BEYOND REGINA:
The On to Ottawa Trek
in Manitoba and Ontario

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of History
in the
Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon
by Steven Roy Hewitt
July, 1992
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of the University make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7N 0W0
ABSTRACT

_Beyond Regina_ examines the reaction in Manitoba and Ontario to the On to Ottawa Trek, specifically in the cities the marchers would have passed through had they not been stopped in the capital of Saskatchewan: Winnipeg, Fort William and Port Arthur, Sudbury, Toronto and Ottawa.

Two major studies on the Trek appeared in the 1980s, Victor Howard's _We Were the Salt of the Earth_ and Lorne A. Brown's _When Freedom Was Lost_. Both monographs offer copious detail on the Trekkers and their journey from Vancouver to Regina, something necessary to provide true context to the event. A national mantle is claimed for the march by the respective authors but the lack of substance in this area effectively renders the event a regional protest movement.

The thesis examines in particular the extent and nature of Trek support in various Manitoba and Ontario cities. It seeks to provide a broader perspective on the On to Ottawa Trek and therein a more comprehensive portrait of the event.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nearly two years of my life have gone into this document. Without the aid of others it would not have been possible. This is especially true of Professor W.A. Waiser who supplied patience, encouragement, and a good pair of hands on Sunday mornings. Gratitude is also due to the Messer Fund for financial assistance and to the University of Saskatchewan's Interlibrary Loan Department, especially Mary Dykes, for their help.

Without friends life is insignificant. Thanks are due to my new friends, Robin, Gary, Glenn, Tom, Warren, Colleen, Michelle, Sanjay, and to my old friends, Bill, Jeff, Doug, Jeff, for their support. For serving as figures of grace, inspiration, and entertainment I am indebted to Jesse Barfield, Tony Fernandez, and Paul Simon. Love has been amply supplied by my parents, brother and sister, grandparents, and Alf, all of whom I will never be fully able to repay. Finally, I would like to thank my special anarchist-communist friend for helping me to become a human being.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: &quot;PRACTICALLY A REVOLUTION&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: &quot;WE ARE SITTING ON THE EDGE OF A VOLCANO&quot;</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: &quot;YOU ARE MAKING HISTORY, YOU ARE MAKING HISTORY&quot;</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: &quot;UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND THOROUGHLY UN-BRITISH&quot;</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: &quot;WE CANNOT SHOO THESE MEN TO ANOTHER PLACE&quot;</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

"Practically a Revolution"

On June 3, 1935, approximately 700 unemployed men left the city of Vancouver on the top of a Canadian Pacific Railway train. Over the next twenty-four hours another 600 would follow on board various trains. These Canadian citizens had the same destination: their nation's capital. The On-to-Ottawa Trek, as it was to become known, was underway. Less than a month later, on July 1, 1935, the march would end among the violence and broken glass of downtown Regina.1 The B.C. Trekkers2 had traveled no further than the capital of Saskatchewan. The forces of the federal government had blocked the tracks.

How had members of Canada's unemployed reached the point where they would attempt a protest march to Ottawa? The march's origins lay in the economic malaise that gripped the nation during the 1930s. Canadians sought a political solution to the Great Depression in the form of the leader of the Conservative Party, Richard Bedford Bennett, who swept to power by promising employment for whoever wanted to work.3 Upon his ascendancy to power, Bennett rapidly implemented several policies to rescue the drowning economy. Most of the measures proved to be ineffective as the Great Depression only worsened. The by-products of this economic calamity were thousands of unemployed men. Eventually they

---


2An upper case "T" will be used when referring to the Trek or Trekkers from British Columbia. A lower case "t" will be employed when referring to all other versions of the On to Ottawa Trek.

gathered in urban centres, seeking work and relief. The Bennett government, fearing that the men would be an easy target for communist agitation and hence a possible threat to constituted authority, accepted the 1932 plan of Andrew McNaughton, Chief of the Canadian General Staff, for the creation of a system of relief camps for physically fit, single homeless men. The Department of National Defence-administered camps, to be located a considerable distance from urban centres, were believed to be the only thing that would obviate the inevitability of a government "resort to arms to restore and maintain order." As historian James Struthers has illustrated, there was a certain irony to the creation of the relief camps:

... [T]he camps represented Bennett's only extension of federal responsibility for the unemployed before his "New Deal" reforms of 1935. The remainder of his unemployment policy proceeded in exactly the opposite direction- towards reducing Ottawa's link with the jobless.

The single unemployed, while not legally compelled to register in a camp, had little choice since a refusal could have led to their name being struck from the relief roll. At the camps, the men were required to perform menial labour for which they received the recompense of twenty cents a day. Through a mixture of organized agitation and genuine grievances the camps became vastly unpopular among the inhabitants. Strikes were common occurrences, including several in British Columbia.

---


5 Struthers, "Two Depressions," 434.
The largest dispute took place in April 1935 when several thousand men, demanding "work and wages" and an end to the relief camp system, staged a massive walkout from camps across B.C..

The year 1935 was a pivotal one for the Bennett government. In January the Prime Minister had made his five famous "New Deal" radio broadcasts in which he informed Canadians that "I am for reform. I nail the flag of progress to the mast. I summon the power of the state to its support."6 Included in this platform of reforms was a de facto recognition of Ottawa’s responsibility for unemployment insurance. The historical debate over the sincerity of Bennett's proposals continues, but at the time of the Trek (only a few months later) little in the way of concrete reform had been introduced into the House of Commons. One of the Trekkers' six demands was a federally organized and financed system of unemployment insurance.

After walking out of the relief camps in April, many of the B.C. strikers had gathered in Vancouver. The province and the city, already overburdened with relief responsibilities and not wanting the additional financial expense, did little to accommodate the interlopers during their stay. By May, with funds dwindling and men beginning to drift away from the city to seek work, the strike was on the verge of collapse. To stem the dispersal and regain some enthusiasm for their cause, the strike committee proposed at a May 29 meeting that the strikers take their grievances directly to Bennett in order to thrust the mantle of responsibility for relief upon the recalcitrant Prime Minister. Ronald Liversedge, who was at the meeting, described in his memoirs the reaction of the men to the proposal of a trek: "The sheer effrontery of the motion

---

6Thompson, Decades of Discord, 261.
startled the meeting.... After the first shock of the suggestion was absorbed and the possibilities conjured up, the meeting was electrified, and discussion went on and on."7 The proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by the crowd. Three days later the On to Ottawa Trek began from Vancouver on the top of a CPR train.

A great deal of organization was required to ensure the success of the march: food and accommodation were required to keep the army of unemployed, literally organized into military ranks, moving. Telegrams were sent across Canada asking supporters to stage sympathy meetings in preparation for the arrival of the Trekkers; they were also requested to be ready to join the procession of unemployed.8 The original plan called for the marchers to spend various periods of time in several cities along the route to Ottawa: two days in Kamloops; three days in Calgary; one day each in Medicine Hat, Moose Jaw, Regina, and Brandon; four days in Winnipeg; four days total in Fort William and Port Arthur; one day in Sudbury; and finally, four days in Toronto.9

As the Trekkers proceeded eastward, their numbers began to swell, especially after a successful stop in Calgary where they enjoyed wide popular support.10 Ordinary citizens called them "our boys," a recognition that the young men were Canadians who had little choice in their plight. By


their very journey the Trekkers illuminated the absurdity of the unemployment relief system in Canada: three levels of government bickered back and forth over which branch was liable for the care of the travelling group of unemployed. The Trekkers were shunned by politicians because they carried the plague of constitutional responsibility. As the contingent of unemployed moved east, Bennett, despite deriding the entire movement as being communist-led and inspired, ignored appeals from provinces and municipalities to halt them.\(^{11}\) Only when it appeared that the Trek would not dissolve of its own accord did the federal government order it stopped in Regina against the expressed wishes of the Saskatchewan government.\(^{12}\) Clearly, the federal government was concerned about the growing support for the march and the possibility that it would reach Ottawa after all.

With the Trekkers now trapped in the capital of Saskatchewan, negotiations between their leaders and the federal government began. Two cabinet ministers, R.J. Manion and Robert Weir, journeyed west to meet with the Trek leaders. At the meeting it was agreed that a committee of eight march leaders would take their grievances directly to Ottawa. The conference with Bennett and his cabinet on June 22 degenerated into a shouting match with each side questioning the veracity of the other. In the end, Arthur Evans, the leader of the Trek, and his associates returned to

\(^{11}\)Victor Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!": The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), 87; "Calgary Asks Ottawa to Halt March," Vancouver Sun 65 June 1935: 4; Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!", 103; "Statement by the Prime Minister, House of Commons, Debates, 7 June 1935, as cited in "Documents Related to... Trek," in Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek Victor Hoar, ed., 174-5.

capital of Saskatchewan vowing to begin anew the march on Ottawa. With the train no longer a transportation option several people attempted to make a test drive from Regina to the Manitoba border but they were arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Finally on Dominion Day, a national holiday, a police attempt to arrest several Trek leaders went awry. The men had just addressed a fund-raising rally in Regina's Market Square when the police rapidly moved in to make the arrests. Instead violence erupted in a hail of rocks and bullets which left one city policeman dead, dozens of citizens, Trekkers, and policemen injured, and caused thousands of dollars of damage to downtown Regina. A subsequent investigation appointed by the provincial government, the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission (RRIC), would put the blame for the mayhem squarely on the Trekkers, despite numerous conflicting accounts from eyewitnesses.¹³

The Trek symbolized a rare moment in the nation's history: a group of disenfranchised Canadians, who were no longer willing to suffer in silence under a political and economic system that seemed both unwilling and incapable of helping them, decided to do something about their plight. They were, with the precision and discipline of a military unit, going to take their grievances directly to those who had the power to redress them. The vividness of that image remains: during the 1991 Progressive Conservative National Convention leaders of anti-government demonstrations invoked the On to Ottawa Trek as a symbol of what their protests wished to emulate.¹⁴ Also in that year a protest in Ottawa by

¹³Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!", 149-79.

western Canadian farmers was labeled as a modern day Trek by both the media and the organizers of the event.

By late June 1935, Regina, to the Trekkers had come to symbolize an impenetrable barrier to the east; in the ensuing years, it has become a similar obstacle to scholarly work on the subject. The main monographs on the Trek have concentrated almost exclusively on the marchers as they moved from Vancouver to Regina, extending their collective gaze east of the capital of Saskatchewan only when the Trek leaders traveled to meet Bennett. This style effectively denied the event any form of context especially in the way of an examination of its national significance. A partial explanation for Regina's role as a barrier to scholarly enquiry might be the events of Dominion Day in that city. The violent denouement of the Trek has provided the historian a natural finale to the story: the heroic youth of Canada stopped in their tracks by the clubs of the steel-helmeted RCMP. This shocking and powerful imagery has dominated the aftermath of the Trek, relegating several important questions to obscurity.

For twenty-five years after the march, no mention was made of it in mainstream Canadian historical literature. Political biographies and celebrations of Canada's coming of age occupied centre stage.\textsuperscript{15} The


The post-World War II move away from economic interpretations of Canadian history... led to little more than a succession of political biographies and a series of narrative histories celebrating the emergence of the Canadian nation. While muted compared to the celebratory excesses of American consensus school historiography, Canadian historical writing in this period was cut from the same cloth. Macdonald, Brown, King, and even Arthur Meighen stepped forward in multi-volume, award-winning biographical studies, which not only swept the field of history but also generally won Canada's major literary awards. The fact that some of these
Canadian Annual Review, a yearly recounting of Canadian current affairs, was the lone exception to this rule. The periodical covered the Trek in its 1935-36 edition. Unfortunately, more space was devoted to the debate in the House of Commons than was given to the actual Trek. This coverage was biased in favour of the state at the expense of challenges to its legitimacy. The CAR offered the following mundane and inaccurate description of the Regina Riot that, in essence, represents the official government story of the event:

The R.C.MP and the Regina City Police decided on [the July 1] meeting as a suitable occasion for the arrest of [the Trek] leaders. Shortly after eight o'clock in the evening forces of both bodies marched into the square as the meeting was in progress. Panic ensued. The police were attacked and fighting and rioting developed and continued for some three hours.... In the course of the attacks on the police shots were fired by the city police although the R.C.MP did not use guns. The police brought the situation under control, some 80 men being arrested.16

Apart from the CAR's coverage, the Trek was generally ignored by Canadian scholars, as exemplified by eminent historian Donald Creighton's Canada's First Century. His book, which professes to offer a history of Canada's first one hundred years, would be more aptly described as a history of Canadian politicians and political parties during this period.17

---


Disturbing events like the Trek do not warrant mention because in histories of elites "the only protests which matter are those which produce some rearrangement of power." The monograph *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* follows a similar approach as Creighton's work. In the book, historian H. Blair Neatby spends an entire chapter on Bennett's tenure as prime minister without once mentioning the On to Ottawa Trek. In a comparable vein, historian Kenneth McNaught devotes a single sentence to the Trek in his chapter on the 1930s in *The Canadians, 1867-1967*.

The Canadian historical community's neglect of the Trek was shattered in 1968 with the appearance of Stuart Jamieson's epochal study of twentieth century labour conflict in Canada: *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66*. The impetus for change was societal. Eruptions against the status quo were occurring throughout the western world and the historical community was no exception. Still Jamieson's monograph had to be created outside of the Canadian historical establishment. The work was commissioned by the federal government's Task Force on Labour Relations after an allegedly serious "crisis" in the workplace occurred in 1965-6. Jamieson's study would document that conflict was nothing new in Canadian labour relations. His was one of the

---


first historical works to challenge directly some of the elite-generated myths about Canada which had previously dominated mainstream thought. Violence had always been considered to be unrepresentative of the Canadian nature, but according to *Times of Trouble* this perception was true only when compared to the United States. Canada, in fact, had a higher rate of violent labour disputes than the democracies of Western Europe. Jamieson argued that Canadian historians and other social scientists were to a large extent responsible for the perpetuation of the myth of this nation as a "peaceable kingdom." Conflict and violence, according to his study, had been locked away in the basement of Canadian historiography:

In Canada... no overall history of labour unrest and conflict has been written to date... This fact perhaps tells us something

---

21 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 262; J.M.S. Careless, "Limited Identities in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 50(1), 1-10 as cited in Berger, *The Writing of English-Canadian History*, 262. In Berger’s study of the historical profession he dealt with the changes that were occurring by the 1960s in that closed society:

Once the relatively small gentlemanly community of historians was dominated by a few outstanding individuals who wrote biographies of other outstanding individuals; now the profession had become a more anonymous collectivity, internally divided into sub-groups of specialists who tended more and more to write of anonymous groups and classes.

Younger historians led the assault upon the dominant Canadian historiography; historian J.M.S. Careless sounded its death knell in a 1969 *Canadian Historical Review* article:

[The] nation-building approach to Canadian history neglects and obscures even while it explains and illuminates, and may well tell us less about the Canada that now is than the Canada that should have been- but has not come to pass.

In the piece, Careless advocated a greater analysis on the role concepts such as region, ethnicity, and class play in Canadian history.

significant about Canadian history generally, at least as Canadian historians have portrayed it, and thus something about the Canadian "national character", however that may be defined. One is almost led to suspect that there has been a sort of "conspiracy of silence" about the whole subject of labour unrest and industrial conflict, particularly of the more violent kind, in this country. Perhaps it would be more realistic to say that Canadian historians and other social scientists have had a mistaken or misguided image of Canadians as a people, and have consciously or unconsciously contributed to perpetuating that misleading image.23

Jamieson, who brought a social democratic perspective to his work,24 courageously dealt in the book's introduction with the question of objectivity, admitting his vulnerability to a "pro-labour bias."25

Times of Trouble devoted only fifteen pages to the Trek. Its main value, however, was that it represented the first scholarly attempt to document the events of June and July 1935. In dealing with the Trek the book offered few insights, just a synthesis of existing sources on the subject.26 The paucity of material on the On to Ottawa Trek is perhaps explainable by the fact that it challenged the Canadian political and economic system, something that was anathema to consensus-seeking historians. Jamieson noted in his endnotes the paradox surrounding the lack of historical works on the Trek:

Considering the extreme importance of these events in Canada's history, labour and otherwise and particularly the

23Ibid., 7.


25Jamieson, Times of Trouble, 30-1.

26Ibid., 233-48.
drama and tragedy of the Regina Riot, it is strange that so little, relatively, has been written about them in terms of scholarly research.27

At the time of his lament, three Trek-related works did exist, all of which were used by Jamieson in his book. None of the sources provided an especially good historical account of the Trek. One was *Recollections of the On To Ottawa Trek*, the memoirs of a participant, Ronald Liversedge. The book which was originally issued in 1960, later underwent proper editing and was re-released in 1973. The work is extremely important in several respects. First, it represents the testimony, albeit belated, of an eyewitness. Even with the passage of time before the book was written, Liversedge was still able to provide the reader with a sense of realism for the events that a scholarly account would probably not have been able to attain.28 *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek* is also unique in that Liversedge's voice is that of an ordinary Canadian and a member of the working class, people historically denied access to their own past. The book's ultimate value to the historiography on the subject, however, is as a

---


28 Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On To Ottawa Trek*, 93-4. This passage describing the train ride through the Rocky Mountains is an example of the book's strength:

It was a nightmarish trip. There was supposed to be a system of fans circulating air throughout the tunnel, but if so, they weren't noticed by any of us on that trip. I think the two locomotives pulling the train were coal burners. At any rate, the tunnel was filled with a dirty, brown, billowing, gritty, warm smoke. The acrid sulphurous stench was overpowering, and gave one a choking sensation. We all lay on top of the boxcars, covering our mouths and noses with handkerchiefs or rags. Some of our boys covered their heads with blankets.

The trip through the tunnel took about thirty minutes, and it was a wonderful sensation to finally emerge into the fresh air.
source to others, not as a work of history. Unfortunately, it contains numerous errors, which the endnotes added by the editor, Victor Hoar, only serve to reiterate, Jamieson described the 1960 book, which he mistakenly cites under a different title, as an "admittedly biased and partisan account, but one containing much interesting data."29

Another work cited by Jamieson is a Royal Military College Bachelor of Arts thesis, written in 1962 by G.M. LeFresne, a member of the Canadian Army. The work, entitled "The Royal Twenty Centers: the Department of National Defence and Federal Unemployment Relief, 1932-36," is primarily concerned with the relief system, not the Trek. In essence, the thesis seems to exist as an apologia for the Canadian military's administration of the relief camps and has an underlying philosophy of authoritarianism and intolerance:

[T]he "March to Ottawa" seemed to justify, at least in the minds of the officials concerned, the precautions that the Department had taken to keep strict control over agitators and to give no encouragement to complaints on the project sites. This attitude of mind became all the harder when it became obvious, as the March progressed, that a great many of the complaints about the relief camps and the depression conditions were merely blind fronts put up by men who had more ambitious goals than just the alleviation of the current conditions. The fact that the "March to Ottawa" could occur was quite sufficient to reinforce the conviction that the "repressive" measures which the Department was forced to take in the relief camps had been based upon sound reasoning.30


Jamieson criticized LeFresne's section on the Trek as being "rather skimpy and inadequate, and... as biased, from the polar opposite in political viewpoint, as Liversedge's."31

The final work employed by Jamieson is also a personal account of the Trek. *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies*, which appeared in 1966, recounted the personal experiences of James H. Gray, a reporter for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Gray covered first-hand Trek-related events in Winnipeg and the book offers material on the situation in Regina during June and July 1935. The description of the events in the capital of Manitoba is the true worth of this reasonably balanced book. His material on the Trek, however, is beset by errors.32

Apart from the works cited by Jamieson, two other books containing general information on the Trek existed at the time. Both works echoed a pro-government stance on the B.C. marchers. John Swettenham's 1968 panegyric to General Andrew McNaughton, in the form of a biography, offers as historical fact the Bennett government's perspective on the march to Ottawa. The following "historical" passage appears in volume one of *McNaughton*:

> Then there was the "March on Ottawa" in the middle of 1935, when "hard-core" strikers from Vancouver- whose members swelled on the journey east- determined to present their complaints to the government.... The march culminated in a


32James H. Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1956), 147-60. In one error Gray describes a trip by Arthur Evans to Toronto after his meeting with Bennett. This action never occurred. A second mistake was a common one made at the time. Gray writes of the "federal government pass[ing] an order in council authorizing the taking of all necessary measures to halt the Trek at Regina." This action also never happened.
riot in Regina, when a municipal policeman was killed and two members of the RCMP seriously injured, and this alienated much of the sympathy that the plight of the marchers had aroused. The ringleaders' provocative acts, their threats of "streets flowing with blood" also turned their fellow marchers against them.33

James Eayrs' *In Defence of Canada* attempts to be more balanced in its portrayal of the Trek but little in the way of insight into the event is offered.34

As Jamieson was lamenting the virtual vacuum in scholarly studies on the events of June and July 1935, Gladys Stone was in the process of completing the first academic analysis of the Regina Riot. The University of Saskatchewan Master of Arts thesis provided a badly need objective perspective on the events in Regina during the period of the Trek and represented a transition into a new phase of historiography on the subject. Her focus, however, did not extend beyond the occurrences in the capital of Saskatchewan.35

In the introduction to *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, published in 1976, an appeal was made for more studies on the "role of strike and violence" in Canadian history.36 The following year, the first of the three main works specifically on the On to Ottawa Trek would appear.


"Work and Wages", co-authored by Jean Evans-Sheils, daughter of Trek leader Arthur Evans, and Ben Swankey, was a combination of a biography of Evans and a history of the Trek. An entire section was naturally devoted to the march: it consisted of a mixture of personal accounts, minutes of Trek meetings, and primary documents and newspaper reports related to the events of June and July 1935. The book was unabashedly subjective in its outlook but it did offer some new insight on the march and was certainly better than the material that had preceded it.

Not until the 1980s, however, did the two main treatises on the Trek arrive. In 1985 American academic Victor Howard, a Professor in American Literature, published "We were the salt of the earth!", a narrative history of the march. Howard had been working on the subject of the Trek since the 1960s and over the years had interviewed many of the participants. His sources also included the Regina City Police Department records which have since been destroyed. "We were the salt of the earth!" offers abundant detail on the marchers: their period in Vancouver; the journey to Regina; and, the violence in that city's downtown. In fact, Howard's literary skills and extensive interviews create a fascinating and compelling human portrait of the Trek; this also represents the book's main fault-- Howard relies too heavily on the memories of those involved, many of which may have been tainted by the passage of time.


38Victor Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!", 86-179. In 1973, he was the editor of a new edition of Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek (although he had a different last name).
Two years after Howard's book, the other major monograph on the Trek, When Freedom Was Lost, appeared. Written by another non-historian, political scientist Lorne A. Brown of the University of Regina, the book deals with the relief camp system and the politics surrounding it. The section on the Trek is less comprehensive and its focus, like Howard's study, is squarely on the B.C. Trekkers as they move from Vancouver to Regina. The monograph is not without other drawbacks including Brown's polemical style. He is a painter whose palette contains only two colours: black and white. Dressed in virginal white are the Trekkers, while the Bennett government is designated to play the part of the villain underneath the black cowboy hat. In a confused section from the book's introduction, Brown, apparently a stranger to subtlety, clumsily uses the past to indict the present:

There are many similarities and many differences between the present depression and the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Great Depression was, of course, on a much more devastating scale....

The similarities between today and the 1930s are also very striking. [The Bennett government] attempted to force working people, and especially the least protected and hence the poorest, to bear the brunt of the depression... Prime Minister Mulroney and his ministers are attempting to implement such a strategy wherever they dare and as much as they can get away with....

This book is about some of the consequences of a similar strategy by the Conservative Bennett government of the early

---


40Ibid., 157, 169. There are also some errors. An incorrect first name is offered for one Trek leader while the latter page lists the wrong name for the Mayor of Winnipeg in 1935.
1930s under somewhat similar but at the same time very different circumstances.41

Despite his apparent purpose, Brown's history is decidedly ordinary in style, more in keeping with older types of labour history where labour elites, rather than the working class as a whole are profiled. In reality, the book offers nothing that Howard's study did not more elegantly detail.

Some newer works have attempted to broach the significance of the march: Bryan D. Palmer's Working Class Experience, Judy M. Torrance's Public Violence in Canada, and James Struthers' No Fault of Their Own. The first includes the Trek in a chapter on the backlash of capitalism against the growing power of the working class in the aftermath of World War One. The material on the march is limited, however, because of Palmer's strict reliance on Brown's dissertation as a source.42 Torrance's monograph is a sociological study of acrimonious episodes in Canada's past. In linking the Trek with other violent events new insight is provided on the prevailing mentalities of both the marchers and the government.43 The book by Struthers places the Trek into the context of the vagaries of the Canadian

41Ibid., 14.


43Torrance, Public Violence in Canada, 165. Torrance linked disparate groups such as the Trekkers and the Front de liberation du Quebec over the purpose of their respective demands:

It is not surprising that the various platforms should contain several itemized discontents, for the main purpose of these documents was to build support for the movement. The more grievances mentioned the greater the number of people who may be enticed to join it. The total document thus represents the extent to which people with different grievances may be expected to support each other.
relief system. More recently Pierre Berton's *The Great Depression* appeared on the scene with a lengthy section on the Trek and the Regina Riot. Although well-written, this account by the famous Canadian pop historian offers nothing that the works he synthesizes do not already provide. In reality though, few general works of Canadian history in recent years have attempted to incorporate or synthesize the main works on the Trek; they may devote more space to the Trek than earlier general histories but they seem to do so out of a sense of obligation rather than a belief in the significance of the event.

Thus the main problem with the literature on the On to Ottawa Trek becomes clear: the major works fail to provide context and a national scope and significance to the event. To a certain extent, Jamieson's challenge to historians has been acted upon. Liversedge's memoir offered a personalized and inherently subjective account on the march. Howard's monograph combined personal perspectives with documented reports to provide a more complete portrait of the Trek. And Brown attempted to offer the standard academic portrayal of the events of June and July 1935. The historical dilemma is that the two main monographs have overcompensated for past academic neglect; they provide, and this is especially true of Howard, an extreme concentration on the Trek denying it any form of context. If the Trek was a national movement then where is the rest of Canada in the various works? In order to establish the true importance of the event there is a legitimate need to extend the historical

---


focus beyond Regina. What makes the situation worse is that the specific works draw undocumented conclusions on the scope of the march. In claiming more for the Trek, Howard and Brown unintentionally provide less, relegating their subject to the status of a regional protest movement.

When Freedom Was Lost contains its author's unsubstantiated assertions on the level of popular support enjoyed by the marchers nationwide: "the most important thing the Trek had going for it was that the very audacity of the expedition appealed to the imagination of the public."46 Continuing in the same vein, Brown later adds: "Although the Trek leaders had originally been doubtful about the wisdom of going to Ottawa, they made the most of the new situation by rallying support for their cause on the journey eastward."47 In neither case does he provide any specific evidence to support his contentions. In fact, his discussion of the national significance of the Trek is contradictory. At the end of the book, Brown alleges that "[d]uring July and August 1935 the issues surrounding the Trek and the Regina Riot were kept before the public by trade unions and civil liberties associations."48 Just six pages earlier, however, he stated: "There were unsuccessful attempts to organize another Trek from points east of Regina... However, they did not receive much national attention and their expedition was generally looked upon as anti-climatic."49 Why, if the

46Brown, When Freedom Was Lost, 151.
47Ibid., 170.
48Ibid., 203.
49Ibid., 197.
50Ibid., 151.
Trek had so captured the support of the general public, did attempts to revive it, especially after the riot, fail so miserably? Brown does not address this seeming inconsistency; he expanded it further by alleging earlier in the book that only "the more conservative elements of the population... [were] apprehensive about what appeared to be a defiance of constituted authority." He apparently based his assumptions about the public reaction to the Trek on the reception provided by the citizens of Calgary. He argued that the warm welcome that the marchers received in the Albertan city had an impact on both the Bennett government and the rest of prairie Canada:

Events surrounding the trekkers' stay in Calgary were probably what convinced Bennett and ministers that the Trek was not going to disintegrate of its own accord: On the contrary, it was picking up support rapidly and had already caught the public imagination. Brown also dutifully reports the aftermath of the meeting with Bennett, when Trek leaders, together with worker representatives from Ontario and Quebec, made a call for a national march to Ottawa by the unemployed. Curiously no comment is made about the reaction of the nation to this impassioned appeal. Nor does he mention the impact upon the public of an earlier call on the part of the National Unemployment Council of Canada for "solidarity meetings and demonstrations in every city, town and village for June 22, the day that the relief camps strikers will present their case to the Federal Government in Ottawa." Many of the conclusions and

51 Ibid., 175-6.
52 Ibid., 153.
contentions about public support from *When Freedom Was Lost* may well be valid, the argument here is merely that not enough evidence has been provided to make them assuredly so and consequently they remain speculative.

The only item to deal specifically with public support for the Trek is an article by Victor Howard that appeared in the book *The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada*. The piece, which contains no documentation, mainly relies on interviews with participants and deals only with those cities the Trekkers passed through, including their final resting stop at Regina.54 Unfortunately, Howard seems to assume that the reaction was the same elsewhere in Canada leaving his broad conclusions about support the Trekkers enjoyed east of Regina filled with supposition. In the monograph's introduction, a national significance was attributed to the march: "It is the story of an event which figured prominently in the history of the Canadian worker, [and] in the history of the Canadian radical..."55 Nothing that follows in the book justifies this generalization. Later he added, "Once the On-to-Ottawa left Vancouver on 3 June, Canada woke up to the prospect of a great story about to unfold, truly a national story."56 Editorials from selected newspapers were then exclusively offered to substantiate this opinion.

By failing to document properly events in other areas of Canada during the period of the Trek, the authors effectively deny the event the

---


55Howard, *"We were the salt of the earth!"*, xi.

56*ibid.*, 171.
national perspective their works had attributed to it. The Trek may well deserve to be considered more than a regional protest movement, but the claim is not backed with any substantive evidence; and evidence to the event's national significance and scope does need to be provided. A left-wing intellectual, Ian Angus, argued in his book *Canadian Bolsheviks*, "[the Trek has] achieved semi-legendary status for labor historians- few of them seem aware that despite the exceptional heroism of the workers who participated... the On-to-Ottawa Trekkers... never got within 2,000 miles of Ottawa." 57

True context to the march can be determined only by an effective study of the situation in Manitoba and Ontario during the days of June and July 1935. A wider perspective is especially pertinent to an understanding of why the Trekkers were stopped where they were, and whether the march had a trans-regional significance that may have influenced the federal government's decision to stop it in the capital of Saskatchewan. Regina, Brown and Howard contend, was a suitable place to halt the Trek because of its large RCMP detachment and a hostile Liberal government that Bennett could burden with the care of the marchers. 58 In addition, each writer alleges, however, that Winnipeg was also an important factor in the federal government's decision not to allow any movement east of Regina. According to Howard, the capital of Manitoba was extremely significant to the history of the On to Ottawa Trek:

---


58 Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost*, 157; Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!", 104-6.
It is certainly unlikely that Prime Minister Bennett ever intended to let the Trek reach Ottawa... If... the march reached Winnipeg, then he would have to deal with a Trek that would have doubled in size in a city which had a volatile labour crisis.59

Brown provided a similar perspective:

While the Trek was still in Alberta, the federal authorities decided to stop it in Saskatchewan.... By the time the trekkers left Calgary they were already on their way to creating a modern popular legend. And they had not even reached Winnipeg- the historic centre of Prairie radicalism.60

A few pages later he added:

The federal government had decided that Regina was a convenient place to stop the Trek.... The next major centre was Winnipeg, a large city with a radical tradition and a large left-wing movement where the trekkers could be expected to obtain both massive public support and many recruits.61

Both authors obviously agree that Winnipeg played a pivotal role in the government's determination to halt the Trek though neither work provides enough information on the situation in that city. For example, what constituted "massive public support"? On only three pages in Brown's book is the situation in cities east of Regina even discussed and then in the sparsest of ways. When dealing with Winnipeg he incorrectly identifies

59Ibid., 100.

60Brown, When Freedom Was Lost, 153.

61Ibid., 157.
the city's mayor, further indicating the poor quality of the material on cities beyond Regina.62

Howard, perhaps because his focus is more squarely on the march, provides greater detail on Trek-related activities in Winnipeg and Toronto. Several pages loosely detail events in Manitoba's capital, although with some inaccuracies: a wrong date is given for the occupation of a dining hall by Winnipeg unemployed, and his account of an attempt by 600 Winnipeg trekkers to board a train is also not correct.63 A brief mention (one line) of events in Ontario is provided in the book's epilogue.

The sole work to deal in any substantive way with events in Winnipeg during the Trek is James H. Gray's The Winter Years. He devotes part of a chapter to Trek-related events in the capital of Manitoba which he covered first hand. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, his memories are somewhat colored by errors.64 Three other works carry brief details on Ontario events associated with the Trek: Dreams of Equality, by historian Joan Sangster, offers two paragraphs on the involvement of women in a march from Toronto to Ottawa.65 G.M. LeFresne devotes three pages of his B.A. thesis to events in Ontario. His disdain for the marchers, however, infects both the objectivity and factual content of the work.66 S.M. Skebo's

62bid., 179, 169. On the latter page Brown lists a former Mayor of Winnipeg, Ralph Webb, instead of John Queen who was Mayor during the period of the Trek.

63Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!", 169-70.

64Gray, The Winter Years, 160. He described the Trek-related events in Winnipeg as "the most exciting story I ever covered in my career in Canadian journalism."


66LeFresne, "The Royal Twenty Centers," 118.
M.A. thesis entitled "Liberty and Authority: Civil Liberties in Toronto, 1929-1935," provides some information on the actions of Toronto Trek-supporters during July 1935. Once more, however, the portrayal is far from comprehensive.67

The paucity of material on Trek-related events east of Regina creates a historical quandary since the existing literature on the subject agrees that knowledge of these events is needed to achieve a more insightful portrait of the Trek. This "snowball effect" interpretation (the idea that as the march moved eastward it would grow in size to the point where it would become uncontrollable) appears in the modern works because the concept was present during the events of June and July 1935.

In his memoirs Ronald Liversedge opined on Trek support east of Regina:

There can be no doubt whatsoever that we could have continued on with very little difficulty had we decided to reject Bennett's offer. Our next big stopover would have been Winnipeg, where three thousand single unemployed were waiting to merge their forces with ours on the journey to the east.68

Arthur Evans viewed the situation in much the same way. On his return from the failed meeting with Bennett he told a crowd at the Fort William train station that an army of 20,000 to 30,000 unemployed would eventually reach Ottawa.69


68Liversedge, Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, 107-8.

The Government's own sources were providing them with estimates on the strength of the Trek. On June 9, 1935, the District Officer Commanding Military District 13 wired Ottawa to warn that "[t]alk amongst men revolutionary movement, large numbers expected to join at Winnipeg and Toronto." Later on June 20, Manion sent a private letter to Bennett to warn that "this Communistic crowd who are leading the more or less innocent unemployed are determined to stir up what would be practically a revolution, and I feel that undoubtedly strong measures will have to be take to curb this movement."

Clearly, then, there is a need to progress to the next historiographical plain; to break the chains of region and study the On to Ottawa Trek in a broader context rather than merely making unsubstantiated assumptions about that context. Historian Gregory Kealey argued in "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s" that too often Western Canadian labour historiography has "been influenced by a strong sense of western exceptionalism which increasingly seems more suggestive of the chauvinist attitudes of both the western working class of the period and of historians today (he specifically cites David Bercuson)." Brown and Howard's limited studies on the march unintentionally reinforce the idea of "western exceptionalism" in this area. Kealey made it clear, however, that he was not advocating a return to the traditional type of national history, "but rather the consideration on a national scale of the particular class experiences of Canadian workers in

70NAC, McNaughton Papers, Vol. 62, File 380 (B), Military District 13 to Adjutant General, 9 June 1935, as cited in Brown, When Freedom Was Lost, 155.

71NAC, R.J. Manion papers, Manuscript Group 27, Ill B7, Vol. 33, File 69, Manion to Bennett, 20 June 1935.
local and regional contexts which adds up to something more than local and regional exceptionalism.\textsuperscript{72} Carl Berger, J.M.S. Careless, and Michael Bliss have also proposed more of a national interpretation in Canadian historiography, although decidedly not from a Marxist perspective. Berger lamented "the excesses of revisionism and the fact that a substantial proportion of contemporary history was more likely to raise painful questions of guilt and grievance rather than provide positive perspectives on the major currents of national life."\textsuperscript{73} The perspective of Careless had come full circle by 1980 as he surveyed the new historical scholarship:

There has been a massive outpouring both in popular and scholarly writings on regional interests and inequities,... on class disparities and stresses, and such things as national concerns are by and large passed over or discounted. In this situation I feel a little like the farmer in the midst of the flood when he declared: Lord, I know I prayed for rain- but this is ridiculous.\textsuperscript{74}

In a 1991 article Bliss argued for Canadian history that does not lose sight of the fact that its subject is Canada.\textsuperscript{75}

In trying to provide context to the On to Ottawa Trek there is a danger that the entire project could devolve into mere speculation and

\textsuperscript{72}Gregory S. Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s," 76-7.

\textsuperscript{73}Berger, The Writing of English Canadian History, 320.


predictions, a version of "what if" history. What if the Trekkers had reached Winnipeg? How large would the march have been if it had passed through Toronto? It is not necessary, however, to project or pontificate on the reaction to the Trek in the cities and regions it was scheduled to travel through east of Regina. Cities like Winnipeg, Toronto, and Ottawa, and the region of Northern Ontario all experienced their own forms of treks and Trek-associated events from June to August 1935, and these activities form part of a larger story that is yet to be told.

On a basic level this thesis will represent an eastern extension of the Howard article on citizen support for the Trek. Winnipeg will be the first city to be dealt with: all activities related to the Trek will examined from as many perspectives as possible. The region of Northern Ontario, including Trek-related occurrences in several smaller cities such as Port Arthur, Fort William, Kenora, Sudbury, North Bay, will be examined next, followed by a chapter on the Toronto situation. The thesis's final stop, as it would have been for the Trekkers, will be Ottawa.

Total objectivity in any pursuit is impossible and this is especially true of history. As historian E.H. Carr noted, "[t]he historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history." This does not excuse the writers of history from at least attempting to ensure a degree of objectivity. Some of the works dealing with the Trek have been too reliant on one particular perspective for their sources. This bias is not entirely the fault of the authors since various agencies of the federal government, in their never-ending quest to protect Canadians from their own past, have been reluctant to release material related to the march. To rectify the

disparity this writer made a formal request under the Access to Information Act for pertinent RCMP documents. Several hundred pages of relevant police records have been acquired. The police material are just part of the varied sources that will be employed to prevent an over reliance on one particular source or group of sources; some have been used before in regards to the Trek but not to deal with the same aspect that this work documents. This principle applies to other government and Trekker material, such as the R.J. Manion Papers, the R.B. Bennett Papers, the Mitchell Hepburn Papers, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation Papers, Communist Party of Canada Papers, and Department of National Defence Records. Newspapers will also be a major source for this thesis and while the majority were certainly opposed to the Trek, some (the Toronto Daily Star, the Ottawa Evening Citizen, and the Winnipeg Free Press) expressed open sympathy for the marchers. Besides, a negative editorial policy toward the marchers did not necessarily affect the quality and objectivity of the news coverage on the subject: the Toronto Globe made no secret of its outright hostility in regards to the marchers yet it offered more extensive coverage of relevant activities in Toronto than did its competitor, the Star.

There are several questions that can be asked of the sources in order to provide more of a trans-regional scope to the Trek historiography: What were the levels of support for the Trekkers in the cities that they planned to march through east of Regina? How was that support realized? Were there marches, campaigns, or other forms of demonstrations in support of the Trek? Was the federal government correct in alleging that the Communist Party of Canada played a major role in organizing the Trek? What was the reaction of various levels of government to the army of
unemployed? How did ordinary citizens feel about the various Trek movements. Was the federal government's decision to halt the marchers in Regina based on an exaggerated or realistic fear of the potential for the Trek to grow, or did the Bennett government, by its very action, radicalize and raise levels of support for the marchers in the Trek's future stops? And specifically did the Trek's appeal stretch beyond western Canada? In short, the time has come to move beyond Regina.
CHAPTER TWO
"We are sitting on the edge of a volcano"¹

The so-called "snowball interpretation" of the On to Ottawa Trek was created with Winnipeg in mind. That tremendous support awaited the marchers in the capital of Manitoba was the opinion of the federal government, the Trek leadership, and more recently, historians. This belief was based on Winnipeg being one of the Trek's largest stops and, more importantly, on the city's radical past. It had already experienced Canada's most famous riot in 1919 when labour disputes degenerated into a general strike and eventually into a clash between the strikers and the RCMP.² It was widely believed—then and even today— that the Trek would take on a more radical tone once it reached Winnipeg.

According to historian David Bercuson, however, the Winnipeg General Strike marked the end of an era in Winnipeg and western Canada.... Much of the vitality of a labour movement grown powerful and energetic during four years of war was sapped in the grinding and hopeless struggle of the six-week confrontation at Winnipeg.³

If, as Bercuson argues, the Winnipeg General Strike represented the denouement to an era, it also ushered in a new age; one which was readily

¹Winnipeg Tribune, 24 June 1935: 9. The comment was made by Fred Lawrence, a labour M.L.A.


³Ibid., 29-30.
apparent in 1935. The Depression was in a large part responsible for the changed environment. During the 1930s, the cost of relief in Winnipeg had risen an average 600 per cent a year over the previous economic downturn of 1920-5. Thousands of Winnipeggers were in need of assistance but the federal government offered little help. The dire situation forced the provincial government of Premier John Bracken into a constant battle with the Bennett administration over relief payments. The provincial government's claim that it was not receiving its fair share was ignored.

Thus by 1935, the radicals of 1919 had become the elected representatives of the civic voters. John Queen was the prime example of the new reality in Winnipeg; he had spent a year in jail for seditious conspiracy in the aftermath of the strike. This penance only seemed to increase his stature as he later became an alderman, an MLA, leader of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and then in 1935, Winnipeg's Mayor. His deputy Mayor, John Blumberg, was also a member of the ILP while two aldermen, Jacob Penner and Martin J. Forkin, were members of the Communist Party of Canada.

It was this new political reality that prepared to greet the Trekkers as they moved east from Vancouver. In a June 8 interview about the march, Mayor Queen urged his city to be hospitable to the approaching army of unemployed. He added, however, that this position was his alone and did not necessarily reflect the attitude of the city council. The Mayor's

---


statement was also clearly based on the assumption that Winnipeg would only be a brief stopover for the marchers before they continued on to Ottawa. Queen estimated that there would be little trouble in caring for the men.8

Premier John Bracken did not share his fellow Winnipeggers assessment of the city's capacity to care for the marchers. Two days after the mayor's comments, Bracken directly asked Prime Minister Bennett to prevent the marchers from reaching the capital of Manitoba arguing that the resources were not available to care for the 2,000 men.9 Bennett's refusal of the Premier's request forced a compromise among the various levels of government in Manitoba. At a joint press conference in Winnipeg attended by the Mayor, the chairman of the civic unemployment committee, the provincial deputy minister of labour, Arthur MacNamara, and representatives of the RCMP, and the local military command, Military District 10 (MD 10), it was agreed that the Trekkers would be considered to be ordinary transient relief recipients; thus they would be able to receive two meals a day at city dining halls and accommodation at rooming houses courtesy of the city.10 The same day, Jessie Kirk, head of the Civic Charities Bureau, stated that her organization would probably allow a tag day for the marchers: "There may be some justification for [a tag day], as

7"Mayor Urges Hospitality to Rod Riders," Winnipeg Tribune 8 June 1935: 3.


after all, these men are in such a plight through no fault of their own, and they are human beings, not mosquitoes."  

On the surface the Bennett government seemed to render Winnipeg's worries and plans irrelevant when it ordered on June 11 that the Trek be halted in Regina. Instead this decision created additional problems for the city and province. Many of the unemployed in Manitoba's capital had been planning to join the Trek, and others began to flock into the city with the same goal in mind. In effect, these men were now stranded in Winnipeg. On June 17, the plight of this growing group of unemployed was taken directly to the civic politicians by a two-man delegation who complained about the traditional policy toward transients. This rule was particularly unsatisfactory since it would not allow the men to wait for the main Trek body which they still expected to arrive. The council was receptive to the pleas of the men. A motion, put forward by Penner, seconded by Forkin, and passed by the council, recommended to the "Provincial Government that the... unemployed from the camps be... provided for in the same manner" as the Bracken government had promised to provide for the British Columbia Trekkers.  

What was the attitude of Winnipeggers towards the On to Ottawa Trek and those who had gathered under its banner in their city? Some local organizations took up the cause of the unemployed army and protested their treatment through the use of letters and telegrams addressed to Prime Minister Bennett. In only a few cases were the messages supportive

of the federal government's actions and policies. Women's organizations were particularly active in using telegrams as their means of protest. For example, the Women's Study Group of Fort Rouge called for the elimination of relief camps. The Labor Women's Federation of Manitoba, "a federation of women's study groups, which has a membership of 1000 women and whose influence may be extended to ten times that number," sent a similar protest to Bennett a few days later. Other women's organizations, including the Ladies Auxiliary of North Centre Winnipeg Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, and the Working Women's League of Winnipeg, complained about the halting of the B.C. Trekkers at Regina.

Other Winnipeg citizens and groups took up the cause of the Trekkers by actively demonstrating and organizing. At a Winnipeg meeting the day after the marchers were halted in Regina, A.A. MacLeod, chairman of the Canadian League Against War and Fascism, a communist front organization, criticized the decision to halt the Trek. Another speaker at the same gathering, local communist Charles Hichin, stated that "when the strikers reach Winnipeg I'd like to see their ranks swelled to 5,000 in the march to Ottawa." A third speaker called for Winnipeg and Manitoba unemployed to support and join the Trek. The Veterans' Security League, which hosted


the meeting, pledged its involvement in the march and called for a mass protest meeting to be held in Winnipeg's Market Square on June 14.¹⁸

On that day an organizational encounter was held inside the Winnipeg Tribune auditorium under the auspices of the Manitoba Conference of Unemployed. One hundred and sixteen delegates representing fifty-two political and labour organizations participated. Two decisions were arrived at: a telegram offering aid was sent to the Trekkers in Regina; and a committee was appointed to organize support for the marchers by requesting the assistance of Winnipeg workers and unemployed, along with churches and other interested organizations. That same evening a protest gathering was held where the first public reference was made to a unilateral Winnipeg march to Ottawa if the Trek was ended by violence in Regina.¹⁹

A further meeting of the labour-political delegates was held the following day (June 15); it was chaired by James Litterick, a local communist who would be elected to the Manitoba legislature the following year. The official chairman was S.J. Farmer, an MLA from the Independent Labour Party. The committee took several concrete steps.²⁰ A telegram was sent to Prime Minister Bennett requesting that "three Manitoba relief camp workers accompany [the] Regina delegation [to] Ottawa" and warning that "over [a] thousand relief camp workers in Winnipeg [are] prepared to [march] to Ottawa to present demands."²¹ The telegram was signed by C.W.

¹⁸Ibid., 6.

¹⁹"Local Jobless Pledge Aid to B.C. Marchers," Winnipeg Tribune 17 June 1935: 3.

Foster, the chairman of the Manitoba Unemployed Conference and a member of the newly formed Trek-support organization's executive. It was also decided to pressure rail officials into allowing the three delegates to travel to Ottawa and to ask that the city allow centralized housing for the unemployed in Winnipeg. Finally, the publicity committee intended to create and distribute a manifesto explaining the Trek and the grievances involved. The name "On-to-Ottawa and Anti-Slave Camp Conference" was officially adopted, although it would later become known as the Relief Camp Workers' Supporting Conference.22

The creation of a manifesto had been proposed by Alderman Penner in order to encourage the support of Manitoba relief campers and Winnipeg workers. The head of the organization committee, Isadore Minster, went a step further urging that the document call for all relief camp workers to join the Trek "to get rid of the slave camps."23 Minster was both a communist and a veteran Workers' Unity League Organizer who had been involved in the 1931 Estevan miners' strike and the 1933 Stratford furniture workers' strike.24 Another proposal was introduced requesting that organizers be sent out from Winnipeg to outlying camps in order to encourage directly the participation of camp members in the Trek. Activism of this type would be the responsibility of the organization committee.25

21NAC, Bennett Papers, "Foster to Bennett," 18 June 1935: 496612.


23Ibid., 1, 9.

It was over the issue of encouraging camp workers to join the Trek that the first divisions of opinion about the goals of the conference began to appear. S.J. Farmer objected to any attempt at encouraging the unemployed to participate in the Trek, arguing that the purpose of their organization was merely one of support, not activism. Litterick, in an apparent attempt to alleviate the division, concurred with Farmer that the workers should be in control of their own future. A compromise was reached whereby it was agreed that members of the relief camps would be kept informed of activities in Winnipeg.26

Two days later, another disagreement within the leadership occurred. On this occasion, the argument was over the content of the manifesto; it offered support for the Regina Trekkers' six demands and requested that Winnipeg's industrial, political, labour and religious organizations offer their support. Farmer opposed two of the six points contending that it was inappropriate to request $.50 an hour because wage rates differed in various areas of Canada and that a demand for unemployment insurance failed to take into consideration diverse views on the situation. Because of these objections the manifesto was initially to have been tabled,27 but a counter argument was made that supporters of the Trek did not have the right to dispute the actual demands of the Trekkers.28 Eventually 10,000 manifestoes were distributed.29

27"Local Refused Fares to Travel East," Winnipeg Tribune 19 June 1935: 2.
Events over the following days would illustrate a certain ineffectiveness and helplessness on the part of the Supporting Conference as it seemed to grapple continually with policy choices of support and activism. One of its biggest failures was the refusal of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council (T.L.C.) to have anything to do with the Supporting Conference. The T.L.C. justification for its refusal to participate was that it wished to remain free of any type of communist influence which it correctly believed was present in the Trek-support conference. Some union members argued that the presence of the ILP and CCF proved the communists were not dominant, but this was countered with the contention that these other social democratic parties were involved merely for crass political reasons. The T.L.C. did unanimously condemn the relief camp system, while a majority of its delegates approved of the On to Ottawa Trek.30

Other failed targets of protest were the two main rail companies. On June 15, a delegation led by Alderman Forkin met with W.M. Neal, vice-president of the western lines of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and demanded that the Trekkers in Regina be allowed to use the railways. Not surprisingly, Neal refused the request, prompting Forkin to accuse him of "supporting the other side."31 During the meeting with rail officials, several hundred people demonstrated outside the station.32


30Ibid., 31-2.

31"Demand Denied For 'Open Way' For 'Strikers'," Winnipeg Tribune 15 June 1935: 2.

32Ibid., 2.
The efforts of the Supporting Conference had so far been largely ineffective. The June 18 arrival in Winnipeg of two federal cabinet ministers, R.J. Manion and Robert Weir, returning to Ottawa after meeting Trek leaders in Regina, offered an inviting target for protest. By this time, there were some additional protesters as an organization specifically representing Manitoba relief camp strikers, and again mainly led by communists, had formed. Thus, the relief camp strikers' leader was among the party of seven to greet Manion and Weir at the rail station. Also present were Forkin, Foster, and Litterick. The primary demand of the group was that three delegates, each selected by Manitoba relief camp strikers, be allowed to join the collection of eight Trek representatives who would arrive the next day from Regina on their way to Ottawa to meet with Bennett. Manion bluntly refused their request telling them that he had "no power to grant permission for a delegation to go to Ottawa from Manitoba."34

Although the protesters were unable to achieve any of their demands, they did leave a strong impression on R.J. Manion. In a confidential letter to Bennett, the Minister of Canals and Railways warned:

In the first place, the situation is exceedingly critical, not only in Regina but it is particularly critical in Winnipeg, so much so that my conviction is that if we stop, as we will eventually have to, the marchers at Regina there will

33"Over 1,000 in Winnipeg, Still Coming," The Worker 22 June 1935: 2; James H. Gray, The Winter Years: The Prairies During the Depression (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), 153-4. Gray, in his capacity as a reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press, provided an eyewitness account of the formation of this new committee. He alleged that the committee's creation was "a classic example of a Communist organized take-over" as four individuals including Mitch Sago, a veteran Workers' Unity League organizer, and Thomas McCarthy from the Shilo relief camp formed the leadership.

immediately arise in Winnipeg a movement to come East from there. We were waited on at the Winnipeg station in passing through Tuesday night by five hundred unemployed who were very dictatorial in their demand that I should permit three of them to come East with the Regina group. This demand was turned down by myself on the ground that I had no right to deal with Winnipeg at all, but we had a pretty uncomfortable half or three-quarters of an hour interview with the leaders of this unemployed group at Winnipeg.  

Nor was this worried analysis of the situation in Winnipeg solely Manion's opinion. After his meeting with the Trek-support delegation at the rail station, he met with representatives from the Winnipeg Board of Trade. Manion also described the flavour of this encounter in his letter to Bennett:

[The meeting with the unemployed delegates] was followed by an interview with the Board of Trade, led by Mr. Cox, the President and they were absolutely panicky about the situation in Winnipeg and insistent that something must be done in the way of giving work to the Winnipeg unemployed in order to avoid a catastrophe.

This represented quite a change in attitude on the part of some of the Winnipeg business community. Only two weeks earlier, one used car lot ran an advertisement: "B.C. Relief Camp Strikers Walk to Ottawa. Why Walk? You can Easily Own One of Our Reconditioned Used Cars." 

---


36 Ibid., 20 June 1935.

37 Winnipeg Free Press, 7 June 1935: 19.
Apparently Bennett heeded Manion's warning as several federal agencies began to pay attention to the situation in Winnipeg. The Department of National Defence was in charge of administering the relief camps and thus, had a strong interest in the current activities. The day after Bennett received Manion's memo, the Commissioner of the RCMP, J.H. MacBrien, himself a former military officer, telephoned the Adjutant-General, C.F. Constantine, to ask several pointed questions about the situation in Winnipeg. MacBrien was interested in the procedure for using the military to restore order. When he was informed that the attorney general of a province would have to authorize the use of the military, the Commissioner asked if there was another method; only if Parliament declared an emergency was the reply. MacBrien also inquired about the total number of troops available in the Winnipeg area (there were 225 at the military's Camp Shilo) and he added that help from the army might be needed at Winnipeg or Regina.38

The day after the call from the Commissioner of the RCMP, the Canadian military attempted to attain a more accurate portrait of the situation in Winnipeg by contacting the District Officer Commanding (DOC) Military District 10, Brigadier J.L. Gordon. Specifically the military commander was asked about a press report claiming that 1,000 men from relief camps were ready to march from Winnipeg to Ottawa. National Defence was reassured by its field commander that men were not leaving the camps and that the environment in the capital of Manitoba while serious was not overtly troubling to the local RCMP detachment.39

---

mentioned in conclusion that his information was based on reports from the previous evening. He telephoned back twelve minutes later to add that as of 22:30 on June 21 there had been no reports of disturbances or exoduses from the camps.40

The general's update covered the period through June 21. But three days later, the situation had changed. Following the meeting with Manion, James Litterick had told a mass meeting that the relief camps in the province would be approached directly in an attempt to convince their inhabitants to join the trek.41 The June 24 military report confirmed this new strategy:

Agitators outside personnel in camp have been particularly active over week end. Foreman Vivian has reported Saturday afternoon men in motor car held a meeting in vicinity of camp in an endeavour to persuade personnel on relief join on Ottawa movement. 17 responded immediately. Foreman further reports anticipates probably 40 leaving today Monday, no further report received. Foreman camp 2 Duck Mountain reports by telephone agitators visited both camps 2 and camp 3 majority of men on strike unable to give exact details as yet. Both foremen instructed discharge strikers who refuse to return to work after reasonable warning. Mounted Police informed.42

Apparently only camps in the immediate vicinity of Winnipeg were subject to agitation. The camps at Riding Mountain National Park in west-central


40Ibid., 22 June 1935.


Manitoba were unaffected. Nor were outside agitators always needed to draw men out of the hated camps. On June 14, at Manitoba's Cross Lake relief camp thirty men went on strike intending to join the Trek when it arrived at Winnipeg. In another case, thirty-five unemployed left a camp at Rennie, Manitoba. Registration offices were initially opened in Winnipeg by the Manitoba Conference of Unemployed, but later the organizing committee of the "On-to-Ottawa and Anti Slave Camp Conference" took control of this task. At a registration bureau on Main Street the men were issued cards listing their name, serial number, and camp of origin. They were also divided into groups of twelve, which were placed in divisions of 300. By noon of June 19, the opening day of registration, 500 men had been signed up. And the numbers continued to grow.

Six days later, in a telegram to Bennett, John Bracken warned that "Single Mens Relief Commission report an addition of twelve hundred unemployed single men [described by the RCMP as "riff raff"] in Winnipeg within last few days,... Number increasing at the rate of one hundred per day..." In fact there had been an increase of 1,214 relief registrants between June 15 and June 25. At least 364 of the new recipients had not

---


previously received relief in Winnipeg, an indication that they were indeed arriving from relief camps and other provinces.48

The burgeoning Manitoba trek movement existed largely to supplement the B.C. Trekkers in Regina. Accordingly, the former group often received orders from the capital of Saskatchewan. For example, the idea to send delegates to Ottawa came from Regina, not Winnipeg.49 On June 17, Arthur Evans informed his Winnipeg contact, the ubiquitous James Litterick, of the Trek delegation's scheduled departure time for Ottawa and advised that "...mass housing arrangements to keep forces together necessary for organizational Reasons [sic]."50 The Winnipeg trekkers' demand for centralized accommodation was to be a source of conflict between previously compatible groups: the unemployed and the civic government. By keeping the men together it would be much easier for their leaders to exert control over them when the time came to begin the trek.

48PAM, Bracken papers, GR1661 G621, File 962, "Unemployed Single Men- List of Men on Relief," no date. The origin of 364 men on relief during late June was reported:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.C.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alta.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sask.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man.</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>(39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ont.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>(24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.B &amp; N.S</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*percentages do not add up to 100% because of rounding


50SAB, RRIC, Ex. 139, #229, "Evans to Litterick," 17 June 1935.
Conversely allowing special accommodation would be a recognition by the city that the Winnipeg trekkers were not ordinary transients.

Arthur Evans arrived in Winnipeg on June 18. He and the other members of his party were greeted at the rail station by 2,000 demonstrators, whom they addressed in a neighbouring lot. Evans, Litterick, Alderman Forkin, and another local unemployed organizer, Fred Donner, also met with Neal of the CPR, who refused to allow the three Winnipeg delegates to travel to Ottawa on credit. The Evans' visit and the subsequent failure of his mission in the nation's capital began a process of radicalization of the situation in its provincial counterpart. It was becoming obvious that the B.C. Trekkers would not be allowed to continue their journey to Ottawa. Hence Winnipeg, with its own nascent trek movement and radical past, was beginning to share the national spotlight. On June 22, 1935, in the aftermath of the failed meeting with Bennett, several groups, including the Regina Trek delegation, issued a Canada-wide call to the unemployed, workers and unions, CCF organizations and other middle class sympathizers to either join or support a massive trek to Ottawa. The message would be taken to heart in Winnipeg.

With the varied Trek-related events in Winnipeg, including the possibility of its own march, the city was clearly stirred up. James H. Gray, a reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press at the time, described the mood in the latter part of June 1935:

51"Local Strikers Refused Fares to Travel East," Winnipeg Tribune 19 June 1935: 1.

The government action in stopping the marchers in Regina stirred up a whirlwind of activity in Winnipeg... An electric current of anticipation crackled around [the city]...

In late June of 1935, the sidewalks were crowded as never before. The waves of pedestrians would veer off at Carlton Street to gather in front of the Free Press to see what was on the late-news bulletin boards... It was a common occurrence for scores to gather around the square on an evening just on the chance a meeting might be held... [T]he impression that something was building up to a climax was strong enough to taste.53

The feeling of increased tension was shared by other Winnipeg citizens, both radical and moderate. On June 22, MLA Fred Lawrence of the Labour party raised the specter of past conflict when he offered a warning to 200 delegates at a Relief Workers' Supporting Conference meeting:

We might not realize it but we are sitting on the edge of a volcano, today. There is the direct possible need for clear thinking in the present situation if a recurrence of the troubles of 1919 is to be averted. If trouble comes it will again be the workers who stop the bullets. Everyone must proceed with the utmost caution. We must do everything in our power to make sure that no one will lose their heads.54

The speech introduced a more moderate current to a meeting where speakers, such as Fred Donner, accused the federal government of having held the meeting with the Regina delegation merely to provide an interlude for despatching more police to the west. At the same gathering plans were

53Gray, The Winter Years, 154-5.
made for a massive protest meeting. Invitations were to be sent to Mayor Queen, J.S. Woodsworth, A.A. Heaps, and other local religious and political leaders including Tim Buck, the leader of the Communist Party of Canada and the only major politician to attend. His inclusion was objected to by Lawrence who argued that the rally was not for proselytizing. In addition, the meeting decided that Lawrence, Litterick, and Farmer would protest to Bracken the arrival of additional RCMP units in the city. Plans were also made for acquiring radio time and distributing additional manifestoes to encourage further public involvement. Three days later, worried over the continuing influx of unemployed, Premier Bracken wired a warning to Bennett:

[a] serious situation is developing... neither province nor city can be expected to shoulder responsibility to feed and house these men and we are afraid of great difficulty maintaining law and order,... Strongly recommend Dominion reopen Riding Mountain National Park camp [it was to closed in June] and enlarge Lac Seul camp and establish other dominion camps to care for men willing to return to camp and also care for those who are not our responsibility.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police was also beginning to worry about the tension in the city. In a previous report to the military, the Mounted Police's Winnipeg detachment had discounted a need for special concern over local Trek-related events by informing Brigadier Gordon that "the


situation is quiet and well under control and very much better than [we] expected.\textsuperscript{58} This reassuring appraisal of the city's mood changed after the angry confrontation in Ottawa and the increased agitation on the part of the Relief Camp Workers' Supporting Conference. A new interpretation of the situation was offered on June 24, by Thomas Dann, head of the RCMP contingent in Winnipeg and a member of the Force since 1904 having risen by 1935 to the position of Assistant Commissioner and commander of Manitoba's "D" Division.\textsuperscript{59}

Dann sent his colleagues in Regina a telegram that reflected both the unity of spirit and the tension in the community:

\begin{verbatim}
ELEVEN HUNDRED SAID TO REGISTERED HERE FOR MARCH...
MEETING SATURDAY SHOWS PRACTICALLY ALL LABOR GROUPS
SUPPORTING MOVEMENT... MASS MEETING TO BE HELD
WEDNESDAY NEXT [June 26] SEVERAL PROMINENT PERSONS
ASKED TO SPEAK... COMMUNIST LEADERS TALK OF A SHOWDOWN
HERE WHEN REGINA CONTINGENT ARRIVES... EXPECTING THEM
SOON\textsuperscript{60}
\end{verbatim}

Perhaps sensing the increasingly radicalized environment, the RCMP actively entered the fray during the last week and a half of June; their intervention was dedicated to obstructing the growing strength of the Winnipeg trek movement by preventing the further movement of potential trekkers into Manitoba's capital and by denying those already in the city


\textsuperscript{60}NAC, DND Records, File 380, "Memorandum," 22 June 1935.
the transportation services necessary to continue the trek eastward. The Bennett government had warned that any attempted treks would be harshly dealt with.61

The RCMP attempted to halt movement into the city by restricting access to rail and road; in the latter case they were able to refuse truck permits to those requesting the right to transport men to Winnipeg, as happened to a group of men in Sidney, Manitoba. The railways were an even more prevalent means of transportation. Working in conjunction with the rail police, transients were either prevented from boarding rail cars, as thirty strikers in Ethelbert, Manitoba discovered,62 or they were removed from trains, which is the treatment sixty-four potential trekkers in Brandon received in late June.63 Despite these efforts men continued to pour into Winnipeg. On June 25, Dann informed Regina by telegram that

... SINGLE MEN BEING PROVIDED FOR HERE THIRTY SIX HUNDRED STOP NORMAL NUMBER TWENTY FIVE HUNDRED STOP ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY ARRIVED YESTERDAY ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY TODAY STOP NUMBERS ARRIVING FROM MANITOBA RELIEF CAMPS THIRTY FOUR LEFT SHILOCAMP THIRTY VIVIAN AND THIRTY WHITEMOUTH ALL ENROUTE TO WINNIPEG NUMBERS ARRIVING IN EXCESS OF ONE HUNDRED DAILY64

---


63 SAB, RRIC, Ex. 209, #494, "Dann to RCMP Commissioner," 26 June 1935.

64 Ibid., Ex. 208, #44, "Dann to Officer Commanding F Div., RCMP, Regina," 25 June 1935.
The next day, Dann reported eighty more men had arrived. Three days later, he wired the RCMP Commissioner J.H. MacBrien, with additional information: "One hundred and eleven transients from east camps last twenty four hours." If the unemployed managed to overcome RCMP obstructions and reach Winnipeg, they faced a similar gauntlet in trying to leave. Bracken, in a telegram to Bennett, blamed Winnipeg's rapidly growing population on "RCMP activity in detaining transients." The federal Minister of Labour, W.A. Gordon, received a similar message from his provincial counterpart's deputy, Arthur MacNamara. The letter warned that the influx of transients, which was blamed on the "trek to Ottawa," created a serious situation including the possibility of violence. MacNamara's main purpose in writing was to ask the federal government to assume responsibility for "the extraordinary expense incurred" by the Bracken government at Winnipeg.

The Mounted Police wished to ensure that no attempts were made to move further east in the direction of Ottawa, or west to link-up with the men in Regina. The same methods employed to keep undesirables out were therefore used to keep them in. Rail was again the Force's principle concern, and arrangements about transients were made with the railway companies as early as June 20. On June 29, patrols were also established on "roads east and west" of the city to inhibit movement in those

---

65Ibid., Ex. 209, #494, "Dann to RCMP Commissioner," 26 June 1935.
66Ibid., Ex. 223, #316, "Dann to RCMP Commissioner," 29 June 1935.
69SAB, RRIC, Ex. 223, #316, "Dann to RCMP Commissioner," 29 June 1935.
Specifically sixteen police officers were sent to Beausejour, Manitoba, a town on the main road east of Winnipeg. They were ordered to begin around-the-clock observation of the highways and railways to check for any trekkers journeying east. Very few men were discovered but ordinary citizens were annoyed by the halting of their vehicles under the pretext that they were being examined "for infractions of the H.T. Act [Highway Traffic Act]." Potential trekkers who refused to stop were to be arrested under Section 98 of the Criminal Code. The operation did not stay secret for very long. The Winnipeg Free Press exposed the chicanery after several irate citizens contacted the newspaper to complain about being stopped by Mounted Policemen. The individual with ostensible control over the Force, the Attorney-General of Manitoba, W.J. Major, denied any knowledge of the patrols, while the RCMP spokesman used the official cover story: the police were merely checking for infractions of the Traffic Act. This prevarication was revealed to the public when the Free Press published a Mounted Police document ordering the patrols to search for transients. Perhaps feeling unsure about attacking such a powerful symbol as the RCMP, the newspaper justified the disclosure as being "in the public interest."

---

70 Ibid., 29 June 1935.


In Winnipeg the RCMP was studying the Trek-related activities by employing informants and intercepting telegrams which allowed them to establish a clear idea of the marchers' future plans. The Manitoba march leadership, realizing that they were probably being spied upon, attempted to counter this through increased operational secrecy. The Mounted Police employed its covert tactics in order to acquire sufficient evidence to allow for the arrest of the trek leaders under Section 98. In particular, the police were asked to record comments which "might be intended to bring the Government into hatred or contempt" or those statements "of a nature likely to disturb the tranquility [sic] of the state." The trekkers, however, skillfully avoided saying anything which might have been liable for prosecution.

Two weeks after the Trekkers had been halted in Regina, events in Winnipeg seemed to continue to slide toward conflict. A huge demonstration was organized for the eight Trek delegates upon their return journey to Regina. The party spent two hours in the city on the night of June 25. The main event was a rally where several speakers addressed the crowd. In his testimony to the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission, Evans described the content of his speech at the Winnipeg gathering:

... I reported at some length on the reply that Mr. Bennett had given us, and I stated that in our opinion the only other way to impress Mr. Bennett that there was unhappiness and discontent in the camps was to go down there en mass and

---

75SAB, RRIC, Ex. 215, #100, "S.T. Wood to Dann," 28 June 1935. In this telegram Wood informed his fellow officer of the specific content of telegrams sent by Arthur Evans to Jim Litterick in Winnipeg and Stanley Forkin in Brandon.

Several other members of the Regina delegation also spoke to the crowd of 2,000 people, as did Harry Binder, one of the leaders of the camp strikers.

Earlier at the train station, Evans had been greeted as a conquering hero by 1,000 people including a delegation of local trek supporters and Tim Buck, who was in Winnipeg ostensibly to campaign in his riding for the upcoming election. The Trek leader had a private meeting with the Winnipeg party at which plans were discussed for getting the trekkers out of Regina:

Coming back from Ottawa on the train I had discussed with the delegation the possibility of leaving Regina by Truck, if possible. I suggested that while we were in Winnipeg and also in Brandon we should attempt to form what we call "truck committees", sympathetic people who would attempt to gather a number of trucks and then wire to us here in Regina the number of trucks they could procure.... I had the assurance that a committee would be set up by members of the Citizens' Committee there.

Evans' contact for this scheme was once again Jim Litterick.

On Wednesday June 26, the largest demonstration yet was held in front of Manitoba's legislative buildings. Between 4,000 and 5,000 people gathered to listen to several orators. Citizens of Winnipeg were called upon to support the trek once it began. A show of solidarity was displayed

---

79 SAB, RRIC, RC8 1,a, Vol. IX, 31-2.
by the leadership of the meeting as social democrat joined communist on
the stage: S.J. Farmer informed the crowd that "we will never rest until
[the trekkers' six demands] are gained." Alderman Penner emphasized that
the men only wanted a decent living. Fred Lawrence decried the
government's obstruction of the trek to Ottawa while Johnny Moffat of the
Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement proclaimed "this is our first
and perhaps our last chance to free ourselves from the binds of slavery."
Tim Buck shared the stage and the sentiments of the other speakers.
Several resolutions were also passed: the first condemned the federal
government for sending RCMP forces to Winnipeg and called for their
removal; the next approved the march to Ottawa and that it be unmolested;
another offered assistance to the Trekkers in Regina; a final one pledged
support for relief strikers in Ontario and Quebec.80

It quickly became clear that there would not be any Regina Trekkers
accompanying their Winnipeg comrades to Ottawa. Upon his return to the
capital of Saskatchewan, Evans was rebuffed by the CPR when he offered
to rent boxcars for the trip eastward. The Trek leadership then sent three
vehicles on a trial run toward the Manitoba border; they never made it out
of the city as the occupants were rapidly arrested by the RCMP.81 This
attempt to leave Regina was also rendered pointless by events elsewhere:
the plan to rent trucks in Manitoba and meet the men from Regina at the
provincial border had collapsed. Evans' contact in Brandon wired him on
June 27 with the information that the Province of Manitoba's Utility Board,


81Victor Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!" The On-to Ottawa Trek and the
Regina Riot (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), 130-1.
the organization in charge of issuing transportation licenses, would only
grant truck permits if ordered to by the RCMP.⁸² Realizing the futility of
the situation in Regina, Evans sent a telegram to Litterick early on the
morning of June 28 requesting him to "COMMENCE THE TREK TO OTTAWA AT
ONCE TO LESSEN THE PRESSURE HERE."⁸³ Later that day, the Trekkers in
Regina received a reply:

DIVISIONS VOTE TO LEAVE SUNDAY [JUNE 30] FOR OTTAWA
STOP NECESSARY PREPARATION ON FOOT STOP MASS SUPPORT
ASSURED STOP NO EDICT IN FOR HERE [a reference to the
restrictions imposed by the RCMP at Regina] STOP HOLD
TIGHT⁸⁴

Having intercepted this and other related telegrams the RCMP expected the
Winnipeg trekkers to begin their march on June 30.⁸⁵ Believing that a
showdown was imminent, Dann consequently wired Commissioner MacBrien
for instructions:⁸⁶

---

⁸²SAB, RRIC, Ex. 102, #385, "Forkin to Evans," 27 June 1935.


⁸⁴Ibid., "Binder to Evans," 28 June 1935.


⁸⁶Ibid., Ex. 216, #365, MacBrien to Wood," 28 June 1935. Earlier MacBrien wired
Wood at Regina with instructions:

...CONFIRMING TELEPHONE CONVERSATION STOP MESSRS BAGSHAW AND MCKINNON
APPOINTED COUNSEL TO YOU AS TO CHARGES AND HANDLE CASE... STOP GOVERNMENT
DESIRSES PROCEED UNDER SECTION NINETY EIGHT AGAINST THOSE ARRESTED AND ALSO
THE KNOWN LEADERS BLACK EVANS ONEIL SHAW AND SUCH OTHERS YOU THINK
NECESSARY....
STRIKERS LIKELY TO MOVE TOMORROW NIGHT IN THE EVENT OF ARREST OF LARGE NUMBER NO PLACE APPOINTED TO HOLD THEM STOP DESIRE BE INFORMED ON WHAT GROUNDS PARTIES COULD BE HELD....

The trekkers did attempt to confuse the police, however, by releasing contradictory information about the specific time and method of transportation for the march. The plans for the actual movement were made by the Manitoba Relief Camp Strikers under the leadership of Tom McCarthy. Twelve hundred men, organized into divisions of 300, were expected to make the trek.

By June 30, conflict seem inevitable. The strikers, with a supportive public and sympathetic civic government, were determined to launch their trek. The RCMP, on the other hand, was equally dedicated to stopping them. Assistant-Commissioner Dann announced that "every step" necessary would be taken to prevent the marchers from leaving Winnipeg.

On the fateful Sunday, James H. Gray and several other reporters were tipped off that the event was about to begin. The 600 to 700 marchers, half of what their leadership had expected, appeared ready to travel: each man carried a bundle of clothes and a blanket. They formed up at the Ukrainian Labour Temple and marched to Market Square where they were lectured by their leaders for a full hour. The men then set off for the CPR station making several detours and stoppages along the route. Suddenly, the parade participants entered a provincially run dining hall. The situation was

---

87 Ibid., Ex. 223, #316, "Dann to MacBrien," 29 June 1935.
89 Ibid., 1.
further complicated by the presence of six city police officers in the occupied building. Gray described them as "hostages," but no force was employed to restrain them from leaving the building.

Why had the marchers seized the hall? Various explanations were offered. One was that the RCMP had set a trap outside of the city and were attempting to lure the group of unemployed into a detention camp east of the city at Rennie, Manitoba. The camp simply did not exist. There was also talk on the part of the trek leaders of using the dining hall as a bargaining chip. The occupation would be ended if the RCMP was withdrawn from Winnipeg. There was no substance to this explanation either. In reality, it seems that the trek leadership, realizing that the men would not be allowed on the trains, decided to occupy the dining hall to achieve more immediate gains: demands were made for centralized billeting and three meals a day.

Caught off guard by the action of the trekkers, the authorities initially planned to storm the building. Restraint, however, took hold as a telegram from Dann to Regina indicated: "TAKING NO ACTION AT PRESENT MAY DO SO LATER WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED DEVELOPMENTS AT PRESENT NO ATTEMPT TO MOVE ON RAILWAYS." The rapid intervention of acting Mayor John Blumberg (Mayor Queen was out of the city) was responsible for the policy of moderation. He had been pressured by some elements to read the

---

80 Gray, *The Winter Years*, 156.


83 SAB, RRIC, "Dann to Wood," 30 June 1935.
Riot Act but resisted such advice.94 Instead, he appeared at the police station within minutes of the dining hall seizure to inform the city police that they were not to employ violence against the strikers.95 Then Blumberg and Arthur MacNamara met with the strikers, and a deal was rapidly achieved whereby the marchers were allowed to stay at the exhibition grounds in tents provided to the city by the Canadian military; they were also guaranteed the standard two meals a day.96

Why did violence not result from the confrontation as it would a few hours later in Regina? Undoubtedly the presence of several thousand people concentrated around the building inhibited the use of force. The fact that civic leaders, especially John Blumberg, were sympathetic to the strikers is also important. There was far more unity and consensus in the Winnipeg of 1935 between labour and civic leaders than had existed in 1919; thus repressive measures faced far greater resistance than during the General Strike. As Mitch Sago would observe almost five decades later, it was "a very important moment in the history of the unemployed and their struggles in Winnipeg."97 Charles Hichin also proclaimed the dining hall occupation a great victory in The Worker: "[C]ivic and provincial

---

94A.B. McKillop, "Citizen and Socialist: The Ethos of Political Winnipeg, 1919-1935," Unpub. M.A. thesis (University of Manitoba, 1970), 236. McKillop writes that "...only the steadfast refusal of acting-Mayor John Blumberg to read the Riot Act saved violence from occurring." Unfortunately, he does not provide a source to substantiate his assertion.

95"Blumberg Tells Of Steps Taken To Avert Clash," Winnipeg Free Press 3 July 1935: 3.


authorities caved in and granted the strikers' demands for central billeting.\textsuperscript{98} A more accurate appraisal of the result was provided by Harry Hereford, the Dominion Commissioner of Unemployed Relief:

\begin{quote}
The Provincial Authorities have conferred with the city police and the Mounted Police and the view locally is to allow matters to simmer for a few days as it is thought that it would be difficult for the leaders to keep the men together under the conditions existing.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

The specific factor which obviated the need for violence, however, was provided in the last line of Dann's telegram about the confrontation: "NO ATTEMPT MADE TO MOVE ON RAILWAYS."\textsuperscript{100} In effect, by turning inward the trekkers had performed the RCMP's work for them, without the police having had to fire a shot. The primary concern of the police was to prevent movement out of Winnipeg and they had been prepared, as Dann indicated to local newspapers, to employ extreme measures. Despite Hichin's declaration of victory, supplying tents and consenting to centralized accommodation were not significant concessions and the marchers were no closer to Ottawa.

With the dispersal of the Trekkers in Saskatchewan, Manitoba's capital now became the centre of trek-related activities. In fact, the news of the Regina Riot only strengthened the resolve of the Winnipeg trek movement. A mass meeting was immediately planned for July 3 in front of the Legislative buildings; several other events were organized as well,

\textsuperscript{98}C. Hichin, "Outsmarterd Mounties in Manoeuvre," \textit{The Worker} 2 July 1935: 1.


\textsuperscript{100}\textit{SAB}, RRIC, Dann to Wood," 30 June 1935.
including sending a delegation of six to Regina after the July 3 meeting to investigate the Riot: Fred Lawrence, Beatrice Brigden, James Litterick, Fred Donner, and A.W. Atwater were among the group.\textsuperscript{101} The Relief Camp Workers' Supporting Conference also made an official request, above the signature of Alderman Penner, for a parade. In a special session the police commission consented to this application. Later on July 2, a rally took place at which a crowd of 3,000 to 4,000 gathered in Market Square to denounce the government; they were informed by trek support leaders that the parade the next day would include a women's section.\textsuperscript{102}

The meeting on July 3 was huge: anywhere from 10,000 to 13,000 took part in an orderly display of discontent making it one of the largest demonstrations ever held in Winnipeg. Many of the speeches, however, were not of a gentle nature. Fred Donner told the crowd that "if relief camp strikers under arrest in Regina are not released, the industry of this country will be crippled."\textsuperscript{103} Tim Buck congratulated Donner on his message and repeated the threat of a general strike if the Trekkers in Regina were "railroaded to the penitentiary." In the same speech he added: "We are building a force Bennett knows will abolish him and his government." Other speakers included the members of the group which would soon be leaving to investigate the events in Regina.\textsuperscript{104}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{101} "Winnipeg Relief Strikers Will Press Their Demands," Winnipeg Tribune 3 July 1935: 1.


\textsuperscript{103} "Bennett and Regina Authorities Blamed For Monday's Riot," Winnipeg Free Press 4 July 1935: 1, 4.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 4.
anyone realize at the time that the evening of July 3 was to be the high-water mark of Winnipeg support for the Trek.

These large demonstrations ensured that the attention of the federal government and its agencies would be quickly and thoroughly shifted from Regina to Winnipeg; this was especially true of the Department of National Defence (DND) which had its nearest base at Shilo, Manitoba. In fact, as surprising as it may seem, the closest the government came to employing military force in western Canada during the period of the Trek was not in Regina, where violence had occurred, but rather in Winnipeg, and in the aftermath of the July 1 riot. Prior to the end of June, the DND had already begun to collect information on the situation in the capital of Manitoba. On June 26, the Adjutant-General, C.F. Constantine, had wired the DOC of MD 10, Brigadier Gordon, to inquire about the specific strength of the units in that district; he was informed that there were twenty-two officers and 298 other soldiers. On June 29, as tensions increased in Saskatchewan, a scheduled July 3 exercise at the military's Sarcee range in Alberta was delayed for a week to provide units should they be needed to restore order in Regina and/or Winnipeg. Then, at 23:10 on July 2, the day after the Regina Riot, and the same day that the Winnipeg trekkers reaffirmed their decision to go to Ottawa, a rush wire was despatched from the Adjutant-General to the DOC, Camp Shilo, and the DOC MD 10 at Winnipeg instructing that there be no unauthorized troop movements and that several units "be held in readiness to move at short notice to Winnipeg STOP Order to move may be given to-morrow STOP... Preliminary train arrangements should be


106Ibid., "General Staff to D.O.C., M.D. 10," 29 June 1935.
made but rolling stock is not to be moved to Shilo without orders from [National Defence Head Quarters]."

The impetus for using military force to restore order clearly was emanating from the federal government. Hugh Gutherie, the federal minister of justice, had telephoned a Manitoban government official on June 29 to inquire about the situation in Winnipeg. He was informed that the RCMP had reported nothing of interest. The cabinet minister proceeded to tell the official that if Manitoba's Attorney-General W.J. Major requested that the soldiers stationed at Camp Shilo be deployed in Winnipeg, the federal government would assume all expenses. \(^{108}\) When the day (July 3) the troops were to be used arrived, the government apparently rethought this action as the Minister of Defence, Grote Stirling, informed military officials that the situation had relaxed in Winnipeg rendering a request for soldiers unlikely that day. \(^{109}\)

Winnipeg was somewhat quieted in the aftermath of the mass meeting on July 3 mainly because the trek supporters were waiting for their investigative delegation to report back from Regina. Nevertheless, tension still existed. The military was requested by the city police to remove "rifle bolts, machine gun locks, and ammunition from [the] McGregor Street Armouries." \(^{110}\) The anxiety was also present at military headquarters in Ottawa. In a conversation between Major-General Ashton,
Chief of the General Staff, and Brigadier J.L. Gordon, DOC, MD 10, the latter was ordered to return to Winnipeg immediately because to the potentially volatile environment. Ashton also requested daily reports on the situation in the city and reprimanded Gordon for not having filed a report the day of their conversation.\textsuperscript{111} Military officials particularly worried about the large demonstrations, including one scheduled for July 8 when the report from the delegation sent to Regina was to be heard. When attendance was less than expected the DND's concern about Winnipeg began to subside.\textsuperscript{112} A peaceful city negated the need for any action.\textsuperscript{113}

The provincial government had been making its own attempt to defuse the tense environment in Winnipeg. Its Single Men's Relief Commission printed up notices and addressed them directly to the single unemployed:

There are vacancies for 100 men in Manitoba Provincial Camps...
There are vacancies for 300 men in other Camps.
Transportation will be supplied to men desiring to go to these camps.
Farm jobs are coming in fairly freely, and men should apply to the Employment Office for a farm contract and, upon production of same, will be given transportation.
Any men who can prove that they have homes elsewhere will be given transportation to their home town on production of proof.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., "Memo-1545 hours," 5 July 1935.
\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., "Adjutant-General to D.O.C., M.D. 10," 8-9 July 1935.
\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., "A-G to D.O.C., M.D. 10," 4 July 1935.
\textsuperscript{114}PAM, Bracken Papers, MG 13 l2, Box 91, File 962, "Notice to Single Unemployed," 5 July 1935.
Many of these methods of encouraging transients to leave Winnipeg had been employed for several years to accomplish the same goal.115

In the first few weeks of July, the various striker organizations tried desperately to keep alive the plan to trek to Ottawa. Petitions of sympathy for the trek were circulated throughout the city in the hope of obtaining 100,000 signatures; six pastors representing twenty-five members of the Ministerial association met with strike officials to offer their backing.116 The waning momentum of the trek also acquired a slight boost when a group of Regina Trekkers receiving free transportation home elected to remain in Winnipeg and join the local march; this had more of a spiritual impact than a numerical influence since only a small number of men were involved.117 Attempts to gain concessions from the provincial government continued. A delegation met with a group of cabinet ministers on July 8 to request cooking equipment at the exhibition grounds, improved food, three meals a day, and permission to begin a march to Ottawa. The latter proposal was refused on the basis that it was a federal responsibility, while the others were turned down under the provincial government's consistent policy of not treating the strikers any differently from other transients. The cabinet, in turn, stressed the availability of farm jobs and the space in DND camps for 600 men. Several men had already opted for these choices. Thirty-five men had recently requested


that they be sent to camps while another thirty asked to be transported home. Many of the farm jobs were also rapidly being filled.\textsuperscript{118}

Later that evening, the report on the Regina Riot by the Winnipeg investigators was delivered to a smaller than expected rally. Not surprisingly, the blame for the violence was attributed to three groups: the federal government, the RCMP, and the Regina City Police. In a continued show of solidarity CCF MP Angus MacInnis took to the stage and called for the abolition of the capitalist system.\textsuperscript{119} It was painfully clear, however, from the small size of the crowd and the reduced turnouts at similar demonstrations, that the Winnipeg trek movement was rapidly losing momentum. Then suddenly on July 10, eight trekkers attempted a test run to Ontario. Two cars carrying the eight made the entire journey to Kenora being briefly stopped several times by the RCMP who checked licenses and took the names of the passengers. Lloyd Evans, one of the strikers, explained the reason for the trip to Ontario, "As the government is giving us no alternative, we are making an effort now to get to Ottawa... If we get through, wires will be sent back and arrangements will be made for the main body stationed in Winnipeg to follow."\textsuperscript{120}

Buoyed by the success of the test run, the Relief Workers' Supporting Conference requested 200 vehicles from the general public to transport 600 marchers to Ontario. Volunteers were also organized, again under the auspices of the Supporting Conference, to administer a tag day on Saturday

\textsuperscript{118}"Requests of Relief Camp Men Refused," Winnipeg \textit{Free Press} 9 July 1935: 3.

\textsuperscript{119}"Bennett, Police Blamed By Local Investigators For Disorders At Regina," Winnipeg \textit{Free Press} 9 July 1935: 7.

\textsuperscript{120}"Strikers Off For Ottawa In Cars; R.C.M.P. Follow," Winnipeg \textit{Free Press} 11 July 1935: 1.
July 13; the funds would be used for the welfare of the trekkers.\textsuperscript{121} The date of the beginning of the Manitoba trek had to be pushed back since citizens were slow to volunteer vehicles. An attempt had been made to appeal for automobiles over the airwaves, but radio station CKY refused a paid advertisement. Instead those in charge opted to wait for the results of the tag day. Around 700 volunteers were recruited to solicit funds but only 450 actually took to the streets;\textsuperscript{122} it was announced at a July 14 gathering that they had collected $2037, ostensibly to provide clothing and food for the marchers.\textsuperscript{123} Great pain was taken to show that it was ordinary people who were supporting the trek movement: 35,000 people had contributed denominations of which the largest value was twenty-one one dollar bills.\textsuperscript{124}

On the same day a vote was held at the Exhibition grounds where 96\% (361 out of 377) of the trekkers voted to begin the march.\textsuperscript{125} Accordingly, it was announced that the march would begin sometime in the next two days. The marshal of the trek offered a warning to the various governments: "We will carry the fight into Ontario, and even if the police smash us we will not be through."\textsuperscript{126} The trekkers approached both railway

\textsuperscript{121}\textit{Ibid.}, 1, 7.

\textsuperscript{122}"Preparing To Leave," \textit{The Worker} 16 July 1935: 1-2.


\textsuperscript{125}CSIS, RCMP Records, Vol. 1, File H.V. 4, 15 July 1935: 2 (081).

\textsuperscript{126}"Strikers Plan To Continue Without Delay," \textit{Winnipeg Free Press} 15 July 1935: 1.
companies offering to use the tag day money to purchase 600 tickets for a trip to Fort William. Both of the companies refused the offer. Instead the money was used to rent buses forcing requests for donations of food and clothing for the marchers to be made since this is what the tag day money had originally been intended to purchase.127

The marchers eventually decided to leave on July 15, but the public utilities board announced that it did not have the power to issue permits to the trekkers.128 When approached by the bus company the following day, the board reversed its position stating that the company was already licensed to carry passengers into that region. This decision allowed the men to leave in twelve buses and two automobiles for the Ontario border. Upon arriving there they were forced to disembark and walk the thirty-five miles to Kenora.129 By leaving Winnipeg the marchers had eliminated much of the federal government’s concern since they had rendered themselves irrelevant: being outside of the city meant that the men no longer threatened the public order and the fact that the railway was not being used for transportation meant that the group of unemployed had no hope of reaching Ottawa. The new was reflected in a Department of National Defence report of July 17:

Situation report Winnipeg twenty one thirty hours. Generally very quiet. Remainder of relief camp strikers approx. one hundred departed east by hired transport fourteen


128Ibid., 4.

fifteen hours this date. With departure of relief camp strikers from Winnipeg to Ontario general situation has now reverted to that normally experienced prior to their arrival in Winnipeg. No indicated tendencies of remaining elements which are mostly political to commit any overt act. No difficulties anticipated until relief camp strikers arrive Fort William or return to Winnipeg.\(^\text{130}\)

The report went on to recommend that daily submissions be discontinued.

Why had the marchers left Winnipeg? The primary reason was to reverse the decline in their movement’s momentum. Between July 11 and July 15, there were more transients leaving the city than arriving. Only thirty-two out of the required 200 private cars were obtained to transport the trekkers\(^\text{131}\) and despite public pronouncements to the contrary, the $2037 collected through the tag day was disappointing to the trek organizers.\(^\text{132}\) Basically the leadership was left with two stark options: remain in Winnipeg and have the trek movement slowly and inevitably disintegrate or make a move towards Ottawa in the belief that the action might somehow revitalize the entire campaign. In choosing the latter option they were merely following a recent precedent: when the B.C. Relief Camp strike had begun to wither in Vancouver, the idea of a march to Ottawa was conceived and the strike was immediately renewed. In the Winnipeg case, however, the course of action had a much different


outcome: the trek-support leadership was decimated along partisan lines. The Communist-CCF/ILP partnership had ended.

In many ways the Communist-CCF/ILP relationship had been an extremely uncomfortable one from the beginning. Historically there was a great deal of enmity between the two political movements. The friction was somewhat alleviated in 1934 when the Communist Party of Canada, reflecting a changing policy in the Soviet Union, began to moderate its tone toward the CCF. United fronts with social democratic parties, previously considered the enemies of the working class and labelled social fascists, became the goals of the communists.\footnote{Ivan Avakumovic, \textit{The Communist Party of Canada: A History} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 96-106.} Winnipeg's Relief Camp Workers' Supporting Conference had been a classic form of this form of unity, something the communists repeatedly emphasized.

Although the accord between these parties on the political left was fragile, it lasted through the violence at Regina and the dining hall seizure in the Manitoba capital. But as the Winnipeg trek movement began to unravel in early July so too did the unity between the communists and their rivals. On July 4, Reverend Stanley Knowles of the CCF, who had been at official observer at some of the Trek-support meetings, commented on the local trek movement in a letter to the Winnipeg \textit{Tribune}:

... The present majority of our citizens are undoubtedly sympathetic with the boys... However, the Communist leadership which many of us feel is being imposed upon the movement tends to alienate that sympathy and to invite repressive measures. The rank and file of the strikers are as opposed to Communism as I am, and they know that they are being used by the Communist Party, to their resentment, and
yet to date no other effective leadership has been offered them.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for other political groups, such as the one I represent, to offer leadership, for on the one hand we would be accused of trying to make political capital out of the situation and on the other hand we would be suspected of being in league with the Communist Party, despite the fact that we regard the latter group as our arch enemy.134

The Independent Labour Party, which had been coordinating activities with the CCF since 1932, was also increasingly disgruntled with the communists; the day the buses carrying the trekkers left for Ontario, it announced its withdrawal from the Relief Camp Workers' Supporting Conference. Its statement and the subsequent response from the communist elements in the Conference reflected the underlying conflict over the goals of the Trek and the methods of achieving them. The ILP justified its action primarily because it believed that public and political support had already been attained and the direction of the movement was no longer beneficial to the men involved. The statement argued that the trek be stopped and an alternative means of expressing the grievances of the unemployed be found in order to avoid "conflict with the forces of the state." The leadership of the ILP was especially upset over the fact that

134NAC, Communist Party of Canada Papers, MG 28, IV4, Vol. 46, File 27, "Mr. Knowles On The Relief Camps' Strike," 4 July 1935. Knowles specifically offered several suggestions to the Tribune:

You could devote your columns to a sympathetic appreciation of [the strikers'] case, to appealing feature articles, etc., you could raise funds to make their stay on the exhibition grounds a little more comfortable. You could arrange mass meetings used by such speakers as would give the movement real weight. You could provide sing-songs and other forms of entertainment. And by your leadership you could help to avert any serious outbreaks while pushing for a better deal for the boys, who belong to as fine and as deserving a generation of Canadians as was ever born.
the money raised from the tag day and which was supposed to be used to purchase food and clothing was instead utilized to rent the buses to transport the men to the Ontario border. The statement went on to add that the ILP still supported the grievances of the strikers.\textsuperscript{135}

On July 19, the remnants of the Relief Camp Workers' Supporting Conference issued a response to the ILP's withdrawal statement:

During the early sessions of the Supporting Conference, the Chairman, S.J. Farmer, frequently emphasized that the Conference was a supporting body only and must refrain from laying down any policies for the Camp Workers unless it wished to be regarded as a strike committee. This policy was adopted by the Conference. Later, when these Camp Workers had expressed their determination to carry through their struggle for the abolition of the Slave Camps, some of the ILP Leaders wanted the supporting conference to take on the functions of a strike committee and change the direction of the struggle which would be contrary to their accepted policy.\textsuperscript{136}

The statement also described the procedure whereby the Manitoba strikers had decided to march to Ottawa in solidarity with their Regina comrades. It ridiculed the ILP's justification of its withdrawal over the issue of distribution of tag day funds by pointing out that the money had been turned over to the marchers for their own use; this was the same principle, it noted, that the B.C. Trekkers had followed without complaint, and their amount was much larger.\textsuperscript{137} The passage concluded with an

\textsuperscript{135}\textit{I.L.P. Withdraws From Strike Body}, \textit{Manitoba Commonwealth} 19 July 1935: 1.


\textsuperscript{137}\textit{Ibid.}
appeal to the rank-and-file members of the ILP and CCF to reject the decision by the party's leadership and to continue to support "the Relief Camp Strikers in their struggle for the abolition of the Slave Camps."  

As these political battles waged, the trekkers were ready to return home from Kenora. Their reception in the Northern Ontario town had not been what they had expected and a feeling of defeat permeated the march. Five of their leaders, in an attempt to save some dignity, travelled to Ottawa to meet Bennett and his cabinet. The Bracken government quickly moved to take advantage of the depleted condition of the Winnipeg trek movement. On July 19, it instructed the Single Men's Relief Commission to offer a strict enforcement of the rules regarding relief for transients:

These regulations provide that transients who applied for assistance were given relief for a period of two days and after that time they must either go to their homes, or to the camps from which they came, or accept the farm work that is available for them. These regulations will apply to any of the camp strikers who have left Winnipeg for Ottawa, should they return to the Province.

Upon the marchers' July 21 return, they refused to accept the government's dictum regarding relief. They did so despite the ILP leadership, including Mayor Queen, recommending that the offer be accepted. Instead, they asked to be allowed to wait for the return of their delegation from Ottawa. This was flatly refused by the Bracken government. With the government's

138 Ibid.


intransigence and the growing apathy of the newspapers and general public, the trekkers, in effect, conceded defeat in a July 24 statement that recognized the forces arrayed against them:

The ultimatum of the Bracken government, the large concentration of the R.C.M.P and the general provocative character of the government... to the strikers as a whole is such, that, despite the peaceful intentions of the strikes, trouble, and probably bloodshed, could not be avoided. This could be gathered from the governments appetite for a showdown, and the refusal of Mr. Queen... to use local initiative in aiding the strikers in their pursuit of peace...¹⁴¹

The statement concluded with the proposal that the men be given free transportation home.

Although the Manitoba leg of the On to Ottawa Trek reached only Northern Ontario, it had left an indelible impact on many members of the Winnipeg community. On the surface, the combination of the city's radical political nature and the unity of its political elite meant the support for the Trek in Canada was strongest in Winnipeg. This does not mean, however, that the marchers had overwhelming support. Most Winnipeggers were undoubtedly sympathetic to the plight of the various trekkers but sympathy is one thing, action is another. The B.C. Trekkers certainly would have received a boost had they arrived in the capital of Manitoba, but it would not have been as large as some of the speculation would suggest. Most ordinary citizens' involvement consisted of signing petitions of protest rather than taking to the streets themselves. The interdiction of the forces of the federal government and their use of violence in Regina

also divided the local march leadership: one side (mainly communist) was willing to risk the wrath of federal forces and continue the march; the other side (predominantly social democratic) advocated safer means of expressing discontent. Both segments of the leadership realized after the Regina Riot that the Bennett administration was prepared to employ extraordinary methods to deal with the threat that the On to Ottawa Trek posed. That there was not violence in Winnipeg after July 1 is directly attributable to the peaceful nature of the local marchers. The invitation to a bloodbath went unanswered. In Northern Ontario many of the same factors would also be on display during June and July of 1935.
CHAPTER THREE

"You are making history, you are making history"

After Winnipeg the B.C. Trekkers would have faced the vast, isolated region of Northern Ontario. Geography was an impediment to any form of undertaking including a venture such as the Trek: the area lacked large urban centres where potential marchers could be recruited; relief camps were also considerable distances from the small existing cities. Finally, the transportation system was limited: the railway predominated since the road system was extremely underdeveloped. The twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William and the city of Sudbury were on the On to Ottawa Trek itinerary but other communities including Kenora and North Bay would not be immune to the events during June and July of 1935. In a region particularly devastated by the Great Depression, dissatisfaction was rampant. It would be up to the Trek, an army of despair, to take advantage of the discontent.

Northern Ontario was characterized by labour discontent both during and prior to the 1930s. This was especially true of the Lakehead region, which because of its location at the head of Lake Superior and hence as a gateway to Prairie Canada, was a major centre for rail and shipping companies. The area would become the beginning point for the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR) westward line and later in 1902 it would serve as the terminus for the Canadian Northern Railway. Immigrants supplied much of the labour for these transportation industries and contributed to

---

1Jean Morrison, "Ethnicity and Violence: The Lakehead Freight Handlers Before World War One," in Essays In Canadian Working Class History, Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 146.
the district's radicalism. Italian immigrants were the primary participants in a 1909 freight handler's strike which degenerated into a riot after the intervention of the police.\(^2\) Finnish immigrants, who made up a majority of the region's lumber workers, would be even more politically active in the north. Communism was the political persuasion of many; labour activism seemed only natural.\(^3\) In 1926, 2,000 to 3,000 lumber workers carried out a successful nine-week strike.\(^4\) Three years later two Finnish union activists were murdered while on a mission to organize lumber camps. Thousands attended their funerals in Port Arthur.\(^5\)

Sudbury had also had its share of labour-political radicalism and concomitant crackdown by those in power. In the late 1920s there had been a celebrated libel trail involving *Vapaus*, the local Finnish communist newspaper. Local officials were determined to stamp out communism. In 1931, the Sudbury city council passed a resolution demanding the federal government "deport all undesirables and Communists." Many that were arrested were in fact deported, some to face death in their native countries.\(^6\) The intolerance in the Nickel City towards political dissent effectively squelched protest. Trekker Ronald Liversedge, who spent the


\(^5\)Betcherman, 118, 120.

winter of 1930-1 in Sudbury, wrote that during this period "there was no attempt at organization amongst the six hundred transients, no mass protests, nor demands of alleviation of the terrible conditions. They seemed to be frozen in apathy." The Workers Unity League-affiliated Mine Workers' Industrial Union which had success organizing elsewhere in Canada failed in a 1933 attempt to recruit in Sudbury.8

With a resource-based economy (minerals and lumber were the primary exports of the north) Northern Ontario was especially devastated by the economic downturn of the 1930s. R.B. Bennett's plan to blast Canada into world markets through higher tariffs helped the manufacturing sector but did nothing for staple-based industries which depended on trade. In Sudbury the dominant industry was mining and within that sector the International Nickel Company (INCO) predominated. During the first three years of the Depression its sales to Europe plummeted by seventy-five per cent, leading to a seventy-nine per cent reduction in its workforce between 1930 and 1932.9 To deal with the huge increase in unemployment the Bennett government established a system of relief camps across Northern Ontario as it had done elsewhere in Canada. These particular camps existed primarily to build airfields and clear trees and were no more successful at avoiding discontent among camp members than anywhere else in the Department of National Defence-administered system.10

7Ibid., 13.


9Ibid., 27.
By the time of the Trek, the labour situation was tumultuous in the Lakehead. During June the threat of a strike between the Western Stevedore Company, the Canadian National Railway and over 800 of their employees levitated over the area.\textsuperscript{11} This potential disturbance was a growing concern to local community leaders. In a June 20 telegram to R.J. Manion, R.B. Pow, the mayor of Fort William, warned that the strike should be settled rapidly as communists were involving themselves in the situation.\textsuperscript{12} To make matters worse from the Mayor's perspective, near the end of the month the lumber sector was beset by a strike as approximately 2,100 employees of pulp-peeling camps walked out over several grievances; the strikers were affiliated with the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada. The owners of the company experiencing the labour disruption, including Charles Cox who was both the local Member of Provincial Parliament and the Mayor of Port Arthur, blamed the trouble on communist agitation. The dispute lasted until early July when the strikers won a small victory.\textsuperscript{13}

These labour conflicts created an interesting atmosphere for the reception of the Trek. The first public Lakehead reaction to the events in the west was on the day the Trek schedule was revealed. The Port Arthur Chief of Police, George Taylor, announced that the Trekkers would not be

\textsuperscript{10}James Eayrs, \textit{In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 126.


\textsuperscript{13}Ian Radforth, \textit{Bush Workers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 132.
treated any differently than other transients provided they behaved properly; he added that the actions of the marchers while in the west would offer a better indication of how they would be treated in his jurisdiction.¹⁴

Otherwise reaction in the Lakehead to the western Trek was low-key. In a speech on June 7, Reverend Dan McIvor, the federal Liberal candidate for the Fort William riding, called for the Trekkers to be treated in a hospitable fashion during their stay provided the conventions of law and order were respected.¹⁵ Both Lakehead newspapers ran editorials on the western march; sympathy was offered for the men, but not necessarily for their leaders.¹⁶ The fairly conciliatory tone of the Port Arthur News-Chronicle is surprising considering that O.F. Young, the paper's editor, later sent Prime Minister Bennett a telegram on July 4 congratulating him on his "FIRM STAND IN RELATION TO COMMUNIST MENACE WHICH WE IN THIS PART OF CANADA... KNOW TO BE NO MYTH."¹⁷ Local unemployed leaders announced plans to join the Trek when it reached their cities, drawing recruits mainly from neighbouring road and airport camps.¹⁸

The federal government's decision to halt the B.C. marchers in Regina sparked a slight increase in interest about the event among Northern Ontarians. Several telegrams of protest, mainly initiated by communist-

affiliated labour and political groups, were sent to Bennett from Sudbury, Port Arthur, Kirkland Lake, Sioux Lookout, Kenora, and Timmins. In Port Arthur On June 14, A.A. Macleod of the Canadian League Against War and Fascism delivered a speech on the grievances of the trekkers to an enthusiastic audience.

That there was little northern reaction to the On to Ottawa Trek, other than the sending of protest messages, was largely a consequence of geography: the Trek was simply too far away to be of great interest. Some areas were also slow to receive news from such a distant location as Regina. For example, Sudbury's newspaper, the Star, published only twice a week. The limited media is one explanation for the almost negligible public visibility the Trek had in the Nickel City. As of June 15, the only relevant activity was the sending of a letter by the Canadian Labour Defence League to the local clergy; it requested moral and spiritual assistance, as well as financial aid for a fund which had been created to furnish the Trekkers with the necessary amenities during their stay in Sudbury, tentatively scheduled for July 2. The Mayor of Sioux Lookout, a small town and relief camp north-west of the Lakehead, announced that his town would feed the


Trekkers should any arrive there.\textsuperscript{22} Newspapers in Kenora and North Bay mentioned the Trek but did not discuss local reaction to it.

The attention of the north to the Trek, or at least the attention of labour activists, was also slightly diverted by another event that was occurring in Ontario during the first three weeks of June. A province-wide hunger march had been scheduled to arrive in Toronto on June 17. It was an event organized by the Communist party and had been scheduled since April 30.\textsuperscript{23} The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), reflecting the provincial government's concern over the proposed march, was ordered to ascertain levels of support for the event.\textsuperscript{24} The various police reports from Northern Ontario described little support for the June 17 hunger march. The Sudbury detachment reported that no one from their district was participating.\textsuperscript{25} A similar message was received from the Lakehead which noted that at a June 2 meeting strong support for the Ontario Hunger March had been called for but little was actually offered.\textsuperscript{26}

What the police did discover were the first attempts in Northern Ontario at organizing support for, and participation in, the On to Ottawa Trek. In Port Arthur the majority of donations were for what a police report described as the "Ottawa demonstration," apparently a reference to

\textsuperscript{22}"Collectors Arrested," \textit{The Worker} 18 June 1935: 2.

\textsuperscript{23}"Ontario Hunger March to Converge on Toronto, June 3, 4, and 5," \textit{The Worker} 30 April 1935: 2. The dates were later changed to June 17, 18 and 19.

\textsuperscript{24}Archives of Ontario [AO], Ontario Provincial Police [OPP]Records, RG 23, E-96, File 1.6, "OPP Chief Inspector to All District Inspectors," 5 June 1935.

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, "A.H. Palmer, Sudbury (No. 11 District) to Chief Inspector, Toronto," 12 June 1935.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, "W.G. Ingram, Port Arthur (No. 12 District), to Chief Inspector," 12 June 1935.
the On to Ottawa Trek. The report concluded that the allocation of donations made "it appear that the Toronto conference is of much less importance [than the Ottawa demonstration]." More information arrived from Sioux Lookout: an increase in the transient population and the arrival of two paid agitators were noted. Three days later, two men were arrested in the same town under Section 338 of the Criminal Code after they circulated "Unemployed Association collection lists for the [Relief Camp] trekkers." The two men went on trial before an overcrowded courtroom on June 24. They were convicted and received suspended sentences.

The most quantifiable display of Lakehead support for the Trek in June was the demonstration at the rail station upon the arrival of Arthur Evans and the Trek delegation on their way to meet with Bennett and his cabinet in Ottawa. M.J. Fenwick, a local communist and correspondent for The Worker, was the Trekkers' contact in the twin cities. On June 18, a telegram informed him of the delegation's arrival time and requested that he organize "a mass demonstration" to greet the eight men.

On June 19, the date of Evans and his party's arrival, a meeting of unemployed was held to discuss Trek plans. Those assembled then marched to the rail station to hear Evans and two other Trek leaders update the situation in the west. The crowd was informed by the leader of the B.C.


30 Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB], Regina Riot Inquiry Commission [RRIC], Exhibits, "Evans to Fenwick," 18 June 1935.
marchers that the entire event was a "fight for the whole working class of Canada. Should the trek be resumed and you are prepared to observe order and discipline we will welcome Fort William unemployed to join us."31 A message of support and congratulation from the local branch of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation was read.32 Paul Stukas, a local unemployed leader, told a reporter that Lakehead trekkers were content to wait for the result of the delegation's meeting with the Bennett and that they were solidly behind whatever decision the national Trek leaders might make.33 No less than 200 men had registered for the Trek in Fort William.34

Sudbury was the next destination on the party of eight's itinerary. On June 18, Evans had sent the message there as he had to the Lakehead. This time the recipient was Amos T. Hill, known primarily as Tom Hill,35 a Finnish immigrant and veteran communist organizer of his nationality's community in Northern Ontario. Hill was also occasionally the editor of Vapaus, the communist Finnish-language newspaper published in Sudbury and one that Evans kept informed about developments in the west.36 He


32Ibid., 1, 10.


35SAB, RRIC, Exhibit, "Evans to Hill," 18 June 1935. He was also no relation to the famous Tom Hill of Lethbridge, Alberta.

36Ibid. , "Evans to Vapaus," 17 June 1935.
was best known as one of the eight communist leaders tried in 1931 under Section 98 of the *Criminal Code*. Convicted, the radical political activist served over two years in prison before being released in July 1934.\(^{37}\)

In Sudbury, the train carrying the eight Trekkers was received by a crowd of around a thousand people including several representatives of the Workers' Unity League. Tom Hill was the first to greet Evans enthusiastically telling him that "[y]ou are making history, you are making history." Several brief speeches were made and then the delegation resumed its journey.\(^ {38}\)

In the aftermath of the party's departure, the north, and especially the Lakehead region, again found its attention diverted in other directions: 1,300 bush workers had gone on strike, in part because of poor camp conditions.\(^ {39}\) Still the strikers did not entirely forget events in Regina. Many of the lumber workers expressed support for the Trek: at Kapuskasing on June 13, 100 forest sector employees and relief camp workers met and unanimously endorsed the Trek and its demands, and pledged to organize support for it in their community.\(^ {40}\) Also in June, 250 striking lumber workers meeting at the town of Nipigon expressed solidarity with the B.C. marchers and with stevedores in Port Arthur who were close to strike action.\(^ {41}\) On June 25, a telegram was sent from the bush workers' strike committee in Port Arthur to the Trekkers in Regina: "HUNDREDS OF LUMBER


\(^{38}\)"Sudbury Reds On Hand To Cheer Relief Strikers," *Sudbury Star* 22 June 1935.


WORKERS ON STRIKE HERE PLEDGE SOLIDARITY WITH YOU IN YOUR HEROIC STRUGGLE FOR A BETTER LIVING.  

In addition to telegrams of support, attempts were made to recruit Northern Ontarians for the Trek. M.J. Fenwick reported in The Worker that as of June 25 it was expected that 1,000 men would be in the Lakehead to join the march. Four hundred were to be coming from the towns of Sioux Lookout and Amesdale. The same article speculated that the Lac Seul relief camp system had recently been closed because of support from camp members for the Trek. The Fort William Times-Journal carried a similar story on June 24 detailing the closing of several Lac Seul camps and the transferring of the men to other areas (at one time there were fifteen different camps and 1,500 men). Major C.V. Bishop, the camp superintendent, responded to a rumour that a large group of his charges had gone to Winnipeg to join the march: "We have experienced no difficulty whatever. In fact most of the men are quite satisfied with conditions in our camps and many of them we sent to other projects resisted being moved." The decision to close the Lac Seul camps and transfer their personnel had actually been made several months earlier on March 20, 1935 at a conference between several officials involved with the relief camp system, including General McNaughton.


43"1,000 Will Gather At Lake Head," The Worker 29 June 1935: 1.


Although some Northern Ontario transients had reached Winnipeg during June, there was no evidence of any large scale abandonment of relief camps, including Lac Seul, by their inhabitants. A Fort William minister, who had been tending to the spiritual needs of the relief campers near the town of Vermillion Bay, saw little success on the part of two agitators from Winnipeg who were attempting to recruit participants for the Trek: only ten out of seventy relief campers left for the Manitoba capital. Approximately one hundred men had deserted ten camps near the town of Nakina and in the Lac Seul system along the Canadian National Railway. Smaller numbers of men had travelled along the Canadian Pacific Railway, many toward the common destination of Winnipeg during the last week of June. The siphoning off of men by the Winnipeg version of the Trek undoubtedly lowered the men available to join the Northern Ontario branch. In addition, the fact that camps were so isolated inhibited participation in any march: unless the men could be assured of reliable transportation, they would literally be putting their lives into jeopardy by wandering the wilds of the Canadian Shield.

Who were the men abandoning the relief camps or being expelled from them for agitating? One example was William Cork, a fair haired and blue eyed, twenty-eight year old inmate, who was expelled from project #109 at Kenora during this time period because of "Refusing work, also a very bad strike agitator." Six other men had been discharged from the same camp over the previous weeks for being absent without leave.

46SAB, RRIC, Ex. 223, #316, "T. Dann to RCMP Commissioner," 29 June 1935.


During the period of the Trek, several relief camps experienced disturbances, demonstrations, and strikes many of which were related to the march. On June 11, a strike occurred at Vermillion Bay area camp; twenty-four men were discharged. Elsewhere in the region thirty-five men left the Petawa camp on July 3 apparently to join in some version of the Trek. Two days later at camp No. 50, near Kapuskasing, an "Agitator distributing Communistic literature" led to the ejection of five men from the camp and the abandonment of the same camp by five others.\textsuperscript{49}

The various incidents prompted a response from the military and RCMP telegram to the Adjutant-General detailed one such problem at Nakina:

WESTERN AGITATORS WORKING NAKINA HOLDING MEETINGS IN VILLAGE AND ATTEMPTING TAKE MEN FROM CAMPS SO FAR WITHOUT SUCCESS... NEAREST PROVINCIAL POLICE SIOUXLOOKOUT [sic] WHOM I HAD TO BRING IN... DISCHARGED SIX AGITATORS AND LAST NIGHT TWO OF PERSONNEL ASSAULTED AFTER POLICE OFFICERS LEFT...\textsuperscript{50}

The Adjutant-General, C.F. Constantine, contacted the Commissioner of the RCMP, J.H. MacBrien, to request RCMP assistance since there were jurisdictional problems with the Ontario over the camps. The Commissioner replied that his forces were being concentrated at Port Arthur and Nipigon but a movement of several officers to Sioux Lookout

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., Vol. 3032, File H.Q. 1376-11-49, "Riots, Disturbances, Strikes, Demonstrations, Etc. Unemployment Relief Camps, [DND] From 1 April 1935 to 30 September 1935."

would be considered. Constantine warned that there "were usually 2-300 men hanging about Sioux Lookout."  

In dealing with the Trek the RCMP had made Northern Ontario one of its principle points for sending forces to stem the flow of marchers. Several factors account for this strategy, including the region's proximity to Winnipeg, its ongoing labour disputes, and the region's history of labour conflict. Specifically MacBrien mentioned Nipigon as the northern location where the Mounted Police were being concentrated "to prevent [the] illegal movement eastward of camp strikers, Communists or unemployed under the control of Communists." Nipigon was approximately ninety-five kilometres north-east of the Lakehead and was a central point where any trekkers from the west would have to pass through on their way to the nation's capital.

One final indication of the level of Northern Ontario support for the Trek in June was Arthur Evans' return to the region on his way back to Regina. It was far less dramatic than his first appearance. In Sudbury before a small audience he allegedly threatened violence if the government attempted to prevent the marchers from resuming the Trek. According to the Port Arthur News-Chronicle only "[a] crowd of seventy-five foreign unemployed gathered at the Fort William depot and... twenty-five in Port Arthur" collected to hear the Trek leader speak on the delegation's meeting

51 Ibid., "Memo of Conversation between the Adjutant-General and the RCMP Commissioner," 26 June 1935.


with Bennett and his cabinet. In the speech Evans predicted that anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 men from the region, mainly drawn from area relief camps, would join the westerners when they arrived. The listeners were instructed to "[f]orm yourselves into divisions, companies and groups and appoint your commanders and captains so that you will be prepared to join us when we arrive from the west."

Of course, the Trekkers from Regina never appeared. Instead R.J. Manion, one of the architects of the federal government's policy toward the On to Ottawa Trek, appeared in the Lakehead on July 1 to celebrate Dominion Day and the opening of a new section of the Trans-Canada highway. Addressing a collection of dignitaries, including the Mayor of Winnipeg, John Queen, and a national audience across the airwaves of the Canadian Radio Commission, Manion offered his vision of Canada. As the cabinet minister's words echoed throughout the country, police were clubbing Trekkers and rocks were crashing through store windows in Regina.

On a day like this and at a time when subversive activities are so apparent, all true Canadians should be prepared to take their part in maintaining law and order and the respect for those in authority that has made Canadian life and citizenship worthwhile. Let us guard our country and its institutions against any revolutionary groups or doctrines.


Even the violence in Regina failed to spark a greater interest in the Trek on the part of Northern Ontario. Several telegrams of protest were sent to Bennett in the aftermath of the riot; various northern groups contributed, including the Fort William branch of the Independent Labour Party, the Port Arthur section of the Women's Labour League, and 500 striking pulp camp workers in Nipigon. On July 4, it was reiterated by the Port Arthur "on-to-Ottawa" committee that a trek to the nation's capital was being organized. Two hundred men from Port Arthur and surrounding relief camps had registered for the march with more expected to arrive from neighbouring Fort William and other districts. At an organizational gathering that same evening, a relief camp representative announced that meetings were being held in every Northern Ontario relief camp and support was high for beginning a trek to Ottawa. The participation of many relief camp members was not unconditional, however. The men wished to be assured that food and accommodation would be provided for them in the Lakehead before they left the camps. Also appearing at the meeting was a member of the Lumber Workers' International Union who reiterated his organization's support for a march to the nation's capital.

Despite these various announcements, plans were still conditional on the actions of the trekkers in Winnipeg; it became a matter of waiting for them to arrive. For any Lakehead marchers the only means of

---


transportation to Ottawa was by rail since the highway still did not traverse the Nipigon River and movement through the United States was not plausible. Many of these same marchers had their concerns expressed on July 8 when a man representing 350 destitute single men recently arrived in Port Arthur appealed to that city’s council for aid. Mayor Charles Cox, an owner of one of the local lumber companies, responded that there were 2,000 jobs available in the lumber camps. He wanted the unemployed as strikebreakers, something they refused to be. In turn, the request to council for assistance was rejected.\(^{60}\) By that time Military District 10 was reporting that the labour situation in the Lakehead region had improved with many of the lumber strikers expressing a desire to resume their former jobs.\(^{61}\)

The waning momentum of the north’s trek movement received a boost when the first party of Winnipeg marchers crossed the provincial border on their way to Kenora. Prior to the arrival of the trekkers little notice of the events of June and July 1935 had been taken in this most westerly Northern Ontario city. The only visible display of interest in the march to Ottawa occurred on June 27, when seventy local men wearing red and white Trek arm bands paraded through the business section of the city. Later they announced plans to join the march when it reached Kenora, claiming the approval of local workers for such an endeavour. Little


support was actually forthcoming, however. Some men had already left for Winnipeg to join the trek movement there.\textsuperscript{62}

The situation changed when the advance guard of six trekkers reached Kenora on July 11. The reception was anything but warm. The Mayor of Kenora wired the Premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, to warn that another 500 marchers were expected to arrive, a number which was far beyond the capacity of the city to care for. Hepburn attempted to assist the Mayor by publicly declaring that in Ontario "no assistance will be given to trekkers and... law and order will be rigidly enforced."\textsuperscript{63} Despite the premier's pronouncement and the decided lack of support from Kenora civic leaders, over 400 marchers from Winnipeg left their buses at the provincial border and walked to the city.\textsuperscript{64} The next destination, Fort William, lay 320 miles away and the Winnipeg contingent would have to approach it on foot and with very little food and water.\textsuperscript{65}

As in Winnipeg and Regina, the goal of the authorities was to prevent the trekkers from using the railways, the only means of transportation which would allow them to reach Ottawa. Through its informants the RCMP had anticipated the movement of the trekkers out of Winnipeg: twenty-five police officers were sent to Kenora ahead of the first busload of strikers. Contact was quickly made with a small RCMP detachment already in Kenora.


\textsuperscript{63}"Kenora Has No Facilities For Feeding and Boarding Relief Camp Strike Workers," Kenora \textit{Miner and News} 12 July 1935: 1.

\textsuperscript{64}"Strikers Made Public Appeal Friday Night," Kenora \textit{Miner and News} 16 July 1935: 1.

and with the local OPP and CPR policemen; it was agreed that trains would be searched for any trespassing transients.\textsuperscript{66} General Victor Williams, Commissioner of the OPP, had cancelled holiday leave for his local charges and despatched a further twenty officers from surrounding districts to Kenora.\textsuperscript{67} The local chief of police told a reporter that the trekkers would receive the same treatment as regular transients "unless they start something." In the corner of the chief's office were three boxes of brand new truncheons.\textsuperscript{68}

Only the Kenora ministerial association displayed any form of sympathy for the Winnipeg trekkers. Both the local Baptist and United churches served the men meals and provided them partial accommodation. The city of Kenora, however, had no patience for the marchers, especially during the height of its tourist season. On July 18, a paper entitled "Kenora's Position" and signed by the mayor, was publicly distributed. It was an ultimatum: free rail transportation back to Winnipeg or a cessation of relief the following day were the alternatives offered the trekkers.\textsuperscript{69} Attempting to stall for time, the trek leadership requested that a tag day be held to raise funds to send a delegation of five to Ottawa. The city refused. Eventually, the delegation did leave for the nation's capital, although only $22 was raised locally (the rest of the money came from an


\textsuperscript{69}AO, Hepburn papers, RG 3, Box 185, Series 8, Hepburn General Correspondence, "Kenora's Position."
account in Winnipeg). The remaining trekkers accepted the offer of free transportation home. On Sunday July 21, 397 marchers returned to Winnipeg by rail.\(^{70}\)

The trekkers' arrival in Kenora sent ripples eastward. At the Lakehead everyone was surprised that the marchers had been allowed to travel that far. Fear spread among some civic officials who realized that the next stop after Kenora would be their cities and since the trekkers could travel no further by road their stay might be a lengthy one. No plans existed for that possibility. One official mentioned to the Port Arthur News-Chronicle that with the lumber strike and the arrival of a large group of trekkers a potentially explosive situation could be created.\(^{71}\) A rumour of a vigilante group being formed to deal with the Manitoba marchers was carried by one newspaper. Lakehead trek organizers announced that only if western marchers arrived would a tag day be held to raise funds for their feeding and accommodation;\(^{72}\) an indication that there were very few local trekkers already in the area or funds to cover nourishment and shelter would have needed to be acquired sooner. All of the speculation ended with the failure of the Winnipeg contingent to move east from Kenora. There would be no Lakehead branch of the Trek.

With the possibility of any Western Canadian marchers reaching Ottawa effectively ended, trek-related activities in Northern Ontario became more prevalent in the eastern part of the region. Plans were

---


\(^{71}\)"Hunger March To Set Forth From Sudbury," Sudbury Star 3 July 1935: 2.

underway to begin an Ontario segment of the Trek and the north was expected to play an important part in the march. Although the RCMP and various rail police had been attempting to obstruct the movement of trekkers toward Ottawa on trains, there were still large numbers of transients in Northern Ontario riding the rails in the latter half of July. What the respective police forces were able to do was to prevent large organized groups of unemployed from travelling to the nation's capital. Because rail transportation was not available to trekkers, only the more easterly cities of the region, namely Sudbury and North Bay where it was physically possible to use the roads to reach Ottawa, would still have a role in the march.

Sudbury was to be one of the centres of the new trek, but like the period prior to the Regina Riot, there was little support for such an event in the community. Speakers at a rally in early July boasted of a 2,000 strong Sudbury-Timmins section of the Ontario version of the Trek. In the following days, meetings were held to generate support; "Comrade Smythe," allegedly a B.C. Trekkers, addressed one such gathering and described what had happened in Regina. On July 12, Reverend Samuel East, who had been involved in Trek support activities in Regina, told listeners at a Nickel City rally that there was a need for a united front to support a new trek and to fight for the repeal of Section 98 of the Criminal Code. The following day, nine men of the Sudbury section of the trek (only

---


75 Ibid., 2.
one was actually from the city) were arrested on charges of begging after they attempted to conduct a tag day without civic permission. The arrests were typical of a city where, as Lita-Rose Betcherman detailed in *The Little Band*, there was extremely little tolerance for protest of any kind. The charges were later dropped because of a lack of evidence. Local authorities also admitted that there was not a law requiring civic permission for a tag day.76

Indicative of the lack of Sudbury support for a trek, estimates of that city's march contingent size were continually lowered. One hundred individuals were now expected to participate. The local trek organization appeared totally disorganized: a citizen's committee was formed to coordinate trek support but it refused to release a list of members because there was no guarantee that all of those named would consent to be involved. Only traditionally sympathetic groups, including a local Finnish organization and the Sudbury branch of the Mine Workers' Union, were unafraid to offer support for the ever shrinking march.77 Eventually the Sudbury leg of the trek would consist of only twenty five men (a group *The Worker* labelled as the "advance guard"). The Sudbury *Star*, no friend to any form of dissent, ridiculed the low number as surprising "considering the number of unemployed in the Nickel District and the extent of the agitation conducted to recruit men and funds for the march.78

76"Regina Trekker Tells of Riots," Sudbury *Star* 10 July 1935: 12.

77"Minister Hears Horrible Tales About Sudbury," Sudbury *Star* 13 July 1935: 3.

The other major Northern Ontario centre for the Ontario trek was North Bay. It was the region's gateway to Ottawa. Accordingly, it was designated as a point of assembly for potential marchers from across the north.\(^7^9\) The city was willing to leave march participants alone provided they obeyed the law, an attitude that drew praise from the trekkers and the scorn of Ottawa Mayor P.J. Nolan.\(^8^0\) By July 16, there were fifty-five marchers in North Bay. "Marchers" was the operative term since the CPR police was ensuring that no transients travelled any further east from North Bay by train. On July 18, the group left for Ottawa on foot.\(^8^1\) A few days later, they were replaced by an additional twenty-six trekkers who arrived from relief camps around Kirkland Lake.\(^8^2\) There was talk that thousands of men would descend upon North Bay from Sudbury, the Lakehead, and even Winnipeg, but there was no substance to the rumours. Another large contingent of transients, however, were in the north. Over a hundred men had gathered in White River, a small town, in the hope of attaining employment on a section of the Trans-Canada highway that was under construction in the area. The MPP. for Sault Ste. Marie accused the North Bay civic authorities of having directed transients from their community to White River. The allegation was hotly denied.\(^8^3\) In the end,


\(^8^0\)"North Bay Designated As Point of Assembly," North Bay Nugget 8 July 1935: 1-2.

\(^8^1\)"Seek Permission To Hold Tag Day," North Bay Nugget 15 July 1935: 1.

\(^8^2\)"Halt Ottawa Trek For Western Mob," North Bay Nugget 17 July 1935: 1-2.

all of the trekkers left North Bay as they had arrived: in tiny groups and on foot.

The spectre of the On to Ottawa Trek had not made much of an impact on Northern Ontario during June and July 1935. This is somewhat surprising considering the lamentable economic condition of the region. There are several reasons that help explain the limited support for the march. An obvious one is geography. Northern communities were small and far flung as were the area's relief camps. Without a large urban concentration and with a very poor transportation system, attempts to organize and agitate were extremely hindered. In general there was a lack of enthusiasm for the entire event even among organizers. Other factors affected individual communities. In the Lakehead the numerous labour disputes may well have divided the attention of groups on the left that would have been natural trek supporters. In Sudbury the same type of constituency had been effectively crushed several years earlier by the interdiction of the state. The power of the state and its involvement at restricting rail transportation was one final negative influence on northern support for the On to Ottawa Trek. Leaving the wide open and desolate Canadian Shield region, the B.C. Trekkers' next destination would have been the urban centre of Toronto, which was also feeling the influence of events in western Canada.
CHAPTER FOUR
"Unconstitutional and thoroughly un-British"¹

Toronto, with a population around 630,000, was to have been the Trekkers' largest stop. The city's reputation for conservatism would seem to have made it rather inhospitable to a group protesting Canada's economic and political system. The political elite of Toronto and Ontario had not taken kindly to any form of radicalism or dissent. Over eighty per cent of the population of Ontario's capital was of British origin and the dominant mentality was to maintain the mother country's values in the face of foreign influences, specifically communism that was associated with immigrants. British principles such as freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly did not apply to those who were attempting to subvert Canadian democracy.² Accordingly, the city had made a habit of physically crushing protest through its chief tool of repression, the Toronto police force under the leadership of Brigadier-General Denis Draper. As his title might suggest, the former military man was known for being a stern disciplinarian when he became Toronto's Chief Constable in 1928. In fact this reputation was primarily responsible for his appointment; he would not disappoint. Over the next six years, the force would seek to crush radical political elements, specifically individuals

¹Toronto Mayor James Simpson, as quoted in "Ban on Strike March Is Term 'Un-British';" Toronto Globe 2 July 1935: 14.

affiliated with the Communist Party of Canada, including its leader, Tim Buck.  

By 1935, however, there appeared to be less hostility toward political dissent on the part of Toronto authorities. The depression had been the catalyst for change. The capital of Ontario, like the rest of Canada, suffered under the economic collapse with one of the highest percentages of unemployed in the province. Yet, because of the vagaries of the relief system, its unemployed received only roughly half of what comparable individuals in Hamilton and Windsor were entitled to. The relief system itself was far from comprehensive: in 1930 only poor widows with two or more children and impoverished elderly over seventy were eligible for some form of public welfare. Because Ontario lacked a poor law, municipalities had no legal requirement to provide any form of assistance. Several private charities attempted to fill this void.

Thus voters began to seek political alternatives to deal with the economic malaise. On a provincial level Mitchell Hepburn benefited from this mood of change: on July 10, 1934 he became Premier. This leader of the Liberal party had attained power unabashedly standing "well to the left where even Liberals will not follow." The Premier's philosophy was to reform capitalism, not abolish it, but if forced to make a choice: "My sympathy lies with those people who are the victims of circumstances beyond their control, not with the manufacturers who are increasing prices

---


4 John Herd Thompson, with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939*

and cutting wages at the same time.\textsuperscript{6} He was joined by two other cabinet ministers with reformist credentials: David Croll, Minister of Public Welfare and Municipal Affairs, and Arthur Roebuck, Attorney-General. Croll had been Mayor of Windsor prior to his election in 1934; he was known to be sympathetic to labour and had been prepared in the past to run on a Liberal-Labour ticket.\textsuperscript{7} Roebuck was the furthest to the left of the three Liberals. He had courted the labour vote in the past and had been involved in the development of the Canadian Labour Party and various other reformist causes.\textsuperscript{8}

The reformist attitude of the Ontario government was displayed shortly after the election. In August 1934, a communist organized province-wide hunger march took place. Hepburn had consented to meet a delegation from the marchers but the mayor of Toronto, W.J. Stewart, had stated that they would not be allowed beyond the city limits. Hepburn, through Roebuck, informed Stewart that while the mayor had the authority "to employ a body of Cossacks to ride them down... he cannot prevent the Prime Minister and his Cabinet from giving an audience to these people"; and he, Roebuck, and Croll did just that as they patiently listened for three hours to a delegation of 200, including seven of the ten Communist candidates from the previous month’s election. The protesters were politely informed that because of the penuriousness of the federal government their demands could not be acceded to. As the delegation filed

\textsuperscript{6}Neil McKenty, \textit{Mitch Hepburn} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 49.

\textsuperscript{7}John T. Saywell, \textquote{Just call me Mitch:} The Life of Mitchell F. Hepburn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 96, 127.

out of the meeting room, Roebuck offered them some encouragement: "God bless you in your work. I hope you become strong enough to come to Queen's Park and enforce your demands upon any government in power."9

An even more dramatic political change occurred at the municipal level in Toronto. On January 1, 1935 James "Jimmie" Simpson, the official Co-operative Commonwealth Federation candidate, was elected mayor with forty-two per cent of the vote. This occurrence was warmly greeted by the conservative (small and big "c") Toronto Globe:

Controller Simpson has proved himself the most popular of the Mayoralty in an election which did not do justice to the common sense of Toronto, but which, nevertheless, represents the verdict of the largest group of those who went to the polls, and therefore must be accepted by all citizens, voters and non-voters alike.10

The Globe must really have been wondering what was happening to its world when Prime Minister Bennett made the first of his "New Deal" broadcasts the following day.

Simpson had a long record of political and labour activism. In 1914 he had been elected to Toronto's Board of Control as a member of the Social Democratic Party of Canada. The future mayor displayed moderation during this period as he spoke out in favour of the war effort and repudiated calls for general strikes to cripple that effort.11 Tim Buck, who knew Simpson at this time, questioned just how radical he really was:

9Saywell, 'Just call me Mitch', 179-81.

He wrote a pamphlet at one time, in which he sought to prove that socialism was already far advanced in Canada because of the fact that the post office was owned by the government, there were public toilets in practically every city, the government of the country left the provincial governments to run their own affairs and municipalities could go to other countries to borrow money. To Jim this was socialism.12

Simpson's Toronto of 1935 knew what it was like to have unemployed marchers in its midst. On June 3, 1935, the day the Trekkers left Vancouver, an article appeared in the Toronto Daily Star describing an upcoming Tim Buck speech entitled "The Need [for] a Hunger March."13 The leader of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), however, was not speaking about the B. C. Trekkers. Instead he was referring to the CPC organized and endorsed Ontario Hunger march. This event was officially sponsored by the Ontario Workers' Federation on Unemployment, a communist front organization under the leadership of Ernest Lawrie. The schedule had marchers arriving in Toronto on June 17 for a three day conference and an opportunity to present the grievances of Ontario workers directly to the Hepburn government. The march would offer a strong indication of how the Trekkers would have been treated had they arrived in the areas. As well, the Ontario Hunger March would associate itself with, and become intricately linked to, the On to Ottawa Trek.

In connection with the Ontario Hunger March, a document was released detailing the situation of workers, their grievances, and the


12National Archives of Canada [NAC], Paul Wesley Fox Papers, MG 31 (K3), "Interview with Tim Buck," 2.

solutions to these problems. There were several demands including one in common with the B. C. marchers: a call for non-contributory unemployment insurance. The publication also contained an appeal to members of the working class and working class political parties for support.\(^4\)

The CCF response to the request for unity was ambivalent. It opted to allow local branches to aid the hunger marchers but the party as a whole offered nothing.\(^5\) The CCF provincial executive also decided "to get a committee of citizens representative of all and sundry, organized to deal with the B. C. Trekkers situation..."\(^6\) Few CCF clubs, given the option, did offer aid to the marchers.\(^7\) Most of the support for the hunger march came from organizations of the unemployed such as the East York Workers' Association and the Toronto Township Workers' Association.

The Ontario Hunger March was only slightly more successful at finding participants in Southern Ontario than it had been in the northern section of the province.\(^8\) Dozens came to Toronto from scattered

\(^{14}\) Archives of Ontario [AO], Hepburn papers, RG 3, Box 185, Series 8, Hunger March-Hepburn General Correspondence, Public 1935, "One Year of Hepburn Liberalism."


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 2.


communities around the province. Along the way the hunger marchers found themselves overshadowed by their western brethren. Eventually, the Ontario Hunger March would perceive itself as being an adjunct of the On to Ottawa Trek. As early as June, 6, the National Unemployment Council, a communist organization located in Toronto and affiliated with the hunger march, sent a letter to Bennett supporting the relief camp strikers. The Ontario Workers’ Federation on Unemployment also issued an early invitation to the B. C. marchers to address the June 17 - 19 Ontario Hunger March Conference in Toronto. Several of the march contingents also sent invitations to their comrades in Regina. Others condemned the federal government’s halting of the Trek. There was even talk of the hunger march continuing on to Ottawa. Later on June 15, when many of the marchers had arrived in Toronto, its leadership announced that if the B. C. Trekkers continued on to Ottawa, the participants in the Ontario march would leave on June 20 for the nation’s capital. At another gathering held in conjunction with the march, a collection was taken for the western Trekkers. Fred Collins, one of the march leaders and a veteran Workers’ Unity League organizer who had been the prime organizer behind the 1933 Stratford Strike, informed the meeting that their next action depended

19"Invite Strikers To Speak," The Worker 8 June 1935: 1.


on the outcome of the conference between the Trek delegation and Bennett which would take place in four days. If the delegation's demands were rebuffed then the Ontario marchers would begin their own trek to Ottawa. The following day, the gathering Ontario unemployed wired Bennett requesting that twenty of their number be included in the Trek delegation's meeting with the prime minister. They wished to represent Ontario in any discussions with Bennett. Eventually, a delegation of four, including Collins and Ernest Lawrie, the chairman of the Ontario Hunger Marcher's Conference, traveled to Ottawa and met with Bennett on June 22.

The response of municipal governments in Ontario to the Hunger March was quite similar to the reception the Trekkers received in Western Canada: "We will see that they get a free passage through the town, and I hope that they will keep on the move," was the statement Mimico Reeve Amos H. Waites indirectly expressed about the vagaries of the Canadian and Ontario relief systems. Other communities were even less enthralled with the marchers. Some towns had taggers arrested. On June 12, the Toronto Board of Control elected not to offer any assistance


24NAC, Bennett Papers, "Interview with the Joint Ontario and Quebec Delegation," 22 June 1935: 1-4 (479979-83).


to the hunger marchers arriving from outside of the city. Mayor Simpson opposed rejecting aid, arguing that the municipal politicians should have waited for the provincial response: "It is a big question; we will have to deal with it." 27

Basic indifference on the part of provincial politicians would greet the June 1935 marchers. This muted response was partially the fault of march organizers since the event had proven to be a dud. The initial optimistic expectation of the march leadership was that 3,600 individuals would flock to Toronto. 28 The actual number was to be only 250. 29 The small turnout, especially from Northern and Eastern Ontario, was blamed by a march spokesman on a June 14 Hepburn announcement in which he stated that the marchers would not be given free accommodation in any public building because there was "no reason for this hunger march. We're doing everything possible for them." 30

All that remained for the marchers, and specifically their leadership, was to gain some semblance of victory from what up to that point had been a dull and uninspiring event. They failed. During an uneventful four-hour meeting with Hepburn and his cabinet, the delegation argued for its demands. Eventually the Premier agreed to undertake a personal fact-finding mission on the relief situation in several Ontario

27 "No City Assistance For Hunger Marchers," Toronto Globe 13 June 1935: 11.

28 AO, OPP Records, E-96, File 1.6, Memorandum for District Inspector, No. 5 District, 14 June 1935.


municipalities.\textsuperscript{31} This was his sole concession. With the hunger march over, the focus of those involved on all sides would shift to the On to Ottawa Trek.

Because the Trekkers were still over a thousand miles from Toronto, their cause was still not at the forefront of public attention; hence few preparations for support would be made prior to the Regina Riot. Relevant actions that did take place included a June 25 announcement that the National Unemployment Council and the Ontario Workers' Federation would head the Ontario trek-support movements and the province-wide treks to Ottawa. They were following the lead of the joint B.C. Trekkers-Central Canadian Hunger March Conference which had called for a national trek to Ottawa in the aftermath of the failed meetings with Bennett. The Toronto groups sent a wire to Regina requesting that six Trekkers be sent to their city in an effort to generate public support for the proposed trek. Conferences were scheduled to be held on July 9 and 10 in the main industrial centres of Ontario, including Toronto. A mass meeting was scheduled for the bastion of English-Canada hockey, Maple Leaf Gardens, where the Trekker representatives would be expected to address the crowd. Another huge demonstration in support of the Trekkers was to be held on July 10 at Queen's Park. Various unions, churches, the C. C. F. and other sympathetic groups were approached for their cooperation. Plans were also made to establish registration offices to enlist trekkers and to acquire advertising on radio to inculcate the dominant Trek slogans such as "Work and Wages" and "Save our Youth" into the minds of the public.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{32}"Mobilizing Nationwide Campaigns," The Worker 27 June 1935: 1.
One of the people deciding policy for the trek behind the scenes was veteran communist and Workers' Unity League chief, Tom McEwen (Ewen). At a meeting with Arthur Evans, while the latter was in Ottawa to meet Bennett, McEwen requested

a speaker to address a mass meeting, and he proposed that a mass meeting should be arranged in Toronto, and suggested that such people as the Reverend Sam East, one of the strikers [sic] should be sent down there... In Toronto they had a large committee that were [sic] waiting to receive the camp strikers when we arrived there, and they thought it would be a good idea in order to stimulate enthusiasm... if some camp strikers were sent to Toronto to hold a mass meeting in the Maple Leaf Gardens.33

Trekker Matt Shaw and Reverend Samuel East would leave Regina for Toronto just prior to the end of June.

Communications continued between Regina and Toronto until the July 1 Riot. The Trekkers were in contact with a branch of the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL) which had sent a telegram of support on June 26. In turn, a message was wired to A.E. Smith, veteran communist and held of CLDL, to inform his organization of the arrest of five Trekkers who had attempted to drive from Regina to Manitoba and to request its assistance in their legal defence.34 The Worker was also a conduit for information. Evans sent the paper a wire on June 28 indicating the growing desperation of the situation in Regina as funds were dwindling and increasing pressure was being applied by the RCMP. The Trek leader suggested that a "TREK ON

33 Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB], Regina Riot Inquiry Commission [RRIC], RC8 1.a., Vol. 27, "Testimony of Arthur Evans," 92.

A NATIONAL SCALE WOULD... RELIEVE THE PRESSURE HERE," the same message that was sent to Winnipeg trekkers. Correctly fearing that communications were being monitored by the police, Evans instructed The Worker to use a code word known by Tom McEwen as an indication that the telegram had reached the newspaper.\textsuperscript{35}

Evans' telegram of June 28 to The Worker was probably responsible for the following day appeal on the part of the W.U.L. and the National Unemployment Council for strikes and treks to Ottawa. The first treks were expected to begin on July 6 while the Toronto leg was scheduled to leave on July 13. It was confirmed that a mass rally would be held on July 5. In a display of unity the event was to be sponsored by the CCF, the League for Social Reconstruction, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the CLDL, and other organizations. Reverend Samuel East would be the event's featured speaker.\textsuperscript{36}

As a further method of increasing support and sympathy for the Trekkers, plans were announced in Toronto for the publication and distribution of a pamphlet detailing the situation in the West. The declaration was made by the Canadian League Against War and Fascism, a communist front organization, which emphasized the united front quality surrounding the pamphlet's publication. Those involved included Jack King, national secretary of the Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement, Kenneth Woodsworth, secretary of a student organization and nephew of the CCF leader, and Matt Shaw, who would represent the Trekkers.\textsuperscript{37} A.A.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., "Evans to Toronto Worker," 28 June 1935.

\textsuperscript{36}"Arena Rally Friday Night in Toronto," The Worker 2 July 1935: 1.

\textsuperscript{37}"Booklet on Camp Trek," The Worker 29 June 1935: 1.
MacLeod (he had returned to Toronto after appearances in Calgary, Winnipeg, and the Lakehead) was to be the document's editor. The whole operation had a hurried, haphazard air to it as a decision was made to produce only 500 to 1,000 copies, although one optimistic report mentioned 100,000 copies.38 The entire array of Trek-related activities in Toronto to this point were disjointed and confused, generating scant in the community at large.

What little interest that did exist in Toronto was directly attributable to events in Regina where a showdown appeared to be looming. The United Church of Canada, displaying an internal conflict between a zeal for social reform and the conservative nature of some of its members, took the lead in offering opinion on the situation in the West. On June 25, its Toronto East Presbytery passed a resolution which advised the Trekkers to stay within the law and beware "being exploited by fake leadership." The statement also recognized the difficult position of the federal government but suggested that "the Christian graces of mutual understanding will accomplish more than the armed force of police... and... arbitration rather domination is the safe course of action." Several local United Church ministers dissented from this fairly neutral statement. Reverend W.E. Wilson derided both the march leaders as "a bunch of paid communists" and the official church policy as a misguided attempt to "dictate to the government." A colleague, Reverend E. Harold Toye, disagreed:

If mounted police attempt to force these marchers into submission, we are headed for a lot of trouble. The

government's attitude in refusing to deal with these men is going to lead us to a revolution. These un-Christian methods are going to cause an explosion and I'm amazed it hasn't come sooner.

In a similar vein, Reverend R.J. Irwin argued that the system needed to be reformed and that the proper course for the unemployed was “to organize and present their grievances every chance they get.” On the other hand, Reverend J.F.L. McDonald contended that the United Church should approve of whatever action the government selected in order to teach the Trekkers that “violence and intimidation of authority is not the way to gain their ends.”

The failed attempt by five Trekkers to escape from Regina on June 27, sparked greater interest in the Trek on the part of Toronto. United Church Ministers, Russell and Irwin, again publicly flayed the Bennett government. As well, Elmer Philpott, a disabled war veteran known for both his radical politics and a shifting between the Liberals and the CCF, repudiated the Regina arrests. The CCF was also becoming increasingly active in the support movement for the On to Ottawa Trek. Some elements of the party believed that it was a political imperative for their organization to become involved in such united fronts. In a June 25 letter to CCF Member of Parliament Angus MacInnis, Graham Spry, head of the party's Ontario wing, outlined the danger of staying on the sidelines:


I am much concerned... with the direction affairs are taking under the impetus given by the relief camp strikers march... I hope, whatever the risks to the CCF, that we can get fully behind the march. To be neutral, it seems to me, would be a disaster; in an issue like this, it seems to me there is no neutrality; either we back the marchers or we are forced into the position of appearing to back Mr. Bennett and his minions.41

One of the risks he wrote of was his political entity becoming too closely aligned with the Communist Party.

In the end, the CCF did involve itself, albeit halfheartedly and with an emphasis on the importance of protecting civil liberties, a cause not associated with the communists. At a 5,000-strong party rally in East York on June 29, J.S. Woodsworth attacked the rumoured "secret" order-in-council, supposedly introduced by the Bennett government to give it further power to quell the Trek, as a "despicable measure, an infringement of provincial rights, and the abolition of personal liberty." A resolution, seconded by Woodsworth, condemned the Bennett government's handling of the Trek and its threat of legal action against those who aided the B.C. marchers. The same day, three separate Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM)-sponsored rallies were held to protest the treatment of the Trekkers.42 The June 29 issue of the New Commonwealth, the Ontario CCF newspaper, carried an editorial that ridiculed the federal government's policy towards the marchers while praising the men. It


argued that "the slogan 'Save Our Youth' is the most effective demonstration yet staged since the depression."43 The Provincial Council of the CCF, again operating under the premise that a secret order-in-council had been passed, challenged the government to prosecute the executive when it voted to send financial aid to the Trekkers in Regina.44 This action did carry some risk since the RCMP had warned on June 29 that anyone aiding the Trekkers would face the possibility of arrest.45 In addition, the same body debated whether to participate with other organizations in the proposed Toronto Citizens Committee that would ostensibly be in charge of Trek support. It was decided to allow Graham Spry to continue to represent the CCF in the formation of the Citizens' Committee.46 Ironically a CCF rally was held on July 1, only a few hours before violence would erupt in Regina. Mayor Simpson, the guest speaker, described the Bennett government's halting of the Trek as "unconstitutional and thoroughly un-British." He observed, "It has been the traditional right of a British subject to carry his appeal for justice even to the foot of the Throne, but Mr. Bennett has taken it upon himself to abolish that right."47

---


45"Will Class All In Strike Body As Communists," Toronto Daily Star 29 June 1935: 1.


47"Ban on Strike March Is Termed 'Un-British'," Toronto Globe 2 July 1935: 14.
Anger was the initial response by elements of Toronto's political, labour, and religious elites to the crackdown by the federal government at Regina. Also contained in the reaction to the Riot was an intriguing and inherent dichotomy that illustrated the dominant British mentality of the Toronto elite. The British value system had a belief in justice and fairness while maintaining a respect for authority and the trappings of law and order.\(^48\) Thus the Trek violated the latter principle while the Bennett government's actions at Regina had the appearance of being, to use Mayor Simpson's phrase, "unconstitutional and thoroughly un-British." The Toronto response would display both diverse elements of the British mentality.

Simpson was one of the first to enter the fray at a July 2 CCF meeting:

> The pitiable sight was seen this week because some men had dared to ask the government for their rights. I am proud to uphold British institutions; the right of assembly; the right of expression....\(^49\)

The attitude of the provincial government to the July 1 events in Regina was also unequivocal. Arthur Roebuck, in a newspaper interview, issued a remarkably vitriolic and inflammatory repudiation of the Bennett administration. It was a far stronger statement than anything produced by western Canadian provincial governments in the aftermath of the Regina

\(^48\)Skebo, "Liberty and Authority," 64.

Riot. The Attorney-General of Ontario argued that the federal government was responsible for allowing the Trek to begin and travel as far as it did. The marchers were allowed to reach Saskatchewan, went Roebuck’s argument, because the Conservatives in Ottawa sought political advantage from the disorder the march appeared to represent:

In my judgement that riot and all its accompanying disturbance was deliberately planned and purposely brought about in order to provide a dying government with a Red bogey. Mr. Bennett’s is not the first tottering government which has instigated a war in order to win an election. He has rattled the sabre and talked of the iron heel and he has waited until the votes are about to be counted before making a kaiser play.

Blood has flowed in the streets of Regina in order that the Conservative press may declare that our national life is at stake, and that Mr. Bennett is the saviour of the nation.50

Roebuck added that his government had peacefully dealt with three separate hunger marches. What especially angered the cabinet minister was an allegation by Bennett that he had failed to prosecute Tim Buck as a communist:

If Mr. Bennett wants Mr. Buck arrested he has an armed force sufficient to carry out his wishes, however arbitrary they may be. The Dominion police have been recruited to the size of a standing army, and they wear steel helmets carry sidearms and fight with machine guns and gas bombs...51


51 Ibid., 1.
Premier Hepburn wholeheartedly endorsed the statement of his colleague (although the *Globe* reported that other cabinet members were not so enthusiastic). He commented on the proposal to begin an Ontario version of the On to Ottawa Trek:

We want no interference in this province with hunger marchers. If they conduct themselves in an orderly manner they have a perfect right to march to Ottawa and lay their case before the man who five years ago planned to end unemployment... Bennett can't fool anybody anywhere anymore. He'll get no sympathy from us if he tries his iron-heel tactics in... Ontario.52

Undoubtedly, the response of both Liberals, especially Hepburn, was influenced by the realization that a federal election would soon be held. Neither man had a great deal of fondness for the Bennett administration.

Ordinary citizens were not so clear in their response to the Regina Riot and the Trek. Competing ideals of liberty and authority were on display when a *Globe* reporter took to the streets and interviewed individuals randomly on their attitude to the violence in Regina. The interviews offer a singular sampling of common opinions and are accordingly unscientific, but interesting nonetheless:

Are you in sympathy with the Regina hunger marchers and their cause?...

Sam McManus, cartage agent,... They're all wrong. Violence will never get them anywhere.

R.J. Bamlett, blacksmith,... It is a very foolish move. They would get better results if they tried other means.

52Ibid., 1.
James Deacon, taxi driver,... I sympathize with them. I was in one of the camps out there myself once, and I know what they are like.

John Carter, lumber dealer- I think they should be canned. They're using too strong methods.

N. Markle, mechanic,... I have no sympathy for strikers. I've seen too many of them.

Benny Rubin, sales clerk,... they're not taking a wise course. There's no use in getting violent about it. You can't take blood out of a stone.

H. Parker, barber- How would you like to work for 20 cents a day?

Alex Ogilvie, janitor,... I think the strikers are worthy of consideration. You can't let a man starve without giving him something to do.

Milton C. MacLean, retired farmer,... I don't think the marchers have been used right by Bennett. He could have used some other method besides force.

George Coles, unemployed,... No man need go hungry in Canada. There's always something he can do to keep from starving to death.

John Kelly, laborer,... I don't believe they'll get anywhere using violence.

Lloyd Henry, milk driver,... I think they should pay them a decent wage.

T. Lewis, unemployed,... I don't think they will ever get anywhere acting the way they are now.

A.J. Hortop, sign painter,... Many of the strikers have likely been influenced by ringleaders. Had it not been for such ringleaders there would probably not be the difficulty there is now.

Charles New, grocer,... When they bring them over from the Old Country, they must be prepared to look after them.

J. White, auto salesman- I believe in law and order.

Herbert McArthur, trucker- Although many of them would work if given the opportunity, there is probably a good sprinkling of agitators among them.53

---

On display in these views was the principle that order must be maintained by the state and that violence, no matter what the circumstances, cannot be justified. The individuals may have disagreed about which side was responsible for violating that credo but the belief in the principle remained intact nonetheless.

Ordinary citizens were not the only people with divided opinions about the Regina Riot. Once again there was a mixed reaction among elements of the Toronto religious community. Reverend T.T. Shields, a Baptist minister, took issue with those such as King Gordon, a fellow Christian minister and CCF candidate, who had aided the Trekkers through financial support despite the opprobrium such an action carried. Reverend Stanley Russell disagreed with Shields arguing that the "State is not always supreme."54

The Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement had no doubt who was to blame for the riot in Regina; in its immediate aftermath various CCYM groups actively led protests including three open air meetings the day after the mayhem. There was some question about the legality of attempting to raise funds at these events but Toronto police did not lay charges.55

With the crushing of the Trek there was even more impetus for protest. On July 2, A.A. MacLeod sent a telegram of support to the remnants of the Trek in Regina:

CITIZENS COMMITTEE COMPOSED OF TWENTY ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING FIFTY THOUSAND PEOPLE WILL HOLD PROTEST


The response included plans for a new trek to Ottawa. Registration booths were established under the auspices of the Ontario Workers' Federation (OWF) to recruit potential trekkers; twenty members of the Toronto Township Workers' Association had already declared on July 3 their intention to participate in just such an event. By July 5, 400 individuals had been registered by the OWF at their six indoor offices and twelve street corner booths. Around thirty meetings a day were being held in conjunction with the recruitment drive. W.G. Harris, an OWF executive member, former hunger march official, and one of the upcoming trek's leaders, predicted that 2,000 protesters would leave for the nation's capital carrying a familiar message:

When the trek reaches Ottawa the same demands made by the Regina trek will be presented to the government. The trek is no longer of a purely relief camp nature, but has been broadened to include all unemployed.

In early July, the Toronto Citizens' Committee requested that all interested parties participate in the July 5 protest rally at Maple Leaf Gardens Friday [June 5]... Hope to raise several thousand dollars for trekkers... We pledge our solidarity in their great struggle... side by side we battle onward victory will come.
Gardens. The Toronto District Labour Council officially rejected the offer to join the mass rally. The labour body made the decision because it did not wish to be involved in any activity that might challenge the authority of the state. The Communist association with the protest and related activities only strengthened the Labour Council's resolve to avoid any hint of radicalism. It was not afraid, however, to condemn the Bennett government's "policy of repression" while confirming its support for the B.C. Trekkers' demands and asking that "every trade union in the city... immediately make representations to the government opposing such a policy." Unions responded to the plea with numerous telegrams to the federal government attacking the treatment of the Trekkers. Had the crackdown not occurred at Regina it was unlikely that any of these organizations would even have expressed an opinion about the On to Ottawa Trek. Now telegrams and letters flooded into Bennett's office from union locals as diverse as the Toronto Dressmakers Union, the Amalgamated Building Workers' of Canada, National Labour Council of Toronto, the United Association of Journeymen Plumbers and Steam Fitters, the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen of America, Toronto Photo Engravers Union, and the International Association of Firefighters. All of these organizations announced their outrage at the use of force by the federal government against, to use the words of one letter, "the peaceful demonstration of the unemployed marchers." The response of labour, however, did not go

60 Toronto Daily Star 5 July 1935, as cited in S.M. Skebo, "Liberty and Authority...", 65.

beyond words. Indeed the Toronto District Labour Council's message to its members went on to caution them against any extreme action. There were to be no revolutions.\textsuperscript{62} The conservative British mentality and its belief in authority was beginning to reassert itself. The right-wing union journal, \textit{Labor Leader}, congratulated the Bennett government for crushing the Trek:

\begin{quote}
Communists must be taught that Canadians will not tolerate revolutions. We insist on law and order, and in order to preserve law and order in this country force, if necessary, must be used. Ten millions of people cannot allow a few thousand discontents to "take things into their own hands" and proceed to destroy the property of others.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

Organized labour was not the only element concerned with the communist involvement in the protest activities. Members of the Toronto political elite, including Mayor Simpson, were also beginning to worry about the radical tinge in the Ontario trek movement. Simpson, who had publicly attacked the Bennett government's treatment of the Trekkers, slowly began to shift his position. On July 2, prior to his verbal assault on the Bennett government at a CCF gathering, the mayor had announced that the Toronto Police would not disrupt the large rally planned for Maple Leaf Gardens.\textsuperscript{64} Twenty four hours later, and after Bennett had linked

\textsuperscript{62}Toronto \textit{Daily Star}, 5 July 1935, as cited in S.M. Skebo, "Liberty and Authority...", 65.

\textsuperscript{63}"Law and Order Must Prevail," \textit{Labor Leader} 5 July 1935: 1.

\textsuperscript{64}"Police Will Not Halt Meeting," Toronto \textit{Globe} 3 July 1935: 9.
communism with the Trek during the Commons' debate on the Riot, Simpson's tone had undergone an adjustment:

We are determined that we are not going to have any truck or trade with the Communists. If there is any truth in the statement of the prime minister that the Regina riots mark the beginning of a Communist revolution, we had better be on our guard. I want it clearly understood that the [CCF] and the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada will not countenance any Communist uprising.

Simpson added that rights still had to be maintained under the Magna Carta. Soon the mayor would not even bother to add the democratic addendum to his anti-communist rhetoric.

Activities in the meantime, were continuing for a trek from Toronto to Ottawa. By July 6, the Ontario Workers' Federation claimed that 6,000 registration cards had been distributed throughout the province; 2,000 marchers were expected to leave from Toronto on July 11 or 13, with tag days being held to finance the excursion. One of the registrants, previously a relief camp member, became a correspondent for the Globe under the pseudonym "Trekker XXX" and filed regular reports detailing the organizing of the trek. Potential participants filled out a card requesting information such as what union the person might belong to, what relief camp the person had been in, and any form of public assistance that the individual might be receiving. Registrants were also asked to recruit others for the march. Rumours abounded that large numbers of men would

---


abandon various relief camps helping the Ontario trek to eventually dwarf its B.C. counterpart in size.67

The high water mark of Toronto trek-support was to be the July 5 rally at Maple Leaf Gardens. Estimates of the crowd size ranged from a low of 3,500 in the Globe to a high of 8,000 in the New Commonwealth. What cannot be disputed is that the evening represented a united front between elements of Toronto's political left. The featured speakers, Reverend Samuel East and Matt Shaw, shared a stage with Graham Spry, Sam Carr, assistant secretary of the Communist Party, Tom McEwen, Reverend Salem Bland, a radical Christian social reformer, James Connor, a member of the Independent Labour Party, and A.E. Smith, among others.68 Mayor Simpson, although invited, chose not to attend; instead he sent a message that proclaimed: "The challenge of our time is the protection of our youth." Several organizations sent official delegations: the CCF, the CCYM, the Young Communist League, the Ontario Workers' Federation, the Workers Unity League, the League for Social Reconstruction, and the Canadian Labour Defence League.69 There was even a CCF orchestra and a communist brass band playing Trekker favourites such as "Hold the Fort." As the song echoed through the overheated hockey palace, cheers greeted the entrance of Matt Shaw upon the shoulders of some of the adoring crowd. His speech was one of many. During his talk, Sam Carr could not avoid a partisan swipe as he noted that it required "the blood of members of [the working]


69"Free Regina Prisoners Investigate Terrorism 5,000 At Rally Demand," Toronto Daily Star 6 July 1935: 3.
class to get the CCF and other groups to stand with us."70 Addressing the crowd, Ernest Lawrie argued that the proper course of action "to combat Bennett's fascist tactics is to go to Ottawa."71

The Bennett government was an incredibly easy target for the various protests because of its mishandling of the Trek. With preparations underway for a new trek, however, many of the federal government's critics would be given an opportunity to illustrate whether their criticism was based on conviction or political expediency. The nascent Ontario trek movement (one estimate placed the size of the contingent at 7,000 to 8,000 strong) required support. And while its leadership was communist, as the anonymous trekker admitted in the Globe, "the great majority of us [trekkers] are just out of school, and we want work... [or] some means by which we can maintain our self-respect..."72

Another blunder by the Bennett government on July 9 would further embolden the Toronto trek movement. Using Section 98 the RCMP arrested Matt Shaw at the offices of the League Against War and Fascism. Not unexpectedly, there was an immediate outcry, especially from the CCF which promised to find legal counsel for the new prisoner. The party also organized several street corner meetings that evening which condemned both the arrest and Section 98. After an emergency meeting of the Toronto Citizen's Committee, a mass gathering to protest the arrest was announced for July 11 at Queen's Park.73 A statement was issued promising "to widen

---

70"8,000 Join in Protest Against Regina Rioting," New Commonwealth 13 July 1935: 1; "Free Regina Prisoners Investigate Terrorism 5,000 At Rally Demand," Toronto Daily Star 6 July 1935: 3.


and enlarge the membership of the citizen's committee. The mass meeting for Thursday night is but the opening of a determined drive for our objectives, the release of Matt Shaw and of all who are held as a result of their part in the trek to Ottawa.  

The strength of reaction generated by the arrest, however, was not sufficient to prevent the public unravelling of the CCF-Communist coalition. Mayor Simpson, who had condemned Shaw's arrest as "bordering too close on the methods of Ogpu [sic] in Russia or the Nazi incommunicado arrests and imprisonments" and who echoed the CCF call for the repeal of Section 98, was invited to the meeting but declined to attend as did Hepburn. The former's absence was noted by A.A. MacLeod, the chairman of the meeting. Before a crowd of 3,000, the Queen's Park forum degenerated into a display of base partisanship. A.E. Smith, rather than calling for unity, spent part of his speech arguing that the CLDL was not a communist organization for which he received loud applause. Graham Spry, perhaps remembering Carr's factious jab at the July 5 rally, responded with the prediction that Tim Buck would lose in the upcoming federal election to CCF member A.A. Heaps; the comment was roundly booed, prompting a rejoinder: "I didn't start this, just keep that in mind. If you introduce it you can expect to be replied to. If there any more boos, get it over with, for I want to talk about Matt Shaw." But the damage had


74“Shaw In ’Extradiction Cell' Pending Return To Regina,” Toronto Daily Star 10 July 1935: 3.

75Ibid., 3.

already been done. The CCF role in the trek-support would ostensibly, although not officially, cease. By the time the trek began its demands no longer included the repeal of Section 98, something intricately linked to the CCF, because according to the trek leadership: "The question of section 98 is largely a political matter... and although this march has its political implications we do not want to stress politics unduly." Otherwise, the trek's demands were a blend of what the B.C. Trekkers and the Ontario Hunger Marchers had sought.77

Having been rebuffed by the Ontario trek movement, the CCF responded by simply ignoring the march to Ottawa. The *New Commonwealth*, edited by Graham Spry, did not carry a single story about the Ontario leg of the trek. Another member of the CCF supplied an even more visible sign that its partnership with the Communist Party had ended: Mayor Jimmie Simpson had become the Toronto trekkers' main enemy. He had already begun to hedge on his support for the trek after the spectre of communism was raised. The fluctuations in his attitude toward the trek were best exemplified on July 10 when he confirmed that Torontonians participating in the march would not have their relief ended because "the right to bring one's case before... the seat of authority is recognized under the British constitution..." In the next breath, however, the Mayor warned that the trekkers would not be permitted to hold the tag day they had planned.78 Nor would they be allowed to sleep in city parks. In the case of the former, Simpson argued that he was merely enforcing the law.


78"Won't Stop Relief Of Hunger Trekkers," Toronto *Daily Star* 10 July 1935: 1.
Meanwhile the Mayor's position shifted even further in the aftermath of the CCF-Communist clash. Displaying a conservative belief in order, he now repudiated both the involvement of the Communist Party in the trek and the trek itself:

In such trying times I do not feel that such spectacular methods are best. They should send their representatives to the seat of authority to make representations on their behalf.

I can see that those responsible for the march are determined to override obstruction of any kind. They are challenging law and order and constituted authority. To be weak and vacillating means encouraging a certain type of individual to revolutionary methods.79

Eventually Police Chief Draper admitted to the Daily Star that there was not a specific law prohibiting tagging; the trekkers upon hearing this confession increased their search for funds.80

Clearly frustrated by the trekkers skirting of authority, Simpson intensified his rhetoric on July 15 when he announced that the trekkers would not be allowed to parade without a permit and anyone caught tagging would have their collection box confiscated. Earlier in the day a group of trekkers marched past city hall in military formation in an apparent attempt to snub an onlooking Simpson. The Mayor warned that if any more unauthorized parades occurred the participants would "be regarded as

---

79 "Will Not Allow Public Appeal For Funds Here," Toronto Daily Star 13 July 1935: 1-2. In fact it was only through consultation with Police Chief Draper and other civic officials that an appropriate law to charge the taggers under was found. Sporadic tagging had already been occurring and it increased in areas where there was not a police presence.

80 Ibid., 2.
revolutionaries and treated as such.\textsuperscript{81} In conjunction with this announcement the CCF mayor ordered Draper to cooperate actively with the Ontario Provincial Police and the CNR and CPR police to prevent any trouble, especially an attempt to use the railway for transportation to Ottawa.\textsuperscript{82} In a final blow to the trekkers, Toronto City Council voted eleven to four against even listening to a trek delegation which was requesting food and accommodation assistance. One councilor announced that the marchers should "go to Moscow, where they get their pay;" he also lamented the fact that only two of their number had been arrested over the preceding days arguing that individuals should have been prosecuted for soliciting or begging. Simpson, who did not vote on the motion, stiffly observed that "law and order" would be maintained.\textsuperscript{83} A day later, fourteen taggers were arrested in the city; five were charged with vagrancy and the remainder with illegal solicitation of funds.\textsuperscript{84}

Simpson's arbitrary, confrontational, and somewhat hypocritical policy toward the marchers angered some ordinary citizens and the odd CCF group which was still sympathetic to the cause of the protesters. The Bedford Park CCYM criticized the Mayor's actions towards the trekkers while the Mount Pleasant branch of the CCF officially requested "the resignation of Mayor Simpson as a member of the CCF."\textsuperscript{85} One citizen


\textsuperscript{82}"Orders City Police To Aid Provincials," Toronto \textit{Daily Star} 15 July 1935: 1.


\textsuperscript{84}14 Alleged Trekker-Taggers Are Arrested," Toronto \textit{Globe} 17 July 1935: 1.
offered a succinct summation of the Mayor's attitude in a letter to the
*Daily Star*: "Mayor Simpson, seemingly very sympathetic and
understanding, recently declared that he would not hinder the marchers,
but stopped them tagging. How could he more efficiently stand in their
way?"  

The Hepburn government was also gradually shifting away from the
inflammatory rhetoric of Roebuck and toward an anti-trek policy. Its
response to the arrest of Shaw was surprisingly meek; the fact that
Roebuck was on vacation may be partially responsible for the restraint.
The RCMP had officially requested that the Ontario Supreme Court
authorize the removal of Shaw to Saskatchewan. Hepburn publicly
announced on July 15 that he would not authorize such an action and then
quietly reversed himself the following day. He gave no explanation for the
change, but the Premier had little choice since the federal government had
threatened to use a legal procedure to force compliance with its wishes.

Originally the official Ontario government policy toward the trek
was to have been one of strict neutrality. Hepburn, himself, announced the
course of action on July 4. he emphasized that his government would
neither encourage nor hinder the proposed march, although in his opinion
such an undertaking would be "futile." On July 10, he confirmed this

---

85NAC, CCF Papers, Vol. 49, "Minutes of the Provincial Executive," 25 July 1935: 1;
Ibid., 22 August 1935: 2.


87AO, Premier Hepburn Papers, Box 185, Series 8, Hunger March- Hepburn General
Correspondence, "Handwritten Memo from McQuesten to Hepburn," 9 July 1935.
"Ontario Won't Help Enforce Section 98 Hepburn Emphatic," Toronto *Daily Star* 15 July
1935: 1; "Crown Counsel Cadi Summoned Before Justice," Toronto *Daily Star* 15 July
1935: 1; "Shaw Papers Signed Mandamus Dropped," Toronto *Daily Star* 16 July 1935:
1.
middle course after a meeting with Fred Collins and other Toronto trek leaders. Then on July 16, Hepburn changed his mind:

I suppose you might say that our policy toward the trekkers is changing. We are tightening up on them because we find we have to. They can still use the roads for their trek if they want to. We won't stop that as long as they behave themselves.... There hasn't been any cooperation so far between the provincial police and the R.C.M.P.'s [sic], but we are ready to call on them if we have to.

The Premier later attempted to justify the shift in government policy toward the trek:

They have lost public sympathy—that is, if I interpret public opinion. They call this thing the workers' hunger march, but the people are beginning to see through it. They aren't workers, for when there are jobs on the farms they won't take them. They aren't hungry because mayors and reeves have assured me that there isn't a case of malnutrition in the province. Now we find they don't even want to march, they want to ride in trucks.

The previous policy seemed to have been based on the belief that the trek would dissolve of its own accord; Hepburn had repeatedly emphasized the uselessness of the exercise and the lengthy distance to Ottawa. But with the news of Winnipeg trekkers on their way to Ontario, the bluff was

89"Won't Aid Or Hinder Trek, Says Hepburn," Toronto Daily Star 10 July 1935: 36.
91bid., 3.
called. After a rapidly organized meeting between the Premier, the Minister of Highways, and General V.A.S. Williams, Commissioner of the OPP, the government introduced a law prohibiting vehicles not licensed in Ontario from carrying passengers within the borders of the province.92 The Southern Ontario trek contingent was also informed that it would not be allowed to use trucks to transport marchers other than for the use of three vehicles to carry the sick.93 Even after the trekkers left the city Hepburn attempted to dissuade them from their journey by offering free bus transportation home and emphasizing the availability of farm jobs. They refused such existing employment. The public appearance of trekkers, many of whom were healthy, single unemployed men, rejecting farm jobs helped to clear the way for Hepburn to order that 15,000 single unemployed be struck from the relief rolls on August 1. It was an attempt to supply badly needed farm labour.94

The event, officially called the On to Ottawa Trek, marched against the opposition of three levels of government. Particularly damaging to their cause was the provincial government's refusal to allow vehicles to carry participants. Undoubtedly the prospect of actually having to walk all the way to Ottawa lowered the numbers of those willing to be involved. Originally 1,500 or more were expected to trek and around 2,000 people did take part in a police authorized march to Queen's Park to celebrate the

92Ibid., 3.


July 17 beginning of the trek. A tag day was the first warning that there might be problems with support for the march: it netted only a disappointing $700. The warning of support problems was confirmed when the actual march began, and only a little over 400 people participated. The anonymous trekker wrote in the Globe that of those signed up to march "at least a third of the addresses were fictitious; but the biggest blow has been the edict of Premier Hepburn regarding the use of trucks."95

An advance party organized sleeping accommodation and food supplies but conditions were still extremely difficult. Not far out of Toronto the numbers had been whittled down to 300 by desertions.96 Nevertheless, the remaining trekkers persevered. Included in this group was a women's section consisting of ten members, the youngest being fifteen years of age. Another woman, communist activist Lil Himmelfarb, was one of the march's spokespersons.97

Those participating were subject to a highly organized system during the march. Ewart Humphreys, a veteran communist and secretary of the National Unemployed Council, was to head the trek. His deputies were Lawrie, Collins, Thomas King, secretary of the OWF, and W.G. Harris.98 All of the men had been involved with the previous month's hunger march. The rank-and-file trekkers were subject to a strict code of discipline with


expulsion being the ultimate penalty for any infractions. A collective decision would select the appropriate punishment. Nineteen rules were established, including prohibition of "obscene language or imoral [sic] conduct" and "frequent[ing] any saloon... or to partake of any intoxicating liquor." The marchers were also forbidden to communicate with the police or press unless permission was granted by the General Trek Executive.99

As in other areas where treks were occurring, the various levels of police kept a close watch on any Toronto march activities. The role of the Toronto Police was far less conspicuous than it had been in the early 1930s, undoubtedly because there was less tolerance toward police brutality on the part of civic and provincial authorities. In addition, two "highly placed officials" at Queen's Park informed the RCMP that the "Provincial Government does not intend to take any action in regard to radical activities in this Province prior to the forthcoming General Election."100 Instead observation replaced obstruction: outside of Toronto the OPP and RCMP shared the role of watchdog. Prior to the beginning of the Ontario branch of the trek, the provincial and rail police forces had been working to prevent individuals from stealing rides on trains.101 Individuals might slip through a net of enforcement but there was no possibility that a large group of trekkers would. Thus the marchers were denied this means of transportation to Ottawa. There was also an ubiquitous police presence right from the beginning of the march. Members


100 Ibid., 4 July 1935: 1 (024).

101 AO, Premier Hepburn's Papers, Box 182, CPR File, "E. de B. Panet, Chief, Department of Investigation, CPR, to Commissioner Williams," 26 July 1935: 1.
of the Toronto Police's "Red Squad" kept the contingent under surveillance as they moved east from the capital of Ontario. The OPP was less secretive: it had fifteen policemen on motorcycles accompanying the trekkers along their route.102

As the trekkers marched along the highway towards Kingston the RCMP became more actively involved. Mounted Police reports of July and August from its Toronto detachment provided information on the numbers of trekkers involved and where various groups were from. Observations were also made about the march's leadership: "Fred COLLINS is in full control of the march, and returns to Toronto at intervals for further instructions. I observed this man... entering the Communist Federal Election Headquarters on Spadina Ave. on the afternoon of July 29th, 1935."103 By the time the trekkers reached Kingston, a Mounted Policeman had infiltrated their numbers. He recognized one fellow officer and believed there might have been still another. The report commented on the low morale of the marchers caused in part by the inability of the rank-and-file to trust that their leaders were not RCMP agents. One of the trek leaders, W.G. Harris, described by a member of the Force as "heavily sun tanned. Wearing a blue work shirt, with (dark) blue serge pants. (False teeth.) appearance [sic] of being an Italian," was rumoured to be an RCMP officer; it was discovered by the police that he had been previously discharged from the Force.104 All of these factors contributed to a lack of


trust on the part of the trekkers for their leaders and to the general poor morale. Indeed the rank-and-file, organized into units of twelve, were encouraged to spy on each other in order to root out "stool pigeons."\footnote{105}

Not only had the police infiltrated the actual march but they also had informants in related organizations as an OPP document describes:

1. [Mrs. Joe Paton] has been an "Operator" for the Special Branch, Toronto Police, for the past 4 years, and is a member of several of the "Workers Associations", and is particularly well up in the inner circle of the National Council of Unemployed, and is in a position to have obtained very valuable information as to the plans, personnel etc., of the different organizations.

2. Through recent investigations, in conjunction with the Special Branch, Toronto Police, in conjunction with the "On to Ottawa Tekkers" [sic], came in contact with this "Operator" and obtained valuable information through her as to the plans, movements etc., of that body.

3. [Mrs. Paton] is paid, by the Toronto Police, the sum of $50.00 per month, for her services, with a special bonus, for any exceptionally good information, of $5.00 or $10.00, and her information has always been found to be reliable...\footnote{106}

Against steep odds the marchers had reached Kingston. It was only a few days walking time to Ottawa from there. The reception that awaited the tired and blistered group in the nation's capital, however, would be even less friendly than in the city they had begun their journey from. There was a mood of reform in Toronto, but it was not strong enough to become


\footnote{105}{Toronto Daily Star 22 July 1935: 19.}

\footnote{106}{AO, OPP Records, E-96, File 1.2, "Report Re. Mrs. Joe Paton," 20 August 1935.}
entrenched. The Toronto trekkers seeking support received only sympathy. When they would not quietly disappear, the underlying conservative nature of the Toronto environment began to reassert itself. Respect for authority and law and order was a cornerstone of the philosophy being espoused by opponents of the trek, even from those with more liberal reputations such as Simpson and Hepburn. Undoubtedly they believed that a harsh policy toward the trek was a reflection of the attitude of the majority of a public that also espoused restraint and respect for authority. Whatever the case, the remaining Ontario trekkers would soon accomplish what their more famous western comrades had been unable to do. They would walk the streets of Ottawa.
CHAPTER FIVE

"[W]e cannot shoo these men to another place"

Ottawa, to the approaching army of unemployed, represented more than the capital of the nation. To them, it exemplified the inequality, unfairness, and harshness of a political system that offered platitudes instead of policy, rhetoric in place of relief. The nation's capital would provide the opportunity of confronting and displaying their anger to those held responsible for the misery of their lives--the federal government.

Ottawa was not the sort of city to be a harbinger for radicalism. It was an urban setting where, according to Workers' Unity League (WUL) head Tom McEwen, "half the population was either on a Government 'payroll' of some sort- or hoping to get there."¹ Politics was an industry that went through few slumps. Some misery did exist, however, as 4,600 heads of families were registered with the Ottawa Public Welfare Board at the time of the Trek.² The capital of Canada would serve as a microcosm for the entire Trek experience: protesters parading by the shadows of the Parliament buildings; political battles between the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Communist Party; extraordinary and fearful preparations on the part of the military and police to deal with a potential insurrection in their own backyard; and finally, conflict between various levels of government over the correct policy toward the Trek.

The initial reaction to the news of the Trek was left to Ottawa's civic administration. The federal government did not take the event's early period seriously, confidentially believing that as the Trek moved eastward

it would dissolve as participants found jobs or went home.³ Ottawa Mayor
P.J. Nolan was of a different opinion. Initially to him the clashes between
the police and relief camp strikers in Vancouver during April and May of
1935 also must have seemed the 2,000 miles they literally were away. But
with the announcement of the Trek and its departure for the nation's
capital, the Mayor's apathy rapidly disappeared. Now his city was the
objective of an army of disgruntled young men. As soon as the Trekkers set
off from Vancouver Nolan was wiring a complaint to that city's mayor,
Gerry McGeer. McGeer was not very sympathetic to his counterpart's
telegram. He retorted that the marchers were "from Eastern Canada and
most of them ought to return there."⁴

Nolan also attempted to intimidate any potential Trekkers by
informing Ottawa's Board of Control on June 7 that several men had
volunteered to form a citizen's militia to deal with the Trek; the Mayor
felt that the various police forces would be sufficient and reiterated that
his city would not care for any marchers.⁵ Despite the public stance
preliminary plans were made by the city's Public Welfare Board to consider
at least the question of accommodation for the B.C. Trekkers.⁶

Even the halting of the Trek in Regina did not end Nolan's
machinations. He fretted about the possibility of trucks being used to
transport the marchers into Ontario. In a letter to Premier Mitchell

³"Government Not Overtly Worried About Trek," Ottawa Evening Citizen 6 June
1935: 1.


⁵"Ready to Deal With Strikers," Ottawa Journal 7 June 1935: 3.

Hepburn, the Mayor asked that the province cooperate with the federal government to keep the Trekkers out "because we cannot shoo these men to another place or another Province after they arrive in our Province...." Nolan warned that the task of halting the Trek would only become more difficult since "there may be as many as three or four thousand and as they go through [Ontario] this number may swell to greater proportions."\(^7\)

Newspapers offered the only other local reaction to the announcement that Ottawa was to be the Trekkers' final destination. In a June 11 editorial, the *Ottawa Journal* expressed amazement at the entire event:

> One begins to wonder what is to be done with these men if and when they arrive in Ottawa. The city... has no responsibility for their maintenance. Nor has the Province of Ontario, because they come from other parts of the country....

> The fact is, however, that these men are coming to Ottawa, that apparently nothing is being done to halt their progress or dissuade them from their mission, that they cannot be denied food and housing no matter if they have been misled and deluded by false leaders....

> Common sense and an appreciation of the realities of the situation would seem to demand that the problem of the itinerant "strikers" should not be left for solution until they reach the Capital.... [I]n due course they will be marching on Parliament Hill. The Government then, whatever its legal and moral rights, will find the problem on its door-step. It would be better in this case, it would appear, to meet trouble more than half way.\(^8\)

---

\(^7\) *Archives of Ontario* [AO], Premier Mitchell Hepburn Papers, RG 3, Box 185, Series 8, Hunger March- Hepburn General Correspondence, Public 1935, "P.J. Nolan to Hepburn," 20 June 1935.

\(^8\) "Invasion From the West," *Ottawa Journal* 11 June 1935: 8.
The local French-language daily, *Le Droit*, in an editorial, entitled "Les Marcheurs Ne Viendront Pas Ici," denounced the Trek as a threat: "Il faut que l'on protège la propriété privée et que l'on maintienne l'ordre social. Les communistes ne sauraient prétendre imposer leurs volontés à tous ceux qui ne veulent pas de leur doctrine sociale."9

The third major local newspaper, the Ottawa *Evening Citizen*, offered pro-Trek editorials in the form of political jabs at the Bennett government. Readers were told that the Trekkers could be considered to be "refugees."10 The paper's next edition continued the theme: "... if [the] strikers get here, the authorities will have a chance to explain how they propose to make the camps unnecessary."11 The reaction of city officials to the Trek was the subject of scorn in another editorial:

> The prospective presence of the men in Ottawa should be the signal for some statesmanlike thought and deliberation. No one expects the mayor and the Board of Control to take up the cudgels for these desperate men (the shock would be too great) but we do expect them to act like adults in the shadow of a pending difficulty.... Incidentally, the mayor says some young men have volunteered to "prevent the strikers coming into the city." Just as if they were the bearers of a plague!12

Aside from the reaction of newspapers and the local government, displays of support or even interest in the Trek were quite limited. During June and July the Trek was still too far away from Ottawa to have any

---


effect upon ordinary citizens content to live their lives. The only limited exposure that the Trek achieved was the arrival of its delegation from Regina to meet with the Prime Minister and his cabinet.Coinciding with the arrival of the eight Trekkers was the delegation of Ontario Hunger March leaders, including Ernest Lawrie, Fred Collins, Ewart Humphries, and Tom McEwen. These men, whose trip was funded by the Ontario Workers' Federation, were greeted by a small crowd at the rail station and then waited themselves to meet Evans and the Trek delegation.13

Politics also arrived with the respective groups. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) leader J.S. Woodsworth had publicly announced that he would be willing to meet with the Trek leadership as representatives of the unemployed, not as communists. Although this pronouncement was dismissed by Evans as not being pertinent to the debate, he did announce upon his arrival that he wished to meet with the Labour Members of Parliament.14 CCF MP Angus MacInnis obliged by communicating with Evans to establish a time and a place for the conference. Evans, however, repeatedly changed the times and finally simply missed an appointment with MacInnis who had cancelled a speaking engagement in order to be available for the meeting. Evans later telephoned the MP to inform him of the result of the meeting with Bennett and to ask that the CCF support the Trek. MacInnis was suspicious of the entire process:

... I think our Communist friends are... giving the powers that be every excuse to use force and to abolish what little

democracy we had left.... I feel that the delegates here led by Arthur Evans did everything possible to put us in a compromising position. When we heard that the delegates were coming Woodsworth, Heaps and myself discussed the matter and decided that we would offer our services in any way that would further the interests of the men in the camps.... As far as Evans was concerned, [however], it was not at all necessary to consult us in the matter. All that it was necessary to do was to instruct us as to what they had decided to do.... The idea was for the delegation to avoid the C.C.F. members while making it appear that they were seeking our assistance and being refused or ignored.\textsuperscript{15}

Once again, the Trek illustrated the battle between the Communist Party and the CCF for the hearts and minds of the working class. In Ottawa, however, the Ontario delegation of hunger marchers also had trouble dealing with Evans, and most of them, like the Trek leader, were communists. The group from Ontario had argued for a joint meeting with Bennett but the request was soundly rebuffed by Evans: "We are going to meet Mr. Bennett all alone.... If men haven't been in the camps then they can't talk about them [Evans conveniently ignored the fact that he, himself, had not been in a camp]."\textsuperscript{16}

Instead, the Ontario leaders of the unemployed and a similar group from Quebec met with Bennett immediately after his discussion with the Regina delegation. In that meeting the Prime Minister attempted to portray the eight men as foreign agitators stirring up discontent among the unemployed. Eventually the verbal jousting degenerated into a shouting

\textsuperscript{15}National Archives of Canada [NAC], Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF] Papers, Vol. 89, "Angus MacInnis to Grant MacNeil," 25 June 1935, as cited in Michiel Horn, ed. The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972), 381-3.

match. The meeting adjourned with nothing accomplished.\textsuperscript{17} The next discussion was not quite as heated as its predecessor. Ernest Lawrie, the group's official spokesperson, put forward the primary demand for non-contributory unemployment insurance. When Fred Collins spoke on the issue of forced labour the meeting's comity rapidly began to deteriorate. Bennett labelled him an agitator and remarked on his well-dressed appearance. Collins retorted "I will exchange jackets with you." Bennett refused the offer. As with the previous meeting, nothing of substance was accomplished.\textsuperscript{18}

After their respective clashes, the two delegations gathered at Ottawa's Keetwatin Hotel to discuss the situation. It was decided to issue a request for a national trek of unemployed to Ottawa. Dissension again surfaced when Ernest Lawrie of the Ontario Workers' Federation argued against the announcement being made only by the Trek leadership and the Workers' Unity League. He felt that the inclusion of his organization was necessary to appeal to the unemployed and workers of Toronto. A compromise was eventually reached allowing Lawrie to be included in the group making the announcement, although the actual press release was written by McEwen, Evans and Humphries.\textsuperscript{19} The official call for a national march was made the following evening before a packed house at Ottawa's Rialto theatre, the only actual display of support for the Trek during June.

\textsuperscript{17} "The Interview between the Delegation of strikers and the Prime Minister and his Cabinet," in \textit{Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek} Victor Hoar, ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973), 194-216.

\textsuperscript{18} NAC, Bennett Papers, "Interview with the Joint Ontario and Quebec Delegation," 22 June 1935: 1-29 (479979-480008).

in the capital of Canada. No CCF officials addressed the crowd because none were invited.

In the aftermath of the departure of the various delegations, the city of Ottawa and its police force decided to set an example for other governments to follow. In the middle of the night of June 22, a force of six city law enforcement officers and several Canadian National Railway policemen raided the local rail yards and took into custody forty-five transients. The action was specifically designed to curtail any movement of itinerants connected to the On to Ottawa Trek into the city. The apprehended men, including one playing a piccolo who was initially perturbed but later treated the police to "a Londonderry air," were later sent to the local mission without being charged.

The general apathy of the citizens of Ottawa toward the Trek continued even in the immediate aftermath of the Regina Riot. There were no massive demonstrations, merely verbal jousts between MPs over the violent event on July 1. During the debate in the House of Commons the Bennett government was repeatedly chastised by both opposition parties for its handling of the Trek. The rest of the city settled in for a hot,
sultry summer, the threat of a trek and other conflict seemingly negated by the riot. this peaceful illusion was shattered on July 8 when at least 150 relief camp workers at the neighbouring Rockcliffe relief camp, administered by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), went on strike, in part out of sympathy for the B.C. Trekkers. The strikers' specific demands included an eighty cent increase in pay, an eight hour working day, better food, and a civilian administration rather than a military one.24

The reaction of the authorities was swift. Those perceived to be the strike's leaders were immediately expelled. One hundred baton-wielding Mounted Policemen were on hand to ensure that the eleven men left the camp, which they did peacefully. The expulsions, however, did not quell the disturbance. Two hundred RCAF and RCMP personnel peacefully ejected a further 138 men from the camp two days later after they refused to work. The men were loaded on government trucks and driven to downtown Ottawa where they were released. Over 100 of these men found accommodation at the Ukrainian Labor Temple, a later centre of Ontario trek activity.25 Many of the Rockcliffe strikers would eventually join the Ontario trekkers marching to Ottawa, including one man who a few weeks later would recognize an undercover RCMP officer, disguised as a trekker, who had been at the Rockcliffe expulsions.26

24 "Minutes of Joint Meeting Held In Ottawa, June 22nd," in "Work and Wages"..., 147; "Relief Men Go On Strike At Rockcliffe," Ottawa Journal 8 July 1935: 1, 4.


The news in July that treks to Ottawa might begin from Winnipeg and various points in Ontario renewed the enmity of Mayor P.J. Nolan. He was especially concerned about those gathering in Ontario for a trek since they were a much more tangible threat. The Mayor met with Premier Hepburn in Toronto on July 10 where he was assured that the provincial government would do nothing to aid and abet the marchers.\textsuperscript{27} The civic politician was not content, however, with the province and city of Toronto's proposed policy of neutrality. He wanted the Ontario trek stopped and crushed if necessary, a sentiment that was expressed in a July 12 telegram to Hepburn:

\begin{center}
IN MY OPINION IT IS THE DUTY OF YOUR GOVERNMENT TO CHECK ALL SUCH [TREK] GATHERINGS AT POINTS OF ORIGIN AND TO PREVENT ORGANIZED BODIES OF UNEMPLOYED LED BY IRRESPONSIBLE AGITATORS FROM USING THE PUBLIC HIGHWAYS FOR THE PURPOSE OF BEING TRANSPORTED TO THIS CITY EXPECT TO BE ASSURED THAT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF ONTARIO WILL TAKE SUCH STEPS AS MAY BE NECESSARY TO PREVENT THIS MOVEMENT GAINING HEADWAY WITH CONSEQUENT POSSIBILITY OF SERIOUS DAMAGE TO PROPERTY AND PROBABLE LOSS OF LIFE IF NOT CHECKED...
\end{center}

The request was refused in a public statement by the Premier: "We are not going to chase the marchers all over the roads as they are doing in Quebec."\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27}"Mayor Refuses to Aid 'On to Ottawa' March of Strikers From Toronto," Ottawa Journal 11 July 1935: 3. In leaving Queen's Park, Nolan was approached by an On to Ottawa tagger requesting a donation. When the Mayor informed the man of his identity, the tagger walked away with a cryptic threat of "beating you all up" when the marchers reached Ottawa.

\textsuperscript{28}AO, Hepburn Papers, RG 3, Box 185, Series 8, "Nolan to Hepburn," 12 July 1935.
Nolan also wired the mayors of Winnipeg, North Bay, and Toronto to warn them that they would be held legally accountable for any damage or other expenses incurred by Ottawa should the various marchers reach Ottawa. All three cities had either aided the trekkers in some form or had failed to prevent them from leaving. The respective wires may have been partially effective as on July 15 the Hepburn government announced that the marchers would not be allowed to use trucks for transportation. Mayor Jimmie Simpson of Toronto, who had previously been indifferent toward the march, also ordered his city's police force to hinder the marchers' attempts to raise funds. Nolan was still not satisfied with the response of the Ontario government. At a private meeting with a friend of Hepburn, he expressed concern and wondered "why we did not stop them as Quebec does. I reminded him that yours was a 'Liberal government.'"

With marches underway and the potential of more starting for Ottawa, the city and its leader began to prepare for a siege. Another raid was made against transients gathered in the rail yards: sixty men fled while fourteen were taken into custody and later released. The police were apparently searching for a contingent of Montreal marchers. Nolan also publicly mentioned the idea of recruiting a temporary force of 500 men to supplement the city police. At the mayor's behest a conference was held


between the Board of Control, and the city, provincial, and federal police forces at which it was announced that any trekkers would receive food and accommodation for three days only. The remaining Rockcliffe relief strikers were told to "work or leave town."  

Nolan's demands aside, the OPP and the RCMP were already preparing for the potential arrival in Ottawa of thousands of men. A few days after the meeting with Ottawa officials, the OPP cancelled summer leave for its members in the province's major industrial centres and Ottawa. The action was conditional on the marchers reaching the national capital. The RCMP had already canceled summer relief for all of its members at the beginning of July. The federal police force was quite busy in dealing with the Ontario trek from mid-July to the end of August. Their main concern was with protecting government buildings and government officials, especially the Prime Minister. A detail of twelve Canadian National Railway Police, with continual access to a Mountie, was ordered to guard the back of the Chateau Laurier where Bennett lived. In addition, an RCMP constable was appointed to shadow Bennett, which he did from August 8 when the marchers arrived to August 26 when any threat was perceived to have passed. Two buses were secured for ten dollars on August 2 to transport ninety-six steel-helmeted and baton-equipped policemen from Rockcliffe to Ottawa in the event of disorder. The RCMP also coordinated the


searching of rail cars bound for the nation's capital, a potential means of transportation for trekkers. As the Ontario leg of the trek neared Ottawa, Commissioner MacBrien requested that he receive daily reports detailing the size of the army of the unemployed. This was accomplished through effective infiltration and observation of the trek by the Mounted Police. When the undercover officer was exposed at Kingston, C.H. King, the commander of the RCMP's Ottawa-based "A" Division, noted to MacBrien that the man would not need to be replaced because "very little could be obtained other than that which we are now receiving daily from other sources."

The Canadian military also took a strong interest in the events in and around Ottawa since it was charged with the capital's defence. Many of those marching were also former members of the federal relief camps and consequently the particular responsibility of the Department of National Defence. On July 13, the Adjutant-General, C.F. Constantine, sent a secret message to the District Officer Commanding (DOC) Military District 3 at Kingston. The DOC was ordered to ready covertly an emergency military force composed of the regular army and, if necessary, the militia. It was designed to defend the Parliament buildings and other government installations should the marchers arrive and attempt to storm them. The soldiers were to be held in readiness and available at the request of the federal government.


Despite the various plans to deal with the trekkers neither Ottawa businesses nor its mayor were completely reassured. Numerous store owners in the city’s downtown took out riot insurance anticipating trouble when the marchers arrived. Nolan, in turn, sought even greater power to deal with any potential threat to public order from the trek. On July 14, the Mayor wrote a confidential letter, on the advice of MacBrien, to Attorney General Roebuck requesting that he be given the power to call in the RCMP. Nolan assured Roebuck that "the assistance of the Royal Mounted Police will not be asked for unless it should be found that the local police force are not able to handle the situation as it should develop." Roebuck refused the request on August 1, arguing that local police officials already had the authority "to take any action which may be found necessary." The final paragraph of the letter was a frank dismissal of the Ottawa Mayor's request:

Under these circumstances it is not necessary to delegate the authority of this office in advance of a possible happening, and I may add that in my judgement it is not good policy to delegate authority in police matters to persons outside of the force....

Nolan replied the following day by noting that his impression was that the mayors of Vancouver and Regina had previously been given the same power.

---


42 "Riot Insurance Taken Out By Local Merchants," Ottawa Evening Citizen 8 August 1935: 2.


44 Ibid., "Roebuck to Nolan," 1 August 1935: (364).
that he sought. The letter also regretted "that apparently underlying this matter is the implication that because I am not a police officer I may not be trusted."\textsuperscript{45}

Over the two weeks prior to the arrival of the Ontario trekkers, Ottawa gave a preview of the strength of the reception they would receive. Chief of Police Emile Joliat had 125 regular and special constables at his command who, along with the RCMP, were to be used to prevent tagging, parades, and trespassing on railway property. Five men were charged on July 27 with collecting food for relief strikers despite having a letter from an Anglican minister which vouched for the legitimacy of their cause. Seven men, all from Quebec, were arrested for trespassing in Hull on August 1. On the same day another six men were arrested for soliciting funds for the approaching trekkers; eight others were found guilty of having been illegally on a CPR train and were sentenced to fifteen days in the Hull jail, which was becoming overcrowded with all of the arrests. A further twenty-five men were charged in the week preceding the August 8 arrival of the marchers.\textsuperscript{46}

The first official group of Ontario trekkers had actually appeared in Ottawa on July 17. Thirty individuals arrived on a freight train after having gone on strike at a relief camp near Pembroke, Ontario. Their leader predicted that the rest of the 1,500 men would also walk out, an action that did not happen although the Toronto marchers were under the

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}, "Nolan to Roebuck," 2 August 1935: (362).

impression that it would. The headquarters for these men was the Ukrainian Labor Temple.\textsuperscript{47} The city police disputed the figure of thirty men, instead claiming that only half that number had reached Ottawa and that there were no more than eighty trekkers in the entire urban centre. H.H. Stevens, leader of the newly created Reconstruction Party, met with several of the men offering sympathy and the advice that a large trek to Ottawa was futile.\textsuperscript{48} Twelve days later, the Sudbury contingent of twenty-three men arrived.\textsuperscript{49}

On July 25, the delegation of five Manitoba trekkers arrived from Kenora. They had an uneventful forty-five minute meeting with acting Prime Minister George Perley (Bennett was on vacation) and some other cabinet ministers; Perley informed them that there were numerous farm jobs available. Having been rebuffed, the five men left the city to return to Winnipeg without having even conferred with other local trek representatives.\textsuperscript{50}

As the marchers neared Ottawa the major concern became accommodation and food. On July 29, a delegation approached the city's Board of Control to request shelter and nourishment for 1,000 people: it was rejected.\textsuperscript{51} Eventually privately owned land in an Ottawa park would

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47}"30 Strikers From Petawawa Reach Ottawa on Train," Ottawa \textit{Journal} 17 July 1935: 1, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{48}"Stevens Meets Relief Strikers At Labor Temple," Ottawa \textit{Journal} 18 July 1935: 1.
\item \textsuperscript{49}"Delegation of Trekkers Will Ask City Help," Ottawa \textit{Evening Citizen} 29 July 1935: 1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{50}CSIS, RCMP Records, "Report of Inspector F.A. Symes, Division A," 26 July 1935: (290); "Acting Premier Asks Trekkers To Aid Farmers," Ottawa \textit{Evening Citizen} 26 July 1935: 1-2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
be provided. Food would be acquired through donations and the trek's own funds.

On August 8, 478 individuals, including twenty-five women and forty-seven Ottawa-based trekkers who had gone out to greet their comrades, marched into the nation's capital. They paraded along Wellington Street, past Parliament Hill and on to a park where ramshackle accommodation was established. The women trekkers were sequestered in a separate area from the men and were the first to receive available blankets and mattresses. Hay and cardboard served as bedding for many.52

On August 9, Mayor Nolan met with King of the RCMP, Ottawa Police Chief Joliat, and OPP Inspector Oliver to discuss the situation.53 The police presence during the period of the trek in Ottawa was fairly unobtrusive as they attempted to prevent street and door-to-door soliciting for food and funds as well as demonstrations. Although the trekkers threatened to hold a parade, they continually retreated from that position to ensure that no provocation would afford the police an opportunity to crush their movement.54 The city attempted to use legal means to force the trekkers from the park where they were residing. the


move failed, however, because the marchers were sequestered on a private section of the park.\textsuperscript{55}

One of the trekkers' goals was to win the support of the Ottawa public. To accomplish this task manifestoes were widely distributed around the city. The publication included a list of the marchers' grievances and an appeal to the citizenry for food and money. Perhaps taking into account the demographics of the intended readership, an attempt was made to link the working class and the middle class in common cause against the Bennett government.\textsuperscript{56} In turn, large numbers of Ottawa inhabitants responded by attending rallies and by offering food, bedding, clothing, and financial support. Local churches chipped in with a small donation. On the night of the Ontario marchers' arrival, thousands of people out of genuine interest or simple curiosity flocked to the park to listen to numerous speakers. Demonstrations on August 10, 17, and 18 each attracted 2,000 people, a remarkable turnout for a city with such a staid and conservative reputation.\textsuperscript{57} Gradually, however, the novelty began to wear off. Attendance at meetings declined as did donations. Perhaps people's attention was directed to a happier event, the annual Ottawa Exhibition.

\textsuperscript{55}“City Unable To Oust Trekkers From Camp,” Ottawa \textit{Evening Citizen} 12 August 1935: 1-2.


Rapidly the marchers' chief concern became survival. Of the $1,400 they had collected since leaving Toronto, only $100 remained. On occasion some marchers were forced to miss a meal.\(^{58}\) A meeting between trek leaders and R.B. Bennett on August 10, even as contributions remained fairly plentiful, illustrated how desperate the situation had become. Rather than present their list of seven demands, the delegation, led by Ewart Humphries, spent the time practically begging for food and shelter. Their pleas went unanswered as the meeting devolved into another shouting match. Afterwards Bennett, who had previously publicly announced that he would not allow government forces to impede the trekkers' attempt to reach Ottawa, derided the march leadership as radicals and labelled an unnamed Toronto man, most likely McEwen or Collins, as being behind the entire event.\(^{59}\)

The marchers, having already wasted their opportunity with Bennett, were continually rebuffed in their attempts to meet various political leaders in Ottawa. Tired of the dwindling food supply and poor accommodation, many trekkers deserted. Those that remained collected rocks to fight off any attempt to force them out of the park. The march leadership, attempting to prevent total disintegration, announced that they would parade with or without the permission of the city police to the Ottawa Exhibition grounds and take their case to thousands of fair-goers.


The city police warned that they would not allow the procession, scheduled for August 19, to occur. Off duty Mounted Police were recalled in anticipation of a clash. At the last minute, however, the marchers, perhaps realizing the hopelessness of their situation, backed down. Three days later, having been refused free transportation home, the remaining 300 marchers set off on the long walk back to Toronto.60

The trek experience in Ottawa was over. Interest had briefly been stirred with the marchers' appearance, but as elsewhere people quickly grew tired of the whole process. Only the city's mayor was still entranced enough to offer a final comment. At the end of August, Nolan wrote a note to MacBrien thanking the Mounted Police for their cooperation in confining "this movement to a very peaceful and ineffective expression of opinion [that] resulted in a complete failure as far as the unwarranted demands... of the originators of this movement were concerned." MacBrien thanked the Mayor for the letter: "It was a great pleasure for us to work with you in an effort to reduce the seriousness of the "On-to-Ottawa trek..."61


CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

The On to Ottawa Trek did not end in Regina. Like a pond after a stone is tossed in, ripples of unrest spread eastward across the nation dissipating the further the distance from the conflagration's epicentre. By its very nature the Trek was more than merely a regional event. It was trans-regional: spanning across British Columbia, the Prairies, and into Ontario. Certainly there were differences in support between regions, but there were also discrepancies between cities within regions. That Ian Angus was able to write "the On-to-Ottawa Trekkers, with the exception of a few party leaders, never got within 2,000 miles of Ottawa,"\(^1\) is all too indicative of the previously existing scholarship on the subject. It is indeed surprising that so little material exists on the Trek-related activities east of Regina considering that a network of organizers, in contact with the Trek leadership, existed in several Manitoba and Ontario cities; as well, these provinces had marches of their own to the nation's capital under the banner of the On to Ottawa Trek. Perhaps the historical void is a reflection of the propensity of historians for dealing with the tangible and with success stories, criteria that do not apply to the events east of the Saskatchewan capital in June and July of 1935. For a complete portrait of the Trek, however, Winnipeg is as essential as Regina, Toronto as important as Calgary: they are all interrelated and integral to the story.

The Trek experience was different in each of the cities studied. Winnipeg, of all of the cities in Canada, had the most dynamic Trek-

---

support movement. Widespread sympathy for the unemployed translated into extensive support for the various organizations created to aid the Trek. The Manitoba capital offered an apparent unity of civic leadership and other organizations on the political left. A community spirit unprecedented in Canadian history, certainly far beyond what had existed during the 1919 strike, and it terrified the Bennett administration. Winnipeg, not Regina, was where its fears were directed, and they went beyond mere public posturing. Yet, as the saying goes, support for the Trek was a mile long and an inch deep. Inherent differences in the Trek-support organization had been papered over in the name of solidarity. The social democratic section was unwilling to sanction any movement that might truly challenge the legitimacy of the state. Nevertheless, the largest demonstration anywhere in Canada during the Trek was held in Winnipeg on July 3 when 10,000 to 13,000 participated. After that initial surge in support, the cause of the Trek rapidly disappeared from the public agenda in the Manitoba urban centre. Undoubtedly the novelty of the event had worn off. The public reaction in the first week of July, and this is true of all the areas studied in this thesis, was reactive rather than proactive: anger was directed at the federal government over the Riot instead of support being offered for a new trek to Ottawa.

Northern Ontario offered little in the way of support for the On to Ottawa Trek despite being severely depressed economically and having a history of radicalism. Geography was a key factor here as urban centres were small and scattered as were relief camps. Roads were primitive and rail lines were controlled by various police forces directly inhibiting participation and support for the Trek. Other labour disputes divided attention but there also seemed to be a general lack of enthusiasm which
in part explains nearly non-existent Trek-related organizing. The poor support for the Ontario Hunger March that preceded the Trek provides further evidence of the apathetic state of the region.

The reaction of Toronto to the Trek was decidedly schizophrenic. By 1935 the dominant British conservative mentality had yielded ground to reformist attitudes that sought to emphasize the British respect for civil liberties as opposed to the worship of authority. In the Ontario capital the main expression of public opinion toward the Trek came in the aftermath of the Regina Riot as various conservative labour unions and other religious and political leaders expressed their outrage at the federal government's attack upon civil liberties. When Toronto witnessed the development of its own trek movement many of these attitudes were rapidly readjusted. The support of labour union and religious groups disappeared while the Mayor of Toronto, Jimmie Simpson, employed anti-trek rhetoric which would not have seemed strange echoing from the mouth of Prime Minister Bennett. It was an indication of how ephemeral the new reformist philosophy really was and how even a minor snubbing of authority could trigger a conservative backlash, even from individuals who carried the banner of liberalism and social democracy. Nor was the dominant conservative mentality merely a monopoly of the political and economic elite: a strong belief in law and order was genuinely reflected in the attitudes of ordinary Torontonians as the only sampling of public opinion during the Trek, the Globe interview with the man of the street (as unscientific as it might be), confirms.

The response to the Trek in its final destination, Ottawa, was also intriguing. Paranoia was the reaction of Mayor P.J. Nolan to the marchers. He unsuccessfully sought extraordinary powers to deal with the
approaching army of unemployed. At the same time, he attempted to pressure other governments into taking a hard line against the various groups of peaceful trekkers. When the Ontario marchers actually reached the nation's capital several thousand of its citizens flocked to their camp. Again curiosity seems to have been a major reason for the public interest which never truly translated into support for the march.

The question of whether the On to Ottawa Trek would have developed into an uncontrollable movement (i.e. the "snowball interpretation") is more difficult to deal with. The march would have found some support in all of its stops east of Regina and without government interference it would have reached Ottawa. For a diverse group of people, including Northern Ontario lumber workers, members of the Toronto Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement, and many Winnipeg communists, the Trek was a tremendous symbol: the powerless facing down the powerful. It can also be added, however, that there was no overwhelming army of unemployed waiting for the main body of trekkers. The working class, despite its genuine despair and discontent, remained in retreat as it had since its high water mark of 1919-1921. With such high levels of unemployment it became everyone for themselves. There was no true unity and without unity there could not be the attainment of power that a strong protest by trekkers might have provided.

Roughly a combined total of 1,000 set out from Winnipeg and Toronto for Ottawa with smaller groups leaving for the same destination from Northern Ontario. These small marches belie the larger numbers of unemployed that were present in the respective areas. Certainly, the

---

interdiction of various branches of government directly inhibited the size of the Manitoba and Ontario march contingents. A particularly detrimental form of involvement by provincial and federal governments was the refusal to allow trains in Manitoba and trains and vehicles in Ontario to transport men. Undeniably this policy contributed to the poor participation in the respective marches. The impact of the Regina Riot cannot be underestimated either. The Bennett government's willingness to employ force against trekkers made it clear that trekking was not simply an adventure to disrupt the monotony of everyday existence, but carried serious consequences. A potential marcher must have wondered what could be achieved by reaching the nation's capital and whether possible gains justified the risk involved in attempting the journey.

Ordinary citizens did have genuine sympathy for the march participants even if they did not offer widespread approval for a trek to Ottawa as a proper means for expressing discontent. Sympathy, however,

3E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), 539-40. One example of government interdiction was the use of spies and informants which, as Thompson discussed, was especially detrimental to radical movements such as the Trek:

Indeed, a convincing history of English Jacobinism and popular Radicalism could be written solely in terms of the impact of espionage upon the movement. In its earliest years the [London Corresponding Society] became aware of the over-zealous and provocative attitudes struck by the typical spy, because of his violent resolutions which were alleged to be for the 'purpose of entrapping' the Society. Jones (the genuine informer, Groves, reported with wry relish) complained:

If a Citizen made a Motion which seemed anyways spirited he was set down as a Spy sent among them by Government. If a Citizen sat in a Corner & said nothing he was watching their proceedings that he might the better report it... Citizens hardly knew how to act....

For this reason the secret political tradition appears either as a series of catastrophes... or else as a trickle of propaganda so secretive and small-scale, and so hemmed in by suspicion, that it scarcely had any effect...
needs to be distinguished from support which should also be separated from activism. It is like the difference between signing a petition, seeking signatures for a petition, and actually creating the petition. There was sympathy for the Trekkers and support for the symbolic nature of the Trek, but only a small core of individuals were prepared to partake in such an endeavour. The vast majority of Canadians were simply not ready to sanction radicalism and a flouting of authority no matter how legitimate the cause. They felt that there was an alternative to taking to the streets as a means of expressing disapproval of the government and conditions: the ballot box offered a peaceful method of protest. The fact that Liberal leader Mackenzie King would campaign in the 1935 election on a platform of "King or Chaos" is evidence that he too was aware of the public mood.

The On to Ottawa Trek by itself was a small, ephemeral event; its importance derives from the way it acts as a historical telescope bringing into focus broader and more important Canadian historical themes: the infighting on the Canadian political left, federal-provincial conflict, and the inherent authoritarian-conservative nature of the Canadian polity.

There was a battle among members of the Canadian political left for the support of the working class because two distinct elements were involved in the Trek. Members of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) played a strong organizational role in the Trek, something that has been too often downplayed or ignored by histories on the subject, perhaps out of a fear of validating Bennett's charges that it was a communist-inspired event. Nor, it should be added, does the strong communist involvement in any way demean the legitimacy of the cause of the trekkers. The initial communist involvement in the Trek is of secondary importance; they were there because no one else would help. Gradually though the CPC's role grew:
it cannot be denied that Arthur Evans was a communist and that his main contacts in Brandon, Winnipeg, Northern Ontario, and Toronto were also fellow members of the Party. Nor can it be denied that part of the motivation for the Communist Party's participation was political gain since it would appear as the champion of the working class, another factor ignored in some of the one dimensional portraits of the Trek leadership. Again this motivation appears to have been secondary among the actual leaders of the Trek. Still the election was only months away, changes in policy were occurring in the Soviet Union (the drive was beginning for united fronts against fascism) and the Trek afforded an opportunity for reflecting the forces driving the Communist Party. The election divided the effort of the Party as it was only after the Trek was well underway that there was a recognition that political gain was available; the involvement of Tom McEwen, the head of the Workers' Unity League and a veteran communist and an Evans' confidant, in designing a national strategy for the Trek is evidence of this. At the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, the Workers' Unity League critiqued its role in the On to Ottawa Trek:

When the trek left Vancouver we had some misgivings. We could not see the thing in its entire political setting, the tremendous potentialities of this trek, and how such a trek would raise the whole question of the single unemployed youth right into the foreground of the Canadian political picture. There are a number of shortcomings in this trek- and that when our comrades in Regina stopped we took the matter up in eastern Canada, the organization of our Eastern and Southern Treks was very bad. We did not understand the tremendous significance of this thing. Our party was not thrown into it. Our forces were not utilized to bring the greatest masses of unemployed workers in southern Ontario together. Only 210 men left Queen's Park.... They left Queen's Park as a gesture of desperation rather than as a well organized body of men with
a strong party leadership at the head of it.... The trek insofar as the East was concerned is a good example of what we could have done if we had only carried it through with a greater degree of conviction rather than a mechanical way, feeling we had to do something and we better get it done.\textsuperscript{4}

The Trekkers' demands seemed, as Judy Torrance noted\textsuperscript{5}, designed to appeal to the widest numbers possible in order to encourage support. In a similar vein the communists sought the assistance of the CCF in a united front. When the offer (its seriousness is debatable since, as Graham Spry observed,\textsuperscript{6} a CCF refusal would supply the CPC with ammunition for the upcoming election) was rejected the CPC's main concern seemed to be to thwart its arch-enemy, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

Prominent social democrats such as Stanley Knowles, Jimmie Simpson, and A.A. MacInnis noted the politics involved behind the scenes of the Trek movement. The reaction of social democratic factions in Winnipeg, Toronto and the national CCF in Ottawa was also reflective of an inherent conservative demeanor in the party hierarchy. Its leaders were attempting to delineate themselves from their main opponents, the communists. Many of these social democratic "radicals" were of British origin and carried a respect for the parliamentary system and the system


in general which had offered them some level of power, J.S. Woodsworth being a prime example. On the other hand, the CCF manifesto called for the abolition of capitalism and at one time Woodsworth described communists as CCFers in a hurry. Many lower level party members and the Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement enthusiastically participated in Trek support organizations and were angered by the obstructionist tactics employed by some of their political leaders. In the case of the Trek, the CCF leaders' conservatism, which was not shared by many of the party's members, would not allow anything to be offered in the early days of the march beyond sympathy and basic support for its partakers. With the violent crackdown at Regina and the intimation of a similar response to future marches the Independent Labour Party withdrew even its conditional support for the trek and John Queen, the former radical, drew the special scorn of the marchers after refusing their pleas for aid. Similarly in Toronto there was even more of an attempt to score political points through the involvement of both the CCF and the Communist Party, and, like in Winnipeg, the relationship came asunder just prior to the beginning of the local trek.

The Trek also displayed conflict on a federal-provincial level. The fractious relationship between the Bennett government and its provincial counterpart in Saskatchewan has already been dealt with in other Trek

---

7Seymour Martin Lipset, Revolution and Counterrevolution: Change and Persistence in Social Structures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968), 412-35. German sociologist Robert Michels wrote about this seeming contradiction between the goals of the party members and the actions of their leaders. Michels called this phenomena the "Iron Law of Oligarchy." The law dealt with the propensity of political organizations to develop a hierarchy that loses touch with rank-and-file party members. Power and the party's existence becomes tantamount over policy and principle.
histories. In Ontario during the Trek there was the appearance of strong enmity between Mitchell Hepburn's government and its federal counterpart. Arthur Roebuck's denunciation of the Bennett administration in the aftermath of the Regina Riot is remarkably virulent and vicious even fifty-seven years later. The Bennett government appeared cowed by the Ontario government's strong declaration of independence and remained outside of the province's affairs, something untrue in western Canada. Mitchell Hepburn was also revealed by the Trek as a charlatan. He had campaigned as a radical and as a friend of the working class; yet his policies toward the march, specifically prohibiting the use of vehicles to transport trekkers, were not neutral, as he claimed, but effectively inhibited participation in the Ontario leg of the trek. Hepburn used the sight of single unemployed marching to Ottawa past labour deficient farms as an excuse to cut all single unemployed off of relief at the end of July 1935. The Premier's response to the Ontario trek offered a preview of his handling of the 1937 Oshawa General Motors' Strike.

Finally, the On to Ottawa Trek exposed the inner turmoil of the Canadian character: the belief in order as an ideal and the concomitant acceptance of authoritarianism. The Canadian government during June and July of 1935, for all of those who wished to watch, demonstrated how far it was willing to go to destroy any inkling of a threat to its constituted authority. Whether it was the RCMP's extensive spying and infiltration of labour, political, and trek organizations or the Department of National Defence's various plans to use the military to control peaceful protests in

---

8For example, see Victor Howard, "We were the salt of the earth!": The On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), 103-34.

9I would like to thank Michelle Robson for the word "turmoil." It captures the essence of what I was searching for.
urban centres, different levels of government clearly felt threatened. Still the perceived threat did not justify the extreme measures. Simply ignoring the trekkers and allowing them to dissolve of their own accord, as occurred in Manitoba and Ontario in July, was a later recognition by Bennett that the policy of interdiction at Regina had been a mistake. Nevertheless, what had come before cannot be ignored: the federal Minister of Justice, Hugh Guthrie, practically begging the Mantioba government to request military assistance prior to July 1.; Toronto Mayor James Simpson threatening to use force to deal with what he perceived to be flouters of the law; Ottawa's Mayor P.J. Nolan seeking the power to be able to use extraordinary force against any marchers reaching his fiefdom. All three of these politicians and the governments they represented were popularly elected and all three faced little in the way of direct recriminations for the proposed invocations of force. Even the federal government's crushing of the B.C. Trek movement at Regina did not cause widespread outrage, with a few notable exceptions as outlined in this thesis. Much of the protest that did occur arose from Bennett's traditional foes on the political left (Mackenzie King merely questioned the legality of the federal government's dealings with the government of Saskatchewan)\(^1\) while the vast majority of ordinary Canadians, afforded the opportunity of displaying their disgust at the riot by taking to the streets or partaking in one of several protest marches to Ottawa, remained silent. Silence, as the embattled Sir Thomas More observed in *A Man For All Seasons*, implies consent.

\(^{10}\) *House of Commons' Debates*, in *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek*  Victor Hoar, ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973), 251-324.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
Primary Sources

Archives of Ontario
Hepburn, Mitchell, Papers (RG 3)
Ontario Provincial Police Records (RG 3)

National Archives of Canada
Bennett, R.B., Papers (Reel M1445)
Buck, Tim, Papers
Communist Party of Canada Papers (MG 28 IV 1)
Cooperative Commonwealth Federation Papers (MG 28 IV 1)
Department of National Defence Papers (RG 24)
Fox, Paul Wesley, Papers (MG 27 III B7)
Manion, R.J., Papers (MG 27 III B7)
Woodsworth, J.S., Papers

Public Archives of Manitoba
Bracken, John, Papers (MG 13 l2)
Flin Flon Oral History Project: Interview with Mitch J. Sago (Tape 2)
Winnipeg Trades and Labour Congress (MG 10 A12-1)

Saskatchewan Archives Board
Regina Riot Inquiry Commission, including exhibits

Canadian Security Intelligence Service
Royal Canadian Mounted Police Documents Relating to the On to Ottawa Trek (Vols. 1-5, File H.V. 4)

Thunder Bay City Council Records

Minutes of the Port Arthur City Council

Winnipeg City Council Records
Minutes of the Winnipeg City Council

Newspapers

Kenora Miner and News

Labor Leader

Le Droit

Manitoba Commonwealth

New Commonwealth

North Bay Nugget

Ottawa Journal

Ottawa Evening Citizen

Port Arthur News-Chronicle

Sudbury Star

The Worker

Toronto Daily Star

Toronto Globe

Toronto Mail and Empire

Toronto Telegram

Winnipeg Free Press

Winnipeg Tribune
SECONDARY SOURCES

Books:


Howard, Victor. *"We were the salt of the earth!": The On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot.* Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985.


Swankey, Ben, and Jean Evans-Sheils. "Work and Wages:" A Semi-

Swettenham, John. McNaughton, Volume 1, 1887-1939. Toronto: Ryerson

Swift, Jamie, and the Development Education Centre. The Big Nickel: Inco


Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969.

Articles:

Bercuson, David. "The Winnipeg General Strike." in On Strike: Six Key Labour
Struggles in Canada, 1919-1949. Irving Abella, ed. Toronto: James

Bercuson, David. "Through the Looking Glass of Culture: An Essay on the
New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian
Historical Writing." Labour/Le Travailleur 7 (Spring 1981), 95-112.

Bliss, Michael. "'Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History,

Hanson, S.D.. "Estevan 1931." in On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in
Company, 1975, 33-77.

Horn, Michiel. "'Free Speech Within the Law': the letter of the Sixty-Eight
Toronto Professors, 1931." Ontario History Vol. LXXII, No. 1 (March


**Theses:**


