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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FRANK FULLER

With this issue of *Labour History* we begin our 3rd year as a P.S.A. We appear to have made our mark on the British Columbian and Canadian scenes as a unique and distinctive kind of association in the field of education.

It is from this vantage point we are going back in these pages to the decade of the Great Depression, 1929 - 1939. I lived through this period as a young man, as did Morris Carrell and Syd Thompson, who describe their experiences in this issue.

Because this decade is a part of me, I would like to make some personal observations which may be relevant. Depressions are not just the unique experiences of those who lived through the 1930s. In every generation for the past 200 years, there are those who have borne the brunt of massive unemployment: personal disorganization and misery. The young people now leaving our classrooms are no exception.

For decades working people have passed on their Depression experiences through the family structure to their children. This past summer I had a nostalgic reunion with my spry and lively 86 year old uncle, who related to me the hard times experienced by his and my mother's generation.

Uncle Jim told me of working in the coal mines in southern Colorado and on the green chain in the sawmills of East Texas and Arkansas prior to 1915. In between jobs he "hopped" freights and toured the West in "side-door Pullmans," searching for work. His experiences were almost identical to mine twenty years later. We both worked long hours for a meagre wage - and for short periods. When we were layed off we rode the "rods", looking for work. We often bummed meals from door to door, or went hungry. We both learned to survive.

Frank Fuller, Agricultural Field Worker, California, 1934.

He saw the United Mine Workers burst forth among the miners in 1914, and helped my mother bury her first husband who was killed in the great miners' strike of that same year. I saw the beginning of the union among agriculture workers in 1934. Both of us saw the end of our hard times for a while - he in 1917, and I in 1940 when we went into the army.

This kind of experience is common to thousands of families in B.C. and has remained a kind of folk history, largely ignored, until recently, by scholars and historians. For this reason it has seldom entered the classroom.

The invention of the tape recorder and the development of oral history techniques have allowed both teachers and students to explore an untold history. Interviews with old timers, photographs, newspapers, diaries and letters are uncovering the lives and struggles of working people.

We hope this issue will make a contribution to this new approach for both students and teachers.

mailBox

All correspondence to the editor should be addressed to: Labour History, c/o The B.C. Teachers' Federation. Letters must be signed; however, names are withheld upon request.

I am very impressed with the first three productions of the Labour History PSA and wonder if it is possible to subscribe for 31 copies of each future issue as well as a set of 31 each of the three back issues.

I would very much like to distribute these periodicals to every member of our servicing staff. I have forwarded my application for membership in the PSA to the BCTF and would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere congratulations to your group on behalf of the BCGEU... I am relieved to find that the Labour History PSA shares almost unanimously, all the concerns of those of us working in labour education in the trade union movement.

R.G. Moore, Education Officer
B.C. Government Employees' Union
Burnaby, B.C.

* * *

My apologies for not communicating with you sooner. However, between our Convention and the herring fishery, combined with Combines attacks ad nauseum, our Executive never got around to expressing our appreciation for the work you have been doing on Labour History project, in particular the edition on the Fishing Industry.

We have found this particular edition useful in our Union's own education work, as the material is presented in a most accurate, if not thought-provoking, way.

Congratulations and keep up the fine work.

Fraternally,

George Hewison, Secretary-Treasurer
United Fisherman & Allied Workers' Union

* * *

I had an opportunity to briefly glance at the third edition of your *Labour History* booklet yesterday. Our Museum is currently developing local history curriculum materials on a variety of subjects, including labour history, and most certainly could make use of these materials...

Sincerely,

Ron Denman, Co-ordinator
Museum Curriculum Development Program,
Museum of Northern B.C., Pr. Rupert

* * *

I would like to commend the Labour History PSA for the excellent newsletter it is publishing. The most recent issue contained some very useful articles, book reviews, lesson plans and historical information on trade unions in B.C.

You may be interested in knowing that much interest is being expressed in this newsletter by growing numbers of teachers in B.C. I have received several calls about the newsletter and I am asked for information about it at workshops throughout B.C. For some time teachers have been searching for teaching materials on the labour movement in B.C. They now feel they have access to such material.

Yours truly,

Wes Knapp, Professional Development
B.C. Teachers' Federation

* * *

Thank you for *Labour History*. It is immensely popular here in the East. So popular, in fact, it lasted on my desk all of 15 minutes before someone borrowed it. But not before I made sure I had my name engraved on the front cover. We are showing it to numbers of people who are involved in labour history and teaching in the hopes that they may start something similar. I am constantly fascinated by the little bits and pieces you come up with and the stories from those actually involved in the events.

Clare Booker, Assistant Dir. of Education
Canadian Labour Congress, Ottawa

THE HUNGRY '30s

COLLEEN
BOSTWICK

Being unemployed is as common an experience among working people as working itself. In a working life of 30 - 50 years, the average person will face unemployment at least once - probably more. This often has nothing to do with a personal decision. Larger forces pull people in, and push people out.

In an unplanned economy mass unemployment (as during the Great Depression) is a re-curring phenomenon. In the Canadian experience these predictable crises have been mis-takenly treated as unusual, and their 'solutions' left to the private decisions of those with economic power. The burden of "labour-saving devices," of over-production, of "down-swings in the business cycle" has been borne by those who have the least participation in directing the economy. On the charts and graphs, the lines reach further extremities of high and low. There are reasons for it, and there are consequences.

The Great Depression of the 1930s hit North America with surprising severity. In Canada each region, community and individual had their own particular experiences. But the common thread is the poverty, the continual unemployment, the hardships - and these grind slowly. It was a long decade.

In this issue of *Labour History* we have chosen to look at the Depression years in B.C. Not all aspects of the Depression have been covered, but it is to be hoped that teachers and students will undertake to further study this period of our history, for there are many, many things to learn.

* * *

In the 1920s B.C.'s economy was booming. There was intensive capital investment from Britain and America. Vancouver was becoming a distributing base for Western Canada and provided access to world markets. The resource industries were expanding rapidly and the manufacturing sector was diversifying. Wages were the highest per capita in the country. Immigration was encouraged. Vancouver became the Dominion's third largest city.

The stock market crash of October, 1929 had an immediate impact on B.C.'s economy. Production declined rapidly and there was a staggering increase in unemployment. Logging, fishing and mining production virtually collapsed, and B.C.'s dependency on foreign invest-ment and world markets took a heavy toll. Lumber, used in the booming construction indus-try, was cut back after curtailment in the building trades. Lumber exports to the U.S. were cut back 70%; newsprint prices fell by 40%. Pulp and paper operated at 53% capacity. The record salmon run of 1930 could not be marketed and the canned fish stayed on the shelves. Fishermen received 45% less for their catch in 1931 than they had in 1929. Metal and mineral prices fell sharply. Copper exports dropped by 60%, lead by 83%

By June, 1931 25,000 men and women were unemployed in Vancouver. In September, 35,000 people registered for relief assistance in B.C. - in six months that figure zoomed to 70,000. By mid-1931, B.C. had the highest percentage of unemployed in Canada, with 40% out of work in fishing, lumber and construction in the peak season, and 40% - 60% in mining.

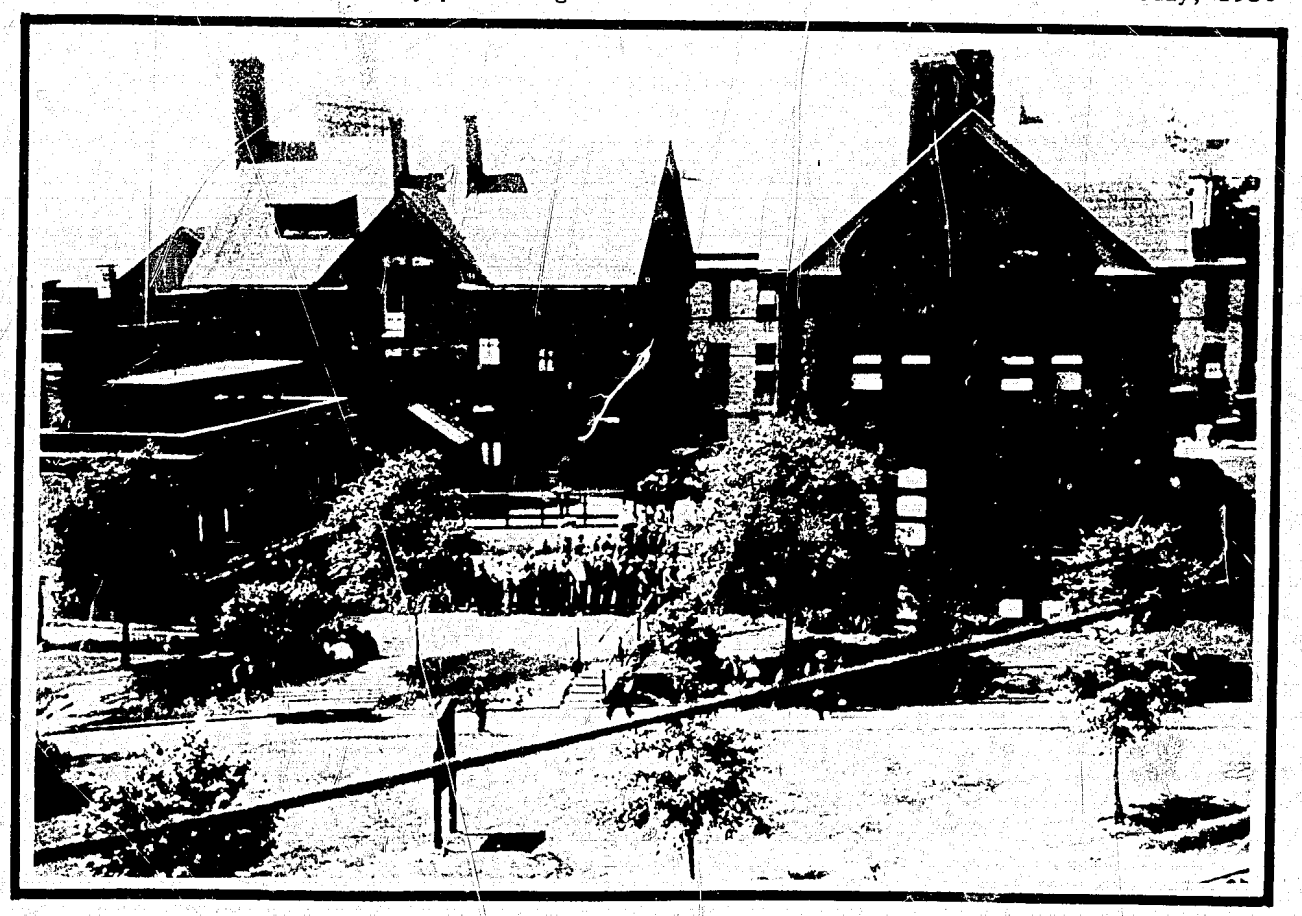
Workers who were able to keep their jobs also felt the severity of the Depression. By 1933 the per capita income in B.C. had fallen to 47% of the 1929 level. Working condi-tions detoriated. The long line-ups of men and women looking for work discouraged employ-ees from pressing for better wages and working conditions. While organized workers fared somewhat better than the unorganized, job security and regular increases were out the window.

B.C. was affected by conditions elsewhere in Canada, too. More transients arrived in B.C. during the '30s than to any other province, including Ontario. These "inter-provincial transients," as they were called, accounted for one-third of the relief camp population, and approximately 12% of relief recipients. Some were pushed westward as the Prairies simply dried up and blew away. Others were attracted to B.C.'s warmer climate and relatively 'liberal' relief benefits. Many just drifted in aimlessly, looking for a day's work, a meal, a place to stay.

Over 68% of the inter-provincial transients were single men and they competed for scarce jobs. Employers preferred hiring local residents and married men. Municipal public works projects made no provisions for transients, especially those with no dependents. These men usually ended up in the larger municipalities: the unemployed converged on Vancouver.

Providing for the "have-nots" had been traditionally the responsibility of local and municipal governments in Canada. Legally, under the constitution, relief was the responsibility of each provincial government. Unemployment had always been considered a regional problem, or one peculiar to certain industries. Only during the 1921-22 depression had governments recognized the inadequacy of this approach. The Federal government had been pushed into providing emergency assistance according to a cost-sharing formula. Ottawa provided one-third of the funds for both relief projects and direct relief. But, the administration and responsibility remained within municipal or provincial jurisdiction.

While the 1921-22 experience did not lead to any constitutional shift of responsibility, it did serve as a precedent. In 1930 the municipalities, faced with a much more serious crisis, went to MacKenzie King and requested aid. But, King was not convinced that unemployment was a problem. His Conservative opponent, R.B. Bennett, was able to capitalize on King's indifference by promising a renewal of the earlier measures. In July, 1930



Civic Relief Office, July, 1932. Corner of Cambie & Pender (old hospital). Courtesy Vancouver City Archives.

the Conservatives won the Federal election and Bennett quickly set aside $20 million and renewed the cost-sharing scheme. Less than a year later, it was clear this was far from what was needed.

A second emergency measure was introduced in 1931. Again this was treated as a temporary measure in the face of chronic unemployment. No specific sum was set aside and the measure was renewed each year until 1934. Though Ottawa's share of relief costs grew from 22% in 1930 to 54% in 1937, the responsibility for the unemployed and destitute was never legally changed from provincial jurisdiction during the Depression.

During the entire "Hungry Thirties" this responsibility was bounced back and forth among the three levels of government: the municipalities were unable to bear the burden of relief and many cities were forced to delcare bankruptcy; the government of B.C. (under Tolmie and later Patullo) demanded That Ottawa assume the entire responsibility for both financing and administering relief. Unemployment was a national, not a regional, problem -- therefore the solution must come from the national government. Ottawa did as little as possible, following timid fiscal policies during the entire Depression decade. *

Even when money was allocated for relief there were sharp conflicts over how it should be spent. Premier Tolmie's 1931 program called for employing men rather than providing a dole. The federal funds were used to establish 237 work camps for 11,000 men. The Bennett government attacked this program as simply providing jobs for freeloaders at excessively high wages. The B.C. government was charged with corruption and maladministration in dispensing funds. As a result, the number of camps was reduced to 98, 6,000 men were kicked out and the wages reduced from $2 a day to $7.50 a month. "Work" camps had become "relief" camps.

In 1932 the camps were placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Defence (DND). On 19 hours notice from Bennett, General A.G.L. McNaughton devised a national system of work relief camps. Under this system all single, homeless and unemployed men would be "kept" in "such physical and mental health that they would be re-employable when economic conditions improved." The administration and finance of the camps remained in Federal hands until 1936. They were isolated from the rest of society, the men were housed in tarpaper shacks and given 20 cents a day for every day worked.

"...why should there be any more of that foolish and futile process of tossing the ball about this problem, back and forth between Ottawa and the provincial capitols? The whole problem of unemployment is one problem; ...no authority less than the nation itself is fitted to cope with it."

Vancouver Province, August 7, 1932

"In administration of relief camps, your government is acting for yourselves and not for the provinces. Responsibility rests with your government to justify its own administration in relief camps."

Telegram, Patullo to Bennett January 3, 1935.

"It is obviously the duty of the municipalities to seek any assistance required from their provincial authorities, because, as you are well aware, a municipality is a creation of the province."

R.B. Bennett, quoted in the Vancouver Sun, May 21, 1935.

Quotations from Lane, *op. cit.*

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* The tensions between Provincial and Federal governments eventually culminated in the Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations in 1937. The final report, published in 1940, revealed information about Canada never before known and was often sharply critical of the federal government's policies (both under Bennett and MacKenzie King) which tended, frequently, to aggravate regional disparities. The Report recommended substantial changes in federal-provincial relations, but there were, for the most part, shelved.

Often the main concern of the Federal government was not the fact that thousands of people in Canada were hungry, homeless and destitute, but rather that the single unemployed in particular constituted a "potential menace." The response of the Bennett government was to isolate and "occupy" as many of these men as possible until such time as the economy improved and the source of discontent therefore eliminated.

"Keeping the jobless occupied" did not mean creating work and wages, but rather containing them in some convenient and inexpensive manner. The relief camp system was the approach chosen. Yet, while many unemployed young people were growing up to become unemployable rubbies, Ottawa had spent more money from 1930-34 in meeting the debts of the C.N.R. than it had on relief provisions and relief camps during the same period. And much of that had gone to bondholders.

"You've got to take care of the have-nots,
or they'll rise up against you."
-Percy Ross, millionaire
Newsweek, Sept. 18, 1978

The Depression changed peoples' lives, for better or for worse. Most people emerged from the decade with their own memories of poverty and hardship, of individual struggles for survival. Many people did not survive, and in every town and city throughout B.C. there is evidence of this.

However, it wasn't poverty which was new to Canadians. In 1929 it is estimated that half of the people in Canada were living at ar near the poverty level. In 1930, before the full impact of the Crash was felt, 60% of the male workers and 82% of the female workers earned less than $1,000 - far short of the minimum needed for an average family to survive. As Michiel Horn put it, "For most people the twenties did not roar."

The adverse conditions imposed by economic depression led many people to question, on moral or political grounds, the ambivalence of business and the "sit tight" policies of government. Ultimately, this questioning led to demands for immediate and long-term solutions. Not everyone was involved in organized struggles - far from it - but, those men and women who did take part deserve the highest credit and respect.

The organizations which emerged during the Hungry Thirties were often a direct response to very immediate conditions. The first known unemployed organization was the Vancouver Unemployed Workers' Assn., established under the auspices of the Workers' Unity League in December, 1929. A second organization, the Single Unemployed Workers' Assn. was formed after single men were segregated from the married unemployed in the dispensation of relief benefits.

Under D.N.D. jurisdiction, any organization of the men in the camps was illegal, and representative committees to communicate problems and grievances to the authorities were prohibited. This was felt to be a violation of civil rights and free speech as far as the men were concerned. But, as far as the government were concerned: "The Department (of National Defence) will not countenance any steps to bring accusations before the tribunal of public opinion, either by speeches, or letters inserted in the newspapers, by men actively employed in relief work. Such a proceeding is a glaring violation of the rules and shows a contempt for properly constituted authority" (Colonol Spry, Director of Organizational and Personnel Services, D.N.D.). Later this regulation was amended to allow individual, but not collective, complaints. Group petitions, organized protests or representations of any kind were strictly forbidden.

The combination of relief as opposed to work and wages, the isolation and restrictive conditions of the camps, the denial of basic civil rights to relief camp workers, all gave rise to the formation, by the W.U.L., of the Relief Camp Workers' Union in the winter of 1932-33. The objective of this organization was to organize all the men in the camps, and to lead the struggle for a decent living standard. In its constitution, the RCWU adopted the principles of trade unionism "and the democratic decisions of the membership to

forward our policy of struggle, and if need be, to use the form of strike if so decided." Further, the RCWU vowed to support all workers' stuggles for unemployment insurance, pensions and workers' compensation. The Relief Camp Workers' Union was to lead many of the struggles of the unemployed, most notably the On-To-Ottawa Trek in 1935.

* * *

One purpose of looking closely at the Depression years is to understand what happened to people and how people sought to find solutions to the problems which so adversely affected their lives. Many people don't know that unemployment insurance, minimum wages and hours of work, Old Age Pensions, workers' compensation are all the result of the efforts of thousands of Canadians who struggled during the Depression. It is not widely known that because of the Depression, Canadians are very sensitive to youth unemployment. The consequences of a whole generation of young people, unemployed for as many as 15 years by the end of W.W. II, caused concern even among the most detached. A young man who, in 1930, was 18 years old, could conceivably have been unemployed until 1945 when he turned 33. A decade of depression and a war -- in history they occupy a short space, but in the lives of men and women they were long, long years.

The struggle of people to find and implement solutions is implied or explicit in every aspect of the Depression. The reforms which came about as a result have given us more protection than they themselves were ever able to enjoy even in the worst years of the most severe depression our country has ever known. These struggles were not exclusively against unemployment and poverty either. There were political struggels against fascism, trade union struggles to organize, and to protect and extend the rights of workers under the most adverse conditions.

Economic depressions have not been eliminated, and studying the 1930s will not 'teach' us how to solve that problem. But, it is right to ask, "what have we learned?" We can look back at the decade and measure progress in the material gains we have made since then, and become discouraged because they appear so easily eroded. We can idealize the struggles and then wonder where the spirit and the fire have disappeared - and become cynical when confronted with today's "indifference." Or, we can look back and compare the policies of governments then and now - and conclude that history only repeats itself over and over again. If these are our conclusions, then we haven't learned enough. ◆

R.C.W.U. marching in May Day Parade, 1935 on Pender near Cambie.

Photo courtesy Vancouver Public Library

This young Polish peasant
Enticed to Canada by a C.P.N.R. advertisement
Of a glorified western homestead,
Spent the best years of his life
And every cent of his savings
Trying to make a living from Candian soil.
Finally broken by the slump in wheat
He drifted to the city, spent six months in a lousy refuge,
Got involved in a 'Communist' demonstration
And is now being deported by the Canadian Government.

F.R. Scott, "An Anthology of Up-to-Date Canadian Poetry," Canadian Forum, XII (May, 1932.) p. 290, quoted in Lane, op. cit.

These letters are only two from among the thousands received by the Prime Minister's office during R.B. Bennett's term of office, 1930-35.

... I am the wife of a returned soldier who has served 4 years overseas under the Canadian army and I am a mother of 5 children. On the 6 of Jan., 1934 I took very sick as I was in a family way suffering from so many diseases I started to loose my eyesight. And which the Doctor told my husband it was through weakness. So finally on the 16 of Jan. when my baby Girl was born I was in real darkness I wasent able to see no one around my bed. And I stayed in bed 3 month without no treatment whatever because my husband was without work and which he has been for several years. So the first part of April I started to get up for the first time. On which I wasent able to see nothing with very little food in the house and 6 children it was very hard for me to get better so on the 11 of June my baby got a bad cold and she died...we had no money to get even a Doctor. So I half blind and losing a child made it worse for my health. So about the month of Aug. it was a Doctor in town so my husband brought him home to examine my eyes. So he told me that he could not do me nothing whatever as I have to go through an eye specialist. And which I have no money to preciede to the destination which it will be to Toronto or Ottawa so please have mercy on me as I'm only a young mother age 32 and the condition I am I cannot attend to my housework...

... Can you possibly help us as we are down and out. My husband his in very poor health & cannot work to keep me & my four children he his a Returned man, & sure did his bit in the great war from 1915 until 1919 & absolutely no good now, in fact no man will employ him because he cannot do a days work for a days pay, & in this town they give no Relief. Our rent is overdue & are expected to be put on the Road. We have no <u>food</u> in fact I had to go to a neighbour house to beg something to eat & some shoes for the kiddies to wear. Sir if you can possibly help us to get Direct Relief or get us the War Allowance which I have tried for & they turned it down. Something will have to be done quickly as my husband is getting desperate because he knows his wife & kiddies are starving when there is plenty in the land. I am not a <u>bum</u> & I hardly ever complain but this is terrible. We are Cons. & always have been & the Liberals will not help us but in my case it should have nothing to do with politics. It is a case of <u>starve</u> to <u>death</u> & <u>be quiet</u>. But this living on hardly anything has gone to far & my kids need food, clothes or it will be I will have to bundle my kiddies up and freight it to Ottawa with them...

◆◆◆

CAMP 200

MORRIS CARRELL

Morris Carrell teaches at Vancouver Tech. He graduated from high school into Camp 200 (Acadia Rd. and University Blvd.). This was his home from Dec., 1933 to June, 1935.

When I left Gr. 12 I quickly found that finding work was almost impossible. I had $25, my total savings, and decided to leave my home in the Fraser Valley and go to Vancouver. The collection of buildings, the stores stuffed with food, clothing, tools all suggested that everything a person could want or need was there in abundance. All I had to do was present myself. Well, I presented myself - ready, willing and able. But, thousands of older and more experienced people were ahead of me in an endless queue.

I didn't give up and run back home. I selected a cheap hotel, put myself on two meals a day and tried to make the $25 last as long as possible. But, now I experienced a new kind of pain - rejection - and one for which I had no defence.

My money dwindled even though I discovered the Wonder Lunch Cafe on Carrall and Cordova where I could buy a three course meal for 25 cents (soup, stew and pie). Then, when my bankruptcy was one day away, a kind lady told me I could go to Camp 200 near the University of B.C., if I agreed to join the Army or Navy. I thought that condition to be strange, but hunger overcame any objections.

When I arrived at Camp 200 on a Saturday morning, a hollow square of tarpaper shacks greeted my eyes. I soon found out that some 240 men, ages 18-60 lived here. I was issued clothing (surplus from WW I), and a straw mattress, three thin blankets (grey) and I was told to go to Hut No. 4. Soon there was a loud clinging sound, which I instantly recognized as a dinner bell. I was hungry, so I needed no second invitation. The food was plain, but then I was used to that.

The next day I was assigned to a work gang. We used picks, shovels and wheelbarrows to extend Chancellor Blvd. Progress was incredibly slow, but I soon found out that speed was not of the essence. This was only one way to get rid of unwanted men and to keep them out of trouble.

At first I was relieved, actually grateful, in finding food and shelter - and, oh, yes, the $5 a month in "wages." But soon a heavy depressed feeling began to set in. How long was this going to last? Where was I going? What was all this leading to?

There was an old lawyer in No. 4 with whom I began to converse, and a draftsmen, a little younger. I recognized that they understood far more than I and we discussed many things: should I go to the war in Spain which was raging then? Many were going! "No," they said. "There is a greater war coming and you won't want to miss that one."

There was restlessness in the air. One morning several police cars appeared in the camp and we learned that we could earn "big money" by breaking a strike on the waterfront in Vancouver. The thought nauseated me. They even offered police protection. A few went, but I did not.

I was in absolute despair in that relief camp. I knew an old friend of mine had retired in Kerrisdale, so I looked his name up in the phone book, called him, and he invited me to come and see him.

The next day at the camp I was called down to the office. I thought for sure I was in trouble for something, but it turned out to be a job offer. My old friend had somehow managed to get me a job with Jersey Farms at Broadway & Vine. It wasn't much money - $11 a week, and nine hours a day, six days a week.

When I heard that the Relief Camp Workers were going to Ottawa I was disappointed that I couldn't go - I just couldn't leave my job. When I heard what had happened at Regina, I was heart broken.

Cleanliness

In Point Grey Camp (200) rats have become a menace, more particularly in the bunk houses. It did not appear that adequate measures were being adopted to abate this nuisance...

MacDonald Commission, May 31, 1935

SUMMER OF '35

INTRODUCTION

In December, 1934 300 relief camp workers who had been blacklisted from various camps in the Fraser Valley, the Sechelt Peninsula and the Fraser Canyon congregated in Vancouver to call upon all camp workers to strike against the blacklist and camp conditions. In response, some 1200 men came out of the camps and into Vancouver.

Under pressure from municipal authorities, the province granted a week's relief to the men. But, the strike could not be sustained, and six days later the men voted to return. It was understood that the Patullo government would pressure the D.N.D. and the federal government to authorize a public inquiry into their complaints.

With no reponse from Ottawa, another strike was called on April 4, 1935. Tag Days were organized to raise money for the 1200 strikers; domenstrations were conducted to bring to the public's attention their demands; rallies were held at which thousands of Vancouver citizens voiced their support of the strikers' demands.

Mayor McGeer, under extreme pressure, granted relief subsidies on an almost day-to-day basis. By the end of May, he refused to extend further relief funds, nor would he grant licenses for Tag Days. It was clear the federal government was not prepared to respond in any serious way to the demands of the strikers.

On May 29 a vote was taken among the strikers and it was decided to go to Ottawa. On June 3-4, about 1,000 men departed Vancouver on freight trains which they hoped and expected would take them to Ottawa.

* * *

The following are first hand accounts of the On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot. "The On-To-Ottawa Trek" is reprinted with permission from SOUND HERITAGE, Vol. VII; No. 3: "Fighting for Labour: Four Decades of Work in British Columbia," published by the Aural History Programme of the Provincial Archives of B.C., and prepared by Patricia Wejr and Howie Smith. The publication is available at a cost of $2.50 from the Aural History Programme.

"The Regina Riot" is written by Barbara Stewart of North Vancouver. Ms. Stewart was a young girl living in Regina, and was one of the many citizens of that city who attended the Dominion Day Rally in Market Square.

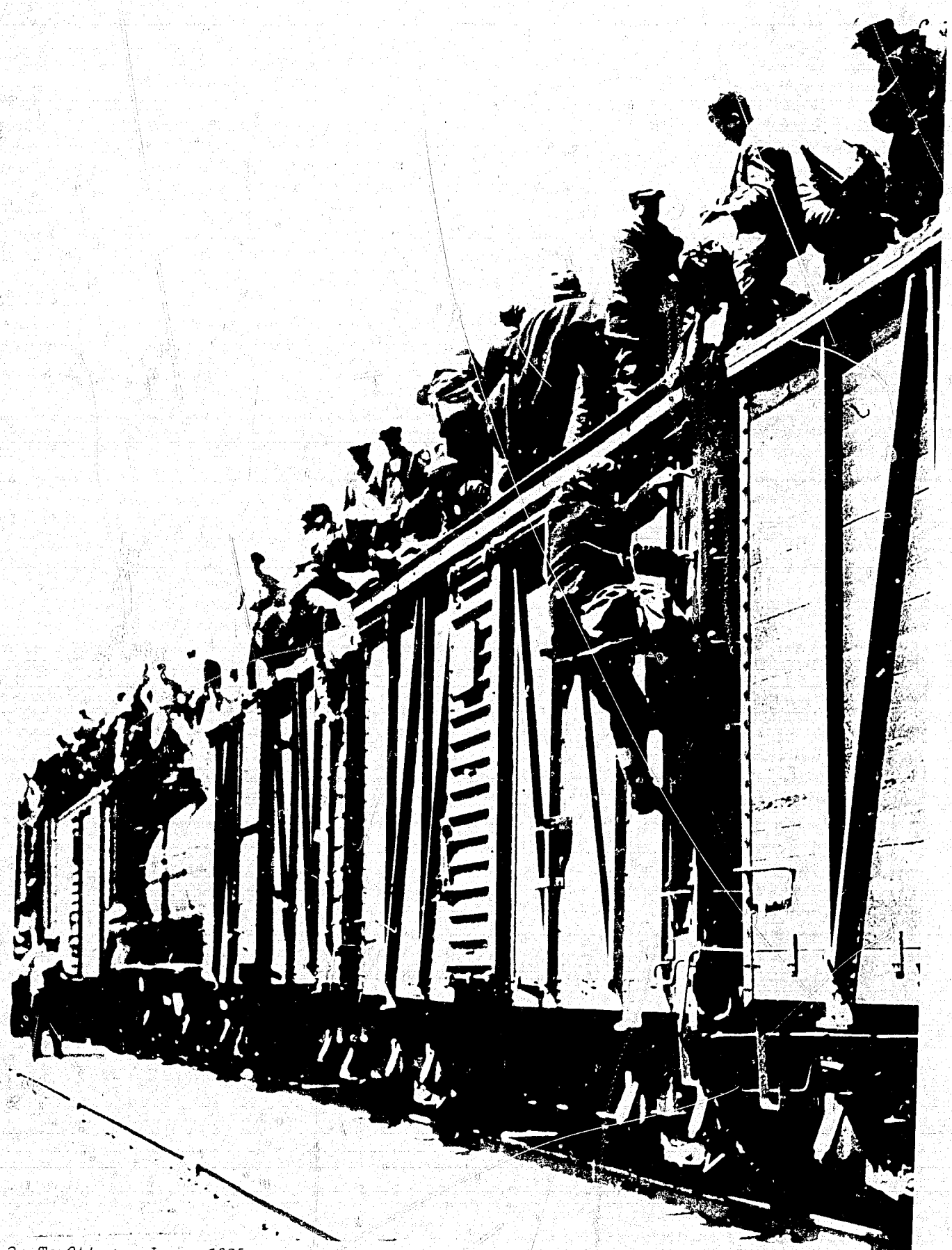
THE ON-TO-OTTAWA TREK

RED WALSH:

Everybody was passing the buck. The city government, the provincial government, they had no control over the camps... 'We can't do anything, you'll have to see the federal government about that.' Couldn't contact the federal government, so we organized a trek to Ottawa.

The first stop was Kamloops at a fishing plant. There was no preparation there and we knew if these people didn't get food and some kind of shelter, we'd lose them. So from then on, we sent a delegation ahead, of about 20. The next stop was Golden. Five o'clock in the morning... I was never so cold in my life after I got off that freight after coming over the mountains. But at Golden, the people must have been up all night. They had food ready for us when we went in.

People joined us along the way, particularly from Alberta. And the government noticed that the people were behind us and with us all along, so they decided to stop us at Regina. If it kept going on, they knew what would hap-



On To Ottawa, June, 1935
C 29399 *Public Archives of Canada*

cont'd from page 10

pen in Ottawa - there would be 150,000 unemployed there.

The stopped all freights going east out from Regina. So to go, we'd have to walk and of course we couldn't do that. They (the government) sent two cabinet members to Regina and they suggested a delegation to Ottawa. At that time, the Tory government was in power under the leadership of R.B. Bennett. We met him, but there was no results from the meeting.

THE SIX DEMANDS OF THE RELIEF CAMP WORKERS' UNION AS PRESENTED TO PRIME MINISTER R.B. BENNETT JUNE 22, 1935

1. That work with wages be provided at a minimum rate of 50 cents an hour for unskilled labour; union rates for all skilled labour. Such work to be on basis of five-day week, six-hour working day, and minimum of 20 days' work per month.

2. All workers in relief camps and government projects be covered by the Compensation Act. Adequate first aid supplies on all relief jobs.

3. That democratically elected committees of relief workers be recognized by the authorities.

4. Relief camps be taken out of the control of the Dept. of National Defense.

5. A genuine system of social and unemployment insurance in accordance with the provisions of the Workers' Social and Unemployment Insurance Bill.

6. That all workers be guaranteed their democratic right to vote.

Arthur Evans presented the demands that we had written out: for the camps to be turned into work camps with wages ... and the workers of the camp should be given the right to vote in elections. Bennett's reaction was hostile, very hostile. I thought that the whole delegation would be arrested. He told Arthur Evans he was a liar when he got up to present the demands and Bennett accused him of being a thief.

... There are always abuses creep into camps where some men, for instance, are lousy, and that is one of your complaints. Lice do not come from accident. They are not of spontaneous production. They are taken into camp by somebody who is lousy, and the lice is spread. You know that; everyone knows that.

R.B. Bennett
June 22, 1935 in interview with Delegation of 'trekkers.'

We went back to Regina and a few days later the riots started at a mass meeting in Market Square. It was a planned attack by the RCMP. There was a mass meeting called to explain to the people of Regina what happened in Ottawa and that meeting was attacked by the RCMP.

And they just beat up anybody that happened to get in the way. They came in by truck, surrounded the meeting and moved right in. There was a federal warrant out for members of the delegation and they arrested Evans right at that time. Well, then the riot started. The rest of the trekkers started to fight back with the police, so they started to use guns.

We know some got shot and some could have been killed, taken away and buried and we not know anything about it. It was a bloody fracas, I tell you!

The next morning we had a meeting with Premier Gardiner and we made arrangements with him for the two trains to take our organization back to Vancouver. See, that was in the summer of 1935. In the fall, there was an election and the Tory government was defeated and the Liberal government was elected. And then the camps were turned into work camps. I think the trek was the instrument that defeated the Tory government at that time.◆

You ask for a programme of work and wages. That will not be carried on as far as these camps are concerned... and I say again that no young men have ever been better treated in better circumstances than these camps provide. Everyone knows that.
R.B. Bennett, June 22, 1935

"...(T)o my certain knowledge in many cases these men were happy and content. Who destroyed their contentment? Who destroyed the peace of mind and happiness of these men? Who interfered? ...(F)rom time to time emissaries of a destructive and subversive force in Canada went among these men... (T)hey said, "We must organize; workers must organize..."

R.B. Bennett, Debate in the House of Commons, July 2, 1935.

"It is not only the condition of these camps that make us get up and howl for something to be done about our state. It is really the fact that we are getting no place in the plan of life -- we are truly a lost legion of youth -- rotting away for want of being offered a sane outlet for our energies. Something to do and something for that doing."

-from *Diary of a Relief Camp Worker*

These camps were just simply the outcome of the humanitarian instinct of the Canadian people to provide men with a place until they had an opportunity to get work and wages...

R.B. Bennett, June 22, 1935

1935

"(On) Sunday, April 28, 2,000 women led a parade of strikers to the Arena where some 16,000 citizens, the largest crowd ever gathered in Vancouver for an indoor public meeting, joined in the demand for the abolition of the relief camps. A second mass meeting held at Hastings Park a week later attracted 10,000 protesting citizens... School children, protesting against their own uncertain future, abandoned their classes to take part in an annual May Day parade... there was talk in several unions of a general strike to force the government to reach a solution. All Vancouver was now aroused into a pressure group to demand that the federal government abolish the relief camps and put the men to work."

Unemployment During the Depression: The Problem of the Single Unemployed Transient in B.C., 1930 - 1938. M.E. Lane, April, 1966, B.A. essay.

Forgotten Men

A growing conviction seems to have entered the minds of most of the men that they are a forgotten group. The isolation of many of the camps renders it impossible for men to keep in touch personally with former employment or with new work opening up... (T)he employment of men from the Relief Camps is so rare that a fixed idea prevails among the men that they are deemed unsuitable for employment, and are shunned by those seeking workmen.

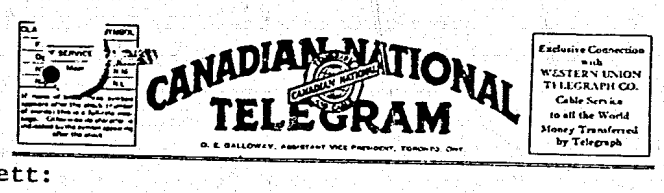
Report of the MacDonald Comission, May 31, 1935.

...they are free to be drafted into work whenever opportunity offers and work is available.

R.B. Bennett, June 22, 1935

I have nothing more to say. Good morning, gentlemen. We have been glad to listen to you.

R.B. Bennett, June 22, 1935



Right Hon. R.B. Bennett:

Informed eleven hundred single unemployed strikers have left Vancouver enroute Ottawa by freight train stop also that another draft leaves tonight stop understand they propose stopping off at Calgary Edmonton and other points as they proceed eastward stop such a movement has the possibility of serious consequences in this province and would suggest you give immediate consideration to having the necessary steps taken to prevent their coming into Alberta stop am infromed immediate action necessary as otherwise they may reach our cities at almost anytime within next twenty four hours.

R.G. Reid, Premier (Alberta)

Following preliminary arrangements to be completed in connection with strikers enroute Ottawa. Proposed to prevent strikers proceeding East of Regina...

Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railway both co-operating... All possible preliminary arrangements to be made but scheme not to be put into action until further instructions received from here.

Telegram from RCMP Commissioner J.H. MacBrien, Ottawa, to Assistant Commissioner S.T. Wood, Regina, June 11, 1935.

Exchange of telegrams between Premier Gardiner of Saskatchewan and Prime Minister Bennett, June 27, 1935, as quoted in Liversedge, op. cit., "Related Documents."

Gardiner to Bennett:
Throughout the whole course of this matter you government has acted without our knowledge, consent or concurrence and took complete charge of our police force and assumed the unquestionable functions of a provincial government...

Bennett to Gardiner:
...(We) have not the slightest intention of withdrawing from the position which we have taken and propose to use our utmost endeavours even although you decline to cooperate and maintain the fabric of our society and the institutions of the country against the illegal threats and demands of communists and their associates.

Gardiner to Bennett:
I must at once take exception to your suggestion that we "decline to cooperate to maintain the fabric of our society and the institutions of the country against the illegal threats of communists and their associates." Fortunately, this province had no problem until you imported one into Sasketchewan and took steps to see that it remained here... I hesitate to think that you permitted this movement to advance from B.C. to Sask. without molestation if you considered that it was an organization dangerous to society and institutions of the country and without warning us of its approach and taking earlier steps to prevent it...

Bennett to Gardiner:
The Dominion Government is determined that the forces organized to maintain society shall contrive to preserve human life, law and public safety...

THE REGINA RIOT

BARBARA STEWART

Market Square in Regina, Dominion Day, 1935. B 171(3) *Saskatchewan Archives Board.*

I have been asked to give an account of my experience in Regina on July 1, 1935. I shall never forget the sight of the freight trains as they pulled into Regina. The sight of the endless group of men on top of the trains made me sick with the realization that these were men looking for work. How sad, the question of food and housing for this tremendous group of people who were on their way to Ottawa to plead for work.

The city housed them in the Exhibition's huge barns. A meeting had been called for citizens in Market Square. They were to have discussions of what was to be done on behalf of the Trekkers. The Trekkers had been asked not to be on the Grounds so that the people who were there would be the citizens of Regina.

I was the literature salesperson on the grounds. As I wandered in and around the crowd I chatted with Mr. Miller, the detective who was killed that night. Mr. Miller was our neighbour. My attention was drawn to the Smeeds Moving Vans which were parked on Asler Street. I was amazed, as my father worked for Smeeds and I knew that there were strict rules to ensure the Vans were in the warehouse by 6:00, and here it was going on to 8:00.

The chairman opened the meeting and the speaker had first started to talk when a shrill whistle blew very loudly. I was standing at the back of the crowd when, to my amazement, the police station, which was on the left hand corner of the block, opened and about 40 or 50 police with billie sticks, yelling like a pack of wolves, attacked the crowd. I then observed, coming from each van, the RCMP on horseback. They rushed the crowd from the side, chasing the people with riot sticks, flaying from left to right as the crowd ran screaming in horror.

I saw a rider chasing a woman with a baby in a carriage - I shall never forget the sight of this screaming woman. The crowd all headed to 11th Ave., which was

the main street. I saw globes* being thrown, and as they popped all over the place, men lifted themselves up to answer them. Neon was not the prevalent fixture that day.

I turned and ran back to 10th Ave., where the Unity Centre was (the gathering place for the unemployed). I was astounded to see, lined up on each of the streets, six RMCP on horseback. If you went to cross the street they would criss-cross and catch you in the centre. As one who had been brought up at all times to respect the police, it was a mind-boggling thing to see.

I got to the Centre and was shocked to see an officer breaking the window with a billie stick. I asked him why he was breaking the glass. I have forgotten what he said, but was staggered when he went in and knocked books off the shelves and threw the typewriter on the floor.

I left and went up to 11th Ave. The streets, littered with debris, were packed with citizens and the people who had been at Market Square. I went up to Lorne St., where the RCMP had a town detachment. This street also was packed with people.

The fire department, which was next to the police station facing 11th Ave., and was a large building, had a deck on the roof. When the nights were hot, the firemen would sit on the deck. When the police attacked the crowd, the firemen had booed them from the deck. They were all given dismissal notices later.

I remember a little old lady standing on the street. A RCMP corporal told her to "please get on the sidewalk." I was horrified to hear her say, "Yes, officer, but that yellow stripe on your pants should be running up your back." My girlfriend had a brother who was a RCMP and as I had been to the Barrack dances, it had never occurred to me that one spoke to the police in this manner.

On the way home I heard that one of the Trekkers had been shot. When I got home I told my father what had happened. He was astounded.

I must mention that that same night Arthur Evans and Reverend East went to meet with officers of the RCMP. The orders from R.B. Bennett were that the Trek was to be stopped in Regina, and that was final. It was not until the next day that we heard Mr. Miller had been killed, and since he was in plain clothes, it was easy to see how this had happened.

Then we heard that one of the Trekkers who was on 11th Ave. had been hit. If he had lived he would have been a mental patient - as it was he died. The RCMP had done their job. They contacted his sister in Fargo, North Dakota. She was a Catholic, so he had a funeral in a Catholic Church. The church was packed.

To sum up the whole of this, it was a sad, cruel and brutal way to treat the unemployed and the citizens of Regina. The orders to attack came from a callous and inept government, headed by an equally callous and inept boor, R.B. Bennett.

In addition to all of this, the government told the people of Regina not to feed the men. This brought forth a tremendous reaction from the citizens of Regina.

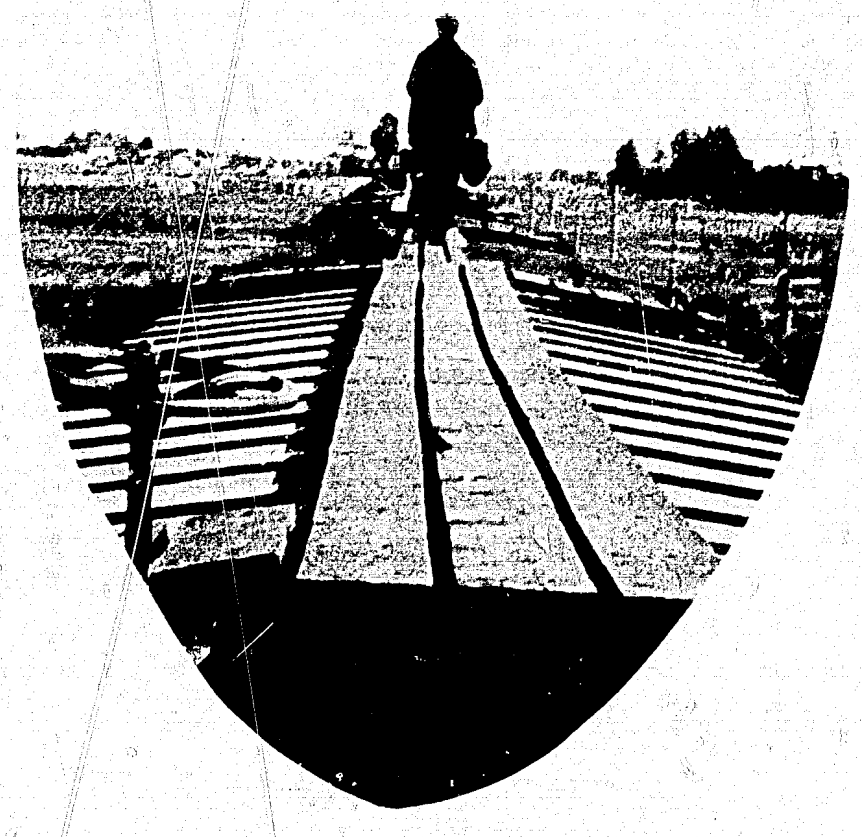
There was a court case in reference to the things that had happened. The court was biased, and frankly I do not remember all the things that happened there. However, this was one of the grim things that took place in a country where one would never think it possible.

The whole incident that night was part of the many struggles of the people for jobs. Needless to say, I shall never forget that night as long as I live.◆

Telegram, Gardiner to Bennett, July 1, 1935.

You have no doubt been advised of latest developments. We wish to state that men had interviewed us at 5 p.m. They stated that they had advised your government through your representatives they were prepared to disband and go back to their camps or homes provided they were allowed to go under their own organization. They state this was denied them. They asked our government to take responsibility for disbanding them... While we were meeting to consider their proposals... trouble started down town between the police and strikers without notification to us of police intervention...

* *A globe is a light bulb or a street light - ed.*



Alberta foothills. Photo courtesy of Vancouver Public Library.

Oral History:

FIGHTING BACK

Syd Thompson was born in 1914 in a farming community in Ontario. He came to B.C. in 1932 and joined the struggle of this province's unemployed thousands. He was unemployed, except for occassional farm labour, until 1940, when he joined the Army and went overseas. He now lives in Vancouver and is President of Local 1-217 of the International Woodworkers of America.

He was interviewed by Colleen Bostwick during the summer, 1978.

Q: Where were you raised?

A: I come from Ontario. I was raised on a farm, left home fairly young. I quit school to go to work on the old man's farm - I was the oldest boy and he said, 'I need you' - and you know what kids think of school. I was tickled to death to get out of there. With the result that I never went to high school. I finished Grade 7.

It was mixed farming: milk cows, pigs, chickens. Seven day week farming - it never ends. You get up in the mornings at 5:30 to milk cows and at 6:00 at night you're still milking cows. It was hard work, and no money.

Q: How old were you when you went into a relief camp?

A: Oh, I must have been about 16 or 17 years old. I think I was in one of the first relief camps that ever opened, in Trenton, Ontario. Eventually, in 1932, I came to B.C.

Q: There were patrols set up along the B.C.-Alberta border to prevent the unemployed from coming into B.C. Did you meet up with any of them?

A: Periodically they would do this...they would comb the freight trains and boot everybody off. When I came West there was a real nasty railroad cop on at Sudbury, (so) you re-routed through Sault Ste. Marie. And out of Sault Ste. Marie, there was a railroad called the Algoma Central. It ran up north somewhere and came to a dead end where it met with the CNR again. Then you got back on the CNR and came to Winnipeg. Even in Sault Ste. Marie you had to make a run for it to catch the train - they had that police there before you got out.

I was never stopped at the Alberta border. Periodically they tried to do this, but there was always ways of getting around that. Other times they'd just let people go, because the communities where they would stop you, well, they didn't want you either.

Q: Were you in touch with the Relief Camp Workers' Union?

A: I'm not sure when the RCWU first started. I became involved in it when I was in a relief camp at Aldergrove. This camp sat almost on the American border. The crew decided that the food wasn't satisfactory one day and there was a strike. So (for) those that didn't want to go to work, they brought up buses and took them to Vancouver ... *("Invited" you to leave?)* Yes, in a forcible sort of a fashion.

So we came to Vancouver and stuck together and they shipped us back to the camp -- that didn't happen too often. Once you were fired out of a federal relief camp, you could not go back to another one.

But there was something about the relief camps that was terribly hard to stomach, and within about a month there was another eruption. We got fired again and came into Vancouver, and at that time there was no going back.

We couldn't get relief in Vancouver. The Union policy was to go into a restaurant, eat a meal and then call the police...*(Because you couldn't pay for it?)* That's right, and to put pressure on the authorities. Well, we had no money. I think there must've been about 20 or more who did that and we all got arrested and I spent 30 days in Oakalla. That was my first experience with the RCWU.

Q: The men in the relief camps must have been pretty frustrated and demoralized, after being tagged "public menaces". Was it hard to organize them?

A: Well, as long as the militants were still in the camps, then everyone would get involved, although I don't think the movement was ever as big and as successful as history would have us believe. It was very, very seldom that a whole camp would walk out. The unemployment pressures were so great that people were afraid... There were middle-aged people in there, and old people. In all these groups you have an element who are rebellious and more militant and they always carry the ball...

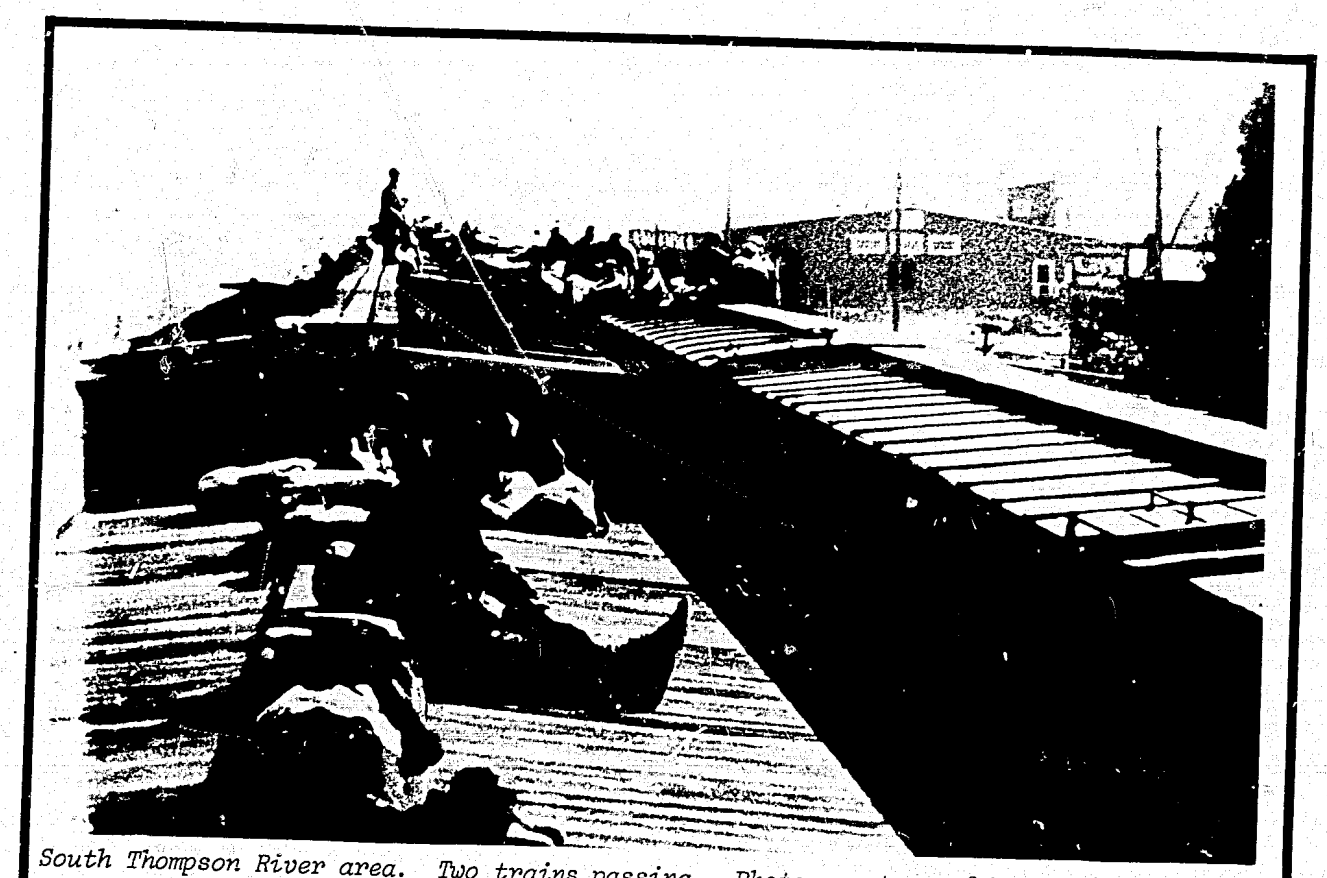
And there were some determined people. I don't know how to properly describe it. You had nothing to lose, you know, and there are some people who are rebellious by nature, who resent that sort of thing. They fought back. And there were different ways of fighting back. I've been in many, many, many relief camps - and you were supposed to be in one camp only. If you quit or got fired, this was like the army -- you were out and never to be put back in again.

Well, what we used to do...was go into a camp. You would work five days. You would get a dollar's worth of canteen tickets. You would get a dollar's worth of tobacco and you would take all the clothes that they issued you, put them in a big gunny sack - and if you had enough room you took the four blankets also - and you pulled what we called a "moonlight". Moonlighting today is a different thing, but that was called a moonlight. You got out in the middle of the night and you caught the first rattler you could get your hands on and get into Vancouver. I've been in, I guess, a dozen or more camps where I did that. If you got caught, of course, you were in jail for theft.

You got to Vancouver and you sold the stuff. In the winter time, if you got a mackinaw that was a half decent one, you used to be able to get $5 for that. The army boots were worth $3. Socks were saleable. The rest of it...the army fatigue pants, the army sweaters - nobody wanted the things. The shirts, nobody wanted them. But, the boots and the mackinaws, particularly, they were worth money.

Q: Were you ever blacklisted?

A: Yes. The guys who were blacklisted in the true sense of the word, were people here caught up in strikes and officially blacklisted. We used to get relief in Vancouver. You would get a meal ticket and a bed in one of the hotels. If you did it right you got blacklisted twice, so that you got two meal tickets and two beds, you see, and you would have some spending money to go to shows.



South Thompson River area. Two trains passing. Photo courtesy of Van. Public Library

Q: What kind of movies did you go see?

A: Oh, cowboy movies, Clark Gable... There was an odd show in town, where you climbed up the ladder and you got in through the fire escape.

Q: Did you think the movies you went to see represented the world you lived in?

A: No. (They were) unreal... The movie that stood out in my mind was The Grapes of Wrath - it dealt with real people, it portrayed life as it is... It also held out an objective: the story was that you had to fight.

Q: Were unemployed organizations more disciplined because of the militarization of the camps?

A: Well, I would say you had to have a disciplined organization because of the black-listing that went on, and the fact that the organization (RCWU) was illegal. That makes people work accordingly. Even then, wierd and wonderful things happened...

I was in a camp near Canmore, Alberta, 20 miles out in the sticks. My mail used to go to General Delivery in Canmore - you never had your mail sent directly into camp. The Relief Camp Workers' paper would come in a bundle and they (the authorities) would know right away. It didn't matter how it was wrapped up, because unemployed, single men didn't regularly get parcels.

The only way we could get into town (was) on Saturday nights - there would be a truckload to Canmore. Well, the damn Post Office was closed on Saturday nights, so I just couldn't get my mail, and after a couple of months, in desperation, I wrote to the Post Office and said, 'send me my mail.' And sure as hell it arrived there and the big wheel who was in charge of all the camps came along with it. (He) said, "Open up the mail."

I said, "I ain't opening up the mail -- that's my mail!" I tried to make a beeline for the stove - to fire it in, and-- Anyway they fired me. And I said, "Fine, I want my ticket to Calgary."

"Nope. We'll take you to Canmore, and that's as far as you go."

"Well," I said, "I ain't leaving here. Not until I get a ticket."

So I sat there for two days until the police came and they took me to Canmore and then I wound up in jail in Banff. I got tried and I defended myself and the beek gave me 15 days in Lethbridge.

Well, they shipped me all the way to Lethbridge, and from Lethbridge back to Calgary again, so I did get my fare paid to Calgary. With good time off and all the other nonsense, I spent about 10 days in Lethbridge that time.

Q: Did you do a lot of reading in those days?

A: I spent almost nine years on the bum in this country, in every sense of the word, and I had to read... many cold days I went to the library. That was the only place I could go. When I was in jail -- and I spent some time in jail -- I read. (I read the entire works of Shakespeare there.) You had nothing else to do, and it made me into a public speaker.

I headed a single, unemployed organization in Calgary - I think it was the winter of '36-'37, and I got six months for unlawful assembly in Lethbridge... that was a long stretch.

The guards in a jail, they're also individuals. There was one there who got along with the crew - Peltier was his name. He would have a package of tobacco for the gang everyday, and that was at a time when you weren't allowed tobacco. We would hoe a couple of rows of potatoes and then we'd have a rest and out would come the tobacco -- have a cigarette and then we'd work again. Well, you didn't mind doing a little work for a guy like that.

We had a riot in the jail. One day we went in for supper and the sausages were rank - they were sour and spoilt. Inexperience, no sense - we should've sat right there and then and had it out in the kitchen when we were all together. But, the ruckus started after we were back in our cells. The place was in an uproar all night.

In the morning they dragged in the firehose to turn on the boys. To overcome that we plugged the toilet sc (there was) no pressure on the firehose and the water would come streaming down the tiers. In no time at all there was a foot of water. The place was an absolute shambles. Anyway, like all riots, it eventually ended.

They weeded out the guys who plugged their toilets and flushed them - that was easy to see. Then isolated them. Those of us who were in that position went on a hunger strike for three days. Had nothing to eat but a little salt and water. That broke. Then we got hauled up before the warden and I remember I got six days in the black hole on bread and water - and it was a black hole, pitch black.

I wound up hoeing sugar beets. This guard, he was a real squirrel, and it was hot out there. We would drink about every 5, 10 minutes. We had a fella, a Scotch guy, who was the water boy. He would look after the water pail. The water pail was a way down at the other end, and one day I said, "Scotty, go and get me the water pail, will ya?" And the guard said, "No, don't you go get the water pail! Godammit, these guys are drinking every 5 minutes!"

I threw down the hoe. I said, "He don't go, I'll go." And I went and got the water pail.

At noon, I'm up before the Warden again. So the guard tells his story - and he really laid it on - and I tell my story, that the guy, he's over doing it, and I told him I swore and cursed, and I said, "Yes, I went and got the water pail. If you like a drink, then surely to God a man's entitled to a drink!"

The Warden asked the guard, "What is he like otherwise?"

This guy, he had a slow way of talking, and he said, "Heeeez a Cawwwwm-u-nistic agitator. He's awwwl the ti-i-ime talkin' Cawwm-u-nism."

The Warden said, "I'm not interested in his politics! I want to know how he's working!"

So, he let me off.

Q: Do you think it was important for unemployed workers to have their own organizations?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. It was the salvation for many of the more aggressive, militant people. It was either that or thievery, and you'd wind up in a lifetime of crime -- and many of them did that. The Relief Camp Workers' Union, and the struggle, was too slow for them.

Unemployment degenerates people and you can't avoid that. There are many people who, under pressures, fall by the wayside, they can't cope with it. I went to see a fellow here about a year ago. He was in Haney where they throw the drunks. He played a leading role in the On-To-Ottawa Trek by pulling the unemployed out of the Dundurn Camp (near Saskatoon). He was in the unemployed organization in Calgary and played an active part. But, he never worked and was just in and out of jail constantly. Not for thieving, but for being a vagrant and being drunk. I don't know how you properly describe these things. It just became a way of life. It became a way of life.

Well, in that sense, it never got the better of me. The fact that I became an organizer in the Relief Camp Workers' Union, the fact that I became a member of the Communist Party, I think this all plays a part in it. Then you had an objective in life. You had an objective in life...to make it into a better world. And I guess somewhere along the way you must be thinking of yourself. You fight to improve your lot in life. There was no other way - you had to hack your way out of this collectively to fight the system.

Q: P.M. Bennett set up the MacDonald Commission in 1935 in response to the first major relief camp workers' strike in December, 1934. In ivestigating their complaints, the Commissioners concluded that, while some of the complaints were justified, what happened in most cases was that the men became depressed in the camps. Therefore, most of the complaints were the result of a poor "mental attitude" towards the relief camps. What do you think of that? Do you agree?

A: Certainly there was a bad attitude in the camps. The camps created the bad attitudes. What in the hell other kind of attitude could working people have when they stuck you in the wilderness some place in a tarpaper shack and gave you 20 cents a day? Anybody with an ounce of gumption -- I'm utterly amazed that the things didn't get burnt down to the ground. That's what should've happened to them. But, we were still that meek and mild that they stayed...

Q: Do you think the Depression had an affect on the trade union movement?

A: The trade union movement, at the start of the thirties, was in terrible shape. Absolutely terrible shape. There were wage cuts left and right and there was no real resistance. There was no effort on the part of the labour movement to work with the unemployed... There were mass layoffs, and it wasn't resisted. It left an awful lot to be desired.

Now the other side to the coin is that in 1935 the CIO came into being and there was a real upsurge - this, inspite of the old craft unions who resisted. John L. Lewis, who played a leading role in this, was an old reactionary of the worst kind. But, for whatever reasons, he erupted in 1935, headed the CIO and played a magnificent role for a couple of years -- and only for a couple of years, then crawled back

into his bloody shell again.

But, that upsurge organized the basic industries in North America. Steel, auto and eventually the woodworking industry. The IWA came out of that. (It) was undoubtedly a breath of fresh air - and that came out of the Hungry Thirties, out of the Depression. Things got so bad, that eventually you had these kind of eruptions. There were some magnificent struggles...

May Day, 1935. Men are pulling a wagon with a mannequin reading the Riot Act. Sign on wagon reads "In Hitler's Footsteps." The mannequin probably represents Mayor Gerry McGeer who had read the Riot Act to unemployed demonstrators only seven days before. The sign is probably in reference to McGeer and City Council members who greeted Nazi soldiers and officers of the German training ship, the "Karlsruhe" during the winter of 1934-35. Photo courtesy Van. Public Library.

I don't think there were more than 200 people living in Winfield the year that I was organizing for the I.W.A. (1937-38). There were 20 bootleggers (who) were there trying to make a buck when the loggers came into town on weekends. I got plunked into the middle of this mess with a guy by the name of Doc Savage, who had a job as C.I.O. organizer in Alberta. Bob Levitt, who was the head of District 18 of the Mineworkers' union, and in charge of the C.I.O. for Western Canada, appointed this guy... There was a big cutback in the States and his job fell by the wayside. So he (Savage) said, "OK, you go to work with me, there in Winfield."

The first place I went to, there was a drunken Irishman running the camp. The secretary of the union was a little fella who wore glasses. He was a preacher's son and he looked every part of it: meek and mild, you know. When we went into this camp, I had the garage owner drive me, and I paid him for it. He provided a taxi service.

I didn't go near the office. I picked one bunkhouse and then I went around to all the other bunkhouses and said, "We're having a meeting..." So they all came into the bunkhouse and I started talking.

I nicely got started and the door flew open and there he was: the bloody boss. He starts screaming and hollering, "get out, get out!"

I said, "The law gives me the right! If you want me out of here, fella, you're

going to have to call the police. I ain't moving."

And, jesus, that stumped him - and he got out. He got in his sleigh, he didn't have a goddam vehicle. He had to get to a telephone, he didn't have a telephone. He was madder than a bastard! That organized the whole camp. That secretary was busy all night signing them up.

After a while, I laid down in the bunk to have a rest, and about 11:00 the door flew open again. Here he was with the RCMP. There was a constable there by the name of Pook. We called him Constable "Puke", and he was monstrous, with his buffalo robe on, ugly as a beer.

He said, "What's going on here?!" The secretary was sitting there peeking over his glasses.

I jumped out of bed and I said, "We're organizing the place!"

He grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and the ass of the pants and out the door I flew - out in the snow bank! I'm standing there waiting for the secretary to come flying out after me - but he'd cooled off by then.

"Come into the office," he said. "I want to search your bag for liquor." I guess they can search any part of you for liquor always - there's always something they can do. But, we had no liquor.

The garage owner who drove us down was his personal friend - they used to drink together, and I'll be a S.O.B. if he didn't charge him for providing a taxi without a license. I never saw anything like it. But that's how I got started in that country. The organization, in the Spring, fell apart because the bush camps were all temporary - all winter works.

Q: When young men stayed in relief camps they couldn't have had much of a social life. Did the Depression separate the experiences of men and women?

A: (The Depression) isolated men and women from one another. It was very difficult for the opposite sexes to get together. Many women didn't have jobs - (but) the only difference was a guy like me could take a freight train and bum around the country. That was very, very difficult for a woman.

There is much ado these days about the prostitutes on Georgia. In those days single women in many ways were worse off than men. There were no relief camps for them. What little I know about it...my understanding is that in some cases relief authorities almost told them, "Well, why don't you get out in the street, you're a good looking girl... What the hell are you doing here?"

In Calgary, on 6th Avenue, there were two blocks of whore houses - absolutely two blocks. It was a dollar a trick: "relief camp day prices." It was a terrible social blight in some senses - and you had that in every city. Vancouver was loaded with it.

For many women, there was no other way to live in the world. When the war came on the authorities finally closed the places in Calgary, and the women eventually went to work. When there was work, people wanted to work.

Q: Did you spend a lot of time in "hobo jungles?"

A: Yes, many jungles. There were nice jungles in B.C. Kamloops had a nice jungle that was known in many areas. In the Okanagan... you know that's beautiful country in the summer. I was in Penticton one summer. I had a pair of cream coloured corduroys on and a yellow turtleneck sweater, a nice tan... just laying along the river. There were relief camps through there also. The fruit season was on, (but) the only cherry picking I did was at night.

Q: If there were relief camps why did the guys stay in the jungles?

A: People were blacklisted out of the relief camps, and people didn't particularly want to stay in relief camps permanently. There were people who were genuinely looking for work and the jungle was a place you could cook, you could eat. You'd have a fire going; you had a frying pan and an old coffee pot or a tin can. You bummed the stores uptown for some bacon butts and cracked eggs, stale bread -- and you were away.

Harrison Mills Relief Camp, after camps were changed from federal to provincial jurisdiction. Spring, 1937. Photo courtesy of V.P.L.

Q: Were there many lasting friendships formed during those times?

A: Well, it's hard to say. It was something like the "buddy" approach in the army almost. When you were in the camps and in the jungles, you'd form a relationship with one another - you were all in the same boat, in the same mess. And in that sense you built up a relationship. In the army also, this is a relationship for a period, then you never see one another again. In that sense, I think the relief camps were that way.

Q: Before the war, when you were in Vancouver, did you know what was going on in Germany? Did you know about the Nazis and about fascism?

A: Yes, I did... I was in a demonstration here in Vancouver where we protested the sailors from the German training ship, *The Karlsruhe*. They were being feted here in the Moose Hall, and the Communist Party put up a demonstration against it. I remember many of the unemployed were there.

We were all lined up and the Germans had to run the gauntlet. The officers, by the time they got there, the people were literally spitting on them. The police came out on horseback and belted the guys around - and I got biffed in the mouth by one of them, didn't get out of it fast enough.

The left in general was aware of what Hitler was about, and Mussolini. And yes, there was a strong anti-fascist feeling, I think, particularly among the unemployed and the poor. People did have time to read, many of them attended meetings...

Q: Do you think the Government was a little bit paranoid about revolution?

A: Well, the system was in terrible, terrible shape. I guess a Prime Minister like R.B. Bennett would be totally incapable of coping with what was going on, totally incapable of understanding it. I suppose it got to the stage with him that almost anybody who didn't agree with him had to be a Red of some kind... I guess that's how you get fascism: those that have, like what they have and they fight to the death to hang on to what they've got.

I don't think it was that much of a problem here in North America, not like Europe. Although there were fascist groups here, they were very distinctly minority groups... There was no need of fascism when you (had) people like R.B. Bennett running the show.

Q: Did you feel, when you were that young, a committment to a trade union, or a political party?

A: I think the best way to describe my feelings in those days is that (I was) bitter, soured, and hated the bloody world. And I think that, more than anything else, would sum it up. Without being a pipe dreamer and figuring I could get out of it, and make a fortune - I think I had my feet on the ground well enough that that never entered my mind -- impossible anyway.

But, yeah, you weren't very happy at times in those days. I had some terrible, terrible experiences. I came through Northern Ontario one time in the fall. I had holes in my shoes, it was late and it was rainy, and I got sick. Terribly, terribly cold. Hitchiked out of Port Arthur, and I can't think of the name of the town I was in, but anyway, I was in such shape that I demanded they put me in jail for 30 days. And they wouldn't even do that, the bastards. I told them, "What do I have to do here, kick in a window or something?" They finally gave me two or three meal tickets... finally I got better and got out of there and made it to Sudbury. Eventually spent the winter in Southern Ontario on the bum.

THE HOBO

A hobo is a man who builds palaces and lives
in shacks,
He builds Pullmans and rides the rods,
He builds automobiles and pushes wheelbarrows,
He serves T-bone steaks and gets the soup bone,
He builds electric-ligh plants and burns oil,
He builds opera houses and goes to the movies,
He makes silk suspenders and holds his pants
up with a rope,
He reaps the harvest and stands in the bread
line,
He weaves silk shirts and wears bull wool,
He makes broadcloth and wears overalls,
He weaves linen sheets and sleeps on a plank,
He digs gold and has his teeth filled with
cement,
He digs coal and shivers in the snow,
He builds factories and is denied a job in them,
He builds skyscrapers and has no place to call
a home,
He builds roads and is arrested on them for
vagrancy,
He creates labour and is denied the right to
labour,
He fights for freedom abroad and is put on
the chain gang at home,
He has made Canada and is denied the vote.

From John o' London's Weekly, as quoted in God in the Jungles, by A. Roddan, Vancouver, 1931.

Q: Do you think our society has come a long way since the 1930s?

A: I think in many ways it is worse (now) than in the '30s. In our own country, with all the affluence that we have here, in relation to one another the rich are richer than they were then, in relation to the poor. I don't think the disparity between unemployed and working people was as great in the '30s as it is today. The guy who worked in the Hungry Thirties didn't make nothing either.

But, now working people own homes - they're not paid for, they're up to their ears in debt, but at least they live in one. They all drive cars - they're not paid for either. But, the poor guy on welfare and on Unemployment Insurance, he can't touch any of these things. Well, in the '30s most working people didn't have cars either. Very damn few of them in this country.

There's no question, there's a big difference between now and then. I think, first of all, there is a difference in the establishment. The system got the hell frightened out of itself in the Hungry Thirties, without question. MacKenzie King set about to make some corrections (during) the war. Unemployment Insurance, Old Age Pensions... a lot of this came out of the Hungry Thirties. The war provided an opportunity to bring about some changes and he knew some changes had to be made -- the guys, after the War was over, weren't about to put up with that shit again. In that sense, some changes came about.

In all situations, the cream comes to the top, as the saying is, and among the unemployed there were elements who rose to the occassion, who were not prepared to accept it. There were people - not as many as I would've like to've seen - who became leaders of the labour movement, who grew out of those days and stuck with it all their lives, and have never forgotten those experiences as long as they've lived.

I have a hatred for this system that, in some ways, has never left me. Every once in a while it comes out. It couldn't be any other way, I guess, after nine years on the bum, and five years in the Army overseas.

Working people make progress. I've done enough reading to know that this society has its ups and downs, its highs and its lows, and that in every way it is an unequal society. I walk around Stanley Park every opportunity I get. I spent time in Stanley Park when I was on the bum - nothing else to do, didn't appreciate the beauty of the Park the way I do now. But, on a Sunday night, the yachts come in: $75,000 worth, $100,000 worth, a quarter of a million dollars. And they're just streaming in. Then you drive home and go through Skid Road here, and there is the other bloody extreme. In that sense, I guess very damn little has changed from those days.

Working people who have unions, yes, they're better off, no question about it. They've made a lot of progress. On the other hand, the old timers who sit in those dives on Cordova and Hastings Street, they are no better off than they were in the Hungry Thirties. The system still leaves a helluva lot to be desired.

Q: You said the reason you remembered the film "Grapes of Wrath" is because it portrayed life as it is and showed people that they had to fight to make a better society. Do you think this is still important?

A: I don't know anything else that's important. That's what life is: fight and struggle. That, in my opinion, will never change... We come into this world kicking and screaming - from Day One we start fighting. That to me is life.

I've had a marvelous 20 years - the last 20 years of my life. I've done the kind of work that I want to do, that I like doing. I guess we all have some conceit - and I do. It makes me feel real good to think that I've also made some small contribution in life. I got married late in life - and that was because of the Depression. There was no way I was going to get married and get "saddled" with a wife and kids -- and that's the way you looked at it in those days - it wasn't the days of equality. I never got married until I was 45 years old. (I have) two children, a boy and a girl. Fine wife. It just turned out perfect. ◆

REVIEWED:

1. Right Hand, Left Hand

GARY ONSTAD

Gary Onstad teaches at Burnaby Central Secondary School and is a member of the Labour History Assn.

Livesay, Dorothy, *Right Hand, Left Hand, A True Life of the Thirties*, edited by David Arnason and Kim Todd. Erin, Ontario, Press Porcepic Ltd., 1977. 280 pp., $6.95.

The economic depression of the 1930s forced thinking people everywhere to re-examine their ideas about politics and its relation to social change and to their own work. Dorothy Livesay, a rare poet who has no difficulty combining politics and art, has made a serious attempt to document the politics of Canadian writers and artists during the Hungry Thirties.

This book is both fitting and disturbing. Fitting, because nearly half a century has elapsed since the literay left in Canada began to speak with a social conscience. Fitting, too, because Livesay is well qualified to relate first hand personal experiences in the Canadian social and literary movement during the '30s. She travelled extensively throughout that decade and actively participated in the first "community" of progressive Canadian writers. Her selection of poems, stories, photographs, plays, letters, news articles and diary notes reflect "a true life of the thirties" and is "an attempt to make known an important part of our literary heritage."

What is disturbing is that so little has been written about Canadian writers in the Depression until now. It is unsettling to note that most of the selections gathered together by Livesay reveal a social and political criticism which is as applicable to the late '70s as it was to the Dirty Thirties. Sexism, racism, poor working conditions, mass unemployment and the struggle to eliminate these problems (as well as the cause) tie the decades together.

This is emphasized in the poem "Day and Night," written in 1935. It is a powerful and accurate statement about the dehumanization of life in factories and mines.

Livesay's descriptions of life in company towns during the '30s are applicable to many company towns in Canada today. The description of the struggle to organize store and office workers in Toronto in 1934 sounds very much like today's struggle to unionize bank workers.

RIGHT HAND, LEFT HAND
(a fragment)

We who are working have no visitors.
Nobody comes to enquire: and how
much gas do you use per month?
We are not seen by relief investigators,
nurses, social workers, coal men, gas
collectors, dietitions, apologetic
postmen. The butcher and the baker
cannot say 'hello.' Only the milkman,
seeing the note hid in the bottle, knows
we are alive.

And the boss, the boss knows.

Mrs. Sutton, your hair is untidy today.
If marriage is going to let you slip up
on your appearance, why we will have
something to say--

(Johnny cut his hand this morning. I
shouldn't have bandaged it.)

Miss Nightingale! Those togs must not
be allowed to litter the floor! Pick
them up with your left hand while your
right hand pulls the lever!

(I know not what my brother doeth)
We who are working have no laughter.

D. Livesay (Used by permission)

Selections for this book have been arranged chronologically (1928 to the outbreak of W.W. II), as well as geographically (Toronto, Paris, Montreal, the West, and Vancouver). An impressive amount of material is presented, perhaps too much, giving the book an almost "clip and paste"

appearance. However, the author ties the material together with brief comments at the beginning of each chapter.

Dorothy Livesay has performed a valuable service for teachers and students. The literature she has chosen offers the imaginative teachers some excellent resource material. For students of English, her poetry and short stories are fine examples of clear-headed, concise writing. For labour history buffs, a number of selections provide rich resource material.

Right Hand, Left Hand is an important addition to the growing Canadian literature about the Depression. It provides a new dimension to the literature already availabe and is a must for every library, resource centre and classroom. ◆

2.Recollections... JOHN CHURCH

John Church is the Assistant Director of Professional Development, B.C.T.F.

Liversedge, Ronald, *Recollections of the On-To-Ottawa Trek, With Documents Related to the Vancouver Strike and the On-To-Ottawa Trek*, edited by Victor Hoar, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1973, 331 pp., $4.50.

This book meets many purposes. First, it is an intensely personal history: the story of Ron Liversedge, one of the 2000 unemployed relief camp workers who, in April, 1935, left the "slave camps" and congregated in Vancouver to arouse public support for their unfortunate plight. After two months, the strikers left Vancouver on the start of the freight train trek to Ottawa in search of work and wages -- and human dignity. Written in 1960, 25 years after the event, Liversedge vividly recalls many of the memorable moments along the way and the tragic conclusion in Regina.

The book is much more than a personal history. Part 2 includes documents relating to the Vancouver strike and the On-To-Ottawa Trek. Included are memos, letters, telegrams (some confidential at the time) between the Ottawa headquarters of the RCMP and the Regina detachment. There are extensive extracts from the House of Commons debate which followed that night of terror.

The latter provides many opportunities for students to compare Liversedge's perceptions with the descriptions included in the official documents. It permits the student to view the varying perceptions of the tragic events held by the leading participants. For example, a comrade to an unemployed relief camp worker becomes a trespasser to the railroad company, or a Communist to R.B. Bennett.

H.H. Stevens, a defector from the Bennett cabinet, deplores "the plight of youth" and pleads that "surely we are not going to ignore the fact that in the veins of the youth of Canada are still pulsating ambition and the desire to get somewhere and be something. J.S. Woodworth compares the situation of the four years of WW I when men had "hopes and believed they were fighting for a cause. These same men are now in relief camps, receiving 20 cents a day, "without hope and with a sense of great injustice."

The book suggests more to the modern teacher and student. It not only provides substantial information about the more than one million unemployed Canadians in the depths of the Depression, but it also prompts the question "what have we learned?" The April, 1978 issue of *Clearing House* features an article "How Teachers Can Help Suicidal Adolescents." The article attributes the "alarming" increase in the rate of suicides to helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness among adolescents as they mature in this decade of extensive and rising unemployment, growing inflation, increasing technology and alienation.

In conclusion, let me note that Liversedge's book can serve at least three educational roles. It is a narrative of an oft-neglected area of Canadian studies. It introduces the student to the elementary skills of historical comparison and analysis. It invites the student to become speculative concerning today's uncertainties, and certainly, tomorrow's increased perplexities. ◆

BLOODY SUNDAY

June 19, 1938

In July, 1936 the federal government closed the relief camps. Work projects, which were to replace the system of relief camps, were temporary. Soon thousands of unemployed trudged back to Vancouver, unable to find work. Once again, in November, the federal and provincial governments jointly sponsored work projects and men were admitted to bush camps two months at a time, on a rotational basis. The men were given 40 cents per hour, the RCWU became the Relief Project Workers' Union, camp conditions improved somewhat and still there were no jobs.

These camps were closed permanently in the spring of 1938. Tag Days, rallies and demonstrations were again held in Vancouver to demand jobs for the unemployed. On May 17, the provincial government announced it would no longer provide relief funds to "inter-provincial transients," but offered to pay for transportation to the Prairies. The unemployed transients offered to leave if they were guaranteed jobs upon reaching their destinations. The mayors of Calgary, Edmonton and Regina declared there were no jobs to be had.

On Friday, May 20, 1938, 1200 men marched to the Post Office, the Art Gallery and the Georgia Hotel, occupying the three buildings to (once again) bring home to the public their desperate situation. Despite urgent pleas, dire predictions and angry demands, Ottawa literally thumbed its nose at both the provincial and municipal governments. The men vacated the Hotel and Art Gallery, but remained in the Post Office. For four weeks, Ottawa chose to ignore the situation. When the federal government did take action, it was only to cable instructions that police action be taken to "vacate" the Post Office. On Sunday, June 19, the RCMP and Vancouver city police co-operated in a violent, brutal "evacuation" of the Federal Post Office, leaving us with what we now call "Bloody Sunday."

* * *

The following selections are from Bloody Sunday by Steve Brodie (Epilogue by Sean Griffin), published by the Young Communist League, 1974. Used by permission.

The story of Vancouver's "Bloody Sunday" has often been told. I have heard and read various versions, few of which are true.

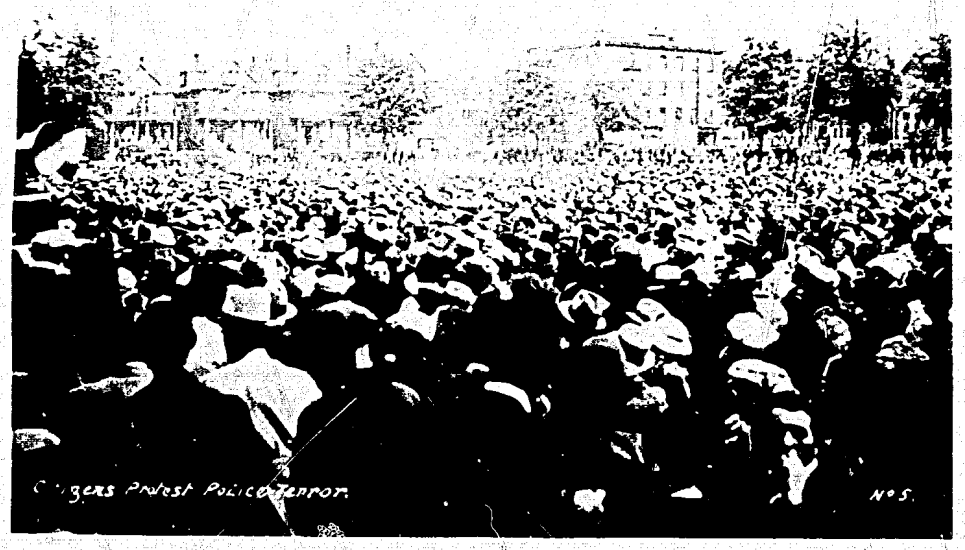
During the days and weeks that fell between the autumn of 1929 and the transformation of bums into heroes a decade later, over 200 police actions involving force are recorded in the press of the day -- all of them aimed at repressing any protest against unemployment, hunger and homelessness. The occasions where the courts were used illegally to suppress such protest number in the hundreds of thousands. Even now the justice department concedes that thousands of illegal deportations were carried out for the same purpose.

In Vancouver during the three winters 1935-6 to 1938-9, the crisis was greater than in any other Canadian city...

The unemployed men's organizations laid before the federal and provincial governments detailed plans for fire trail work in our forests and tree planting programs from coast to coast.

These were dismissed as being impossibly costly at $1 a day per man and board. General McNaughton stated that such plans would cost the nation an estimated $36,000 per day and would bankrupt the country. He later presided over the defence department, spending over one million per day for direct war purposes.

One policy never changed during the years of organizing the unemployed. A simple majority could vote lack of confidence in any one, or group of, executive members at any regular meeting. Reverend Bob Matheson,... dared city council, or cabinet ministers, to sit in our meetings as he sometimes did. He often stated publicly that no organization he had ever



Citizens protesting police brutality against P.O. Sitdowners.

known followed democratic procedure so well and so consistently.

Toward the middle of May 1938, I felt that the men were becoming desperate and more and more doubtful that the organization was anything but a begging institution and I realized that something really defiant should be done, and that once it was successfully accomplished we should disarm the forces sent to deal with us by immediate submission to the law, once and for all forcing the governments to accept responsibility for the unemployed, or openly demonstrate that they preferred to act brutally and unlawfully. Although I hoped, against all hope, that they would at least go through the motions of civilized behaviour, I dreaded their only known cure for protest.

To prevent leaks, I asked for and received a vote of complete confidence, in a select committee. This committee was to be composed of the five division leaders. Ernie Cumber was co-ordinator for the group, and the men were assured that in any action taken they would be led, not sent, by their division leaders.

We met in an old rooming house on Cambie Street and I introduced the plan to march on the Post Office, the Art Gallery and the Hotel Georgia... We agreed to go into action...

Fred Duncan and Tony Quinn joined forces at the Georgia Hotel. At the first sign of reasonable negotiation, the men left with no damage done, amid expressions of goodwill between the unemployed and hotel management.

Jack Lucas with Division 11 joined with my Division 1 at the Post Office. At each meeting, both Lucas and I requested a vote of confidence, offering to support anyone elected in our place. At all times we were assured of their support. Sometimes members of the public were present and all workers of the mail section saw and heard everything that took place, yet newsmen claimed consistently that the men lived in fear of some nameless punishment if they disobeyed their leaders.

Three times during the thirty days, we were confronted by police orders to vacate, and each time we submitted to arrest, insisting however, that being equally guilty, we expected equal punishment. Never in ten years had all levels of government been in agreement on the issue of unemployment, but now they agreed that the buildings should not be cleared by lawful arrest and trial. A riot was necessary to provide the pretext for a few leaders to be railroaded for inciting, rioting, and destruction of property.

All levels of government were shocked as week followed week, and public support remained strong... (B)usiness clubs and others who had never shown concern, now called for public works as the only possible solution...

An attack was planned for 5 a.m., June 19 - Father's Day. As I slept on the floor wrapped in a blanket lent me by one of the night pickets, I was shaken awake and asked to go outside, as our pickets were uneasy at the large numbers of police gathering there. They gathered in groups on street corners...

The outside pickets withdrew into the building where we observed members of the RCMP gathering in the mail sorting areas. We held a meeting where I received a vote of confidence as spokesmen.

A proclamation was read, ordering us to depart to our homes, as we were now declared an unlawful assembly. Failure to depart would mean forcible eviction. I immediately reported to Major Hill 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 make 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 arrest."

Staff Sergeant Wilson, who to this day swears he saw no unnecessary force used, threw the first bomb. Up until that moment we had lived for 30 days in that building without five cents worth of damage to property. Now as the lobby filled with gas, arrangements were made to purify the air by eliminating some $3,000 worth of plate glass, which helped to dissipate that choking cloud. From both ends of the lobby, the RCMP attacked, equipped with gas masks and plying their whips in joyful abandon...

In the general melee, Jim Redvers slipped to the floor, and was immediately pounced on by two of "Canada's Finest." He was kicked about the head so savagely, that one

Sitdowners being evicted from Post Office. Photo courtesy Vancouver Public Library.

of his eyes was knocked out. His buddy, Little Mike, took a severe pounding as he led Redvers out. He then made the mistake of asking a city constable to call an ambulance. The error cost him a slash which laid his jaw open two inches.

He carried that scar to his grave at age 22. That grave is on the hill overlooking Dieppe.

Once I was recognized, I received some special attention by the eviction crew, and was subjected to a further attack after I was dragged from the building. The beating was finally stopped when a sergeant noticed a movie newsreel being made.

It was a citizen who placed me in his car and took me to St. Paul's Hospital. The police were not calling ambulances that day, which ended for me at about 6 a.m.

No one was ever arrested for his part in the month long occupation of public buildings. Any court hearing would have shown who was responsible for these illegal attacks, with resulting damage to people and property.

** Epilogue **

By Sunday afternoon, 15,000 people had gathered at Powell Street grounds in a giant protest rally to hear several speakers, amonth them aldermen from the city. The rally ended amid thunderous approval for a resolution demanding that the Patullo government act immediately to provide work and wages -- or resign.

Later that evening, 30,000 people gathered at the CPR pier for a massive send-off for 100 jobless who were on their way to Victoria... The crowd filled the streets from Granville and Hastings where the attack had taken place that morning, all the way down to the pier.

As the 100 men heading for Victoria marched through the crowd to a ferry, they received a tremendous ovation. Up on the deck, they began singing "O Canada" and the echo resounded among the surrounding buildings. As the boat pulled away, the huge throng joined them in singing "Hold the Fort." No one wanted to leave. It was 1 a.m. when the crowd finally broke up...

LABOUR STUDIES

"THE LABOUR STUDIES PROGRAM IS COMMITTED TO MEETING THE SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS OF B.C. WORKERS, THEIR ORGANIZATIONS, AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN GENERAL. FROM ITS INCEPTION IN 1974, THE LABOUR STUDIES PROGRAM HAS BEE A CO-OPERATIVE VENTURE OF CAPILANO COLLEGE AND THE B.C. FEDERATION OF LABOUR... WE OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF LABOUR RELATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS..."

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LESSON PLAN

BLOODY SUNDAY

A Student Skit based on the 1938 Post Office Sitdown

PETER SEIXAS

Peter Seixas teaches at an alternate secondary school in Vancouver and is the Vice-President of the Vancouver Secondary School Teachers' Association.

The writing, acting, and recording of "Bloody Sunday" came at the end of a unit on the nature of class relations in a Canadian Studies course. There is a persistent danger of depressing students when presenting a class analysis of life under capitalism, and the last thing we wanted was for the student to feel depressed and/or powerless. We felt that it was particularly important to end the unit on a positive note, with a section which would emphasize examples of working class solidarity and possible paths of action. Further, the lesson which we developed involved the students, in an elementary way, in the same creative, co-operative activity which was itself the subject of the lesson.

The lesson which follows is valuable as much for technique employed, as for the particular incident which it explains. The technique, which was developed in conjunction with George Smith, might be applied to any one of a number of historical incidents.

The lesson was designed in an alternative school setting. Our time restrictions were fairly flexible. The ideas presented here took 2 - 3 weeks to go through. Teachers in other situations will have to adapt the ideas to their own time frameworks.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To provide students with information about the Post Office Sitdown.

2. To enable students to empathize through role-play, with some of those who were hardest hit by the Depression.

3. To develop their understanding of, and sympathy for, those who have struggled in the past to win some of the benefits (e.g. unemployment insurance) workers now have.

4. To give students a positive sense of their own creative abilities.

PROCEDURE

A brief background lecture was given on the P.O. Sitdown and the Depression in B.C. (The most complete account of the sitdown is *Bloody Sunday* by Steve Brodie. Stuart Jamieson's *Times of Trouble* has a two page summary of the incident.)

A sketch outline of a five scene play was then presented. Students were divided into five groups, each of whom were given one brief scene-outline to work on. Each group was responsible for fleshing out the bare outlines of the plot, creating their own settings, dialogues and characters. The more background the students have on the Depression, the richer the role-plays can be. Students were encouraged to make use of supplementary information wherever possible.

We taped a preliminary role-play of these scenes, then made a written transcript from the tapes. Copies of their transcript were distributed to students who, in their groups, revised and refined the scenes. The revised lines were then memorized, and we video-taped the final production with props, sets and costumes.

OUTCOMES

The final production was hardly professional, but the students remembered the lesson in the end-of-term evaluations as one of the high points of the year. Frequent references to the Depression, the Sitdown and to Brodie indicated to me that the factual material

had been assimilated with a positive, empathetic understanding of the events.

THE SCENES

The following sketches were the outlines presented to students after the preliminary lecture and play-summary:

Scene I: October, 1937, "Hard Times on the Farm." Young Joe Duncan (a fictional character) and his family in Saskatchewan discuss the difficult economic situation. Joe is one more mouth to feed, and it is decided that he will leave and try to find work in B.C.

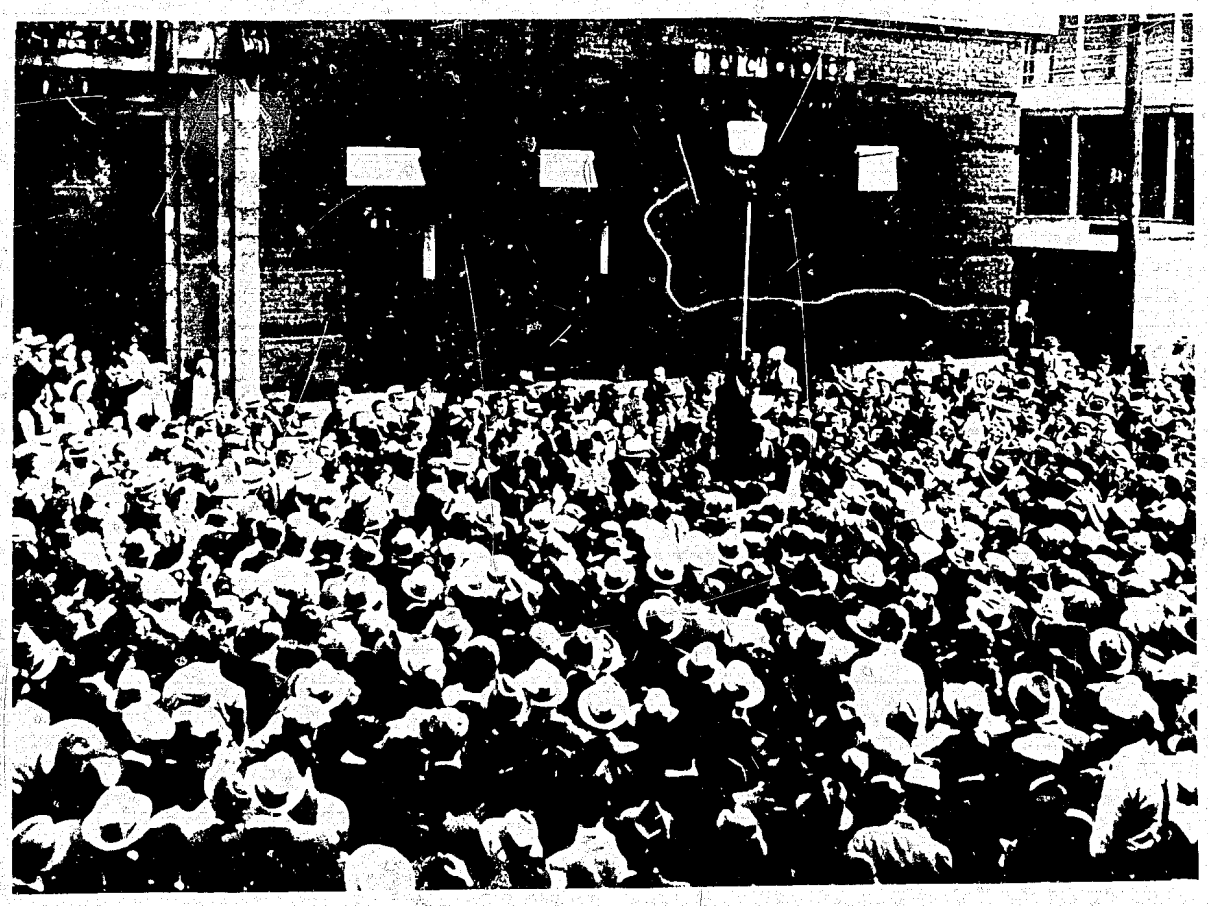
Scene II: December, 1937, "Conditions in Vancouver." Joe discusses conditions in Vancouver with members of the unemployed men's organization. Having been unable to find work, he joins them.

Scene III: May, 1938, "A Decision." The Action Committee of the Unemployed Organization, including Steve Brodie, discuss a proposal for a demonstration, involving sitdowns in the Georgia Hotel, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Post Office. They decide to go ahead with the demonstrations.

Scene IV: June 19, 1938, 5:00 A.M., "The Post Office and the Police Attack." The demonstrators who have been in the P.O. are aware of police amassing outside; they try to get themselves placed under arrest, and avert violence. Tear gas is thrown, police get set for clubbing as the demonstrators vacate the building.

Scene V: Later that day, "Powell Street Rally." 15,000 citizens of Vancouver, having heard about the incident at the P.O., come out to hear speeches and to protest.

Epilogue: (narrator) War brings an end to the Depression; gains made by pressure on governments; unemployment today.



Demonstration in support of the Post Office Sitdowners; protesting police action, June 20, 1935. Harold Winch is the person addressing the crowd.
Photo courtesy of the Provincial Archives of B.C.

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HELENA GUTTERIDGE

1880
TO
1960

When the full history of progressive movements in B.C. is finally written, one woman, Helena Gutteridge, will stand out. This tireless fighter helped to organize women laundry and garment workers during World War I. At the same time she gained recognition as an important officer of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council where she held a number of positions including vice chairperson, statistician, treasurer, and business agent.

She will also be remembered for her role in forcing through protective legislation for women and workers. She helped gain passage of the Minimum Wage Act (and organized women around this issue), the Deserted Wives Maintenance Act, Juvenile and Family Court Act, and Workmens' Compensation Act.

She was politically active in both the C.C.F. and its precursor, the Socialist Party of Canada. And she fought for peace: opposing conscription during World War I and assisting the formation of the Women's League for Peace and Freedom.

During the Hungry Thirties she spoke for the unemployed and against the actions of the Vancouver city government. In 1937 she became the first woman elected to the Vancouver city council. Her defeat in 1939 has been attributed to her opposition to spending scarce city funds on a Royal Visit at a time when the streets were lined with the unemployed.

Labour historians have a special debt to Helena Gutteridge. She was a correspondent to the Labour Gazette from 1913 to 1921. And this is one of the primary sources for information on the early labour movement and working conditions.