

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

the railways to keep going during the strike were retained. The *Winnipeg Telegram* reported that labour union radicals would not be reinstated: "They should be permanently blacklisted. They should be made to wander about." The loss of jobs was a calamity in many homes. Many men out looking for employment wondered if they had been blacklisted.

At first, Premier Norris denied that the provincial government had appointed a commission to investigate the cause of the strike or to investigate the unemployment problem: "The reinstatement of all workers is not a matter for the government, nor for any government commission and has not been considered." Within a few days, he recanted this statement and asked Justice H.A. Robson to conduct what became known as "The Robson Commission." Its purpose was to "enquire into and report upon the causes and effects of the general strike which recently existed in the City of Winnipeg for a period of six weeks, including the methods of calling and carrying on such a strike." The commissioner was to begin the hearings in July 1919.

Following the Winnipeg General Strike, the most significant activity in Winnipeg was taking place in a courtroom. Ten of the strike leaders – Ivens, Russell, Bray, Armstrong, Johns, Queen, Pritchard, Heaps, Dixon, and Woodsworth – now faced criminal charges. Five more men – Verenchuk, Choppelrei, Almazoff, Charitinoff, and Blumenberg – faced deportation hearings.

The Defence Committee, formed to raise funds to finance the legal defence of the arrested striker leaders, was active in Winnipeg and soon took the cause nation-wide. Many of the accused strike leaders, including Dixon and Woodsworth, travelled through Western and Eastern Canada attending fundraising meetings. The money raised was to go into a defence fund to be used at the upcoming trials. As a gimmick, legal looking bonds were printed in several denominations and sold to convey the idea that a purchaser was helping to invest in a better future for workers. When the defendants spoke, they protested against the amendment to the *Immigration Act*, denouncing it as a dangerous alteration of the principle of trial by jury. They went from one end of the country to the other, speaking about the strike and subsequent events. Their account of the ruthless actions of the government and the injustice of the arrests attracted thousands of sympathisers and precipitated a steady flow of money into the coffers of the Defence Committee.

The Defence Committee sent Fred Tipping, former president of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, to Ottawa in late June to speak to Justice Minister Meighen. Meighen told Tipping that the strike had been incited by Bolsheviks and was an attempt to establish a Soviet form of government, but Tipping dismissed this assertion as nonsense: "Let the government grant merely one request – the right to collective bargaining.

You'll see that I am right." Before the meeting ended, the minister revealed that the government had already decided that the strike leaders would receive jury trials.

In its search for more evidence, agents of the Canadian government conducted raids from coast to coast during the last week of June and the first week of July. The scope of the seizures was enormous and mountains of evidence were shipped to Winnipeg to be used against the strike leaders. Andrews, speaking on behalf of the Department of Justice, told a reporter, "In view of the tons of literature seized, we feel confident of securing a conviction of the men accused." Despite this claim, the Crown relied on some questionable tactics to make their case.

One of the most troubling examples of misconduct involved Russian-born Mike Verenchuk, who had been arrested without a warrant. Upon realising that he could not deport Verenchuk, Andrews asked Magistrate Sir John Macdonald to permit a different course of action:

Your Worship, the counsel for the Crown finds it has not sufficient evidence to proceed with the charges against this man under the *Criminal Code* and being a naturalised British subject, we cannot deal with him under the amended *Immigration Act*. But we have great reason to doubt his sanity and propose to hand him over to the military authorities to take care of him.

The men in the courtroom were astonished. They had been with Verenchuk in the penitentiary and, although he spoke little English, he was as sane as Andrews or any of them. The defence demanded that Verenchuk be released, but Andrews opposed the move. This prompted the defence to demand a psychiatric examination. One week later, Verenchuk was declared sane and released.

Bill Ivens was incensed with the proceedings and set out his view in the *Western Labor News*:

Is Andrews Guilty? If A.J. Andrews imprisons a man for three weeks, fails to state the charge under which he is arrested, refuses bail, and then dismisses the man without a charge being laid, is he a fit and proper person to be a Deputy Minister of Justice? If A.J. Andrews seeks to terrorise an innocent man, raid his house at midnight, rush him to the penitentiary [...] refuses him bail, threatens him with deportation, suggests to Court doubt of man's sanity – have him examined by inquisitorial doctors time after time – and then be compelled to drop the case for lack of evidence to even begin a prosecution, is he worthy of a place on the legal bar?

Ivens declared the proceedings against Verenchuk to be "a great blow to British justice" and insisted that Verenchuk be entitled to damages.

After leaving court, Magistrate Macdonald wrote to Justice Minister Meighen: "I must also congratulate you on the way you are dealing with the

men at the head of the movement intended to introduce government framed on the Russian model into Canada.” He also expressed the hope that:

these dangerous conspirators [are] sent out of the country where, God knows, they have done enough harm already [...] We have a very bad and dangerous element in the good city of Winnipeg [...] coming as these men do from countries where such a thing as freedom is unknown, they do not understand generous treatment and consider it is only extended to them because the government is afraid of them [...] Fear is the only agency that can be successfully employed to keep them within the law, and I have no doubt that if the Dominion government persists in the course that it is now adopting, the foreign element here will soon be as gentle and as easily controlled as a lot of sheep.

This is particularly alarming considering a fair system of justice requires a judge to remain impartial. It would have been troubling enough for Magistrate Macdonald to express his views to a friend or colleague, but for him to write to the Minister of Justice is totally improper. This impropriety, unfortunately, would not be the last in the proceedings against the accused men.

In late June and early July, the first Boards of Inquiry established in Western Canada sat to hear the deportation cases against Oscar Choppelrei, Matthew Charitinoff, Moses Almazoff, and Samuel Blumenberg. All were Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe. Andrews was the counsel representing the Immigration Department. T.J. Murray, Marcus Hyman, and E.J. McMurray were counsel for the defence.

The special Immigration Board hearings opened in Winnipeg before a harsh board. It consisted of two officers – both employed by the Immigration Department and appointed by the Immigration Minister – with Magistrate R.M. Noble sitting as chairman. The accused men were charged with being undesirables under the *Immigration Act* and their deportation was being sought. Of particular interest is the fact that the charges bore a date nine days after their actual arrests.

The hearings are memorable for a haunting plea made by defence counsel Marcus Hyman:

I had a sleepless night last night. I lay thinking. Am I insane? Is this a nightmare? Is this a delusion I am labouring under, that I have to meet trifling, ridiculous charges of this kind under the British Empire and the British flag? Are we going to have it stand in that way, that the first proceedings we have in this City under the amended Act can show the greatest horrors that can be conceived under British law will be perpetrated here?

Despite its truth and eloquence, his statements bore little effect on the outcome.

Oscar Choppelrei was a musician born in San Francisco, who immigrated to Canada in March 1918. He served in the Canadian Army in the last

months of the war. He was deported to the United States on September 25, 1919. Samuel Blumenberg was ordered deported on the grounds of misrepresentation on entry into Canada. He had told immigration officials that he was an American citizen when, in fact, he was a Romanian national. Matthew Charitinoff was ordered deported, but successfully appealed to Ottawa for a reversal of the order. The case against Moses Almazoff was dismissed.

Another controversial proceeding took place prior to the trials of the strike leaders. The inquest into the death of Mike Sokolowski, a shooting victim of the June 21 riot, opened before the coroner, Dr. George, in police court on July 7. Acting for the Crown, Hugh Phillips, K.C. and R.B. Graham examined thirteen witnesses. J.B. Coyne, K.C. represented the RNWMP.

The RNWMP commanding officers, on scene during the riot, swore that they had instructed their men to use every possible means to prevent violence. They testified that the Mounted Police were told not to use their batons unless they were forced to protect their horses or themselves. They explained that while handling a crowd, officers are not permitted to shoot to kill. Instead, if gunfire is deemed necessary, they are always instructed to fire low. In this case, the officers insisted that the men had been instructed to fire the first shots in the air during the riot. Moreover, the officers swore that the RNWMP had not fired any shots while they were on Main Street. Rather, they had used their revolvers only as they swung past City Hall after clearing the corner of Main and William. Nearly all the witnesses who testified said that they heard shots fired before the police had even drawn their revolvers. In fact, one of the witnesses swore that he had actually seen a man with a revolver in his hand standing in the window of a hotel on Main Street and shooting in the direction of the Mounted Police. In his evidence, Dr. Gordon Bell stated that Sokolowski had been struck an inch and half below the left breast, the bullet leaving the body through the back. In the end, there was no evidence to prove that the fatal shot had been fired by the RNWMP.

After an hour and a half of deliberation, the jury brought in its verdict. The foreman of the coroner's jury announced that Mike Sokolowski had met his death by being shot through the heart by some person unknown. The person who killed him has never been discovered.
