400.00⁵⁶ damage was done. From the store the men paraded to Victory Square, where they were joined by other strikers and citizens, and delegations were sent to the mayor asking for relief. The mayor read the Riot Act to disperse a crowd which was orderly but in view of the events at the Hudson's Bay Company store he and the Chief of Police considered it the best course.

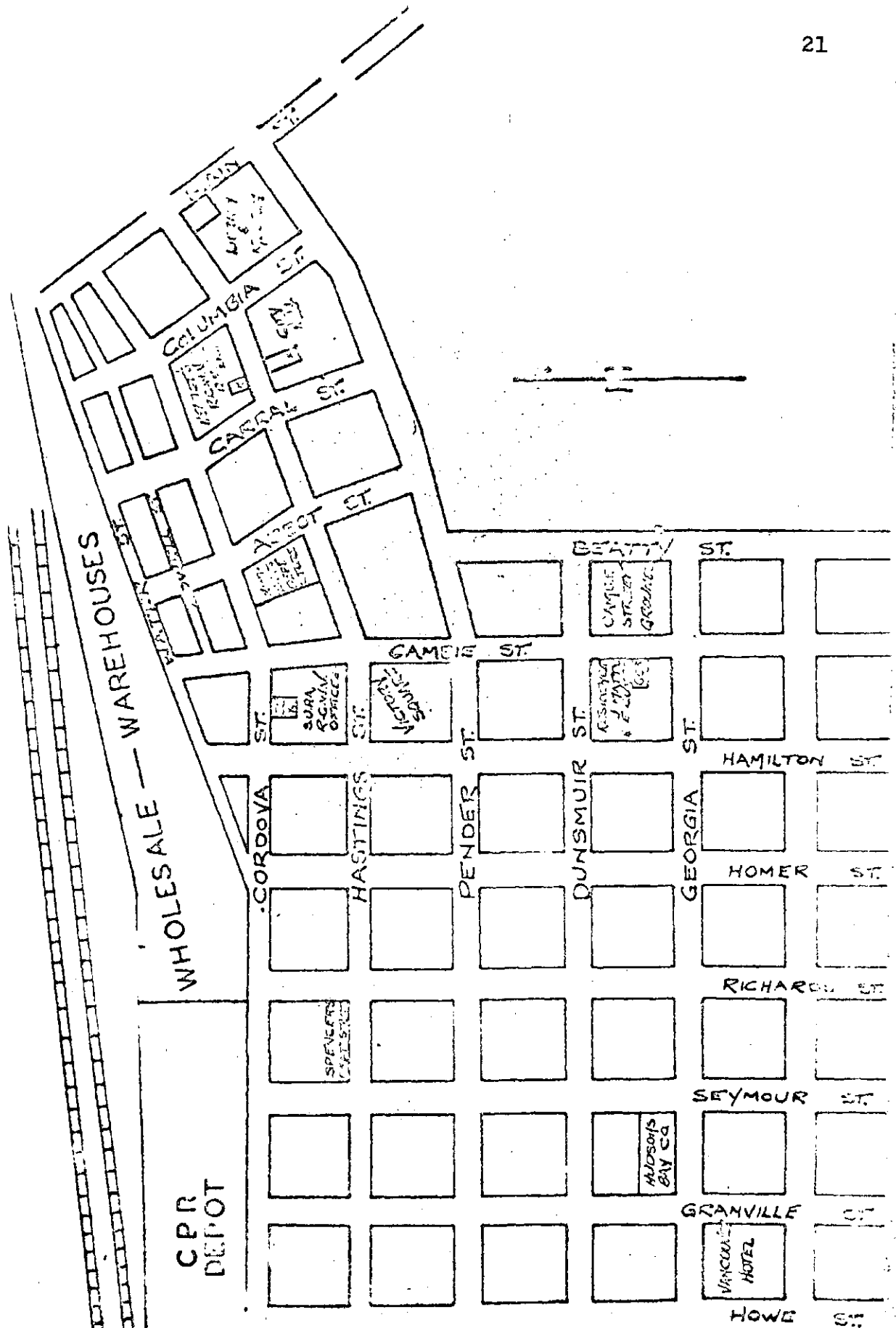
The rioting in the Hudson's Bay store was described as "one of the most destructive demonstrations Vancouver had seen in years."⁵⁷ This breach of law and order prompted Mayor G. G. McGeer, who blamed Communist organizations and

⁵⁴ See map, p. 21.

⁵⁵ RRIC, Exhibits, no. 293.

⁵⁶ Ibid., no. 288.

⁵⁷ Vancouver Sun, April 24, 1935.



Sketch of Part of the City of Vancouver
 RRIC, Report, Vol. II

the federal government's ineffective measures for coping with unemployment for the problems Vancouver was experiencing, to appeal to Ottawa. He asked the government to return the men to camps and to call a conference of mayors and provincial governments to develop a work and wages program.⁵⁹ The acting Prime Minister, George Ferley, also blamed Communist organizations for the situation, but he pointed out that the provinces were responsible for the maintenance of law and order. He stated that it was impossible to introduce a work and wages program in one province or in the relief camps alone and that a general work and wages program would create an intolerable tax burden.⁶⁰

Alarmed that the continued presence of the strikers would result in more serious consequences the mayor of Vancouver attempted to settle the strike. He proposed that the strikers, except for a small delegation which would be sent to Ottawa by the city, return to the camps. If the men would do this the civic officials would continue their efforts to have the federal government negotiate on the seven demands and reappraise its unemployment policy.⁶¹ The strikers did not, as they had in December, accept this proposal. They insisted that the whole group remain in Vancouver, that they be granted relief and that negotiations

⁵⁹Ibid., April 24, 1935, April 29, 1935.

⁶⁰Ibid., April 27, 1935.

⁶¹Ibid., April 25, 1935, April 30, 1935.

begin with Ottawa immediately.⁶²

In the middle of May tension again began to increase. On May 16 another delegation from a mass meeting followed by a parade went to City Hall to ask for assistance to open negotiations with Ottawa and to demand relief. Relief was refused, but the mayor wired Ottawa requesting the government to authorize relief until the strike was settled.⁶³ Two days later the strikers instead of demanding relief employed another means to obtain funds. While the police were attempting to control the movements of strikers who had paraded to the large department stores, 250 strikers rushed into the Museum on the top floor of the library building.⁶⁴ They barricaded themselves in and refused to leave until relief was granted. They had no doubt chosen the Museum because they knew the authorities would not precipitate any action that might result in the destruction of valuable property. The city authorities granted the strikers \$1,500.00 for relief. It was also agreed that if they received relief a meeting would be called by the Strike Committee to allow the men to vote on whether to return to camp while awaiting the result of the appeal to Ottawa. Mayor McGeer wired R. B. Bennett again on May 19 advising him that the situation was "extremely

⁶²Ibid., April 26, 1935.

⁶³ERIC, Exhibits, no. 299, McGeer to Bennett, May 16, 1935.

⁶⁴See map, p. 21.

critical".⁶⁵ Prime Minister Bennett replied that the men, once they left the camps, were a provincial responsibility and that the Dominion could not accede to the request to open negotiations.⁶⁶ With little action being taken by the strike leaders to carry out the agreement to vote on ending the strike McGeer again appealed to Ottawa.

[I] am afraid you do not grasp seriousness of situation in Vancouver. . . . We cannot hold situation any further without resorting to force. . . . If you persist in attitude laid down in your telegram trouble is inevitable and responsibility must rest on you.⁶⁷

The strikers meanwhile had received \$2,000.00 from the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers' Association⁶⁸ which enabled them to carry on without further forceful demands on the city and without deciding whether to end the strike. Any connection between the longshoremen and the relief camp strikers only worsened the situation as far as the city was concerned. The longshoremen were involved in a dispute with the British Columbia Shipping Federation and if a strike occurred the participation of the relief camp strikers would complicate the situation. In fact Mayor McGeer believed that the Waterfront Workers' Association's business agent, who had advised that if the strikers were given relief

⁶⁵ERIC, Exhibits, no. 287.

⁶⁶Ibid., no. 299, Bennett to McGeer, May 20, 1935.

⁶⁷Ibid., no. 299, McGeer to Bennett, May 21, 1935.

⁶⁸ERIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 51, pp. 170-173.

they would likely return to the camps, had deliberately done so to keep the relief camp men in the city until the long-shoremen went on strike.⁶⁹

By the last week in May, however, there were indications that the relief camp strike was ending. The funds of the strikers were exhausted. Some of the men began to apply for reinstatement in the camps.⁷⁰ Finally on May 29 the strike leaders announced that a vote by secret ballot on continuing the strike would be held the next day.

By the end of May the strikers had been in the city two months; during that time their activities were dictated by a desire to secure the seven demands and by the state of their finances. They had arrived without funds; during that period they had raised over \$22,000.00⁷¹ which, except for the \$1,500.00 received from the city, came from contributions from individuals and organizations. A week after their arrival an unauthorized tag day netted them over \$5,000.00, one of the biggest tag days held in the city;⁷² on April 28 at a mass meeting organized by the C.C.F. and attended by 16,000 people \$1,500.00 was collected.⁷³ Various unions contributed money; the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers'

⁶⁹Vancouver Sun, May 27, 1935.

⁷⁰Vancouver Sun, May 29, 1935, May 30, 1935.

⁷¹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 8, p. 21.

⁷²Ibid., Vol. 51, p.18. ⁷³Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 8.

Association gave \$4,000.00;⁷⁴ the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, an affiliate of the Workers' Unity League, donated \$650.00⁷⁵ and two other unions a total of \$850.00.⁷⁶ However by the end of May the strikers' resources were exhausted. No matter how great the financial and moral support had been they did not expect it to continue indefinitely. Furthermore, it was evident by the end of May that neither the provincial nor federal authorities were prepared to settle the strike on the basis of the seven demands. On May 30, at the mass meeting to announce the result of the secret ballot, Arthur H. Evans proposed that the strikers trek to Ottawa and present their grievances directly to the authority the strikers held responsible for relief camp conditions -- the federal government.⁷⁷ On June 3 and 4 over 1,000 strikers boarded freight trains to begin what has been called the On-to-Ottawa march.⁷⁸

⁷⁴Ibid., Vol. 51, pp. 171-173.

⁷⁵Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 14.

⁷⁶Ibid., Vol. 8, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁷Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 32.

⁷⁸Although G. G. McGeer was no doubt relieved to see the strikers leave Vancouver Mayor P. J. Nolan of Ottawa objected to the strikers being allowed to come to Ottawa. A wire sent by McGeer to Paddy Nolan said in part: Understand you object to relief camp strikers coming to Ottawa. Surely a mayor with your name cannot object to the men laying their grievances before the government of the Nation. Vancouver Sun, June 5, 1935.

CHAPTER II
THE TREK TO REGINA

The decision of the relief camp strikers to proceed to Ottawa to present their demands to the federal government was followed by two other decisions. The seventh demand¹ was deleted. Since the remaining demands pertained more specifically to the relief camps the trekkers, and their leaders in speeches at mass meetings, were able to concentrate on forcing the public and the authorities, in the words of Evans, "to realize the situation which was grinding the youth of the country."² As trek leader the strikers elected Arthur Evans, who, as has already been shown, had played a prominent role at the Kamloops Conference and as a member of the Action Committee and Strategy Committee in Vancouver.

Evans, who had been a member of the Communist Party since 1926,³ became district organizer of the Workers' Unity

¹That section 98 of the Criminal Code, sections 41 and 42 of the Immigration Act, vagrancy laws and all anti-working class laws be repealed.

²ARIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 8, p. 45.

³Ibid., Vol. 10, pp. 46-47. Evans' only qualification to this statement was that at times his membership had lapsed because he had been unable to pay his dues but that he had never been expelled nor had he withdrawn from the party. When he made this statement in the late fall of 1935 he had not paid his dues since leaving Vancouver as trek leader.

League for British Columbia in 1932. An experienced and capable organizer and agitator, he had been involved in organizational activities over a long period of time. Born in Toronto, he came west in 1911 when he was in his early twenties to secure employment during the harvest season. In December of 1911 he was sent to jail in Kansas City because of speeches he had made for a union. Evans claimed he was released shortly after because "we organized the other 1,500 in the jail there owing to the grievances they had and they were glad to release us."⁴ In 1919 as a representative of the Kimberley miners he attended the conference at Calgary when the One Big Union was established. He became district organizer for that union at Drumheller and later became district secretary for British Columbia and Alberta.⁵ Evans then became district secretary for the United Mine Workers at Drumheller. In 1925 he went to British Columbia where, as a member of the United Brotherhood of Joiners and Carpenters, he worked as a carpenter and served as job steward. After he became district organizer for the Workers' Unity League in 1932 he organized the miners of Princeton for strike action. As a result of his activities in Princeton he was convicted under Section 98 of the Criminal Code. While awaiting trial Evans, who had never been an inmate of a relief camp, became involved in expanding the Relief Camp

⁴Ibid., p. 110.

⁵Ibid., pp. 121-126.

Workers' Union. He returned to Vancouver after his release from prison in mid-December of 1934 and took up his activities with the relief camp strikers. He emerged, as has been seen, as a prominent organizer of the April walk-out.

Evans believed that strikes were the main weapon of the working classes. He claimed in Marxist language that the "state forces", the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the provincial police, were used by the "owners of production . . . at strikes in order to maintain the living conditions of workers in the interest of employers", that Royal Canadian Mounted Police "stool pigeons" deliberately lied and that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police "framed" certain people by manufacturing false evidence.⁶ While Evans was aware of the value of public opinion, he was prepared, as his activities in Vancouver demonstrated, to use extra-legal means.

Evans, aggressive, tenacious and self-confident, became the dominant individual connected with the trek. His own estimate of his abilities may not have been much of an overstatement.

I do not want to throw bouquets at myself, but the general opinion of the organization was that I was the most qualified one to be the leader of the committees and I was the leader of all the committees that were set up.⁷

⁶RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 11, pp. 82-92.

⁷Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 52.

Evans left Vancouver several days before the trek as an advance agent. Having decided to force the federal government to recognize their six demands by going to Ottawa, the strikers also wanted to arouse public support for their cause, both for the advantage this would give them in negotiating with the federal authorities and for the financial support which was necessary if the trekkers were to succeed in reaching the capital.⁸ Therefore stop-overs of two or three days in the larger centers were planned. The advance committee formed a citizens' committee by enlisting the active support of other organizations and with the assistance of the committee arranged for food and shelter and publicity. The advance committees, of which there were several, had another function. The Strike Committee had decided to accept any single workers;⁹ the activities of the advance group in the city to which the trekkers were proceeding or nearby cities induced others to join. Although it is not clear how large a group the leaders felt capable of marshalling to Ottawa, the number increased as the trek moved eastward from Vancouver.

The activities of Evans as an advance agent were similar to those of other advance delegations. In Kamloops he contacted the Unemployed Workers' Association and the

⁸The strikers had \$800 when they left Vancouver. Ibid., p. 21.

⁹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 10, p. 88.

C.C.F. organizations with whose help a public meeting was arranged for June 2. At the mass meeting a delegation of citizens was named to accompany Evans to interview the civic authorities to request food and housing for the trekkers and permission to hold a tag day, all of which were refused. Evans then proceeded to Golden where, accompanied by local citizens, he interviewed city officials and secured the use of the Auto Park. Evans collected food from the surrounding area.¹⁰

The main body of the On-to-Ottawa marchers left Vancouver in two groups on June 3 and 4. The leaders of the strikers, in order to keep the body of men together for the trans-Canada journey and in order to secure and maintain public support, established a tightly organized and well disciplined group. The trek was organized under the trek leader, Evans, and later an ostensible co-leadership was set up. J. Cosgrove, an ex-service man, acted as marshal and was responsible for the conduct of the men on parades, demonstrations and the boarding and leaving of trains. The men rode on top of the freight cars and at a signal from the marshal they boarded and left trains in an orderly manner. The main body of the trek was made up of four divisions when it left Vancouver and later two more were added, under division captains; each division was subdivided into groups

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. 8, pp. 63-70.

under group leaders. A central Strike Committee of 70 or 80 men, made up of the two leaders, the marshal, the division captains and the group leaders, served as the executive. This central committee was divided into publicity, finance, card, relief and tag day sub-committees. Aware also that discipline and unity were best maintained if there were a line of communication between the leadership and the rank and file, the leaders presented decisions arrived at by the Strike Committee to a general meeting of the men. The orderly behavior of the trekkers had the desired effect on the public. Mayor J. Taylor of Swift Current, for example, later commented: "They were very well behaved. In fact they were highly commended by the citizens of Swift Current. . . ." ¹¹ The mayor of Moose Jaw also commended them for their conduct. ¹²

The arrival of the trekkers at a city was followed by more mass meetings and tag days to enlist the moral and financial support of the public. The first group arrived in Kamloops on June 4; they were joined the next day by the second group. An unauthorized tag day was held, but they collected only \$70. ¹³ Although they had intended to remain in Kamloops two days, conditions were unsatisfactory and they left on June 5, arriving in Golden on June 6.

¹¹Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 13.

¹²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 12, Moose Jaw Evening Times, June 13, 1935.

¹³Winnipeg Free Press, June 6, 1935.

Evans left the trek at Golden¹⁴ and returned to Vancouver; he later rejoined the trek in Medicine Hat. George Black was elected leader, although up to that time he had not been on the Strike Committee. He was born in Scotland and came to Canada about 1925. Medically unfit for relief camps, Black was on relief in Vancouver. He became involved with the strikers when the Workers' Ex-Servicemen's League of which he was a member sent him as a delegate to the conference that set up the Action Committee in Vancouver, after which he participated in the activities of the strikers during April and May. When the decision was reached to march to Ottawa the Workers' Ex-Servicemen's League named Black and S. O'Neill to represent it on the trek since many ex-servicemen were in the camps. This league, according to Black, was set up to rectify grievances of veterans because it was felt that the Canadian Legion was not sufficiently zealous in its efforts.¹⁵ Black remained as leader until Evans returned, after which there were ostensibly two leaders. Black lived with the men and was in command whenever Evans was away. He was less aggressive than Evans, as his own description of his participation in the leadership suggests:

I had not actually taken on the leading of the whole trek to Ottawa. I understood there was a strike committee there which was very capable

¹⁴When he was elected trek leader the Workers' Unity League consented to his leading the trek as far as Golden.

¹⁵RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 12, pp. 145-147.

of leading the trek to Ottawa and which also discussed all the problems and the strikers were very capable themselves of managing any affairs. As far as I was concerned I was merely there to add any experiences I had as to how best we could get along.¹⁶

From Golden the trek proceeded to Calgary on June 7. In Calgary as in Vancouver this highly organized body of men demonstrated a willingness to use extra-legal means to gain a desired end. An advance group had gone to Calgary and contacted unemployed organizations and at a public meeting had named a delegation to interview the City Council to arrange for food and shelter and the holding of a tag day. They were refused the relief and the tag day permit but were granted the use of the grandstand for housing. After the main body arrived the delegation, supported by the strikers and interested citizens, paraded first to City Hall and then to the provincial relief office. While the delegation went in to talk to A. A. MacKenzie, Chairman of the Provincial Relief Commission, strikers and citizens remained massed in the street. Prior to their arrival MacKenzie had wired H. Hereford, Dominion Relief Commissioner, requesting instructions regarding the strikers' demands for assistance.¹⁷ Although MacKenzie first talked to Black and another striker, events in the office were soon taken over by citizen members of the delegation, especially A. A. McLeod, national chairman of

¹⁶Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷RRIC, Exhibits, no. 300.

the Canadian League against War and Fascism,¹⁸ who demanded that a more strongly worded wire be sent. MacKenzie complied.

Interviewed delegation British Columbia single men. Demand food until Monday. Some immediate action necessary. Will distribute funds or food if you make available.¹⁹

Meanwhile outside the building twenty or thirty pickets had been placed around the relief office by some of the division captains to prevent the relief officials leaving until relief was granted.²⁰ The pickets remained there from eleven to two-thirty²¹ when the provincial government capitulated and granted relief. An unwilling witness to this incident was Dr. G. E. Stanley, Conservative member of parliament for Calgary East, who left for Ottawa to request action by the federal government.²²

The strikers were in Calgary from Friday afternoon to Monday evening. Besides the relief forced from the provincial government, the strikers had collected \$1,300 in an unauthorized tag day,²³ were entertained at a picnic sponsored

¹⁸RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 52, pp. 21-22; see also Leader-Post (Regina), June 12, 1935.

¹⁹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 300, MacKenzie to Hereford.

²⁰RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 12, p. 27.

²¹Ibid., Vol. 52, p. 9.

²²Leader-Post (Regina), June 10, 1935.

Dr. Stanley who had been in the building when the pickets arrived was allowed to leave only because he was a doctor. RRIC, Preliminary Hearings, p. 252.

²³Winnipeg Free Press, June 10, 1935.

by a citizens' committee, brought their demands to the attention of the public in mass meetings and added to their numbers.

The trek arrived in Medicine Hat on the morning of June 11. The mayor offered the advance committee \$250.00 if the trek would not stop there. However, the city finally agreed to provide the money and the use of a ball park where the men cooked their own meals.²⁴

The attitude of the mayor of Medicine Hat to the approach of the trekkers was a typical reaction. The civic authorities of the various cities at which the strikers stopped were apprehensive about the difficulties that might arise with a large number of men encamped and took steps to minimize the risk. For example arrangements were made in Calgary, Swift Current and Moose Jaw with railway officials to stop the train close to where the trekkers were to be accommodated.²⁵ In those three cities police escorts accompanied the men to their quarters to ensure an orderly march. In most centres the strikers had been refused permission to hold a tag day, probably because permission might have been construed as active support; however, when unauthorized tag days were held, in most cases the police ignored the taggers because to have stopped them might have led to disturbances. The

²⁴RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 14, pp. 154-55.

²⁵Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 141-142, Vol. 7, p. 4, Vol. 14, p. 147.

chief concern of officials was to assist the trek through the city without trouble.

The officials of the Canadian Pacific Railway, on whose freight trains most of the men were travelling, did not attempt to stop the strikers from boarding at Vancouver or at any point east (until Regina), although under the Railway Act the men were trespassers.²⁶ The officials hoped that the trek would disintegrate while travelling eastward.²⁷ Furthermore, the railway officials delayed train departures to enable the men to board, stopped trains at locations to permit easy loading and unloading, gave information to the trekkers as to the time and place of departure and gave instructions to the men on how to protect themselves while passing through tunnels.²⁸ These actions were carried out, not because the officials actively supported the strikers and wished to assist them in carrying their grievances to Ottawa, but because they wished to avoid any disturbances that might lead to the destruction of railway property or loss of life and because they were requested by various civic authorities

²⁶Revised Statutes of Canada, 1927, c. 170 s. 443.

²⁷RRIC, Exhibits, no. 31, W. A. Mather, General Manager of the Western lines of the Canadian Pacific Railway, to J. G. Gardiner, June 13, 1935.

²⁸RRIC, Exhibits, no. 29, Mather to Gardiner, June 13, 1935, no. 31, Mather to Gardiner, June 13, 1935; RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 7, p. 4, Vol. 8, pp. 80, 86, 87, 89, 119, Vol. 12, pp. 42, 52, 58.

to make arrangements that simplified their problems in dealing with the strikers.²⁹ The effect, whatever the reason, was to facilitate the trekkers' march eastward.

The reaction of the federal authorities to the On-to-Ottawa march was to declare it a provincial problem, while some provincial governments urged the Dominion government to take action. Prior to the arrival of the trekkers Premier Reid of Alberta, fearing disturbances, requested the Prime Minister to prevent their arrival.³⁰ R. B. Bennett announced in the House of Commons on June 7, the day the men arrived in Calgary, that the railway companies had not requested assistance to stop the trespassers; if they did and if the provincial authorities requested assistance the federal government would act. Bennett emphasized the responsibility of the provinces:

We are not in a position to render any assistance until some complaint is made, and that matter . . . is one that rests, in its inception and its carrying forward with the provincial authorities.³¹

On June 10 Premier Bracken of Manitoba suggested to the Prime Minister "that the movement be stopped by having a representative of the Dominion government meet the men at some western point" or if that was not possible that a camp

²⁹ERIC, Exhibits, no. 29, Mather to Gardiner, June 13, 1935, no. 31, Mather to Gardiner, June 13, 1935.

³⁰Regina Daily Star, June 6, 1935.

³¹House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. IV, p. 3397.

be organized by the Department of National Defence in Manitoba to care for the men.³² Bennett reiterated that the Dominion authorities would assist if the provinces asked for help but that they could not intervene unless such help were requested.³³

Although the requests of Alberta and Manitoba appeared to be requests for assistance, they apparently wanted the federal government to initiate action before the trekkers reached the province concerned. Once the provincial governments were confronted with the presence of the trekkers their chief concern was to have them leave as quickly and with as little trouble as possible. The provincial government in Alberta had capitulated to the demands of the trekkers. In Winnipeg on June 11 officials of the province, the city of Winnipeg, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Department of National Defence decided to make arrangements for food and shelter to provide for the expected influx of On-to-Ottawa marchers.³⁴ On the other hand the federal authorities were saying in effect that if a provincial government initiated action to stop the marchers and requested assistance then, and only then, would the government act. Ottawa argued correctly that the administration of justice fell within provincial jurisdiction.

³²Winnipeg Free Press, June 11, 1935.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., June 12, 1935.

Meanwhile the government of Saskatchewan decided the best solution was not to request Ottawa to take action but to facilitate the movement through the province as quickly and with as little chance of disturbance as possible. The Attorney General of the day, T. C. Davis, explained later:

That was our attitude before they ever arrived, that the Province should take care of them in the way of feeding them and facilitating their progress through the province as rapidly as possible.³⁵

The Saskatchewan government knew from press reports of the impending arrival and the likelihood of a stopover in Regina as in the other large centres; at that time no advance committee of strikers had reached Regina. The government also was aware of the incident in Calgary, both from press reports and from the Assistant Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who had been in contact with Calgary and who discussed the situation with the government. And the attitude of the government in Ottawa was known in Regina. Between June 7 and 10 it was decided that the Saskatchewan government would treat the men as transients; it was arranged that the civic officials would provide food and shelter and the province would assume the cost.³⁶

³⁵RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 6, p. 27.

³⁶The province had had for some time an arrangement with urban municipalities that transients who were temporarily in the city would be provided with relief by the city with the province paying the cost up to 40 cents a day. Ibid., Vol. 6, pp. 137-138.

The trekkers, who, except for their stay in Calgary, had been preparing their own meals under outdoor camp conditions, found in Saskatchewan that shelter and meals in restaurants had already been arranged. The trekkers climbed down from the train at Swift Current for a noon meal on June 12, found time to hold a public meeting and arrived in Moose Jaw in the evening. They remained in Moose Jaw until the early morning of June 14. On that morning approximately 1,500 trekkers left the freight train at Regina and marched four abreast to the Exhibition Grounds. One newspaper described their arrival in the following words:

Two thousand men, waifs of two provincial governments, snuggled down in a straw-littered Regina haven early Friday morning.

In the damp grey morning about 6 o'clock they climbed down from clanking box cars in the Canadian Pacific railway yards.

Grim, taciturn, they marched to the stadium. . . .

They were damp.

They were stiff.

But unworried by rain or rheumatism.

They were silent -- their silence unmistakably suggestive of the menace of 2,000 sticks of explosive.

.
They are one of Canada's most amazing efforts -- that of vaulting a continent with a protest.

.
They were young men mostly. Few from appearances could be judged more than 35. Many were boys, not much more than 15.

When the train stopped, they did not dismount. They waited for orders. And orders in this gang of marchers are orders and are obeyed.³⁷

³⁷Leader-Post (Regina), June 14, 1935.

Two days before their arrival the federal government had announced that the On-to-Ottawa march was to be halted at Regina.

CHAPTER III
STALEMATE IN REGINA

The first intimation that officials in Saskatchewan had that the On-to-Ottawa march was to be halted in Regina by preventing the men as trespassers from boarding the trains was on June 11 when Sir James MacBrien, Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, informed Assistant Commissioner S. F. Wood that it had been "proposed to prevent [the] strikers [from] proceeding east of Regina."¹ On the following morning Wood was authorized to put these instructions into effect. Although the federal authorities had reiterated since the strike of December, 1934 that the provincial governments were responsible both for relief for these men once they left the camps and for the maintenance of law and order, no request for assistance had been made by the government of Saskatchewan. Although the Dominion government claimed that the railway companies had asked for help to prevent the trespassers from using their property, in effect the Dominion government had made the decision to stop the march.²

¹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 158. On June 8 Wood had requested instructions from MacBrien. Ibid., no. 155. MacBrien had replied "Take no action except at the request of Attorney General." Ibid., no. 156.

²Furthermore Wood's instructions included the information that the "Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways [are] both cooperating."

The apparently sudden reversal of the policy of the federal government can be explained by the circumstances surrounding the movement of the strikers eastward. The failure of the federal government to take any action to prevent the trekkers from boarding the freight trains in Vancouver, when under the Railway Act they were trespassers, indicated that the cabinet did not consider the situation serious enough to warrant interference. They probably believed the trekkers' organization would collapse before the men had travelled very far, although the fact that the leaders had succeeded in keeping a body of men together in Vancouver for two months ought to have given them some warning of the cohesiveness of the group. They also assumed that if measures had to be taken to maintain law and order, the provinces, which were responsible for the administration of justice, would act. Furthermore, there were other labor problems in Vancouver; specifically the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers' Association and the Shipping Federation of British Columbia were involved in a dispute;³ the longshoremen had been strong supporters of the striking relief camp workers. R. B. Bennett later claimed that the government was not aware that the strikers were going to leave Vancouver.⁴ Since the

³The longshoremen went on strike June 5 and other unions went on sympathy strikes. A report of the Royal Commission which investigated the dispute on the Vancouver waterfront is found in the Labour Gazette, 1935, pp. 982-995.

⁴House of Commons, Debates, 1935, Vol. IV, p. 4138.

decision to go to Ottawa was common knowledge in Vancouver, it seems improbable that the officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police did not inform their superiors in Ottawa of the impending trek. There was, of course, only a few days between the announcement of the proposed trek and the departure of the men.

However, as the trek passed through Alberta (it was in Medicine Hat on June 11) it became evident that the trek was not going to end before it reached Ottawa. Clearly the trek was well organized and unlikely to disintegrate; obviously the provinces were not going to interfere, but were in fact expediting the movement by granting relief. It was almost certain that a large, well organized body of men would reach Ottawa. The situation was also becoming more serious. The number of men in the trek was increasing; with each stopover more unemployed joined and, as more and more publicity was given the trek, it was likely to grow at an increasing rate. The strikers had intimidated the officials in Calgary, as they had in Vancouver, into granting relief. Although the Calgary incident was no more serious than the one in Vancouver, Dr. Stanley, Conservative member of Parliament, had witnessed the incident and had, according to press reports, left immediately for Ottawa. His eye witness and probably vivid account of twelve hundred strikers forcing the government of Alberta to capitulate may have contributed to the change in attitude of the federal government. The threat of

intimidation, the possibility of large scale disturbances and the open invitation to others with grievances to march to the capital, implicit in the convergence on Ottawa of this militant organization, spurred the officials into action for reasons of law and order.

The alarm engendered by the militancy and increasing size of the trek was strengthened by the evidence of communist leadership which to some was synonymous with attempts to undermine constituted authority. Hugh Guthrie, Minister of Justice, stated in the House of Commons:

. . . the government is satisfied that the present easterly march of so-called camp strikers . . . has been organized and is under the direction of certain communist elements throughout Canada and is a deliberate attempt to disturb peace, order and good government of Canada by unlawful means.

.
The government views the action of the marchers as a distinct menace to the peace, order and good government of Canada, and it also realizes that unless discontinued it may ultimately produce serious damage to life and property upon the railways.⁵

After the trek was stopped at Regina, the federal government was faced with the difficult task of settling the dispute and dispersing the marchers.

The Saskatchewan government reacted immediately and vehemently to the confirmation of the orders of the federal government to prevent the trekkers from travelling east from

⁵Ibid., p. 3592.

Regina on the freight trains. For neither the first nor the last time the federal government and a provincial government became involved in a dispute over their respective fields of jurisdiction. Premier Gardiner's chief concern was that the marchers, who had done nothing in Saskatchewan to warrant interference, move out of the province; to Gardiner the presence of nearly 2,000 unemployed who were determined to go to Ottawa and a police force who had orders to stop them would almost inevitably result in trouble. Premier Gardiner, Acting Attorney General J. W. Estey and later Attorney General T. C. Davis argued that the federal government should not prevent the men leaving Regina by train because they were not the usual trespassers. They came to this conclusion because the strikers had been permitted by the railway and federal officials to board trains in Vancouver and travel without interference to Regina and because the railway authorities had assisted the movement of the men eastward by delaying trains or stopping them at convenient locations.⁶

Another issue in the dispute, and to the Saskatchewan government more important than the question of trespassing,

⁶RRIC, Exhibits, no. 20, Gardiner to Bennett, June 12, 1935, no. 23, Gardiner to Bennett, June 12, 1935, no. 27, Gardiner to Bennett, June 13, 1935, no. 173, Estey to Wood, June 14, 1935. Requests from the railway authorities elicited the same response from Gardiner. Ibid., no. 24 Gardiner to Mather, June 12, 1935, no. 28, Gardiner to S. J. Hungerford, President of the Canadian National Railways, June 13, 1935, no. 30, Gardiner to Mather, June 13, 1935, no. 37, Gardiner to Mather, June 16, 1935.

was the administration of justice. Gardiner complained that without a request from the province or even prior consultation the federal government had issued orders to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Saskatchewan and in so doing had interfered with the administration of justice in the province, which by the terms of the agreement of 1928 for policing the province⁷ and the British North America Act was a provincial responsibility. The police should act under the instructions of the Attorney General and not of officials at Ottawa. Gardiner contended that the provincial government was capable of dealing with the marchers; if the government needed assistance it would ask for it.⁸ The Saskatchewan government had

⁷The police agreement provided:

- 1(a) The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Force to remain a Dominion Force, entirely under the control of the Dominion government, except in matters relating to the administration of Justice in connection with which the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or an officer appointed by him to be in charge of Criminal Investigation in Saskatchewan will act in accordance with the wishes and under the direction of the Attorney General of Saskatchewan.
16. The officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police specifically charged with the administration of Justice in Saskatchewan shall be authorized to act on their own responsibility under the direction of the Attorney General, as aforesaid, without reference to the superior officers of the Force at Ottawa except where Federal Statutes other than the Criminal Code or Federal Police duties are concerned, the object being to avoid delay and so that prompt decisions can be given within the Province.
- ERIC, Exhibits, no. 71, Minute of the Executive Council of Saskatchewan.

⁸For the arguments of the provincial ministers ERIC, Exhibits, no. 20, Gardiner to Bennett, June 12, 1935, no. 33, Gardiner to Bennett, June 15, 1935, no. 39, Gardiner to Guthrie, June 17, 1935, no. 173, Estey to Wood, June 14, 1935.

received requests for assistance from the railway authorities, but these had been received after Gardiner had been informed by Wood that the federal government was planning to stop the trek.

On the other hand, the federal government declared that the men were trespassers and legally they were. As far as the administration of justice was concerned Guthrie pointed out to Gardiner that under the terms of the police agreement special provision was made for enforcement of Dominion statutes such as the Railway Act and, since the railway companies had asked for aid in coping with the trespassers, the police had been instructed to assist the railway police.⁹

By June 17 Gardiner had conceded the fact, but not the constitutionality, of the intervention by the Dominion.

We understand you take full responsibility for concluding [that the] Ottawa marchers are trespassers and that you are instructing the Mounted Police to prevent further trespassing. This constitutes taking the right to instruct the police in matters of administering justice entirely out of our hands. . . . We strongly protest the flouting of the constitutional rights of the province and would once more ask you to reconsider your position.¹⁰

The dispute did not end there; Gardiner and Davis continued to protest the Dominion's action as unconstitutional. As the halting of the strikers by preventing them from leaving

⁹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 38, Guthrie to Gardiner, June 16, 1935.

¹⁰Ibid., no. 39, Gardiner to Guthrie, June 17, 1935. June 17 was the day the trekkers had announced as the day of departure for Ottawa.

by railway became less important and the federal government took other steps to prevent the men moving eastward, the provincial government protested and questioned the measures taken.

In a series of statements to the press, which included the correspondence between the two governments, Gardiner laid his position before the public. In his zeal to make clear that termination of the march was the result of federal action over the protests of the province, Gardiner declared that "We consider the efforts being made from outside to create trouble in the midst of this province, the most diabolical conspiracy ever perpetrated upon the people of any province or city."¹¹ The following day he levelled the same accusation against the Conservative government. "The federal government attempted to interfere with the administration of justice . . . at a time and under circumstances which would indicate that they were carrying out a planned scheme which could only result in trouble between two outside forces coming to a head in Saskatchewan at the city of Regina."¹² Gardiner also kept Mackenzie King, leader of the opposition in Ottawa, informed about the situation.¹³

¹¹Leader-Post (Regina), June 13, 1935.

¹²Ibid., June 14, 1935.

¹³ Archives of Saskatchewan, Gardiner Papers, Unemployment file ("On-to-Ottawa" Trek), Gardiner to King, June 12, June 13, June 15, July 1, July 2. (hereafter these papers will be cited as Gardiner Papers, Unemployment file ("On-to-Ottawa" Trek))

The reaction of the leaders of the trek to the decision made at Ottawa was no less positive than the federal government's order to stop them. Evans, in an effort to learn the attitude of the provincial government, interviewed Gardiner, who informed him that the march was to be stopped in Regina, that he had protested to Ottawa on the grounds that the marchers ought to be allowed to leave the province by the same means they had entered and that the provincial government would provide relief for three days.¹⁴ It was unlikely that support of the federal decision by Gardiner would have deterred Evans, but in any case he rejoined the trek at Moose Jaw and announced that the men were determined to proceed to Ottawa in spite of all obstacles.¹⁵ On their arrival in Regina on the morning of June 14 the strikers were given official notice by the railways that the law in connection with unlawful riding was to be enforced; the railway companies would discuss with the federal government the means of returning them to their homes.¹⁶ But it was going to take much more than an offer of transportation to disperse

¹⁴RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 8, pp. 127-128.

¹⁵RRIC, Exhibits, no. 12, Moose Jaw Evening Times, June 13, 1935.

¹⁶Ibid., no. 108. The notice reached Black who did not bring it to the attention of the strike committee until the next day. RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 12, pp. 74-76. The feeling that the notice with its offer of transportation was not being made common knowledge amongst the trekkers led the railway officials to print and distribute the notice on June 16.

the trek.

While the march had been prohibited by the railways, there also existed in Regina a group organized to support it. The Citizens' Emergency Committee, the nucleus of which had existed prior to the arrival of the advance guard, was officially organized June 13. The Committee was established to enlist public support, moral and financial, to make the stopover in Regina as comfortable as possible, and to assist the men to reach Ottawa.¹⁷ The Citizens' Emergency Committee, since the Saskatchewan government was providing relief for three days, arranged for publicity, public meetings, delegations to interview civic and provincial officials, and picnics. An unauthorized tag day, which resulted in the collection of \$1,446.00, was sponsored by the Committee.¹⁸ Later, when the strikers were not receiving either federal or provincial relief, the Committee attempted to secure food and money for relief and it also became involved in trying to secure transportation. The Chairman and Secretary of the

¹⁷Leader-Post, Regina, June 17, 1935, statement of publicity committee.

¹⁸Alderman A. C. Ellison, a member of the Citizens' Emergency Committee, explained later that after the request for permission to hold a tag day had been refused, he had been requested to get in touch with various city officials to ascertain their attitude to a tag day. Ellison did not tell the Committee to go ahead, but he did advise them there would be no opposition. RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 15, p. 96.

Committee, which was made up of thirty-one representatives of organizations and citizens acting as individuals, were A. D. Fisher of the Trades and Labor Council and E. M. Bee, secretary of the local C.C.F. organization. Others active in support of the strikers came from the Trades and Labour Council and various branches of the Union of Unemployed. One of the most vocal and staunch supporters was the Rev. S. B. East.

One of the first events sponsored by the Citizens' Emergency Committee was a public meeting on the evening of June 14, attended by 5,000 to 6,000 Regina citizens, at which local citizens and strikers spoke. M. J. Coldwell, provincial leader of the C.C.F., said: "You have won the respect of the cities through which you have passed [for your orderly conduct]. . . . If you continue [such conduct] no power will be permitted to stop your onward march."¹⁹ B. J. McDaniel, speaking for the Roman Catholic Church, voiced approval for the march only if it continued to be orderly and only as a way to bring to the attention of the public conditions in the camps.²⁰ Rev. J. Mutch, who commended the strikers for their orderliness, suggested that they attempt to negotiate with representatives of the federal government in Regina and that they give the fullest publicity to their requests, which

¹⁹Leader-Post (Regina), June 15, 1935.

²⁰Ibid.

would achieve as much as trekking to Ottawa.²¹ The leaders of the march exhibited "real Communist, bolshevik courage" declared T. G. McManus.²² Evans, the trek leader, declared: "Bennett has issued orders to stop the trek, but it is gaining strength and is going to continue to gain. . . . There are not enough Cossacks in the Dominion to stop us if the workers throughout the Dominion unite in saying: Hands off the relief camp strikers."²³ He added: "If any trouble takes place it will be for the same reason as at Vancouver when the Bennett Cossacks attacked under the future Fascist leader in Canada, Jerry McGeer! . . . If you all turn out [at the train when the strikers leave] I say there are not sufficient Cossacks under Bombastic Bennett to stop us!"²⁴ Recognition of the value of public support was evident in the words of Shaw: "Bennett's thugs will not prevent us from proceeding to Ottawa because you people of Saskatchewan are rising up in protest. The voice of the people cannot be ignored."²⁵

The indications of public support alarmed Assistant Commissioner Wood, who believed the main body of the marchers

²¹Ibid.

²²Regina Daily Star, June 15, 1935.

²³Leader-Fost (Regina), June 15, 1935.

²⁴Regina Daily Star, June 15, 1935.

²⁵Leader-Fost (Regina), June 15, 1935.

and the general public were being misled as to the true purposes of the trek. He considered the movement revolutionary because of the tactics employed, such as the extra-legal methods used in Vancouver and Calgary and the character of the leadership, especially Evans. There were other methods used by the leaders of the trek which confirmed Wood's belief that this was a revolutionary movement. The leaders verbally attacked the police and this, Wood believed, disposed the trekkers to attack when their actions were opposed even though the actions were unlawful. The leaders manoeuvred the police into positions where they had to act, as would be the case if the strikers attempted to board a freight train despite the order forbidding it, so that the strikers could attempt to justify their subsequent actions. Furthermore, the leaders endeavored to have a large number of people present when some action was planned in order to make police action difficult if not impossible.²⁶

Wood took steps to inform the public of the nature of the trek and its leadership. Wood interviewed the Rev. Mr. Mutch after the meeting on June 14 to explain the seriousness of the situation and the revolutionary tactics used;²⁷ on Sunday from the pulpit Rev. J. Mutch sympathized with the

²⁶RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 38, pp. 76-114.

²⁷RRIC, Exhibits, no. 204, Wood to MacBrien, June 24, 1935.

men but issued a warning against the leadership.²⁸ Wood, through a third party, also got the records of the leaders and their communist connections to the newspapers.²⁹ Editorials did appear in the Leader-Post and Regina Daily Star. The Leader-Post emphasized that authority must not be challenged by force and called on the trekkers and the public to support the police. For example, an editorial entitled "The Police and the People" said in part:

The democratic State is the creation of the people. It is subject to change if the people desire change. But while the State remains it must function with authority. Its authority must not be challenged by force by any section of the community. To permit that or to condone that is to authorize anarchy.

. . . .
The police forces of the community are the servants of the community. The community must stand by its own servants. The police are merely the agency of the people themselves.³⁰

The Regina Daily Star emphasized the character of the leadership and called upon citizens and trekkers alike to support the government. An editorial entitled "Challenge to the State" said in part:

The Star refuses to believe that the majority of the strikers realize the way in which they are being used to promote the Communist cause. Many of them are quite boys, who have been brought up to understand what loyalty to country means. They are not old or experienced enough to realize that

²⁸Leader-Post (Regina), June 17, 1935.

²⁹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 204, Wood to MacBrien, June 24, 1935.

³⁰Leader-Post (Regina), June 20, 1935.

they are being used for purposes of men flushed with the belief that they can disobey the laws of the land and set ministers of [the] Crown at defiance.³¹

The positions of the federal government, the provincial government and the strikers had been established by the time the trek arrived in Regina. The federal government, alarmed because of a threat to law and order, had stopped the trek in Regina; the government was then faced with the problem of preventing the trekkers from defying this order, in the face of their stated determination to do so, and dispersing the movement without a breach of the peace. The leaders and the main body of the men, supported by the Citizens' Emergency Committee, were determined to carry their grievances to Ottawa; if they were to succeed they had to circumvent this order without destroying public support. The provincial government wanted the strikers moved out of Saskatchewan; the ministers refused to become involved in the merits of their grievances. Gardiner was later to say he had not cared where the strikers went, as long as they moved out of Saskatchewan.³² The marchers were most vulnerable from the standpoint of finances. One of their points of strength was public interest, sympathy and support (specifically from the Citizens' Emergency Committee) which they had aroused. This sympathy

³¹Regina Daily Star, June 26, 1935.

³²RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 4, p. 59.

was engendered partly by the plight of the youth condemned to relief camps and was augmented by the orderly conduct and evident discipline of the trek. Support and relief were related, since whenever the trekkers were unable to secure federal or provincial relief they were thrown back on what the public gave.

June 17 was a day of decision. This was the day Evans and others had announced for departure for Ottawa. From the platform on June 14 and by a leaflet distributed on Monday, June 17 the leaders had called upon the citizens of Regina to come out to enable them to leave:

Only the mass support of Regina Citizens will force the Authorities to keep their hands off us on our way to Ottawa.

We call upon every citizen who supports us in our fight against Forced Slave Labor to assemble at the CPR freight yards between Albert and Broad Streets.³³

However, Evans also knew from press reports that two federal cabinet ministers were coming to Regina to discuss the dispute and a strikers' negotiating committee was established.³⁴

The federal government had also made further plans beyond the decision to stop the trek. The relief campers were

³³RRIC, Exhibits, no. 10, leaflet distributed by strikers, June 17.

³⁴RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 8, p. 145. The committee consisted of Evans, who was the chief spokesman, J. Cosgrove, Marshall of the trek, J. Walsh and M. McCauley, who were both active in the Relief Camp Workers' Union, S. O'Neill, representative of the Workers' Ex Servicemen's League, Tony Martin, R. Savage and P. Neilson.

to have one of their oft-repeated aims granted -- the opening of negotiations with the federal government -- when Robert Weir, Minister of Agriculture, and R. J. Manion, Minister of Railways, arrived in Regina on June 17 to open discussions with the leaders. The government apparently hoped that if negotiations were opened with the marchers the trek could be dispersed.³⁵

Weir, Manion, the delegation of seven strikers led by Evans, representatives of the civic and provincial governments, of the railways, of various organizations, and of the press were present at a meeting at which the two spokesmen were Manion and Evans. The main proposal presented by Dr. Manion was that a delegation go to Ottawa to discuss with the cabinet the six demands while the rest of the men returned to the camps or their homes. Evans would only agree to a delegation going to Ottawa while the rest of the men remained in Regina; the delegation could not make a decision but must bring any proposals made at Ottawa back for a decision by the trek as a whole. The terms of the "truce" agreed upon were: the strikers' delegation, whose expenses and fares were to be paid by the government, were to leave for Ottawa within thirty-six hours; the federal government was to provide the main body of men in Regina with three twenty-cent meals a day (the provincial

³⁵RRIC, Exhibits, no. 186, Wood to MacBrien, June 17, 1935 "Cabinet ministers will suggest small delegation of strikers proceed Ottawa. Remainder to enter temporary government camp here and register with a view to being sent to their homes."

government had provided only two) in city restaurants; the government was to make no attempt to disrupt their forces while the committee was away; the strikers were not to encourage others to join in order to augment their numbers, except that the men from Dundurn who had already signified their intention of coming would be allowed to join the trek up to the evening of June 19; the government was to arrange for additional quarters for the men; the rank and file in Regina were not to trespass upon railway property.³⁶

Anxious that the negotiations go smoothly Dr. Manion suggested that the trekkers be sent home but he did not make an issue of it; he also said in answer to Evans' statement that a delegation would not have as much influence as a body of men, that when the delegation returned they would be in the same position as they were now; he also said that he believed that if they went to Ottawa their proposals would have consideration. Dr. Manion's normal concern was probably increased by Wood, who had been in the midst of the situation for several days, and heightened even more by his meeting with the determined Evans. Manion's concern was justifiable.

³⁶Regina Daily Star, June 18, 1935; the Leader-Post (Regina), June 18, 1935. Full reports of the meeting appeared in the press; also RRIC, Exhibits, no. 187, memorandum of agreement, Manion to Wood, June 17, 1935; Ibid., no. 84, Report of interview between Mr. Manion and Mr. Weir and Relief Strikers Delegation, June 17. C. P. Burgess, representative of the Dominion Department of Labour in Regina, arranged the details for the care of the men with the civic officials.

There can be little doubt that if there had been no negotiations or if an acceptable proposal had not come out of the meeting the marchers, with thousands of Regina citizens in the vicinity of the railway yards, would have attempted to board the eastbound freight that evening.³⁷ Nor was Evans alone in his desire to go to Ottawa; it took him and Shaw some time to persuade the marchers to accept Dr. Manion's proposal.³⁸ Later Evans was to comment that Dr. Manion had given them a sympathetic hearing in Regina³⁹ -- a sharp contrast to his attitude to Bennett, to whom he was later to say that he [Bennett] was "not fit to be Premier of a Hottentot village".⁴⁰ Although the threat of Evans and the trek boarding the train that evening, in defiance of the order against trespassing, was great, Evans was aware that a reasonable proposal would have to be accepted in order to retain public sympathy; if it were not, he declared, "then Weir and Manion and the government as a whole would use this to blacken us from one end of the country to the other. . . ." ⁴¹ However, Evans, calling

³⁷Wood had arranged to have the train cancelled and preparations had been made for reading the Riot Act.

³⁸RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 3, p. 37.

³⁹Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 159.

⁴⁰RRIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of Interview between the Delegation of Strikers and Dominion Government, June 22nd, 1935, p. 117.

⁴¹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 8, p. 159.

the decision of the federal government to open negotiations a "stall", expected little from the Ottawa meeting.

The terms of the agreement were concluded that evening. The large number of citizens who had assembled saw, not the strikers board the train, but a two hour parade including a snake-walk in the area of the Saskatchewan Hotel, where the cabinet ministers and the delegation were meeting. Wood estimated that 10,000 people were present while the less conservative Evans said 25,000 which would have been almost half the population of Regina.

In a stormy meeting on June 22 Evans and the delegation met Prime Minister Bennett and members of the cabinet. In discussions carried on chiefly between the Prime Minister and the trek leader, punctuated by the declarations "you are a liar" directed to Bennett by Evans in connection with Bennett's comments on Evans' criminal record, the six demands were rejected. That the grievances were not justifiable was the essence of Bennett's reply. The camps had been established to care for the single unemployed until opportunities arose for employment and as such the camps functioned satisfactorily. Communist agitation was responsible for the discontent in the camps.⁴² The main demand for work and wages was financially impossible to meet and work was being provided as

⁴²RRIC, Report, Vol. II, Report of Interview between the Delegation of Strikers and Dominion Government, June 22nd, 1935, pp. 109-112, p. 119.

rapidly as it could be.⁴³ As for the rest of the demands, the relief camp men were provided with workmen's compensation when it was possible; complaints would always be heard but there would be no toleration of "soviets" in the camps; there was no evidence of militarism in the camps; non-contributory unemployment insurance was a request that could not be met; anyone who met the requirements of the Elections and Franchise Acts was entitled to vote.⁴⁴ The men could go back to the camps and await employment opportunities but the government was determined to maintain law and order.⁴⁵ That summed up the stand taken by Bennett.

Evans, who had expected little from the meeting with the federal cabinet, was undismayed and certainly undeterred by the rejection of the demands; he retaliated with not only a declaration that the trek would continue from Regina, but with a call for a national walkout. Discussions took place with delegations of unemployed from Toronto, Montreal, the Valcartier and Rockcliffe relief camps and Tom Ewen, national secretary of the Workers' Unity League,⁴⁶ and it was announced that a call was being issued for a mass trek to Ottawa sponsored

⁴³Ibid., pp. 120-122.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 122-124.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁶RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 11, p. 84.

by the Workers' Unity League, the Relief Camp Workers' Union and the National Unemployment Council Executive.⁴⁷ Evans at a mass meeting in Ottawa to publicize the event predicted 20,000 to 30,000 relief camp workers and other unemployed would trek to the capital; by the time he reached Winnipeg he had increased the number to 50,000. Evans had already taken advantage of the all-expense paid trip to Ottawa to hold meetings on station platforms at Brandon, Winnipeg, Fort William, Port Arthur and Sudbury; he held a second series on the way back to Regina.

Meanwhile the main body of the trek in Regina had been occupied with integrating those who had joined on its arrival in Regina and those who had arrived from Dundurn as permitted by the truce terms. By the evening of June 19 city officials were issuing nearly 2,000 meal tickets.⁴⁸ Mass meetings were held and speakers were sent to other Saskatchewan points to keep the issue before the public. With the rejection of the demands and the stated determination to continue to Ottawa, a delegation of strikers and citizens interviewed Premier Gardiner on June 24 to ascertain the attitude of the provincial government to the continuance of the trek. They were seeking definite commitments from Gardiner: they wanted to know if

⁴⁷Leader-Post (Regina), June 24, 1935.

⁴⁸RRIC, Exhibits, no. 133, Burgess to Hereford, June 18, 1935. Burgess gave the number of trekkers as 1,700 and on June 19 gave the number as close to 2,000. Ibid., Burgess to Hereford, June 19, 1935.

the provincial government had the power to force the railways to take the men out without instructions from the Dominion, if the government would give them financial assistance to secure transportation, and if Gardiner would agree that they had a "right" to place their grievance before the Ottawa officials.⁴⁹ Gardiner gave them no real satisfaction. He replied that the strikers "were on the way to Ottawa and the railways facilitated their movements, and should take them through."⁵⁰ Furthermore, since the government at Ottawa was instructing the police, "the only thing I can say in reply to your question as to what position the government is in here is that we are in no position to take any action."⁵¹ He requested the trekkers to discuss future plans with the government before they acted.

Even before the delegation met the federal cabinet on June 22 the feeling in Ottawa was "that the proposed negotiations may not lead to satisfactory results owing to the impossible demands made by the strikers."⁵² Officials in Regina had also concluded that discussions in Ottawa would not solve the problem.⁵³ Evans' stated determination to continue, this

⁴⁹Archives of Saskatchewan, Gardiner Papers (micro-film), p. 20413, p. 20416.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 20407.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 20412.

⁵²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 198, MacBrien to Wood, June 19, 1935.

⁵³Ibid., no. 193, Wood to MacBrien, June 18, 1935;
Ibid., no. 133, Burgess to Hereford, June 19, 1935.

time supported by the proposed national walkout, left no doubt. The failure to solve the problem in Ottawa was followed by an official announcement to the trekkers on June 25.

The agreement between Dr. Manion and the strikers terminates this evening. The Dominion Government recognizes that many of those now congregated at Regina on the "On-to-Ottawa" trek are young men who have been misled by their leaders, the majority of whom are acting and taking their directions from the Communist Bureau of Canada, with a view to upsetting constituted authority. There is, therefore, no doubt that many desire to return either to their homes, where such exist or to the Relief Camps, . . .⁵⁴

The strikers were to be provided with food and shelter in a temporary camp near Lumsden after the morning of June 26 until arrangements could be made to return them to their homes or to camps.⁵⁵ The government did not expect a rush to the camp; undoubtedly they believed that some trekkers, sufficiently concerned about being involved in possible future trouble, would go and -- more important -- when the trek funds were exhausted there would be no other choice. At the same time the officials did not feel it was merely a matter of waiting; the government was prepared: " . . . if [the] situation

⁵⁴Ibid., no. 14, June 25, 1935, Dominion Department of Labour notice to the strikers.

⁵⁵Gardiner protested immediately to Bennett "the formation of a camp in this province to maintain here marchers brought into the province from the outside and would ask the Federal government . . . to see that the marchers leave the province." Ibid., no. 40. Not only was Gardiner concerned about possible disturbances but the formation of a camp to accommodate men from outside the province would mean they might be taking advantage of employment opportunities which might better go to the people of Saskatchewan.

develops seriously on Wednesday [the] permanent force will be called out to support [the] police and [a] state of emergency [will be] declared by [the] government."⁵⁶ Wood was instructed to "put into effect [the] largest mobilization scheme [from] your own division."⁵⁷

It soon became obvious that the expectations of the government regarding the camp were right. The registration office was picketed by strikers, the intent and result of which was that on the evening of June 26 C. P. Burgess, representative of the Dominion Department of Labour, reported that no one had registered at the Grain Show Building in the Exhibition Grounds.⁵⁸ Suspicious that the camp was to be a place of detention and, what was more important, anxious that the rank and file of the trek remain together, the leaders informed the men that the camp was a "concentration camp".⁵⁹ Evans described Lumsden camp "with its barbed wire entanglement as being a place, not where we will be able to walk in there, but will be driven in."⁶⁰

⁵⁶Ibid., no. 200, MacBrien to Wood, June 24, 1935.

⁵⁷Ibid., no. 205, MacBrien to Wood, June 25, 1935.

⁵⁸Ibid., no. 133, Burgess to Hereford, June 26, 1935. In order to overcome this the strikers were informed they could go directly to the camp without registering.

⁵⁹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 13, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁰Regina Daily Star, June 27, 1935.

The loss of federal relief except at Lumsden camp threw the marchers back on their own resources.⁶¹ In an attempt to secure assistance a delegation of strikers and citizens requested the provincial government to secure the marchers against police interference while they were in the province, to finance transportation to Winnipeg and to supply food and shelter.⁶² Gardiner replied that the police were taking instructions from Ottawa, that the province could not transport them to Winnipeg and create a problem for that province as others had for Saskatchewan, and that in order to get relief as transients they must apply to the city.⁶³ After a series of trips by the delegation between civic and provincial offices in search of relief, Gardiner wired Bennett: "We would understand . . . you have taken full responsibility for these men and intend to force them into camp. We fear the result if both parties continue in [their] present attitude. Do you desire these men fed in Regina another day?"⁶⁴ Bennett replied that a camp was available and therefore there was "no reason why the province of Saskatchewan should be

⁶¹On the morning of June 26 they had about \$3,000.00. RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 9, p. 13.

⁶²Leader-Post (Regina), June 26, 1935.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴RRIC, Exhibits, no. 41, June 26, 1935.

called upon to carry [the] responsibility in connection with the feeding and care of these people."⁶⁵ Gardiner apparently hoped to keep the lines of communication with the trekkers open without taking any overt action.

By the evening of June 26 the trekkers, denied federal relief except at Lumsden camp where they refused to go, denied provincial assistance and prohibited from riding the trains, had to rely on their own funds and what assistance they could get from the public. On June 27 the next move in the conflict between the On-to-Ottawa marchers and the federal government was made as the marchers attempted to move east by highway. On his return from Ottawa Evans had arranged to have individuals in Brandon and Winnipeg provide for transportation;⁶⁶ an appeal was issued to the citizens of Regina at a mass meeting on June 26 to donate money or vehicles, while the Citizens' Emergency Committee and the strikers attempted to arrange for transportation in Regina and points outside. It was decided to begin leaving in the afternoon.

However, Wood had already received instructions that "no movement of strikers eastward is to be permitted by railway, motor cars, buses or trucks [or on foot]."⁶⁷ As

⁶⁵RRIC, Exhibits, no. 42, June 27, 1935.

⁶⁶RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 9, pp. 31-33. Evans had been informed that they had failed to secure transportation.

⁶⁷RRIC, Exhibits, no. 200, MacBrien to Wood, June 24, 1935. Ibid., no. 209, MacBrien to Wood, June 26, 1935.

vehicles drove up to the exhibition grounds, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who had been in evidence for the first time on the 26th and were seen in even larger numbers on the 27th, warned the drivers that under instructions from Ottawa they would be prosecuted and the vehicles seized if they assisted the strikers. Assistant Commissioner Wood gave the press a statement to the same effect.⁶⁸ The co-leader of the trek, Black, later claimed that thirty or forty cars and ten to fifteen trucks had arrived and departed on that afternoon.⁶⁹

Having failed in his attempt to have at least part of the trek move out, Evans decided, since the press quoted Wood as saying that any trucks carrying passengers would have to have permits, to send out a small cavalcade armed with provincial permits as a test of whether the Dominion or the province controlled the highway.⁷⁰ That evening two cars and a truck driven by Regina citizens left the city carrying some strikers. The driver of the truck had secured a provincial permit to carry passengers.⁷¹ The Royal Canadian Mounted

⁶⁸Leader-Fost (Regina), June 27, 1935.

⁶⁹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 12, p. 121.

⁷⁰Ibid., Vol. 9, pp. 47-48.

⁷¹According to the driver of the truck he had secured a permit after office hours. Ibid., Vol. 16, pp. 41-42, pp. 54-55. C. N. Dunn, Minister of Highways, in a press statement declared that no instructions had been issued to keep the office open and that instructions had been issued

Police stopped the vehicles on the outskirts of the city; six men were arrested, including Rev. S. B. East who was released almost immediately.⁷² Wood had been informed prior to the attempted departure of the trekkers that "the government is taking action under [the] Relief Measures Act declaring a national emergency. . . . This will protect you against such action and seizures which you consider it necessary to take with regard to [the] present situation affecting [the] camp

that no permits were to be given. Regina Daily Star, June 27, 1935.

The person in charge of the office in another press statement supported Dunn's contention but added that the clerk who had issued two permits had not realized the significance of his action since the applicants had commercial licences and could carry passengers without a permit. When the applicants insisted upon permits he issued them. He also said it was not unusual for the office to be open after hours.

Ibid., June 28, 1935.

T. C. Davis had already questioned Wood on what Ottawa intended to do if the trek decided to leave by the highway. RRIC, Exhibits, no. 212, Davis to Wood, June 25, 1935. He had been informed that the federal government was considering declaring a national emergency if necessary to stop the movement.

Ibid., no. 213, Wood to Davis, June, 26, 1935. Such a "national emergency" would supersede a provincial permit. Either the provincial officials were involved in mistakes made by clerks as they claimed or they were acting, as they had always acted, of not putting obstacles in the way of the trekkers' departure without actively assisting them.

⁷²Three strikers and two citizens of Regina acting as drivers were arrested and were later charged under section 98 of the Criminal Code; later the charges against the drivers were withdrawn.

strikers in Regina."⁷³ It was under this authority that he acted.

By the evening of June 27 the strikers who had been denied any government relief except at the Lumsden camp and who were now prohibited from leaving Regina by any means were dependent on their own fast-dwindling resources. How long they could carry on depended upon the assistance they received from the public. Relying on public support, the strikers decided to set up a camp of their own from which to carry on the struggle. Assistance by the public was diminished as a result of a notice given to the press by Wood warning the citizens of Regina and the province that they were open to prosecution if they aided the strikers.⁷⁴ The press report also included the information that the warning was issued under the emergency order-in-council which had forced the police to stop the trekkers leaving Regina the evening before. This warning also appeared in the July 29 editions of the

⁷³RRIC, Exhibits, no. 47, MacBrien to Wood, June 27, 1935. The Relief Measures Act properly titled the Relief Act provided: 3 In addition to the powers conferred under the provisions of any statute or law the Governor in Council may, when Parliament is not in session, take all such measures as in his discretion may be deemed advisable to maintain, within the competence of Parliament, peace, order and good government throughout Canada; . . . Statutes of Canada, 1935, 25-26 George V, c. 13. The Unemployment and Farm Relief Act, 1931 and the Relief Acts of 1933 and 1934 also contained a "peace, order and good government clause."

⁷⁴RRIC, Exhibits, no. 218, Wood to MacBrien, June 28, 1935; Leader-Post (Regina), June 28, 1935; Regina Daily Star, June 28, 1935.

Leader-Post and the Regina Daily Star.

Assistant Commissioner Wood later explained that the warning applied only to assistance in setting up an outside camp,⁷⁵ but, in effect, it prohibited any assistance at all. By June 29 the effects of the threat of prosecution were being felt. The Citizens' Emergency Committee reported that a canvass of Regina homes for food had been unsuccessful.⁷⁶ The Citizens' Emergency Committee had already had on June 25 a heated debate on whether or not to issue a press statement declaring that they favored only constitutional means in supporting the trekkers.⁷⁷ On the 29th all except one of the Trades and Labor Council members withdrew from the Committee in the face of the government order forbidding assistance.⁷⁸ Although the warning issued by Wood had a definite effect on aid rendered to the strikers, it only speeded up a process. It was unlikely the strikers would have been able to maintain themselves for any length of time. They had already discovered in Vancouver that support from citizens could not last forever. But the trek had left Vancouver; it could not leave Regina.

The emergency order-in-council was never passed since Parliament was in session until July 5. Wood was not informed that the order-in-council had not come into effect. However,

⁷⁵RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 37, pp. 79-80.

⁷⁶Regina Daily Star, June 29, 1935.

⁷⁷Leader-Post (Regina), June 26, 1935.

⁷⁸Regina Daily Star, June 29, 1935.

since on June 27 he had asked MacBrien to "request [the] necessary government action immediately to declare [the] camp strikers in Saskatchewan an unlawful association within the meaning of section ninety-eight,"⁷⁹ and since on June 28 he was informed that the government was going to proceed against those already arrested and against the other leaders who were to be arrested under section 98,⁸⁰ he probably assumed that the federal government considered the strikers an unlawful association and that he, therefore, was justified in warning the public not to assist the strikers in any way.⁸¹ Although Wood had not been instructed by the Commissioner to issue a warning to the public, he did inform the Commissioner that he had done so.⁸² Apparently, however, the action taken by Wood was unknown to the minister responsible for the Force who declared that "no instructions have been issued to prevent

⁷⁹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 214, Wood to MacBrien, June 27, 1935.

⁸⁰Ibid., no. 216, MacBrien to Wood, June 28, 1935.

⁸¹Section 98 of the Criminal Code defined an unlawful association as any association whose purpose was "to bring about any governmental, industrial or economic change within Canada," by the use of force or violence or which "teaches, advocates, advises or defends" the use of force or violence to accomplish such changes. An officer or a member was liable to imprisonment for twenty years. An individual, in the event of prosecution, was presumed "in the absence of proof to the contrary" to be a member of such an unlawful association if it was proved that he had attended meetings of an unlawful association, spoken publicly in support of the association, or distributed literature for the association. Revised Statutes of Canada, 1927.

⁸²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 218, Wood to MacBrien, June 28, 1935.

persons rendering assistance to [the] marchers by way of food or otherwise"⁸³ in reply to a query from the Attorney General of Saskatchewan.

Meanwhile several conferences were taking place between Evans and the provincial government. While the strikers were attempting to organize their own camp on June 28, Gardiner, who had learned from the Assistant Commissioner the instructions in connection with the emergency order-in-council, initiated a meeting with a strikers' delegation.⁸⁴ Gardiner, who feared that the strikers would remain in the province and add to the unemployment problem and that the actions of the federal government and the strikers were going to result in a disturbance, for the first time suggested to Evans that the On-to-Ottawa march be discontinued. He proposed that the men go to Lumsden camp while the provincial and federal governments settled the constitutional problem. If they would go to Lumsden camp and not leave without consulting the provincial government, Gardiner would insist that they be allowed to keep their organization intact and he would ascertain that nothing of a military nature existed in the camp. When the differences were settled with Ottawa, Gardiner would insist that the men be removed from the province at the expense of the federal government.⁸⁵ Evans refused this and instead

⁸³RRIC, Exhibits, no. 75, Guthrie to Davis, June 29, 1935.

⁸⁴RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 4, pp. 122-123.

⁸⁵Regina Daily Star, July 2, 1935.

proposed on June 29 that the men set up a camp with provincial assistance. Gardiner explained he could not do this because if the officials at Ottawa were proceeding under section 98 in dealing with persons from outside the province, a power given to them by the Parliament of Canada, he could not interfere. Also, and this was probably more important to Gardiner, the matter was between the strikers and the federal government and the provincial government "did not intend to adopt 1,800 men mostly from outside the province as our special care".⁸⁶ Evans was becoming disgusted with the provincial government and voiced his irritation in his usual graphic manner; "Gardiner like a spineless jelly fish is accepting this [violation of provincial rights]."⁸⁷

After the flurry of activity on June 27, the next two days were quiet but tension-ridden. Would the trekkers force their way out of Regina or would they abandon the attempt to get to Ottawa? On June 29 Wood reported that the "strikers acknowledge the hopelessness of their intention to proceed. [There is] dissension in [the] ranks and [there are] prospects of disintegration shortly."⁸⁸ He was partially right, although "disintegration" proved to be too optimistic a word. On June

⁸⁶Regina Daily Star, July 2, 1935.

⁸⁷Ibid., June 29, 1935.

⁸⁸RRIC, Exhibits, Wood to MacBrien, June 29, 1935. Burgess had come to the same conclusion. Ibid., no. 133, Burgess to Hereford, June 30, 1935.

30 the strike committee discussed "the best method of retreat".⁸⁹ Because their funds were exhausted and because they believed that sufficient public agitation had been aroused to ensure some results, Evans initiated a series of meetings on July 1. Evans asked C. P. Burgess, the representative of the Dominion government, to call a meeting of the strikers' delegation, officials of the provincial government and Burgess. When Burgess refused to have officials of the provincial government present, Evans arranged to meet Burgess and provincial ministers separately. Evans met Burgess and proposed that the strikers disband from Regina under their own organization to the places where the strikers had joined the trek and that all, except Evans, be exempt from prosecution.⁹⁰ After consulting with his superior in Ottawa Burgess rejected the proposal and insisted that the men go to Lumsden or Dundurn as a place of disbandment for those wishing to return home.⁹¹ The federal government, inasmuch as the trouble on the waterfront in Vancouver was still serious, did not want the strikers to arrive back in Vancouver as a highly organized unit, but planned instead to break up the organization and send the men back in small groups over a period of time.⁹² Evans and the other leaders, on the other hand, while they had reached the end of

⁸⁹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 9, p. 10.

⁹⁰RRIC, Exhibits, no. 244, notes of a meeting between Burgess and a delegation of Camp strikers.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 238, MacBrien to Wood, July 3, 1935.

their resources and were prepared for a strategic retreat, were not prepared for an ignominious defeat, which is what dispersion at Lumsden under the federal government symbolized to them. Also, as Evans' request for exemptions from prosecutions indicated, the strikers were suspicious of the intentions of the federal government in insisting that the marchers go to Lumsden.

Evans had arranged to meet Gardiner at five o'clock when he explained that the proposed retreat of the trekkers under their own organization had been rejected, but that the trekkers were willing to be dispersed by the provincial government.⁹³ While the provincial cabinet discussed the proposal a riot broke out on Market Square.

⁹³Regina Daily Star, July 2, 1935.

CHAPTER IV

THE RIOT AND THE DISBANDMENT OF THE TREK

On July 1, the day the negotiations between the delegation of strikers led by Evans and the representative of the federal government failed, preparations were made to arrest the leaders. On June 28 Assistant Commissioner Wood and F. B. Bagshaw, counsel for the Dominion government, had been informed that the government wished to proceed under section 98 of the Criminal Code against the strike leaders. Wood advised the Commissioner that the actions of the leaders since they had entered the province did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant arrest;¹ it was necessary to await the arrival of documents from Alberta and British Columbia and the arrival of Sergeant Leopold² of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with documents from Ottawa. On July 1, when Wood returned from the fruitless meeting with the marchers, he was informed by Bagshaw, who, along with E. C. Leslie and Sergeant Leopold, had spent the day going over the material, that there was sufficient evidence to issue warrants for the arrest of seven leaders, including Evans and Black, and to charge them with

¹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 37, p. 75.

²Sergeant Leopold as an undercover man for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had become a member of the Communist Party 1921-1928, and had been the chief crown witness in the trials in 1931 when Tim Buck and others had been tried under Section 98 of the Criminal Code.

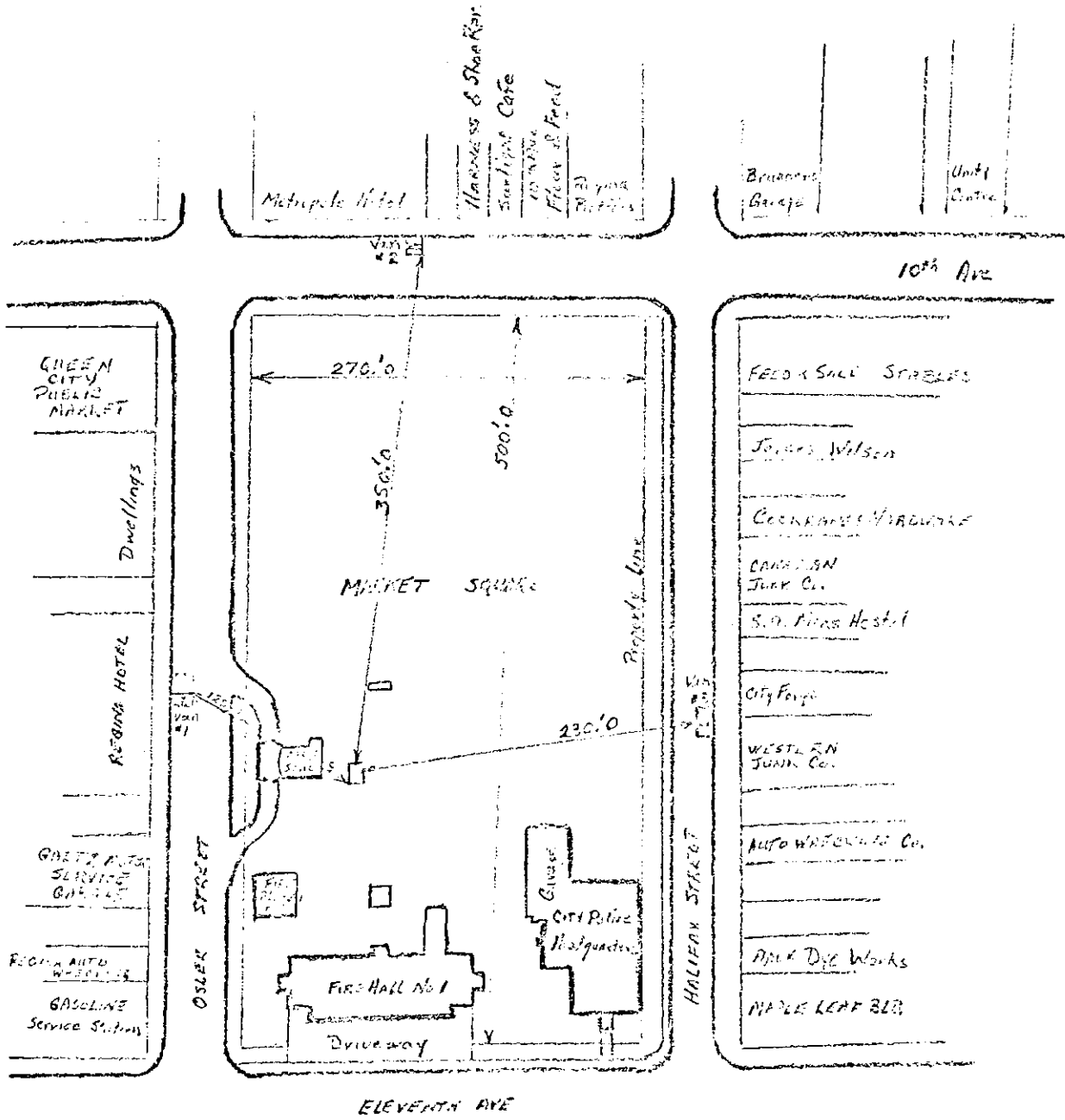
being members of an unlawful association. The warrants were issued at six o'clock.³ In devising their plans Wood and other members of the Force decided against making the arrests at the stadium because of the probability of determined resistance by the strikers and because Evans did not live there. It was decided that Unity Centre, often used as a meeting place by the leaders, would be the best place, since the leaders would be away from the main body of the men. If, however, the police were unable to arrest the leaders there, it was decided, since prompt action was necessary, to do so at Market Square where a public meeting was to be held that evening.⁴ The warrants were to be executed by plainclothesmen stationed on the Square near the speakers' platform; to protect them and to forestall any attempt to rescue the arrested leaders, vans, each of which concealed twenty-five Royal Canadian Mounted Police, were to be drawn up on three sides of the Square and on the fourth side where the city police station was located members of that force were to be ready behind the closed doors of the garage.⁵ At a signal from a whistle the men were to be arrested and the police in the vans were to step out and be prepared to converge on the platform if it became necessary;⁶

³RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 37, p. 106.

⁴Ibid., Vol. 37, pp. 107-110.

⁵See map p. 81.

⁶Ibid., Vol. 37, p. 124.



Sketch of Market Square, Regina

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some confusion in instructions led the city police to believe that the whistle was meant to signal an immediate move to the platform.⁷ As a further precaution a mounted troop of thirty-five was to stand by a block away at Osler and Twelfth Avenue. The plainclothesmen detailed to watch Unity Centre reported that the leaders were not there and it was decided to go ahead with the plans to arrest the men at Market Square.⁸

At eight o'clock on the fateful evening of July 1 a crowd began to gather in the area of the speakers' platform; most of the crowd was facing south in the general direction of the city police station. There were 1,500 to 2,000 people, of whom only 200 or 300 were strikers; the rest of the strikers, who by this time could find nothing new in a mass meeting and who remained close to their quarters in case they were evicted in their absence,⁹ were at the Exhibition Grounds watching a ball game. When the vans arrived at 8:13 they were recognized by several strikers, including Evans and Black, as the same kind used by the Mounted Police on June 27 on the outskirts of the city.¹⁰ The inspectors in the vans on Tenth Avenue and on Halifax Street, each believing that he heard the

⁷RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 46, p. 126. In view of the claim by Wood that the whistle was a signal for the police to stand ready and the claim by Bruton that his instructions were to move immediately to the platform, apparently the instructions were misunderstood.

⁸Ibid., Vol. 41, p. 61. ⁹Ibid., Vol. 13, p. 51.

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. 27, p. 39, Vol. 26, pp. 75-77.

whistle, lined their men up facing the Square.¹¹

At 8:17 the whistle to signal the arrests was blown from near the platform; Evans and Black jumped from the platform and were taken into custody and escorted from the Square by the waiting plainclothesmen. Although the arrests had been successfully carried out,¹² the whistle set into motion other events known as the Regina Riot. At 8:17 the garage doors of the city police station opened and on the double the city policemen converged on the platform; the crowd rushed off the square in all directions, but mainly to the west, to Osler Street. One newspaper described it in the following words:

A whistle blew. The four doors of the city garage at the rear of the headquarters building, not 100 feet from the speakers stand, swung upward with a clatter and blue uniformed, helmeted constables, as well as plainclothes officers, rushed out, waving "baseball bat" batons overhead. People began to run.¹³

At the same time the Mounted Police began to move. The Inspector in charge of the troop on Halifax Street began to advance onto the Square where the troop met resistance from individuals in a hand to hand struggle; the troop never reached the platform.¹⁴ The troop at the north side of the Square was stoned

¹¹Ibid., Vol. 42, p. 60, Vol. 43, p. 39.

¹²These were the only two out of the seven warrants issued that were executed on Market Square; later one other striker was arrested.

¹³Regina Daily Star, July 2, 1935. The "baseball bat" batons, cut down children's bats which had never been used before, had been added to the equipment in 1931 after a disturbance which the city police had had to quell led the Chief Constable to the conclusion that the ordinary billies were inadequate. RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 42, p. 62.

¹⁴RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 42, p. 62.

from behind as it advanced¹⁵ and the troop on the west side, which had left the van when the whistle blew, was passed by fleeing streams of people. In a short time the Square was virtually cleared of people except for a few citizens and strikers who, empty handed or armed with clubs of fence poles or tools which were on the Square,¹⁶ battled with the police, especially on the eastern side of the Square. But some of the strikers and some citizens who had left the Square returned with bricks and stones with which they attacked the police; the police dispersed these sallies with charges and one officer said they had driven the attackers back five or six times. Reinforcements were sent for and by the time the mounted troop stationed at Osler and Twelfth arrived at approximately 8:30 the police were in control of the Square. The mounted troop along with others cleared the streets around the Square of the missile throwers.¹⁷

While the police gained control of the area of the Square the rioting spilled out into the streets of Regina, especially on Eleventh Avenue west of the original disturbance.¹⁸

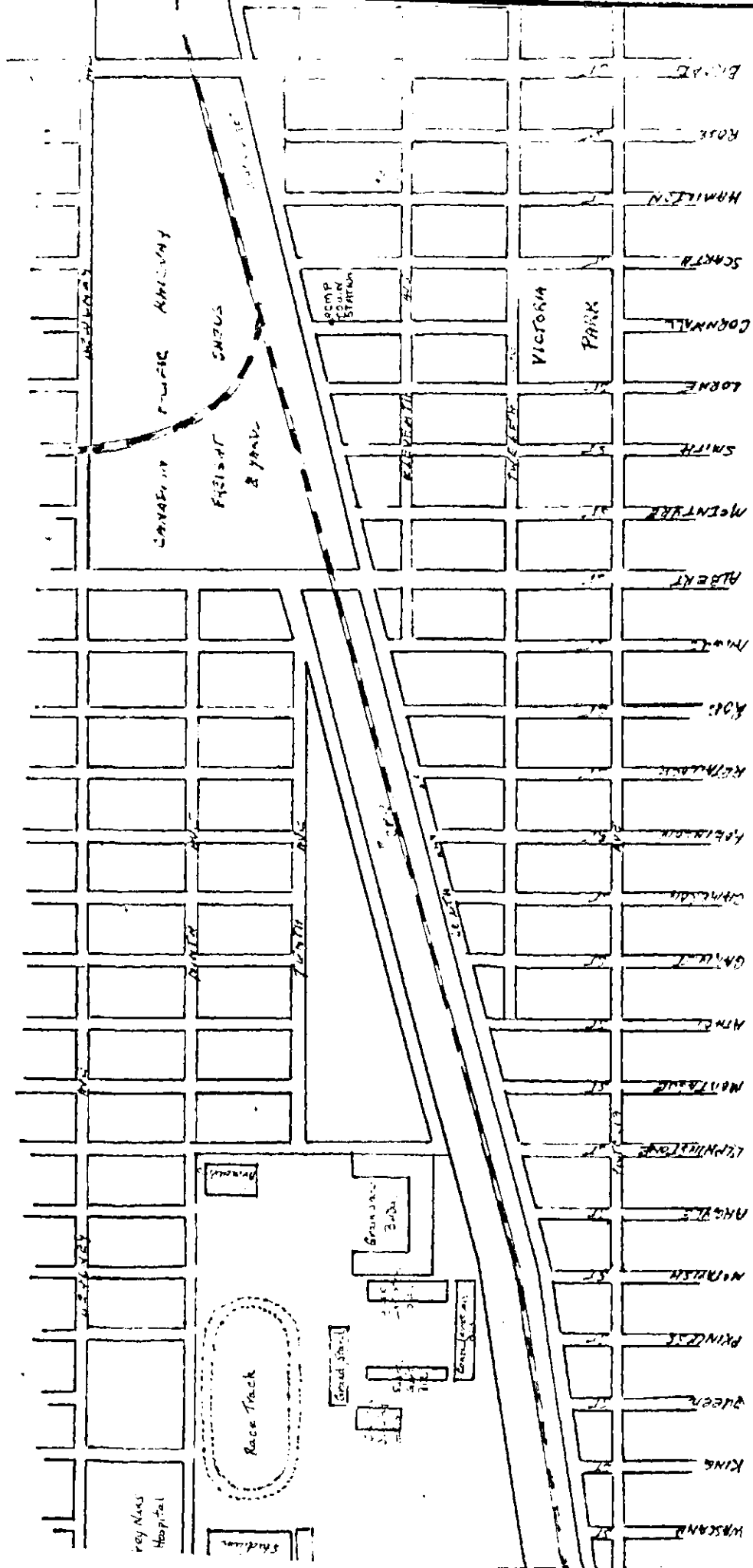
* The frustration created by the failures of the preceding days turned into an onslaught upon the police. Strikers aided by some citizens threw bricks, stones and pieces of iron from

¹⁵Ibid., Vol. 43, p. 45.

¹⁶Ibid., Vol. 43, p. 41.

¹⁷Ibid., Vol. 41, p. 17.

¹⁸See map p. 85.



Sketch of Part of the City of Regina

RRIC, Report, Vol. II

the street or dropped them from the tops of buildings. When the rioters were dispersed they moved into lanes off the street to restock their "ammunition" and returned to continue the battle from behind crowds of people who congregated on the sidewalks, and then vanished to re-appear at a new location. At times the strikers hurled missiles from behind barricades of cars which they had pushed across the street or from behind stalled street cars. Although evidence was given later concerning supposed caches of missiles,¹⁹ the marchers had been in Regina long enough to be familiar with the area and there was sufficient construction and repair work being done to provide an ample supply.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, whose complement totalled about 300 on the night of July 1, were almost all involved in breaking up the riot. About 160 were stationed in the city before the trouble erupted;²⁰ when the riot spread out into the streets Assistant Commissioner Wood ordered all the reserves sent from the barracks.²¹ The police, hampered by the short reach of batons against flying missiles, found it difficult to break up the riot. They were also hindered by the crowds milling about, behind which rioters took refuge; some of the people had been on the Square or in the area,

¹⁹ERIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 28, pp. 117-118, Vol. 32, pp. 104-105.

²⁰Ibid., Vol. 41, p. 11.

²¹Ibid., Vol. 38, p. 4.

while others, learning of the fracas in the centre of the city, could not resist the human impulse to rush to the scene. The most effective means employed to disperse the rioters was the mounted troop; tear gas grenades were also used but these were sometimes picked up and thrown back into the midst of the police. Besides the constant ebb and flow of rioting, a sustained attack was made shortly after 8:30 on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police town station located on Cornwall Street north of Eleventh Avenue.²² Rioters, apparently in an attempt to rescue the prisoners, collected behind a barricade of cars and hurled bricks and rocks at the twenty officers guarding the station. The troop of officers several times advanced toward the rioters to disperse them but were driven back; the use of eighteen tear gas grenades²³ over a period of time failed to disperse the mob. Eventually the officer in charge when "it appeared that we would not be able to hold our ground . . . against what appeared to be several hundred [rioters] . . ." ²⁴ fired one shot directly over their heads and when they advanced again he fired five shots over their heads. Finally a mounted troop cleared the intersection at Cornwall and Eleventh.

²²RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 36, p. 23, see map, p. 85.

²³Ibid., Vol. 36, p. 30.

²⁴Ibid., Vol. 36, p. 28.

When the trouble on the Square was almost over reports of an attempted break into a hardware store came in. A group of city police left the Square to investigate. Moving from there to Scarth and Twelfth they found a crowd assembled. Inspector McDougall later described the scene:

The crowd that was on the intersection of Scarth and Twelfth advanced towards us heaving those bricks or whatever missiles they had at us. . . . I would estimate [that crowd was] three hundred or a little better than 300 men.²⁵

When the crowd rushed forward the police fell back a few paces and Inspector McDougall ordered the officers to fire in the air; the mob broke and ran. Moving north to Eleventh and Scarth, the police were rushed by a group of two or three hundred;²⁶ McDougall, because he thought "that every man [he] had there was liable to be killed"²⁷ ordered shots fired, not into the air, but down the street; several were wounded. In justifying the firing Chief Constable Bruton said:

The City Police did not fire until they were charged by at least 400 strikers near Scarth Street on Eleventh Avenue. There our men bore the brunt of the bitterest fight and it is my belief every policeman there would have been killed if they had not used their firearms. They fired at the strikers, not over their heads, and they fired volley after volley.²⁸

²⁵RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 47, p. 18.

²⁶Ibid., Vol. 47, p. 25. It was approximately 10:00 p.m. Ibid., Vol. 47, p. 29.

²⁷Ibid., Vol. 47, p. 26.

²⁸Regina Daily Star, July 2, 1935.

Apparently the action was the climax of the riot; the reports that came to Wood after this incident indicated that the rioting was abating and that the strikers were returning to the Exhibition Grounds.²⁹ At midnight Wood informed the Commissioner that the "situation [was] quiet".³⁰ After the rioting ceased a police guard was placed around the stadium to prevent anyone from entering or leaving because Wood had received word that the strikers intended reprisals.³¹ On the other hand some strikers later said that the two hundred clubs removed from the buildings after the trekkers left Regina were made on the night of July 1 because they feared an attack by the police.³²

As a result of the riot thousands of dollars of damage had been done, mainly to plate glass windows, cars and street cars. One city policeman, Detective Charles Millar, was clubbed to death on Market Square shortly after the riot began. According to hospital records 39 Royal Canadian Mounted Police, four city policemen and 39 strikers and citizens (twelve strikers and four citizens from bullet wounds) were hospitalized.³³ Although over a hundred were arrested in connection with the riot, only eight were convicted on various charges

²⁹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 38, p. 10.

³⁰RRIC, Exhibits, no. 234, Wood to MacBrien, July 1, 1935.

³¹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 38, p. 9.

³²Ibid., Vol. 51, pp. 130-151.

³³RRIC, Exhibits, no. 243, no. 267, no. 268.

of rioting, unlawfully wounding and assault and were sentenced to terms ranging from seven to fifteen months; six of the cases went to the Court of Appeals but the appeals were dismissed.³⁴ Eight others, including those arrested on the night of June 27, were charged under section 98 of the Criminal Code with being members of an unlawful association. The charges against the two citizens, who had been the drivers of the vehicles carrying some strikers out of the city on June 27, were withdrawn.³⁵ One striker was released at the preliminary hearing. The remaining five, Evans, trek leader, Black, co-leader, Cosgrove, trek marshall, Shaw, who had left for a speaking tour in Ontario before the riot and who was returned from there early in July, and E. Edwards, a striker, were committed for trial at the preliminary hearings in July and allowed out on bail. The six were charged with being members of an unlawful association, the Relief Camp Workers' Union, and Black, Cosgrove, Evans and Shaw were also charged with being officers of the same association. In addition Cosgrove was charged with being a member of another unlawful association, the Workers' Unity League, and Evans was charged with being a member of still another, the Communist Party of Canada.³⁶ Early in 1936 the Attorney General of Saskatchewan, T. C. Davis, announced that the charges against the five leaders

³⁴RRIC, Evidence and Trials; RRIC, Appeals: Record of Evidence.

³⁵RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 41, p. 20.

³⁶RRIC, Preliminary Hearings.

had been dropped because there was not enough evidence to warrant proceeding with the charges.³⁷

The problem of disbanding the trek remained. Gardiner, who had been discussing with others of the cabinet Evans' proposals for disbandment under the provincial government when the riot broke out, was spurred by the event to take a more decided stand than he had previously. On the one hand the Premier wanted to make an arrangement with the marchers to disperse and on the other to secure the agreement of the federal government to the provincial government's assuming control. The situation had changed; the trekkers were now confined to the Exhibition Grounds under police guard and were offered relief only at the Lumsden camp³⁸ which Gardiner believed would "end in a worse riot than last night".³⁹ He considered this was no time for proposals and counter proposals; he assumed control and the federal government acquiesced. Gardiner asked to be informed within two hours if the federal government was going to grant relief to these men and what the plans for disbandment were.⁴⁰ Before he heard from the Prime Minister, Gardiner arranged to have the men fed coffee and

³⁷Castell Hopkins, ed., The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, Toronto, The Canadian Review Company Limited, 1935-1936, p. 314. (hereafter cited as Canadian Annual Review)

³⁸RRIC, Exhibits, no. 51, Bennett to Gardiner, July 2, 1935.

³⁹Ibid., no. 50, Gardiner to Bennett, July 2, 1935.

⁴⁰Ibid.

sandwiches at the Exhibition Grounds.⁴¹ On July 4 on instructions from the Attorney General the police allowed the strikers to leave the Exhibition Grounds and the men were provided with meals in the city restaurants by the provincial government.

At the same time Gardiner completed arrangements with the marchers for disbandment. The provincial government was prepared to provide -- no doubt was eager to provide -- transportation for the men to the cities where they had joined the trek or to their homes, and to provide them with food and shelter in Regina until they left.⁴² During the negotiations it was obvious that the trekkers, although they had lost some of their leaders, were suspicious of the outcome and were not yet ready to dissolve the organization. The provincial government assured the delegation of strikers that the whole group would be given train tickets and would not be prevented from going to their destination, that the men in the hospitals would get adequate medical attention and be provided with transportation when they were discharged, that the men charged with offences would receive the same assistance from the government as any other individual and that those under arrest who were likely to be released shortly would be sent to their homes.⁴³ After the trekkers were satisfied the men registered,

⁴¹Bennett replied later that the federal government was willing to feed the men at Lumsden camp, but he concluded "of course we have no intention of interfering with any action you may decide to take that does not involve these men in violation of the laws of the country. RRIC, Exhibits, no. 51, Bennett to Gardiner, July 2, 1935.

⁴²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 81.

⁴³Ibid., no. 82, memorandum from T. C. Davis to a committee of five of the strikers, July 4.

giving the place to which they wished transportation, during the evening of July 4. At noon the next day two special trains, a Canadian National and a Canadian Pacific, left Regina carrying the trekkers westward; there were 724 bound for Vancouver, 160 for Alberta points and 170 to 200 for various places in Saskatchewan.⁴⁴

The news that the strikers were being sent west had prompted Acting Premier Hart of British Columbia to protest Gardiner's action in sending the men back to British Columbia. He suggested that the strikers be sent only as far as Kamloops, that no more than 500 be dispatched every two days and that a detachment of police accompany the men to see that more transients did not board the trains. Hart was concerned that the return of the marchers would aggravate the waterfront strike situation.⁴⁵ The government of British Columbia planned to send the men to various camps when they arrived in Kamloops.⁴⁶ However, the relief camp workers with tickets to Vancouver returned to that city⁴⁷ and began to file applications for

⁴⁴The Regina Daily Star, July 5, 1935. Many trekkers had not returned to their quarters the evening of the riot; this accounts for the disparity in numbers between those present in Regina and those leaving. There were also others being sent east on regular passenger trains and some who came from the Regina area.

⁴⁵Gardiner Papers, Unemployment File ("On-to-Ottawa" Trek), Hart to Gardiner, July 4, 1935.

⁴⁶Leader-Post, July 6, 1935. ⁴⁷Ibid., July 8, 1935.

admission to the camps.⁴⁸ The "On-to-Ottawa" march was over.⁴⁹

Although Evans was no longer with the strikers, his proposals of July 1 for a strategic retreat had become in fact the method of dispersal. The federal government had suggested -- it no longer insisted -- that the provincial government break up the marchers' organization as much as possible and that the men be sent to camps rather than to Vancouver.⁵⁰ But under the auspices of the provincial government the organization was not broken up and many of the trekkers returned to Vancouver.

The constitutional conflict which had begun with the federal order to stop the men in Regina was also over. Gardiner's assumption of the direction of the situation in granting relief and disbanding the men and the Prime Minister's

⁴⁸Leader-Post, July 9, 1935.

⁴⁹Approximately 1,500 strikers had gathered in Winnipeg in anticipation of joining the men from Regina if they succeeded in leaving that city. After July 1 about 500 of the Winnipeg contingent went by chartered bus to the Manitoba border and then by foot the 35 miles to Kenora, Ontario. Eventually they accepted the Ontario government's offer to pay their fares back to Winnipeg where the Manitoba government provided relief for two days. The strikers then returned to the camps or their homes or found employment. A delegation was sent by the Winnipeg group to Ottawa with demands similar to those of the Regina group. Acting Prime Minister Perley told the delegation he had nothing further to add to what the Prime Minister had said to Evans.

⁵⁰ERIC, Exhibits, no. 238, MacBrien to Wood, July 3, 1935, no. 239, Wood to Davis, July 3, 1935.

wire informing Gardiner that the Dominion government "had no intention of interfering with any action you may decide to take . . . "⁵¹ removed the participation of the federal authorities. This meant that Assistant Commissioner Wood from July 2 took instructions from the Attorney General on matters relating to the trekkers. In connection with the removal of the police guard around the Exhibition Grounds Davis stated the position of the government explicitly when he informed Wood that "it is the desire of the government that the men be permitted . . . [to have meals in the city restaurants] and you are hereby instructed accordingly."⁵²

The constitutional conflict was ended, but it was not solved. In a further exchange of telegrams the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice each maintained the correctness of his position.⁵³ The dispute was precipitated by one event -- the sudden decision of the federal government to stop a large body of men in Saskatchewan. The altered circumstances following the riot led Gardiner to take a decided stand and caused the federal government, apparently at a loss as to what step to take next, to withdraw in the face of action by the provincial government. The dispute disappeared with

⁵¹ERIC, Exhibits, no. 51, Bennett to Gardiner, July 2, 1935.

⁵²Ibid., no. 80, Davis to Wood, July 4, 1935.

⁵³Ibid., no. 78, Davis to Guthrie, July 2, 1935, no. 79, Guthrie to Davis, July 3, 1935.

the disappearance of the event which had created it.

On July 1, before the arrest of the leaders and the outbreak of the riot, the strikers had been engaged in negotiations with the federal and provincial governments and the police had made preparations to arrest the leaders. Assistant Commissioner Wood did not know that the strikers' delegation was to meet with the provincial cabinet after the meeting with federal representatives.⁵⁴ The provincial government was not aware of the plan to arrest the leaders on Market Square,⁵⁵ although the Deputy Attorney General had inquired if Wood contemplated any action that day.⁵⁶ Had the provincial government and the Assistant Commissioner each known what the other was planning would events have followed a different course? Could Gardiner act? The Premier, as long as the federal government was in command and the Assistant Commissioner taking instructions from Ottawa, was not in a position to end the trek or to issue instructions relating to it. Therefore, if Gardiner had been able to request that no further action be taken until

⁵⁴RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 38, pp. 17-18, Vol. 4, p. 179.

⁵⁵RRIC, Exhibits, no. 48, Gardiner to Bennett, July 1, 1935.

⁵⁶RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 6, p. 38. At that time the Assistant Commissioner knew counsel were going over the evidence, but he did not know when or if warrants would be sworn out. Wood, who was taking his instructions from Ottawa, was under no obligation to inform the provincial government and he probably believed the fewer who knew of the decision to carry out arrests the better.

the cabinet met the strikers, the only possible gain would have been time for further discussions and this only if the federal government believed that further talks would accomplish some good or at least not make the situation more critical. However, the federal government had the strikers' proposals; the ministers were unlikely to think that Premier Gardiner would be able to induce the strikers to modify their demands so that they would be acceptable to Ottawa. On the other hand the Assistant Commissioner was under instructions from Ottawa to arrest the leaders; only with further advice from the same source would he have been able to await the outcome of a meeting between the provincial cabinet and the strikers, had he known such was about to take place. If, however, Wood felt that he could decide without reference to Ottawa to wait while these discussions took place, it was unlikely he would have done so; he knew the strikers' proposals and the decision of the federal government regarding them. The provincial government disbanded the march and was permitted to do so by the federal government after July 1; it cannot be assumed that these results might have occurred on July 1 had the provincial government known of the plan to arrest the leaders and had the Assistant Commissioner known of the negotiations between the strikers and the provincial government.

What turned the meeting on Market Square into a riot? The meeting was quiet and orderly when the convergence of the police precipitated the riot. The movement of the police

when the whistle blew resulted in immediate resistance by some; the Inspector on Halifax Street who had previously lined his men up outside the van moved only to the edge of the Square before he and his men were involved in a hand to hand struggle with the strikers. Later when witnesses gave estimates of the time that had elapsed between the whistle and the throwing of rocks the answers varied from immediately to a few minutes. This did not necessarily mean that the strikers came armed to the Square. Since this was one more in a series of similar mass meetings in Regina it would then seem that the strikers were armed at all the meetings; there was no indication that they had been. If this meeting was different from the others it would be because the strikers had discovered the plans of the police. There was no indication that they had and they had little time in which to learn of the plan to arrest the leaders. Whether the stones were picked up from the Square, collected in the first rush from the Square or even if some came to the Square with stones, it was clear that the trouble on Market Square came quickly after the whistle. The speed of this resistance was indicative of the readiness of the strikers to battle with the police when they took action, as had already occurred in Vancouver. The speed of the resistance was also partly the result of the premature descent of the police from two vans, more particularly the one on Halifax Street, which alerted the strikers to impending police action.

In view of the consequences why had S. T. Wood decided to arrest the leaders at a public meeting? Was he prepared for a showdown? There was no doubt that Wood was prepared from June 14 to deal firmly with the strikers when the situation called for it. At certain times and under certain circumstances he foresaw the possibility that incidents would arise when the police would necessarily have to act without hesitation. On June 17, when Wood drew up plans to deal with the strikers should they attempt to board a train, he arranged to have the evening freight train cancelled. The strikers were to be allowed to board a train in the morning and were to be taken to the first siding outside the city where they would be removed from the train; "the advantage of such action . . . would of necessity have prevented any clash within the City Limits."⁵⁷ When the strikers were offered relief only at Lumsden camp he expected few would register.

Sooner or later [he wrote] there will be a demonstration in front of Mr. Burgess' office which will bring about Police action. The situation is suitable for our purposes in that it is opposite the armouries and there is a large open space in all directions surrounding the building where we could use mounted men to advantage. Following any such clash between the police and the strikers, I anticipate there will be a movement then toward voluntary registration and dispersion.⁵⁸

These plans for action in which Wood foresaw the possibility

⁵⁷RRIC, Exhibits, no. 193, Wood to MacBrien, June 18, 1935.

⁵⁸Ibid., no. 206, Wood to MacBrien, June 25, 1935. Burgess' office was in the Exhibition Grounds.

of a clash were made in anticipation of a movement by the strikers and action being taken away from places where the public gathered. On the other hand

should they [demand free meals, undertake nuisance parades in the stores or otherwise make themselves obnoxious in the city] we will have to support the city police and endeavour to handle the situation as best we can.⁵⁹

But while Wood was prepared to act decisively, in view of the fact that the arrests were to be made at a public meeting and of his handling of the situation for over two weeks, there was little reason to indicate that he was prepared for a showdown.

Assistant Commissioner Wood felt that prompt action was necessary because he was under instructions from Ottawa and the Commissioner had inquired the day before if the arrests had been carried out;⁶⁰ when they could not be made at Unity Centre it was decided to proceed with the alternate plan. Presumably, however, the Assistant Commissioner had some discretion as to the method to effect the arrests and the anxiety of his superior officer would hardly be sufficient to hurry him into an ill-conceived plan. His major reason for prompt action was to effect the removal of the

⁵⁹RRIC, Exhibits, no. 206, Wood to MacBrien, June 25, 1935.

⁶⁰RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 37, p. 96.

Strategy Committee of the strikers which was directing the movements of the marchers.⁶¹ Wood believed this was essential because confidential information⁶² sent to him indicated that at a mass meeting of strikers on July 1 Black had warned the men to be ready at all times as trouble was imminent.⁶³ This information confirmed Wood's apprehension that the strikers, since their cause was lost, had nothing to lose by demonstrations which would necessitate police action and lead to disturbances.⁶⁴ Furthermore the resources of the marchers were exhausted and Wood believed this would lead to incidents similar to those that had taken place in Vancouver and Calgary.⁶⁵

The decision that prompt action was necessary appeared to belie Wood's advice to the Commissioner on June 29 that he expected the strikers' organization to disintegrate shortly and it also appeared to ignore a new development -- that Evans had himself proposed on July 1 that the trekkers disband. But Evans' insistence that the trek disband on his

⁶¹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 37, p. 115.

⁶²There had been two Royal Canadian Mounted Police constables who had joined the trek in Saskatchewan as undercover men. Although they had left the marchers prior to July 1, Wood had other sources of information.

⁶³RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 37, p. 107, p. 113. Black later denied he had made this statement. Ibid., Vol. 26, p. 99.

⁶⁴Ibid., Vol. 37, pp. 112-113. ⁶⁵Ibid., Vol. 37, p. 114

terms apparently convinced Wood that "disintegration" was much farther away than he had anticipated and that, in order to negotiate with the marchers on terms offered by the federal government before the leaders embarked on extra-legal activities, it was necessary to remove the leaders.

While Wood was convinced of the necessity of prompt action he was also aware of the risks attending such action. His own conviction that the march was a "revolutionary movement" and his realization that restraint was needed in dealing with the trek since any provocation by the police was an open invitation to the men to start hostilities indicated that he was well aware of the dangers inherent in the situation.⁶⁶ In arresting the leaders on Market Square Wood was balancing serious problems: to effect the arrests there was to risk provoking the strikers, while to wait was to risk more serious disturbances later.

⁶⁶For example, Wood refused to have a uniformed member of the Force accompany the railway officials who served the notice on the strikers on June 14 because he considered such action "provocative". RRIC, Exhibits, no. 177, Wood to MacBrien, June 15, 1935. In the instructions issued to the police by Wood he warned them, that while it was necessary to be firm, they must act with restraint and clearheadedness since the "Communist organizers" would take advantage of provocative action on the part of the police. Ibid., no. 150. On June 27 there had been a confrontation between the police and the strikers without trouble but the circumstances had been different and Wood's apprehension concerning the attitude of the strikers was not lessened by the report that some strikers began to make clubs that afternoon. RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 4, pp. 16-21.

The scales, however, were very rapidly tipped from risk to disaster by the blunders which marked the execution of the plan. The premature descent from the vans of fifty police officers and the charge of the City Police to the platform when the whistle blew radically altered the situation. While the sight of a large number of police a distance from the crowd might have kept the situation under control, their movement to the Square resulted in a serious riot when the strikers and some sympathizers fought against them.

CHAPTER V

THE ROYAL COMMISSION; THE RELIEF CAMPS CLOSED

A short time after disbanding the trek the provincial government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding the Regina Riot.¹ The Commissioners were to inquire into and report upon the strikers' departure from Vancouver, the movement to Regina and the means, if any, taken to prevent this movement, the steps taken to prevent the strikers going east from Regina, the riot, the disbandment and

generally make the most complete and exhaustive inquiry possible in connection with the whole movement of the said men and all actions taken in connection therewith from the time of their departure from Vancouver and the time of their return thereto, and to make such findings as to all or any matters aforesaid as the said Commission may deem advisable in the public interest.²

It was thought that an inquiry was necessary because of the seriousness of the riot: several of the police, citizens and strikers had been injured, one city policeman had been killed and extensive damage had been done to property.

¹Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Gazette, July 31, 1935. The Commission was issued July 10. The Commissioners were Chief Justice J. T. Brown of the Court of King's Bench of Saskatchewan, Mr. Justice W. M. Martin of the Court of Appeal and former premier of Saskatchewan, and Judge J. E. Doak of the Judicial District of Prince Albert.

²Ibid.

Furthermore, the public were confused and uncertain about the circumstances surrounding the riot and this confusion could only be ended by a proper inquiry. Finally, certain of the leaders and sympathizers before and during the inquiry had made malicious accusations against the police, especially the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It was said that a member of that Force had killed Detective Millar, that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had killed and buried many of the strikers, that they had assaulted and brutally treated numerous strikers and citizens without reason and that they were intoxicated during the period of the riot.³ It was little wonder that the Commissioners considered this inquiry very important.

Before the inquiry was begun there was another constitutional conflict with the federal government, which objected to the appointment by the provincial government of judges to act as a commission without previously securing the consent of the Dominion authorities. Although the Commissioners declared that such approval was unnecessary, they asked that the appointments be revoked in view of the position taken by

³RRIC, Report, Vol. 1, pp. 6-9.

Evans, after he was released on bail, spoke at meetings from Halifax to Victoria in the fall of 1935. At some of these meetings, especially in eastern Canada, he claimed that Millar had been killed by a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 27, pp. 53-66. After July 1 three members of a committee functioning to assist the strikers who faced charges went to the barracks to discover if any dead were buried there. The witness testified that they had been given every assistance by the police in their search and that they had found nothing. Ibid., Vol. 16, pp. 164-168.

the Minister of Justice; the provincial government refused to do this. It was decided to await the outcome of the federal election and, as it turned out, the victory of the Liberal party ended the dispute.⁴

The extent of the investigation when it finally began was indicated by the fact that 359 witnesses testified, 309 exhibits were filed and nearly 8,000 typewritten pages of testimony were taken over the period from November 12, 1935 to March 12, 1936. Commissioner Doak, accompanied by one of the counsel to the Commission, held hearings in Vancouver and Calgary. Besides the Commission counsel, the federal government and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the city police and the strikers were represented by counsel; the Saskatchewan government paid the fees of the strikers' counsel. Some of the key witnesses were Assistant Commissioner Wood, Premier Gardiner, Attorney General Davis and the strike leaders, Evans and Black.

The Commissioners attributed the strike in the relief camps at the end of 1934 and again early in 1935 to "a lack of appreciation on the part of the men of the difficulties of finding a method of really solving the unemployment problem as a whole, of which this is only one aspect." They added, however: ". . . undoubtedly it was also partly due to outside and disruptive influences that are constantly sowing the seeds

⁴RRIC, Report, Vol. I, pp. 2-3. See also the Leader-Post, July 13, July 16, August 14, August 26, September 3, September 9, September 11, September 12, September 21.

of discontent."⁵ The Commissioners went on to say that, while the men were very well cared for, the camps were "a fertile ground for sowing seeds of discord, discontent and false philosophies of life. . . ." and that although the camps were a relief measure, "they are in reality a tragic experience for many of the men who are found in them."⁶

The findings with regard to the methods of the provincial and federal governments in coping with the trek included the statement that it was not within the scope of the inquiry to decide whether or not the federal government had exceeded its powers in taking control of the police force, or whether the protest of the provincial government was valid.⁷ The Commissioners believed that the federal government might have been able to end the strike in Vancouver if negotiations had been undertaken when the strikers, near the end of their resources, seized the Museum.⁸ They also thought that if the federal government had wished to prevent the trek leaving Vancouver it could have done so, although the Commissioners were not prepared to suggest that it could have been stopped without rioting.⁹ However, the Report went on to say that the Dominion government was justified in the decision to prevent the strikers

⁵RRIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 13.

⁶Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁷Ibid., pp. 100-101.

⁸Ibid., p. 85.

⁹Ibid., p. 86.

from moving east of Regina; a statement based largely on the character of some of the trekkers, what had occurred before the strikers reached Regina and what would probably occur if they had been allowed to continue. The Commissioners emphasized that the leader, Evans, was an announced Communist and some of the men were dangerous and had no regard for life or property. The practice of the leaders of constantly branding the police as their enemies created an antagonism on the part of the men to the forces of law and order and was added reason to terminate the march. The activities of the men in Vancouver and Calgary to secure relief about which they had boasted and the threat to peace, order and good government in every city the men stopped on the way to Ottawa unless relief was granted were further reasons to justify the decision of the federal government. Estimating that 5,000 trekkers would reach the capital the Commissioners concluded:

On arriving in Ottawa, unless their demands had been fully met, one can readily surmise the danger involved. It probably would have been necessary to call out the militia in order to preserve the peace and a worse riot would likely have occurred than that which actually took place at Regina.¹⁰

The attitude of the provincial government to the decision made at Ottawa to stop the trek was understandable, the Commissioners found, because that government had not been made "aware of the potential dangers lurking in the trek."¹¹ In connection with this it should be pointed out, as the Commissioners

¹⁰RRIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 277.

¹¹Ibid., p. 277.

themselves did, that knowledge of the Calgary incident was one of the reasons why the provincial government had decided to grant relief to the men while they were in Saskatchewan. The Commissioners added that it was also understandable because no previous attempt had been made to stop the men, and in fact the Prime Minister had announced that he would not intervene unless requested to do so by the provincial government.¹²

It was other participants, the trekkers and their leaders, that the Report criticized most severely. The Commissioners, in tracing the origins of the movement, stated that the Workers' Unity League which had organized the Relief Camp Workers' Union was "in reality the working organization of that [the Communist] party."¹³ The Commissioners were also of the opinion

That the leaders, at least of the Communist party as at present constituted, are not prepared to confine themselves to peaceful means to bring about the revolution they desire; on the contrary it appears that they are prepared to resort to militancy and force.¹⁴

The report continued:

Whatever may be the policy of the Communist Party in regard to bringing about the revolution in government by force, we are convinced that it is still its policy and that of the League to resort to strikes in industry in preference to conciliation and arbitration and to organize general strikes thereof and to use force if necessary to accomplish their aims.¹⁵

¹²RRIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 277. ¹³Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 27-28.

The Commissioners were critical of the trek leaders, especially Evans. They described him as forceful, persistent and an able organizer, speaker, writer and agitator. But they also found that he was "suspicious and intolerant" of those who disagreed with him and that he was "reckless and indifferent as to the truthfulness of his utterances."¹⁶ This was surely an apt description. The leaders "gave the whole movement a colour and character which condemned it from its inception and which caused it to be branded as dangerous by those in authority."¹⁷ The Commissioners found that some of the men, too, were lawless and dangerous but went on to state that the majority were of a different calibre and deserved sympathetic consideration.¹⁸

In connection with the events of July 1 the Commissioners, recognizing the disadvantages of long distance negotiations, felt that if Assistant Commissioner Wood had been allowed to negotiate with the strikers an agreement might have been reached and trouble avoided.¹⁹ However, this had not occurred and, because Wood believed from confidential information and from his knowledge of the strikers' activities in Vancouver that the strikers were preparing for demonstrations, the police

¹⁶RRIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 306.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 275. Wood had suggested that he negotiate with the strikers on the basis of dispersal from Regina.

were justified in taking the step of arresting the leaders on Market Square which the police thought would forestall any trouble.²⁰ The Commissioners added that in view of the rioting "the expediency of effecting the arrests on Market Square may be questioned" but not the "right" to do so.²¹ They also stated their belief that the police underestimated the violent opposition and did not foresee the rioting.²² On the other hand the Report stated "that there would have been rioting either at the time or at once when the news of the arrests reached the strikers."²³ The Commissioners considered it fortunate that the city police came to the platform when they did; otherwise it was unlikely that the arrests would have been successfully carried out.²⁴ The rioting, they concluded, "originated in an attack made by a number of strikers upon Inspector Brunet's troop when the latter attempted to advance upon the Square."²⁵ Although one cannot quarrel with this statement and although the "expediency of effecting the arrests on Market Square [was] questioned," a look at prior events would indicate that the convergence of the police had precipitated the attack.

As has already been pointed out, one reason the Commissioners considered the inquiry important was the malicious accusations that had been made against the police. The Report stated categorically:

²⁰RRIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 282.

²¹Ibid., p. 284.

²²Ibid., p. 284.

²³Ibid., p. 116.

²⁴Ibid., p. 283.

²⁵Ibid., p. 134.

There was absolutely no justification on the part of any leaders of the trek, or anyone else who took the trouble to investigate, for making such mendacious charges against the Mounted Police.²⁶

Statements made by Evans and others were dismissed as rumour unsubstantiated by any evidence. The Commissioners added that certainly the police had used force, but that they had been compelled to do so in order to end the rioting; there had been no unprovoked assaults.²⁷ On the other hand, the writers of the Report found that there were a minority of strikers of a "vicious" character who were prepared to go to any lengths in the use of force and who had led other strikers on July 1 into committing violent acts;²⁸ as a result of the brutal attacks of the strikers on the police there were serious injuries.²⁹

The Royal Commission had been established to "investigate and report" on the "facts and circumstances" surrounding the trek and the actions taken in connection with it; without doubt this had been accomplished. The scope of the inquiry was sufficiently broad to enable the investigation to reach back to the formation of the Workers' Unity League and the establishment of the relief camps, two developments leading to the trek. Although critical of the federal government in some instances, the Commissioners justified the actions taken;

²⁶RRIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 8.

²⁷Ibid., p. 288.

²⁸Ibid., p. 125.

²⁹Ibid., p. 289.

the stand taken by the provincial government, which was understandable, was outside the scope of the inquiry. It was the leaders and a small group in the trek who were held mainly responsible. The Report concluded:

The unemployment problem will not be solved by killing or brutally assaulting the police in the performance of their duties, nor by damning men who hold responsible positions of authority, nor by broadcasting false propaganda in speech or pamphlet.³⁰

The activities and character of the strikers, for example, the communist connections and the seriousness of the riot, were borne out by the evidence. The attitudes and actions of the governments, justified in the Report, may be justified by the evidence. Emphasis was placed on the activities of the strikers; the riot originated with an attack made by them on the police although it was evident the convergence of the police provoked the attack even though there was no doubt the strikers were ready at all times to attack; the strikers came armed to the Square, but there was not sufficient evidence to sustain this conclusion. The main finding of this exhaustive inquiry and Report was that a minority of strikers were responsible for the problems that arose out of the trek. However, the purpose of the inquiry was to investigate the "facts and circumstances" and that had been done to a degree that enabled others to form conclusions.

While the Royal Commission inquired into the riot that was the climax of a trek that originated in the relief camps in British Columbia, strikes had been staged in other camps --

³⁰ERIC, Report, Vol. I, p. 311.

Valcartier in Quebec, Rockcliffe in Ontario and Dundurn in Saskatchewan. What was the eventual disposition of the relief camps? The Conservative government discussed plans which were based on government financial assistance to end the camp system by providing employment for the men in industry on a wage basis³¹ and by encouraging them to seek employment in the harvest season.³² This latter plan was abandoned because the men refused to take the jobs already offered in the agricultural field.³³ Any further steps the Conservative government might have taken to deal with the relief camp situation ended with its defeat in the general election. It was left to the incoming Liberal administration to seek a solution.

The new Prime Minister announced that the relief camps would be transferred from the Department of National Defence to the Department of Labour.³⁴ Before any other steps were taken the Minister of Labour, Norman McL. Rogers, appointed at the end of November a Special Committee to investigate the relief camps.³⁵ The Committee was to report on whether the

³¹Winnipeg Free Press, July 8, 1935.

³²Ibid., July 12, 1935. ³³Ibid., July 17, 1935.

³⁴Leader-Post (Regina), November 5, 1935.

³⁵The Committee consisted of R. A. Rigg, Director of the Employment Service Branch of the Department of Labour, Humphrey Mitchell, former president of the Hamilton Trades and Labour Council, and E. W. Bradwin, Principal of Frontier College.

camps should be continued as they were or in any other way, what type of wage or allowance system should be used, the adequacy of facilities for securing agricultural and industrial employment for the men in relief camps, the adequacy of facilities for education and recreation and the general conditions of the camps.³⁶

The Committee reported that it was necessary temporarily to continue the camps since there were not sufficient employment opportunities to absorb the men. In the investigation of the camps they found a large number of young men and older men who desired gainful employment. They also found a group of young men aged eighteen to twenty-five who, because of thwarted ambitions and lack of hope for the future, had become an "easy prey to the subversive influences of Communistic or Anarchistic philosophy, sedulously propagated by experienced agitators" and under these influences they constituted "a real menace to the maintenance of our existing institutions."³⁷ There was also a group of older men who, because of age and the "deteriorating influence of several years dependence upon public charity", were unsuited for regular employment. The Committee therefore recommended that the camps be closed as soon as possible in the "best interest of the state and for

³⁶The Report entitled "Interim Report on Relief Camps in Canada" appeared in the Labour Gazette, 1936, pp. 141-148.

³⁷Ibid., p. 142.

the sound healthy development of the majority of the men in the camps."³⁸ They added that "relief camp conditions cannot be regarded other than as exercising a baneful mental and moral influence."³⁹ The Committee recommended the substitution of a work and wages policy for the allowance system, and found that the employment Service of Canada was securing employment for the men when it was possible; the real problem was the lack of employment opportunities. They stated that educational and recreational facilities were adequate and that the general camp conditions as to food, sleeping accommodations and medical services were good. The work of the Department of National Defence in running the camps was highly commended.

On February 26, 1936 the Minister of Labour announced that the camps would be closed during the year, probably by July 1. In making the announcement he said:

As an emergency measure these camps may have been justified. . . . To continue these camps, however, on their present basis, would be to institutionalize them and to encourage an attitude of hopelessness on the part of those for whom they were designed to make provision in a period of economic extremity.⁴⁰

³⁸Labour Gazette, pp. 142-143.

³⁹Ibid., p. 143.

⁴⁰House of Commons, Debates, 1936, Vol. 1, pp. 541-542.

When the closing of the camps was begun on March 1 under the Director of Labour Transference, Humphrey Mitchell, there were 20,000 men in the camps. Some left to find employment for themselves, 650 more were placed in farm employment, 9,000 others, through an agreement with the railways, were given work on deferred track maintenance, and 2,500 others were placed in other jobs. By June 30, 1936 the federal relief camps across Canada were closed.⁴¹

What effect had the strike in the relief camps, the trek and the Regina Riot had on the decision to close them? Relief camps had been established as a temporary solution to part of a very pressing unemployment problem. Certainly the trekkers had brought the relief camps forcibly to the attention of everyone. It had been clearly demonstrated that the relief camps, no matter how satisfactorily they provided the basic needs of this group of unemployed, were not maintaining the health and efficiency of the youth of Canada until they could be absorbed into industry.⁴² After the events at Regina the Conservative government made tentative approaches to ending the camp system. With a government fresh from the opposition benches after a campaign that had featured unemployment as an issue, different approaches were likely to be made in many areas. The trek had ensured that the relief camps would be among the first problems to be investigated. The new government decided that the relief camps

⁴¹Labour Gazette, 1936, p. 608. ⁴²Supra, p. 1.

may have been necessary to meet an emergency but the 'On-to-Ottawa' trek and Regina Riots showed the danger of maintaining them on their existing basis.⁴³

Perhaps the trek and the riot had ensured that, if possible, the camp system would be changed.

⁴³Address by Norman McL. Rogers January 11, 1937, to the Canadian Club at Toronto, "The National Attack on Unemployment," summary in Labour Gazette, 1937, pp. 25-26.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Regina Riot was a manifestation of the distress caused by the depression. The discontent that developed in the relief camps established by the federal government to provide relief for one group of unemployed enabled the Relief Camp Workers' Union, assisted by the Workers' Unity League whose function was to organize "revolutionary" unions, to organize a strike and a walkout in the camps in British Columbia. It was these strikers, along with others who joined their eastward trek, who were involved in the Regina Riot. The trek reached Regina because no authority accepted the responsibility for dealing with the situation. Some authorities, such as municipal, provincial or railway officials, even assisted the strikers because of direct or implicit coercion.

Constitutionally relief was a provincial responsibility, but these men came from camps run by a federal department. If anyone was to deal with the strikers it had to be the federal government. After the December strike that government did set up a commission to investigate the relief camps, but it was appointed only four days before the scheduled April walk-out. Also, the terms of reference did not include an investigation of the strikers' demands. Consequently, the strikers

considered it merely an attempt to frustrate the walkout and not a serious consideration of their grievances. The strikers congregated in Vancouver to back up their demand that the federal government open negotiations on the basis of their demands. Had the federal government done so the strike might have ended, but it cannot be assumed that unless the demands of the strikers had been granted the opening of negotiations would necessarily have forestalled the decision to "march" to Ottawa. When the strikers boarded the trains in Vancouver they were trespassers. The railway officials were not prepared to stop them, nor was the federal government. Until the trek was passing through Alberta the federal government considered that the situation was not serious enough to warrant action and that delay would obviate the need for intervention.

But the strikers reached Regina, not only because they were not prevented from doing so and in some instances were assisted, but also because of their own efforts. Under determined and resourceful leadership the ranks were largely kept intact for two months in Vancouver and a ten-day trek by freight train. Without their own financial resources the strikers aroused sufficient public support to acquire funds; when these funds were insufficient they used extra-legal means to force concessions. But as a consequence of this reliance on outside sources for relief and the specific instances of coercion wherever the strikers were, they were an implicit threat to law and order. Therefore the trek acquired public sympathy

and support through its own efforts which enabled it to continue, but at the same time the authorities were apprehensive. Eventually the threat to law and order implicit in the trek caused it to be stopped.

The federal government suddenly reversed its policy and, on the grounds that the trek was a threat to public security, a belief intensified by the evidence of Communist leadership, stopped the trek in Regina. In order to settle the dispute it also began to negotiate with the trekkers. The trekkers had demanded this since the April walkout. Instead of the meeting in Ottawa being the climactic ending, however, it was merely one more event in a series. It gave the Prime Minister the opportunity to explain why the demands could not be met. It gave Evans the opportunity to demonstrate that only satisfaction of all the demands would end the trek.

The federal government, although sufficiently alarmed to stop the trek, had underestimated the difficulty of solving the problem. Even before the negotiations ended, however, Ottawa had concluded that further measures would be required. Regina became the location of a determined effort by the strikers to continue the march to Ottawa and an equally determined effort by Ottawa to prevent them from doing so. Step by step the federal authorities closed all avenues to the capital and blocked possible sources of assistance so that the trek would disperse. The energetic and resourceful Evans devised every method he could to break the blockade and keep

the trek together. Ultimately the resources of the trekkers were exhausted. But when Evans finally proposed to the federal government that the trek disband, each suspected the motives of the other to a degree that prevented an agreement being reached.

The resources of the federal government were such that time was on its side. But because of the threat of violence in the trek the government did not assume during the stalemate in Regina that time alone would solve the problem. It was in an attempt to forestall disturbances that the Assistant Commissioner put into effect the decision to arrest the leaders. The method of effecting the arrests precipitated the riot.

During this dispute between the federal government and the strikers the former was also involved in a dispute with the Saskatchewan government over the administration of justice. In this dispute the province declared that the administration of justice was a provincial matter while the Dominion claimed that it had the right to act in regard to the On-to-Ottawa march. The federal officials instructed the police to prevent the strikers from trespassing on railway property. Under the Railway Act, although the law had not been enforced, the men were trespassers and the police agreement specifically provided that federal statutes, other than the Criminal Code, were excepted from the direction of the Attorney General. T. C. Davis later reluctantly admitted that the federal

government had the power to act in this instance.¹ The order-in-council supposed to have been issued to declare a national emergency as provided for in the Relief Act was not part of the dispute over jurisdiction, although Davis queried the Minister of Justice about its issuance since Parliament was in session. The federal government instructed its counsel in Regina and the police to proceed against certain of the leaders under Section 98 of the Criminal Code; the police agreement specifically provided that the enforcement of the Criminal Code was under the direction of the provincial Attorney General. Although Guthrie explained, when Davis demanded that he "forthwith instruct the police to take orders from me and from me alone in connection with the enforcement of the provisions of the [Criminal] Code in Saskatchewan,"² that the "Dominion counsel . . . are fully aware that should any of the charges laid under their direction result in a committal for trial, the proceedings will thereupon by virtue of the Criminal Code pass under your control as attorney general . . ."³, it is hard to justify, though easy to understand, Dominion interference in the enforcement of the Criminal Code. Normally if the Dominion government had evidence which led it to feel action ought to be taken, the problem would be handed over to the

¹RRIC, Record of Proceedings, Vol. 6, p. 72.

²RRIC, Exhibits, no. 78, Davis to Guthrie, July 2, 1935.

³Ibid., no. 79, Guthrie to Davis, July 3, 1935.

Attorney General of the province.⁴

That the responsibility was within the sphere of both the provincial and federal jurisdictions meant that the logical way was for the federal government to secure the co-operation of the province in which the trek was stopped. Perhaps the suddenness of the decision to act precluded at least an attempt to work out with the province a common approach to the impending influx of trekkers. More important, the federal government underestimated the difficulties of dispersing the trek. Once the first instructions were issued to the Assistant Commissioner in Regina the immediate reaction of the provincial government made it clear that there was little hope of securing its active co-operation; in fact, early in the dispute Wood anticipated that Premier Gardiner would actively assist the trekkers.⁵ Although the fear of provincial intervention lessened, the federal government had no confidence in the

⁴Action taken under section 98 of the Criminal Code in another instance illustrates this approach. In August, 1931 Communist headquarters were raided and alleged members of the Communist Party were arrested by the Ontario Provincial Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police under the direction of the Attorney General of Ontario, W. H. Price, who was acting under section 98. The Department of Justice had been gathering information on Communistic activities and discussions had taken place between the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General. Canadian Annual Review, 1932, p. 425.

⁵RRIC, Exhibits, no. 168, Wood to MacBrien, June 13, 1935. Wood informed MacBrien: "There is more than a possibility that if the situation becomes critical the Premier will call upon the citizens of Regina to provide cars and the province to provide trucks with which to carry these relief camp strikers to the Manitoba boundary."

manner in which the provincial government would deal with the strikers if given the opportunity to do so.

On the other hand, the provincial government, confronted with a situation which it had not created, but which was the result of a decision in Ottawa, objected. It no doubt hovered in Gardiner's thoughts that, if the federal government was embarrassed by this attitude, that government was after all Conservative.

The conflict was based on two opposing points of view regarding the trek. To the federal government the seriousness of the situation made the problem Dominion-wide in importance, necessitating the order to stop the trek in Regina.

[The] present trouble is not a local matter involving administration of justice. It is incidental to proper policing of railways and is part of a dominion wide scheme under [the] leadership of revolutionaries to concentrate a large body of men at Ottawa for [the] purpose of endeavoring to enforce demands which have already been refused by [the] Dominion.⁶

Gardiner agreed that it was not a "local problem". The provincial government viewed the trek only as a group of men passing through Saskatchewan on the way from Vancouver to Ottawa. They had not broken the law in Saskatchewan. If disturbances could be prevented by providing relief the provincial government was willing to provide that until they were out of the province.

What effect did the attitude of the provincial government have on the situation in Regina during a serious dispute

⁶RRIC, Exhibits, no. 79, Guthrie to Davis, July 3, 1935.

between the federal government and the strikers? Although vocal in his condemnation of the federal government's decision to stop the trek, and arguing that since these men had been brought into the province they ought to be taken out, J. G. Gardiner at first refused to become involved in the merits of the trekkers' grievances. On June 28 he changed his position and suggested to Evans that the men go to Lumsden camp. Although it might be said that had Premier Gardiner acted as a mediator after the negotiations failed in Ottawa the dispute between the federal government and the strikers might have been resolved without violence, there was little to indicate that this was so. In the first place the federal government had not asked the provincial cabinet to seek a solution⁷ and the strike leaders, until late in the afternoon of July 1, had requested only that the provincial government assist them to continue the trek. Secondly, had the provincial government made proposals for ending the dispute anyway, it was probable that such proposals would have fallen on deaf ears; on the one hand the federal government was competent to deal with the situation and on the other hand the aggressive Evans had to be convinced by circumstances that he had exhausted every avenue to reach Ottawa before he would consider a strategic retreat. The attitude of the provincial government may even

⁷The federal government had good reason for not doing so; the hands-off policy of the provincial government left Ottawa with no confidence in it.

have had a beneficial effect; there were no demonstrations, except for the one on June 17, or attempts to secure relief by extra-legal means in Regina as there had been in Vancouver and Calgary. It was probable that Evans did not want to lose what moral support he had from the provincial government; this must not be overemphasized because the situations in Regina and the other cities were different, inasmuch as the federal government and the police by the middle of June were prepared to act in the event of any such occurrence and as the strikers were provided with relief until the morning of June 26.

In the light of succeeding events the most crucial decision was to prevent the strikers from moving east of Regina. This decision can be justified, not necessarily on the grounds that the leader was a Communist and that therefore there might be trouble, but on the practical grounds that when the requests of the strikers had been turned down in other instances they had resorted to extra-legal means to gain what they wanted. But, was the decision expedient? Would it not perhaps have been better to allow the trek to continue to Ottawa?

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