

CHAPTER NINE

The defendants were free on bail. But with the trials pending, Winnipeg remained a city divided. The Citizens' League, a newly formed group, espoused the cause of the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand. The Defence Committee defended the actions of the Strike Committee. The Citizens' League sponsored speakers and published some of the evidence that would be used at the coming trial. The defendants set forth the strikers' viewpoint in the *Defence Bulletin*. As newsmakers of the day, they travelled across Canada raising funds for their defence. The polarity of opinion within the city would soon be reflected in the campaign efforts for the municipal elections scheduled for November 1919.

On September 14, a meeting took place. It was attended by representatives of the Dominion Labour Party, the Ex-Soldiers and Ex-Sailors Party of Manitoba, the Women's Labour League, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, and the Central Labour Council of the OBU. It was agreed that a united political front should be presented at the civic elections, and that a meeting to select labour candidates would be called for October 6.

All classes of labour attended the nomination meeting. The chairman, Sam Cartwright, emphasised the harmonious mood: "While we are split on the industrial field, we do not want to be split on the political field [...] Our end must be to solidify our forces to defeat the very men who were responsible for our defeat in the recent strike. The emancipation of the working class can only come by political action."

Candidates were proposed for council and the school board. Once again, Queen was nominated as an alderman. Ivens was chosen as a mayoral candidate by a vote of 222 to 206 over his nearest rival S.J. Farmer. Believing that Farmer would attract more votes, Ivens declined and Farmer became the official mayoral candidate to run against Mayor Gray.

The bitter campaign was played out in the local press. The *Winnipeg Telegram* opposed the labour candidates and urged citizens to be alert to the danger presented by a "carefully organised sympathetic vote." The *Winnipeg Tribune* and *Free Press* were less apprehensive. The *Free Press* noted, "The ballot is, after all, labour's best weapon. Let labour make use of it."

The strike leaders and their impending trial became a major issue in the campaign. At a meeting at the Board of Trade Building, Dixon encouraged a crowd to give a verdict of "not guilty" to the labour candidates at the polls and to clear Winnipeg of the "slime" cast upon its name by the Committee of One Thousand.

In contrast, Mayor Gray sought to pass blame for the strike onto the strike leaders: "Who is responsible for this? Not the working men – not the

mayor, nor society generally. The responsibility lies with the strike leaders, none of whom have experienced any want or suffering as a result of their incompetent leadership.”

Likewise, the Citizens’ League launched a massive propaganda campaign using such headlines as “Red Menace Is Faced By City Next Friday,” “Sane Labour Is Asked To Give Radicals Club,” “Complete Overturn Sure To Follow Institution Of Radicals In Civic Power,” and “JUST ONE ISSUE NOW, ‘RED’ OR WHITE.” One of its advertisements cautioned that “Winnipeg is in Danger! The verdict of the electors on Friday must be unmistakable, decisive – and sure.”

After the ballots were counted, council was evenly divided with each side holding seven seats. Heaps continued the second year of his term and Queen was re-elected. Mayor Gray was also victorious and promised an impartial rule with justice to all classes of the community. The results brought a mixed reaction.

Dixon was not pleased with the outcome and said that democracy had suffered a temporary defeat but would eventually triumph. In contrast, James Law, secretary of the Defence Committee, reported:

S.J. Farmer, Labour candidate for mayor, was beaten by a little over three thousand votes [...] The Committee of One Thousand – now called The Citizens’ League, our strike opponents, spent floods of money, and poisoned the minds of the public through the press, with the Radical-Labour propaganda, but in spite of all, Labour did splendidly.

For the most part, both sides expressed satisfaction publicly and some disappointment privately. It was a standoff – a true representation of the situation within the city.

As promised in early July, the Robson Commission inquiring into the causes of the Winnipeg General Strike conducted public hearings and heard a wide range of witnesses. The report was completed before the opening of the November assizes and was submitted in its final form to the Manitoba government on November 6.

The public had awaited the findings with great anticipation. Had the strike been financed by Bolshevik funds? Had there been an attempt at revolution? Had the workers of Winnipeg been misled by a handful of seditionaries? Those in government who had access to the report knew what the judge had concluded, but a decision was made not to make the report public at this time.

Now that the report was finished, the labour unions turned to Robson to use his influence in getting jobs back for the strikers. Robson wrote to Senator Robertson but received no response. Similarly, he wrote to Justice Minister Meighen, explaining that the postal employees had “expressed their

deep regret and persisted that there was no feeling of disloyalty or desire to subvert institutions of their part." Robson's pleading had no effect. The government remained firm in its policy that the guilty must be punished. In fact, Prime Minister Borden stated in Parliament that "members of the civil service cannot be permitted to disregard their public duties." The government would not reinstate those employees who had disregarded the request to return to work.

With their trial quickly approaching, the accused men were anxious to retain the best possible lawyer to present their defence. The defendants tried to hire R.A. Bonnar, the best-known criminal lawyer in Western Canada, but he declined. They were apprehensive about other Winnipeg lawyers. Bill Pritchard knew a lawyer in Vancouver by the name of Wallace W. Lefeaux, a member of the Socialist Party of Canada. Lefeaux practised law with J. Edward Bird, a modest general practitioner who had some speaking ability. The two maintained a long friendship. Bird had attended some socialist meetings, but his interest lay more in his law office than in politics. Lefeaux remained a deeply committed socialist. Bird and his partners had added a new member to their firm in 1919. He was Robert Cassidy, an older man who was also a member of the Manitoba Bar. Cassidy had recently received a lot of publicity fighting an immigration case for a Hindu association in British Columbia.

Bill Pritchard made the recommendation and an arrangement was made to bring the three lawyers – Lefeaux, Bird, and Cassidy – to Manitoba to join McMurray as the defence counsel for the accused men. Robert Cassidy was to be the leader.

Alfred Andrews was also putting together his team of prosecutors and picked talented lawyers to work with him. The subsequent legal careers of the lawyers he chose attest to their quality. E.K. Williams worked behind the scenes. In later years, this brilliant and diligent lawyer was widely known for his legal tomes and his encyclopaedic judgements as Chief Justice of the Manitoba Court of King's Bench. Isaac Pitblado and James Bowes Coyne also joined the team, as did Travers Sweatman, a good trial lawyer who conducted major litigation in subsequent years. All five men – Andrews, Williams, Pitblado, Coyne, and Sweatman – devoted themselves to the preparation of these trials. These were bright, able lawyers. They brought their talents and experience as members of the private bar to the side of the Crown. The prosecution was prepared to proceed and determined to convict.