

serious as the Winnipeg Strike [...] we think the evidence strongly points to an effort to introduce Bolshevik methods and a Soviet system of government in the western hemisphere." From coast to coast across America, the newspapers delivered a similar message.

The situation in Winnipeg was nearing a climax when Mother Nature decided to make the environment even more uncomfortable. On May 30, the *Free Press* reported, "Such a heat wave as Winnipeg has experienced during the past eight days, when the temperature varied from 82 to 95 degrees, is unprecedented for the month of May [...] To get anything like this, one has to turn to records for July and August, which are the most torrid months." June, however, would prove to be the hottest month for the strikers.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER FOUR

As the tension in Winnipeg increased, the Citizens' Committee bombarded the federal government, headed by Prime Minister Robert Borden, with calls for action. They wanted the immediate arrest and deportation of the agitators.

Isaac Pitblado, the head of a large legal firm, was fifty-two years old in 1919, and he would continue to practice law well into his nineties. Having earned three university degrees, Pitblado had a strong academic background and even received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Dalhousie University. Between 1891 and 1899, he worked with Alfred Andrews and, like Andrews, was similarly interested in crushing the strike effort.

In the political arena, Major G.W. Andrews, war veteran and the Member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, was the lone defender of the strikers. "Gentlemen," he said, "if you apply the term [Bolshevik] to those men, you apply it to me because they are my friends [...] I know these men and for their force would be absolutely the last recourse [...] They want a change because they are not satisfied with present conditions. How many Honourable gentlemen in this House are satisfied?" Unfortunately, this view was outnumbered.

On June 5, RNWMP Commissioner Perry sent Justice Minister Meighen a telegram stating that the "Citizens' Committee waited today on provincial government and Dominion authorities urging immediate arrest [sic] Strike Committee [...] Pitblado thinks government should arrest strikers [...] Hope legislation dealing specifically with Bolshevism may be rushed through."

The federal government responded by rushing several bills through Parliament. With little opposition, the *Criminal Code* was amended to give the government greater powers concerning unlawful associations. Anyone wearing the badge of an unlawful group could receive a penalty of up to twenty years imprisonment and property could be seized without warrant. And, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it was presumed that anyone who attended a meeting of an unlawful association was a member of the group. This unusual amendment offended the fundamental principle of British justice that a person was innocent until proven guilty.

In addition to amending the *Criminal Code*, Parliament also modified immigration policies to allow for the deportation of any person other than a Canadian citizen who was convicted of certain seditious offences. On June 6, Alfred Andrews conveyed to Arthur Meighen his dissatisfaction with this federal legislation, specifically that immigrants who had received Canadian citizenship could not be deported:

Section very disappointing, does not cover dangerous class not born in Canada. Commissioner Perry believed and assumed that could deport any undesirable save Canadian born. Anything less than this absolutely useless and will not meet situation or satisfy citizens who [...] will be greatly disheartened and disgusted.

His concerns were addressed, and a further amendment was made deleting the words “other than a Canadian citizen.” This meant that deportation proceedings could be taken against Canadian citizens provided they were born outside the country. Most of the members of Parliament were probably unaware of the motives behind the bill they had just passed. The purpose of this seemingly innocuous amendment to the *Immigration Act* would soon become obvious.

Empowered with his new position, Andrews was becoming more deeply involved in the conflict between the employers and the strikers. On June 7, he sent a telegram to Senator Robertson in Ottawa, containing an offer from the metal employers to settle the strike. A couple days later, Senator Robertson advised that the “sympathetic strike should be called off before negotiations are resumed.” He concluded, “Understand Citizens’ Committee and companies agreed sympathy strike cannot be allowed wholly or partially to succeed.” In other words, no compromise. No settlement.

In response to the new developments, Senator Robertson announced that he would be returning to Winnipeg. Andrews wrote to Justice Minister Meighen regarding his approval of the trip:

The metal employers are stalling the matter off [and] in the meantime [...] I will try and arrange to have this held up until the senator arrives. What we want to avoid if

possible is a definite finding by this committee against the metal trades and in favour of the Strike Committee.

The Strike Committee knew that public disturbances would only turn the public against them and would likely bring the strength of the state down upon the strikers in an effort to break the strike by force. For that reason, the *Strike Bulletin* advised the strikers to stay calm, stay out of trouble, and do nothing. The strikers were heeding the call for calm, but the Strike Committee lacked influence and control of the war veterans.

Soldiers paraded either for the strike or against the strike. On June 2, the local newspapers reported on a parade in which the soldiers marched to the Legislative Building, met with Premier T.C. Norris, and demanded legislation guaranteeing the right of collective bargaining. The reports said that Roger Bray, the spokesman for the group, had proclaimed himself a Bolshevik and was discourteous to the premier.

Roger Bray must have felt very strongly about the issues of the day. Although he was one of the authorised speakers for the Strike Committee, he was not the type of person one expects to see making public speeches. Bray was a butcher before he went to serve his country in war and did not belong to any political party. He had a large family of eight children and was likely feeling the economic effects of hard times. As a speaker, Bray was forthright and seemingly fearless of the authorities. It is not quite clear why he called himself a Bolshevik on this occasion, unless he did so in the same way that Major G.W. Andrews had done when he spoke in Parliament a short time earlier.

The soldiers' parades, many in support of the strikers, fuelled public anxiety. In response, Mayor Gray issued proclamations prohibiting parades, but the soldiers would not comply. Order was being threatened, and the mayor prepared for the worst.

Meanwhile, another crisis was looming. Suspicion was rising against the police force, which had declared its sympathy for the strikers. On June 5, the *Free Press* editorialised:

So far as the records go, there has not been, in a single case, an arrest of an offender. A man is beaten on Portage Avenue, in the middle of the day, for wearing a British flag in his buttonhole; nothing is done. A mob attacks a delivery van in Market Square and cuts its tires to ribbons; there are no arrests. Men driving trucks are hauled from their seats and beaten; there is no redress [...] The fact that there does not appear to have been a single arrest proves nothing but the disturbing fact that the authorities are, for the moment at any rate, unable to maintain law and order in this city.

In answer to this attack on the law enforcement authorities, Chief Constable Donald MacPherson issued a statement calling on citizens to report "all cases

of intimidation, assaults, or breaches of the peace to the office of the Crown prosecutor at the central police station.” He promised that complaints would be immediately dealt with according to law.

Chief Constable MacPherson was called upon to defend the conduct of his men before the Police Commission. The Police Commission was not satisfied and instructed MacPherson to call upon all members of the force to sign an agreement that, among other things, forbade them from striking. MacPherson met with each of his officers in private. In the end, all but twenty-one men refused to sign what many referred to as a “slave pact.” Soon after, the Police Commission asked Chief Constable MacPherson to take a leave of absence. When he refused, he was dismissed from the police force altogether. At a union meeting, the police officers voted to veil the honour roll in the police station and remove photographs of the men killed in action “until the police force is honourably reinstated to their positions without prejudice.”

Later that day, City Council voted to hire special constables to protect the city at a cost of \$150,000. Aldermen Queen and Heaps opposed the hiring of the special constables but were defeated by a majority vote. The fact that these two aldermen voted against hiring a more loyal police force was recorded.

That night, a new breed of police made their first appearance. Dubbed the Specials, they roamed the streets in intimidating groups. Without uniforms, they were indistinguishable from citizens on the street, except they carried with them sawed-off wagon wheel spokes that resembled baseball bats. Employed to ensure law and order, they risked causing as much of a riot as they quelled. It was not long before trouble began.

The weather on Tuesday, June 10 was hot, bringing men, women, and children outdoors. Although the streetcars were missing, the numerous automobiles and carriages gave the streets a holiday air. Around the Portage and Main intersection, traffic had come to a standstill and the sidewalks were jammed. Pedestrians spilled onto the streets. Then the Specials appeared. Some were on horseback and others on foot. They tried unsuccessfully to cope with the traffic problem, but were met with jeers from a comparatively cheerful crowd, some of whom were shouting, “Aren’t you afraid of being run over? Are you lost?”

When the Specials brandished their sawed-off wagon wheel spokes in an effort to clear the streets, the cheerful mood quickly turned. One Special struck a woman on the arm and, witnessing the incident, several war veterans grabbed the Special, knocked his hat off, and tore his clothing. The Specials charged the crowd swinging their bats. The crowd retaliated by throwing anything that was handy, including bottles, bricks, and stones.

During the pushing and hitting, a rock struck one of the mounted Specials as he rode into the crowd. *The Winnipeg Citizen* was the first newspaper to carry the story and, it seemed, the facts were far less important than the message:

At the time of writing, Sergeant Fred Coppins, Victoria Cross hero of France, is lying in the Military Hospital and is stated to be dying. He was not expected to live until morning. Sergeant Coppins swears that his injuries were caused by three Austrians who kicked him in front of Alloway and Champion's offices on Main Street during the riot. By the time that this appears, Coppins may be dead.

No doubt, the public was outraged to learn that nationals of a country against which Canada had so recently been at war had probably killed a distinguished war hero!

In Ottawa, Prime Minister Borden answered questions about the incident: "The government has requested that an investigation should be made as quickly as possible [...] in order that we have reliable information as to the injuries [...] sustained by some returned soldiers and especially by one very distinguished soldier who won the Victoria Cross." He wired for a report of Coppins' condition and was told, "Sergeant Coppins, V.C., reported improving nicely injured ribs and chest. Medical officer reports every chance [of] recovery. Assailants stated to be Austrian aliens, not yet arrested, as lost in the crowd."

Fred Dixon was infuriated to learn that he was misquoted in the *Winnipeg Tribune* as saying, "I am sorry to hear that Sergeant Coppins was hurt, but he apparently got what he was looking for when he signed up with the mounted police." On the evening the article was published, Dixon read the newspaper story at a meeting and asked, "Will those who heard me mention Coppins' name hold up their hands?" No hands were raised. Instead, the crowd shouted at Dixon to make them apologise. His response was published in the *Winnipeg Tribune*:

I am supposed to have said this in a speech to returned soldiers in Victoria Park yesterday morning. As a matter of fact, I did not mention Sergeant Coppins in that address nor did I at any time say 'he had apparently got what he was looking for.' I am sincerely sorry that Sergeant Coppins was hurt and wish him a speedy recovery. Trusting you will give this as full publicity as you have given the false report referred to.

The Coppins affair continued to rage and opinions remained divided. Attorney-General of Manitoba, Thomas H. Johnson, offered a five-hundred-dollar reward for information about the controversial assault, and the events began to take the form of a witch hunt.

This incident earned the Specials a great deal of attention. On June 12, the *Free Press* reported that:

More returned soldiers lined up for duty at city hall this morning than on any other day since the force was initiated. All were highly indignant at the injury done Sgt. Coppins, V.C. Mayor Gray announced that the city would accept another thousand men. In fact, the civic government will accept every eligible man who applies for Special police duty.

In a full column editorial, the *Winnipeg Tribune* praised the Police Commission for acting wisely in appointing the Special police force because the city “had been only half-heartedly policed since the strike began.”

Not everyone supported the Specials. Some went to City Hall and asked Mayor Gray to remove the Specials from duty. It was argued that the bats carried by the Specials were an incitement to riot, but Mayor Gray rejected this claim and the Specials remained on duty. Similarly, the *Strike Bulletin* denounced the Specials saying, “They are not maintaining law and order but are brutally attacking any person who voices an opinion favourable to the strikers.” The *Strike Bulletin* also condemned the editorial previously published in the *Winnipeg Tribune* and, in objection, wrote: “Its propaganda is pernicious. When there was no disorder and no arrests the city was ‘half-heartedly policed.’ When men’s heads are broken and mounted police charge the crowd, conditions are apparently satisfactory.”

Across Canada, newspapers reported on the strike developments. By most observers, the strikers were seen as antagonists, wrongfully challenging the constituted government. To a few, however, the news engendered sympathy for the strikers.

Bill Pritchard said that he first heard about the Winnipeg General Strike while he was standing on Hastings Street in Vancouver. He was reading the bulletin board of the *Vancouver Province*. “There it was. It struck me as being something stupendous,” he said.

Pritchard, who had been elected to the executive of the OBU at the Calgary conference, was encouraged by colleagues to go to Winnipeg to inspect the strike situation. His train pulled into Winnipeg late in the evening on June 12. Although the city was quiet when he arrived, rumours were circulating that the arrests of those who were most active in the strike were imminent.

The day after arriving in Winnipeg, Pritchard shared the podium with Ivens at a meeting in Victoria Park. Here was Pritchard, the sacrilegious speaker at the Calgary conference, now sharing an open-air church platform, if not a pulpit, with the sanctimonious Reverend Bill Ivens. What strange bedfellows this strike produced!

The *Free Press* reported that Pritchard should have been met at the station and escorted immediately out of town. In response, Pritchard told the crowd in Victoria Park that on his voyage from Vancouver, coming through the

Crow's Nest Pass, he had met coal miners who could write more intelligent editorials with their picks than John W. Dafoe, editor of the *Free Press*, could write with his pen.

If nothing else, the *Free Press* editorials were consistent. Not only did the paper advocate Pritchard's expulsion, it also called for the immediate deportation of the city's "aliens," reminding the public that Coppins had received a beating at the hands of "bohunks, aliens and foreigners."

Rumours were reported in the *Strike Bulletin* under the heading, "Ugly Action Contemplated." The story described the build-up of police in the city, and the mobilisation of men by the Citizens' Committee. It was reported that "between one hundred and one hundred and fifty strike leaders are slated for arrest," and that "martial law is to be declared and an armoured car is ready for action. The latter course is contemplated in view of the disorder that is likely to ensue when the leaders are arrested."

According to a story in the *Winnipeg Telegram*, Senator Robertson was reported to have returned to Winnipeg and was given very wide authority from the federal government "in connection with the revolution." There seemed to be a substantial change in his policy because the cabinet minister was now prepared to meet with the Strike Committee. A delegation of strikers was quickly put together and they optimistically went to the Royal Alexandra Hotel where Senator Robertson had set up his office.

At the meeting, Alfred Andrews did most of the questioning, specifically gathering information about the strike leaders' birth origins. When the meeting was over, the delegation was bewildered. Why were Andrews and Robertson more interested in where they were born than in discussing the terms of a settlement? The newly amended Section 41 of the *Immigration Act* provided Andrews with a dangerous new weapon, and the strike leaders would soon feel the brunt of its force.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER FIVE

**O**n June 16, 1919, Mayor Gray announced that "something big" was going to happen. It was a sticky, sultry, and ominously calm day. In the late evening, without warning, winds up to eighty-four miles per hour hit the city like a sledgehammer. Roofs flew off schools, apartment buildings, houses, and hospitals. Telephone poles, light poles, and chimneys were flattened. Century-old elms were destroyed, and hundreds of dead birds