**Appendix 1: Backgrounder Lesson: Bloody Sunday**

**BLOODY SUNDAY, 1938: “When The People Occupy In Protest”** **By Gavin Hainsworth**

In 1935, after the On-to-Ottawa trek, the unpopular Conservative government of **R.B. Bennett (1930-35)** lost the election to the liberals under **William Lyon Mackenzie King** **(1921-26, 1935-48).** King had won the election in part due to the economic fears and uncertainties of the Great Depression— and in fact used the slogan “King, or Chaos” in the election. Once elected, he honored his election promise of closing the relief camps that had fueled the On-to-Ottawa trek. In their stead, in 1936, Prime Minister King convinced the provinces to co-fund a workers’ farm placement program, wherein unemployed workers of both genders would be placed on farms as workers, and provided accommodation. However, British Columbia did not have enough farms for the unemployed, and therefore something similar was created through forestry camps for the workers. The Premier of B.C. at this time was **Thomas Dufferin (Duff) Pattullo (1933-41)**, also a liberal, shared King’s philosophy of extending work and relief to the unemployed that had not been offered by the previous conservative government of **Simon Fraser Tolmie (1928-33).**

By 1938, though, these programs were both unpopular with the people involved, and unpopular with the governments funding them. They seemed little more than a rebranded version of what went before.

In April, 1938, Pattullo announced that the province would no longer fund the placement plan; moreover, he cut all relief for any people in BC who were not from there. The result was a sudden increase in homeless men on Vancouver’s streets again, and a new round of organizing by unions and other worker organizations determined to force the government to offer more support. Two additional forces in this process were :

* **Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Party**, later to be renamed the New Democratic Party (NDP). The CCF aimed to alleviate the suffering that workers and farmers, the ill and old endure under capitalism through the creation of a Co-operative Commonwealth, which would entail economic co-operation, socialization of the economy and political reform.The Co-operative Commonwealth was defined as a "community freed from the domination of irresponsible financial and economic power in which all social means of production and distribution, including land, are socially owned and controlled either by voluntarily organized groups of producers and consumers or - in the case of major public services and utilities and such productive and distributive enterprises as can be conducted most efficiently when owned in common - by public corporations responsible to the people's elected representatives”
* **Communist Party of Canada**, although it was banned, it worked through groups such as the Workers Unity League, and the Relief Camp Workers’ Union. The CPC was the only party to make a systemic critique of the depression as a crisis of capitalism. It was also the first political party in Canada to call for the introduction of unemployment insurance; a national health insurance scheme; making education universally accessible; social and employment assistance to youth; labour legislation including health and safety regulations, regulation of the working day and holidays, as well as a minimum wage for women and youth.

The Relief Camp Workers and the National Unemployed Workers Association played significant roles in protest marches and demonstrations and campaigns such as the On-to-Ottawa trek.

Since the Trek, the Communist party had slowly shifted in a new direction, in large part because of the influence of Moscow. The Soviet Union had decided, as Nazi Germany expanded its influence in Europe, that it was necessary to move Communist parties around the world to a more populist, anti-Fascist footing.

For Canadian Communists, this meant joining the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, but also building more widely popular protest movements in the vein of the Trek.

While the Trek had been a somewhat spontaneous event, Premier Pattullo’s cuts were an opportunity to try to craft the same sort of popular movement out of a new political opportunity.

For the CCF, the unemployment crisis was an opportunity to elect its candidates to the BC Legislature as MLAs, and to potentially form government in British Columbia by breaking through past the conservatives and liberals. They had won 7 out of 48 seats in the 1937 election. One was **Harold Winch (1933-52),** who would become leader of the BC CCF in 1938, serving as such until 1953.

The tactic selected by Unemployed Workers Association and the Relief Camp Workers were a Sit-Down Strike and Occupation. In a **Sit-Down Strike** the people simply sit-down, and refuse to move or to work. It had been used in the factories previously, but not as a form of civil protest. The planners chose to adapt this form of civil protest by extending it to **Occupation**, where protesters enter a building and refuse to leave until their demands are met. In total 1200 unemployed men began this protest on May 20, 1938.

They chose to occupy three sites chosen for the symbolic importance:

* 200 occupied the **Hotel Georgia**, representing capital:
* 300 occupied the **Art Gallery**, (former Art Gallery) representing the city and province;
* and 700 occupied the **Post Office** (now the Sinclair Centre), representing the Federal Government