

benefit of legal hearings. Innocent Americans were persecuted without having committed any offence and many were brutally beaten.

North America's second general strike, similar in character to the Seattle strike, developed in Winnipeg, Manitoba on May 15, 1919. Winnipeg, located on the Canadian prairies, was then a city of 160,000 people.

Newspapers around the world filled their pages with exaggerated stories of the Winnipeg General Strike, depicting a city in siege and streets rampant with bloodshed. And when the government made arrests, they described the strike leaders as conspirators, Bolsheviks, and revolutionaries. Was this a second attempt at Communist revolution in North America? In print, it certainly appeared true. Lurid headlines fed an insatiable public appetite for drama. The Red Scare was a mighty slingshot firing panic into an already turbulent sea and the waves would carve a destructive path throughout the western world.

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## CHAPTER TWO

The First World War was more than half over when the Canadian government enacted conscription with the Military Service Bill of June 12, 1917. Later that year, the *Wartime Measures Act* gave the government wide powers to rule by Order-in-Council and the authority to jail conscientious objectors.

In anticipation of the passage of this new and sweeping legislation, two City of Winnipeg aldermen, John Queen and Abe Heaps, organised a meeting to protest compulsory military service. They invited Fred Dixon, a member of the Manitoba legislature, to be a speaker.

The atmosphere at the meeting was explosive. Over one thousand people jammed into the Grand Theatre in downtown Winnipeg for what was for some a final opportunity to protest the impending legislation. Soldiers, many recently returned from the front, occupied the main floor of the theatre. Here and there, women were visible in the loges. Representatives for both sides of the issue were on the platform readying themselves for debate.

Thirty-six-year-old Alderman John Queen was chairman of the meeting. As business manager of the *Western Labor News*, the newspaper published by the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, he was frequently called upon to lead political meetings.

Queen had emigrated from Scotland when he was nineteen years old and had worked for an oil company in Winnipeg where he learned the trade of barrel making. He was an attractive man with bright eyes and a dark widow's peak hairline. His warmth and humour made him a popular politician. With characteristic wit, Queen often joked that he had entered politics simply because he was the only person in his labour group who owned a house and could meet the property requirements of political office. Queen's humour, delivered with a lilting Scottish dialect, carried him far as a speaker. His constant and most staunch supporter was his wife, Katherine, who came from Inverness, Scotland. They enjoyed a strong family life with five children.

The audience on this day would not be easily charmed. When Queen stood to open the meeting, the soldiers stridently expressed their support of the legislation. Determined to be heard, Queen shouted over the racket and asked the soldiers for fair play. He assured all conscription advocates that their representatives would have full opportunity to answer any of his arguments, but his efforts to calm the hostile crowd were unsuccessful.

When Fred Dixon moved to the podium to speak, the audience hissed and jeered. In response, Dixon shouted, "You can bar me from speaking and you can tear me limb from limb, but you can't change my opinion." Dixon paced the platform waiting for the disturbance to subside, but the audience would not settle. The futility of proceeding was apparent so, in a voice barely audible in the uproar, Queen declared the meeting adjourned.

Dixon and the other speakers left the stage and shouldered their way through the agitated crowd to the rear exit of the theatre, but the soldiers gathered in the lane outside forcing them to turn back and to take refuge in the cellar. Dixon was not easily intimidated. After exchanging a few punches with an angry soldier, he moved toward the front of the building. On his way through the basement, a group of soldiers attacked him. By the time the police arrived to rescue Dixon, his body was battered and bruised, and pieces of his hat were being distributed as souvenirs. The police officers safely escorted the speakers home, preventing further violence.

This meeting was not the first time Fred Dixon's anti-conscription views had enraged an audience. Earlier that same year, he stood up in the Manitoba legislature and said that he would refuse to sign his National Service Card, a threat he carried out once the conscription legislation was passed. Premier T.C. Norris, once Dixon's friend, immediately denounced him. "A man who questions the merits of his country's cause when a war has begun is a traitor, and those who refuse to register should be jailed," he said.

"Traitor! Traitor!" bellowed other members of the legislature at Dixon. "Throw him in jail!"

Dixon responded to the criticism with courage and eloquence. "I have sat at the feet of the world's greatest thinkers, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Carlyle, Sir Thomas Moore, and Jesus Christ," he said, "and I cannot forget their teachings immediately as the war drum is sounded." Dixon further explained that if he remained loyal to his convictions, he could not be disloyal to his country. "What pride could Canada have in a man who would commit intellectual treason because of cowardliness?" he challenged.

In December 1918, about eighteen months after the aborted Grand Theatre meeting, the Socialist Party of Canada and the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council organised a protest meeting that called on workers to "rally to the colours in the fight for liberty." All seats in the Walker Theatre were filled for a performance that would prove in keeping with the theatre's tradition of great shows.

Although John Queen belonged to the more moderate Social Democratic Party, he agreed to preside as chairman of the meeting. He announced that the purpose of the meeting was to pass three resolutions protesting specific policies of the federal government.

The First World War was over, but some of the Orders-in-Council issued by the government were still in effect and were crippling the socialist movement by censoring or prohibiting the more radical socialist publications. Some socialist groups had even been declared illegal.

A member of the Socialist Party of Canada proposed the first resolution. He explained to the crowd that government by Order-in-Council was a violation of the principles of democracy and asked the audience to "protest against government by Order-in-Council and demand the repeal of such orders and a return to a democratic form of government."

Queen was similarly eager to eradicate the Orders-in-Council. "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom," Queen shouted to his Walker Theatre audience. "The Orders-in-Council the government issued during the war will remain unless we show, in unmistakable terms, that the working class will not tolerate them." The motion was seconded by George Armstrong, the founder of the Manitoba branch of the Socialist Party of Canada.

The next speaker was the fervent Reverend William (Bill) Ivens, a forty-one-year-old Englishman. He had immigrated to Canada and studied to become a Methodist minister. During the war, Ivens had boldly advocated pacifism and neutrality. "No conscientious minister of Christ," he preached, "could promote war either in Canada or Germany."

The members of Ivens' congregation at the McDougall Methodist Church were proud of their war record and resentful of the notoriety to which the church was being subjected after three years under Ivens' pastorate. They described him as admirable, but fired him anyway. Similarly, the Manitoba

Conference of the Methodist Church terminated Ivens' ministry on the grounds that he was "not willing to devote himself to the work of a Methodist minister."

Ivens' expulsion from the Methodist church changed the course of his life. With his religious fervour undampened, he became the minister of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council and the editor of its newspaper the *Western Labor News*. He quickly founded what he called the Labour Church and began preaching sermons in halls and parks throughout the city. He boasted that his new church embodied a truer interpretation of the essentials of real religion and criticised formal churches for being guided by the powers of finance, custom, and ritual religion, rather than the spirit of Christ. Attempting to apply the principles of Christianity to the social problems of the day, Ivens was a distinctly different kind of labour supporter and certainly no follower of the atheist Karl Marx. "Bill is a man sincere in his views," an old acquaintance of his once said. "No one doubts his integrity. He knows things are not right, but he has no specific remedies to offer." Because Ivens was a sanctimonious character and often took himself too seriously, he was frequently the brunt of jokes, but no one could say he lacked a passionate belief in the rightness of his views.

It was Ivens who proposed the second resolution raised at the Walker Theatre meeting. He passionately called on the government to release all conscientious objectors from jail and described the government's actions as being contrary to Christianity. Ivens argued that any justification for their imprisonment vanished when the armistice was signed. It was Fred Dixon who rose to second the motion.

Although Dixon was neither a member of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council nor the Socialist Party of Canada, he also spoke at the meeting. He supported Ivens' resolution and described the situation as a negation of democracy:

A man who follows the dictates of his conscience is not necessarily a criminal. Those responsible for the Ross rifle, defective shells, shoddy clothes, paper boots, and the whole black record of war profiteering and graft gave ten thousand times more aid and comfort to the enemy than all the socialists and conscientious objectors put together!

What a calamity it would be if we should continue to punish men who dare to be true to their honest convictions and reward those who are false [...] While these men are in jail, not one of us is really free. It was their turn yesterday. It may be ours tomorrow [...] For the sake of the men in jail and for your own sakes that you may not be in jail, and for the sake of the nation that it may not gain the reputation of rewarding its hypocritical knaves with titles and its honest men with shackles, I ask you to support this motion in favour of liberating all political prisoners.

Dixon spoke with his usual eloquence while the audience listened intently, and the second motion was passed.

Robert (Bob) Boyd Russell, an energetic thirty-year-old, was also in attendance. Russell lived on the same street as Queen and, like his neighbour, was a lowland Scot, but there was little else the two men shared and they developed no rapport. In contrast to Queen, Russell was intense and serious. He adopted the views and rhetoric of Karl Marx without reservation. His speeches were provocative but lacked originality and humour. "Capitalism has come to a point where she is defunct and must disappear," he proclaimed at the Walker Theatre meeting, parroting his mentor Karl Marx.

Russell worked hard to introduce his Marxist views into the labour movement and government. He was secretary of the Manitoba branch of the Socialist Party of Canada, business agent for the Metal Trades Council, and a radical member of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council. Russell had been deeply stirred by Russian revolution, which he believed offered the promise of justice for the workers of the world. Like a true Marxist, he described the First World War as being a capitalist venture at the expense of the workers and insisted "there was no material interest involved which could justify the loss of one member of the working class." Russell, then a socialist firebrand, would become a quieter and more thoughtful man whose tireless work on behalf of labour would later garner the respect of the community. But here in the Walker Theatre, he was a passionate, young radical.

It was Russell who proposed the third and final resolution – the withdrawal of allied troops from Russia. He explained to the crowd that the continued presence of these troops could only lend credence to the suspicion that there was a concerted attempt to overthrow the new Russian government. "Blood is running in Russia, and blood will run in this country from the Atlantic to the Pacific, or we will get our rights," Russell said. "We are willing to wade in blood to obtain what we claim to be our rights." His speech that day extolled the existing government in Russia as "the only free people's government that the world has ever seen, and the only government under which the workman had ever got his rights or could expect to get his rights." Samuel Blumenberg, a Jewish member of the Socialist Party of Canada, seconded the motion.

Like many in the audience, Blumenberg was wearing a brilliant red tie, a provocative symbol of his devotion to the socialist cause. In support of Russell's resolution, he described Bolshevism as being the only thing "which will emancipate the working class." Thousands of soldiers returning from the war would say they had fought for the country and now "are going to own it," proclaimed Blumenberg.

The audience was in an uproar and when Queen, in his Scottish burr, called for the vote on Russell's resolution, he made a slip of the tongue. "I hope you will support the revolution," he said. The audience laughed and applauded, and an amused Queen corrected himself. "I mean *resolution*," he said, "but perhaps it would be better to leave it as revolution." That little joke would return to haunt him. The final resolution was passed and the audience filed out of the theatre.

Every show has its critics and this was no exception. The federal government was using spies to keep a close watch on all political meetings. That evening at the Walker Theatre, Sergeant Francis Edward Langdale – a lawyer by profession and an intelligence officer with the Military Intelligence Department of the Canadian Army – was in the audience. As the politicians spoke, Langdale scribbled notes on a pad that he kept hidden under the hat on his lap.

A month after the Walker Theatre meeting, the Manitoba branch of the Socialist Party of Canada held a public meeting at the Majestic Theatre in Winnipeg. The topic was "reconstruction" and four speakers were each given twenty-five minutes to address the audience. There was a range of socialist literature available to further spread Marxist ideas, including the party's publication: *The Red Flag*.

Members of the Socialist Party of Canada supported the revolution in Russia and the international socialist movement. Although the party occasionally ran election candidates, its main function was the distribution of propaganda for the education of the workers. Despite its dedication to the destruction of capitalism and its use of vigorous and threatening language in its meetings and literature, the Socialist Party of Canada held that it did not advocate violence.

The first speaker that evening was George Armstrong. At forty-five years old, Armstrong was older than most of the local socialists. With his wide suspenders visible and a wad of tobacco in his cheek, he was a colourful personality whose salty and sometimes vulgar language entertained his audiences. On this occasion, his wife, who often sat beside him on the platform, did not accompany him. She was a large, hearty woman, as forthright as her husband, and often carried on the oratory when he wearied. The couple was affectionately known as Ma and Pa Armstrong.

Armstrong unsuccessfully ran as a socialist candidate against Dixon in two provincial elections and their debates in Market Square had drawn huge crowds. Armstrong, the radical socialist, scorned the "petty reforms" of the capitalistic system, while Dixon, the liberal independent, laughed at the "cataclysmic socialists."

True to his form, Armstrong's speech at the Majestic Theatre was a cataclysmic denunciation of capitalism. "Your interest as workers is in opposition to all forms of property," he declared. "We ask you to support such schemes as will abolish all exploitation of the working class, which means the destruction of all property rights."

R.J. (Dick) Johns also spoke at that meeting. He was a twenty-nine-year-old, slightly built man who had emigrated from Cornwall, England. Although he was a warm and friendly person known for his youthful smile, like Russell, he was a serious-minded Marxist. Russell and Johns were often together. They had worked side by side as machinists for the railway and buried themselves in the work of the Machinists' Union. Both belonged to the Socialist Party of Canada, but neither ran as candidates. Johns' speeches were, like Russell's, predictable and always emphasised the need to educate the workers.

In his short speech on this day, Johns again urged workers to increase their education. He warned the audience that, due to rapid societal change, only an educated working class could avoid bloodshed. It is not surprising that he is remembered today as a dedicated educator in Winnipeg's trade school system.

As usual, Bob Russell's speech was dramatic. He supported "the Soviet Government of Russia against the attacks of the press and the pulpit" and maintained that the "truth had not been told about Russia." He accused labour supporters of not being committed to revolution and called on the returned soldiers to join the socialists. With an illustrative snap of his fingers, he proclaimed, "We don't give that much for the city, provincial or Dominion Government of Canada." He damned the reconstruction program and the labour movement for not doing enough and said that the red flag was flying in every civilised country in the world.

The next speaker, Samuel Blumenberg, was the hottest of them all. He challenged Russell's assertion that the socialists were not advocating revolution. Blumenberg was unequivocal. "If they were not advocating revolution they wouldn't be here," he pointed out to Russell.

Meanwhile, agents from the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP), posing as members of the Socialist Party of Canada, were secretly recording the proceedings.

During the Majestic Theatre meeting, Dick Johns announced that a meeting would be held on the following Sunday in Market Square to commemorate the deaths of two German martyrs, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Liebknecht and Luxemburg had been two of the leaders of the German Spartacus League, a revolutionary left-wing branch of the German Social Democratic Party. During this week, their names had been in most of the newspapers around the world.

The Spartacists were a powerful propagandist agent outside Russia and had been in constant communication with the Soviet government. They roused the sentiments of German workers by rushing motor trucks through the streets and distributing thousands of pieces of literature calling for protest meetings. For two weeks in January 1919, the streets of Berlin had been the scene of open battles between city officials and the Spartacists, who seized newspaper offices, railway stations, breweries, telegraph stations, electric power houses, and the water works. They started similar riots in Bremen, Brunswick, Halle, Dusseldorf, Essen, Hamburg, and other German cities, forcing the German government to proclaim martial law. On January 10, 1919, the Spartacists called for a general strike. Although the German government was well on its way to suppressing the insurrection, the deathblow to the Spartacus League came when Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were arrested and later killed by a group of patriotic soldiers and civilians.

The Market Square meeting did not occur as planned. Refusing to tolerate a memorial for the two slain Spartacists, approximately two hundred returned soldiers appeared in the square to protest the event, causing the socialist speakers to stay away from the site. However, the disappointed soldiers decided that if the socialists were not going to appear, they would go see them.

The volatile mob marched to a location across from the Marlborough Hotel and vandalised the Socialist Party of Canada's local offices. The soldiers smashed furniture and threw items out broken windows into the streets below, including a piano, books and literature, and a red flag. As the soldiers marched away, the large flag was set on fire and carried along at the head of the procession.

After destroying the socialist headquarters, the soldiers turned their anger toward the "aliens" whom they accused of spreading unpatriotic political ideas and stealing their jobs. Blumenberg had a small cleaning store on Portage Avenue and it was destroyed by the mob. In their rampage, the soldiers similarly damaged a brewery owned by a German immigrant.

The marching and rioting continued the next day and, as the soldiers moved through the streets, they were told which businesses were owned by "aliens." They visited industrial establishments, factories, a cold storage plant, and the Royal Alexandra Hotel, demanding that German and Austrian employees be dismissed and replaced by returned soldiers. At some of the locations, they captured immigrants, beat them, and forced them to kiss the Union Jack or meet more violence. Streetcars were stopped and searched. If foreign-looking men could not produce naturalisation papers, they were often beaten. The soldiers viewed their actions as an act of patriotism. They felt the

authorities were not doing enough to protect the city from Bolshevism and, as a result, violently took the law into their own hands.

Winnipeg Mayor, Charles F. Gray, appealed to the soldiers to disperse, and the RNWMP attempted to persuade the men to desist. However, the authorities did not actively intervene. One reason might be because spies had been planted among the rioters to collect evidence. The spies watched and recorded the violent events, sometimes even participating to protect their true identities, until the rioters gradually dispersed.

The violence and destruction caused thunderous outcries in Winnipeg and the citizens called for a proclamation from Mayor Gray prohibiting political meetings. The responsibility for these riots would become an even bigger question. Who was responsible, the soldiers who rioted, the Mounted Police who did nothing in response, or the Socialist Party of Canada that had called for the memorial service against which the soldiers rebelled? Rather than condemning the active perpetrators, the newspapers blamed the Socialist Party of Canada and this message certainly influenced public opinion.

Three Winnipeg aldermen – John Queen, Abe Heaps, and Ernest Robinson – issued a public statement in response to the riots. They insisted that the soldiers and labour people needed to bridge the divide between them. But opinions varied, even within the socialist movement. For example, in a letter to another Socialist Party of Canada member, Russell scorned the aldermen’s moderate views. He ridiculed “Our Noble Labour Aldermen,” saying that it “makes one feel like presenting them with a bottle of glue, so that they can stick together.”

Despite the controversy, the socialist movement persisted and directed its attention to labour matters. In September 1918, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (the Canadian equivalent of the American Federation of Labour) held a national convention in Quebec with representatives from most Canadian cities. A group of western radicals, determined to revolutionise the structure of the international trade union movement, was among the delegates. These radical socialists had little faith in the tradition of moderation represented by the American Federation of Labour (AFL) founder, Samuel Gompers, and demanded that trade unions be more aggressive in fighting capitalists. They argued that the division of labour into craft locals weakened the labour movement’s bargaining position. Instead of electricians, carpenters, or plumbers bargaining separately, they wanted to see one powerful union bargaining for all the crafts in the building industry. They argued that this would give labour the strength it needed to deal with the capitalists. The western delegates presented a series of resolutions, including the organisation of union locals on an industry-wide basis, a six-hour workday, and the withdrawal of Orders-in-Council banning the

publication of certain socialist newspapers. All of the resolutions were defeated.

In response, the western group decided to organise its own conference in March 1919 in Calgary to further their aims. Speakers at the Calgary conference shockingly denounced Samuel Gompers, an action comparable to hearing Catholic speakers criticise the Pope. There were several heated speeches on the state of labour and politics, and radical action was proposed. Ultimately, a resolution was passed, approving the formation of the One Big Union (OBU) and its weapon of choice – the national general strike. The call was for a Canada-wide strike beginning on June 1, 1919.

Dick Johns of Winnipeg and thirty-year-old Bill Pritchard of Vancouver were among those elected to the central executive of the OBU at the Calgary conference. Pritchard, the son of a coal miner, was an athletic and eloquent Welshman. Because of his oratorical ability, he was recognised as one of the Socialist Party of Canada's leading speakers. His speeches contained humour, sarcasm, stinging criticism, personal modesty, and warmth. Despite their length, he had no trouble holding the attention of his audiences. Religion was frequently a target of the Marxist socialists who regarded it as "the opiate of the people." In a speech at the conference, Pritchard ridiculed an opponent's theological foundation with a reference to "the late Mr. Christ." His use of sacrilegious remarks as a weapon during verbal sparring established his reputation as a formidable opponent, but would be later turned against him.

Whether or not there was an attempt at a revolution in Canada, as was later charged against many of the socialist speakers, remains debatable. But there is no doubt that the supporters of the resolutions proposed at the Calgary conference intended a true revolution in the ranks of labour. The employers, however, were equally determined. A chasm had formed and the two sides would endure a long and arduous battle.

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### CHAPTER THREE

In Winnipeg, like elsewhere in Western Canada, a large percentage of the labour force was seasonal workers struggling to earn a living. Even if a person had steady employment, it was not likely to pay a subsistence wage. According to Manitoba's Minimum Wage Board, twelve dollars per week was