

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

On 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

lay on the ground. At the height of the hurricane, Portage Avenue presented the rare spectacle of store dummies, merchandise, newspapers, and cartons flying in a wild maelstrom.

Watching the storm from a window in the Labour Temple, Bill Pritchard wondered if this was the fulfilment of the mayor's prophecy. But he soon realised the storm would be followed by even more devastation. Soon, four hundred officers, consisting of the Specials, lawyers, and Mounted Police surrounded the Labour Temple.

As the Labour Temple raid began, other officers raided the Central Hall, Ukrainian Hall, and Liberty Hall in the city's north end. It was not the radicals they were after, but the proof needed to put them in jail. A well-known trial lawyer, W.P. Fillmore, recalled the events as he experienced them:

There were four or five of us. Chief Newton was the leader. So we go up to the door, break in the door. There was nobody there except some old man. We just proceeded to open drawers and whatever was there and looked for things. There was a book by Lenin and other communist literature. I came up to a box or bench, which was locked. I had on my wrist a short baseball bat so I gave a tremendous heave – the lid flew open, the bat flew back – hit me on the head and knocked me down. So I was wounded in action and I don't know if I ever got better.

The officers entered by whatever means they could and quickly carried out their orders. Paper, books, and files were loaded onto waiting drays and taken away as evidence.

Before turning in that night, Bill Ivens had set the type for a newspaper story headlined, "The Morning Dawns." Ironically, the article expressed his desire for an honourable end to the strike. By 2:00 a.m. on June 17, his hopes were dashed. Officers armed with guns and riding whips were banging on the doors and demanding entry into several homes in and around Winnipeg, including his own.

An uncooperative Helen Armstrong refused to admit the police into her home until she had checked with the police station. When she relented, armed officers searched every corner, shelf, and drawer in her house; gathered all the books, papers and periodicals they could find; labelled them and placed them in cartons. After the search, George Armstrong was arrested and taken away.

When the officers knocked on Roger Bray's door, he told them to wait while he got dressed, but the men defiantly followed him into the bedroom where his wife was in her night clothes. Before arresting Bray, they combed the bedrooms of his eight children in search of seditious literature and firearms.

Bob Russell was just going to bed when there was a knock on his door. His wife looked out the window and saw four or five armed men in the yard. Russell went down the stairs, opened the door, and let them in. His home was searched and he was arrested.

John Queen was arrested at the residence of Alderman Heaps, where he was staying with his family while vacationing in Gimli. When the officers came to the door, Heaps raced up the stairs shouting, "John, John! It's you they want."

Queen took his time, sauntering down the stairs. As an officer began to read the warrant, Queen interrupted, "Oh, I'm sorry, excuse me just a minute." He walked to the foot of the stairs and shouted, "Abie, you had better come down. It's not for me, it's for you. I'm going back to bed."

The officer, slightly embarrassed, interjected, "Mr. Queen, we have one for your arrest too."

Of course, Queen was not a bit surprised. "Oh, I was having such a lovely dream," he said. The two aldermen were handcuffed and taken to a waiting car.

Mike Verenchuck, a naturalised British subject who had come to Canada from Russia, was also arrested that night. He was a war veteran who had been honourably discharged in 1917 after being wounded in the Battle of the Somme. He had been left in charge of a farm belonging to a man named Davieatkin.

Verenchuk was in bed when the police arrived, armed with a warrant for Davieatkin's arrest. Without knocking, the officers tore a hole in the screen, unlatched the door, and entered the house carrying flashlights. They pulled Verenchuk from his bed and ordered him to dress. Without asking his name or showing him a warrant, they took him away at gunpoint. In fact, his name did not appear on an arrest warrant until thirty-six hours after he had been jailed.

The officers drove up to the parsonage of the McDougall Methodist Church looking for Bill Ivens. The new pastor, S.O. Irvin, convinced them that a mistake had been made and that he was not Ivens. His story was believed only after showing the officers the marriage register that proved Ivens had not been in the house for over a year. Despite the inconvenience, Irvin was unperturbed by the incident, and he later praised the directness and energy of the men who had come to arrest him. The officers eventually caught up with Ivens that night in his new home.

On the night of the raids, Dick Johns was in Montreal and Bill Pritchard had gone to Brandon to speak at a meeting. Warrants had also been issued for their arrests, but these could not be executed until a few days later.

Aside from Mike Verenchuck, who was mistakenly arrested for Davieatkin, three other “aliens” – Matthew Charitinoff, Moses Almazoff, and Oscar Choppelrei – were also arrested during the raids. Like Pritchard and Johns, Samuel Blumenberg would be arrested a short time later.

The ten men arrested that night were assembled at a north end police station. Less than twenty minutes elapsed between the arrival of the first and last car bearing the prisoners. The men were searched and placed in cells.

Armstrong, who had helped build that same police station, quoted a line from one of Ivens’ sermons: “They that build fine houses shall live in them.”

In the next cell, Ivens paced up and down, repeating, “They can’t do this to us. They can’t do this to us.”

Armstrong teasingly replied, “What the bloody hell, Bill, ain’t your door locked?”

The men were not kept at the police station for long. With armed officers all around, the prisoners were led outside to automobiles driven by the Specials. They were seated like dangerous criminals – one in the back seat of each car with a Mounted Police officer on either side – for the eighteen-mile journey to Stony Mountain Penitentiary.

Stony Mountain Penitentiary stands like a great fortress just north of Winnipeg. It is the highest security prison in Manitoba and convicted criminals serving major sentences are sent there. There was no legal imperative for taking the arrested men to a federal penitentiary and the fact that it was done on this night makes a strong statement in itself. Was it that someone feared there might be an uprising and an attempt to rescue these men if they were held in a lesser facility?

When the cavalcade wound up the hill and reached the front gates of the prison in the dark of night, there was delay and confusion. With all the secrecy surrounding this undertaking, no one had advised the penitentiary staff of the plan, and Warden Graham was not given notice of the prisoners’ arrival. Furthermore, night was not the usual admitting time, and inmates are usually brought to jail after a conviction in court. These men hold the dubious distinction of being incarcerated in a federal penitentiary without having first been convicted of a crime.

Once admitted, the prisoners were put through the usual entrance procedure. They were searched and their personal belongings – rings, watches, and even tobacco paper – were stored in individual white canvas bags with the name of each owner attached by a string. Their names were entered in the register. Then they were taken up a steel staircase to a row of cells, each about nine-by-five feet with thick brick walls, furnished with a bed, stool, and table. The only opening was a steel-barred door, placed in such a way that no two prisoners could see each other.

In the morning, each man received a bowl of porridge flavoured with cooking molasses and a slice of dry bread. Queen's sense of humour, which had flagged when the gates swung shut, was somewhat revived. As he received the glutinous mixture, he called loud enough for Armstrong to hear, "Ugh, I can't eat my eggs that way. I like them turned over and the bacon's too well done."

Armstrong, viewing his own meal, was furious. "You've got eggs and bacon? You should see what I've got!"

Queen doubled over his porridge with laughter.

Minutes later, a trusty passed down the corridor yelling, "Want any tea?" He carried a large water can with a spout about three feet long and poked the spout through the bars to fill up the prisoners' little enamel mugs.

In the afternoon, Andrews appeared at the penitentiary, accompanied by a magistrate, and proceeded to set up court. His role in the events had been expanded. Despite having been active in the Citizens' Committee during the strike, Andrews was to act as the Crown prosecutor in the trials against the strike leaders.

In the improvised courtroom, the men were lined up and the charges were read. Andrews asked for an adjournment for eight days. Until then, the men had no inkling that they were in a court of law. If this was a court, where was their counsel? The men were advised that the solicitor for the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council had become stuck in the mud created by a recent rain on his way to the penitentiary. Andrews smugly told the men not to worry and that within seventy-two hours they would be on the Atlantic bound for the land of their birth.

The magistrate denied bail and, having won his first victory as prosecutor, Andrews informed Ottawa via telegram that he had arrested the strike leaders. Upon receiving the news from Andrews, Justice Minister Meighen wired back the following statement to Andrews:

Government just received information that ten arrests made last night [...] those arrested being detained at Stony Mountain. Yesterday morning I wired you that *Immigration Act* provides for detention only in Immigration Station and early yesterday afternoon Mr. Calder [the Minister of Immigration] wired Starnes [Commanding Officer of the RNWMP in Winnipeg] that authorisation for taking into custody and detaining for examination under *Immigration Act* must come from him personally and asked for names and particulars accordingly. He just received now 3:40 p.m. these names and particulars and is immediately dispatching authorisation [...] Presume you are satisfied that there is legal authority for arrests and for detention at Stony Mountain but I would be glad to have full information as to this wire.

Justice Minister Meighen's response is interesting because it appears the arrests occurred without proper authorisation. Rather than admit his error, Andrews attempted to justify his actions in another telegram to Meighen:

For very purpose justifying arrests I had information laid charging seditious conspiracy which in my opinion could be proved. Commissioner Perry and Starnes informed me police barracks and jail usual place detention. See interpretation Immigration Station in Act.

When person detained in penitentiary pursuant to deportation, surely it becomes Immigration Station. My intention was to drop criminal proceedings when detention order made and proceed deportation. If any persons not deportable think should continue criminal proceedings against them where evidence justifies. Satisfied public opinion with our action [...] Everything I have done has been at suggestion Senator Robertson but because it might weaken his position with labour, I have taken full responsibility for Justice Department.

Events change so rapidly here and telegraph communications so slow you must either trust to my judgement or employ more trustworthy representative. Pitblado, Coyne, Sweatman and other leading practitioners not only approved my course but are voluntarily aiding me. Military and Police agreed Penitentiary only safe place available.

This defensive message contains poor excuses for what may be regarded by many people as sloppy legal work. Whatever his strengths as a lawyer may have been, in this situation he appears prone to panic. Even more disturbing is the matter in which he attempted to shirk responsibility for his actions by transferring blame to Senator Robertson.

Meighen's response is equally troubling: "Notwithstanding any doubts I have as to technical legality of arrests and detention at Stony Mountain, I feel that rapid deportation is best course now that arrests are made and later we can consider ratification." Furthermore, a telegram from Immigration Minister Calder to RNWMP Commanding Officer Starnes provided retroactive authorisation twelve hours after the arrests had already occurred. Such evidence demonstrates the manner in which the government and its representatives were acting without full consideration of the law.

With editor Bill Ivens in jail, Fred Dixon met with his friend Reverend J.S. (James) Woodsworth to discuss the uncertain future of the *Strike Bulletin*. They agreed that, without the newspaper, the strikers would lose an important voice. Despite risk of incarceration, they agreed to continue publishing the *Strike Bulletin*.

Dixon could not have found a more appropriate substitute for Ivens. Formerly a Methodist minister, Woodsworth had left Winnipeg because of the unpopularity of his position on conscription. He shared Ivens' strong social conscience and applied his Christian principles to social problems in his books and lectures. Woodsworth learned about the strike while speaking

in Calgary and arrived in Winnipeg shortly before the strike leaders were arrested.

Woodsworth wasted no time in getting to work. The June 18 edition of the *Strike Bulletin* protested the arrests of the strike leaders: “The strikers will add a fourth demand – the freeing of political prisoners. The men in Stony Mountain are not there primarily for their personal utterances or acts. They are there because they have voiced the demands of the workers.” He also levelled an attack against the Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand:

After a month’s campaign of vilification, misrepresentation and intimidation, unparalleled in this country in its intensity, there are more men and women on strike in Winnipeg than there were a month ago. The Committee realises this and have gone stark raving mad [...] It is impossible for the infamous [Committee of One Thousand] to descend much lower but let them go to the limit; we have no intention of following them [...] It is the firm resolution to win that will overcome and cast down the greedy tyrants from the pedestal on which they have placed themselves [...] They will be taught that 30,000 brains and hearts are united and will in the long run, rise victorious through all the nefarious machinations of the 1,000, secure the objects for which this strike is being waged and vindicate the men who were arrested.

Although the strike leaders were arrested and jailed, the continued publication of the *Strike Bulletin* fought to keep the issues alive.

Dixon shared Woodsworth’s outrage and determination. He participated in a meeting at Victoria Park to protest the arrests. The chairman read some of the sympathetic telegrams for the imprisoned men that had come from all over Canada. Dixon was persuaded to sit on the platform and was invited to speak. He paralleled the current strike situation with the Chartist agitation in England:

Although the rights for which the Chartists fought in those days were termed most radical, and although leaders were arrested, the claims of those men are recognised as moderate and just in the present day [...] The demands of labour today, although judged radical like those of the Chartists, are reasonable and right, and will prove so in the future.

Dixon praised the imprisoned men and predicted that they would become martyrs for their important cause.

When the news of the arrests became public, labour men were stunned and frightened. The sudden raids, arbitrary arrests, and threat of deportation were clear warnings of the government’s determination to suppress agitators.

Despite the large turnouts at protests and the continued publication of the *Strike Bulletin*, the strike was losing momentum. Senator Robertson informed Prime Minister Borden of this abatement in a June 18 telegram:

Everything quiet in Winnipeg today. Street railway service commenced at eight o’clock this morning and has continued without any interruption. Understand 1,500 carmen

have advised Strike Committee they propose to return to work tomorrow. Our action(s) [...] have proved effective and satisfactory to the citizens generally and will be wholly justified.

Although the strike in Winnipeg was waning, revolution spread across North America. Vancouver, Regina, Brandon, Edmonton, Moose Jaw, Calgary, and Saskatoon were all experiencing strikes, as were several major cities in the United States.

The government had not yet learned to use Parliament to legislate strikers back to work. Rather, the Borden government in Ottawa sought to break the strikes by arresting agitators, just as they had done in Winnipeg. The justification for these measures is evident in this statement made by Andrews to the *Free Press* on June 19:

Trial of Reds to be behind closed doors – Red leaders arrested in Winnipeg early yesterday may be on their way across the Atlantic within the next seventy-six hours, it was announced today. They will be tried at Stony Mountain Penitentiary tomorrow, provided the Board coming from Ottawa to hear the charges against them arrives in the city tonight. This Board, it was stated by A.J. Andrews who is conducting the case for the Crown, has the power to deport them right away. If they are not deported, they will be dealt with under the *Criminal Code*. Bail will not be allowed if Mr. Andrews can possibly prevent it, according to his statement.

These heavy-handed tactics did not receive full endorsement from the public and the proposed action caused an avalanche of protest from labour and liberal groups all over the Western world.

The British Labour Party urged the British Government to use its influence in Canada against an act so contrary to Anglo-Saxon tradition. *The Statesman*, a popular British journal, criticised Prime Minister Borden, Justice Minister Meighen, and Senator Robertson:

He [Borden] cannot escape the verdict of the country on his incapacity as a statesman. Having destroyed the responsible government and impaired the usefulness of Parliament, he now finds himself face to face with the spirit of revolution which is not confined to Winnipeg.

In his hysterical impotence he confounds this revolutionary spirit with Bolshevism and thinks that if he cries loud enough that the wall of Jericho will fall down. With the aid of the Honourable Arthur Meighen the high priest of Tory autocracy – and that of a Labour Minister who could not get the votes of 100 labour men in any constituency in Canada, he has given his support to an irresponsible Citizens' Committee in Winnipeg, and thereby thrown the whole weight of his government against the working men and returned soldiers of that city, who have the sympathy and support of 7/8th of the people of Canada [...]

The Borden Government is not only an anachronism in the 20th century. It is a monstrous subversion of constitutional government and a crime against the citizens of Canada.

In addition, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada threatened to launch protest meetings from Halifax to Vancouver unless fair civil trials were held. Even John W. Dafoe of the *Free Press*, who previously had been hostile toward the strikers, challenged the arrests, albeit for somewhat different reasons:

Their arrests at this time may do the extremists an actual service. They were in the perilous position of leaders of a senseless criminal strike, which was nearing the point of collapse [...] Their arrests will enable them to pose as martyrs in the cause of the working man, and will also supply them with a plausible excuse for failure.

Despite the outcries, the federal government continued its plans for deportation.

The first snag was Armstrong. The government had intended to deport the men under the terms of the newly amended *Immigration Act* on the grounds that they were undesirable citizens born outside Canada. However, Armstrong had been born in Ontario, causing Andrews to seek a criminal conviction instead:

After consideration believe fairest course towards English-speaking prisoners would be to try them on criminal charges before proceeding with deportation [...] I believe public opinion generally will approve this manifestation of fairness on part of Crown [...] Am still considering how to proceed with foreigners, some of whom will require, I fear, to be denaturalised [...] Am satisfied arrests and raids have wonderfully improved situation.

Upon receipt of this telegram indicating the changed course of action, Justice Minister Meighen provided a supportive response:

Course suggested as to English-speaking prisoners approved. Consider it important that whatever course as regards Immigration be taken respecting foreign-born prisoners, the criminal charges against them be proceeded with so that on this score no discrimination will appear. Denaturalisation proceedings will probably require several weeks.

In this telegram, Meighen claimed to support criminal charges only if the foreign-born and English-born men appeared to receive the same treatment. As expected, this would not be the case.

In response to growing public disapproval, Andrews released the arrested men. On June 19, arrangements for their release were completed just before midnight. Bail was set at two thousand dollars each. At first, Andrews was unwilling to go to the penitentiary at such a late hour because it meant waking the warden, guards, and a magistrate. However, the defence lawyers pressed for their clients' release and reminded Andrews that since the men had been taken out of bed to be imprisoned, certainly the officials could get out of bed to release them. Andrews reluctantly agreed.

Shortly after midnight, Alfred Andrews, a police magistrate, the defence lawyers, bondsmen, a large number of friends, and labour supporters were on

their way to Stony Mountain Penitentiary. It was a happier entourage this time, with friends, family, and colleagues looking forward to seeing the men. Upon their arrival at the prison, the warden was annoyed. Again, he had been given no notice and it was the second time in one week that his sleep had been interrupted. When the prisoners were awakened in their cells and told by the guards to get dressed, they feared the worse. Was the deportation order being carried out so soon?

Greeted by their friends and families, the men were soon reassured that all was well. After three days and two nights of incarceration, they were free on the condition that they would take no further role in the strike, address no meetings, and have no interviews with the press.

Despite Justice Minister Meighen's earlier instructions stating that all men should appear to be treated the same, four of the ten men arrested on the night of the raids remained locked up at Stony Mountain Penitentiary: Mike Verenchuk, Matthew Charitinoff, Moses Almazoff, and Oscar Choppelrei. These men were treated as undesirables under the new *Immigration Act* and were to receive hearings before a specially appointed Immigration Board. Their continued detainment raised several questions. What was the justification for releasing six people – Russell, Ivens, Bray, Heap, Queens, and Armstrong – and not the other four? Did British justice depend on one's birthplace?

CHAPTER SIX

Saturday, June 21, 1919 proved to be the most violent day in the history of Winnipeg. Although Mayor Gray had issued a proclamation banning parades, a large group of returned soldiers gathered in Market Square on June 20 to protest the ban, arguing that it was an unconstitutional denial of their civil liberties. The soldiers planned to hold a silent march to the Royal Alexandra Hotel the next afternoon to demand from Senator Robertson an explanation of his activities in the city. Many of the men invited their wives to parade with them. When Mayor Gray learned that women might be participating, he had an announcement printed in that morning's *Free Press*. "Any women taking part in the parade do so at their own risk," he cautioned. It was an ominous warning.

On the morning of June 21, representatives of the returned soldiers met with Mayor Gray in a final effort to have the parade ban lifted, but the mayor