

Strike in the Single Enterprise Community Flin Flon, Manitoba — 1934

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Strike in the Single Enterprise Community:

Flin Flon, Manitoba — 1934

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THE 1934 FLIN FLON LABOUR dispute was an episode in the radical unionism of the Great Depression. As such, it combined the innovative strike tactics of the Workers' Unity League (WUL) with the revised, anti-communist style hysteria of "boss" oriented propaganda, to provide a major example of 1930s style labour-management confrontation. Unique to the Flin Flon case, however, was the single enterprise nature of the community.¹ The Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company Ltd. (HBM&S) had entered the Flin Flon field in 1927 when it coordinated development with its technical expertise and financial capital.²

¹ For a more detailed definition of the single enterprise community as well as a discussion of the Flin Flon experience, see: Robert S. Robson, "Flin Flon: A Single Enterprise Community, 1927-1946," M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980. Other material that could be consulted for a total understanding of the single enterprise community phenomenon would include: Hilary Archer, "A Classification and Definition of Single Enterprise Communities," M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1969; John Bradbury, "Instant Resource Town Policy in British Columbia: 1965-1972," *Plan Canada*, 20 (1980), 19-38; S.H. Dietze, *The Physical Development of Remote Resource Towns* (Ottawa 1968); P. Keilhofer and J.W. Parlour, *New Towns: The Canada Experience* (Ottawa 1972); Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown* (Toronto 1971); Leonard Marsh, *Communities in Canada: Selected Sources* (Toronto 1970); L.D. McCann, "The Changing Internal Structure of Canadian Resource Towns," *Plan Canada*, 18 (1978), 46-59; H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development* (Toronto 1974); V.J. Parker, *The Planned Non-Permanent Community* (Ottawa 1963); N.E.P. Pressman, *Planning New Communities in Canada* (Ottawa 1975); Ira Robinson, *New Industrial Towns on Canada's Resource Frontier* (Chicago 1962); L.B. Siemens, "Single Enterprise Communities on Canada's Resource Frontier," *Contact* (1976), 277-97; G.A. Stelter and Alan Aribise, "Canadian Resource Towns in Historical Perspective," *Plan Canada*, 18 (1978), 7-16; H.W. Walker, *Single Enterprise Communities in Canada* (Ottawa 1953).

² The HBM&S was initially represented in the Flin Flon field by the Complex Ores Recoveries Company (CORC). The Ore Recoveries Company had been invited into the Flin Flon project in 1925 by its lease holder, the Mining Corporation of Canada. The

Robert Robson, "Strike in the Single Enterprise Community: Flin Flon, Manitoba — 1934," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 12 (Fall 1983), 63-86.

Based upon a 1927 government charter, the HBM&S established the machinery necessary to facilitate ore treatment.³ The charter granted surface rights to some 153 mining claims or a total area of nearly 6,000 acres.⁴ The property was held under a 21-year crown lease which was renewable by the HBM&S when not in default for successive periods.

The construction phase of the Flin Flon camp, which preceded production, extended from 1927 to 1930.⁵ By fall 1930, the mill, the zinc plant, and the copper smelter were all processing Flin Flon ore. Accompanying the opening of the treatment facilities was a significant increase in the "temporary" townsite population. Totalling approximately 1,800 individuals by 1930, the large workforce and the less than tolerable conditions of the townsite propelled the Company into the organizational stage of community development. Through the Community Development Company (CDC) which was established in 1931 by the Flin Flon Town Planning Scheme, the HBM&S directed townsite expansion.⁶ In its attempt to bring order to the community, the CDC's authority extended to the realignment of the townsite towards a more permanent configuration. Its responsibility included the granting of business licences, the enforcement of elementary zoning practices, and the regulation of community expansion. The tenure of the CDC as townsite authority was officially terminated in 1933 with the incorporation of the Municipal District of Flin Flon. The municipal council which consisted of the Mayor and six councillors

Complex Ores Recoveries Company belonged to the American entrepreneur Harry Payne Whitney. It was a fairly large organization that was heavily involved in North American mining speculation. Essentially, the CORC was the mother company of the HBM&S.

³ The authorized capital of the HBM&S upon its formation in 1927 was 2,500,000 shares of no nominal or par value. Of these, the Whitney interests of New York held 500,000 shares while its partners, the Newmont Mining Corporation and the Mining Corporation of Canada held 350,000 and 150,000 respectively. Of the remaining 1,500,000 shares, 325,000 were allotted to the Mining Corporation of Canada and the rest were sold to cover costs.

⁴ The charter issued to the Company in 1927 eventually formed the basis of its perceived authority in townsite management. Its authority in this regard however, is somewhat suspect as the charter granted surface rights but made no mention of the legal right to administer a townsite.

⁵ The growth of Flin Flon in the period 1927-1946 can be classified in four stages: construction, organization, reaction, and maturation. With minor deviations this roughly corresponds to what Rex Lucas has termed construction, recruitment, transition, and maturity. See Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, 21-112.

⁶ The Flin Flon Town Planning Scheme was implemented in July 1931. It created a townsite of approximately three square miles which was administered by the Community Development Company. Technically the CDC was intended to act as a holding company until such time as the inhabitants made application for the incorporation of the municipality. In reality however, with its directorship composed of roughly two-thirds HBM&S appointees, the CDC functioned as an arm of the HBM&S.

assumed control on 4 October 1933.⁷ The council continued to depend upon the HBM&S for the provision of electricity and water services and, while it took the initiative in legislating zoning by-laws and in the establishment of a municipal fire brigade, it still generally deferred to HBM&S directives. In this sense the municipal council, like its predecessor the CDC, functioned within the constraints established by the HBM&S. Essentially, the company ran the town.

By June 1934 worker dissatisfaction resulted in a call to strike. On 9 June, the demands of HBM&S employees were presented to, and rejected by, Company officials. The consequence was that some 1,300 workers walked out of the mine and the processing facilities. Largely orchestrated by the WUL and its affiliate the Mine Workers' Union of Canada (MWUC), the month-long strike conforms to what Stuart Jamieson and Irving Abella have described as the radical unionism of the "Dirty Thirties."⁸ Characterized by communist leadership, the radicalism of the period involved a militancy that co-ordinated the unemployed and the unorganized into cohesive fighting units.⁹ As suggested by Leach in his Stratford furniture strike study, the union movement was by and large a reaction to the "bureaucratic" nature of the established union process.¹⁰ It was further intended to represent the ideological needs of the worker with the heightening of class consciousness through the process of education.¹¹ While David Bercuson has suggested that "western radicalism reached the peak of its influence in 1919," the new radicalism of the WUL reached its zenith in the mid-1930s.¹²

Accompanying the innovative labour tactics of this period was a major re-emphasis on "boss" instigated, anti-communist strategy.¹³ Described elsewhere in terms of battling with "revolutionary communists,"¹⁴ this style of "negotiation," while not unique to the 1930s, was dramatically more pronounced during the halcyon days of the WUL. In Flin Flon, the outcome of the 1934 labour dispute was essentially decided by this form of vehement, anti-communist crusade. Directed by HBM&S officials, the movement eventually

⁷ The first municipal council was elected by 1,218 registered voters.

⁸ Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble* (Ottawa 1968), 215-6; and, Irving Abella, (ed.) *On Strike* (Toronto 1974), xii-xiii.

⁹ Desmond Morton and Terry Copp, *Working People* (Ottawa 1980), 143.

¹⁰ James D. Leach, "The Worker's Unity League and the Stratford Furniture Workers: The Anatomy of a Strike," *Ontario History*, 60 (1968), 39.

¹¹ In this vein, the WUL helped to organize the unemployed workers' councils and the campaign for a National Non-Contributory Unemployment Insurance Bill. See for details: Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left* (Scarborough 1977), 137.

¹² David Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier: 1897-1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 156.

¹³ Two vivid examples of the anti-communist mentality that prevailed in business/government circles of the 1930s are R.B. Bennet's "iron heel of ruthlessness" philosophy and Mitch Hepburn's communist inspired "Hussars." See Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left*, 136; and Irving Abella, "Oshawa 1937," in Abella, *On Strike*, 110.

¹⁴ Desmond Morton and Terry Copp, *Working People*, 144.

enlisted the support of local business interests, municipal council members, provincial and federal political representatives — most notably, Premier John Bracken and Attorney General W.J. Major — and, the protection of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Flin Flon in large part epitomized the theme of anti-communist rhetoric. This is particularly true in respect to the HBM&S, whose President of mining operations, R.H. Channing Jr., interpreted the confrontation as one between "law and order and communism."¹⁵

The Flin Flon strike's place in Canadian labour history is largely dictated by the single enterprise nature of the community. Like Noranda in 1934, Blairmore, Bellevue, and Coleman in 1932, and Estevan in 1931, Flin Flon offers the opportunity to isolate the labour-management confrontation and to study the all-encompassing effects of the conflict upon the industrial community.¹⁶ Of particular interest in the Flin Flon conflict are: the role of the RCMP as civil authority; the almost last ditch effort by the WUL to co-ordinate workers' organizations in the extractive field; the fervent anti-communist hysteria which isolated the WUL and its affiliate the MWUC; the eventual establishment of the management oriented Employees' Welfare Board, as a collective bargaining agency; and, perhaps most succinctly, the finality with which HBM&S officials could deal with labour organizers in the single enterprise setting.

The 9 June walkout was the result of ongoing labour conflict, depression accentuated economic difficulties, and a variety of single enterprise community troubles. The combination of these factors during summer 1934 produced the strike.

The history of labour-management relations in Flin Flon during the pre-strike era was characterized by management's continued resistance to the union movement. Organizational efforts by the workers often resulted in dismissals or Company blacklisting. The ensuing labour-management animosity polarized local sentiment. Indeed, the suggestion was made by a local union organization that the 1934 conflict actually had its origin in the dismissal of 60 carpenters during the construction phase of development in 1929.¹⁷

The first avenues for the expression of discontent appeared in the immediate pre-strike period. The Northern Manitoba Prospectors' Association, the Flin Flon Miners' Association, and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) offered the miner a forum for the exchange of ideas.¹⁸ The ILP perhaps more so than the Prospectors' or Miners' Associations reflected worker dissatisfaction.

¹⁵ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 5 July 1934.

¹⁶ For Estevan, S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931," in Abella, *On Strike*, 33-77; Blairmore, Bellevue, and Coleman in Allen Seager, "The Pass Strike of 1932," *Alberta History*, 25 (1937), 1-11; and, Noranda in Evelyn Dumas, *The Bitter Thirties in Quebec* (Montreal 1975), 28-42.

¹⁷ *The Northern Mail*, 23 June 1934.

¹⁸ Flin Flon Miners' Association in *The Flin Flon Miner*, 18 February 1932; Northern Manitoba Prospectors' Association in *The Flin Flon Miner*, 5 March 1931; and the Independent Labour Party in *The Northern Mail*, 30 June 1930.

Organized within the community during summer 1930, the ILP provided a platform for the first serious discussion of unionization as well as having hosted a speaking tour of prominent party men. W.T. Ryan, appearing under the auspices of the party and as a representative of the International Union of Mine and Smelter Workers, addressed a June gathering on the issue of union organization.¹⁹ Ryan's proposal, however apparently went unheeded until 1932 when Alex Stewart approached W.A. Green, mine superintendent with a suggestion for the formation of an "industrial body."²⁰ Green informed Stewart in no uncertain terms that any effort towards unionization on the part of the men would result in immediate dismissals. By 1933 conditions within the camp apparently were such that they warranted the risk of dismissal and the workers formed secretive groups of five into a local chapter of the MWUC.²¹ Aided by the WUL and the Canadian Labour Defense League (CLDL), the labourers solidified the organization during winter 1933-34, despite threats and acts of violence on the part of "Company goons."²²

In 1934, the HBM&S, true to form, fired suspected union organizers. During May and June it dismissed approximately 27 men who were involved in union organization.²³ Officially, the company declined to justify the discharges but labour organizers in Flin Flon had traditionally been subjected to Company harassment.²⁴ The 1934 example served to further unite the workers' cause.

The role played by economic issues in the conflict revolved around an HBM&S pay reduction and the depression relief program facilitated by provincial and municipal tax schemes. In July 1932 HBM&S had instituted a wage cut of 18 per cent for single men and 15 per cent for married men — with an allowance of one per cent per child.²⁵ In 1932 the decrease had apparently been acceptable to the workers but by 1934 with a rise of 75 per cent in gold prices, and proportional increases in copper, zinc, and silver prices, the men demanded a return to the former wage scale.²⁶ Their determination in this matter was even further heightened by the HBM&S *Annual Reports* for the years 1931-33 which showed a Company profit of almost 800,000 dollars. The tax burden of the relief program compounded the workers' wage loss with an increase in municipal taxes of 2.5 per cent and in provincial taxes of 2 per cent.²⁷ While the increases were perhaps justified by the Department of Labour's

¹⁹ *The Northern Mail*, 23 June 1930.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ This information is based on an interview with Mitchi Sago. For details, see: Irving Abella and David Millar, eds. *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto 1978), 277-80.

²² *Ibid.*, 279.

²³ *The Northern Mail*, 23 June 1934.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 June 1934.

²⁵ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 21 June 1934.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1934.

²⁷ For municipal tax increase, *The Flin Flon Miner*, 12 April 1934; and provincial tax increase, *The Flin Flon Miner*, 21 June 1934.

relief expenditure estimates, for the Flin Flon miner it further accentuated the economic squeeze of the depression.²⁸

The community troubles most closely associated with the call to strike reflect the single enterprise nature of the community. The HBM&S position as controlling interest within the community was facilitated by continued subservience of local authorities to Company directives. The Board of Trade formed in 1929, the Community Development Company established in 1931, the Ratepayers' Association founded in 1932, and the municipal council, all coalesced under the Company umbrella. In this sense, HBM&S employees as community members, had little, if any, recourse to debate Company policy within the community. The one agency that appeared to give the community at large a vehicle for the expression of local grievances was the Ratepayers' Association.²⁹ It, at one time or another, approached the CDC, the HBM&S, and the municipal council on issues such as garbage, water and electrical rates, street maintenance, sulphur fumes, and the "levelling" off of taxes.³⁰ At the other extreme, CDC policy as the responsible community authority from 1931-33, reflected the HBM&S composition of its directorship. Established with a board of eight directors, HBM&S representatives filled five positions, while community appointments held the remaining three.³¹ The CDC was in reality a subsidiary holding company of the HBM&S.

Community troubles, or more specifically, Company dominance within the townsite, combined with the ongoing labour-management conflict and the depression accentuated economic crisis to give rise to the strike. The workers' decision dramatically threatened the well-being of the whole community.

The MWUC had become a secret force in the lives of Flin Flon miners. Its origin in the community resulted from the intervention of the WUL in the organization of HBM&S workers.³² In the winter prior to the strike call, a group

²⁸ Relief expenditure had increased from \$5,777.64 in the period 1 October, 1930-March, 1933, to \$12,681.65 in the period 1 April, 1933-March, 1934. For details see: Manitoba, Department of Labour, *Annual Report*, "Review of unemployment and Relief," 1935, p. 3.

²⁹ See the expressions of local grievances over issues such as high utility rates and smelter fumes in *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934 and *The Northern Mail*, 23 June 1934.

³⁰ The Ratepayers' Association was actually formed in November 1932 to represent the "average lot holder" in dealings with the CDC. The relationship between the Ratepayers and the CDC was at best stormy. The CDC viewed the Ratepayers as inferior community members while Gordon Smith, chairman of the Ratepayers, denounced the CDC members as "cockroach businessmen." For details of the feud, see: Valerie Hedman, Loretta Yauck, and Joyce Henderson, *Flin Flon* (Altona 1974), 85.

³¹ It is of interest to note that the first three community representatives of the CDC Board of Directors were non-HBM&S personnel. The positions were filled by two local businessmen and a community employee.

³² Irving Abella and David Millar make the point in *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century*, 260, that "what strikes there were [in the 1930s] were almost always organized and led by the Workers' Unity League." It is of further interest to the

of Flin Flon miners had sent word via letter to the WUL in Winnipeg asking for assistance in the organization of the mine workers.³³ In response to the request the WUL sent M. Sago and E. Edwardson to the mining community. They organized a branch of the CLDL as well as units of the MWUC. It was estimated by Sago that the WUL organized 700 men during the winter.³⁴ It was not surprising therefore that, when the HBM&S completed its final round of union oriented dismissals on 8 June the local branch of the MWUC was prepared to call for strike action within 24 hours.

The WUL which fostered the growth of the MWUC in the Flin Flon camp was an organization founded in the winter of 1929-30.³⁵ It was established as the Communist Party's representative in the attempt to organize previously unorganized industries.³⁶ The WUL had in affiliation three organizations which were in existence prior to the establishment of the League including the MWUC.³⁷ Outside of the MWUC, the League was active in the organization of the logging, shipping, longshoring, and fishing industries. By 1934 the WUL had approximately 40,000 men.³⁸

The activity of the MWUC local on Saturday, 9 June, was precipitated by the Company's move to rid itself of union organizers. Although the strike leaders later admitted that a strike was planned for "some time" during summer 1934, they maintained that the walkout was a spontaneous decision based on Company dismissals.³⁹ The first reaction of the union to the Company's firings was the calling of a meeting on 8 June.⁴⁰ The meeting consisted of several small gatherings, with a representative of each department of the mine in attendance. Grievances were discussed and a committee composed of group leaders was chosen to present union demands to management. The strike committee of twenty confronted W.A. Green the next morning.⁴¹ They demanded:

Flin Flon case study that H.C. Pentland in *Background of the Canadian System of Industrial Relations* (Ottawa 1968), 29-30, also suggests the necessity of outside organizers when he claims that labour in company towns has "a limited conception of what is practical in the outside world."

³³ Abella and Millar, *The Canadian Worker*, 278.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

³⁵ In an interesting article by Glen Makahonuk entitled "Trade Unions in the Saskatchewan Coal Industry, 1907-1945," *Saskatchewan History*, 31 (1978), 51-68, the distinction is made between the "business union" and the "revolutionary union." The latter term is used to describe the WUL.

³⁶ Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 235.

³⁷ Canada, Department of Labour, *Labour Organizations in Canada* (Ottawa 1934), 138.

³⁸ D.J. de Beer, "The Flin Flon Strike, 1934," unpublished paper, University of Manitoba, 1973.

³⁹ *The Northern Mail*, 12 June 1934.

⁴⁰ *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 11 June 1934.

⁴¹ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 9 June 1934.

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1. Recognition of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada.
2. That no discrimination against anyone because of union activity occur and that all those discharged without just cause be reinstated.
3. That the pay deduction of 18 per cent single employee, 15 per cent married employee and 1 per cent for each child, cease at once.
4. That the number of those employed not be reduced by lay-offs.
5. That pay day be twice a month, approximately every 15 days.
6. That the eight-hour day be instituted with time and a half for overtime up to sixteen hours, double time for all time in excess of sixteen continuous hours.
7. That nothing be touched or tampered with after an accident until investigated by the departmental committee.⁴²

Green refused to recognize the strike committee or the MWUC and, under the conditions presented, to consider the workers' grievances.⁴³ The workers then vacated HBM&S facilities and the strike began at 6 p.m. on Saturday, 9 June 1934.⁴⁴

The strike committee was quick to act. Even before the official walkout, pickets had been established around the mine and the treatment facilities, denying employee access to the property.⁴⁵ The actual transition to strike force was smoothly carried out with very few incidents. The strike committee had guaranteed the safety of Company property by allowing a protective group of twenty to remain in the area in order to keep the mine drained and the machinery under surveillance. The committee also attempted to help maintain a measure of order within the community by requesting that beer parlors and liquor stores close for the duration of the strike. This measure was thought necessary to keep the men "under control."⁴⁶ On behalf of local merchants an appeal was made to the workers by the strike committee, asking that bills of credit be paid in order that the business community might continue to function.⁴⁷ And finally, to ensure continued water supply, electric power and lighting, an agreement was reached between the strike committee and the Company which allowed the

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ The question of assessing the support of the strike committee presents a problem in accuracy and definition. The HBM&S employed on the average between 900-1,300 workers in 1934. Excluding both management personnel and those who remained on the job would leave a figure of approximately 973 workers involved in the conflict. The strike committee claimed that they had secured the support of 100 per cent of the workers by the tenth. The Bracken interviews conducted in July, suggest that the committee had the support of only 25 per cent of the workers at the call to strike. It would appear that the union had the support of the departmental representatives but not necessarily the workers themselves. A number of workers waffled from one side to the other further complicating an accurate measure of MWUC support.

⁴⁵ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ The merchants eventually went on a cash only basis.

men engaged at both the power house and water supply plants to go to and fro without interference.⁴⁸

The initial reaction of the HBM&S to the strike call appeared to be one of surprise. Believing that they had rid the Company of union activists through the dismissals of the previous weeks, R.H. Channing Jr. and R.E. Phelan, general manager of the Flin Flon mine, had both departed from Flin Flon before the threat of walkout had occurred.⁴⁹ This left W.A. Green in charge of the operation at the time of the ultimatum. His position was reflected through his rejection of the grievances and his refusal to recognize the bargaining position of the union.

The two most visible local authorities, the municipal council and the *Flin Flon Miner*, expressed legitimate concern over the walkout. The council sought to remain "an absolutely neutral body" in an endeavour to present the facts in a manner befitting the responsible authority.⁵⁰ It hoped that its neutrality would serve its chosen role as mediator.⁵¹ The *Miner* expressed a similar desire to mediate. Through its editorials, it presented the opinion that the struggle was perhaps "inevitable," in view of the rise in metal prices and the continued wage cut, and that on that basis, the miners had legitimate grievances.⁵² Like council, however, it was willing to pursue the fastest method to a peaceful solution.

The organization of the workers continued through the weekend. Mass meetings were held on both Saturday and Sunday evenings to discuss union strategy.⁵³ The major issue confronting the union was the impending arrival of a special train on Monday, 11 June, carrying what was believed to be strike-breakers. An appeal was issued for increased picketing at the plant side, as well as for a large turnout to meet the arrival of the 7:15 from Winnipeg. A confrontation was brewing; 300 strikers lined the tracks at the station while another 200 maintained picket lines at the mine.⁵⁴ The peace of the Flin Flon strike had previously been broken only once; this had occurred late that Sunday evening when a lone worker attempted to crash a picket line.

The picketers were quite surprised and rather distressed when the 7:15 turned out to be carrying 18 RCMP officers, R.H. Channing, and a Winnipeg journalist.⁵⁵ Instead of scab workers, the strikers wondered if they had been countered with a RCMP strikebreaking force. Premier Bracken attempted to relieve the volatile situation with an 11 June press release, which explained that

⁴⁸ *The Northern Mail*, 12 June 1934.

⁴⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 June 1934.

⁵⁰ This is a rather interesting phenomenon that appears to be the norm in the single enterprise community. The council, in hoping to resolve the crisis as quickly as possible, generally seems to adopt the role of mediator. See, for example: David Frank, "Company Town/Labour Town," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 27 (1981), 190-1.

⁵¹ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 28 June 1934.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1934.

⁵⁴ *The Northern Mail*, 12 June 1934.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

"the presence of the police is not to be regarded as a threat to the strikers so long as they conduct themselves within the law."⁵⁶ Fear of a possible performance of RCMP strikebreaking tactics was now an underlying issue in the Flin Flon strike.⁵⁷



Strikers meeting the June train. SOURCE: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

The official Company statement in response to the walkout was issued on 10 June.⁵⁸ In a combined effort by Channing and Phelan, the Company reaffirmed the position assumed by Green earlier. They "would under no circumstances" recognize the workers' union nor accept their demands as presented to the mine superintendent. The major obstacle to conciliation as far as the Company was concerned, was the workers' organization.⁵⁹ Phelan, perhaps more so than Channing, characterized Company sentiment with an emphatic denuncia-

⁵⁶ PAM, John Bracken Papers, Flin Flon Strike File, Number 807 (henceforth Bracken Papers).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Estevan, Saskatchewan or Corbin, British Columbia in Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 220-1

⁵⁸ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

⁵⁹ This is well summarized by David Moulton, "Ford Windsor 1945," when he states: "Very few working-class fights have been carried on solely around the question of the immediate demands of the workers. The question of the political direction of the trade-union movement is often on the agenda. . . ." Irving Abella, *On Strike*, 131.

tion of the union when he claimed "... their affiliation with the Workers' Unity League classed them with Red organizers."⁶⁰

Based on correspondence with Ontario Attorney-General W.H. Price, Phelan maintained that the MWUC was not concerned with the betterment of the miners' working conditions but rather with "world revolution." Stating that the Communist International at Moscow was the governing body of the Communist Party of Canada and therefore controlled the WUL and the MWUC, Phelan was willing to close the plant for ten years before recognizing such a union.

Channing presented a milder version of Company policy. Although he did reaffirm the conviction that the union was not representative of the mine workers and therefore did not have the authority to speak on their behalf, he also reflected upon the friendly relationship that had existed between the Company and its employees.⁶¹ Channing attempted to illustrate Company "generosity" by claiming that the HBM&S had offered full-time employment to 1,200 to 1,300 men at wage levels comparable to anywhere in the world, during times of depression. The president's amiable approach to the workers' grievances was concluded with a declaration that after the men had returned to work, the Company would consider dealing with the proposal affecting their complaints.



The early cordiality of the Flin Flon strike is demonstrated by R.H. Channing's willingness to move amongst the strikers. Shown here with Mine Superintendent W.A. Green. SOURCE: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

⁶⁰ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

While Phelan presented the hard line and Channing was somewhat more conciliatory, the official statement of the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company was a six-point rejection of union demands:

1. That the HBM&S would not recognize the strike committee.
2. That the Company would not recognize the MWUC.
3. That the Company was prepared to pay twice a month.
4. That the Company had been more than fair with its employees; offering employment, reasonable wages. . . .
5. That the Company would consider negotiating after the men returned to work.
6. That the Company did not believe that the demands were from a majority of Company employees but were the result of outside Communist agitation.⁶²

As official statements were conveyed, the miners solidified their position with further numerical support when on 11 June, some 200 women and unemployed individuals joined their ranks.⁶³ Wives and mothers of the strikers organized themselves into an auxiliary strike committee.⁶⁴ The women canvassed for funds and provided coffee for night-time pickets, while the unemployed volunteers joined the picket lines and helped to ensure a continuance of available manpower.

On 14 June, the *Miner* carried the strike committee's reply to the HBM&S statement. The workers countered Channing's claims with the suggestion that the Company had not been overly generous to its employees, that the wage decreases were not simply a response to depression economics, and that the union was indeed representative of the workers. The most damning of the Company's allegations, however, was difficult for the strike committee to disprove entirely. This was the HBM&S's belief that the demands of the workers' organization were the result of outside communist agitation. Even the possibility of an association between the union and communist activists raised anti-union feeling within both the Company and municipal council.⁶⁵

The major indictment presented by the HBM&S concerning communist involvement in the confrontation was their association of the MWUC, WUL, the Communist Party of Canada, and the Third International. The connection was initially suggested by R. E. Phelan. The affiliation of MWUC with the WUL was readily available information. Not only was it recorded by the Department of Labour publication, *Labour Organizations in Canada*, it was also a fact readily

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ This would appear to reflect the influence of the WUL. Irving Abella summarizes their methods when he states; "The WUL was the only labour center committed to organizing not only the unorganized but the unemployed as well. . . ." *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973), 3.

⁶⁴ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

⁶⁵ There is a rather interesting contrast to the perceived communist threat of Flin Flon in the Blairmore strike of 1932. Allen Seager, "The Pass Strike of 1932" demonstrates that in the Blairmore situation the "Red Scare" was not a threat because "it was often the Communists, and practically no one else, who had lent concrete support."

admitted by MWUC organizers in Flin Flon. P. Barclay of the MWUC, for example, when interviewed by the municipal council, was quoted as saying that the union has been "affiliated with the WUL [since] 1931."⁶⁶ For the connection between the WUL and the Communist Party of Canada, Phelan relied on information supplied by Ontario Attorney-General, W.H. Price. Responding to a request for information on the WUL, Price informed Phelan that:

The Communist International at Moscow is the governing body of the world organization. The Communist Party of Canada is the Canadian section of the Communist International and the Workers' Unity League is the name for the Communist Party of Canada's activities in the industrial fields.⁶⁷

Price's confirmation of the Moscow connection convinced Phelan that "communist agitators" had instigated the walkout. The important issue, however, appeared not to be the accurate determination of communism in Flin Flon but rather the suggestion of "Red" infiltration. In other words, Phelan was more interested in the possibility of communism in the workers' organization than he was in actually proving it.

The municipal council's response to the allegations made by the HBM&S was to initiate its own investigation. On 11 June, Mayor Foster telegraphed W.J. Major, Attorney-General of Manitoba, requesting information on the political affiliation of the MWUC. Major forwarded a reply to Foster, as well as forwarding the initial telegram to the Federal Department of Labour. The correspondence from the Attorney-General read in part: "Affiliated in 1931 with Workers' Unity League. . . . However the officers claim only fraternal relations with the Russian body maintained since 1932."⁶⁸

The council's investigation was not strictly limited to correspondence. On 11 June, they also received a delegation of union representatives in the council chambers.⁶⁹ Representing the union cause was A. Stewart, A. Hay, Messrs. Chandler, and Cavanagh (all local organizers of the MWUC), J. Coleman (associated with the Winnipeg branch of the WUL) and P. Barclay (associated with the Calgary branch of the MWUC). The council's questions ranged in scope from the possibility of having an appointed Board of Arbitration settle the strike to the nature of the strike vote.⁷⁰ Four or five important points were clarified by the union delegation: that the WUL was "the big brother" of the MWUC; that the MWUC was a government-chartered organization, but that the local unit was not; that there were no outside men on the executive council of the strike committee nor were there any in the local; and, that the strikers were not prepared to accept a Board of Arbitration or Conciliation. It is of some

⁶⁶ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Flin Flon Municipal Council*, 11 June 1934.

⁷⁰ See a copy of the transcript in *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934.

significance that the meeting took place prior to the above noted response from the Attorney-General to Mayor Foster's inquiries and that once the reply was received, council's dealings with the union were not nearly as amiable.

The strike committee, perhaps realizing the shift in sentiment against alleged communist involvement, issued a 14 June statement emphatically denying the communist connection.⁷¹ It claimed affiliation with the WUL, the Amalgamated Mine Workers of New Brunswick, and other unions which had "succeeded in improving bad conditions everywhere," but it denied affiliation with any form of communism. The strikers, however, did not deny an earlier communist connection nor did they attempt to reiterate the fact that the connection was merely "fraternal" since 1932.⁷²

Concurrent with the polarization of sentiment within Flin Flon was a division in public opinion beyond municipal borders. This was most vocally expressed over the RCMP in the labour dispute. Positive support for the strike was voiced over the fear of possible RCMP strikebreaking activity while on the negative side, the communist bogey claimed to warrant the presence of the RCMP.

In the Manitoba legislature, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), led by John Queen, S.J. Farmer, and H.F. Lawrence, led the crusade for collective bargaining.⁷³ They requested that Bracken use the influence of the provincial government in "forcing" the HBM&S into recognizing the principle of collective bargaining.⁷⁴ The three ILP members further "expressed regret" at the presence of the RCMP in Flin Flon. Bracken assured them that the purpose of the force was to ensure law and order and not to participate in strikebreaking activity. They thus received little satisfaction from Bracken short of his promise to consider their request.

Further reaction to the government's policy was voiced by a variety of labour organizations. Over a hundred petitions from union organizations as far afield as Guelph, Ontario; Bellevue, Alberta; and Glace Bay, Nova Scotia were received by Bracken. The most significant, however, in terms of its impact was that of Noranda, Quebec.⁷⁵ The Noranda Mines local of the MWUC had voted for strike action on 11 June, with the following sentiment: "Here is real support for Flin Flon. We are launching a national campaign to support these heroic struggles of metal miners and smelter workers."⁷⁶ All the labour protests, including Noranda's, demanded the immediate withdrawal of the RCMP. Once again, fear of RCMP strikebreaking tactics provided the basis of the protest.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² This use of "fraternal" is based on the report of the Department of Labour in *Labour Organizations in Canada* (Ottawa 1932).

⁷³ Bracken Papers.

⁷⁴ *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 11 June 1934.

⁷⁵ A good account of the Noranda strike can be found in Evelyn Dumas, *The Bitter Thirties in Quebec*, 28-42.

⁷⁶ *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 12 June 1934.

The final charge in the denunciation of Bracken's handling of the early stages of the strike came from the WUL. Its concern was expressed by M. Sago, when he claimed that the RCMP were sent to Flin Flon for "scab recruiting and strikebreaking purposes."⁷⁷ The WUL was of the opinion that not only were the RCMP in the services of the HBM&S, but even "honest" John Bracken had been "hired" by the bosses.

Positive support for the action of the Bracken government or the HBM&S was not nearly as obvious as the dissent of the protesters. Generally, the positive reaction was restricted to politicians or other government officials who sensed a real problem in the possibility of communist involvement in the Flin Flon altercation. This sentiment was expressed by B. Stitt (federal MP for the area), W.J. Price (Ontario Attorney-General) and most emphatically by Colonel Webb, Mayor of Winnipeg.⁷⁸ Mayor Webb, convinced that the strike leaders were communists, recommended to Mayor Foster plans for "their immediate departure by the first boat from Churchill."⁷⁹

Such was the opinion both locally and nationally as the strike entered its second week. The workers had established a rather efficient organization as a result of the assistance of experienced organizers. By the end of the second week, the combined organizational force of Barclay and Coleman had been augmented with the arrival of Mabel "Mickey" Marlowe (secretary of the Manitoba section of the CLDL) and Cecil Zuken, alias William Ross (MWUC organizer).⁸⁰ The facilities established by the union included a strike fund, which was reported to amount to several thousand dollars, a soup kitchen under the supervision of the women's auxiliary, and around-the-clock picketing schedules, which included the provision of coffee, coats, sweaters, etc. With organization came a heightened level of militancy. As the strike progressed, non-participating workers became openly subjected to forms of violence. The "scab" label had been applied to more than one dwelling in the community.⁸¹

The second week of the strike witnessed the watershed in public sentiment. The conflict no longer centred on the miners' demands but rather on the political implications of communist involvement. It was best illustrated in the pages of the local newspaper which on 21 June published correspondence from W.M. Dickson, R.B. Russell, and J.S. Woodsworth's personal secretary, allaying any doubts as to the sympathy of the local press. The telegram from Deputy Minister Dickson was a reply to a request from Mayor Foster for a clarification of the affiliation of the WUL with the Red International. Dickson referred the Mayor to the Second National Congress of the WUL in 1933, at which time the WUL declared its desire to maintain and develop fraternal

⁷⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 July 1934.

⁷⁸ See B. Stitt in *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 June 1934; W.J. Price in *The Northern Mail*, 15 June 1934; R. Webb in *The Northern Mail*, 23 June 1934.

⁷⁹ *The Northern Mail*, 23 June 1934.

⁸⁰ Marlowe had arrived in Flin Flon on 23 June while Zuken was present by 16 June.

⁸¹ See, for example, *The Northern Mail*, 15 June 1934.

relations with the Red International of Soviet Russia.⁸² This amendment to the 1932 constitution, by which the WUL had claimed to have broken ties with Moscow, intensified Foster's suspicions. The two letters from the offices of J.S. Woodsworth and R.B. Russell, which had been solicited by Foster and were printed in full in the *Miner*, supported the claim by Dickson.⁸³ The association was drawn between the WUL and the Moscow International by both letters. They maintained that while there may have not been "direct affiliation" the two worked "hand in hand," in the fulfillment of mutual objectives. The opinion of the two pro-labour activists on the subject of communist involvement in the WUL had a far reaching effect on the Flin Flon situation.

The anti-communist movement, supported by the letters of Dickson, Russell, and Woodsworth, gathered momentum. In a supplement to the same edition of the *Miner* in which the correspondence was printed, Councillor Mainwaring further condemned the union and its association with the "revolutionary movements of Russia." He maintained that it was council's responsibility "to open the eyes of the people to the terrible consequences of countenancing with revolutionary tactics."⁸⁴

A further blow to the union came by way of an organized effort on the part of local interests to "stamp" out communism and its adjuncts within the community. This took the form of a Canada First Union or, as it was known officially, the Anti-Communist League of Flin Flon.⁸⁵ The founding meeting which took place on 18 June, elected officers and passed a 26-point constitution — all pertaining to the expulsion of communism from the community. The most pointed of the resolutions declared "Membership shall be open to all free white males or females 21 years of age who openly avow their opposition to communism. . . ."⁸⁶ The attack on communism carried some rather blatant racist overtones.⁸⁷ Support rallied around the League and within three days of its organization, it boasted a membership of 300.⁸⁸

Last but not least, *The Flin Flon Miner's* editorial of 28 June characterized the growing anti-communist sentiment within the community. The question was no longer whether or not communist agitators had infiltrated the community, but rather how to get rid of them. In an effort to protect the virtue of Flin Flon, the *Miner* combined with representatives of commercial and fraternal

⁸² *The Flin Flon Miner*, 21 June 1934.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ While the attack on the perceived communist nature of the strike-force did indeed have racist overtones, it was never as racially oriented as might have been expected. Doug Baldwin in "The Life of the Silver Miner," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 104, for example, suggests that "racism reached a peak in the Cobalt camp during strike activity." The difference between Cobalt and Flin Flon might in part be explained by the single industry vs. single enterprise nature of the two communities.

⁸⁸ *The Northern Mail*, 21 June 1934.

organizations, in asking the strike committee to persuade non-resident communist agitators to leave the district.⁸⁹ The power of the local press had rallied against suspected intruders in order to prevent "women and children [from] suffering" needlessly. It was apparent that the balance of opinion had shifted against the MWUC.⁹⁰

The stage was set for a major confrontation when on 23 June R.H. Channing, in the belief that a large percentage of the men were prepared to return to work, issued a return to work proposal.⁹¹ Channing offered a guarantee that those taken back by the Company would not be discriminated against because of their participation in the strike. Reinforced by a statement from Bracken which promised protection against union retaliation, the proposal was alluring. The men were slowly becoming more and more disillusioned with the long, drawn-out strike. Many had decided to leave town for its duration, while still others attempted to take a more neutral stance by resigning their union memberships.⁹² The possibility of returning to work without the fear of penalty or retaliation was inviting.

The MWUC responded to the Channing statement with one of their own. Meeting in a closed session on 24 June, the local branch of the MWUC revised its original demands to exclude recognition of union status.⁹³ This major change was further revised on 25 June, when it was announced that union recognition was still a factor but that it no longer represented the most important plank in the local's platform.⁹⁴ The implication of the union's revision suggests that it was faltering under the weight of the anti-communist crusade.

The HBM&S combined with local businessmen in an effort to take advantage of the uncertainty that existed within the workers' organization. Hoping to capitalize on the union's seemingly wishy-washy revisions and the fact that they honestly believed that the majority of men were willing to return to work, the two announced plans for a 30 June secret ballot on the question of returning to work. Arrangements were made to poll the employees of the HBM&S at the Community Hall between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.⁹⁵ To ensure a peaceful vote, Mayor Foster was called upon to swear in 100 special constables.

The assessment of the situation in Flin Flon by the Company was proven drastically wrong on the morning of the vote. The Community Hall became the scene of the bloodiest conflict in the strike.⁹⁶ Members of the MWUC, aided by the women's auxiliary, formed a solid picket line at the entrance to the Hall.

⁸⁹ *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 27 June 1934.

⁹⁰ *The Worker*, 9 June 1934, suggests that the "balance of opinion" was oriented around "boss class organizations such as the Elks [and] the Knights of Columbus."

⁹¹ Bracken Papers.

⁹² *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 16 June 1934.

⁹³ *The Northern Mail*, 25 June 1934.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1934.

⁹⁵ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 28 June 1934.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 July 1934.

Armed with eggs, mud, and pepper, the group was determined to prevent the vote from taking place. As the men came within range of the Hall, they were pelted with missiles. If they persisted in trying to gain entrance to the building, the women in the group violently attacked them, ripping and pulling at their clothes and hair.⁹⁷ The confrontation was remembered well some 40 years later:

We went down to the community hall and all us women were up on the steps and blocked the doorway. I had two eggs in my pocket and I waited till a bunch of strike breakers was trying to get through and I threw my eggs — they made a lovely mess.⁹⁸



The 30 June ballot at the Community Hall resulted in the bloodiest conflict of the strike. Shown here is one George Watt after having registered his vote. SOURCE: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

Approximately 140 men braved the onslaught to register a vote. Although the special constables attempted to escort them safely into the building, they were badly assaulted. The presence of the constables actually did more to provoke the strikers than to ensure peace. At 2:30 p.m., despite the combined efforts of the RCMP and the special constables to curtail the strikers' passion, Mayor Foster was forced to close the poll.

⁹⁷ Jean Morrison in "Ethnicity and Violence: The Lakehead Freight Handlers Before WWI," makes an interesting connection between ethnic background and the tendency towards violence in the strike situation in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto 1976), 143-160.

⁹⁸ Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love* (Toronto 1980), 217.

The council, realizing the gravity of the situation, sought further provincial government assistance in quelling the vote-generated disturbance. In a telephone conversation with Premier Bracken on the evening of 30 June, Mayor Foster expressed concern for the lives of the citizens of Flin Flon, saying that the "situation [was] very, very grave."⁹⁹ In a follow-up telegram on the first, the Mayor demanded that the Premier send "at least" 50 additional trained RCMP officers to Flin Flon.¹⁰⁰ Foster's persistence resulted in the arrival of 18 Mounties on 1 July and an additional 40 on 4 July. The total force in Flin Flon numbered over 90 constables.¹⁰¹

The reaction of the HBM&S to the outbreak of violence was summarized by Channing when he concluded that the situation had degenerated into a struggle "between law and order and communism." The *Flin Flon Miner* in its interpretation of Channing's statement suggested that he was "washing his hands of the whole affair."¹⁰² The inference was that the HBM&S believed its position was that of law and order and as such, warranted the protection of the government. The Company maintained that the RCMP should simply have exercised its authority and arrested the agitators so that work could return to normal.

The MWUC, on the other hand, felt that the vote held on the thirtieth was yet another example of coercion by the HBM&S.¹⁰³ As such, the strikers refused to knuckle under to such tactics and stepped up their campaign with increased picketing. Another blow, however, was dealt to their efforts of entrenchment when the Community Club executive ordered them to vacate the Community Hall. Further animosity developed with the union's refusal to comply with the wishes of the Club. The MWUC claimed that the HBM&S had instigated the action as a further strikebreaking tactic. The lack of co-operation on the part of the union was therefore based on the suspected coercive policy of the HBM&S.

The enforced peace of Flin Flon was virtually guaranteed during the first week of July with the arrival of RCMP reinforcements. By week's end, a total of 65 people had been arraigned on charges ranging from intimidation to the obstruction of justice.¹⁰⁴ The presence of the large police contingent and the resulting undercurrent of worker animosity prompted the *Miner* to publish a full page "appeal to reason."¹⁰⁵ Stating that it was pointless to prolong the strike, the press encouraged the workers to disband the union and to return to work. Summarizing the position of the strikers, the appeal went on to suggest that the conflict had degenerated into a police-union affair and that the HBM&S was no longer the principal opponent.

⁹⁹ V. Hedman, *Flin Flon*, 126.

¹⁰⁰ Bracken Papers.

¹⁰¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 9 July 1934.

¹⁰² *The Flin Flon Miner*, 5 July 1934.

¹⁰³ Bracken Papers.

¹⁰⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 July 1934.

¹⁰⁵ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 5 July 1934.

Mayor Foster continued his own appeal for law and order. His demands for intervention by the Premier or the Attorney-General finally fell on attentive ears. Bracken, partially as a result of the Mayor's pressure and partially because of public opinion, travelled to Flin Flon on 7 July in hopes of settling the conflict. The Attorney-General, E.J. Major, reacted to Foster's appeals with further arrest orders.

The outside lobby for government action in the Flin Flon conflict arose primarily from labour organizations in Winnipeg. The independent Labour Party (ILP) continued its pressure on the Premier for government intervention, while the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council demanded a commission of investigation to intercede in the dispute.¹⁰⁶ The combined impact of the labour lobby with the pleas of Mayor Foster, encouraged the Premier's personal involvement in the dispute.

Premier Bracken's arrival in the community on 7 July marked the beginning of the end for the strikers. In an effort to determine a solution to the conflict, he conducted a series of interviews with a cross section of individuals, ranging from council members to Elks Club representatives.¹⁰⁷ His supposedly "impartial" position was compromised by the fact that he had interviewed approximately ten community groups as well as Company officials before considering the strike committee.¹⁰⁸ And even then, the committee was forced to request the audience with the Premier.

Generally, substantial opposition to the MWUC was reflected by an overwhelming majority of groups interviewed by Bracken. The opinion presented was that the men were either forced or fooled into siding with MWUC and that a large number of them now realized the error of their ways and wished to return to work. Based on these interviews, classified "confidential" by Bracken, he asserted that 847 of the men were willing to return to work, while 220 were still adamant in their rejection of the Company's proposal.¹⁰⁹

The strike committee, which eventually met with Bracken at 5 p.m. on 8 July, was composed of five members who, at the Premier's request, were not WUL, CLDL, or MWUC representatives.¹¹⁰ Claiming the support of 824 employees, the committee demanded that Bracken force the HBM&S to recognize the bargaining rights of the union. The Premier listened to the strikers' presentation but, after two days of anti-strike talks, including a two-hour ses-

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Bracken Papers.

¹⁰⁸ It would appear as if this type of occurrence was a regular feature of government intervention in strike negotiations — particularly where "revolutionary tactics" were perceived. See for example: Arthur Meighen's visit to Winnipeg in David Bercuson, "The Winnipeg General Strike" or J.A. Merkley's junket to Estevan in S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931," in Abella, *On Strike*.

¹⁰⁹ Bracken Papers.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

sion with Channing, his decision, it was later suggested by the union, had already been reached.¹¹¹

On the evening of Sunday, 8 July, Bracken issued his statement. Based on conclusions that he had drawn from the two days of discussions the Premier had determined that the majority of the men were willing to return to work and, on that basis, should be allowed to do so.¹¹² To a large degree, his statement was a reiteration of what Channing had said on 23 June. The exception was that Bracken now declared that the government would protect the men and their families if they decided to return to their job. Bracken encouraged the men to return to work on the terms offered by Channing. The mine, he said, would be opened the following morning.

The position of the strikers was completely undercut by the government's involvement. Not only was the mine to be reopened with the support of the province but, because of the Attorney-General's participation, the majority of strike leaders were sitting in jail. Coleman, Zuken, and Marlowe, principally, but also local organizers, such as Alex Stewart, had all been locked up because of their "illegal" deeds of previous weeks. The strike committee, however, refused to quit.

The operations of the HBM&S resumed activity on the morning of 9 July. Between 700 and 800 men were reported to have returned to work.¹¹³ With the assistance of the RCMP and led by R.H. Channing and W.A. Green, men marched past the continuing strikers. Another 100 men were reported to have returned to their jobs later that same day, bringing the total to some 900.

The remaining strikers fought the return to work call with a further challenge to Company authority. Meetings were held and plans made to distribute a petition in an effort to reclaim the support of the workers.¹¹⁴ Efforts were also made at the provincial level by labour supporters, to lend moral support to the faltering local. This included a mass rally at the Provincial Legislative Buildings, denouncing government participation in the Flin Flon conflict. Regardless of the support that the union received, its goal was becoming less and less attainable. With a total of almost 900 men on the job, the HBM&S was operating at close to peak efficiency. Indeed, approximately 140 to 200 new men had been hired by the company to replace those who remained on strike.¹¹⁵ The MWUC had lost almost all its leverage in the continuing struggle.

¹¹¹ Bracken's impartiality is not that unusual under the circumstances. Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater* (Vancouver 1967), 107, makes the case that "The early years of the depression saw a rapid deterioration in the relations between all the various labour groups and the federal and provincial governments. . . ."

¹¹² *The Flin Flon Miner*, 12 July 1934.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Alderman Penner of Winnipeg was one of the driving forces behind this effort to reorganize the union. For details, see *The Flin Flon Miner*, 12 July 1934.

¹¹⁵ Bracken Papers.



The 9 July return to work march. Note the helmeted RCMP officers. SOURCE: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

On 14 July, the strike committee finally succumbed to the inevitable and voted 201 to 18 in favour of ending the strike.¹¹⁶ In a last ditch effort to prevent discrimination against union members, the committee addressed a telegram to the Department of Labour asking for government arbitration. Complaining that 107 men had been discriminated against, the local branch of the MWUC requested the establishment of a Board of Arbitration to investigate miners' claims.¹¹⁷ The Deputy Minister of Labour replied that it was impossible to set up a Board of Arbitration because the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act clearly did not apply to men who were no longer in the employ of the company.¹¹⁸ With its leaders awaiting trial, its forces cut down by more than 75 per cent, the mine in operation, and the refusal of government arbitration, the local branch of the MWUC had its last hope rejected.

Having clearly defeated the MWUC, the HBM&S arbitrarily dealt with the men's grievances.¹¹⁹ The workers received some consolation when the Company announced that, effective from 9 July, it would implement a 50 per cent reduction in the 18 per cent wage cut. The HBM&S also announced a reduction

¹¹⁶ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 19 July 1934.

¹¹⁷ Bracken Papers.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 26 July 1934.

in light charges and a twice-a-month pay cycle. The Company had broken the back of the union and a settlement, however small, aided in the transition to the post-union period.

The most interesting concession was a Company statement dated 16 July.¹²⁰ R.H. Channing informed the miners that the HBM&S had long considered the formation of a "welfare committee" to represent the men in "collective bargaining with the management," but shelved the plan when the evidence of outside union activity was detected. Now that the MWUC was defeated, the HBM&S was prepared to reconsider the formation of the workers' committee. The proposal for the workers' committee was acted upon on 20 July when over 90 per cent of the employees eligible voted for the 17 positions on the Workmen's Welfare Board.¹²¹ The nominations, prepared by the Company and like the governing rules of the body, were designed in the best interests of the HBM&S.¹²² The most interesting of these regulations stated that "12 out of 17 members of the committee shall be British subjects..."¹²³ The Company-established union appeared to be an organization through which the HBM&S attempted to control the racial, as well as the political complexion of its employees. While the *Census of the Prairie Provinces* indicates that the ethnic composition of the community was overwhelmingly English-speaking (75 per cent), the HBM&S felt it necessary to ensure through the Board's by-laws the dominance of the English population.¹²⁴

For the strike leaders there was no Welfare Board. Coleman, Zuken, and Marlowe were all sentenced to terms ranging from one to two years.¹²⁵ Local organizers were sentenced to the blacklisting of the HBM&S as well as in some cases, prison terms of six months to a year. All in all, they had been instrumental in gaining the 50 per cent reduction in the wage cut, the reduction in light charges, and the twice monthly pay cycle. At the same time, however, they indirectly helped to ensure the tightening of the Company's control over its employees. The Company union with all its rules and regulations, was destined to fill a previous void in HBM&S authority.

The 1934 labour dispute was an almost inevitable response to rapid growth in Flin Flon. The conflict was a reaction to the dominance of the HBM&S in both industrial and community affairs.¹²⁶ The overriding authority of the HBM&S evoked a growing consciousness among the workers which eventually erupted into the full-scale labour dispute of 1934.

¹²⁰ *The Northern Mail*, 16 July 1934.

¹²¹ *The Flin Flon Miner*, 26 July 1934.

¹²² Bracken Papers.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ The most accurate assessment of the ethnic composition of the population is by "household head." See: *Census of the Prairie Provinces*, I, 1946, Table 53, p. 117.

¹²⁵ *The Northern Mail*, 30 October-13 November 1934.

¹²⁶ Flin Flon would appear to be yet another example of the contradiction in Rex Lucas' statement that "In communities of single industry unions are seldom militant" in *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, 140.

Typical of the era was the involvement of the WUL in the provision of strike leadership. Equally typical was the nationwide response to the WUL's perceived association with Moscow. The threat of communist influence in the Flin Flon altercation was perhaps more than any other factor, responsible for the eventual HBM&S victory. The "communist bogey" helped to weld the Company, the local council, and the provincial government into a solid front against the perceived menace.

The single enterprise nature of Flin Flon allowed the communist hysteria to ripen fully. With the leadership provided by the HBM&S, the business community, the municipal council, and the least militant of the wageless strikers combined under the guise of anti-communism to defeat the union. Perhaps the most telling incident of the whole affair was Channing's interpretation of the struggle as a contest "between law and order and communism" or more pointedly, between good and evil. The structure of the community also allowed the Company the privilege of dealing with the strike leaders in a most final manner. HBM&S's refusal to reinstate strike organizers to their former positions within the Company, freed the community of potential agitators. Displaced workers were forced to relocate elsewhere in order to secure employment.¹²⁷

In the end then, while the employees of the HBM&S received minor concessions from the Company, it was the Company that made the greatest gains. It had rid itself of potential trouble makers, while at the same time establishing an organization which would continue to ensure Company dominance. The Workmen's Welfare Board also afforded the HBM&S the privilege of isolating itself from many of the workers' demands. Indeed, the Welfare Board eventually served the Company as a buffer in its relationship with the community at large.

While the strike was officially settled on 14 July, labour problems within the community persisted. Episodes of mysterious explosions, anti-Canadian Labour Defence League vigilante tactics and even suspected Ku Klux Klan cross burnings followed on the heels of the 1934 labour conflicts.¹²⁸ If peace had been restored to the community through the Workmen's Welfare Board, it was but a tentative peace.

I would like to thank J.E. Rea, J.G. Snell and G.A. Stelter for their advice and comments at various stages of the Flin Flon project.

¹²⁷ Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism," 167, refers to this method of company dominance as the "velvet glove" approach.

¹²⁸ *The Northern Mail*, 26 July 1934; *The Flin Flon Miner*, 14 March 1935; there are two examples of possible Ku Klux Klan activity in Flin Flon that can be located in the local press. *The Flin Flon Miner*, 6 May 1935 and 13 June 1935. Both episodes suggest a continuing anti-communist sentiment within Flin Flon in the post-strike period.