Activity 2: Written Primary Sources Lesson: Bloody Sunday

**SOURCE #1: Excerpt from “The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest E. Winch and His Times”, by Dorothy G. Steeves (1960):**

Petitions to the federal and provincial governments…were fruitless. After a month of mass meetings, tin-canning and begging for food about 1,200 men decided to bring their plight to the attention of the public in a novel way. They marched into the Georgia Hotel, the Art Gallery and the Post Office in orderly fashion, sat down and stayed there. It was the famous Sit-Down Strike of the unemployed in Vancouver. After a few days they were persuaded to move out of the Georgia Hotel, by the temporary payment of $500 in relief, but they stayed in the other buildings for four weeks. Most Vancouverites were intrigued and sympathetic. Women took in food for them and the Mother’s Council which had 17 women’s organizations as affiliates supplied many needs. The Post Office sit-downers edited an amusing little gazette which was printed for them by friends and handed out to the public. It was good propaganda. At the masthead it stated:

*“This paper is not published or paid for by the department of Labor or the Government of British Columbia.”*

The editorials publicized the situation of the men and asked for a comprehensive works program. The humorous column “Post Office Flashes” raised much merriment:

*“Many works of art may be viewed when the sailors remove their shirts”*

*“Sit-downers would prefer to raise callouses on their hands”*

*“The atmosphere has been cleared up considerable with the arrival of a shipment of new socks”*

*“The commissar department is featuring the Pattullo sandwich this week. Two slices of bread jammed together”*

And so on…It was good fun but it couldn’t last. The Post Office did a roaring business and a lot of people visited the Art Gallery, but it wasn’t the paintings they came to see. The officials at both buildings were on excellent terms with the boys. People brought in radios, blankets and books. Lines of washing were strung up and it was all very cozy.

The authorities were angry, because they felt outwitted. They couldn’t arrest the men, because no crimes had been committed, as Police Chief Foster pointed out. So they planned secretly for a police raid and eviction by force. At 5a.m. on Sunday, June 19th (1938), police cars arrived at the Art Gallery and Post Office, equipped with tear gas bombs. The men were told they had twenty minutes to get out. Harold Winch was at the Art Gallery, as he had been tipped off and had rushed to the scene. He implored the strikers to come out quietly and not to damage the works of art. After the bombs were thrown they did disperse without any trouble, although some were badly affected by the gas. It was a different story at the Post Office where all the windows on the main floor were smashed after the gas was released and the men came stumbling out to be precipitated into a scene of frightful violence and fighting, one of the worst ever witnessed in the city. The jobless battled with their fists and improvised clubs against the police whose blows from quirts and batons rained down unmercifully. There were severe casualties on both sides. The strike leader, Steve Brodie, was almost battered to death, before he was rescued by an RCMP sergeant. The men, maddened by the gas attack and the beatings, streamed down Cordova and Hastings streets pursued by the police, and broke hundreds of plate glass windows in the stores. Finally they found refuge in the Ukrainian Labor Hall where volunteers fed them and bound their wounds.

At an emergency meeting of the CCF executive and the MLAs the manner in which the eviction was carried out was called “ghastly, inhuman and brutal”. The difference in attitude and behavior between the city police under Chief Foster and the RCMP who were in charge of the Post Office eviction was stressed. The CCF statement demanded the resignation of the whole Legislature, because the conduct of the eviction was “a grave reflection upon the intelligence and integrity of every member of the House.”

The excitement was not finished for that day. After a mass meeting at the Powell Street grounds a crowd of 2,000 converged on the police station to demand the release of the arrested men, 22 in number. Again, Harold Winch showed his good sense, when he managed to climb up on a car in the midst of the shouting mob and urged people to go home: “We’ve had one riot this morning – we don’t want another one”, he said. At midnight he was at the Victoria boat seeing a delegation of the unemployed off to see the cabinet.

Next day, however, Mr. Pattullo was in town and met leaders of the Relief Project Workers’ Union, CCF MLAs and a group of pastors from city churches. But nobody could be as adamant as Duff Pattullo once he had made up his mind. He refused all pleas for emergency food rations and further action. It was up to Ottawa, he thought. To the ministers he said: “There comes a time when too much sympathy can be shown the men. That time had come in Vancouver”.

Twenty minutes after it had started the meeting adjourned without progress. Mayor Miller of Vancouver and the Provincial Minister of Labor accused communists and trouble-makers of fomenting the riot. (p.117-118)

**SOURCE #2:Newspaper Editorial: (Excerpt): Vancouver Province, June 20, 1938**

“But the strikers can by no means be condemned alone. They were foolish and ill-advised. They may even have yielded to agitators as Premier Pattullo suggests. But who zealously prepared the ground in which the seeds of the agitators took root? Who but the two responsible governments—the one in Ottawa and the one in Victoria, which have, for months now, keep the question of unemployment shuttling back and forth between the two capitals.

The record is about as bad as it could be. The two governments have been faithless to the unemployed, faithless to the cause of good government in Canada. The Federal Government tried to persuade the men that there would be work for them if they would only leave British Columbia; the Provincial Government offered to assist them on their way. But neither government thought it worthwhile to suggest to the men where work was to be found. And the men, not unnaturally, thought they were being hoaxed, and refused to move…”

**SOURCE #3: Steve Brodie’s Personal Account: Steve Brodie, “Bloody Sunday,”** in Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1985), p. 90-91 (fn 2).

“A proclamation was read, ordering us to depart to our homes as we were now declared to be an unlawful assembly. Failure to depart would mean forcible eviction. I immediately reported to Major Hill [the commanding RCMP officer] that we were even more anxious to avoid damage to property and to ourselves than he was, so being now declared unlawful, we placed ourselves under arrest. To be certain that there could be no misunderstanding, I asked the men if they now willingly submitted to arrest. They shook the building with a loud “yes.” I turned to Hill and said, “Sir, we are now your prisoners.” He replied, “I have no orders about arrest,” whereupon I gave him a short lecture on the law, reminding him that being only a policeman, he had no legal right to punish. That, I assured him, was the function of our courts, and asked again that he do his lawful duty, and place us under arrest. I offered to march with the men to any place he would designate where we would await trial by magistrate. When he refused, I asked the same of City Police Inspector Grundy. His only answer was, “We are here to keep you moving when you hit the street. There will be no arrests.”

**SOURCE #4:Maurice Rush’s Personal Account: Steve Brodie, “Bloody Sunday,”** in Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1985), p. 106-107

“The scene at the Ukrainian Hall was one that I will never forget. The grass outside and every available bit of space inside were covered with injured and gassed men. Blankets and bandages, collected earlier for medical aid for China, were rushed to the hall. Members of the YCL and other organizations tended to the wounded and set up a kitchen to feed the men”