

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

refused. He explained that he would stop the parade by peaceful means if possible, but warned, "If we have to take sterner methods, we will not hesitate to do so."

The Strike Committee was similarly opposed to the parade. Fearing the consequences, they urged the returned soldiers not to march, but were instructed to stay out of the matter. "This is our affair," they were told. "Stay out of it."

That afternoon, the phone rang in Senator Robertson's room at the Royal Alexandra Hotel and Mayor Gray answered the call. The voice on the other end was panicked: "You must come at once! Crowds are gathering on Main Street between City Hall and Portage Avenue!" The caller, acting Chief Constable Newton, explained to Mayor Gray that the Specials could not handle the growing crowds and urged the mayor to call in the RNWMP for assistance.

Mayor Gray quickly travelled the few blocks from the hotel to the crowd at City Hall. Thousands of people were walking up and down the sidewalks and spilling over into the middle of Main Street. Upon witnessing the situation, Mayor Gray asked Commissioner Perry to have Mounted Police sent to the scene to take measures to quell the riot.

Meanwhile, the violence was escalating. A volunteer-operated streetcar was travelling down Main Street toward the crowd in front of City Hall. The sight of the vehicle, and the threat that public transportation might be restored, so angered a mob of strike supporters that they barricaded the way and brought it to a standstill. The streetcar was attacked. Its windows were smashed, and someone from the crowd entered the wooden car and lit a wicker seat on fire. It could have been a spectacular blaze in the heart of the city, if it were not for volunteer firemen who rushed to the scene and turned the fire into clouds of billowing white smoke. Angry men rocked the vehicle until it was pulled off the track and tipped on its side. Photographs of the scorched streetcar in front of City Hall, smoke pouring from its windows, captured the incident. This image has become a familiar, even symbolic, representation of the conflict and violence that occurred on that day.

In an effort to clear the streets, Mounted Police armed with revolvers and wooden clubs rounded the corner of Portage and Main and rode north toward the crowd. The mob responded to their presence with boos and jeers, inciting the officers to charge. As the riders galloped toward them, people began to scatter. Men, women, and children fell to the ground, hurt and bleeding.

Perched high upon the steps of City Hall, Mayor Gray read the riot act. His voice was barely audible over the noise below: "His Majesty, the King, charges and commands all persons being assembled immediately to disperse

and peaceably to depart to their habitation or to their lawful business upon pain of being guilty of an offence, for which upon conviction they may be sentenced to imprisonment for life.”

The club-wielding Specials formed a line across Main Street so that the crowd was confined between the Mounted Police on one side and the Specials on the other. Turning to regroup for a second charge, two Mounted Police were pulled off their horses. A horse, its legs caught up on a fender from the smouldering streetcar, crashed to the ground with its rider still in the saddle.

The Mounted Police charged again, this time with revolvers drawn and an order to fire shots into the crowd. People huddled together for protection as gunfire tore through the streets. Mike Sokolowski, a tinsmith, was struck in the chest and died where he fell. Another man, Steve Schezerbanowes, was hit in both legs by the shots and would later die from gangrene caused by his wounds. Many more were injured. Some of the wounded were trampled while they lay moaning and bleeding in the street. The Mounted Police turned their weapons upon the men surrounding the over-turned streetcar and another volley of bullets pierced the crowd. Panic-stricken, people fled down side streets pursued by the Specials. When the Specials seized men to put them under arrest, they precipitated an outbreak of hand-to-hand fighting. Men used what was handy to fight, including lumps of cement, stones, bricks, and their bare hands.

Mayor Gray was driven down Main Street, stopping frequently to persuade people to return to their homes. When he arrived back at City Hall, Mayor Gray was met by a delegation of returned soldiers, requesting a meeting with him in Victoria Park. He told the delegation that he blamed them for causing the day’s “lamentable exhibition of lawlessness” and advised them not to hold any meetings until he made a decision on the matter on Monday morning.

The mayor was driven to the Osborne Military Barracks and asked the military commander for Winnipeg, General Ketchen, for military assistance in controlling the riot. Cars bearing soldiers armed with rifles with fixed bayonets and trucks mounted with machine guns were immediately dispatched. Soldiers from the 90th Winnipeg Rifles, the 100th Winnipeg Grenadiers, the 106th Light Infantry, and the 79th Cameron Highlanders were sent to the riot area.

General Ketchen wired Ottawa, reporting that, “Serious riot started at 2:45 p.m. Mounted Police turned out and now engaged with crowd. Mayor had read Riot Act and called on militia. Turning out at once. Further report later.”

By the time the riot ended, more than one hundred people had been arrested. Twenty-nine people were taken to hospital, thirteen of which were treated for bullet wounds. Four RNWMP officers and two Specials were injured. Rather than face the threat of arrest by going to a public hospital, countless others nursed wounds in silence at home. Armed soldiers patrolled the sidewalks, armoured vehicles with mounted machine guns drove up and down the streets, and the riot site was eventually secured.

Shortly after the riot, Senator Robertson finally broke his silence. In a prepared statement, he said, "Authentic information concerning the cause of the sympathetic strike" had been obtained in the raids and should now be made public so that "thousands of well-intentioned but misinformed and misled working people" should be fully informed. He produced copies of incriminating letters seized in Russell's office. One letter signed by Russell showed the source of his funds for travelling speakers, pamphlets, and newspapers. According to Senator Robertson, the letter contained the sentence, "I just got a shipment of Bolshevik funds for this purpose." Apparently, the money had come from the United States.

Senator Robertson convened a meeting between Commissioner Perry, Alfred Andrews, Mayor Gray, and five members of the Strike Committee to inform them of the incriminating evidence. The senator was confident the strike leaders had used the strikers as pawns. He linked the OBU with Bolshevik and International Workers of the World organisers and said that there had been:

a carefully planned attempt to overthrow our constitution and to replace it by a form of Soviet Government [...] Feeling as we do that this is nothing less than Bolshevism that has raised its ugly head, it is the duty of loyal citizens to band themselves together and see to it that the principles for which our Government stands are not trampled under foot, and wherever this vile serpent appears hit it and hit it hard.

The senator's revelations were shocking. Had the Canadian government finally found the evidence needed to prove its case? It appeared true, but members of the Strike Committee denied any knowledge of the alleged Bolshevik connection.

The Winnipeg Citizen reported on the "armed uprising" and "bloody revolution." It stated that the Specials and Mounted Police had only killed in self-defence and deemed the mayor a hero for risking his life by standing on the steps of City Hall to order the crowds to disperse.

Fred Dixon wrote angrily about the riot in the *Strike Bulletin*. Leading with the headline "Bloody Saturday," he gave a different account of the events:

When the Mounties rode back to the corner of Portage and Main, after the fray, at least two of them were twirling their reeking tubes high in the air in orthodox

Deadwood Dick style. Some individuals, apparently opposed to the strike, applauded the man-killers as they rode by.

On the same page, in an article headed “Kaiserism in Canada,” Dixon wrote:

There may be those who think that the blood of innocent men upon our streets is preferable to a silent parade. There may be those who think their dignity must be upheld at any cost but we fail to see the slightest justification for the murderous assault which was committed [...] [and] the shooting of innocent and defenceless citizens marks the depths of desperation to which the Kaiser-like crowd at the Industrial Bureau are prepared to go in order to run their defeat into temporary victory. There have always been those who imagine that a ‘whiff of grapeshot’ would stop the cry of the people for justice [...] those who think the shooting on Saturday taught labour a lesson [...] Labour already knew that two dozen men on horseback shooting to kill could disperse a crowd of several thousand unarmed men and women.

Dixon refused to allow the article in the *Free Press* to go unchallenged, but this decision would not come without consequences.

Dixon’s scathing censure of the authorities caused Andrews to close down the *Strike Bulletin*. Dixon argued in vain as the presses and manuscripts were seized. After publication of the *Strike Bulletin* was halted, Andrews filed a report of his decision with Justice Minister Meighen:

Monday’s Labour News very seditious and likely to incite further riots [...] Publishers of Labour News friends of mine and good citizens expressed desire to discontinue publishing they requested me to demand discontinuance which did in principle prevent further crimes assuming not to act under orders-in-council. Publishers gave me access to original manuscripts including seditious libels of Dixon and Crown Attorney promised to arrest him [...] if he does not, we should do so.

Despite the growing risk, Dixon remained determined and defiant.

As Woodsworth and Dixon hastened to inform the Strike Committee of the closing of the paper, a policeman stopped them with a warrant for Woodsworth’s arrest. Though surprised, Woodsworth went peacefully to the police station. He was refused bail.

Upon hearing about her husband’s arrest, Woodsworth’s wife prepared for a raid. In anticipation, she sent their fourteen-year old daughter, Agnes, to look for any books in their home that might be incriminating. She instructed Agnes to get rid of the books, but asked her daughter not to tell her anything about their disposal. This way, if questioned by the authorities, Mrs. Woodsworth would not be forced to lie. Agnes and a friend went through Woodsworth’s belongings, removing potentially damning evidence, especially books with red covers. The books and papers were placed in a breadbox and hidden under a log in the woods.

Despite imprisonment and disillusionment, Woodsworth’s commitment to his cause remained intact. In a letter to his wife from his jail cell, he wrote:

Well, this surely about finishes the old conventional ideals. To be in jail is no longer the most terrible thing. Justice is no longer enthroned. In practice it depends upon a dozen conflicting interests, political and commercial. But one is committed as never before to the cause of the poor and the helpless, particularly the foreigner.

News of Woodsworth's arrest travelled quickly, and it was not long before he began receiving messages of encouragement, including a telegram from friends in the Federated Labour Party in Vancouver, who wrote: "Congratulations on your martyrdom. Hope you deserve it."

To Dixon, the closing of the *Strike Bulletin* meant the suppression of the peoples' voice. This was a silence that he could not tolerate. On the morning of June 24, a new newspaper appeared on the street called the *Western Star*. It had a different format and typeface, but the words were clearly Dixon's:

The Strike Committee has opened a defence fund for all the comrades who have been arrested during the past week. There will be a determined effort to build a web of circumstantial evidence around these men [...] Injustice can be had for nothing, but justice costs money. How much will you give to assist in obtaining justice for Ivens, Russell, Queen, Heaps, Bray, Armstrong, Woodsworth and all the others who have been arrested because of their activities for the cause of labour?

Andrews was kept well-informed of Dixon's writing and, in a wire to Meighen, he noted: "They have issued a paper called the *Western Star*, very mildly seditious. We will follow this up [...] Senator Robertson approves our action and legal associates also endorse." And follow up he did. A warrant for Dixon's arrest was issued on June 24. The printing presses were seized, but Dixon could not be found.

In response to the warrant, Dixon hid underground and arranged for the use of another printing press. He alternated his hiding place among the homes of two friends. Even his wife, Winona, did not know his location. The police repeatedly raided the Dixon home searching for the elusive writer. "If I were you, I'd advise your husband to give himself up," one policeman advised Mrs. Dixon.

"You tell him that yourself," she shot back.

Dixon continued to write. The first night in hiding, he wrote until 2:00 a.m. and covertly arranged for delivery of the newspaper text to the print shop. The successor to the defunct *Western Star* was called the *Enlightener*. Because of a legal technicality, the press could not be seized and the publication was released.

On June 25, the first issue of the *Enlightener* carried the most important news since the strike began on May 15 – the strike had been called off. Dixon reported that the Strike Committee was running out of money. Because public meetings were banned, the committee was unable to obtain financial donations. As a result, they could no longer operate the relief fund and this

was causing many families to suffer. Dixon also reported that the provincial government would likely be appointing a commission to investigate the causes of the strike, and it was expected that all strikers would get their jobs back. The strike was scheduled to end on June 26 at 11:00 a.m. With little more than a whimper, the Winnipeg General Strike was over.

After the release of his final publication, Dixon returned home and said to his wife, "Let's go for a walk tonight. You can see me arrested." Dixon and his wife did go for a quiet stroll that evening. Shortly after, he walked into the Central Police Station and surrendered. He was reunited with his friend Woodsworth in prison. Both men were charged with seditious libel. They were released on fifteen hundred dollars bail a few days later.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Six weeks after the rank and file had voted to strike, without consultation or suitable explanation, they were informed that the strike was over. The Strike Committee was inundated with demands to explain the sudden action. Why were the unions not allowed to vote on this issue? Thousands accused the Strike Committee of being defeatist, even cowardly, and said that they would not obey the call to return to work. Others were anxious to return. Although the arrested men denied it, Senator Robertson continued to claim that he now possessed proof that Bolshevik funds were used to support the strike effort. This development had many people upset. The strike may have ended, but the conflict was far from over.

Some people saw the end of the strike as a glorious victory for law and order. The *Free Press* published an editorial saying:

The general strike is over, after six ruinous, disastrous, strife-breeding weeks that have done incalculable harm to this community [...] It was a wanton unnecessary assault upon the community by unwise labour leaders who were drunk with a sense of power and really imagined that they could force this community to yield to their dictatorship by the application of force [...] It was a strike deliberately engineered by the Reds and planned long in advance.

The Citizens' Committee congratulated its members for not compromising with the strikers.

Although Dixon's parting words in the *Enlightener* suggested that the strikers would be reinstated to their former positions, this did not occur. The *Winnipeg Telegram* reported that the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National railways were struggling to cope with a flood of former employees seeking their jobs back. The companies were hiring some men but were refusing to take the strikers back as a group. Rather, the new employees who had enabled