

## Under a Watchful Eye: A Case Study of Police Surveillance During the 1930s

Michael Lonardo

Volume 35, 1995

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t35art01>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lonardo, M. (1995). Under a Watchful Eye: A Case Study of Police Surveillance During the 1930s. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 35, 11–42.

Résumé de l'article

Durent la décennie 1930, le Parti Communiste a organisé et a encouragé la lutte ouvrière contre les conditions résultant de la Dépression. Selon certains, les services de renseignements de l'État auraient prêté peu d'attention à ces efforts. Cependant, des faits attestent de la forte implication de la Gendarmerie Royale du Canada dans la surveillance et la répression des activités du Parti Communiste. Ce texte va démontrer l'étendue et les tactiques utilisées par la Gendarmerie Royale du Canada dans ce but, en analysant la participation de Stewart O'Neil, vétéran de la Première guerre mondiale et militant du Parti Communiste, dans quatre mouvements radicaux: la Workers Ex-Servicemen's League, la Marche des chômeurs sur Ottawa, le Workers' Theatre movement, et la Guerre civile espagnole.

# ARTICLES

## Under a Watchful Eye: A Case Study of Police Surveillance During the 1930s

Michael Lonardo

THE PASSAGE OF THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT (1983) has at least partially unveiled the surveillance activities of Canada's national police force. And while there are some who have recently argued that between the wars the Canadian intelligence community's efforts against the left were "on a small scale" and that it was only with the Gouzenko affair that the "age of innocence ended" in Canada,<sup>1</sup> the continuing revelations lend support to others who have claimed that "strong and consistent anti-Communism was ... a longstanding feature of the Canadian state prior to the Cold War. Communism was officially seen as an illegitimate participant in Canadian public life, to be at worst watchfully tolerated, and at best repressed when the opportunity arose."<sup>2</sup> This paper represents an attempt to shed additional

<sup>1</sup>J.L. Granatstein and David Statford, *Spy Wars: Espionage and Canada from Gouzenko to Glasnost* (Toronto 1990), 26, 63.

<sup>2</sup>Reg Whitaker, "Left-wing Dissent and the State: Canada in the Cold War Era," in C.E.S. Franks, ed., *Dissent and the State* (Toronto 1989), 195; see, for example, the RCMP Commissioner's comments to Ernest Lapointe on the eve of World War II concerning the existence of a list of "all known potential enemy aliens," on the necessity of a "more rigid and extended surveillance of Communist Agitators," and the RCMP's recommendation that the Communist Party be outlawed. Quoted in Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The War Series, 1939-1941* (St. John's 1989), 9; for a description and analysis of earlier state repression of the left, see Gregory S. Kealey, "State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada, 1914-20: The Impact of the First World War," *Canadian Historical Review*, 73, 3 (September 1992), 281-314.

Michael Lonardo, "Under a Watchful Eye: A Case Study of Police Surveillance During the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 35 (Spring 1995), pp.11-41.

light on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) surveillance of communists during the 1930s by focusing on the involvement of one individual — Stewart "Paddy" O'Neil — in four radical causes supported by the Communist Party.<sup>3</sup> Although not a major figure, from the period 1933 to 1937 O'Neil was directly involved in the Workers Ex-Servicemen's League (WESL), the On-to-Ottawa trek (O'Neil was one of the eight delegates who travelled to Ottawa to meet with R.B. Bennett after the strikers reached Regina), the workers' theatre movement in Vancouver and as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, a cause for which he died. While not a biography of O'Neil,<sup>4</sup> the paper does provide a glimpse of the life of a Communist Party activist during the 1930s. Primarily, however, reconstructing O'Neil's involvement in each of these four radical movements provides a connecting link to demonstrate the extent of the surveillance to which radicals like O'Neil, and the movements in which they were involved, were subjected, by the RCMP, as well as by the Vancouver police and the British Columbia Provincial Police.

After leaving the British Army in 1926<sup>5</sup> O'Neil migrated to Canada in 1928 and made his way to the West, discovering, as did so many other ex-servicemen, that there was little place for him in post-war Canadian society.<sup>6</sup> There began a five-year period in O'Neil's life, wandering through western Canada, during which time he was in and out of prison on a variety of charges, many of them related to depression conditions. The day after Christmas, 1928, O'Neil was arrested for Vagrancy "D" (Begging) in Vancouver.<sup>7</sup> On 26 July 1930 at 1:45 a.m. he was arrested for vagrancy once more, this time in Regina, using the alias 'Stewart Homer.' The file indicated that O'Neil was a single, 29 year-old labourer, with no fixed address. His religion was given as Presbyterian and his nationality as Irish.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Initially this study was sparked by the statement in Victor Howard's monograph that O'Neil was born in Newfoundland. The original intent was to gather information about this unknown Newfoundlander, for local interest; however, as additional information was gathered and the extent of the surveillance made clearer, the focus changed. See Victor Howard, *"We were the salt of the earth": A Narrative of the On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Regina 1985), 124.

<sup>4</sup>The existing sources of information have been used to their fullest, and although I do have additional information on O'Neil (primarily details of his arrests and short time in Spain) there is inadequate material for a serious biography. Unfortunately, a potentially useful source of information, an RCMP personal history file, does not exist for O'Neil. In addition, I have not uncovered any papers or diaries that might have been exploited.

<sup>5</sup>Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*, Edited by Victor Hoar, (Toronto 1973), 92, 102; National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC). Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion Collection, MG 30 E 173, vol. 1, file 6, account of William Brennan, 13.

<sup>6</sup>For one man's experience in attempting to find work in western Canada during this period see Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*, 3-7.

<sup>7</sup>City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA). City of Vancouver. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Court Calendars, vol. 63, 312.

<sup>8</sup>My thanks to Ms. Shirley Harkness of the Regina Police Service for this information from the records of the Regina Police Department. Correspondence in possession of the author.

Other convictions followed, including possession of stolen goods, breaking and entering, as well as additional vagrancy convictions.<sup>9</sup> By the end of 1932 O'Neil was back in Vancouver facing the prospect of Christmas in jail. On 24 December he had been arrested for an indecent act (quite likely urinating in public) and on 3 January he was sentenced to time served.<sup>10</sup>

O'Neil also spent time in a relief camp during these years<sup>11</sup> and by the early 1930s he had become involved in the single men's organizations in Vancouver.<sup>12</sup> One of the largest constituencies among the unemployed was that of returned veterans and it was logical for O'Neil to gravitate to an organization that represented the interests of this group. Such an organization was the WESL founded in Winnipeg in October 1931 (initially it was known as the Working Class Ex-Service Men's League — WEL). Like its predecessor, the Canadian National Union of Ex-Servicemen, formed in 1921,<sup>13</sup> the WESL was organized as a radical alternative to the conservative veterans' organizations, particularly the Canadian Legion.<sup>14</sup> George Black, a representative of the WESL, told the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission that the organization tried to keep officers out because they did not have the same grievances (relief and unemployment, for example) as the ordinary ex-servicemen.<sup>15</sup> The League's constitution stated that it

differs from all existing Canadian Ex-servicemen's organizations in that it promotes working-class unity and joins hands with the militant labour movement .... The WEL seeks nothing at the expense of the general working-class interests. It addresses its demands squarely to the capitalists and their governments, obtaining in support of these demands, the forces of the militant labor movement, led by the Workers' Unity League.<sup>16</sup>

Among its demands were non-contributory state unemployment insurance, that all pensions received by ex-servicemen be adjusted to the same rate as those received by ex-officers suffering the same disability, and that all veterans' funds be pooled and distributed to ex-servicemen without discrimination.<sup>17</sup> Apart from these spe-

<sup>9</sup>Saskatchewan Archives Board. Regina Riot Inquiry Commission (hereafter RRIC). Exhibit 228 for O'Neil's criminal record.

<sup>10</sup>CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Court Calendars: Indictable, vol. 11, 111, 126.

<sup>11</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 12, 154, testimony of George Black.

<sup>12</sup>Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*, 19-20.

<sup>13</sup>On the CNUX, see Elizabeth Anne Lees, "Problems of Pacification: Veterans' Groups in Vancouver, 1919-1922," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1985.

<sup>14</sup>RRIC. Report, 252; Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (hereafter CSIS). Access Request 90-A-6, Workers Ex-Servicemen's League, 200, 427, Report of the WESL 2nd National Convention, 30 August 1933; Howard, "We were the salt of the earth," 16, 38.

<sup>15</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 12, 146.

<sup>16</sup>CSIS. 90-A-6, 68-71, Objects & Constitution. Working-Class Ex-Servicemen's League.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 90-A-6, 638, WESL poster.

## 14 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

cific goals, as one of the Communist Party's mass organizations, the WESL was also expected to transform itself "into a mass fighting organisation"<sup>18</sup> against the new "Imperialist War," as indicated in a Party document seized by the RCMP in April 1932:

The preparatory campaign must be marked by a decisive turn of the Ex-Servicemen's League to mass work and, at the same time, by the attitude of the Party to those organisations and their political work .... The mobilisation of the members in the Ex-Servicemen's League is the first prerequisite for the mobilisation of the entire membership and, beyond that, of the masses of the victims of the war.<sup>19</sup>

One of the areas in which the WESL expanded early was British Columbia, and in particular Vancouver. By 1932 the League had established its own office at 165 Hastings St. W., where it held weekly meetings, all the while encouraging potential members to join. More importantly, it made its voice heard at both the municipal and provincial level in support of ex-servicemen. In addition to numerous letters of protest,<sup>20</sup> the League also acted on behalf of individuals with specific complaints or problems.<sup>21</sup> The high profile developed by the League helped raise its membership to 2000 individuals in Vancouver by 1935.<sup>22</sup>

By 1933 O'Neil was actively involved in the single unemployed movement and the WESL in particular. In October he was organizing relief camp workers, many of them ex-servicemen.<sup>23</sup> By January of the next year he was serving as the chair of WESL business meetings,<sup>24</sup> as well as being a regular speaker at public meetings. In December, for example, at a meeting of over 1200 people organized by the Relief Camp Workers Union during that month's walkout from the camps, O'Neil spoke on behalf of the WESL. As the RCMP officer in attendance noted in his report: "O'Neil ... pledged the support of his organization in the present camp strike, appealing to all ex-servicemen who had come into town from the camps to join the

<sup>18</sup>Williams, "The Veterans' Movement in the U.S.A.," *Communist International*, 9, 16 (1 September 1932), 566.

<sup>19</sup>British Columbia Archives and Records Service (hereafter BCARS). BC Attorney General. Correspondence files 1902-1937, reel no. B2300, file L-125-1-1932, Communist File, 224-30.

<sup>20</sup>See for example, CVA. Office of City Clerk, Inward Correspondence (16-A-7) file 3; Board of Police Commissioners: General Files (75-D-2) file 3; Office of the Mayor: General Correspondence 1901-1958 (33-B-6) file 7; BCARS. BC Attorney General. Correspondence files 1902-1937, reel B2301, file L-125-1-1933 Unemployment — Part II, 101 and reel B2302, file L-125-3-1933, Strike, Anyox, 74.

<sup>21</sup>CVA. Office of the City Clerk, Inward Correspondence (16-C-2) file 8.

<sup>22</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 11, 119, testimony of George Black.

<sup>23</sup>*Unemployed Worker*, 4 October 1933.

<sup>24</sup>CSIS. 90-A-6, 216, RCMP report, 15 January 1934.

WESL.<sup>25</sup> In March 1935 he was appearing on radio station CJOR to answer criticisms of the left by right-wing commentators like broadcaster Tom McInnis,<sup>26</sup> and by June he was BC Provincial Secretary for the WESL.<sup>27</sup>

The WESL's close ties to the Communist Party ensured that it would attract considerable attention from the authorities. In Vancouver, where the WESL was a significant force, the police department was quick to assign officers the task of watching the organization. Based on surviving records, it appears that one member of the force in particular was assigned the task of surveillance. During the Fall of 1931 he attended WESL meetings almost on a daily basis.<sup>28</sup> Not content to merely observe, the Vancouver authorities also attempted to impede the activities and the growth of the WESL. For example, this same individual who regularly attended WESL meetings, obviously working undercover, attempted to sabotage a demonstration planned for 11 November 1931. On 5 November he reported that "every W.E.L. man I meet, I tell them that it would be foolish to pull off anything on the 11th as they are not strong enough .... I think it will work."<sup>29</sup> More seriously, the WESL was also subjected to police raids and the seizure of its property.<sup>30</sup>

The RCMP's surveillance of the WESL began in the same month that the organization was formed.<sup>31</sup> On 23 October 1931 S.T. Wood, the Officer Commanding in British Columbia, reported to J.H. MacBrien, the RCMP Commissioner, that the Ex-Service Men was a section of the National Unemployed Workers Association and that it had two hundred members.<sup>32</sup> In November the RCMP in Manitoba, where the national headquarters of the WESL was located, reported that the arrest and conviction of the Communist Party leaders in 1931

has cooled the leaders of the Communist Party somewhat here in Winnipeg. They fully expect the Workers' Centre to be raided and that arrests will take place in Winnipeg of the Communist leaders, also that the Party will be declared illegal and driven underground and to be able to carry on in the open to a certain extent they will concentrate on the Working Class Ex-Service Men's League.

<sup>25</sup> NAC. Dept. of National Defence, RG 24, vol. 4630, file 18-34-1-1, vol. 1 RCMP report, 30 December 1934.

<sup>26</sup> *B.C. Workers' News*, 22 March 1935.

<sup>27</sup> *RRIC*. Exhibit 176, J.W. Phillips, Officer Commanding, B.C. to S.T. Wood, 15 June 1935.

<sup>28</sup> CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: General Files (75-F-1) files 13 & 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, file 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Unemployed Worker*, 17 December 1932.

<sup>31</sup> An access request to CSIS for information on the WESL produced 578 pages of documents; another 122 pages were exempted in their entirety. After a complaint to the Information Commissioner, three additional pages were released. For additional evidence of RCMP surveillance of the WESL, see Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part I, 1933-1934* (St. John's 1993).

<sup>32</sup> CSIS. 90-A-6, 2, Wood to MacBrien, 23 October 1931. He also reported the name of the "Fraction leader," but this information was deleted by CSIS.

The RCMP also learned that the WESL had been a section of the Workers Unity League (WUL) until 15 November 1931, at which time the Acting Secretary of the WUL indicated that the WESL could no longer be a section because it was not a trade union, "but that close contact would be maintained between the WUL and WESL."<sup>33</sup>

RCMP documents reveal that the authorities made determined efforts to keep watch over and impede the spread of the organization in Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Rumours of branches being started in Estevan and North Battleford in November 1931, for example, resulted in "discreet enquiries" being made to determine their accuracy.<sup>34</sup> In June 1932 Superintendent King of the Western Ontario Division was pleased to report that J.C. Wilson, National Secretary of the WESL, had been detained by the Toronto City Police "and taken to the City Police Station for questioning. He was later escorted to the Eastern City Limits, and told to keep out of Toronto." A few days later A.E. Smith, the Secretary of the Canadian Labour Defence League, related the story of Wilson's arrest to a friend he was visiting. That same day Smith's "friend" forwarded a report of the visit to the RCMP. And when the WESL sponsored a conference of the unemployed in Ottawa in August 1933, the RCMP kept close watch on the movement of delegates to Ottawa and in at least one case, RCMP offices in Kamloops, Nelson and Cranbrook were instructed to "endeavour to prevent journey east" of the delegates.<sup>35</sup>

The RCMP was also anxious to cooperate with organizations, such as the Canadian Legion (whose members were obvious targets for the WESL), in impeding the growth of the WESL. In June 1932 Colonel H.H. Matthews, Director of Military Operations for the Department of National Defence alerted Lt.-Col. T.S. Belcher, Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP, to a letter that the WESL was circulating to members of the Legion in Vancouver and Victoria outlining the benefits and strengths of the WESL. Matthews indicated that his informant felt that "undoubtedly some members of the Canadian Legion have been affected, but the number is very small, and conversely one or two members of the Canadian Legion joined the new organization for the express purpose of countering its activities."<sup>36</sup> This mutual interest in thwarting the efforts of the WESL encouraged the RCMP to join forces with the leadership of the Canadian Legion by regularly providing it with information about WESL tactics. The Legion, in turn, alerted the RCMP to continuing recruiting attempts by the WESL. On 18 November 1932, for example, J.R. Bowler, the General Secretary of the Legion wrote to the RCMP Commissioner thanking him for the file "relating to the activities of the Workers' Ex-service Men's League .... This information is indeed illuminating and will be valuable to us as showing the

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 6, R. Field, O.C. Manitoba District to R.R. Tait, O.C. Southern Saskatchewan District, 17 November 1931.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 4, 8, RCMP reports, 25, 26 November 1931.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 438, 463-4, 504-5, 536.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 51, Matthews to Belcher, 21 June 1932.

sort of tactics we must guard against .... I am taking the liberty of sending a copy of your file ... to General Ross." Ross was the President of the Saskatchewan section, an area where Legion officers had expressed concern that rank-and-file members were succumbing to the overtures of the WESL. After receiving the report, Ross replied to Bowler that

there is trouble in the Regina Branch at present ... I am watching the situation very closely but it would probably assist if arrangements could be made to introduce an observer who could mingle with the men ... if I was in a position to show that the present agitation was entirely communistic I might induce a number of substantial citizens to go in and take control of the situation .... In the meantime I have issued instructions that branches shall on no account supply lists of members to any outside person and also asking [sic] that all correspondence received from outside organizations shall be forwarded to me forthwith.

In recognition of Ross' efforts, J.W. Spalding, the Acting Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP, wrote to Bowler on 11 January 1933, noting that he was

interested in the very determined effort that General Ross is making to prevent the Communist element from attempting to influence any members of the Canadian Legion. If at any time you receive information that an effort is being made to influence members of the Legion by the Communist element I would be very pleased to have any particulars with which you can furnish me.<sup>37</sup>

British Columbia, with its large contingent of ex-servicemen, became fertile ground for the WESL and its activities there were subjected to considerable RCMP surveillance. As noted above, as early as 23 October 1931 Wood was forwarding information on the WESL to his superiors. These reports continued throughout the period from the early days after the formation of the WESL to the arrival of the camp strikers in Vancouver and beyond. The incomplete file received from CSIS indicates that during this period at least four RCMP personnel in Vancouver routinely submitted reports on the activities and meetings of the WESL. Often relying on sources (whose identity is always deleted by CSIS), these signed reports usually contained information on WESL-sponsored meetings. Another set of reports included in the file, prepared by Constable N.E. Macfarlane, are actually relevant sections of reports from a larger file on Communist Party activities in Vancouver.<sup>38</sup> According to Wood, Macfarlane, who was responsible for overseeing the surveillance of the Party, including organizations like the WESL, was his contact person when he wanted information about radicals in British Columbia.<sup>39</sup> To this end, from 1932 to 1935, Macfarlane prepared weekly reports, based on information supplied by sources and RCMP personnel, summarizing Party activity. Relevant

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 97, 108-9, 139.

<sup>38</sup> My thanks to Greg Kealey for allowing me to examine this file.

<sup>39</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 38, 62, testimony of S.T. Wood.



sections of these reports were cross-referenced to the WESL file. They alerted the authorities to such matters as internal strife, financial troubles, apathy among members, resolutions passed, strategies and tactics, and the influence of the WESL on other veterans' organizations. Finally the file also includes a series of reports dated May 1932 to August 1933 by a source or sources, probably undercover agents, whose names have been deleted by CSIS. Rather than submitting their information to an RCMP contact, these individuals prepared their own reports on matters such as the numerical strength of the WESL, the resignation of key individuals, the formation of new locals, strategies and tactics, internal politics and dissension.

Because of the deletions made by CSIS, it is difficult to know with certainty the details of the methods the RCMP used to acquire the information that it deemed valuable. However, after reading several thousand pages of RCMP documents, it becomes evident that the force employed three major tactics for gathering information. The RCMP routinely used plainclothes personnel to attend open meetings, parades and demonstrations. Reports of speeches, resolutions, financial contributions, etc., were then submitted to superior officers; the names of the authors of these reports are not deleted by CSIS. The RCMP also used its own personnel as undercover agents. The most infamous case of this, of course, was that of Sergeant Leopold, but for two and one half years during the early 1930s in Vancouver, the RCMP relied on the undercover work of Constable Leland Graham to provide it with information on radical activity in that city. Using the name G. Grant, Graham joined the Canadian Labour Defence League, the Single Unemployed Protective Association and the Friends of the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Information, and materials, such as newspapers and leaflets, were often passed on to other RCMP officers who would use the information to prepare reports. In addition to the reports of 1932 and 1933 noted above, one RCMP document released by CSIS provides further evidence that the force used undercover operatives to infiltrate the WESL. In a report from Cpl. L.F. Fielder to Wood on the activities of the WESL in Vanderhoof, BC, Fielder related that some citizens were contemplating joining the WESL, but that he had "dissuaded several from further efforts to become members, at the same time have diverted any suspicion they may have that we are under cover [sic] men in this movement, as it is possible that someone may be acting as informer on the status of prospective members."<sup>41</sup> Finally, the RCMP used numerous civilian informants. Shortly after the formation of the WESL in Vancouver, S.T. Wood reported to the RCMP Commissioner that he had received information from a source (name deleted by CSIS) indicating that none of the members of the WESL

<sup>40</sup> RRIC. Records. *Rex v. Ivan Bell, George Black, John Cowan Cosgrove, Arthur H. Evans, Ernest Edwards and Matthew Shaw*. Preliminary Hearing, July-August 1935, 351, 371.

<sup>41</sup> CSIS. 90-A-6, 646, Fielder to Wood, 23 November 1932.

could be trusted to remain loyal to the working class movement within the sound of an old Sergeant-Major's voice. He believes that ex-service men's organisations of all kinds ... would supply the material for counter-revolutionary forces. This is a subject that we have discussed at some length, and there is no doubt that certain individuals could be cultivated and used as channels of information in keeping touch with methods of propaganda and organisational methods used by the Party in their efforts to win the confidence and allegiance of the old soldier to their programme.<sup>42</sup>

In varying degrees, these three methods were used simultaneously by the force to keep watch over the activities of the radical movement, including the WESL, in Vancouver. Presumably because it is part of the public record that Graham acted as an undercover agent, CSIS has not deleted his name when it appears in the documents as a source of information. However, identifying information concerning any other undercover agent or civilian source is carefully deleted. Nevertheless, what cannot be hidden, is the major effort on the part of the RCMP to maintain surveillance on these organizations.

\* \* \*

On 4 April 1935, in response to an appeal for a strike from the Relief Camp Workers Union, hundreds of men left the camps and travelled to Vancouver for what was to become a two-month stay in that city, followed by a trek that reached Regina before the federal government ordered the RCMP to halt the movement of the strikers.<sup>43</sup> On 7 April representatives from 42 organizations, including labour unions, associations of the unemployed, the CCF, and the WESL, met and formed an Action Committee, whose role was to organize support for the strikers. The WESL, with a membership of about 2000 in Vancouver, many of them having spent time in relief camps, was represented at the meeting by George Black. Later O'Neil joined him as a WESL representative on the Committee.<sup>44</sup> O'Neil also became a member of the Strategy Committee, a group of six men that functioned as the policy-making body of the strike.<sup>45</sup> According to Wood, the members of the Strategy Committee "were really the brains of the organization and without

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 13, Wood to MacBrien, 9 December 1931.

<sup>43</sup>For a discussion of the trek see Howard, *"We were the salt of the earth"*; Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*; and Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator and the State* (Montréal 1987).

<sup>44</sup>RRIC. Report, 252-3, 266.

<sup>45</sup>Howard, *"We were the salt of the earth,"* 38; RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 10, 64, testimony of Arthur Evans. Evans only mentioned five members of the Committee and, unfortunately, Howard does not give a source for his information; for his part Cunningham, the lawyer for the strikers during the Regina Riot Inquiry, told the Inquiry that O'Neil "was never an officer of any kind, not even a group leader on this trek until some time after the trek had reached Regina," but this seems unlikely in light of O'Neil's activities throughout the trek, RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 38, 139.

exception were active Communists. Their main endeavour was to control and steer the body of strikers along Communist party lines (policies) and tactics."<sup>46</sup>

Even before the walkout on 4 April RCMP personnel had been watching the movements of those in the camps and reporting on the role of the Communist Party in organizing the strike.<sup>47</sup> As far as the authorities were concerned, the walkout was led by communist agitators with ulterior motives, who had managed to convince naive camp inmates that the improvement of conditions was their main objective. An unsigned confidential RCMP report dated 27 March 1935 on "Factors in the Relief Camp Situation" pointed to the "exploitation" of the existing unrest "by those of Communistic views." The same report indicated that in Vancouver it had been evident for some time that there was an effort to

correlate for offensive action the efforts of all groups with Communistic tendencies .... The plan last discussed embraced a general strike of: — (a) Mill workers, (b) Street railway men, (c) Longshoremen, and this was to be staged simultaneously with the concentration of relief camp men in Vancouver and then, if possible, work up to a general strike. This plan, however, has not matured, groups (a) and (b) are definitely out of the picture, whilst the latest information about group (c), and mine is obtained from one of their own officers ... is, that although a strike is pending, it will not take place for some weeks, and then only provided the relief camp workers show determination and become involved in real conflict with authority.<sup>48</sup>

As noted above, Wood was certain that the leadership of the trek was firmly in the hands of active Communists and he was convinced, for example, that the reason the strikers later agreed to send a delegation to Ottawa was because the "movement has, for the moment, got beyond the control of the Communist leaders and it is my opinion that they have accepted ... in order to stall for time, thereby gaining further strength and greater control along Communist lines."<sup>49</sup> As a result, on 29 March 1935, Commissioner MacBrien gave instructions that 25 men were to be transferred to Vancouver temporarily in anticipation of the walkout.<sup>50</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, while the camp strikers were in Vancouver they were subjected to intense surveillance from both Vancouver City Police<sup>51</sup> and the RCMP.<sup>52</sup> The two RCMP personnel most heavily involved were Constables Eric Kusch and Leland Graham. Kusch, a four-year veteran of the force whose assign-

<sup>46</sup> CSIS. Access Request 89-A-115, Files of Historical Value, H.V.8, Regina Riot 1935, 1315, Wood to MacBrien, 19 July 1935.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-8, 62, 66, RCMP reports.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-1, RCMP report.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 401, Wood to MacBrien, 18 June 1935.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-1.

<sup>51</sup> On this see Howard, *"We were the salt of the earth,"* esp. chapters 3 & 4.

<sup>52</sup> For evidence of British Columbia Provincial Police surveillance, see NAC. RG 24, vol. 4630, file 18-34-1-1, vol. 3.

ment was to investigate workers' organizations,<sup>53</sup> had begun observing the RCWU at the end of March 1935. Although he did not join the organization, he did attend meetings open to the public.<sup>54</sup> Constable Graham, however, managed to join a number of radical organizations and although not a member of the RCWU, he did march with the strikers during one of the demonstrations at Spencer's Store.<sup>55</sup> While the strikers were in Vancouver, Kusch filed more than 30 reports, many of them based on information received from Graham, dealing with the finances of the strikers, the arrival of new strikers, meetings of support groups, accusations that Malcolm Bruce and others were stealing funds from the collections, accusations of Evans being drunk, the internal politics of the strike, and, of course, reports on what was said at meetings of the strikers.<sup>56</sup> Other reports, unsigned, but initialled by Kusch, dated between 15 April and 21 May, are obviously based on information from an undercover agent(s) or informer(s),<sup>57</sup> who were much closer to the strikers. For example, the report of 15 April indicated that the "strike committee has neither plan nor policy beyond a determination not to go back to the camps. It is felt by the personnel of the leadership that it would be useless for them to present themselves at any of the camps for admission, and they propose to hold as many of the men in town as possible while they have the sympathy of the public with them." The report of 30 April pointed out that on "Friday [deleted] with his nerves a little jumpy over the recent events, decided to move the Party printing plant .... The exact location will be forwarded as soon as ascertained." The 10 May report indicated that the Action Committee was becoming resentful of Evans' "domineering methods." On 14 May the source reported that the strikers as a whole were unhappy with the leadership and that most unions were cold on the idea of a sympathetic strike. The agent also noted that a fellow operative "[deleted] is taking classes of the leading Division members in the 'Elements of Political Education', and is in a good position to observe the conduct of the main body of strikers." Finally, on 21 May he reported that Evans wanted "action" and that he had proposed a surprise manoeuvre for 15 May, but had been dissuaded.<sup>58</sup>

Although it is not possible, because of the deletions made by CSIS, to determine whether the sources of information were RCMP personnel or informants,<sup>59</sup> Wood testified during the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission that the force had several agents in among the strikers and that there was also information volunteered by

<sup>53</sup>RRIC. Records. Rex v. Ivan Bell, George Black, John Cowan Cosgrove, Arthur H. Evans, Ernest Edwards, and Matthew Shaw. Preliminary Hearing, July-August 1935, 436-7.

<sup>54</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 2, 24-6, testimony of Constable E. Kusch.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 101-5, testimony of Constable L. Graham.

<sup>56</sup>CSIS. 89-A-115, *passim*.

<sup>57</sup>The source or sources are deleted by CSIS.

<sup>58</sup>CSIS. 89-A-115, 96, 131, 160, 190, 195, 229.

<sup>59</sup>The source of these reports was not Graham since CSIS did not delete his name from other reports based on his information.

## 22 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

individuals who were not members of the force.<sup>60</sup> The strikers were certainly well aware of the existence of informants and agents in their ranks. Evans testified to the Commission that the strikers went so far as to form a committee whose function it was to "watch persons of suspicious character."<sup>61</sup> In a further effort to combat infiltrators, the functioning of the strategy committee was organized in such a way "that the purpose or intention or proposals ... would not be divulged ... to profitters or stool pigeons that were sent in among our ranks."<sup>62</sup>

At the end of May, after the strikers had decided to launch the trek on Ottawa, the WESL executive, having made the decision to be officially represented because many of the participants were ex-servicemen, elected Black and O'Neil to accompany the strikers to Ottawa.<sup>63</sup> Although Constable Kusch believed that the decision to launch the trek was "merely a last effort of the strike committee to secure further funds from the citizens" and that the trek "would be abandoned immediately [sic] the strikers got out of sight,"<sup>64</sup> and despite the fact that initially the Communist Party did not think the trek advisable,<sup>65</sup> on the night of 4 June 1935 Black and O'Neil left with the second contingent of strikers.<sup>66</sup> Reports of the makeup of the strikers indicate that, for the most part, they were young men under the age of thirty,<sup>67</sup> and a mature individual like O'Neil, especially one who had experienced army discipline, was very useful as an organizer of such a large group of men.<sup>68</sup>

When the strikers left Vancouver and arrived in Golden, BC they had among them five undercover Special Police from the BC Provincial Police Force.<sup>69</sup> Although Betke and Horrall have claimed that Constable Graham also accompanied the strikers when they left Vancouver,<sup>70</sup> no evidence has been found to corroborate this. In fact, at the preliminary hearing of the seven strike leaders

<sup>60</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 38, 86. He provided no details on where or when these agents and informers were working, or how many had managed to infiltrate the trekkers' organization.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 10, 72-3.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 7, 112, testimony of Arthur Evans.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 11, 140, 142, testimony of George Black.

<sup>64</sup>CSIS. 89-A-115, 267.

<sup>65</sup>*The Worker*, 1 June 1935. This should have been an indication to the authorities that the strikers were not simply "tools" of the Communist Party.

<sup>66</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 11, 144-5, testimony of George Black.

<sup>67</sup>*Vancouver Daily Province*, 4 June 1935.

<sup>68</sup>Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*, 102.

<sup>69</sup>BCARS. BC Attorney General. Correspondence files 1902-1937, reel B2302, file L-125-3-1935, Relief Camp Strike, 22, Report of Constable W. Hodgkin B.C.P.P., 8 June 1935. For a popular history of the BC Provincial Police, including scattered references to its surveillance activities, see Lynne Stonier-Newman, *Policing a Pioneer Province: The BC Provincial Police 1858-1950* (Madeira Park, BC 1991).

<sup>70</sup>CSIS. Access Request 117-90-107, Carl Betke and Stan Horrall, *Canada's Security Service: An Historical Outline 1864-1966* (Ottawa 1978), 448. My thanks to Greg Kealey for this reference.

arrested on 1 July and the days following, Graham testified that he had not attempted to join the strikers.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, in a lengthy report to the RCMP Commissioner on the organization, equipment and methods used during the strike, Wood regretted being

handicapped in our sources of information in view of the fact that no Secret Agents or informers accompanied the camp strikers into this Province [Saskatchewan] in spite of the fact that they organized in BC and travelled through Alberta ... it would have been of immense help had informants been placed among these people to begin with and accompanied them on their trek west [sic]. This is a point that should be kept in mind for future occasions.<sup>72</sup>

Although it may not have had secret agents among the strikers, the RCMP continued to conduct surveillance activities against them. On 5 June, while the strikers were still in British Columbia, E. Bavin, the Officer Commanding the Calgary Subdivision informed the Officer Commanding "K" (Alberta) Division that the Secretary of the WUL in Vancouver had contacted his counterpart in Calgary with the news

that up to Wednesday night ... a total of 1700 men are expected to leave ... Vancouver. The local opinion [i.e., in Calgary] is that they will be held up at the Provincial Boundary .... On the other hand should they reach here ... strict instructions are outlined that they must behave themselves and comply with any ruling or order of the City Council.

He also reported that the Calgary branch of the Communist Party had sent a wire "to the branch in Vancouver containing advice to hold men in Vancouver for the party here consider that the fight is in Vancouver and not in Ottawa and that the men are showing the 'white feather' by running away from the point of action."<sup>73</sup> The next day Sgt. H. Trickey, who submitted a series of reports while the strikers were in Calgary, also reported, based on information received from a source, that "the local C.P. are doing all in their power to stop it" [the trek], for fear of alienating support in the upcoming election.<sup>74</sup> On 8 June Trickey submitted a report on the arrival and organization of the strikers and these were followed by further reports on the ninth, tenth and eleventh dealing with the strikers' activities while in Calgary.<sup>75</sup> It also appears that the RCMP did, in fact, attempt to introduce one of its

<sup>71</sup>RRIC. Records. Rex v. Ivan Bell, George Black, John Cowan Cosgrove, Arthur H. Evans, Ernest Edwards and Matthew Shaw. Preliminary Hearing, July-August 1935, 394.

<sup>72</sup>CSIS. 89-A-115, 1302-3, Wood to MacBrien, 19 July 1935. The decision not to send secret agents with the strikers may have been taken as a result of the information provided by Constable Kusch in his report of May 31 quoted above.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 293-4.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 325-6, 331-45, 354.

## 24 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

members into the trek while it was in Calgary. In a 14 June report by Constable F. McAdam, he indicated that he had been instructed

to mix with these men with a view of obtaining all possible information regarding their movements. During my association with these men, very little information of any value was obtained as it was found that the rank and file were kept in ignorance .... On June 10, the writer endeavoured to join this body of men, and was given a card .... Each applicant was strictly cross-examined as to what camp he belonged to, and reasons for leaving. The writer made a pretence of going home to get his pack-sack, in order to avoid questioning.<sup>76</sup>

When the strikers reached Moose Jaw the RCMP once again attempted to infiltrate one of its men onto the trek. A report by Constable Mervyn Black indicates that on 12 June Black drove to the outskirts of Moose Jaw where he met 23 year-old Constable Henry Cooper and another individual whose identity was deleted from the document released by CSIS. Black instructed the two

to observe the movements of the leaders, to endeavour to learn the intentions of the Strikers, and to report anything of importance to me at a pre-arranged point of contact. I instructed Cst. Cooper to endeavour to join the ranks of the Strikers. [deleted] kept in touch with the movements at Headquarters of the Unemployed at Moose Jaw.<sup>77</sup>

Even though he had been on the force less than two years, Cooper had already completed three undercover assignments, the latest being time spent as a relief camp worker at Dundurn. During his interview with the Card Committee Cooper, who had given his name as Henry Ward, referred to his stay at the Dundurn camp, and managed to convince the Committee that he was a legitimate striker.<sup>78</sup> He was assigned to Group 25 of Division 3 and given card number 295.<sup>79</sup> That same day he attended a closed meeting of strikers and later contacted Black, as had been arranged, to report "on the activities of the Strike leaders as they came under his observation." He travelled with the strikers to Regina the next day and each day thereafter he submitted reports to a member of the force, probably Black. However on 19 June Black frustratedly reported that "the policy of the leaders is to keep the intentions and plans of the 'Strategy' Committee secret from the mass of the rank and file until the very last moment .... Owing to this policy it is practically impossible to obtain advance information of the intentions of the leaders." More seriously, on 18 June Black had to instruct Cooper "to leave the camp immedi-

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 464-5.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 413-20, Black to Wood, 19 June 1935.

<sup>78</sup>RRIC. Records. Rex v. Ivan Bell, George Black, John Cowan Cosgrove, Arthur H. Evans, Ernest Edwards and Matthew Shaw. Preliminary Hearing, July-August 1935, 86-98, testimony of Constable Henry Cooper.

<sup>79</sup>RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 3, 22, testimony of Constable Henry Cooper.

ately."<sup>80</sup> Cooper, who was normally stationed in Regina, had been recognized by at least one citizen as he took part in one of the strikers' marches through the city. Wood did not delay in replacing Cooper with Constable Donald Taylor, a two-year veteran of the force from "D" Division (Manitoba) with no previous undercover experience. After ten days, however, Taylor too was forced to abandon his assignment when he "came under suspicion, having been recognized by a striker from Winnipeg."<sup>81</sup>

Although Cooper and Taylor have been identified as RCMP personnel, it is clear that others were also involved in surveillance activities while the strikers were in Regina. As we have seen above, the night Black drove to the outskirts of Moose Jaw to meet with Cooper, there was another individual at the meeting who was also assigned to watch the movements of the strikers, although he was not instructed to join the strikers' ranks. And, as noted above, Wood testified at the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission that the force relied on several agents among the strikers. Yet there is also evidence that after the departure of Taylor from the ranks of the strikers on 28 June the RCMP, while undoubtedly continuing to rely on other informants, had no secret agents who had managed to gain admittance to the trek. In his evaluation of the manner in which the trek was handled, quoted above, Wood indicated that the "experience in endeavouring to get informants at the last moment was most unsatisfactory. Const. Cooper managed to join the organization at Moose Jaw and accompanied them to Regina." But as we have seen above, after six days he had to be withdrawn, as did Taylor, after he had replaced Cooper. Wood went on to bemoan the fact that the force had no informants in the ranks of the strikers on the day of the riot and that the force was dependent on an operative of a detective agency<sup>82</sup> employed by the C.P.R. "The information supplied by this operative, through the C.P.R. police, was very useful and accurate, but unfortunately we did not have control over his movements, or [sic] could we contact him."<sup>83</sup> In his testimony to the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission, Inspector John Chesser of the CPR acknowledged that there was an undercover operative who was passing information to him. Chesser, in turn, communicated the information he received to Wood.<sup>84</sup>

It appears, therefore, that in the crucial three days before the events of 1 July the RCMP was dependent on an agent in the employ of the Canadian Pacific Railway

<sup>80</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 413-20, Black to Wood, 19 June 1935.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 1302, Wood to MacBrien, 19 July 1935.

<sup>82</sup> The name of the detective agency is illegible in the document provided by CSIS; the illegibility of many portions of the documents received from CSIS is a serious hindrance to researchers, especially when coupled with the deliberate deletions.

<sup>83</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 1302, Wood to MacBrien, 19 July 1935.

<sup>84</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 35, 74-7, 95, testimony of John Chesser. On the information supplied by the CPR informant, see Canadian Pacific Archives. Vice-President (System) Montreal, RG 4 B15989 Parts v & vi.



for its undercover information. Wood was grateful enough to thank Brigadier Panet, Director of Investigation, in a letter dated 5 July: "I wish to convey my appreciation of the co-operation and valuable assistance rendered by Inspector Chesser .... I would particularly like to mention the valuable advice and information furnished by Inspector Chesser and your under-cover operative. The reports of the latter were concise and accurate."<sup>85</sup> Just how valuable the information was to the RCMP becomes clearer when later correspondence is examined. In August Wood complained to the RCMP Commissioner that the CPR was reluctant to have its agent exposed by testifying at the trials of the strike leaders. The company argued that the required evidence might be gotten in other ways, but Wood was convinced that this was "not correct, for no policeman or [deleted] was living in the Stadium in close contact with the leaders and strikers generally during the whole course of their stay here, nor, more particularly, did we have any operatives in the ranks of the strikers on the night of the riot, other than [deleted]. His evidence is, therefore, most valuable."<sup>86</sup> In December Wood again expressed his frustration over the fact that the CPR operative could not be called as a witness. He asked the Commissioner whether it would be permissible to submit the operative's written reports in a confidential manner to the Commission. He went on to write to his superior officer that

it is apparent that you do not appreciate the importance of this witness, [deleted], since neither Const. Taylor nor Const. Cooper, were in a position to learn anything of value and had been withdrawn from the Stadium some days prior to the riot. It was *solely* on the information supplied [deleted] — please refer to his reports of the 29th June and 1st July — that I considered it advisable to make the arrests at the Market Square on the night of July 1st, as I believed, from the information supplied [deleted], that the next day would see a demonstration, and at a time and place suitable to the strikers.<sup>87</sup>

A week later the Commissioner gave permission to place the reports before the Inquiry confidentially.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to police agents who infiltrated the movement, plainclothes officers that attended open meetings and kept surveillance on strikers, and informants, the RCMP also exploited its position to intercept the correspondence of the strikers and their supporters. Although in his testimony to the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission Wood testified that Evans' mail was never intercepted,<sup>89</sup> the evidence in the CSIS Regina Riot file and at least one exhibit put before the Commission indicates that the RCMP was routinely carrying out such activities. On 7 June Assistant Commissioner H.M. Newson forwarded a report to Commissioner

<sup>85</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 976, Wood to Panet, 5 July 1935.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1448, Wood to MacBrien, 21 August 1935.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 1608, Wood to MacBrien, 12 December 1935.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 1649, MacBrien to Wood, 19 December 1935.

<sup>89</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 37, 102.

MacBrien in which he quoted from a telegram (the source of the information is deleted) sent to the camp strikers' contact in Calgary by an unemployed group in Edmonton offering to join the trek.<sup>90</sup> On 14 June Assistant Commissioner J.W. Phillips sent a report to the Commissioner in which he quoted the contents of a letter to Malcolm Bruce.<sup>91</sup> Later that month Wood, himself, reported to the Commissioner the contents of a telegram from Evans to James Litterick, a leader of the unemployed movement in Winnipeg.<sup>92</sup> Even six months after the strike had been stopped, the RCMP were still intercepting telegrams from Evans to his wife.<sup>93</sup>

Not content to merely observe, the RCMP and the government were prepared to resort to whatever tactics they deemed necessary in order to ensure the failure of the strike. On 28 June Wood received a telegram from MacBrien indicating that he should "proceed under Section 98 against the known leaders Evans, O'Neil, Shaw, and such others you think necessary."<sup>94</sup> This despite the fact that Wood had telephoned Ottawa earlier that morning to advise that there were no grounds for the arrests.<sup>95</sup> The following day Wood wrote to the Commissioner that he was attempting to gather evidence against the leaders, but that the prospects "do not appear bright."<sup>96</sup> Wood's fears concerning the lack of evidence were supported two weeks later by a Regina lawyer (name deleted by CSIS) who had been retained by the federal government. In a letter to the Deputy Minister of Justice, he wrote that in relation to the arrests of Evans, Black and Shaw,

The Crown Prosecutor, [name deleted] K.C., takes the position that the evidence here both documentary and otherwise is insufficient. The Mounted Police have referred to an agent in Montreal who can establish the relationship between the Workers Unity League and the Communist Party of Canada, but they are not so sure that the Montreal agent can prove the Relief Camp Workers Union to be an affiliate ....

In my letter of yesterday's date I enclosed a copy of a letter addressed by me to [name deleted] on page 2 of which I indicated the activities of the Relief Camp Workers Union in this Province. These activities were no doubt in varying degrees unlawful, but I have very grave doubt as to whether such activities without any other evidence, would be regarded as bringing the Relief Camp Workers Union within the ambit of Section 98.<sup>97</sup>

If the government's decision to arrest the strike leadership was based on doubtful legal grounds, the RCMP's motives in effecting the arrests in the location it chose are also open to question, especially in light of the fact that the force

<sup>90</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 313.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 456.

<sup>92</sup> RRIC. Exhibit 215.

<sup>93</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 1831, R.L. Cadiz, Officer Commanding, B.C. to MacBrien, 24 January 1936.

<sup>94</sup> RRIC. Exhibit 217, MacBrien to Wood, 28 June 1935.

<sup>95</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 37, 75, testimony of S.T. Wood.

<sup>96</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 732, Wood to MacBrien, 29 June 1935.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 1185-6.

appeared willing to apprehend only two of the seven despite the fact that in later testimony to the Commission Wood repeatedly insisted that it was crucial that all seven be arrested so as to prevent the possibility of the others rallying the strikers.<sup>98</sup> Regina Chief Constable Burton, for one, was clearly not in agreement with the RCMP's choice of tactics in making the arrests, indicating that he "was well aware of the seriousness of making the arrests on Market Square, and expressed disapproval but after protesting and pointing out the seriousness, I could go no further .... The city police were very much misled by the RCMP in the arrangements for the arrests."<sup>99</sup>

Wood himself had not been averse to using illegal tactics to impede the progress of the strikers. After it had become clear to the strikers that they would not be allowed to proceed further east on railway property, they attempted to arrange for alternate modes of transportation. Therefore on 27 June O'Neil and other members of a subcommittee of the strikers' Transportation Committee proceeded to Moose Jaw to obtain trucks for transporting the strikers. In the evening O'Neil called Evans to report that although the use of ten trucks had been obtained they were unavailable because the RCMP had forbidden their movement.<sup>100</sup> That same evening the RCMP stopped and arrested supporters of the strikers occupying a truck and two private cars headed east on the highway outside Regina. And the next day the Regina newspapers carried a statement by Wood to the effect that anybody who assisted the strikers would be subject to prosecution.<sup>101</sup> The following day Wood wrote to the RCMP Commissioner that the statement to the press had been effective in preventing assistance to the strikers. "I regret if my action ... may have embarrassed the government, but I think the means justified the end."<sup>102</sup> As far as Wood was concerned, the fact that Evans was leading the trek ensured "ulterior motives," and whether they were lawful or not, all means had to be used to stop the trek because it was a "question of preserving the constitution of the State," in the face of a Communist Party plan, with the support of the WUL and the WESL, for the violent overthrow of the government.<sup>103</sup> This justification is one that the RCMP continued to maintain throughout the Inquiry looking into the events of 1 July, and as late as 7 December 1935 Wood was still looking for witnesses that could link the Communist Party to the trek, "as so far we have been unable to get any evidence to this effect before the Commission, members of which are very 'green' on Communist activities as a whole."<sup>104</sup>

<sup>98</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 40, passim.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Howard, *"We were the salt of the earth,"* 173.

<sup>100</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 12, 121-3, testimony of George Black.

<sup>101</sup> On the "phantom" order-in-council used to justify the action, see Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost*, 184-6.

<sup>102</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 734, Wood to MacBrien, 29 June 1935.

<sup>103</sup> RRIC. Proceedings, vol. 38, 76, 113, 116-7, testimony of S.T. Wood.

<sup>104</sup> CSIS. 89-A-115, 1592, Wood to Cadiz, 7 December 1935.

\* \* \*

On Friday 5 July, after several days of negotiations between the strikers and the Saskatchewan government, most of the men, including O'Neil, who had been tagged by the RCMP as "one of the more active members of the Communist Party in Vancouver,"<sup>105</sup> prepared to board CPR and CNR trains for the return journey to the west. The next day, at Mission, BC, the strikers' train was met by agent #4 of the Intelligence Branch of the Vancouver City Police Department. As instructed, the agent attempted to board the train, three times, in order to ride with the strikers into Vancouver, but on each occasion he was removed, in the first instance by two C.P.R. officials, then by the strikers themselves and finally by Provincial Police constables. Nevertheless, while the train was stopped, he did manage to speak to some of the strikers, and he reported that they were planning "to cause all the trouble they could in Vancouver. They were going to join the striking longshoremen."<sup>106</sup>

During the strikers' absence from Vancouver Chief Constable Foster had continued his re-organization of the police department that began shortly after his appointment in 1935. In part, this involved the replacement of 60 per cent of the personnel in the Criminal Investigation and Morality Departments and the formation of an Intelligence Section, "to secure information and prevent crime."<sup>107</sup> To head the CID, Foster negotiated with Commissioner MacBrien to have Superintendent Herbert Darling, second in command of the RCMP's CID, seconded to the Vancouver City Police Department for a period of six months starting 2 July 1935. The Commissioner agreed to the request and Darling was placed in charge of the Vancouver CID.<sup>108</sup> One of his first initiatives included the formation of a Communist Activities Branch of the Intelligence Branch. The archival records examined do not include any specific details, but it appears that existing personnel from the Intelligence Branch involved in the surveillance of radicals were transferred to this new branch. Reports from the operatives continued to be forwarded to Det/Sgt. J.J. Nicholson, head of the Intelligence Branch, who in turn forwarded them to Darling. Nor did the method used to identify agents change; reports continued to be unsigned, each agent using a number instead, 1 through 7, making it fair to assume that there were no more than seven agents in the branch during this period.

The first report in the archival records from a member of this new branch is dated 12 July 1935,<sup>109</sup> ten days after the arrival of Darling from the RCMP. But as we have seen above, the strikers were under surveillance by the Intelligence Branch

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 439, undated, unsigned report on the "Relief Camp Strikers' Delegation to Ottawa."

<sup>106</sup> CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: Chief Constable's Correspondence (75-E-7) file 3, Intelligence Branch report, 7 July 1935.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, file 5, W.W. Foster memorandum, 12 April 1935. Subsequent reports are headed "Intelligence Branch."

<sup>108</sup> CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Minutes. 14 June 1935.

<sup>109</sup> CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: Chief Constable's Correspondence (75-E-7) file 4.

previous to that date. In addition to the surveillance of agent #4, on 8 July, agent #7 reported on enquiries that he had made at the relief strikers' headquarters concerning the leaders and the likelihood of the strikers going back to the camps. On 9 July Foster sent Mayor McGeer a report based on information received from "undercover men" who indicated that "there is a great deal of dissatisfaction owing to the discipline of a few leaders, it being stated openly that these leaders were simply working in Communistic interests and using the men as tools."<sup>110</sup> In the following days a few additional reports were filed on the activities of the strikers, but the surveillance soon decreased when it became obvious that the majority of the strikers intended to register for the camps.

Constable Kusch also resumed his surveillance of the strikers after their return to Vancouver, reporting that at a meeting at the Empress Theatre on 8 July the strikers had voted in favour of registering for the relief camps.<sup>111</sup> And on 27 July an RCMP source reported that the organization of the camp strikers was becoming unravelled. O'Neil, however, who had been identified by the Vancouver police as a member of the strikers' leadership after their return to Vancouver, was not among those who returned to the camp. He remained in Vancouver, continuing his efforts on behalf of ex-servicemen.<sup>112</sup> The information gathered by both the RCMP and the Vancouver police indicated, however, that the ex-servicemen's movement was undergoing substantial changes during this period. On 26 June Foster informed his Deputy Chief Constable that an "organization calling itself the United Veterans are meeting in the Moose Hall ... tomorrow evening. It would be well to have someone present to see what goes on as most of them seem to be Communists rather than veterans." The next day two special constables attended the meeting, reporting that it was "of distinct Communistic tendency, and seemed to have as its object the enlistment of the returned soldiers of the Communistic League."<sup>113</sup> On 22 July veterans met at the WESL hall to form an "action committee" composed of members of the WESL, and other veterans' groups.<sup>114</sup> It seems that all three organizations were linked and that O'Neil played a major role in each of them. According to a report dated 10 October 1935 by the Communist Activities Branch,

Stewart O'Neill [sic] who has been practically the dictator of the Workers' Ex-Servicemen's League, the CP movement among the returned men, has recently been the main figure in the new organisation among the veterans known as 'United Veterans of Canada' and later 'The Action Committee of Ex Servicemen'. The 'constitution and principles' of this new

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, files 3, 6.

<sup>111</sup>CSIS. 89-A-115, 1155, 9 July 1935.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 1387, Cadiz to MacBrien, 27 July 1935; CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: Chief Constable's Correspondence (75-E-7) file 3, Police report.

<sup>113</sup>CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: Chief Constable's Correspondence (75-E-7) file 3.

<sup>114</sup>*The Worker*, 15 August 1935.

organisation take in the usual communist 'demands' from 'abolition of relief camps' to statements of 'Fascist dictatorship' etc.

According to the police report, O'Neil outlined the aims of the new organization as increasing "our organisation of veterans by forming a united front to draw rank and file away from other veteran organisations. We have been too revolutionary, in our talks, in future we are going to organise around grievances that all vets want. Then we'll draw new members to a committee and so activize [sic] them."<sup>115</sup> Clearly, the organization of this new group was a reflection of the beginning of the united-front period. On 1 August 1935 O'Neil had put the new philosophy and approach to the test when he attended a meeting organized by the Canadian Legion, the Army and Navy Veterans and the Amputations Association. At another meeting organized by disgruntled members of another veterans' group O'Neil encouraged "members of the Legion ... [to] work for Unity on the pressing needs of the Vets."<sup>116</sup> At their own meetings the Action Committee now invited speakers that would not have been acceptable only a few months earlier. For example, a Vancouver police agent reported on a 19 September 1935 meeting of 100 people to listen to Roger Bray of the CCF.<sup>117</sup> By 23 October, however, the RCMP was reporting the demise of the Action Committee. "It is interesting to note that during the short period of its existence the Workers Ex-Servicemen's League, which sponsored the formation of this committee, gained considerable prestige amongst the rank and file veterans. S. O'Neil, who is one of the most active leaders of the W.E.S.L., is said to have been the chief factor behind this movement."<sup>118</sup>

While the Vancouver Police maintained a close watch on the veterans' movement during this period, the RCMP devoted much less attention to the United Veterans and the Action Committee, perhaps having decided that it was not a sufficient threat.<sup>119</sup> In any case, it was only in October 1936, after being alerted to the existence of the United Veterans of Canada, that S.T. Wood wrote to R.L. Cadiz, the Officer Commanding the BC District, asking him to determine if there was any connection between the WESL and the new organization. On 6 November Cadiz responded that the group had had an office for about two months, during May and

<sup>115</sup> CVA. City of Vancouver. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: General Files (75-F-2) file 12, Police report.

<sup>116</sup> *B.C. Workers' News*, 20 September 1935.

<sup>117</sup> CVA. City of Vancouver. Office of the Mayor: General Correspondence 1901-1958 (33-B-5) file 2.

<sup>118</sup> Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II* (St. John's 1995), 548.

<sup>119</sup> An Access Request to CSIS for information on the United Veterans of Canada and the Action Committee of Ex-Servicemen resulted in only 34 pages of documents.

## 32 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

June 1936, "but the organisation gave up this office the latter part of June and nothing has been heard of them since in this City."<sup>120</sup>

O'Neil, however, continued to maintain a high profile, speaking on radio station CJOR in October 1935 on behalf of the Action Committee, at an anti-war meeting in November, and at a dinner organized for ex-servicemen in December.<sup>121</sup> In the new year he acted as chair of a Communist Party of Canada meeting held 19 January in the Victory Hall in Vancouver. According to the RCMP report prepared by Constable Kusch, O'Neil

opened the meeting with a short speech, outlining the purpose of the gathering as a memorial gesture to the greatest of working class leaders, Lenin. He added that this was the first open meeting under the auspices of the Communist Party that had been held in eleven years .... He concluded with an appeal to all those present to assist him in building a United Front of the Working Class in the struggle against Capitalism.<sup>122</sup>

\* \* \*

After his return to Vancouver, O'Neil also became involved in the workers' theatre movement, specifically the Progressive Arts Players, the drama section of the Progressive Arts Club. Originally formed in 1931 in Toronto, the Progressive Arts Club was a loosely-linked organization, sponsored by the Communist Party, dedicated to organizing a workers' theatre to produce plays "which tend to the achievement of social justice."<sup>123</sup> In the years that followed the clubs spread across the country and in August 1935 a branch was launched in Vancouver, primarily due to the efforts of Garfield King, a Canadian Labour Defence League lawyer.<sup>124</sup> A headquarters was established and the group decided on Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* as the first production to be undertaken.<sup>125</sup> Calls for auditions were printed

<sup>120</sup> CSIS. Access Request 117-92-037, United Veterans of Canada, Cadiz to MacBrien, 6 November 1936.

<sup>121</sup> *B.C. Workers' News*, 4 October 1935, 15 November 1935, 27 December 1935.

<sup>122</sup> CSIS. Access Request 117-91-70, Recruiting Volunteers for the Spanish Civil War (Vancouver), 21 January 1936.

<sup>123</sup> Constitution of the Progressive Arts Club quoted in Bonita Bray, "Against All Odds: The Progressive Arts Club's Production of *Waiting for Lefty*," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, 25, 3 (Fall/automne 1990), 108; Toby Ryan, *Stage Left: Canadian Workers Theatre, 1929-1940* (Toronto 1985), 26-7; on the role of the progressive theatre movement as part of a worker culture of resistance, see Bonita Bray, "The Weapon of Culture: Working Class Resistance and Progressive Theatre in Vancouver, 1930-38," MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1990.

<sup>124</sup> Bray, "Against All Odds," 108; Ryan, *Stage Left*, 49-50. King had also acted as an advisor to Arthur Evans when he made his appearance before the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission session in Vancouver, see *Vancouver Daily Province*, 20 February 1936.

<sup>125</sup> *B.C. Workers' News*, 12 July 1935 quoted in Ryan, *Stage Left*, 49-50; for an account of the staging of *Waiting for Lefty* by the PAC see Bray, "Against All Odds."

in the workers' press<sup>126</sup> and the Ukrainian Labour Temple was approached for help with casting and rehearsal space.<sup>127</sup> A long period of rehearsing followed and on 25 October 1935 opening night was held at the Ukrainian Labour Temple. In the cast was O'Neil in a minor role as one of the members of the union.<sup>128</sup>

The play was presented in the midst of the bitter five-month strike by the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers' Association and the municipal authorities were concerned that "considering existing local, social and labour circumstances, the expressions used might inflame emotions of *Lefty* patrons and lead to something not in the best interest of law and order."<sup>129</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, in the audience for the third performance of the play was Superintendent Darling of the Vancouver Police Department. The Communist Activities Branch of the force had been keeping watch on active party members, including Garfield King, who, it had been reported on 10 October 1935, "has ambitions for a successful 'Progressive Arts Club'."<sup>130</sup> After his attendance of the performance Darling reported that the hall had been full and that "judging from the looks of some of the people in the audience ... I would say some of them were quite decent respectable men and women." As far as the play itself was concerned, however, he reported that it was

a Labor Propaganda revolutionary spreading drama and the actors are gathered from the local talent in the communistic element of Vancouver .... In many parts of the play the language is worse than you would hear in any cheap sporting house, but at that the class of actors and actresses in the play seemed to get a thrill out of using it.<sup>131</sup>

Chief Constable W.W. Foster in turn wrote to the Attorney General on 13 November 1935 informing him that in view "of the filthy language used, the proprietors of the building where the play was produced have been advised that their license will be cancelled if it is shown again."<sup>132</sup> In response, on 16 November Attorney General Sloan informed Foster, the chief law enforcement officer for the city of Vancouver, that "stage plays are not subject to censorship. Matters of this kind are covered by the relevant sections of the Criminal Code and I feel sure that should

<sup>126</sup>*B.C. Workers' News*, 9 August 1935.

<sup>127</sup>Ryan, *Stage Left*, 63.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 226; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 1 February 1936; *People's Advocate*, 23 July 1937.

<sup>129</sup>Police report quoted in Bray, "The Weapon of Culture," 94.

<sup>130</sup>CVA. Board of Police Commissioners. Police Department: General Files (75-F-2) file 12, Police report.

<sup>131</sup>BCARS. BC Attorney General. Correspondence files 1902-1937, reel no. B2346, file P-195-4-1935, "Waiting for Lefty" — Play, 4.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 6; Ryan, *Stage Left*, 50; in actual fact the "filthy language" was merely a pretext for closing a popular communist production that had generated complaints from the influential Citizens' League and the Shipping Federation, see Bray, "The Weapon of Culture," 93.



the information you have be placed before your prosecuting department, action could be taken against the players for the use of indecent and blasphemous language."<sup>133</sup>

The British Columbia Provincial Police also had agents attend performances of the play. In a report dated 20 January 1936 Constable Winegarden indicated that from "a dangerous Communistic point of view the play need not in my opinion be regarded very seriously, but the language used by both male and female performers was disgusting." Winegarden's report was forwarded to the Deputy Attorney General by J.H. McMullin, the Commissioner of the BC Provincial Police, with a request for advice on any charges that might be laid. The Deputy Attorney General responded on 17 February 1936 that the issue seemed to be "more a matter of bad taste than a criminal offence." He added, perhaps with a hint of sarcasm, "I see from the press reports that this play was chosen to represent British Columbia in the finals of the Dominion Drama Festival at Ottawa in April — probably the objectionable features of the play were omitted on this occasion." Undeterred, the BC Provincial Police continued to observe performances of the play, reporting to the Attorney General on 24 March that the play "was not a bona fide entry in the Annual Dramatic Competition. It was put on solely for the purpose of propaganda and run under the guise of a competing play simply because it would not otherwise have been tolerated by the authorities."<sup>134</sup>

A request to CSIS for information on the Progressive Arts Club resulted in five pages of a general history of the workers' theatre movement. Similarly, the 4052 pages of documents on the Communist Party of Canada in Vancouver requested by Kealey did not include any references to the Club. The only evidence of RCMP interest in the Club was found in two issues of the RCMP's weekly *Report on Revolutionary Organizations and Agitators in Canada*. In the issue of 27 November 1935 the presentation of "Waiting for Lefty" to a full house at the Ukrainian Labour Temple was noted. And in the 1 April 1936 issue a fund-raising effort to send the cast to the Dominion Drama Festival was also reported.<sup>135</sup>

Obviously, raising the funds for the trip must have been difficult and probably because of the expense and the fact that they were non-speaking roles, none of those cast as members of the union, including O'Neil, made the trip to Ottawa.<sup>136</sup> Ironically one of the social events that the members of the cast were invited to was a luncheon at the Chateau Laurier hosted by the Leader of the Opposition, R.B. Bennett.<sup>137</sup> Undoubtedly, this event was more pleasant than the meeting O'Neil

<sup>133</sup>BCARS. BC Attorney General. Correspondence files 1902-1937, reel no. B2346, file P-195-4-1935, "Waiting for Lefty" — Play, 7.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-10, 12-7.

<sup>135</sup>Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II* (St. John's 1995), 606; *The Depression Years, Part III* (forthcoming) no. 800.

<sup>136</sup>*Ottawa Citizen*, 23 April 1936; NAC. Theatre Canada, MG 28 I 50, vol. 34, Final Festival Programmes 1933-39.

<sup>137</sup>Ryan, *Stage Left*, 53-4.

and the other leaders of the trek had had with Bennett less than a year earlier. On 22 April the play was presented at the Ottawa Little Theatre and was acclaimed by the adjudicator as the "most interesting thing of the evening."<sup>138</sup> At the end of the competition it was awarded the prize for the best play in English.<sup>139</sup>

O'Neil continued to be active in the drama group and by November 1936 he, along with other members of the cast, were rehearsing *Private Hicks*, a play about the use of the National Guard to disperse strikers. Among the props needed for the play were steel helmets and anyone willing to provide these was asked to contact O'Neil at the Ex-Servicemen's Hall.<sup>140</sup> The play had its opening in December with O'Neil cast in the role of Corporal Cavanaugh. The final performance of the production was slated for 24 February, but even before that last performance the drama group was announcing the preparation of its next production, *Bury the Dead*, to be presented 2 April.<sup>141</sup> O'Neil was to have been in this production as well, but when the notice of the production appeared in the local press O'Neil's name was not included as one of the cast.<sup>142</sup> He had decided to leave for Spain instead.<sup>143</sup>

\* \* \*

In July 1936 fascist forces led by General Franco moved to overthrow the Republican government and the ensuing civil war soon attracted the attention of progressive movements. In October Tim Buck arrived in Spain to have a first-hand look at the situation with which the Spanish government was confronted and on his return he prepared a widely-distributed leaflet entitled *Defend Democracy in Spain* in which he appealed to Canadians to support the Spanish government, indicating that Spain deserved "all the energy of our party and of every friend of peace and progress."<sup>144</sup> According to the RCMP, in that same month (the Order in Council making the Foreign Enlistment Act applicable to the Spanish civil war only passed on 31 July 1937), the Communist Party of Canada was already considering a proposal from the Spanish Communist Party to recruit Canadians for military service in Spain. Although the matter had not yet been decided, initial enquiries to potential recruits had been made<sup>145</sup> and by December the Party was operating an

<sup>138</sup> *Vancouver Daily Province*, 23 April 1936.

<sup>139</sup> Ryan, *Stage Left*, 54.

<sup>140</sup> *B.C. Workers' News*, 27 November 1936.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 December 1936, 29 January 1937, 12 March 1937.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 March 1937 quoted in Ryan, *Stage Left*, 68; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 1 April 1937.

<sup>143</sup> *People's Advocate*, 23 July 1937.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in William C. Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers: Spain 1936-1939* (Regina 1989),

2.

<sup>145</sup> CSIS. Canadian League for Peace and Democracy, RCMP report, 14 October 1936, 38. My thanks to Greg Kealey for allowing me to examine this file as well as the files on Recruiting for the Spanish Army and Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.

active recruiting system.<sup>146</sup> Many of the Canadian volunteers for Spain came from Vancouver and in December Stewart O'Neil was among those who applied for a passport.<sup>147</sup> The RCMP was convinced that individuals like O'Neil — single men with previous military experience — were highly prized as potential recruits for Spain. Obviously men without family ties would not be leaving any dependents should they be killed and those with military experience were valued not only for their military skills but also for their potential abilities as instructors and as "steadying influences on the green recruits."<sup>148</sup>

The RCMP's information came as a result of the force's efforts to keep track of those individuals who were making plans to leave for Spain. Documents obtained by both Kealey and myself under Access to Information as well as documents in the records of the Department of External Affairs reveal the lengths to which the RCMP and the government went in their efforts to monitor the volunteers for Spain and the very active support that both received from J.J. Connolly, the Passport Officer at the time. In January 1937, long before it became illegal to volunteer for the war, Connolly sent the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs a memo concerning "suspicious" passport applications.<sup>149</sup> The next month Wood wrote to the Passport Officer

It would be appreciated if you would kindly forward to this office particulars regarding the addresses given by the individuals referred to [deleted] when making application for their passports, together with the names of the persons who acted as "vouchers" in these cases. This information is required to enable us to determine as to whether or not any of the

<sup>146</sup>Ronald Liversedge, *A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (Unpublished memoir, UBC Special Collections), 4-5; Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988), 136-7; *Canada's Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada 1921-1976* (Toronto 1982), 124; Randy Ervin, "Men of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion: A Case Study of the Involvement of the International Communist Movement in the Spanish Civil War," MA thesis, Carleton University, 1972.

<sup>147</sup>Dept. of External Affairs. Passport Office. Accession 585 Reel 2 (1937) location B1-12-34. On the motives of the volunteers for Spain, see Norman Penner, "Canada and the Spanish Civil War," *Canadian Dimension*, 23, 3 (April/May 1989); John Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, An Oral History* (New York 1986); Liversedge, *A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War*; Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*; Martin Henry Peter Lobigs, "Canadian Responses to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, 1936 to 1939," MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1992, esp. Chapter 2.

<sup>148</sup>CSIS. Recruiting for the Spanish Army, 165, T. Dann, Commanding "D" Division to RCMP Commissioner, 2 March 1937; NAC. Dept. of External Affairs RG 25 vol. 1802, file 631-D Part I, G.L. Jennings, Deputy Commissioner, RCMP to O.D. Skelton, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 20 January 1937.

<sup>149</sup>NAC. RG 25, vol. 1802, file 631-D Part I.

individuals mentioned above have had any connection with the subversive movement in their respective locales while resident in Canada.<sup>150</sup>

The extent of the harassment suffered by volunteers was indicated in a letter of complaint to O.D. Skelton from Garfield King, who was known to the RCMP as one who assisted volunteers in obtaining passports:

Members of the working class who have applied for passports comment that their applications, particularly if they are suspected of belonging to socialist or other radical organizations, seem to be viewed with the greatest suspicion. Lengthy and protracted and trivial correspondence [sic] in such cases is initiated by your passport office .... Unusual curiosity is manifested in whether the applicant has any particular interest in the loyalist forces in Spain.<sup>151</sup>

Caught up in this web of surveillance was Stewart O'Neil. An RCMP memo from Cadiz to the Commissioner dated 8 February 1937 reported that a member of the "Communist Party of Canada in Vancouver has attempted to recruit volunteers for service in Spain, and to date has four names on his list. These are [deleted] and O'Neill [sic]. They are in Vancouver awaiting funds for transportation to Spain .... The matter will be closely watched."<sup>152</sup> However, lest we assume that the RCMP, the Passport Officer and the Department of External Affairs were infallible in their surveillance of suspected volunteers, it is instructive to take note of Connolly's error in including a "Paddy O'Neill" on another list of volunteers that he forwarded to Skelton. This O'Neill was issued a passport, number 29920, on 3 March 1937 in the name of Patrick O'Neill. His birthplace was Ireland, to which he intended to return on vacation, date of birth was 6 April 1895, and his occupation was that of chef. Under "Distinguishing Marks" it was noted that the tip of the third finger on the right hand was missing. His voucher for his passport was C. Archambault, Manager of a branch of the Banque Canadienne Nationale in Montréal, who indicated that he had known O'Neill for four years.<sup>153</sup> Certainly there is no evidence that O'Neil ever lived in Montréal and certainly not during that period. Furthermore, Stewart O'Neil was the only Canadian with that surname who fought in Spain. The unfortunate Mr. O'Neill from Montréal was likely unaware that a holiday in Ireland was attracting the attention of the government.

On 8 January 1937 Connolly brought another suspicious passport application, from a Stewart Homer of Vancouver, to the attention of the Assistant Under-Sec-

<sup>150</sup> CSIS. Recruiting for the Spanish Army, 147, Wood to Connolly, 17 February 1937.

<sup>151</sup> NAC. RG 25, vol. 1802, file 631-D Part I, 7 April 1937.

<sup>152</sup> CSIS. 117-91-70, Cadiz to MacBrien, 8 February 1937.

<sup>153</sup> NAC. RG 25, vol. 1802, file 631-D Part I; although an access request to the Dept. of External Affairs brought back the answer that they had no record of the passport in their files, several months later CSIS contacted me with the information that they had found a misfiled passport application for a Mr. Patrick O'Neill, a photocopy of which they informally released to me.

retary of State for External Affairs.<sup>154</sup> The application also raised suspicions in the mind of the author because, as noted above, O'Neil had been arrested in Regina under that name. Furthermore, the collection of file cards, with names and pictures of each of the Canadian volunteers, found in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion Collection, includes a card for "O'Neil, (Homer) Stewart (Paddy) Vancouver, BC." In response to my request, the Department of External Affairs forwarded a copy of Stewart Homer's passport file, including a passport photograph. The photograph is the same as that on the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion file card for Stewart O'Neil,<sup>155</sup> leaving no doubt that O'Neil and Homer were the same person. In late December 1936 "Stewart Homer" applied for a passport, indicating on his application that he lived at 312 Georgia St., Vancouver and that his place and date of birth were Banbridge, Ireland, 26 December 1900. He gave as his occupation logger, while his voucher, Garfield A. King (who would have known O'Neil as a member of the Progressive Arts Players) declared that he had been acquainted with "Homer" for 1½ years. It may well have been "Homer's" voucher that raised the suspicions of the bureaucracy and the RCMP because of his involvement with progressive movements. In any case, Connolly wrote to King on 12 January 1937 explaining that he could not find the name Stewart Homer in his copy of the Vancouver directory and that the address given by "Homer" appeared to be vacant. "I, therefore, write to inquire whether from your personal knowledge of this applicant you can give me an assurance that he is a bona fide resident at the address given in the form." King replied that he always took the applicant's word for the information given on the form before he signed it. After receiving Connolly's letter he went to 312 Georgia St. and indeed found a "solid substantial two-story red brick building.. . And I found Mr. Homer there in his room." He also suggested that "Homer's" absence from the directory "probably means nothing more than that he wasn't in the city when the directory representative called."<sup>156</sup> Presumably still suspicious, on 23 January Connolly wrote directly to "Homer" asking him to forward his birth certificate. One week later "Homer" responded that he had sent instructions to the registrar of births to forward the birth certificate directly to Connolly. He also took the opportunity to offer the further information that he had sailed from Belfast on 17 March 1928 and had arrived in the port of Saint John on 24 March on the S.S. Montclair [sic]. Although the copy of the birth certificate

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, Connolly to Beaudry, 8 January 1937.

<sup>155</sup>NAC. MG 30 E 173, vol. 1, file 20.

<sup>156</sup>A search of the 1936 *British Columbia and Yukon Directory* verified that "Homer's" name was not listed and that 312 West Georgia was designated as vacant. However, if Connolly had searched for Stewart O'Neil's name in the same directory, he would have found that he was renting, quite likely a room, at 312 West Georgia. Not coincidentally, in the 1935 directory, 312 West Georgia was listed as being the home of Arthur H. Evans. In 1936 Evans moved to 35 Fifth Ave. W. See, *The British Columbia and Yukon Directory* (Vancouver 1935-1937).

requested does not appear in the passport file, the author was able to obtain a certified copy, from the General Register Office, Belfast, of the birth certificate of one Stewart Homer, born 18 December 1900 to George and Annie Homer, at Doctor's Lane, Banbridge.<sup>157</sup> An inquiry to Employment and Immigration Canada confirmed that a Stewart Homer did arrive in Saint John on the S.S. Montclare on 25 March 1928. The landing record also confirmed that Homer sailed on 17 March 1928 and that he was born in Banbridge. It lists his nearest relative outside Canada as Mrs. A. Homer, Scarva Street, Banbridge.<sup>158</sup> Presumably satisfied, on 22 February 1937 the Department of External Affairs issued a passport (number 29462) to Stewart Homer.<sup>159</sup> The RCMP were well aware of the fact that the Communist Party managed to obtain false passports for Party members, often using birth certificates belonging to others.<sup>160</sup> In this case, however, it seems that O'Neil was able to obtain a passport by using his real name. That Homer was his true name seems unquestionable in view of the fact that the birth certificate was sent directly from the Register of Births; he was familiar with the details of Homer's arrival in Canada nine years earlier; and seven years earlier he had given his name as Stewart Homer when arrested in Regina.

On 8 July the RCMP Commissioner forwarded to the Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs a list of over 75 "individuals who have left Canada at one time or another to take part in the Civil War." Among the names included were "Tom Lawrence, Ronie [sic] Liversedge, Paddy O'Neill[sic], Joe Kelley, Tony Martin — these five men are understood to have left Vancouver, BC for Spain, date unknown."<sup>161</sup> At least on this occasion, the RCMP's intelligence reports were out of date. O'Neil had been killed on the morning of 6 July at the Battle of Brunete.

\* \* \*

O'Neil's involvement in the radical movements of the 1930s provides a glimpse of the life of a Communist Party activist. In significant ways his life must have been representative of the many others who were involved in these movements. And while much of his life will remain unknown, retracing its outlines and his involvement in Communist Party activities has provided evidence of a significant level of

<sup>157</sup>In the possession of the author. On his application, O'Neil gave his birthdate as 26 December 1900.

<sup>158</sup>Employment and Immigration Canada. Access Request 1785-1.

<sup>159</sup>The information contained in the passport application file is available on microfilm, Dept. of External Affairs. Passport Office, Accession 585 Reel 2 (1937) Location B1-12-34. Photocopy in the possession of the author.

<sup>160</sup>NAC. RG 25, vol. 1802, file 631-D Part I; Lobigs, "Canadian Responses to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, 1936 to 1939," 104.

<sup>161</sup>NAC. RG 25, vol. 1802, file 631-D Part I, 8 July 1937.

## 40 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

RCMP surveillance against the left.<sup>162</sup> Unquestionably, the force's considerable efforts did, indeed, reflect its conviction that communism was an "illegitimate participant" in Canadian life. J.H. MacBrien articulated these sentiments clearly when, in a letter to the Reverend Ben Spence, the Chair of the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, he wrote:

It is desired to inform you that I do not desire to be associated in any way whatever with the appeal which you mention in your letters. I am not in favour of the Democratic Form of Government such as exists in Spain, which includes communists, anarchists and the like.<sup>163</sup>

The evidence demonstrates that a similar sentiment towards the Canadian democracy formed the basis of the RCMP's activities against the Communist Party in the 1930s. These activities included deliberate attempts to sabotage and suppress, even to the extent of advocating and employing questionable legal tactics. Raids on the offices of the WESL and other communist-supported organizations; the harassment of leaders; co-operation with the Canadian Legion and the Passport Officer to impede the respective goals of the movements; the interception of mail; the tactics used during the days leading up to 1 July, including the questionable legal basis on which the arrests of the leaders were made, the location and timing of the arrests; and the deliberately misleading information given the citizens of Regina concerning their right to aid the strikers, are some examples of RCMP attempts to suppress these movements.

Although this paper has focused on the RCMP, there is evidence that at least one municipal, as well as a provincial police force, were also involved in surveillance activities against the left. In the case of the RCMP, Vancouver City Police and the BC Provincial Police, the amount of cooperation seems to have been insignificant. However, further research on these forces, and others, might provide a more complete picture of surveillance activities, as well as an indication of the level of cooperation between the RCMP and these municipal and provincial forces.

While the evidence certainly confirms significant RCMP surveillance against the left, here too further research will provide additional details on its efforts. For example, how effective were police operations?<sup>164</sup> Clearly, the amount of information gathered was significant. Nevertheless, the force's failure to insert an agent while the strikers were in Calgary; the use of Taylor, an agent with no previous

<sup>162</sup>On the origins and early years of RCMP surveillance, see Gregory S. Kealey, "The Surveillance State: The Origins of Domestic Intelligence and Counter-Subversion in Canada, 1914-21," *Intelligence and National Security*, 7, 3 (1992), 179-210 and "The Early Years of State Surveillance of Labour and the Left in Canada: The Institutional Framework of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security and Intelligence Apparatus, 1918-26," *Intelligence and National Security*, 8, 3 (1993), 129-48.

<sup>163</sup>CSIS. Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, 140, 13 July 1937.

<sup>164</sup>Kealey has noted some of the difficulties the force experienced in the early years. See Kealey, "The Early Years of State Surveillance of Labour and the Left in Canada," 131-2.

undercover experience, to infiltrate the strikers; Cooper and Taylor's inability to learn much of any significance; the force's reliance on a spy employed by the CPR for crucial information in the three days before 1 July; Wood's complaint about not having agents travelling with the strikers into Saskatchewan; and the force's apparent ignorance of O'Neil's use of his true name to obtain his passport are indications that there was significant room for improvement in RCMP operations.

We have seen, also, evidence of RCMP cooperation with other bodies and institutions, for example, the Passport Officer and the Canadian Legion. In addition, there is evidence that the RCMP had opportunities to work with private detective agencies. In April 1932, for example, a letter from the Manager of the Pratt Secret Service Ltd. in Vancouver to the Attorney General of BC offered that company's services for spying on radicals, claiming that the company had "a particularly good operative in the thick of this movement in Vancouver," being prominent in the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, the Friends of Soviet Russia, and the CLDL. R.H. Pooley, the Attorney General, referred him to the RCMP, "who have primary charge of Communist matters in Canada."<sup>165</sup> But, while there clearly was cooperation, the extent of it requires further research. In addition, given the force's long history of surveillance, we might expect its efforts and successes to have varied over time. Finally, from the perspective of those who were, often knowingly, the objects of RCMP operations, to what extent was their commitment affected? If O'Neil can be offered as a representative Communist Party activist, then the conclusion must be that they had little or no impact.

<sup>165</sup> BCARS. BC Attorney General. Correspondence files 1902-1937, reel no. B2300, file L-125-1-1932, Communist File, 182-5.

*My thanks to Greg Kealey, Olivia Lewis and Joe Cherwinski for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Labour/Le Travail's anonymous reviewers. A portion of the research was funded by grants from the Office of Research and the University Librarian, Memorial University. I wish to express my gratitude to them. Finally, my thanks to Carmelita Power for typing the manuscript.*

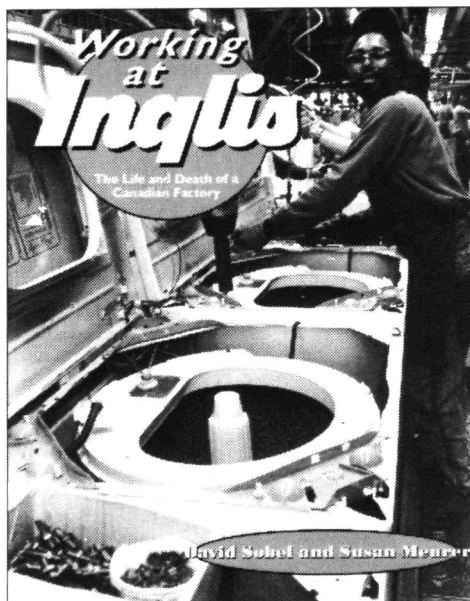


# The LIFE and **DEATH** of a Canadian factory

**T**oronto's famous Inglis plant was once at the bedrock of Canada's manufacturing economy. But in the 1980s it succumbed to foreign ownership, neglect and a 1989 shutdown.

Historian David Sobel and trade unionist Susan Meurer tell the story of this important Canadian factory from the perspective of the people in Toronto who worked there.

This is a rare account of a factory shutdown in the context of free trade.



Fully illustrated with over 150 photographs  
\$24.95 paperback

Order now by calling 1-800-565-1975  
Fax order to 902-425-0166 or send your order to  
Formac Distributing, 5502 Atlantic St., Halifax, NS B3H 1G4

**James Lorimer & Company**