

**BATTLING BOLSHEVISM FROM VICTORIA TO VLADIVOSTOK:
THE SIBERIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE AND
CLASS WARFARE IN CANADA, 1917-1919**

by

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It was the shortest day of the year – and the first day of winter – when the troops began their four-and-a-half-mile march from Willows Camp to the good ship *Teesta* that awaited them in Victoria's outer harbour. Saturday, December 21, 1918.

The Armistice had been signed a little over a month earlier, ending four years of blood, death and fire in the trenches of the Western Front. But peace would evade these men. Their country had important plans for the 900 troops in the 259th Battalion: opening a new terrain of battle in the vast, barren expanse of Siberia, where Admiral Alexandr Kolchak – the recently self-proclaimed dictator of an All-Russian government at Omsk – was engaged in a bitter battle to wrest the northeast corner of Asia from the Bolsheviki. Conscripts and volunteers from across the country, over 4000 men had assembled at the Willows in the last months of 1918. An advance party of nearly 700 men, including Major-General James H. Elmsley, commander of the Siberian Expeditionary Force, and a cavalry unit from the Royal North West Mounted Police, had sailed for Vladivostok in early October aboard the *Empress of Japan*.¹ But the 259th Battalion was the first detachment from the main body of the force to leave Victoria.²

A light drizzle mingled with the cool, salty air as the men gathered their gear and left the stables at the Willows Camp at 7:30 a.m. that Saturday morning. During peace time the camp was the scene of lively horse racing, but the regal exhibition hall with its hundred-foot spires and the less glamorous stables nearby had been converted to sleeping quarters with the arrival of the winter rains.³ Night still lingered as the column of men turned west onto Fort Street. The Casanave farm spanned before them. A streetcar

¹ Roy MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976), 150-1.

² MacLaren, 175.

³ The *Times* reported that, "It may not have been the best time of year for troops to have been quartered in Victoria... The latter part of their stay has been marked by an unusual amount of rain with an attendant sea of mud at the Willows. (*Daily Times*, 17 December 1918, 7)

whizzed past on its way up the Cadboro Bay trail. The steady click of boots on gravel and the dull muffle of shifting packs accompanied the troops as they marched into town. They crossed Bowker Creek at the path to Foul Bay, and the Royal Jubilee Hospital appeared beside the road. Fort Street began a slow climb and when the men reached Oak Bay junction, the halfway point of their march, a whistle was sounded from the back of the line, signalling a halt.

Ten minutes later the Colonel blew the whistle again, but there was a disturbance at the back of line. "Fall in!" Lieutenant-Colonel Albert 'Dolly' Swift barked at a group of men who were fraternizing with civilians on the side of the road. The troops appeared none too eager to go to Siberia that day. Colonel Swift removed his revolver from its holster and raised it high above his head. "Boom!" the gunshot cut through the crisp morning air. The creak of windows and doorframes could be heard up and down Fort Street. Curious and troubled neighbours poked their heads out cautiously, inquisitively. The darkness of night had given way to morning and the City of Victoria was churning into motion.

A few men stepped into line, but there was still a large number who refused the commanding officer's orders. "I won't go to Siberia to fight the Bolsheviks!" a conscript from Montreal shouted defiantly. But the Military Service Act stated he must. Timid murmurings throughout the battalion.

Lieutenant-Colonel Swift began to fear he had a mutiny on his hands. Quick and decisive action was necessary. He approached two companies of men from Ontario. "Take off your belts and ensure these men follow my orders," the Colonel said. As a lieutenant would write to his wife from Tokyo two weeks later, the soldiers proceeded "to

whip the devils into line, and they did it with a will, and we proceeded.”⁴ It must have been bloody, but in the end every naysayer joined the ranks.

The march continued along Fort Street toward the heart of the city and the awaiting *Teesta*. A half mile later, a “guard of honour” appeared on both sides of the road, 50 men in close formation with rifles and fixed bayonets.⁵ Arms were presented to the Ontario troops who led the march, and once the mutinous company had passed, the guard of honour was ordered to “Outwards turn.” The parallel lines of 50 armed men stepped in behind the dissidents, compelling them to continue the march “virtually at the point of the bayonet,” the Lieutenant wrote, “they being far more closely guarded than any body of German prisoners I ever saw.”⁶

And so the 259th made its final parade through Victoria, a company of armed troops from Ontario at the front, their belts still damp with the fresh blood of their mutinous comrades; a large group of disloyal men behind them who had no desire to leave for Siberia that day; and in the rear, a guard of 100 troops armed with rifles and fixed bayonets who prodded the mutinous men toward the awaiting *Teesta*. At the Outer docks marking the entrance to Victoria’s Harbour, the dissidents were held under armed guard. The ship had not yet docked, the military authorities wanting to be certain they had a handle on the situation before allowing the men to board. And so the day passed into evening as the 900 men of the 259th Battalion fought off the cold in the wharf’s flimsy sheds, until the *Teesta* finally moored at 10 p.m. A half hour later the troops began boarding the ship, and it was not until 3 a.m. in the wee hours of the morning that all the cargo had been loaded. “When we proceeded to our quarters below, the natural feeling

⁴ *BC Federationist*, 28 February 1919, 4.

⁵ *BC Federationist*, 28 February 1919, 4.

⁶ *BC Federationist*, 28 February 1919, 4.

was one of indescribable disgust,” Lance-Corporal Erskine Ireland wrote in his diary, “especially when the hammocks were up side by side, as close together as sardines in a tin.”⁷ A dozen ringleaders from the near-mutiny during the march were locked up in the cells of the ship’s hold.⁸ The two worst were handcuffed together.

Finally, at 5 a.m. on the morning of December 22, 1918, the good ship *Teesta* pulled away from the wharf in Victoria’s Outer Harbour and entered the Juan de Fuca Strait, bound for Vladivostok, Siberia.

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Victoria, British Columbia is on the other side of the globe from the former Soviet Union. But on 21 December 1918, these two worlds came painfully close together. The history of the First World War is often said to end on 11 November 1918, but any study that hopes to accurately represent the Canadian experience in the war years cannot possibly cease with the signing of the Armistice. Peace in Europe freed up Western armies to wage war on a socialist state that was struggling to establish itself in Russia. The once faithful Allied power that ascended from the ashes of Czarist autocracy and militarism with dreams of peace and working-class emancipation was besieged from within and without. In the four years since an assassin’s bullet in Sarajevo triggered the chain of events that would descend Canada and her allies into the blood, death and fire of the Western Front, a far more serious threat than the German Kaiser had revealed itself to Allied leaders: the spectre of proletarian revolution. From Russia to Romania, Germany to Hungary, Italy to Norway, Holland to France, South Africa to the Dominion of

⁷ MacLaren, 175-77.

⁸ Their disobedience would land them between six months and two years of additional service when a court martial was eventually convened. Remitted by Elmsley upon force’s departure from Vladivostok in May (see MacLaren, 175)

Canada, war had heightened the consciousness of workers and bolstered support for revolutionary change.

Profiteering in food stuffs and war materials crystallized the divisions between owner and worker and contributed to the belief that a few were growing rich off the war while the many suffered and sacrificed their lives. In late 1916, the Borden government raised the stakes in announcing the universal registration of workers. Organized labour condemned this measure as a precursor to military and industrial conscription, but with voluntary enlistment beginning to wane, pressure on Canada from the British War Office to cough up fresh human fodder could not be ignored. On the other side of the globe, a series of mass strikes in Petrograd in early March forced the abdication of the Czar and compromised a crucial Ally in the East. Workers' councils came to rival the power of Kerenskii's provisional government, and by summer the Bolshevik faction – promising the workers and peasants of Russia 'peace, land, and bread' – had won a majority of seats on the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. In Canada, Borden extended his mandate to a seventh year and pushed his Military Service Act through Parliament in the summer of 1917. In September, the British Columbia Federation of Labour held a special convention where it was decided that organized workers would 'down tools' the moment Dominion authorities touched the first man against his will.

Class struggle was present in both Canada and Russia, developing independently in parallel out of the material conditions of the war. But in November 1917, events unfolded in Russia that would alter the tenor of class struggle for nearly a century to come. On 7 November 1917, the Bolshevik party seized control of state power in a nearly bloodless coup and became the messiah and guiding light of workers the world over.

With the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, Lenin made good on his promise to take Russia out of the war and fighting ceased on the Eastern Front, inflaming and terrifying Allied leaders and bolstering pacifist and anti-war sentiments in Canada. Internationalism, a decades-old principle of labour that was much-professed prior to 1914 but disappeared in the weeks preceding the declaration of war, was suddenly back on the agenda. Canadian workers came to identify increasingly with their brothers or sisters in Germany or Russia rather than with their boss. They became less and less enthused about fighting what Lenin had dubbed a world imperialist war. Meanwhile, strike activity escalated and the demands and aspirations of labour took on an increasingly radical tone. Dominion authorities decided that something had to be done. World War had precipitated an international class war.

With strikes and troop desertions in Germany tipping the scale in favour of the Allies in the West, the Imperial War Council, comprised of British officials and the Prime Ministers of the Dominions, met in London in the summer of 1918 and decided on a new campaign to rid the world of the menace of Bolshevism. White armies and governments would be established and supported to the North, South, and East of Bolshevik Russia, with the aim of defeating the workers' republic, re-asserting 'law and order' in Russia to make it safe for foreign investment and capitalist development, and removing what had become a dangerous example for the Allies' domestic populations. And so we find the young Dominion of Canada doing her part in mobilizing a 4000-strong Siberian Expeditionary Force for deployment with American, French, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Greek, Czech and British forces in the Russian Far East. For the first

time in the history of the Dominion, Canadian boys would serve under a Canadian general and the military would be organized independently of Great Britain.

But armed intervention in Russia was only one component of Canada's war against Bolshevism. In the months and weeks leading up to the signing of the Armistice, 14 political parties and scores of publications were banned by the government of Canada. Meetings and political offices were raided by local and Dominion police and hundreds of labour radicals were arrested, jailed and fined. State repression would further radicalize workers, as would the Dominion government's decision to proceed with the Siberian expedition after the declaration of 'peace.' Parallel developments within the Canadian labour movement saw leaders in the West break from the Eastern-dominated Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, a move that culminated in the formation of the One Big Union at Calgary in March 1919, where fraternal greetings were extended to the Bolsheviks and German Spartacists and the general strike weapon was advocated as the mechanism for achieving working-class power in Canada. In Victoria, the local labour council endorsed the aims and purposes of the Russian and German revolutions in February 1919 and called for a general strike if Canada continued to wage war against Soviet governments in Russia and elsewhere.⁹

The stakes were too high and Prime Minister Borden balked. Continued efforts to suppress the Bolshevik model in Russia were driving increasing numbers of Canadian workers into open sympathy with Lenin and the revolutionary workers of Russia.

⁹ For a comprehensive look at the post-war labour revolt in Canada and its regional manifestations, see Craig Heron, ed. *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1998). The Dominion government's response to labour radicalism is well illustrated in orders-in-council passed from September to November 1918, preserved in the volumes of the *Canada Gazette* (Ottawa: J. de Labroqueire Taché, 1918). Both the *British Columbia Federationist* and the minutes of the Victoria Trades and Labour Council provide a detailed glimpse into the condition and actions of labour in British Columbia at the end of the First World War (University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections, Victoria Labour Council fonds, 80-59, Box 3, "Minutes," November 1918 – July 1919).

Suppressing Bolshevism was no longer an external affair; indeed, its domestic manifestation was one of the primary factors behind the withdrawal of the Siberian Expeditionary Force from Vladivostok in the spring of 1919. But the forces of radical labour had been unleashed in Canada and wide sections of workers united in seeking an end to capitalism, finding their solution in the One Big Union and its call for workers to unite and organize as a class along industrial lines, and exercise their economic power through the general strike weapon to force a change in the economic and political order in Canada. While Canadian troops were deployed to Vladivostok in an effort to wipe out Bolshevism at its source, by the time the Siberian Expeditionary Force returned to Canada in the spring of 1919 cities from Toronto and Montreal and Amherst, Nova Scotia, to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and even Victoria would be crippled by general strikes. Class war was no longer a distant phenomenon in the land of the Soviets: the Russian revolution had come home.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between revolution in Russia and labour unrest in Canada at the end of the First World War. While historians of this period make reference to Russia as a source of inspiration to Canadian workers, the connectedness of the two struggles has been scarcely studied.¹⁰ This paper will attempt to prove that the Russian revolution provided an ideological framework through which Canadian workers came to interpret their own position in Canadian society, a mechanism through which grievances inherent to the development of capitalism in Canada –

¹⁰ Craig Heron discusses the impact of the Russian Revolution on Canadian labour peripherally in his introduction to *The Workers' Revolt in Canada*, while David Bercuson downplays the ideological ferment in this period in *Fools and Wisemen: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978). According to Bercuson, the post-war labour revolt can be reduced to an exceptional, regional movement stemming from the unjust, dangerous working conditions in the coal fields of Alberta's Crow's Nest Pass. That radicalism and anti-capitalist sentiments could be widespread in both rural and urban Canada is absent from Bercuson's study, though Heron's compilation succeeds in presenting a more accurate picture of the post-war labour revolt. Still, the question of Russia is not explored in depth.

heightened by the experience of war – found their expression. Domestic labour unrest was intimately tied to events that were unfolding on the international stage. While workers in Canada did not need Lenin to tell them how to think, the Bolshevik uprising resonated on the home front because it was seen as the practical manifestation of ideas that had previously existed only in theory. A source of inspiration to workers, revolution in Russia was viewed as a menace by those in Canada who benefited from the existing economic order. Soldiers were therefore deployed to Siberia and elsewhere in Russia as part of an Allied campaign to re-establish traditional class relations in that country, while radical labour in Canada was the target of repression by the state. This complex web of causality – of revolution and counter-revolution, both domestic and external – fundamentally informed class relations in the years 1917-1919, and defined the terrain of the class struggle in Canada until the last decade of the twentieth century.

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According to the Financial Times, if the war lasts six months longer, Dominion Steel, a Canadian company, will finish the year's business with cash holdings of \$15,000,000, after liberal appropriations for depreciation, the wiping out of all bank loans and such reduction of annual fixed charges as will make an astounding revelation of success.¹¹

BC Federationist, 26 January 1917

¹¹ *BC Federationist*, 26 January 1917, 1. The *BC Federationist*, throughout the First World War period, was socialist in its orientation, edited by Parm Pettipiece, a Vancouver trades unionist and a member of the Socialist Party of Canada. However this hardly resulted in a uniformly anti-war position. Indeed, contradictory stories and editorials reflected the diversity in socialist thought toward the war and militarism. While small pockets of radicals in Canada adopted an anti-war position from August 1914 onward, the dominant position in Canadian labour viewed the German Kaiser as the epitome of reaction, and therefore supported the Canadian and larger Allied war effort. A few *Federationist* stories questioned the war, but overall the paper echoed the mainstream press in railing against “the autocracy of Mid-Europe” and “Teutonic Aggression.” However by 1917, the war had dragged on for nearly three years, the extent of profiteering was entering the public discourse in Canada, doubt was being cast on the Allies’ commitment to securing an early peace, and Canada was moving toward conscription. Anti-war sentiments were on the ascent, and this position would only be bolstered by the Bolshevik demand for peace at all costs. While the *Federationist* was subject to censorship from 1914 to 1919, which prohibited the publication of any copy that could be seen to hinder Canada’s war effort, by the last years of the war the paper was consistently challenging these regulations, and by 1918 blatantly anti-war stories and editorials were prevalent.

If the combined bodies of the dead and wounded were laid head to foot we could form with their bodies a human bracelet around the entire world, with enough bodies left over to line every foot of the Canadian Pacific railroad from Vancouver to Montreal....¹²

BC Federationist, 3 February 1917

By early 1917, the First World War was taking its toll on Canadian society. While thousands of men were dying in the trenches of the Western Front, and men and women on the home front were struggling to feed their families in the face of rampant inflation, stagnant wages, and shortages in food stuffs and other necessities of life, some Canadians were growing rich off the war, hoarding goods, driving prices up, and realizing staggering profits. Meanwhile, the Dominion government under Prime Minister Robert Borden was taking steps toward the conscription of men for military and industrial service. In order to understand why Canadian workers responded as they did to the revolution that would soon unfold in Russia, it is necessary to consider the deepening social polarization and emerging class consciousness in Canada at the time. Compulsory military service, yet to be legislated though part of the public discourse by the beginning of 1917, was driving a wedge between labour and the government of Canada, and in the process providing an opening to radical alternatives such as that advanced by the Bolsheviks in Russia in the months ahead.

At a meeting of the Pioneer Political Equality league, held in Vancouver in January 1917, a group of women discussed the Borden government's plan to register the manpower of the Dominion. The league's president, Mrs. William McConkey, said that

the men who were going to the front were endangering their lives not only for the protection of their homes, but also for the protection of capital.

¹² *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

This condition made it only fair that there should be a registration and conscription of war profits, and also of wealth.¹³

A month earlier, Sir Robert Borden, Prime Minister of Canada, had met a delegation from the executive of the British Columbia Federation of Labour during a visit to the West Coast. James McVety, president of the Federation, along with vice-presidents Morrison and Yates and Victor Midgley, secretary-treasurer of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, held a 40-minute meeting in Vancouver with Borden, who was joined by Member of Parliament and future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, and the director-general of the National Service Commission.¹⁴ The labour leaders pressed Borden on the role of the new Commission and the purposes for which the data that was being compiled on every male citizen would be used. As McVety reported at the Federation's annual convention a month later, the Prime Minister's response was vague: "The government has not come to a decision."¹⁵ While he refused to rule out conscription, Borden said such a development was unlikely: "A man may decide that he will not mortgage his house, but may afterwards have to change his mind."¹⁶ The labour delegation advocated that the government take over the basic industries before conscription or the registration of men, but were told that the Dominion was already taxing war profits very heavily and could not take any further action without the consent of Parliament.¹⁷ The labour leaders left the meeting disillusioned about the prospect of mounting a successful campaign against

¹³ *BC Federationist*, 26 January 1917, 1.

¹⁴ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

¹⁵ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

¹⁶ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

¹⁷ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

conscription “in view of the censorship of the press, mails and telegraph service.”¹⁸ But as McVety would report:

Spontaneously, however, all the Western Trades Councils, without any common understanding, took action against the registration scheme. Resolutions were passed; mass meetings were held, and the working people advised to ignore the cards, a policy that was followed to a large extent in the larger centres of the province.¹⁹

In Victoria, Member of Parliament Green told the executive of the local labour council that “failure to answer the questions re National registration would mean fine or imprisonment.”²⁰ On 20 December 1916, the Victoria Trades and Labour Council held a special meeting on the issue. Vice-president Christian Sivertz introduced a motion suggesting resistance was futile, but delegates Wells and Simmons amended it to read:

Being of the opinion that National Service Registration is only a prelude to conscription and failing assurance by Government that no Conscription proposals shall be adopted unless the conscription of Wealth and the means of wealth production and distribution as well as men is embodied such proposals to be submitted to a referendum vote of the people that this Council will oppose all registration and Conscription proposals.²¹

After what the minutes describe as “a very full discussion,” the following amendment to the amendment was approved: “That we oppose any description of registration until some action is taken to Nationalize the Industries of the Dominion.”²²

¹⁸ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

¹⁹ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

²⁰ University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections, Victoria Labour Council fonds, 80-59, Box 3, “Minutes,” 6 December 1916.

²¹ UVACS, “Minutes,” 20 December 1916. Sivertz’ original motion read: “Realizing the difficulty of making any effective opposition to the registration scheme already launched by the Government Council recommends that organized Labor of the Country take steps through the Dom Trades and Labor Congress Central Bodies of this Dominion against Conscription and recommend as some of the best material to oppose same a determined stand for the Conscription of Wealth. Also that in case the Government concedes Conscription is necessary we demand the question be submitted to a referendum vote of the people.”

²² UVACS, “Minutes,” 20 December 1916.

Clearly, strong sentiments favouring the collective ownership and redistribution of wealth existed in Victoria and across British Columbia by the beginning of the year 1917. Opposition to registration, and to full-blown conscription several months later, was indelibly tied to the profiteering of private interests. Workers found it difficult to sacrifice their lives for war while business interests in Canada were enjoying massive profits as a result of booming wartime demand and the speculation and hoarding of foodstuffs and other supplies. For the vast majority of Canadians, soaring prices and food shortages meant hardship and privation. A resolution passed by the Victoria labour council at the end of November 1916 sheds some light on the state of affairs: “The ever increasing cost of the necessities of life is making it impossible for the worker and his family to exist... The Victoria Trades and Labour Council condemn both the Government and the Opposition for their neglect in this matter, and... recommend to the membership of the affiliated unions that they seriously consider this neglect in the coming elections.”²³

The BC Federation of Labour held its annual convention in the Rocky Mountain town of Revelstoke in January 1917. The new slate of executive officers drew heavily from the Socialist Party of Canada and the ranks of radical labour. President Joseph Naylor was a coalminer from the Vancouver Island town of Cumberland who had been blacklisted from the mines since the epic strike of 1912-1914.²⁴ Naylor was joined by his friend and fellow Socialist Albert “Ginger” Goodwin, a leader of the Cominco smelter workers in Trail, who was elected vice-president for West Kootenay district.²⁵ Other Socialists included Victor Midgley, elected vice-president for Vancouver, South Wellington mine union leader Walter Head, as vice-president for Vancouver Island, and

²³ UVACS, “Minutes,” 29 November 1916.

²⁴ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 1.

²⁵ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 1.

Victorians Joseph Taylor, elected vice-president for the capital city, and A.S. Wells, secretary-treasurer.²⁶ In his outgoing address to the Federation, McVety discussed the Borden government's registration plan:

Naturally enough, the government press and some misguided individuals have caustically criticized the "unpatriotic" stand taken by the labor²⁷ organizations, overlooking entirely the fact that the workmen of Canada are quite willing to co-operate in any scheme of genuine national service, but refuse to be a party to any arrangement by which the government hope to turn large numbers of workers over for exploitation to the profiteering manufacturers of this country, who, while every second or third home in Canada is mourning the loss of some member who has lost his life in protecting the property of the plutocrats, who are wringing the hearts blood out of the Dominion for private profits.²⁸

A working-class consciousness was steadily taking shape in Canada, based on the collective experience of suffering, servitude, and, in the near future, compulsory military service. The ideas, actions, and aspirations of labour began to directly challenge patriotic pleas for unity and an orderly prosecution of the war. Far from blindly following the decrees of Ottawa, by the beginning of 1917 British Columbia workers were openly defying a registration policy that Borden had deemed necessary to the Canadian war effort. This dissent would only grow in the months and years ahead, and while the grievances emerged organically out of the Canadian experience of war, opposition to capitalism in Canada would come to be articulated through the lens of one of the Dominion's allies: Russia.

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Russia is now thoroughly supplied with munitions... the Czar's huge armies are prepared... industries and transportation are fully organized...

²⁶ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 1.

²⁷ The *Federationist* relied primarily on the U.S. spelling, which has been left intact as it appears in the source material.

²⁸ *BC Federationist*, 2 February 1917, 3.

everything is in readiness for a great offensive, simultaneously with a similar move by the Western Allies.²⁹

Victoria Daily Colonist, 9 March 1917

When these optimistic words hit newsstands in Victoria, events were already unfolding in Petrograd that would fatally compromise Russia's standing with the Entente powers. Since the outbreak of war in August 1914, the Empire of Czar Nicholas II had maintained a strong Eastern Front against Germany, relieving pressure on the British, French, and Canadian forces fighting in the trenches of France and Flanders. And trade ties, developed in the years preceding the war, were significantly expanded after the commencement of hostilities. Over a quarter of the Imperial Russian Gold Reserve – the largest in the world at over 1.6 billion gold rubles – was shipped from Vladivostok through Vancouver to provide credit for Allied loans in four separate loads from 1915 to 1917.³⁰ Indeed, in February 1917, 187 million rubles of Russian gold left Siberia for the British Columbian port.³¹ Canadian trade missions were established in Petrograd and Omsk in 1916, and a Russian purchasing mission in Canada. Russia emerged as the seventh largest market for Canadian goods.³²

In early March 1917, a group of Canadian military officers visited Czarist Russia, and the Grand Duke Alexander Oldenberg invited the men to the famous health resorts in the Causasian Spur in the southern part of the country. According to the *Victoria Daily Times*,

The Caucasian spur, where they will be quartered, is several thousand feet above sea level. Mud and mineral baths there are excellent for rheumatism

²⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 9 March 1917, 3.

³⁰ J.D. Smele, "White Gold: The Imperial Russian Gold Reserve in the Anti-Bolshevik East, 1918-?," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46:8 (1994), 1319.

³¹ Smele, "White Gold," 1319.

³² MacLaren, 224.

and kindred complaints, and the climate is mild, like the French Riviera. All expenses will be paid, including the first class accommodation and meals for the long round trip.³³

The officers, along with Allied colleagues, were addressed by Russian Premier Lvoff, leaders of the Duma, and none other than Czar Nicholas himself.³⁴ Ties between Canada and the Russian empire were strong. At the beginning of March 1917, Russia was proving to be a formidable ally in the war against the Central Powers. As British forces occupied Baghdad, Russian armies advanced from Hamadan, and the *Victoria Daily Colonist* expressed the hope that “at no distant day the Allied forces will effect a junction and continue their advance up towards Armenia.”³⁵ Reconnaissance missions on the Russo-Galician and Roumanian fronts were proceeding, a Russian airship withstood German fighter plane fire in bombing the town of Balanovichi, and near the Volchek station on the Sarny-Jewel railway, Russian aviators downed a German plane.³⁶ On 11 March 1917, the *Colonist* reported that

On no fewer than five fronts in all – on four fronts in Europe, and one front in Asia – Russia is taking her part in the battle-line, in the closest concert with the Allies...

One powerful Russian contingent is fighting in France, on the Western front. A large and constantly increasing Russian army is helping the Roumanians, and its presence in the war-area will assuredly, before long, turn the scales decisively along the Danube. There is a Russian contingent with General Sarrail’s Salonica army... In the Baltic, the Russian fleet is master of the northern island sea...

Not for one moment has Russian flinched. Nothing, indeed, also could be finer, or more inspiring, than the firm, outspoken expression of her determination to see the war through to a completely victorious finish, as voiced by the Emperor Nicholas in proclamations and in his New Year’s address to the army; and since expression then, also, in recent addresses by

³³ *Daily Colonist*, 13 March 1917, 3.

³⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 20.

³⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 13 March 1917, 4.

³⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 7 March 1917, 1.

the Emperor himself, the Russian Premier, and the Leaders of the Duma, to the Allied delegates now visiting Russia.³⁷

But despite the bold hopes of the Entente powers and their loyal press,³⁸ all was not well for the Allied war effort. In Sweden, the King and his parliament were in a state of crisis, with the Social Demokraten counting the days until the Scandinavian state would rid herself of monarchy.³⁹ In Britain, a pacifist socialist element within the British Labour Party was on the ascent, forcing the party's pro-war majority to pull out of a conference of Socialists of the Entente countries scheduled for Paris in mid-March.⁴⁰ And 15 kilometres north of Victoria, BC, a hairsbreadth off the eastern shoreline of the Saanich Peninsula, the munitions workers at the Canadian Explosives Ltd. Plant on James Island went on strike demanding shorter hours, a six-day work week (they had been working seven), safer working and living conditions, and a reduction in the daily food allowance charged by the company.⁴¹ On 10 March 1917, 300 of these employees downed tools and boarded two special trains in the town of Sidney to converge on Victoria's downtown and pressure the premier to lobby on their behalf.⁴² "The manufacture of munitions in unending quantities at the present time is vital to the success of the British armies in the field," the *Colonist* reported.⁴³ Indeed, the James Island plant

³⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 20.

³⁸ Censorship was a fixture in the warring nations from 1914 into well into 1919. For more information, see Jeff Keshen, "All the News That Was Fit to Print: Ernest J. Chambers and Information Control in Canada, 1914-19," *Canadian Historical Review*, 73:3 (1992), 315-43. On 11 March 1917, the *Colonist* announced that "for more publications printed in the United States have been excluded from circulation in Canada under consolidated censorship regulations. They are: World's War Chronicle, Philadelphia; The New York Hatjset; The North Star, Fithsburg, Mass.; Vierecks American Weekly, New York." The first was said to be Ruthenian, the second and third Finnish and the last publication German. (*Daily Colonist*, 11 Mar 1917, 1)

³⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 7 March 1917, 1.

⁴⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 2.

⁴¹ *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 6.

⁴² *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 6.

⁴³ *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 6.

produced one-fortieth of the TNT used by the British Army in 1914,⁴⁴ and the uppity workers had threatened the Allied war effort at its source.

Unrest was widespread the world over. In Cuba, 400 US Marines were deployed from warships to the town of Santiago to crush a rebel uprising and occupy the streets.⁴⁵ “The cane fields and the Union Sugar Mill at San Luis, ten miles north of Santiago, are burning,” the *Colonist* reported.⁴⁶ Rebel leader and former president Jose Miguel Gomez and his entire staff were arrested in Havana after a fierce gun battle with the US-backed government forces. And in Germany, Socialist deputy Herr Hofer warned the Reichstag that “if you insist on carrying on war you must see that the people are adequately fed. Does it not suffice for the government to incur the hatred of the whole world, or does it also want revolution at home?”⁴⁷ Appearing under the headline ‘Food or Revolution’ in the 11 March 1917 issue of the *Colonist*, Hofer’s prediction would not manifest itself in Germany for 20 months. But it would prove to be the fate of Russia, Canada’s ally, rather than the loathed Germans. On 16 February 1917, the *BC Federationist*, the official organ of the British Columbia Federation of Labour, relayed a news item from the daily press, stating that,

eleven members of the workmen’s group of the Central Military and Industrial committee of Petrograd have been arrested, charged with belonging to revolutionary parties and fomenting a labor movement with the ultimate aim of transforming Russia into a Social-Democratic republic.”⁴⁸

The *Federationist* went on to say that

⁴⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 28 December 1918, 17.

⁴⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 9 March 1917, 14.

⁴⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 9 March 1917, 14.

⁴⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 11 March 1917, 24.

⁴⁸ *BC Federationist*, 16 February 1917, 2.

It appears that the move of the Petrograd workmen does not meet with the approval of either the Russian government or that of the daily press of this glorious capitalist Dominion.... It would indicate a disposition upon the part of at least a section of the Russian workers to act along class lines in a manner that would indeed portend trouble for that class that lives by the art of ruling and robbing. This could not be expected to bring joy to the hearts of rulers and swag gatherers in any land, be it a despotic Russia or a democratic Britain or France.⁴⁹

While the February Revolution⁵⁰ is often described as a spontaneous act of a desperate people hungry for food, radical labour was clearly preparing for a confrontation with the Czar.

On International Women's Day, 8 March 1917, 5000 female textile workers went on strike in Petrograd to protest the high cost of food.⁵¹ They were joined by women and children in bread lines, and marched on the Putilov works where 36,000 metalworkers joined them.⁵² Demonstrators flooded out of the working-class Vyborg district into the city's Imperial core, their numbers swelling into the hundreds of thousands. Police fired machine guns from the tops of buildings, killing or wounding many, but the Czar's Cossack guards refused orders and joined the demonstrations, as did Petrograd's 100,000 garrison and reinforcements that were deployed to the Russian capital.⁵³ Prisoners were freed from the cities' prisons, one of which was razed to the ground along with the Law Courts and two police stations.⁵⁴ The Winter Palace was occupied by the revolutionists

⁴⁹ *BC Federationist*, 16 February 1917, 2.

⁵⁰ The February and October Revolutions are based on the Julian calendar, which the Bolsheviks replaced of the Gregorian system in early 1918. Hence, February 25 in Petrograd was March 8 in Victoria; the Bolshevik seizure of October 25 occurred on November 7 in the West. For the purposes of clarity, and considering the dominance of contemporary Western sources in this study, I will use the Gregorian dates exclusively, except in reference to the popularly named 'February Revolution' and 'October Revolution.'

⁵¹ David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), 64-5.

⁵² Mandel, 65. The Putilov metalworkers had gone on strike a day earlier.

⁵³ *Daily Colonist*, 16-18 March 1917, 1, and Mandel, 64-5 and 164.

⁵⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 18 March 1917, 1.

and declared national property. Mass strikes paralyzed the city and the streetcars stopped running.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, members of the Imperial Duma were struggling with the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' deputies for control of the Russian state. A 12-member provisional committee of the Duma with Prince Georges K. Lvoff as premier and Alexandr Kerenskii as justice minister was formed.⁵⁶ On Tuesday, 13 March 1917, socialists issued what the *Colonist* described as "a most seditious proclamation," forcing the provisional committee to consent to elections for a constituent assembly.⁵⁷ An armed band of workers, soldiers and sailors marched through the regal Astoria military hotel, disarming Russian officers and terrifying Allied officers who were staying in Petrograd.⁵⁸ A telegraph from the city reported that "a steady flood of socialist pamphlets has been poured out... All government buildings are displaying red flags."⁵⁹ The next day, the Czar's train was stopped in the town of Pskoff as it approached the capital and Nicholas received the following message from the Duma committee:

Unless Your Majesty complies with the moderate element of influence at present exercised by the provisional committee of the Imperial Duma, it will pass wholesale into the hands of the Socialists, who want to see a republic established, but who are unable to institute any kind of an orderly Government, and must inevitably precipitate the country into anarchy within and disaster without.⁶⁰

At midnight, Czar Nicholas II abdicated the throne on behalf of himself and his son Alexis, naming his brother Michael to succeed him.⁶¹ But at 2:30 p.m. on the afternoon of Friday, 16 March 1917, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch himself abdicated,

⁵⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 15 March 1917, 1.

⁵⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 16 March 1917, 1.

⁵⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 16 March 1917, 11.

⁵⁸ *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 3.

⁵⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 18 March 1917, 1.

⁶⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 3.

⁶¹ *Daily Colonist*, 18 March 1917, 1.

marking the end of the Romanov dynasty's 400-year-rule in Russia.⁶² The provisional committee of the Duma declared Russia a republic and named itself the new Government, which was promptly recognized by Great Britain, France and Italy.⁶³

No mention of the unrest in Petrograd was made in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* until 14 March 1917, and even then it was a short piece headed 'Shortage of Bread – Crowds in Petrograd Engage in Mild Demonstrations Because of Scarcity.'⁶⁴ According to the report, forwarded from Petrograd on March 11, "demonstrations by a small portion of the inhabitants...composed mostly of students and boys" were "dispersed without violence" by Cossack troops. But within two days a *Colonist* headline would read, 'Russian Revolt Was Expected,' and a story the next day reiterated this point and declared that the "real basis of the revolution" was to weed out German sympathizers in the Russian government and rule out the possibility of the country signing a separate peace with Germany.⁶⁵ In an editorial of 16 March 1917, the day the Czar's abdication was announced, the *Colonist* expressed nothing but optimism regarding the rapid changes that were unfolding in Allied Russia:

The Revolution in Russia, culminating in the abdication of the Czar, is the climax of unrest many decades old.... The outcome of the revolution will mean constitutional government in the Empire, an extended process of economic readjustment, and lastly, and what is of highest import to the Entente cause, a rejuvenation of the vast energies which Russia is putting forth to secure peace with victory.⁶⁶

⁶² *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 1.

⁶³ *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 1 and 14.

⁶⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 14 March 1917, 3.

⁶⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 16 March 1916, 1 and 17 March 1917, 3.

⁶⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 16 March 1917, 4.

The next day, however, following the proclamation of the Russian republic, the tone of the paper's editorial had shifted markedly. The revolution was now blamed on the personal failings of the Czar.

The ex-Czar was never a strong man from an intellectual point of view, and instances might easily be recalled when he exhibited a lack of ordinary personal courage.⁶⁷

He should never have abandoned Petrograd to lead the army at the front, the paper said, and "there was no public animosity towards him up to the time when he foolishly dissolved the Duma."⁶⁸ The *Colonist* said it was highly probable that order would be fully restored "in a day or two" and that "a stronger and fully united Russia will face the Teutonic enemies of civilization."⁶⁹ A new stage of First World War had begun.

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News of the February Revolution took several weeks to make its way into the labour press. But on 23 March 1917, the *Federationist* printed an editorial on 'The Russian Revolution.' Equating the February Revolution to the French Revolution of 1789, the paper stated,

that the Russian revolution marks the downfall of autocracy, and the uprising of the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class, to power, and that the workers have been used to bring this about, but even so it is distinctly a working class victory in the sense that the triumph of the bourgeoisie over autocracy is but a prelude to the eventual triumph of the working class over its master and exploiter, the capitalist class.⁷⁰

Already BC labour was suggesting that the revolution in Russia was far from over, foreshadowing the Bolshevik seizure of power in November. At the same time, the

⁶⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 4.

⁶⁸ *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 4.

⁶⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 17 March 1917, 4.

⁷⁰ *BC Federationist*, 23 March 1917, 2. While the *Federationist* was clearly socialist throughout the war, it was in the wake of the February Revolution that the concept of "revolution" entered the pages of the newspaper with increasing frequency. The overthrow of the Czar and the eventual Bolshevik seizure of power gave concrete expression to ideas that had previously been only vaguely articulated.

Federationist touched on the repression Canadian workers had endured throughout the war, and which would only increase as the labour movement in Canada and Russia challenged the existing order:

All hail to the Russian people. They have indeed set the world an example in patriotism that may well be followed by the people of other lands who may be in any manner threatened by the forces of reaction and tyranny, those evil influences which never overlook the opportunity to express themselves and strengthen their clutch and stranglehold upon the people's liberties, no matter how loudly the dogs of war may be howling. It is in times of war that these sinister influences get in their deadly work. It is then that the common people are called upon to forego their privileges and surrender their liberties in order that the war may be successfully carried on. And a people that is so foolish as to listen to such sophistry and surrender its liberties, may rest assured it will never regain that which it has surrendered without having to fight for it.⁷¹

The editorial went on to suggest that war offered workers the opportunity to extend their rights and strive for greater liberty, suggesting the dynamic at play in the escalating strike activity and labour organization internal to Canada in the last years of the war:

When ruling classes want war, then is the time for those over whom their rule is exercised to demand and take, if possible, whatever extension of their liberties they may deem advisable. Either that or refuse to shed any blood....⁷²

The *Federationist* concluded by expressing the hope that the gains achieved by Russian workers would not fall prey to counter-revolution, going so far as to advocate the slaughter of the forces of reaction:

In the interest of human advancement, and for the furtherance of liberty and democracy, let it be hoped that the forces of reaction in Russia will be unable to nullify the gains of the liberty-loving Russian people by means of any counter-revolution. While it is pleasing to note that the revolution was accomplished with very little shedding of blood, may all that has been gained be held, even though it necessitates the lopping off of the heads of all the bureaucrats and reactionaries in Russia. If the German people

⁷¹ *BC Federationist*, 23 March 1917, 2.

⁷² *BC Federationist*, 23 March 1917, 2.

would but follow the lead of the Russians... peace would return to Europe forthwith.⁷³

A week after the abdication of the Czar, British Columbia labour was looking to Russia as an example of popular emancipation in the face of war and repression. This trend of seeing Russian workers as the vanguard of an international movement would only grow in Canada in the months and years ahead.

On 4 May 1917, two months after the Petrograd rising, the *BC Federationist* blared the headline, ‘The Oncoming Tread of the Proletariat Is Now Heard... Increasing Labor Unrest Presages the Collapse of Capitalism.’⁷⁴ The lead story stated,

To the tottering thrones and the trembling capitalists of the world, the marching of fully a million men and women in various parades in the city of Petrograd, on May 1st, under the red banner of International Labor, and singing the songs of liberty, could not have been a pleasing and inspiring spectacle.⁷⁵

While May Day celebrations in North America were more modest, the miners of the Vancouver Island community of South Wellington, near Nanaimo, downed tools and shut down their mine in celebration of International Labour Day.⁷⁶ As mine union leader Walter Head wrote in the *Federationist*, “I will always look back on that day with joy, as one of the days when the workers made a demonstration of the power that they possess, but never, as a class, use.”⁷⁷ The same paper that discussed the Petrograd May Day celebrations reported that,

The provisional government of Russia has taken over the entire trade in grain and flour, and the graft of the speculator is finished. The ‘graft of the speculator’ has

⁷³ *BC Federationist*, 23 March 1917, 2.

⁷⁴ The sub headline for the story were as follows: “May Day Incidents That Portend the Rapid Approach of the Social Revolution – The Voice of Militant Labor Now Heard Above the Din of Ruling Class War – Increasing Labor Unrest Presages the Collapse of Capitalism.” (*BC Federationist*, 4 May 1917, 1)

⁷⁵ *BC Federationist*, 4 May 1917, 1.

⁷⁶ *BC Federationist*, 11 May 1917, 1.

⁷⁷ *BC Federationist*, 11 May 1917, 1.

not even been threatened here in Canada as yet. He is still perfectly safe to go the limit. The people of Canada are too highly civilized to cut off profit gambling.⁷⁸

Again, the Russian model was presented as an alternative for Canadian workers who were going hungry as a result of “profit gambling” and speculation in foodstuffs. With the Bolsheviks still a marginal, albeit ascendant party in Petrograd and Moscow, revolutionary Russia was emerging as a dangerous example to the workers of the world. Things were only going to get worse for the “tottering thrones and the trembling capitalists” of the world.

In mid-May, the *Federationist* reported that the ‘Russian Crisis Passes Safely’:

Advices from Petrograd indicate that the governmental crisis is over. A new cabinet has been formed and accepted by representatives of the Council of Workmen’s and Soldiers’ delegates. Six representatives of socialist groups are to sit in the cabinet and share in the government. One of them, A.F. Kerensky, is to assume the war portfolio....

A splendid tribute to the advanced intelligence of the Russian working class is found in the heavy representation of the socialist movement in the government. *In no other country in the world can a similar representation be found.* It is a distinct challenge to the intelligence of the workers in those countries that have long boasted of democracy and freedom, and whose labor movements have professed to constitute the vanguard of human progress. It is now up to the Russian working class to send cablegrams of cheer and wise counsel to the labor movement of Canada, the United States and other backward lands.⁷⁹ (emphasis added)

Russian workers were now explicitly praised as the most advanced in the world. They had offered a “challenge” to the workers in countries such as “Canada, the United States and other backward lands” that had “long boasted of democracy and freedom” and “professed to constitute the vanguard of human progress.” Further, this report sheds light on an important development in revolutionary Russia: the emergence of what has been referred to as ‘dual power’ between the provisional government under Lvoff then

⁷⁸ *BC Federationist*, 4 May 1917, 3.

⁷⁹ *BC Federationist*, 18 May 1917, 1.

Kerenskii and the burgeoning Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow. If the article is accurate, the Petrograd Soviet appears to have had the upper hand, with the newly formed cabinet requiring the approval of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' delegates.

On 8 June 1917, the *Federationist* reported that unrest was spreading from Russia to neighbouring Sweden:

The Russian revolution has everywhere heartened the foes of present-day society. It has given them a territorial focus, a base of operations, and if the 'Reds' overthrow the provisional government of Russia and replace the liberal leaders, Miliukov, Lvov, etc. by chiefs of really crimson hue, we shall see a wave of syndicalist unrest sweep over the whole earth.⁸⁰

Such a statement cannot be described as anything other than prophetic. In essence, it summarizes the forces that would find their Canadian expression in the Winnipeg strike two years later. It suggests that radical elements existed in Russia in opposition to the moderate leaders of the provisional government, foreshadows the seizure of state power by these "chiefs of really crimson hue," and suggests that such a move will inspire labour unrest "over the whole earth." On 13 June 1917 socialist leader Bill Pritchard – who would be arrested in Calgary two years later during the sympathetic strike of June 1919 – gave a speech to a crowd of unionists in Vancouver's Empress Theatre:

War is caused by the desire of the capitalists to place their extra wealth in countries where capital has not yet penetrated. If the dwellers in those countries objected, or if another nation coveted the place, what was the inevitable result?...

The army serves not only to act against foreign powers, but has a domestic duty to fulfill. When the police fail the army must be active at times of great strikes, when free labor must be protected....

If proletarian Russia becomes strong enough to constitute a menace to militarism, the latter would immediately lay itself out to wipe out that proletariat, as happened in France in the bygone days.

⁸⁰ *BC Federationist*, 8 June 1917, 4.

There is a call to war, and to this war the Socialist Party of Canada calls you all, for it is a war for the wiping out of all conditions which make war possible, a war against those who fatten and batten on the bodies of the workers.⁸¹

Pritchard tied the imperialism driving the Allied war effort to the killing of 30,000 Parisians when the Commune was broken in 1871, culminating in a call to arms to the workers of Canada. World war had heightened the consciousness of Canadian workers and pushed the Dominion to the brink of class warfare.

In Russia, the power struggle between the provisional government and the Soviets would be played out in the months that followed, but the chief forces that ultimately convinced Russian workers to vest all power in the Soviets was discussed by the *Federationist* on 22 June 1917:

Were the Russian Revolutionists fighting merely for the privilege of exchanging tyrants? Have they overthrown the Romanoffs for the purpose of putting the Russian Rockefellers and Morgans on their necks? ...

A great many, the vast majority, are for peace. Plainly the peoples of the world must take the affairs of the world out of the hands of the kaisers... and see whether with these greedy profit-mongers out of the way, the world cannot have permanent peace. And this is what the Russian revolutionists are just now asking themselves and the world.⁸²

On the crucial question of the war the course of Russia's revolution would be determined. The Menshevik justice minister and then Prime Minister Alexandr Kerenskii called for continued fighting under his policy of "revolutionary defencism," leading to mass unrest and carnage in Petrograd in early July after he announced a new Russian offensive on the Eastern front.⁸³ Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin, on the other hand, recently returned from exile in Switzerland, adopted a "revolutionary defeatist" position and called for soldiers to fraternize with the enemy, disobey orders, form themselves into councils, and

⁸¹ *BC Federationist*, 15 June 1917, 7.

⁸² *BC Federationist*, 22 June 1917, 8.

⁸³ For information of the 'July Days,' see Mandel, 164-6.

lay down their arms. The defeat of General Kornilov's attempted coup in August by mutinous rail workers and the armed proletariat of Petrograd in many ways sealed the fate of the Kerenskii government and solidified support for the Soviet and its Bolshevik majority.

But the Allies had not given up hope on the new Russian government. In late June 1917, the *Federationist* reprinted a statement made by Baron Heyking, Russia's consul-general in the United Kingdom, to the effect that the "this revolution is conservative."⁸⁴ Heykingan went on to say that

In Siberia, which as yet has hardly been developed at all, she possesses the granary of the world.... There is no mineral wealth which is not to be found there, and the conditions for carrying on industry are there also.... We have been kept out of the capitalist system, but I do not see how we can avoid it any longer.... We are a rich country but we are short of capital.... Let capitalism come in; it will develop quickly.⁸⁵

Baron Heyking was in effect extending an invitation to the financiers of the Western powers to invest in his country and exploit her resources, making specific reference the vast, unexploited land and resources of Siberia. Czarism had retarded the development of capitalism and industry in her resource and agriculturally rich eastern frontier, and the path was now cleared for their exploitation. Further, there is evidence that mechanizations were underway to establish in Siberia a stronghold of reaction and counter-revolution against the radical elements that were consolidating power in the Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow. As the *Federationist* reported on 24 August 1917,

Mr. Nicholas Romanoff and family have left Petrograd and taken up their residence in Siberia. It has been suggested that the Romanoff purpose in so doing is to establish the nucleus of a colony to be built up solely by erstwhile royal throne-sitters and crown-toters who have been repudiated by the vulgar and irreverential commonality. It is expected the colony will

⁸⁴ *BC Federationist*, 29 June 1917, 1.

⁸⁵ *BC Federationist*, 29 June 1917, 1.

rapidly increase in membership during the years immediately following the ending of the present royal row in Europe.”⁸⁶

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The Russian revolution was reverberating across the world. In August 1917 the *Federationist* reported on a meeting of Socialists in Japan:

Socialists of Japan, in resolutions adopted in Tokyo, hail the Russian revolution as the beginning of a series of revolutions which will end in the downfall of capitalism.... The proletariat of the belligerent countries should turn the guns that are [pointed] at the self-same proletariat in enemy countries at once on the ruling classes of their own respective countries. This is the responsibility of Russian Socialists as well as that of International Socialists.⁸⁷

Two weeks later, the *Federationist* reported that, “At a huge mass-meeting in Albert Hall, London, recently, fully 10,000 people gave hearty greetings to the Russian revolutionists.”⁸⁸ In mid-September 1917, George F. Stirling of Salmon Arm, BC, the newly appointed Dominion organizer of the Social Democratic Party of Canada, wrote to the *Federationist* impressing upon the workers of BC the need for organization:

Our comrades in Russia have made a stand against imperialism; against the machinations of politicians; against the greed of ambitious potentates; and the heartless profiteering of capitalists. In Italy and France and Great Britain, the power of the Social Democracy is growing so rapidly that its bitterest foes are now mouthing phrases about Liberty and Democracy.

In Canada our forces have been disorganized since the outbreak of the war, with the result that our rulers have passed the iniquitous conscription measure in flagrant contempt of the wishes of the majority... Organization is imperative.⁸⁹

The Russian model was inspiring workers from Tokyo to London to the interior of British Columbia. On 20 September 1917, Helena Gutteridge, an early socialist

⁸⁶ *BC Federationist*, 24 August 1917, 4.

⁸⁷ *BC Federationist*, 10 August 1917, 3.

⁸⁸ *BC Federationist*, 31 August 1917, 14.

⁸⁹ *BC Federationist*, 14 September, 2.

feminist in BC and a delegate to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, told her colleagues that

The cold storage plants were groaning with piled-up food... One concern on Water Street has so much butter in storage it was necessary to brace the floors to hold it.⁹⁰

The Council then voted overwhelmingly to approve a motion from Gutteridge calling on the food controller of Canada to order the release of food by the profiteers “so there would be enough to eat.”⁹¹ At the same meeting, delegate Jack Kavanagh railed against the Borden government’s recently passed Military Service Act. Labour’s only position, he said, was to say to the master class, “If you touch a man of us, we will touch your industries.”⁹² Two weeks earlier, a special convention of the BC Federation of Labour had met in Vancouver over the Labour Day weekend to determine a course of action against the Borden government’s recently ratified Military Service Act. A referendum of affiliated members had been taken on the question of ‘downing tools’ to oppose conscription. Of the 2417 ballots that were returned, 1841 were in favour of the general strike policy, while 576 voted against.⁹³ The special convention voted 56 to 8 to empower the Federation’s executive to call a general strike when the first unwilling conscript was forced into service.⁹⁴ At the convention, Ginger Goodwin

declared conscription meant life or death to the workers. If they wanted to be extinguished they would know what to do.... The governing class had always coerced the workers, and he could understand the attitude of men who were waxing fat as the result of the war. He stated categorically that he was a socialist, and said that if the Borden government could fool the workers they deserved at least some appreciation. If the war ended tomorrow he did not believe it would make any difference to the real interests of the workers. He believed there was a

⁹⁰ *BC Federationist*, 21 September 1917, 1.

⁹¹ *BC Federationist*, 21 September 1917, 1.

⁹² *BC Federationist*, 21 September 1917, 1.

⁹³ *BC Federationist*, 7 September 1917, 1.

⁹⁴ *BC Federationist*, 7 September 1917, 1.

great force of opinion against conscription, and that the idea of striking and otherwise opposing it was not confined to Quebec by a long shot.⁹⁵

Goodwin said he had been asked to run as a Socialist candidate in the upcoming Dominion elections, and said that if he decided to run “he would do all in his power to prove to the workers that the war was none of their business.”⁹⁶ Two months later, on 2 November 1917, the *Federationist* printed a letter from Goodwin, who asked readers the following question:

What is to become of the present capitalist system of production and distribution? There are signs on the horizon that portend of basic and fundamental changes in the future. Just at what time this is to be, there is no telling, but if the circumstances to which the master class are resorting to are considered it seems as if the end is in sight....

War is simply a part of the process of capitalism.... Whether the capitalist system can survive this cataclysm remains to be seen. It is the hope of the writer that capitalism will fang itself to death, and out of its carcass spring the life of the new age with its blossoms of economic freedom, happiness and joy for the world’s workers.⁹⁷

Change was indeed on the horizon, far closer than Goodwin would likely have ever imagined. Five days after his letter was published in the newspaper of BC labour, the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ deputies seized control of the Russian state.

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The word “revolution” shocks certain minds, yet it is merely a change from the old to the new, from worse to better, from what is outgrown to what is shaping itself for our future purposes.⁹⁸

BC Federationist, 12 October 1917

⁹⁵ *BC Federationist*, 7 September 1917, 2.

⁹⁶ *BC Federationist*, 7 September 1917, 2.

⁹⁷ *BC Federationist*, 2 November 1917, 4.

⁹⁸ *BC Federationist*, 12 October 1917, 8.

While the mainstream press in Victoria would rail against revolution in Russia and launch a relentless campaign to equate revolution with anarchy, tyranny and destruction, the labour press had a more sympathetic view, suggesting a revolutionary transformation of society was both natural and forward-looking. On 7 November 1917, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* ran a story under the headline ‘Trouble Looms in Petrograd’:

PETROGRAD. Nov. 6 – Negotiations between the general staff in the Petrograd district and the military revolution committee of the Council of Workmen’s and Soldiers’ Delegates... has been broken off. The military committee, learning that the military governor during the night had summoned troops in the environs of the capital to Petrograd ordered these troops to disobey the Government. The city is now guarded by loyal troops. The situation is complicated by the action of Premier Kerensky in suspending three Maximalist and two Conservative newspapers.

The authorities tonight ordered a disconnection of bridges between the quarters of the city inhabited by the working classes and the centre of the capital... At this afternoon’s preliminary session of the preliminary parliament Premier Kerensky, referring to the Maximalist attempt to seize power and provoke civil war, said amid applause from the right, centre and part of the left:

‘The people who dare to raise their hands against the will of the Russian people are at the same time threatening to open the front to Germany.’⁹⁹

A discreet brief near the back of the paper, bearing the same dateline of 6 November 1917, stated that ‘Premier Kerensky is planning a visit to England on official business, it was announced today. The Premier has been seriously ill, but has recovered sufficiently to travel, and it is expected he will leave Petrograd for England within a few days.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 7 November 1917, 1. While the anti-Bolshevik bias of the *Colonist* was evident from the moment the party seized power, I have retained the paper as my main source for events in Russia in order to provide insight into the information Victoria workers were receiving at the time. As well, scholarship of the February and October Revolutions is so riddled with revolutionary and counter-revolutionary propaganda that it is extremely difficult to determine what exactly transpired in Petrograd. The contemporary mainstream press, though blatantly anti-socialist, represents a source untainted by historical hindsight.

¹⁰⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 7 November 1917, 12.

Trouble was afoot in Russia's capital city. The next day, the *Colonist* ran the following editorial, titled, 'Another Russian Crisis':

Premier Kerensky has at last awakened to the realization that the organization known as the Soldiers' and Workmen's Council is subversive of law and order in the country. It is questionable if the repressive measures he has undertaken have come in time. Already a Maximalist revolt is beginning to take shape. Kronstadt apparently in siding with M. Lenine¹⁰¹ for a naval guard has taken forcible possession of offices of the official Petrograd Telegraph Agency. This step would be preliminary to preventing any news of what is happening going beyond Petrograd. It is apparent from the occurrences of the past few days, that the Russian capital is once more the scene of an uprising against existing authority, though how far the disaffection goes cannot be estimated.

If the time has not been reached now, its coming is inevitable when the Provisional Government will have to get to grips with the Soviet, and between them they will have to decide which is to have sovereignty in the country.... By virtue of the Revolution Russia has recast her ideas on the war and has practically admitted that the Declarations regarding peace, signed by Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and herself, is no better than a scrap of paper. The others nations of the Entente must regard Russia's actions from the viewpoint of international honour. When the honour of an Ally is besmirched faith in that Ally must waver and break....

If General Korniloff's revolt had been successful it is probable conditions would have been vastly different today. But General Korniloff's failure has given M. Lenine and his Bolshevik following their second chance.¹⁰²

The Bolsheviks were not about to squander this chance. Indeed, by the time Victorians had digested this editorial, Alexandr Kerenskii's provisional government was no more. Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov – Lenin – and his Bolshevik party had seized state power in Russia. On 9 November 1917, the *Colonist* ran the headline "Russian Radicals Upset Government and Assume Power."¹⁰³ Coinciding with the convergence in Petrograd of 560 delegates to the Congress of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils of all Russia,

¹⁰¹ It appears the *Colonist* took several days to straighten out the Bolshevik leader's first initial. As well, both labour and the mainstream press used the phonetic spelling "Lenine" throughout 1917-1919.

¹⁰² *Daily Colonist*, 8 November 1917, 4.

¹⁰³ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 1.

the Petrograd Soviet's Military-Revolutionary Committee seized control of the capital.¹⁰⁴ Bridges spanning the Neva river as well the Nevskii Prospekt – Petrograd's main thoroughfare – were wrested from government troops on the afternoon of 7 November 1917, and key buildings and installations were seized.¹⁰⁵ As evening fell, the naval cruiser *Aurora* was unmoored from the Nikolai Bridge and sailed to within range of the Winter Palace.¹⁰⁶ As approximately 6 p.m. Petrograd time, the city's Soviet issued an ultimatum demanding the surrender of the provisional government ministers, who had holed themselves up in the Winter Palace. Following the expiration of a 20-minute grace period, where the ministers refused to recognize the military committee, armed automobiles of the insurrectionary forces swung into action in front of the palace gates, while cannon from the St. Peter and St. Paul Fortress pummeled the palace from across the Neva and the six-inch guns of the *Aurora* opened fire.¹⁰⁷ After four hours of fighting, the ministers surrendered to the Soviet military committee. Kerenskii had fled the capital.

Meanwhile, the Congress of Soviets held session. Of the 560 delegates, the *Colonist* reported that 250 were Bolsheviks, 150 Socialist Revolutionaries, 60 Mensheviks, 14 Menshevik-Internationalists, six National-Socialists, three non-party Socialists, and the remainder independents.¹⁰⁸ A Menshevik resolution to enter into negotiations with the provisional government was defeated.¹⁰⁹ An executive committee of 21 was elected: it was comprised of 14 Bolsheviks including Lenin, Zinoviev and Trotsky and seven delegates representing the Socialist Revolutionaries. According to a

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 1 and 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

proclamation issued by the Military Revolutionary Committee, the programme of the new authority rested on the following principles:

First, the offer of an immediate democratic peace;

Second, the immediate handing over of all large proprietorial lands to the peasants;

Third, the transference of all authority to the Council of Soldiers' and Workmen's Delegates;

Fourth, the honest convocation of a constituent assembly.¹¹⁰

In a statement to soldiers on the front, the Military Revolutionary Committee instructed "the revolutionary soldiers to watch the conduct of the men in command. Officers who do not join the accomplished revolution immediately and openly must be arrested at once as enemies."¹¹¹ The troops were instructed to prevent "uncertain military detachments" from leaving the front for Petrograd "by force without mercy."¹¹² Any attempt to prevent the proclamation from being read to the rank and file constituted "a great crime against the revolution, and will be punished by all the strength of the revolutionary law."¹¹³ The Military Revolutionary Committee concluded the proclamation with the simple statement: "Soldiers: For the peace, for bread, for land and for the power of the people."¹¹⁴

The reaction from the *Colonist* was unequivocal. Under the heading, 'M. Lenine's Coup D'Etat,' the paper stated:

The new authority in Petrograd, which has secured power by a coup d'etat, cannot last, because it is the centralized force of all the disruption which

¹¹⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

¹¹¹ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

¹¹² *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

¹¹³ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

¹¹⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

has brought Russia to her present pass. No government among the Allied Powers will recognize the sovereignty of M. Lenine and his followers....

The latest developments are the most sinister for the Allies since the outbreak of the war. The Leninites are going to enter into negotiations with all the Powers for an armistice. That means they will have pourparlers with the enemy alone, for none of the Allies will recognize their authority... If the army, as it appears, is supporting the Extremists of Petrograd, Germany can withdraw a score or two score more divisions from her Eastern front and use them as she thinks best. For the time being Russia has ceased to be a factor in the war....

Since the certainty exists that the Leninites will repudiate all the obligations of their predecessors in office, the Allies have no longer any guarantees for the loans they have made to Russia. Presumably no further aid will be given. In the event of Russia concluding a separate peace with the enemy, the Allies will have to decide jointly on what their course of action will be. If Russia becomes an active friend of Germany and supplies her with foodstuffs and munitions, some drastic measures will have to be adopted....¹¹⁵

And so the die had been cast. The Bolsheviks were defiled as “the enthronement of anarchy at Petrograd” and suddenly Russia was a bitter enemy of Canada and the other Entente powers.¹¹⁶ This reversal of relations, hinted at in the previous day’s editorial, was now explicit. The Allies were committed to the continuation of the war, and with the Bolsheviks desperately desirous of peace, there could be no compromise. The logic of the pro-war position meant that the Bolsheviks and Russia were now pro-German and, therefore, a legitimate target of Allied armies. The stage for intervention had been set.

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On the home front, things were further complicated for the Allies. Under the leadership of Ginger Goodwin, 1500 workers in Trail shut down the smelter of the

¹¹⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

¹¹⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1917, 4.

Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company – Cominco – on 15 November 1917.¹¹⁷ The smelter was producing 20 to 50 tonnes of zinc per day for the Imperial Munitions Board, a valuable ingredient for the bullets that were being fired by the millions from the Allied trenches of France and Flanders.¹¹⁸ Ginger’s message from Trail posted on the front page of the 16 November 1917 *Federationist* was brief and to the point: “Strike on at Trail. Advise all men to keep away.”¹¹⁹ The same newspaper published a letter in which a writer calling himself “A. Rebel” discussed voting for working-class candidates in the federal election slated for December 17. He wrote:

You can be on one side or the other, there is no room between. Hence, as a useful member of society, you, an abject slave, can but line up on one side. The other side has but to follow the destiny of the Romanoffs, Siberia, and receive a taste of their own philosophy.¹²⁰

A month later, three days before the election in which several labour candidates ran in BC on a platform calling for the “abolition of profit-making,” Joe Naylor, wrote an article in the *Federationist* titled ‘Lenine’s Doctrine Scares Ruling Class.’¹²¹ Naylor, president of the BC Federation of Labour and a resident of the Vancouver Island mining town of Cumberland, wrote:

Many of us are not convinced that the actual overthrow of the Czar was intended to be a proletarian revolution, but was intended to be a revolution to oust an autocracy and enshrine a capitalist plutocracy, such as we so loyally uphold here in Canada....

Clear-thinking socialists have all along been convinced that Kerenksy was only a tool of...financial interests....

¹¹⁷ Susan Mayse, *Ginger: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1990), 124.

¹¹⁸ Mayse, 103.

¹¹⁹ *BC Federationist*, 16 November 1917, 1.

¹²⁰ *BC Federationist*, 16 November 1917, 3.

¹²¹ *BC Federationist*, 14 December 1917, 2. For more information on the election, consult the *Federationist* from 9 November 1917 to 21 December 1917. For the platform of the labour candidates, see the *BC Federationist*, 9 November 1917, 3.

Is it not high time that the workers of the western world take action similar to that of the Russian Bolsheviki and dispose of their masters as those brave Russians are now doing?¹²²

Naylor touches on the divergent interests of the forces at play in the February Revolution, suggesting capitalist interests favoured the overthrow of the czar but sought to keep the movement within safe parameters under men such as Kerenskii. He then appeals to Canadian labour to follow the lead of the Bolsheviki in Russia.

Vancouver socialist Dr. W.J. Curry, a frequent correspondent to the *Federationist*, expressed a similar sentiment in a letter published in the same paper: “If there is anything certain, it is that our kept press hates and fears the turn the revolution of Russia is now taking.”¹²³ He goes on to describe the way in which the mainstream newspapers of the province made a fundamental about-face in their editorial position toward Russia:

Well, we remember when Nicholas, “our gallant ally,” entered the ring with John Bull and France, to avenge martyred Belgium and crush the brutal Huns... Then suddenly, the rotten old aristocracy fell to pieces and the duma was no more. But it was days after this greatest of social miracles that our press reluctantly recorded the fact.... Kerensky was now the heaven-sent saviour of Russian democracy....

But alas! News came of the regiments deserting to go home, and of peasants firing their landlords and actually taking possession of the land they worked, of industrial workers seizing mills and factories and producing for use instead of dividends for social parasites. This was the last straw. This violated the “sacred rights of property” and if lauded and tolerated in Russia, the workers some day might turn the same trick in Canada or with the great landowners of Britain and the Land of the Free. So the mental guardians of plutocracy grasped at Korniloff....

But alas, Korniloff soon stumbled and fell down and even a move to bring law and order once more to Russia by replacing Nick or placing his uncle upon the throne was hailed with inward satisfaction by our press since anything is better than social democracy and the rule of the common people

¹²² *BC Federationist*, 14 December 1917, 2.

¹²³ *BC Federationist*, 14 December 1917, 10.

The worst has now happened for Russia.... The extreme rebels, those who would actually conscript land and all social property, and who have abolished titles, are on top and apparently there to stay....¹²⁴

Dr. Curry holds no punches in railing against the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the press, and his interpretation appears to accurately reflect the *Daily Colonist's* coverage of events in Russia. Dr. Curry proceeds to shed light on the war and, in echoing Joe Naylor, he appeals to the people of Canada to follow the lead of their brothers and sisters in Russia:

This war, like all others, is about plunder.... We know that the political and financial rulers of Canada belong to this same [ruling] class, and today they are profit-mad and war-mad.... The time has come for the common people of Canada and elsewhere to unite for the purpose of doing to their rulers what the workers of Russia did to theirs – fire them off their backs and establish a real democracy.¹²⁵

Within weeks of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd, some British Columbians were raising the red flag in the fair dominion of Canada. The Russian Revolution had come home.

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At the end of 1917, there were 648,000 tons of Allied munitions and war supplies in the Siberian port of Vladivostok.¹²⁶ Sent to help the Czar in his bid to defeat the central powers on the Eastern Front, the shipments continued after Nicholas abdicated the throne in the face of a worker and soldier uprising in Petrograd in March 1917.¹²⁷ Over the course of the war, Russia had emerged as the seventh largest market for Canadian goods.¹²⁸ From a meagre \$16,000 in 1896, Canadian exports to Russia reached \$16

¹²⁴ *BC Federationist*, 14 December 1917, 10.

¹²⁵ *BC Federationist*, 14 December 1917, 10.

¹²⁶ MacLaren, 127.

¹²⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 16 March 1917, 1. For consistency I will use the Gregorian dates throughout this paper, except when referring explicitly to the proper names February Revolution and October Revolution.

¹²⁸ MacLaren, 224.

million by 1916.¹²⁹ Canadian trade commissioners were appointed in Petrograd and the Siberian city of Omsk the same year, and a Russian purchasing mission was established in Canada.¹³⁰ The Russian Empire had deep pockets to fund the war supplies from the Allies. The Imperial Russian Gold Reserve was the largest holding of the precious metal in the world. Valued at over 1.6 billion gold rubles, in four shipments of December 1915, June and November 1916, and February 1917, over a quarter of this gold was shipped from Vladivostok to Vancouver to guarantee British war credits to Russia.¹³¹ Transported overland on the Canadian Pacific Railway, the gold was safely stored in a Bank of England depository in Ottawa.¹³²

With her ability to repay her loans assured, Allied manufacturers were more than happy to ship their goods to Siberia. According to the *New York Times*,

during the war scores of great warehouses were constructed to house the perishable goods, and when these were stacked to the rafters it became impossible to erect buildings as fast as the supplies came, everything from cotton to unassembled motor-lorries, were piled in open fields and lots and covered with tarpaulins. Outside the city...are hills and fields of munitions and materials, rotting, rusting, decaying, wasting.... There are 37,000 railway truck-wheels and heavy steel rails in such quantities as to make it possible to build a third track from the Pacific to Petrograd. There is enough barbed wire to fence Siberia. There are field guns, millions of rounds of ammunition, and a submarine; automobiles, shoes, copper and lead ingots.”¹³³

But the October Revolution threw the entire Russian war effort into doubt. The once amicable ally was now an enemy of Canada. On 3 December 1917, the Vladivostok workers' and soldiers' council elected a Bolshevik majority.¹³⁴ A month later, the central

¹²⁹ MacLaren, 224.

¹³⁰ MacLaren, 224.

¹³¹ Smele, “White Gold,” 1319.

¹³² Smele, “White Gold,” 1318.

¹³³ Ackerman, *Trailing the Bolsheviks*, 42, as quoted in MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia*, 128.

¹³⁴ N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 45.

Bolshevik government under Lenin decreed a state monopoly on gold.¹³⁵ Allied emissaries and businessmen in the Siberian port were terrified by the turn of events, as were military and political leaders throughout North America and Europe. Something had to be done to secure the city for the Allies. In January and February 1918, British, Japanese, and United States warships were deployed to Vladivostok and lay at anchor in the city's harbour.¹³⁶ By March, the local Communists were reportedly growing "increasingly resentful of the inhibitions placed upon them by the spectacle of the foreign warships in the harbour" and the "Allied consular representatives increasingly irritated by the harassment of their nationals and the suppression of normal business activity in the port."¹³⁷ That same month, the Bolsheviks carried through with their commitment to peace, surrendering huge concessions to Germany in signing a treaty at Brest-Litovsk.

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There is no other sign post upon the social horizon pointing the way to peace than the movement which is now typified in the Russian Bolsheviks. Well may rulers and robbers hail its advent with terrified squaks and bourgeois souls quake with terror at its probable triumph. For with that triumph their game of loot and plunder will end.¹³⁸

BC Federationist, 25 January 1918

By the beginning of 1918, BC's labour newspaper was touting the Bolsheviks and the movement they represented as the only hope for peace. And the "probable triumph" of the forces of anti-militarism in Russia was tied directly to the downfall of capitalism internationally. On the evening of Saturday, 23 February 1918, Jim Hawthornthwaite, member of the provincial legislature for the Vancouver Island riding of Newcastle,

¹³⁵ *BC Federationist*, 1 February 1918, 4

¹³⁶ MacLaren, 126.

¹³⁷ MacLaren, 127.

¹³⁸ *BC Federationist*, 25 January 1918, 4.

addressed the inaugural meeting of the newly minted Federated Labour Party in

Vancouver's Labour Temple:

We can abolish capitalism by special acts in the province of British Columbia, in Canada, or any part of the British empire....

This is the beginning of the end. The day is coming when class rule shall no longer prevail, the day is in sight when the downfall of capitalism is at hand. The workers the world over are aroused and thinking. They are looking over the world and thinking what is in this war for them, nothing but misery, hunger, want and degradation. But they intend to have no more of that.

Listen to the tramp of the revolutionary workers of the world marching to the front. Yes, marching on to war, and marching on to victory, victory for their class.¹³⁹

Hawthornthwaite, a prominent Socialist member of the provincial legislature throughout the first two decades of the 20th century, had been returned to the legislature by a margin of two to one in a by-election of 24 January 1918. "The Bolsheviki triumphs!" the *Federationist* story proclaimed.¹⁴⁰ A week before the election, Hawthornthwaite wrote in the paper that "the war, notwithstanding its horrors, has already produced striking beneficial results. Russia has, in a carnival of destruction, got rid of the Romanoff autocracy that for generations foully oppressed the working people of that country..."¹⁴¹

While Hawthornthwaite would later break ranks from the mass of organized labour in condemning the Bolsheviks, throughout 1918 he appears to have believed that they represented a positive force in Russia. During the BC Federation of Labour's 1918 convention held in Vancouver in late January, the decision was made to form a Federated Labour Party with branches across the country.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *BC Federationist*, 1 March 1918, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *BC Federationist*, 25 January 1919, 1. In another by-election held in the riding of Vancouver City that day, Miss Ralph Smith became the first women elected to the legislature of British Columbia.

¹⁴¹ *BC Federationist*, 11 January 1918, 5.

¹⁴² *BC Federationist*, 1 February 1918, 1.

On 3 March 1918, Hawthornthwaite addressed the party's first meeting in South Wellington, located in his riding near Nanaimo. He presented a compelling perspective on the Russian situation and the Allied war effort against Germany:

The capitalist press in this country is out-lying each other in vilifying the Bolsheviki, but we cannot believe one word we read. A close observer is forced to the conclusion that the Allies are standing by to allow the Germans to overwhelm Russia and steal from them the fruits of the revolution. The Allies have a majority of three to two in men and two to one in guns and ammunition and yet they do not start the spring offensive, which has been so well advertised and which started much earlier last year. The Russians have large stores of supplies in Vladivostok and Petervolosky, which to all appearances the Japs are about to cut off. So we are forced to the conclusion that the Allies are liberating the Germans on the western front, and allowing them to devastate the Russian workers' republic.¹⁴³

Hawthornthwaite also discussed the changes that were taking place under the Zapatistas in Mexico, suggesting that in BC,

we can take over the mills, mines and factories; by paying for them, if necessary, and then operate them for the common good and give to each the product of his or her toil. With this end in view I appeal to you all to get in the party...¹⁴⁴

While Hawthornthwaite advocated expropriation with compensation, the new Bolshevik government in Russia felt no obligation to honour the financial commitments of the Czar and Kerenskii. In early March, they announced the repudiation of billions of dollars in Allied loans to Russia, sending shivers through the Allied ranks:

The intimated intention of the Russian Bolsheviki to repudiate the debt contracted by previous governments of that country has caused quite a flutter of alarm in the dove-cote of the ruling class thieves. And that alarm is amply justified, for if such a precedent were once established and followed out to its logical conclusion, the entire superstructure of bourgeois flimflam and swindle would crash to the ground, and the soft sand of living on the plunder taken from slaves under the pretense of payment and the humbug of money, be brought to an end...¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ *BC Federationist*, 8 March 1918, 2.

¹⁴⁴ *BC Federationist*, 8 March 1918, 2.

¹⁴⁵ *BC Federationist*, 8 March 1918, 4.

J. Galitzky of Hedley, B.C., wrote a letter to the *Federationist* on 9 March 1918 addressing the question of ‘Why They Fear the Bolsheviki.’ In it, he defended the repudiation of the loans, arguing that “it would be unjust if the Russian people would have to pay interest on money loaned to the Czar’s government for the purpose of conquest, war profit and wholesale murder.”¹⁴⁶ The Bolsheviks were being elevated to mythic proportions in the minds of war-ravished British Columbia workers, and simultaneously raising the ire of Allied political and financial leaders.

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On 29 March 1918, British Colonel Keyes wrote a report on British financial interests in Russia:

As well as control over the grain trade on the Volga and in southern Russia, they controlled the whole sugar trade in the Ukraine, 1.25 million acres of ‘easily accessible’ forest, 300,000 acres of irrigated cotton land in central Asia, nearly all the Russian insurance business, besides large coal, oil, cement and other concerns.¹⁴⁷

The next day, the British Foreign office requested the Treasury make payment for the British Government’s purchase of the Siberian Bank.¹⁴⁸ On 5 April 1918, 500 Japanese marines landed in Vladivostok from the warships in the harbour.¹⁴⁹ Fifty Royal Marines were deployed from the cruiser *Suffolk* to guard the British Consulate.¹⁵⁰ Two weeks later, the *BC Federationist* ran the following editorial:

According to a statement issued by the International Bureau of the Council of Workmen’s, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ delegates, the “Russian working classes are not striving for a republic of the type of the American trust magnates, or of the French Stock Exchange sharks.” This no doubt accounts for the manner in which

¹⁴⁶ *BC Federationist*, 15 March 1918, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Kettle, 30.

¹⁴⁸ Kettle, 31.

¹⁴⁹ Kettle, 35.

¹⁵⁰ R.M. Connaughton, *The Republic of the Ushakovko: Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-20*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 36-40, N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 53, and Kettle, 35.

these two republics view with complacency the impudent intervention of feudal Japan into Russian affairs. A bourgeois republic in Russia would be quite acceptable to all the remaining ancient tyrannies on earth, but a Worker's Republic, never.¹⁵¹

It was the first mention of Allied intervention. But the next week the paper quoted the Japanese Ambassador to Russia, who appeared to be hostile to his country's interference with Russia's internal affairs:

The Soviets are gaining enormous power in Russia. The people feel that they are the rulers of the country and it is wonderful to observe them. Germany may destroy the Lenine government but Bolshevism will permeate the world. Any other pronouncement would be false.¹⁵²

He went on to say that every foreigner who has not large interests of a commercial nature "leaves Russia fairly committed to the Bolshevik view of life."¹⁵³ Several months prior to these reports, a front-page article titled 'Political Parties in Russia' had appeared in the *Federationist* under the byline "N. Lenine."¹⁵⁴

Throughout Russia, White armies were emerging to challenge Bolshevik power and nurture the forces of counter-revolution. In the south, an army was formed under Colonel Anton Denikin. Cossack armies rose up across the country, with the Ataman General Grigory Semenov leading the charge in eastern Siberia. And from May 1917 on, a peculiar force known as the Czechoslovak Legion controlled a 4000-mile stretch of the Trans-Siberian Railway.¹⁵⁵ At odds with the Bolsheviks,¹⁵⁶ and eager to see a homeland

¹⁵¹ *BC Federationist*, 19 April 1918, 4.

¹⁵² *BC Federationist*, 26 April 1918, 5.

¹⁵³ *BC Federationist*, 26 April 1918, 5.

¹⁵⁴ *BC Federationist*, 15 February 1918, 1.

¹⁵⁵ After the February Revolution, Czech nationalist leader Jan Masaryk, a professor who had been exiled in London, went to Russia to organize isolated units of Czechs into a genuine army under the red and white flag of Bohemia. The legion was officially recognized as an Allied Army. In June 1917, the Czechs proved themselves a valuable force, capturing 4000 Austrians as part of General Brussilov's offensive, despite the fact that the Russian troops deserted and left the front. The collapse of the Russian army resulted in a windfall of machine guns, rifles, and ammunition for the Czechs. (John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-19*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), 88-91, and MacLaren, *Canadians in Russia*, 134)

established out of the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Allies recognized a powerful ally in the Czechs.¹⁵⁷ The legion was ordered to lead the offensive against the Bolsheviks in western Siberia and northern Russia, a force of 15,000 was deployed to Vladivostok. On 7 June 1918, Czech units seized Omsk from the Bolsheviks, the largest city in western Siberia.¹⁵⁸ Samara fell the next day.¹⁵⁹

On 24 June 1918, Alexandr Kerenskii met for several hours with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, discussing the Bolshevik's hold on power and prospects for the future.¹⁶⁰ Kerenskii had made his way to London after fleeing Russia in the wake of the October revolution. In his opinion, Trotsky was pro-German and Lenin "lived in the clouds."¹⁶¹ Later that day, Lloyd George made a report to the Imperial War Cabinet – which held session in London from June to August 1919 and consisted of British political and military leaders and the Prime Ministers of the Dominions of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. After Lloyd George reported on his meeting with Kerenskii, Borden told the ministers "we ought to have Allied intervention and not Japanese intervention."¹⁶²

The next day, Czech leaders met with the Allied consuls in Vladivostok, requesting the immediate deployment of an Allied force of 100,000 troops and large

¹⁵⁶ Masaryk had negotiated a deal with the Bolsheviks to have the Czechs evacuated out of Vladivostok. But on 14 May 1918, an argument with a pro-Austrian Czech in a passing train at the Siberian town of Chelyabinsk culminated in the Legionnaires seizing control of the town. Trotsky ordered the entire Legion disarmed and arrested, but the Czechs intercepted the message and seized control of the rails. (R.M. Connaughton, *The Republic of the Ushakovko: Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-20*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 36-40, and John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-19*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), 92-93.

¹⁵⁷ On 29 April 1918, Masaryk arrived in Vancouver on his way from Russia to Europe.

¹⁵⁸ John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-19*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), 94.

¹⁵⁹ Swettenham, 94.

¹⁶⁰ Kettle, *The Road to Intervention*, 220-1. Kerenskii told Lloyd George he regarded Trotsky was pro-German and that Lenin "lived in the clouds."

¹⁶¹ Kettle, *The Road to Intervention*, 220-1.

¹⁶² Kettle, *The Road to Intervention*, 222.

quantities of arms.¹⁶³ Three days later, on 29 June 1918, a force of 15,000 Czechs along with Japanese and British marines toppled the local Soviet.¹⁶⁴ In an article published in the *Federationist* six months later, Albert Rhys Williams, an American who was present in the city at the time, described ‘the Red Funeral of Vladivostok’:

When the Czechoslovaks, aided by Japanese and British troops, suddenly seized the Soviet and its officers, throwing confusion and terror into the ranks of the workers, the *gruzshchiki* (longshoremen) rushed into the Red Staff building, and, though outnumbered forty to one, refused to surrender until the building was fired by an incendiary bomb.¹⁶⁵

Williams attended the funeral of the fallen workers, along with 17,000 citizens of Vladivostok on 4 July 1918.¹⁶⁶ With the 12-inch guns of the Allied fleet in the harbour below, a procession “jamming the street not from curb to curb, but from wall to wall” made its way to the city’s public square, in front of the surrendered Red Staff building and “fifty feet” from the British Consulate.¹⁶⁷ At the head of the march four men carried a huge red banner proclaiming: “Long live the Soviet of Workmen’s and Peasants’ Deputies! Hail to the International Brotherhood of the Toilers!” One hundred girls dressed in white, carrying green wreathes from the 44 unions of the city, accompanied the freshly painted red coffins of the fallen longshoremen.¹⁶⁸ The music of the Red Fleet Band was drowned out by the singing of the ‘Internationale.’ A group of Czech troops offered the procession a guard of honour, but they flatly refused. In the main square, speakers mounted a platform on the back of a parked truck, and Constantin Suchanov, a

¹⁶³ Kettle, *The Road to Intervention*, 222.

¹⁶⁴ MacLaren, 134.

¹⁶⁵ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 5. (Reprinted from the *New Republic*)

¹⁶⁶ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 5.

¹⁶⁷ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 5.

¹⁶⁸ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 5.

24-year-old student, son of a former Czarist official, and president of the Vladivostok Soviet – paroled for the day by the new authorities – told the crowd:

Here before the Red Staff building where our comrades *gruzshchiki* were slain, we swear by these red coffins that hold them, by their wives and children that weep for them, by the red banners which float over them, that the Soviet for which they died shall be the thing for which we live – or if need be – like them, die.¹⁶⁹

It would be a year and a half until the Soviet was resurrected in Vladivostok. Two days after the funeral, on 6 July 1918, British, French, American, Japanese, and Czechoslovak representatives in the city announced that the region had been placed under their “temporary protection.”¹⁷⁰ Later that month, General Horvath issued a proclamation in Vladivostok placing all “administrative, judicial, financial and other departments” under the command of his cabinet.¹⁷¹

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It is reported from Shankhai (sic.) that the Allies have decided on joint intervention in Siberia. British, French, American and Japanese contingents are to occupy Vladivostok, it seems, in the interests of the Czecho-Slovaks. We can't quite make things out. If the Czecho-Slovaks are not strong enough to win control by themselves, they must surely be in the minority, and, therefore, not entitled to run the country.... If, on the other hand, the Czecho-Slovaks are the strong party, there doesn't seem much need to assist them. Of course, the opponents of the Czecho-Slovak's are the Bolsheviki – mere working people. That may explain matters somewhat.¹⁷²

BC Federationist, 26 July 1918

On 6 July 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson had agreed to the deployment of 7000 US troops in Siberia.¹⁷³ Four days later, the British war office sent a formal request to Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden asking if Canadian troops could be made

¹⁶⁹ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 5.

¹⁷⁰ MacLaren, 134.

¹⁷¹ *Daily Colonist*, 28 July 1918, 1.

¹⁷² *BC Federationist*, 26 July 1918, 2.

¹⁷³ MacLaren, 137.

available to “restore order and a stable government” in Siberia, provide assistance for the Czechoslovaks, and help reopen an Eastern Front against Germany.¹⁷⁴ Despite countless requests from Canada in the months that followed, this would constitute the most concrete definition of British policy in Siberia. In the weeks ahead, the details of the Allied force were hammered out. Major-General Sir Thomas Bridges, British military envoy in Washington, went to Ottawa to further the War Office request, and military officials in Ottawa began to organize the skeletal form of a Canadian contingent.¹⁷⁵ Lord Balfour, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, suggested the destination of the force be kept secret because of the “delicate situation as regards negotiation for intervention in Siberia.”¹⁷⁶ As Czech forces threatened the city of Ekaterinburg in mid-July, local Soviet officials executed Czar Nicholas and his family.¹⁷⁷ Another propaganda tool had been handed to the Allies. With the seizure of Kazan in early August, 651 million rubles of Russian gold was transferred from the State Bank to Omsk.¹⁷⁸

In his memoirs, Borden writes that on 27 July 1918 “we discussed our contingent for the Siberian expedition.”¹⁷⁹ The next day, Borden received word that the Privy Council of Canada “approves principle of sending expedition, leaving you to arrange cost

¹⁷⁴ MacLaren, 138.

¹⁷⁵ MacLaren, 139 and 144.

¹⁷⁶ MacLaren, 140.

¹⁷⁷ A month later, Ekaterinberg fell to the Czechs. Six months later, in December 1918, reports surfaced from London to the effect that the execution of the Romanovs was a lie, created for propaganda purposed by the Bolsheviks, and that the Czar and his family were living safely in a location known to Allied authorities. (“Claim Now Is Made Russian ex-Czar and Family Are Alive,” *Daily Times*, 27 December 1918, 1)

¹⁷⁸ Smele, “White Gold,” 1319-21. The White forces seized Kazan and the gold immediately before the Bolsheviks planned to evacuate the treasure up the Volga to Moscow. After Kazan was taken, White forces bickered over control of the gold, which was transferred from Kazan, to Ufa, to Chelyabinsk, finally ending up in Omsk in late September 1918.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Borden, *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs*, eds. Henry Laird Borden and Heath MacQuarrie, (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 146.

and other detail.”¹⁸⁰ A dispatch from London was printed in the *Daily Colonist* two days later under the headline ‘Britain States Aims in Russia’:

The aim of His Majesty’s Government is to secure the political and economical restoration of Russia without internal interference of any kind and bring about the expulsion of enemy forces from Russian soil. His majesty’s government categorically declares that it has no intention of infringing to the slightest degree the territorial integrity of Russia.¹⁸¹

On the other side of the Russian landmass, many thousands of kilometres to the West of Vladivostok and the grain fields of Siberia, Allied troops landed in the port of Archangel in the beginning of August, seizing the city from 8000 Bolsheviks and armed workers and catapulting an anti-Bolshevik ‘Government of the North’ into power.¹⁸² On August 9, Trotsky said in a statement that “our troops are fighting British invaders and a declaration of war can hardly be avoided,” while Lenin issued an ultimatum to the Japanese consul in Moscow demanding the withdrawal of troops from Siberia.¹⁸³ Britain’s 1000-man strong 25th Middlesex Regiment, comprised of elderly class ‘C’ troops known as the ‘Hernia Battalion,’ had landed in Vladivostok on 3 August 1918 as Japanese deployment began on a large scale, with 18,000 troops having landed in Vladivostok by the end of the month.¹⁸⁴ American troops were sailing from the Philippines, and 2000 Italians, 12,000 Poles, 4,000 Serbs, 4000 Romanians, and 1850 mainly Vietnamese French troops were all on their way to Vladivostok.¹⁸⁵

On 12 August 1918, with Prime Minister Borden still in London, the Privy Council passed an order-in-Council authorizing the deployment of a Canadian

¹⁸⁰ MacLaren, 140.

¹⁸¹ *Daily Colonist*, 30 July 1918, 1.

¹⁸² *Daily Colonist*, 6 August 1918, 7 and 9 August 1918, 1.

¹⁸³ *Daily Colonist*, 10 August, 1918, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Kettle, *The Road to Intervention*, 301, and Swettenham, 126. By November, there would be 72,400 Japanese men in Siberia and northern Manchuria. The Middlesex Battalion served as the garrison of Hong Kong before landing in Vladivostok. (*Daily Colonist*, 25 August 1918, 1)

¹⁸⁵ Swettenham, 127 and MacLaren, 181.

Expeditionary Force to Siberia.¹⁸⁶ Under the leadership of Major-General James H. Elmsley, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia) would be composed of the following:

‘B’ Squadron, Royal North West Mounted Police (Calvary),
 85th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery,
 16th Field Company, Canadian Engineers,
 6th Signal Company,
 259th Infantry Battalion,
 260th Infantry Battalion,
 20th Machine Gun Company,
 No. 1 Company Divisional Team,
 No. 16 Field Ambulance,
 No. 11 Stationary Hospital,
 No. 9 Ordnance Detachment.¹⁸⁷

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When the Privy Council of Canada met in Ottawa and approved the deployment of a Canadian force to Siberia, labour unrest had reached a fever pitch on the West Coast. Strikes were rampant, new unions formed almost daily, and the forces of labour were being mobilized on a scale unprecedented in Canadian history, let alone in the midst of World War. While not yet articulated as an explicitly revolutionary movement, BC workers posed a very real threat to the Canadian war effort and were increasingly vocal in expressing their opposition to capitalism and their solidarity with Russian workers and the Bolshevik government. A glimpse into this period of working-class struggle in British Columbia in the last months of the First World War is necessary in order to understand the society that would serve as the launch pad for the Siberian Expeditionary Force.

In Victoria, the summer of 1918 witnessed the rapid organization into unions of a diversity of local workers, including the garment workers, upholsterers, teamsters,

¹⁸⁶ MacLaren, 141. Subsequent orders of 23 August 1918 and 5 September 1918 augmented the original force.

¹⁸⁷ John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-19*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), 128.

telephone operators, laundry workers, retail clerks, and sawmill workers at the Brackman Kerr Milling Company shops.¹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, opposition to conscription mounted. Not wanting to fight a war in which they believe they had no interest, workers fled to the hills of central Vancouver Island to avoid the draft. One of these men was Ginger Goodwin, who went underground in the spring of 1918 after the conscription board removed him from class ‘D’ (unfit) and declared him fit for military service. On the night of 27-28 July 1918, in the dense forest where the Cruikshank River empties into Comox Lake, special constable Dan Campbell of the Dominion Police force shot Goodwin dead.¹⁸⁹ Events surrounding the killing were murky, with conflicting rumours over whether Ginger had aimed his hunting rifle at Campbell, or whether he was shot in the back in cold blood.¹⁹⁰ Tension mounted when it was learned that Goodwin had been killed with “a soft-nosed bullet, or dum-dum bullet...which has been ruled out of [the] ‘civilized warfare’ of Europe.”¹⁹¹ While a coroner’s jury left an open verdict and Campbell was arrested for murder on 31 July 1918, the charges were quietly dropped.¹⁹²

But workers in British Columbia were not about to ignore the death of their comrade. The day of Goodwin’s funeral, 2 August 1918, the City Band led a mile-long procession from the centre of Cumberland to the cemetery outside town. A mass meeting two days earlier had approved a resolution to down tools in the mines.¹⁹³ As the *Federationist* reported,

Every scene of industrial activity was closed down and the town took a general holiday. The funeral was the most largely attended in the history

¹⁸⁸ UVACS, “Minutes,” 5 June 1918, 19 June 1918 and 17 July 1918.

¹⁸⁹ *BC Federationist*, 2 August 1918, 1.

¹⁹⁰ *BC Federationist*, 2 August 1918, 1.

¹⁹¹ *BC Federationist*, 2 August 1918, 1.

¹⁹² *BC Federationist*, 2 August 1918, 1, and 4 October 1918, 4

¹⁹³ *BC Federationist*, 2 August 1918, 1.

of Cumberland, and the procession was over a mile long. . . . On the request of the chief of police the Dominion police were removed from the district prior to the funeral, that official stating that he would not be responsible for the results unless this was done.¹⁹⁴

The miners of Cumberland were electrified by the death of Brother Goodwin, who had been blacklisted from the mines of Vancouver Island after the epic strike of 1912-1914, and for one day at least the state decided to give them a wide berth. But Vancouver would be a site of confrontation after organized labour at last decided to act on its long-standing “down tools” policy. The night before Goodwin’s funeral, the labour council voted 117 to 2 to endorse the action of the metal trades council in calling a 24-hour work stoppage beginning 12 noon the day of the funeral.¹⁹⁵ Streetcars ground to a halt and boilermakers and shipyard workers left their shops to protest the death of the labour leader. The forces of reaction in Vancouver reacted with a vengeance. “German of British?” asked the *Sun*’s front-page editorial.¹⁹⁶ A band of 300 returned soldiers was organized and proceeded to march on the Labour Temple. They stormed the building, smashing windows and doors, trashing offices and forcing secretary-treasurer Victor Midgley out a window onto the second floor coping that ringed the building.¹⁹⁷ He crawled around to another office and the soldiers attempted to force Midgley out the window again but Miss Foxcroft, the telephone exchange operator in the building, stood in front of the window and prevented them. According to the *Federationist*, she was “bruised considerably in the process.”¹⁹⁸ Midgley was taken downstairs, forced to kiss the Union Jack, and beaten. George

¹⁹⁴ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 1.

¹⁹⁵ *BC Federationist*, 2 August 1918, 1. The Trades Council later resigned on mass to run for re-election after being accused of not representing the membership. With a few exceptions, union locals returned the same delegates to office. (*BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 1)

¹⁹⁶ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 1.

¹⁹⁷ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 1.

¹⁹⁸ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 1.

Thomas, a member of the longshoremen's union, was seized by the soldiers, struck in the face, beaten in an alley, and forced to kiss the flag.¹⁹⁹

That night, an emergency meeting was held in the Empress Theatre. Mayor Gale, Members of Parliament H.S. Clements and S.J. Crowe, firemen's union president Richardson and carpenters' representative J. Reid, member of provincial parliament J.S. Cowper, and P.G. Shallcross from the Board of Trade came together to condemn the strikers' actions.²⁰⁰ Shallcross was merciless toward the strikers and Goodwin:

Let me say to you that the men who organized the movement today which compelled some of our best citizens to throw down their tools are as big cowards as the one who got shot – in front or the back, and I hope in both.²⁰¹

Goodwin was a traitor and he deserved to die, and the strike leaders in Vancouver were not much better. The meeting concluded after approving the following resolution: "That the government of the Dominion of Canada should immediately take strong and stern measures to suppress all seditious and anti-war movements or language."²⁰² It called for the immediate conscription of the strike leaders, their removal from the executives of local unions, as well as for industrial conscription of enemy aliens' labour for \$1.10 per day.²⁰³ The message was clear: the Win-the-War faction of patriots and profiteers was prepared to play hardball in order to prevent labour from derailing the war effort. While purporting to stand for "law and order," the anti-strike camp endorsed and initiated vigilantism as a means of suppressing working-class self-activity: BC's own version of the *freikorps* and the *fasci*.

¹⁹⁹ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 1.

²⁰⁰ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 2. Richardson threatened to pull the Firemen's union out of the labour council, but his members rejected such a course in a vote later that week.

²⁰¹ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 2.

²⁰² *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 2.

²⁰³ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 2.

The Canadian government began to realize the threat posed by the workers of British Columbia. On 7 August 1919, E.H. Chambers, chief censor of Canada, met with the editorial board of the *Federationist* and threatened to suppress the publication for its questionable stance toward the war and conscription. Chambers reluctantly allowed the paper to continue operating after the directors signed the following statement:

Since it has been pointed out to us by the Chief Press Censor for Canada that our paper has been for some time publishing matter in direct contravention of the consolidated orders respecting censorship, we hereby undertake and promise that in the future no objectionable matter of a like or any other nature will be printed in this or any other paper in which we have any responsible or interest, directly or indirectly.²⁰⁴

The censorship orders, originally passed in January 1917 and updated in May 1918, declared “objectionable matter,” as, among other things, “Any statement, report or opinion which may tend to weaken or in any way detract from the united effort of the people of Canada in the prosecution of the war.”²⁰⁵ The *Federationist* was going to have to exercise caution and restraint to avoid immediate suppression.²⁰⁶

And the state was only warming up for its battle against militant labour. On 14 August 1918, Joe Naylor – blacklisted coal miner, former president of the BC Federation of Labour, longstanding member of the Socialist Party of Canada, and a personal friend of Goodwin’s – was arrested and locked up in the Courtenay Jail.²⁰⁷ Naylor was accused of assisting Goodwin and others in evading the conscription law. He had served as the Vancouver labour council’s representative at the coroner’s inquest, and within weeks the

²⁰⁴ *BC Federationist*, 9 August 1918, 4.

²⁰⁵ *BC Federationist*, 7 August 1918, 4.

²⁰⁶ Although critical reportage remained throughout, suggesting the reach of the censor may have been limited, or enforcement uneven.

²⁰⁷ *BC Federationist*, 15 August 1918, 1.

authorities had determined that they would spare no precautions. Naylor was eventually acquitted, but many more arrests were to come.²⁰⁸

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‘Canada to Send Force 4,000 Strong to Help Russia in Siberia,’ the *Victoria Daily Colonist* proclaimed the morning of 13 August 1918, the day before Joe Naylor was arrested in Cumberland.²⁰⁹ The story said that

Siberia, in soil, climate, and agricultural capabilities, is remarkably like the prairie provinces of Canada.... There is sure to develop enormous trade, which will profoundly affect the commercial development of the Pacific.... Canada can look forward to a legitimate share in this future trade.²¹⁰

Canadian intervention in Russia was clearly tied to trade considerations in the Far East. A week later, an article discussed “the mines of the Ural Mountains” in western Siberia that “produce more than 90 per cent of the platinum of the world. There is also gold and copper and other metals much needed in the conduct of war.”²¹¹ Siberia was proving to be irresistible to the Allies. Upon his return to Canada on 24 August 1918, Prime Minister Borden announced that the organization of the Canadian Army would now be independent of the British Army.²¹² He also confirmed that a Canadian force would be sent to Siberia. Whether these two announcements were related is a matter of speculation, but the possibility exists that this fundamental step toward Canadian sovereignty – independent military organization – was directly related to the commitment of Canadian troops to intervene in the Russian Civil War. Ideological motives were at play as well.

²⁰⁸ *BC Federationist*, 11 October 1918, 1. The grand jury at the Nanaimo Assizes threw out the charges against Naylor on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence, however fellow mine union leader and co-accused David Aitken remained in jail.

²⁰⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 13 August 1918, 13.

²¹⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 13 August 1918, 13.

²¹¹ *Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1918, 3.

²¹² J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, (Toronto: Canadian Annual Review, 1918), 419.

In an editorial the day after the announcement of Canada's Siberian force, the *Daily Colonist* referred to rumours of

the approaching downfall of the Bolshevik government, an event which has never been in doubt, the only question being, when?... Whatever semblance of government exists is in the hands of Lenine and Trotzky, but the area throughout which their behest are obeyed is a constantly narrowing one....

Russia is gradually emerging from her wild dream. She is discovering Bolshevism is only a transitory force which thrives by revolution and that Lenine and Trotzky do not differ in their brutal impractical efforts at Government from Danton and Robespierre....²¹³

A few days later, the *Colonist* suggested in an editorial that Victoria should be the concentration point of the new force. Members of parliament from Vancouver, the paper stated, were actively lobbying to have the unit stationed in that city, and with BC only required to raise a company of 250 men for the force, Victoria needed to show some patriotism.²¹⁴ "We see no reason why Macauley Plains, or even the Willows Camp, should not be utilized," it said. The *Colonist* called on "City Council, the Board of Trade and our Island member of parliament to put forth their best efforts to induce Ottawa to establish a camp here."²¹⁵ They got their wish.

Major-General Elmsley began organizing the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force in London in August, transferring the headquarters to Ottawa upon his return to Canada on 19 September 1918.²¹⁶ He then headed westward to concentrate the force in Victoria for deployment to Vladivostok. On 27 September 1918, the Honourable N. Wesley Rowell, President of the Privy Council, arrived in Victoria as part of a national speaking tour to drum up support for the Siberian intervention. Over a luncheon in the

²¹³ *Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1918, 4.

²¹⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1918, 4.

²¹⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1918, 4.

²¹⁶ MacLaren, 146

Empress Hotel's regal ballroom, Rowell addressed 300 members of the Canadian Club and Women's Canadian Club.²¹⁷ Premier John Oliver was among those in attendance. In his address, published in full in the next day's *Colonist*, Rowell reiterated the official aims of the Siberian Expeditions: (1) "to aid the brave Czecho-Slovak army;" (2) "to support the elements and governments of the Russian people, which are battling against German armed force and intrigue and which are seeking to establish a free, independent and unified Russian nation;" and (3) "to reestablish the Eastern front."²¹⁸ This theme of Germanic influence on the Bolshevik side was to remain central in the propaganda war that accompanied Allied intervention. It was used to justify the expansion of fighting into the territory of the former ally, and it would be used to justify a continuation of warfare once the Kaiser was defeated in Germany.

Rowell warned that failure to intervene in Siberia would allow Vladivostok to fall into the hands of the Germans, giving her a base of operations on the Pacific and threatening the security of Victoria and BC: "You will have, therefore, an especial and peculiar interest in Canada's position as a Pacific power and in the Canadian Expeditionary Force which is now being mobilized at Victoria for service in Siberia."²¹⁹ He said the achievements of gallant Canadian troops over the course of the war had won for the country "a new place among the nations," obliging Canada to do her part on the world stage.²²⁰ "She seeks no territorial or other advantage as a result of the war," Rowell insisted.²²¹ Rather, Canada had only the interests of the Russian people in mind:

²¹⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 8.

²¹⁸ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 8.

²¹⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 8.

²²⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 8.

²²¹ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 8.

When they finally threw off their corrupt and autocratic government because of its own inherent weakness and incapacity, we all hailed the Russian Revolution as the dawn of a new day for liberty and democracy and its consummation as one of the greatest triumphs of this war.... The Bolsheviki were pledged to secure peace and brought it at an awful price....

The disastrous terms of peace accepted by the Bolsheviki and Germany's method of enforcing them, together with the incapacity of the Bolsheviki to fulfill their pledges to the people are combining to undermine the Bolsheviki authority. Its power appears to be steadily waning.... The revelations recently made of the treachery and duplicity of Lenine and Trotzky should hasten the end of the Bolsheviki....²²²

Rowell proceeded to describe the forces that would restore order and stable government to Russia on the heels of the retreating Red armies, referring to Cossack governments in south and central Russia and the new 'Government of the North' in Archangel. "A Russian government has also been established in Siberia with headquarters at Vladivostok," Rowell said, "and the Allies are now able to co-operate with these various independent Russian governments, who are appealing to the Allies for help."²²³

Rowell concluded his talk by discussing the substantial economic opportunities provided in Siberia.

This vast country is in a very precarious position from the standpoint of trade and commerce. She needs capital and expert guidance in the work of reconstruction. Canada may not be able to provide large sums of capital, but she can give Siberia the benefit of her experience along the lines of interior development.... As Canadians we must take every opportunity of establishing the closest connections with our great neighbour to the west. We may confidently expect that as a result of more intimate relations the greatest benefit may result both to Canada and Siberia.²²⁴

Rowell expressed hope "an economic mission also may be sent to Siberia."²²⁵ This wish was realized on 21 October 1918 when the Privy Council passed an order-in-Council

²²² *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 13.

²²³ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 13.

²²⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 13.

²²⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 13.

approving the formation of a Canadian Siberian Economic Commission.²²⁶ It was charged with the task of co-operating with the Allies in re-establishing the productive industries and re-organizing the commercial activities in Siberia, and also of investigating local conditions of transport, agriculture, trade, and finance “with a view to the development of Canadian trade.”²²⁷ The members appointed to the Commission were Conradin F. Just and Dana Wilgress, the former Canadian Trade Commissioners to Russia, as well as Canadian Forces liaison officer Colonel John S. Dennis and Ross Owen, the general manager of the Canadian Pacific Railways operations in Vladivostok.²²⁸ Other Canadian businesses were taking interest in the Siberian port. The Royal Bank of Canada sent officers to Vladivostok to open a branch in late 1918.²²⁹ At the bank’s annual general meeting, Edson L. Pease, Vice-President and Managing Director, said the Siberian Economic Commission

which comprises representatives of agricultural, mining, transportation and financial interests, was sent to aid in supplying the pressing needs of Russia, and assist in stabilizing conditions there. The organization of a Siberian Supply Commission will follow, and through it goods will be purchased in Canada for shipment to Russia. Siberia needs commodities which Canada can supply...²³⁰

The motives of Canada and her Allies in Siberia were cloudy from the outset. The ideological imperative of ridding the world of the Bolshevik model – couched in more benign terms by Canadian leaders – was intertwined with potential investment in the resource and grain-rich Russian Far East. As well, over a billion rubles of gold was held by the Whites in Siberia while billions of dollars in debt owed to western banks had been cancelled by the Bolsheviks. And as long as the war in Europe continued a White victory

²²⁶ Hopkins, (1918), 432.

²²⁷ Hopkins, (1918), 432.

²²⁸ Hopkins, (1918), 432.

²²⁹ Hopkins, (1918), 801.

²³⁰ Hopkins, (1918), 801.

left open the possibility of re-opening an Eastern Front against Germany. These aims were never integrated into a coherent policy, so the question of why Canadians were sent to Siberia does not have a simple answer. It is difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between the ideological war against the nascent Communist state, military objectives related to the war against Germany, and explicitly economic motives – investment, a market for consumer goods, access to resources, unpaid debt and the gold reserve. Indeed, all of these motives could be interpreted as being economic in character, as war against Germany, many have argued, was about access to resources and markets, while the war against Bolshevism was aimed at preserving capitalism in both Russia and Canada. However these specific forces interacted and weighed in the deliberations of the Privy Council of Canada and the Imperial War Council, it is clear that Canada and her Allies had sided with the Whites and were committed to wage war against the Bolsheviks. And so Canadian boys converged on Victoria.

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On the other side of the Pacific, Allied forces were struggling to stabilize conditions in Siberia. The *Daily Colonist* reported on 23 August 1918 that strikes of freight handlers in Vladivostok had hampered the unloading of Allied transports, requiring soldiers to do the work.²³¹ A few days later there was a clash between strikers and replacement workers, and Allied troops intervened.²³² And at the end of August it was reported the General Horvath's dictatorship had collapsed in Vladivostok, despite aid he had received from Allied forces in the city.²³³ A rival White government calling itself the Provisional

²³¹ *Daily Colonist*, 23 August 1918, 1.

²³² *Daily Colonist*, 27 August 1918, 2.

²³³ *Daily Colonist*, 29 August 1918, 2.

Government of Autonomous Siberia, under a man named Derber, had attempted to consolidate power in the city but failed.²³⁴

The need for a strong, central government to consolidate the White war effort was becoming increasingly clear to the Allies. Competing claims of authority from military generals and Cossack captains were weakening the struggle against the Bolshevik forces. After the Whites seized the Siberian capital of Omsk from the Bolsheviks in early June, a Western-Siberian Commissariat had been established, but by the end of the month it had been overthrown by a Directory under a Cabinet of Five.²³⁵ This new Provisional Siberian Government called for all White forces to unite around it, vying for supremacy in Siberia with the Derber and Horvath governments in Vladivostok and the Siberian Regional Duma based in Tomsk.²³⁶ On 18 July 1918, a Commercial-Industrial Congress took place in Omsk. V.A. Zhardetskii, leader of the Kadet party in Siberia, told attendees that “it is essential to bring in strong unipersonal authority” to lead the White forces.²³⁷ The Congress issued an ultimatum calling for the abolition of the Tomsk Duma.²³⁸ Newspapers in Omsk began to speak favourably of General Kornilov and his unsuccessful coup of the summer 1917, suggesting military dictatorship may have been able to prevent the further drift to the left that culminated in the Bolshevik rising.²³⁹

The Siberian Regional Duma convened in Tomsk on 15 August 1918, but it was disbanded after five days under the orders of the Omsk Directory.²⁴⁰ V.V. Kukilov, a member of the Omsk branch of the anti-Bolshevik Union of Regeneration, said that “at

²³⁴ Pereira, 73. On 5 July 1918, the US consular representative in Vladivostok came to the conclusion that Derber “has no authority for claiming to be the government of Russia. (Pereira, 54)

²³⁵ Pereira, 68-9.

²³⁶ Pereira, 69 and 75.

²³⁷ Pereira, 75 and 80.

²³⁸ Pereira, 80.

²³⁹ Pereira, 75-6.

²⁴⁰ Pereira, 80.

the present time it is impossible to establish parliamentarianism” and “essential to introduce state dictatorship and to dismiss the Duma.”²⁴¹ An All-Russian Provisional Government was established between competing White interests following 15 difficult days of negotiations in September.²⁴² With executive authority vested in a five-member Directory, this government would be based in Ufa. When Privy Council President Rowell addressed the Canadian Club members in Victoria’s Empress Hotel on 27 September 1918, news of the new government had just reached the city: “This morning we are in receipt of the welcome and cheering news that out of these various governments a central government for all Russia has been formed.”²⁴³ But even greater centralization was in the works.

As the Siberian Expeditionary Force began to concentrate in Victoria under Major-General Elmsley, a man named Alexandr Kolchak, former admiral of Russia’s Baltic Fleet, landed in Vladivostok from Japan and boarded a train to Omsk on 21 September 1918.²⁴⁴ He arrived in the city on 13 October, four days after the All-Russian Provisional Government was relocated from Ufa to Omsk.²⁴⁵ Five days behind Kolchak, Britain’s 1000-strong Middlesex Regiment entered Omsk on the Trans-Siberian Railroad.²⁴⁶ A shipment of 651 million rubles of the Imperial Gold Reserve had been transferred to Omsk from Ufa a few weeks earlier.²⁴⁷ The day was just around the corner when Kolchak would be proclaimed Supreme Ruler of ‘All Russia.’

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²⁴¹ Pereira, 75.

²⁴² Pereira, 96.

²⁴³ *Daily Colonist*, 28 September 1918, 13.

²⁴⁴ Connaughton, 70

²⁴⁵ Connaughton, 79.

²⁴⁶ Connaughton, 88.

²⁴⁷ Smele, “White Gold,” 1319-21

But back in Canada, the war between labour and a government committed to fight what many workers considered to be a capitalist war was heating up. On 16 September 1918, 440 delegates from all over Canada converged on the Knights of Columbus hall in Quebec City for the annual convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.²⁴⁸ The week of meetings was to prove a fateful turning point in the history of Canadian labour. Angered over what they perceived to be the conservatism of eastern delegates, the 45 representatives of unions “from Winnipeg and points west of that city” nearly walked out in protest. They held session twice during the convention, and decided to hold their own meeting before the congress met again: this would evolve into the Western Labour Conference that in a meeting in March 1919 endorsed the formation of a One Big Union.²⁴⁹ Early on in the Quebec convention’s proceedings, delegates considered resolution 32, introduced by the machinists’ of Toronto, “protesting Allied Intervention in Russia”:

Delegate Koldofsky of Toronto, in supporting the resolution, stated that he was not a Bolsheviki and that he did not agree with them altogether. He had taken part in the 1905 revolt and was personally acquainted with Lenine, though not by any means in accord with his ideas. From his personal knowledge of Lenine, however, he was convinced that under no consideration could he be guilty of the crimes toward the working class in Russia such as were being charged in the daily press. He was strongly opposed to Allied intervention in Russia. In order to conceal their ignorance of the matter, the Eastern delegates shut off debate by tabling the resolution....²⁵⁰

Delegates returned to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC bitter and disenchanted with the central organization of Canadian labour. Ideologically they had broken ranks,

²⁴⁸ *BC Federationist*, 4 October 1918, 1.

²⁴⁹ At the Western Labour Conference that took place in Calgary in March 1918, western labour would vote to sever ties with the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, disaffiliate from their international unions, and form a One Big Union of all workers.

²⁵⁰ *BC Federationist*, 4 October 1918, 1.

and a movement was afoot that would entrench this divide organizationally. They would report on the proceedings to local labour councils from Winnipeg to Victoria. And a minority of the eastern delegates had voiced similar concerns about the conservatism of the Congress' leadership.

On 28 September 1918, a few days after the labour convention in Quebec City, the Borden government passed an Order-in-Council declaring the following to be unlawful associations “while Canada is engaged in war,”

The Industrial Workers of the World;
 The Russian Social Democratic Party;
 The Russian Revolutionary Group;
 The Russian Workers Union;
 The Ukrainian Revolutionary Group;
 The Finnish Social Democratic Party;
 The Social Democratic Party;
 The Social Labour Party;
 Group of Social Democrats of Bolsheviki;
 Group of Social Democrats of Anarchists;
 The Revolutionary Socialist Party of North America;
 The Workers International Industrial Union;
 Chinese Nationalist League;
 Chinese Labour Association.²⁵¹

Anyone who was a member of these groups, or who possessed their literature, wore their buttons or insignia, or attempted to “sell, speak, write or publish anything” on the organization's behalf, could be jailed for “not less than one year and not more than five years.”²⁵² Further, the order stated that,

No public meeting or assemblage of any kind except church meetings or meetings for religious services, shall be held in Canada during the present war at which the proceedings or any part thereby are conducted in... the language or any of the languages of Russia, Ukraine, or Finland.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Canada, *Canada Gazette*, (Ottawa: J. de Labroqueire Taché, 1918.), 1278.

²⁵² *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1278.

²⁵³ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1278.

Anyone who attended such a meeting could be apprehended without warrant and subjected to a \$5000 fine and up to five years in jail.²⁵⁴ A government censorship notice of 28 September 1918 declared “a pamphlet entitled ‘Political Parties in Russia,’ by Nicholas Lenine, published by the Socialist Publication Society... New York,” to contain “objectionable matter” and

The possession within Canada of any issue or copy of the said pamphlet ‘Political Parties in Russia,’ whether heretofore or hereafter published, has been prohibited by a Warrant of the Secretary of State of Canada.²⁵⁵

A sentence of up to \$5000 and five years in jail applied. Six month earlier, ‘Political Parties in Russia’ had been printed on the front page of the *BC Federationist*.²⁵⁶ Other publications banned by the Canadian government in late September and October 1918 included:

“A Reply to the Press Lies concerning the Russian Situation,” Alberta Provincial Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of Canada;
 “The Canadian Forward,” 397 Spadina Avenue, Toronto;
 “Rabotchyj Narod” (The Working People), printed in Russian, 664 Pritchard Avenue, Winnipeg;
 “The World Tomorrow,” Fellowship Press, New York;
 “The International Socialist Review,” Charles H. Kerr & Co., Chicago;
 “After War,” Charles H. Kerr & Co., Chicago;
 “To the Young Workers,” printed in Russian, Union of Russian Workmen, New York;
 “Anarchism and Communism,” printed in Russian; location unknown;
 “Defense News Bulletin,” Industrial Workers of the World, Chicago;
 “Men and Mules,” W. F. Ries, Girard, Kansas.
 “World Problems – The Solution,” Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California.
 “Komy Potribna Wyjna” (Who Wants War), translated from Russian into Ukrainian by T. Sfefanicky, Toronto;
 “Do Not Chain the Living Soul,” printed in Ukrainian; Chicago²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1278.

²⁵⁵ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1295.

²⁵⁶ *BC Federationist*, 15 February 1918, 1

²⁵⁷ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1294-1296, 1379, 1391, 1525, and 1626.

On 11 October 1918, a month to the day before the signing of the Armistice, an order-in-council declared that “any person who during the continuance of the present war shall incite, order or participate in a lockout or strike...shall be guilty of an offence punishable” by six months imprisonment and a \$1000 fine.²⁵⁸ Two days earlier, on 9 October 1918, the Secretary of State of Canada declared objectionable “the ‘Western Clarion,’ a newspaper published monthly by the Socialist party of Canada, at 401 Pender Street East, in the City of Vancouver, in the province of British Columbia.”²⁵⁹ A week later, a leaflet was added to the list: “The Bolshevist Declaration of Rights.”²⁶⁰ Possession could result in a fine of \$5000 and five years in prison.

A month before “peace” was declared in Europe, the government of Canada – in a string of orders-in-council and in the mobilization of an expeditionary force at Victoria – had declared war on Bolshevism in both Siberia and on the home front. That the government’s actions were motivated by events in Russia is evident from the political organizations and publications that were banned. The orders-in-council were directed at the Canadian manifestation of Bolshevism, in an effort to quash the class war that was gaining momentum across the Dominion. But in declaring war against militant labour and Bolshevism in Canada and Siberia, the Dominion government had confirmed what many workers already knew: that the struggle against capitalism in Canada was intimately tied to developments in revolutionary Russia. The reaction of Canadian political and financial leaders to the Bolshevik government bolstered the Russian model as the correct course for bringing about radical social change in Canada. Inadvertently, domestic repression had strengthened the ties between Canadian workers and the Bolsheviks in Russia. And

²⁵⁸ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1444.

²⁵⁹ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1461.

²⁶⁰ *Canada Gazette*, 26 October 1918, 1525.

in the end, the domestic incarnation of Bolshevism would force the Dominion to withdraw her troops from Siberia.

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On 11 October 1918, the day the government of Canada banned strikes, Major-General Elmsley and an advanced party of 680 Canadian men – including 21 members of the RNWMP's cavalry squadron 'B' – left Victoria aboard the Canadian Pacific steamship *Empress of Japan* and sailed for Vladivostok.²⁶¹ Fifteen days later they arrived in the Siberian port, and established base headquarters in the Pushkinskaya Theatre, 'a large modern building' in the centre of the city.²⁶² Their central task was to prepare for the arrival of the troops were who being concentrated in Victoria, while some of the men would be deployed to Omsk to serve as the headquarters staff for the Middlesex Regiment.²⁶³

From early October on, the main body of the Siberian Expeditionary Force converged on the Willows Camp in the greater Victoria municipality of Oak Bay for several months of intensive training exercises. It occurred under an imposing backdrop: the influenza epidemic that ravaged the western world in the last months of 1918. On 7 October 1918, a 'temperature parade' was held at the Willows to identify the prevalence of the disease among the men.²⁶⁴ Thirty troops, while not actually diagnosed with influenza, were found to have "above normal" temperatures, and they were isolated from the rest of the force in a segregation area organized by the unit's 16th Field Ambulance.²⁶⁵ On the night of 7 October 1918, it was announced that there were between 50 and 100

²⁶¹ MacLaren, 151.

²⁶² MacLaren, 151.

²⁶³ MacLaren, 151-52.

²⁶⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 8 October 1918, 5.

²⁶⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 8 October 1918, 5.

known cases of the disease in Victoria, and the next day the city's health committee banned all public gatherings in an effort to contain the outbreak.²⁶⁶ Schools closed the morning of 8 October 1918, as did “pool-rooms, dance halls, and public meeting places.”²⁶⁷ The ban would not be lifted until late November, after 2,759 citizens had fallen ill with the disease and 101 had died.²⁶⁸

But on 11 November 1918, Victorians ignored the ban on gatherings to welcome news of the peace with frantic enthusiasm and wild partying.²⁶⁹ However, their euphoria was short-lived. Two days into the ‘peace,’ the Privy Council amended several orders-in-council. Certain foreign-language publications were allowed to apply for a license and the no-strike order was removed.²⁷⁰ But while the ban on the Social Democratic Party was lifted, 13 political parties remained suppressed, and the Privy Council declared unlawful “for the duration of the war...any association, organization, or corporation... which teaches, advocates, or advises that any class should forcibly take possession of all property, or forcibly abolish all private ownership of property.”²⁷¹ Somehow the signing of the Armistice did not mean an end to the war. The promise of peace, ushering with it a new era of freedom and democracy – the cause for which 60,000 men had perished in bloody, vermin-infested trenches in the years 1914-18 – would evade Canadian workers. The enemy was no longer the German Kaiser, but the Allies had a class war to fight, at home and in Russia.

²⁶⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 8 October 1918, 4.

²⁶⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 8 October 1918, 4.

²⁶⁸ Victoria, *Annual Reports: Corporation of the City of Victoria*, (Victoria: Diggen, 1918), 89.

²⁶⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 12 November 1918, 1.

²⁷⁰ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1804-5 and *BC Federationist*, 15 November 1918, 1.

²⁷¹ *Canada Gazette*, (1918), 1877-8.

White flags were raised over the battlefields of France and Flanders and Allied troops streamed into Germany to suppress the nascent Soviets that had toppled the Kaiser in the days leading up to the Armistice.²⁷² “Mutinous German sailors in Kiel have seized the battleships Kaiser and Schleswig-Holstein and refused to return to work until a treaty of peace with the Allies is signed,” the *Daily Colonist* reported on 7 November 1918.²⁷³ Germany had severed diplomatic ties with Russia the day before pending a “guarantee from the Soviet government that in future no revolutionary propaganda against state institutions will be carried out in Germany.”²⁷⁴ It was the one-year anniversary of the triumph of the Soviets in Petrograd. In Victoria, rumours of peace triggered mass celebrations:

Shortly after 10 a.m. the report of peace circulated. Within a remarkably short space of time it had penetrated to the outskirts, the residents of which, aroused by the continuous whistles, ringing of bells and staccato blasts from boats in the harbour, kept the telephones busy.... The machinery in Victoria’s industrial plants ceased to hum shortly after the news was announced.... Without waiting for orders the men quit work and threaded their way out of the shipyard gates and started for the downtown sector....²⁷⁵

While reports that an armistice had been signed turned out to be premature, the episode is evidence of the burning desire of Victoria residents for peace. The next day, the *Colonist* reported that the crew of the Kaiser had “hoisted the Red Flag,” that the German submarine crews had joined the revolution, and that “a revolt had broken out in Hamburg”.²⁷⁶

Kiel is governed by the Marines, Soldiers’ and Workers’ Council. All the workshops have been occupied by Red troops. The streetcar lines and

²⁷² Provisions of the Armistice authorized Allied troops to seize German ships and submarines and disarm the entire army.

²⁷³ *Daily Colonist*, 7 November 1918, 1.

²⁷⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 7 November 1918, 1.

²⁷⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 8 November 1918, 7.

²⁷⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 8 November 1918, 1 and 4.

railways are under the control of the Workmen's council.... The entire German navy and the greater part of Schleswig are in the hands of the revolutionists.²⁷⁷

With the German war effort collapsing and Kaiser Wilhelm on the brink of abdication, the *Daily Colonist* focused its attention on 'Suffering Russia':

Enough is obviously not being done in the matter of intervention in Russia... The danger of Bolshevism, a doctrine which consists of killing all who do not espouse its tenets, is as great to civilization as Prussian autocracy has ever been. Its menace has loomed up with grim significance within the past few days owing to outbreaks in Austria and indications the same ruthless policy will attempt to enforce its sway in Germany. If Middle Europe should become the prey of terrorist happenings the task of the Allies will take some months yet before it is finished. Allied occupation of all Middle Europe and Russia may be necessary before law and order can be established in the world....²⁷⁸

Peace was not on the agenda. The next day, a general railway strike was declared in Germany, and Hamburg was reported to have fallen to the revolutionists, with the red flag flying from all ships in the harbour.²⁷⁹ Soldiers joined the revolution in Bremen, and it was reported that at a mass meeting in Bavaria a republic had been proclaimed.²⁸⁰ The *Colonist's* editorial was more pointed by 9 November 1918:

The Bolsheviki know the menace with which they are confronted. They have sought to get the Allies to enter into peace negotiations with them, but that is impossible for their status as a power has never been recognized by any free people.... They recognize no law but force, and like the Germans they must be opposed with force, "without stint or limit."²⁸¹

While the Allies' stated aims in Siberia several months earlier had been to save the Russians from German influence, the *Colonist* was now calling on the Allies to occupy Germany, Austria and all of Russia to kill the scourge of Bolshevism. Indeed, the

²⁷⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 8 November 1918, 4.

²⁷⁸ *Daily Colonist*, 8 November 1918, 4.

²⁷⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1918, 1 and 3.

²⁸⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1918, 3.

²⁸¹ *Daily Colonist*, 9 November 1918, 4

motivations behind the Siberian Expeditionary Force were slippery and flexible. The one thing that was clear was that powerful interests in Canada sought to maintain armed conflict against the Bolsheviks.

On 11 November 1918, Victorians awoke to the headline ‘Peace.’ A cease fire went into effect at 3 a.m. local time, and the horror of fighting on the Western Front was over. On his way across the Atlantic to participate in treaty negotiations, Prime Minister Borden wrote in his diary aboard the *Mauretania*: “Revolt has spread all over Germany. The question is whether it will stop there. The world has drifted far from its old anchorage and no man can with certainty prophesy what the outcome will be....”²⁸² A day earlier, a Soviet had been formed in Berlin. A bulletin from Copenhagen stated that, “The red banner has been hoisted over the royal palace and the red flag is waving from the Brandenburg gate,” while “a majority of the public buildings and establishments” had been taken over by armed workers and soldiers.²⁸³ Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated the throne and fled to Holland.²⁸⁴ On 15 November 1918, Canadians in Vladivostok participated in their first official duty, 62 troops marching in an Allied victory parade through the main street of the city.²⁸⁵ On the other side of Russia, Canadian soldiers joined British, American, and White Russian troops in launching an offensive on 11 November 1918 against the Bolsheviks in the city of Tulgas on the Murmansk front.²⁸⁶ Meanwhile, in London on 16 November 1918, Prime Minister David Lloyd George announced the dissolution of parliament, stating,

²⁸² Borden, *Memoirs*, II, 157.

²⁸³ *Daily Colonist*, 11 November 1918, 2.

²⁸⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 11 November 1918, 1 and 2.

²⁸⁵ MacLaren, 151.

²⁸⁶ MacLaren, 69-70. On 17 September 1918, 92 Canadian men sailed from Leith, Scotland to the Russia port of Murmansk, arriving on 26 September. On 20 September 1918, 469 Canadian troops and 18 officers sailed from Dundee, Scotland for Archangel. (Swettenham, 52 and 68)

At this moment the air of Europe is quivering with revolution. Two-thirds of Europe has been swept by its devastating deluge.... The institutions, even of this country, may follow those of many in the rest of Europe.²⁸⁷

World war had bred class war and international revolution. Decisive action was necessary to halt the red tide that was threatening to engulf Europe and the world. Domestic repression of radical labour would be coupled with a frontal assault on the source of inspiration of these rebellious soldiers and workers: Russia's nascent Bolshevik government.

On 16 November 1918, Admiral Alexandr Kolchak and Major-General John Ward, commander of Britain's Middlesex Regiment, dined in a train car on their way to Omsk, arriving in the Siberian capital the next evening at 5:30 pm.²⁸⁸ On the night of 17-18 November 1918, with the men of the Middlesex Regiment fast asleep in a nearby building, the ministers of Omsk's Directory were arrested by Cossack guards and Kolchak was proclaimed Supreme Ruler of Russia.²⁸⁹ In his proclamation to the people, Kolchak said,

I shall not go either on the road of reaction or on the fatal road of Party partisanship. I set as my main objectives the creation of an efficient army, victory over Bolshevism and the establishment of law and order....²⁹⁰

The Allies now had their point man in Siberia. Kolchak offered an alternative to the dangerous policies of the Bolsheviks, and he would be backed by the might of Western armies and eager financiers. The line between the Whites and the Reds had at last been clearly defined in Russia. Through Kolchak the scourge of Bolshevism could be stamped out once and for all, and the world could return to the stable, stratified moorings that

²⁸⁷ Hopkins, (1918), 154-5.

²⁸⁸ Connaughton, 70

²⁸⁹ Connaughton, 98.

²⁹⁰ Connaughton, 99.

prevailed before the war. For the first time since November 1917, the prospects looked bright that the Russian model of a new democracy was on the way out.

* * *

But the advent of peace had put into question the future of Canada's Siberian Expeditionary Force. A flurry of telegrams was exchanged between Borden and his acting-Prime Minister Sir Thomas White in the days and weeks following the signing of the Armistice. On 14 November 1918, White wrote to Borden that

All our colleagues are of the opinion that public opinion here will not sustain us in continuing to send troops, many of whom are draftees under the Military Service Act and Order-in-Council, now that the war has ended. We are of the opinion that no further troops should be sent and that Canadian forces in Siberia should, as soon as the situation will permit, be returned to Canada. Consider matter of serious importance.²⁹¹

The Toronto machinists' condemnation of Allied intervention in Russia was mirrored in communities across the country. On 21 November 1918, the Vancouver Trades and Labour council held its first meeting since the end of the war, and discussed censorship and the Russian intervention. Delegate Winch said that "if the government desired evolution, and not what was called revolution, that it would be wise in removing the restrictions."²⁹² The council passed a resolution calling for all censorship restrictions to be lifted, and committed itself "to use every available weapon against it."²⁹³ The message was forwarded to labour councils across the Dominion for endorsement. At the same meeting, Delegate Alexander introduced a resolution stating that,

We, the members of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, place ourselves on record as being against intervention in Siberia or interference in Russia's internal affairs.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Swettenham, 154-5.

²⁹² *BC Federationist*, 22 November 1918, 1.

²⁹³ *BC Federationist*, 22 November 1918, 1.

²⁹⁴ *BC Federationist*, 22 November 1918, 1 and 10.

On 25 November 1918, White wired Borden again: “There is an extraordinary sentiment in Canada in favour of getting all our men home and at work as soon as possible.”²⁹⁵ But the Canadian Prime Minister, now in Europe, was committed to soldier on in Siberia. The day after the Vancouver meeting, Borden wrote to White expressing his opinion that the Siberian Expedition should proceed:

I think we must go on with this as we have agreed to do so and there seems some reason from our own standpoint as well as the common interest why the expedition should proceed. Evidently it is not anticipated that our troops will be called upon to engage in active warfare except perhaps to quell some local disturbances. They will assist in stabilizing conditions and in giving needed aid to the recently organized Russian Government, in training the newly organized formations of Russian troops. Then it will be of some distinction to have all the British Forces in Siberia under the command of a Canadian Officer. Moreover the Economic Commission which we have sent over would otherwise be useless and would have to be recalled to our possible detriment in the future.²⁹⁶

In a message a few days earlier, he had warned White: “Experience has shown... that Russian troops will melt away if they have not the moral support and example of no matter how small an Allied contingent.”²⁹⁷ On 27 November 1918, the Privy Council of Canada voted to proceed with the Siberian Expedition as originally planned, with the provision that troops could voluntarily return home within a year of the signing of the Armistice if they desired.²⁹⁸

That same day, the Victoria Trades and Labour Council held its first meeting since the influenza ban of early October was lifted.²⁹⁹ From the time of their last meeting,

²⁹⁵ MacLaren, 161.

²⁹⁶ Borden, II, 159.

²⁹⁷ Swettenham, 155.

²⁹⁸ Swettenham, 157.

²⁹⁹ UVACS, “Minutes,” 27 November 1918. The ban on public gatherings was lifted on 20 November 1918. (Victoria, *Annual Reports: Corporation of the City of Victoria*, 89)

when the government had passed an Order-in-Council banning strikes, raids and arrests had occurred across the country in an effort to enforce the ban on 14 political parties and countless “objectionable” publications, and peace had been declared in Europe. The council received a letter from Victor Midgley, secretary of the Vancouver council, asking the Victoria body to support the resolution on censorship.³⁰⁰ The council did so, then directed the executive to organize a mass meeting against censorship.³⁰¹ Two days later, the *Federationist* wrote the following in an editorial:

In Canada we are already seeing a great change in the attitude of the workers towards the actions of the government. While the workers have been satisfied to jog along and take all that has been handed out to them during the last four years with little protest, they are now taking a definite stand on the censorship, and the intervention of the Allies in Russia. Not only are the workers asking for some explanation as to the intentions of the Allied governments in the Siberian expedition, but some of the daily papers are asking questions, and from the information at hand, there is some little unrest amongst the men detailed for duty in that part of Russia....³⁰²

Evidence of this unrest is hard to come by. The force that was concentrated in Victoria was comprised of two battalions: the 259th under Lieutenant-Colonel Albert E. Swift, with men from Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, London and Toronto; and the 260th battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel F.C. Jamieson, with men from New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia.³⁰³ There were 1,653 conscripts in the Siberian Expeditionary Force, or nearly a half of the total contingent.³⁰⁴ The legality of whether men could be compelled to serve in Siberia was even in doubt, since the Military Service Act of 1917 authorized the conscription of citizens “to defend

³⁰⁰ UVACS, “Minutes”, 27 November 1918.

³⁰¹ UVACS, “Minutes”, 27 November 1918. and *BC Federationist*, 29 November 1918, 1.

³⁰² *BC Federationist*, 29 November 1918, 4. The *Toronto Globe* ran an editorial on 26 November 1918 against Canadian intervention in Russia

³⁰³ *Daily Times*, 17 December 1918, 7.

³⁰⁴ MacLaren, 148.

the realm.”³⁰⁵ It was a stretch to suggest that the Bolsheviks, no matter how dangerous ideologically, threatened Canadian soil. Along with the 1653 men who were ordered to converge at the Willow Camp, two platoons of 135 Russian troops who had fought with the Allies on the Western Front were attached to the Siberian Expeditionary Force.³⁰⁶ But soon after their arrival in Victoria, it became clear that some of the Russians were less enthused about fighting the Bolsheviks than they had been about fighting Germany.³⁰⁷ The Russian platoons were broken up and 35 men discharged to prevent their wild ideas from infecting the other troops, while the remaining 100 Russians were integrated into other units.³⁰⁸ But as events would reveal, the contagion of dissent had spread beyond the Russian soldiers.

As 3000 members of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force continued their training regimen in rain-soaked Victoria,³⁰⁹ uncertainty prevailed in the highest levels of government as to the wisdom of sending the men to Siberia. On 7 December 1918, acting Prime Minister Sir Thomas White wired Borden in London:

There is a good deal of feeling in labour and other quarters here against our continued participation and my personal view is that a serious political situation may arise later unless some definite statement can be made as to the return of the expedition within a reasonable time.³¹⁰

Borden responded by saying Canada had made commitments that had to be honoured, Armistice or no Armistice.³¹¹ But opposition to the Siberian expedition continued to mount in Victoria. Rumours of unrest among the troops at the Willows Camp were

³⁰⁵ MacLaren, 148.

³⁰⁶ MacLaren, 146-7.

³⁰⁷ MacLaren, 146-7.

³⁰⁸ MacLaren, 146-7.

³⁰⁹ The *Times* reported that, “It may not have been the best time of year for troops to have been quartered in Victoria... The latter part of their stay has been marked by an unusual amount of rain with an attendant sea of mud at the Willows. (*Daily Times*, 17 December 1918, 7)

³¹⁰ MacLaren, 163.

³¹¹ MacLaren, 164.

confirmed the evening of Sunday, 8 December 1918, when the Victoria branch of the Federated Labour Party (FLP) held its inaugural public meeting in the Columbia Theatre.³¹²

Hundreds of members of the Siberian Expeditionary Force attended the meeting, and according to the *Federationist*, “the way those boys applauded the Labor speakers showed in no uncertain manner where their sympathies lay.”³¹³ The first speaker, W. R. Trotter, an organizer for the FLP, discussed what the party was about, then moved on to discuss the war, censorship and Russia. “We know enough to distrust every reference to Russia in the capitalist press,” Trotter told the crowd.³¹⁴ He went on to discuss the overthrow of the Omsk government by Kolchak as well as the killing of 40 longshoremen by Japanese and British troops when the Vladivostok soviet was toppled the previous June.³¹⁵ The next speaker, Jim Hawthornthwaite, the socialist member of the legislature from the Nanaimo riding of Newcastle, discussed post-war reconstruction as well as the Soviet form of government in Russia. When Hawthornthwaite said the soldiers were going to Russia to civilize the country, shouts rose up from all over the theatre to the effect that “We aren’t there yet!”³¹⁶ He described the Soviet system where wealth was produced and distributed and owned communally by the workers. “They should be left free to produce as they like, and when we are rid of tyranny and plunder here in Canada we will then be in a better position to judge others,” Hawthornthwaite said. A collection

³¹² *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 3. Founded in the wake of the December 1917 federal election, in which the BC Federation of Labour endorsed a slate of candidates, local branches of the FLP emerged in communities across BC over the course of 1918. Victoria’s branch was one of the slowest to organize.

³¹³ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 3. The *Federationist* reported that 700 men from the force attended the meeting. (*BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 1)

³¹⁴ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 3.

³¹⁵ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 3.

³¹⁶ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 3.

of \$46.75 was raised, and a number of publications, including the banned books of Kerr & Co., were sold.³¹⁷ At a meeting in Vancouver the same night, a resolution was passed that read:

Whereas, it is imperative that the working classes of the nations unite, in order that the great sacrifices in the late war may serve permanent peace and true democracy rather than imperialism and capitalism...

That this meeting of Vancouver citizens, held on Sunday, December 8, in the Rex Theatre, under the auspices of the Federated Labor Party of B.C., protest against the Canadian government sending forces to oppose the soviet in Russia.³¹⁸

Russia's experiment with revolution was wreaking havoc on Canada's west coast.

Workers had broken ideologically from their economic and political leaders, and it was threatening to destabilize the Canadian contribution to the White war effort in Siberia.

After the Columbia Theatre meeting, the *Federationist* quipped that

The Siberian invasion is not being looked forward to with a very charitable manner by the majority of the boys now located at the Willows Camp, and according to comments one can hear amongst them down town, they are wondering what the devil self-determination of nations really means.³¹⁹

The agitation of labour radicals was getting too close to home.

On 10 December 1918, the *Daily Times* ran an editorial titled 'Help for Russia,' stating that "certain elements of pronounced Socialistic tendencies claim she is 'all right,' that she needs no help from the rest of the world and that if the Bolsheviki are given time

³¹⁷ An Order-in-Council of 30 September 1918 banned all works by Chicago publisher Charles Kerr & Company from Canada. These included Lewis H. Morgan's *Ancient Society*, Marx's *Capital* and a pamphlet on *The Siberian Expedition*. It appears that BC labour violated the order and defiantly sold Kerr's books at public meetings. On 4 December (*BC Federationist*, 22 November 1918, 1, and UVASC, "minutes," 4 December 1918)

³¹⁸ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 8.

³¹⁹ *BC Federationist*, 13 December 1918, 5.

they will put the country on its feet.”³²⁰ The Bolsheviks, the *Times* argued, were subjecting the country to terror and mass starvation:

That is why the Allies have sent an expeditionary force to Vladivostok. They must maintain control of the trans-Siberian railroad along its whole length from the Pacific to the Urals.... Russia needs help and it is the duty of the Allies to see that she received it.³²¹

A few days later, the *Times* said “Canada is to take a hand in setting up law and order in a land now terrorized by the Bolshevik,” describing the Allies’ Siberian expedition as “part and parcel of the job foisted on them in 1914.”³²² Another *Times* story quoted L.D. Wilgress, Canadian Trade Commissioner in Vladivostok and a member of the Canadian Siberian Economic Commission: “The population of Siberia is practically destitute of clothing, linen and shoes” and was looking to the Allies for help.³²³ According to the *Times*, “the Canadian Economic Commission... will assist in the restoration of industrial and agricultural conditions in Siberia, and incidentally secure trade for Canada.”³²⁴ A move was afoot in Victoria to counter labour’s opposition to the Siberian Expedition.

When the Victoria Trades and Labour Council’s anti-censorship meeting was held in the Columbia Theatre on 13 December 1918, a group of officers from the Siberian Expeditionary Force showed up to prevent the speakers from further weakening the morale of their men. They shouted and jeered from the balcony of the Columbia, “one of them repeatedly jumping up and down in his excitement, shaking his cane at the stage in a most ludicrous manner.”³²⁵ Even so, the *Federationist* reported that “the majority of the

³²⁰ *Daily Times*, 10 December 1918, 4.

³²¹ *Daily Times*, 10 December 1918, 4.

³²² *Daily Times*, 17 December 1918, 7.

³²³ *Daily Times*, 16 December 1918, 1.

³²⁴ *Daily Times*, 16 December 1918, 1.

³²⁵ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

soldiers present were with the labor speakers.”³²⁶ The first speaker, E.W. Woodward, read a letter the labour council had received asking the unionists to “refrain from holding a meeting and expressing opinions on subjects of which they had little or no conception.”³²⁷ Woodward told the crowd that censorship had supposedly been imposed to help win the war, but now that the war was over it was being used to upset workers’ plans and organizations.³²⁸ He said free speech was a safety valve, and if the government was not careful it would wake up with a revolution on its hands. He said censorship prevented the press from presenting the truth about Russia, and that the Siberian expedition may actually be justified, but how could anyone tell when they did not know and were not allowed to know the facts.³²⁹

The second speaker, Joseph Taylor from the Longshoremen’s Union, said the war had been fought for democracy, but that democratic rights were being withheld in Canada. He said British workers had fought for a greater degree of free speech, and that on the eve of a national election the Labour Party was calling for the withdrawal of troops from Russia. While the press depicted the Bolsheviks as “a horrible, murderous gang of cut throats,” Taylor said there was no evidence for it.³³⁰ He said the people of Russia had overthrown the regime of the Czar and taken the land from the barons, and were now experiencing liberty such as they had never known. Why should Canada want to overthrow them? If the system in Russia was detrimental to the interests of the working class, Taylor said Canadian labour would fully support the Siberian Expedition, but that based on what they did know that support wasn’t warranted. And since the authorities

³²⁶ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³²⁷ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³²⁸ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³²⁹ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³³⁰ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

controlled the news in Canada, the people did not know the truth about Russia. Taylor concluded by saying that it was time they had some democracy in Canada, where the workers were treated as if they had no intelligence and their medium of liberty was filched from them and free speech debarred.³³¹

A sergeant from the Siberian force was then permitted to address the audience to justify why the expedition was necessary. He talked about Bolsheviki atrocities, then said,

We are going to Siberia as far as I know because Britain has loaned a great amount of money to Russia. I don't know how much, and the Bolsheviki has repudiated the loan money This is as much our's as anybody's, and we are going there to get it.³³²

An effort was made to pass a resolution calling on the federal government to remove all censorship regulations, but a group of soldiers, egged on by the officers in the balcony, took over the stage and prevented a vote by hollering and signing songs. According to the *Federationist*, "the majority of their comrades in the body of the theatre watched their antics with undisguised disgust, which later developed into very heated debates, in which the remarks of the labour speakers were strongly defended."³³³ At the labour council's next meeting, Joe Taylor suggested the secretary inquire through the press as to the names of those officers who had disrupted the meeting, but his motion was narrowly defeated by the deciding vote of the chair.³³⁴

Meanwhile, the military put on its own meeting, holding a mandatory lecture on Siberia on the afternoon of 17 December, and 1500 men packed into the YMCA building on Yates Street to hear James W. Davidson discuss the geography and political climate of

³³¹ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³³² *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³³³ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 5.

³³⁴ UVASC, "Minutes," 18 December 1918.

the region.³³⁵ That day, a G.S. Conover of the 260th Battalion penned a letter to the editor of the *Times* countering the arguments of local opposition to the expedition:

Some people have a mistaken idea concerning the Siberian Expeditionary Force, and being a member of it, I take this opportunity of writing a few lines in an endeavour to put them right... The Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force is not for the suppression of the working class in Russia, but to aid them to put a government of their own choice in power.³³⁶

However, while support for the expedition existed within the ranks of the troops, dissent was brewing at the Willows Camp. On 20 December 1918, the *Federationist* printed an excerpt of a letter one of the troops in Victoria had written to his sister-in-law:

Well, things are beginning to look awful black over here; we are going to be railroaded to Siberia, and we cannot do a thing to help ourselves. They started to dish out our clothes to us the first day, and out of 78 of us 77 refused to take them, as we were told before we left that park by Major Askwith that we were not going to Siberia. We were all paraded before the major here, and he asked us why we refused, and we told him our reasons and what Major Askwith had said. He called him a damned liar, and also said that we would have to go anyway.³³⁷

A day earlier, the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council decided to hold its own mass meeting protesting censorship and Allied intervention in Russia.³³⁸ The same issue of *Federationist* published a statement from G.W. Tschitscherin, Soviet commissar of Foreign Affairs, in which he suggested that,

A handful of capitalists who desired to repossess themselves of the factories and banks taken from them on behalf of the people; a handful of landowners who want to take again from the peasants the land they now hold; a handful of generals who again want to teach docility to the workers and peasants with a whip... have betrayed Russia in the north, in the south, and in the east to foreign imperialist states, by calling foreign bayonets from wherever they could get them...³³⁹

³³⁵ *Daily Times*, 20 December 1918, 22.

³³⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 25 December 1918, 10.

³³⁷ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 6.

³³⁸ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 1.

³³⁹ *BC Federationist*, 20 December 1918, 8.

This call for foreign bayonets had reached the rocky shores of British Columbia, and the Borden government was prepared to answer. The Canadian response to Bolshevism kicked into high gear the next day.

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At 5:30 a.m. the morning of 21 December 1918, the 898 men of the 259th Battalion awoke in the bunks in the stables³⁴⁰ at Willows Camp, packed their kit, and embarked for the fateful march to the wharf where a revolver was fired, some men were whipped, and a company was prodded to the awaiting *Teesta* at bayonet point. The details of the attempted mutiny are sketchy at best. Rumours that force was used made their way into the *Federationist* within a week, but it was not until late February 1919 that a more lucid picture of the altercation emerged. The *Federationist* ran a letter a lieutenant in the battalion had posted to his wife when the *Teesta* reached Tokyo on January 11:

Yesterday morning (Saturday, December 21) we turned out a reveille, 5 a.m., and turned in all our camp equipment at quartermasters' stores. We breakfasted at 6 a.m., and marched out of camp at 7:30 a.m. for the wharf, a distance of four and a half miles. When we got half way the signal came from the rear to halt, so we stopped for about ten minutes. Then the commanding officer blew his whistle as a signal for everyone to resume his place in the column, and we jumped into our places waiting for the further signal to advance, which was an unusually long time coming.

We could not see the rest of the column, as we had turned a corner of the road – and a few minutes later a shot rang out, but still we waited till eventually we received word to resume the march. In the meantime it appears that our gallant... or a number of them, had absolutely refused to fall in again when the signal blew, or to go down to the boat at all. So then the colonel drew his revolver and fired a shot over their heads – in the main street of Victoria – when some more got into line, though there were still a large number who would not, so the other two companies from Ontario were ordered to take off their belts and whip the poor devils into line, and they did it with a will, and we proceeded.

³⁴⁰ At the height of the influenza outbreak, the troops' sleeping quarters were transferred from tents to the stables and Exhibition Hall at the Willows Park racetrack. (MacLaren, 152)

While all this was happening the general staff car was flying round with good effect, so that after marching another half mile we came to a “guard of honour” (50 men in close formation, with rifles and fixed bayonets on either side of the road) who presented arms in the approved fashion to us – scouts, bugle band, and the Toronto company – but as soon as the other company was just nicely between them the order was given to the guard to “Outwards turn,” with the result that this company continued the march virtually at the point of the bayonet, they being far more closely guarded than any group of German prisoners I ever saw, and they were put under armed guard till we actually pulled out to sea, and even now a dozen of the ringleaders are in the cells – the two worst handcuffed together – awaiting trial.

We arrived at the wharf at 9 a.m., but found that the boat was not yet docked, so waited till she came in, exactly 13 hours later, and commenced to embark at 10:30 p.m. It was 3 a.m. before everything was on, and at about 5 a.m. we started off.³⁴¹

No mention of the unrest surrounding the 259th Battalion’s departure made it into the daily press. It was almost a week later when the *Times* even hinted that a departure had taken place, and the *Colonist* tacked a brief mention of Colonel Swift’s force onto a story recounting the festive Boxing Day departure of the 260th Battalion.³⁴² Nonetheless, in an editorial of 27 December 1918, the *Colonist* mentioned local opposition to the expedition:

The regime of Lenine and Trotzky has been a career of anarchy and destruction such as has never been known.... Those are the conditions which certain influences wish to perpetuate by the cry of “hands off Russia.” The same people, who are opposing the sending of food to Russia in the only possible way in which it could be sent, were not long ago endeavouring to weaken the hands of their nations in the prosecution of the war against Germany.³⁴³

³⁴¹ *BC Federationist*, 28 February 1919, 4.

³⁴² *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, and *Daily Colonist*, 27 December 1918, 2. In a letter to the *Colonist* dated 21 December 1918, a Mr .Irving wrote: “I have been informed there are quite a few slackers who are making trouble about going to Siberia... If Canada and her people wish to participate in the development of Siberia she must assist her in making the country free for democracy.” (*Daily Colonist*, 27 December 1918, 12)

³⁴³ *Daily Colonist*, 27 December 1918, 4.

While no concrete evidence of the local “Hands off Russia” advocates is provided in the editorial, opposition to the Siberian expedition was clearly being felt in Victoria. The *Federationist* would later report that “unwilling men were forced to embark for Siberia at Victoria” after leading protesters were “put under arrest.”³⁴⁴ Details of protests surrounding the *Teesta*’s departure are difficult to uncover, but it is clear that the civilian population played a role in the events of 21 December 1918. And news of the near-mutiny made its way into the next edition of the *Federationist*:

In Victoria, if street corner reports are true, some members of the Siberian Expeditionary Force refused to go, and were compelled to do so by the use of forceable methods, amongst which was the use of revolvers by the officers.³⁴⁵

An editorial in the same paper stated,

The hypocrisy of the profiteering class is now disclosed. It is not the welfare of the Russian people that is sought, but pelf and profits, and members of the working class of this country are to be sent to Siberia, in order that they may, if necessary, at the point of the bayonet, establish such conditions in that country, as will make it possible for the avaricious dreams of the ruling class to be realized.³⁴⁶

With 2200 men still at Willows Camp, there was likely a concerted effort to control information surrounding the disturbance in order to contain the threat of a full-blown mutiny. On 25 December 1918, 1800 members of the Siberian expedition were fed a lavish Christmas banquet by their officers under Brigadier-General Bickford and 50 women, members of the local chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire.³⁴⁷ The dinner was arranged by C. Calza, manager of the Empress Hotel, who

³⁴⁴ *BC Federationist*, 10 January 1919, 4. The *Federationist* reported 23-24 December as the date of the *Teesta*’s departure, though a body of sources suggest otherwise.

³⁴⁵ *BC Federationist*, 27 December 1918, 4.

³⁴⁶ *BC Federationist*, 27 December 1918, 4.

³⁴⁷ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 6, and *Daily Colonist*, 27 December 1918, 2.

procured the donation of 1500 pounds of turkey.³⁴⁸ Following a toast to the King with pints of two-per-cent ‘near beer,’ the men flooded into the Exhibition Building for dancing to the tunes of the unit’s band. They finished off the night with a performance of ‘All-of-a-Sudden Peggy,’ put on by the Red Cross Stock Company in the Royal Victoria Theatre.³⁴⁹

The next morning, 26 December 1918, the remainder of the Siberian Expeditionary Force left Willows Camp for Victoria harbour. Both the *Colonist* and the *Times* reported on the departure, suggesting it was a lavish, festive affair. The disturbances surrounding the departure of the 259th Battalion a few days earlier do not appear to have been repeated. With bands from the local Foundation Company, the H.M.S. Lancaster, and the Siberian force itself leading three different sections of troops, the 2200 members of the 260th Battalion and accompanying units passed through the city, leaving for Vladivostok at 6:30 p.m. aboard the Blue Funnel liner *Protesilaus*.³⁵⁰

According to the *Times*, the ship had been in dock for several days, with the troops supposed to sail before Christmas. But plans were made to allow them to celebrate Christmas in style.³⁵¹ The *Teesta*’s turbulent departure may have had something to do with it. But whether with turkey or revolvers, leather belts, and bayonets, by Boxing Day 1918 the bulk of the 4000-strong Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force was at sea sailing toward Vladivostok, with a small group already in the city and a trickle more troops training on the BC mainland. Yet from its inception labour was dead set against the sending of Canadian troops to Bolshevik Russia.

³⁴⁸ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 6.

³⁴⁹ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 6, and *Daily Colonist*, 27 December 1918, 2.

³⁵⁰ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 11.

³⁵¹ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 11.

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The working classes of the Entente must force their governments to a peace negotiated with the mass of the Russian people. The Russian soviet will use its forces to oppose foreign capitalism....³⁵²

Vladimir Lenin, *Daily Colonist*, 29 December 1918

As Canada's Siberian force sailed toward Vladivostok and Lenin called on the workers of the Entente to force their leaders to the peace table, Prime Minister Borden – still in London – experienced a change of heart. For months his cabinet had warned that the Canadian public was opposed to intervention, but Borden had insisted that the Dominion would do her part in Siberia. The motives of the Prime Minister in ordering the withdrawal of the force are as cloudy as those surrounding the decision to deploy troops in the first place. Did reports of the use of force in the deployment of the 259th Battalion reach the Prime Minister? Were other Allies getting cold feet? These questions are difficult to answer, but based on the correspondences between Borden, his cabinet, and the British War Office, it appears the Prime Minister came to the conclusion that it was better to abandon the Siberian campaign than witness the explosion of revolution on Canadian soil. By the end of 1918, events were underway that would culminate in the withdrawal of the Siberian Expeditionary Force from Russia by early June.

The day the *Protesilaus* sailed from Victoria, the *Times* ran the headline 'Troops May Return from Siberia in Summer Months, or Even During Spring.'³⁵³ In the wake of "news despatches from Paris that the Allied Governments have decided against further intervention in Russia," official sources within the Dominion government were

³⁵² *Daily Colonist*, 29 December 1918, 3.

³⁵³ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 1.

suggesting that the troops could soon be on their way home.³⁵⁴ In a report dated 28 December from Honolulu, it was announced by the Japanese War Department that half of the Japanese troops would be withdrawn from Siberia.³⁵⁵ In London, the Imperial War Cabinet held session in preparation for peace talks with Germany in Paris. The situation in Russia was discussed on 24 December 1918, Prime Minister Borden wrote in his diary, and the cabinet decided to enter into formal negotiations with “the alleged Bolshevik representative.”³⁵⁶ Three days later, the Bolsheviks approached the Allies regarding terms of Peace, but according to the *Colonist*, “the proposals met with no response, as they emanate from a government which is not recognized.”³⁵⁷ On 30 December 1918, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George reported on conversations he had had with US President Woodrow Wilson. “The President was opposed to armed intervention in Russia,” Borden wrote, “and he was not favourable to the Siberian expedition.”³⁵⁸ Later that day Borden discussed the impending peace talks:

Regarding Russia, I did not see how the War could be regarded as having terminated if we should leave the Peace Conference with five or six nations and Governments still fighting in that country... and I suggested, in lieu of forcible intervention, that the Governments of the various states in Russia should be induced to send representatives to Paris for conference with the allies and associated nations.³⁵⁹

The location of Borden’s proposed conference shifted from Paris to the island of Prinkipo – Prince’s Island – in the sea of Marmaris south of Istanbul, and was slated for

³⁵⁴ *Daily Times*, 26 December 1918, 1.

³⁵⁵ *Daily Times*, 28 December 1918, 1.

³⁵⁶ Borden, II, 170-1.

³⁵⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 28 December 1918, 6.

³⁵⁸ Borden, II, 171-2.

³⁵⁹ Borden, II, 172.

15 February 1919.³⁶⁰ An invitation was drafted to the warring Red and White forces, and issued through the Moscow press and via radio since no Allied power had recognized the Bolshevik government.³⁶¹ Upon receipt of the invitation, Soviet Foreign Commissar Chicherin sent a reply on 4 February, offering concessions on resources, territory, and debt payments to the Allies in exchange for peace, and expressing his government's willingness "to enter into immediate negotiations on Princes Island or in any other place."³⁶² Chicherin asked the Allies to inform Soviet Russia "without delay" of the place to which it should send its representatives, as well as the time and the route.³⁶³ But unfortunately the Prinkipo Conference was not to be. White leaders were outraged that the Allies would consider making peace with the Reds. The Russian general at the helm of the Government of the North had photographs of Woodrow Wilson removed from shop windows in Archangel when he heard about the idea.³⁶⁴ General Denikin in the South sent a personal message of protest to the Allies.³⁶⁵ And Admiral Kolchak in Omsk, according to a British officer, "is said not to have slept a wink since he heard about Prinkipo," his government rejecting the invitation almost as soon as it was received.³⁶⁶ Despite the efforts of the Canadian Prime Minister, the White generals had ruled out the possibility of the Russian Civil War being resolved through negotiation.

This may have helped spur Borden to the conclusion that continued Canadian participation was no longer worth the political havoc intervention was wreaking on the

³⁶⁰ Borden was to be the representative of the British Empire at the Prinkipo conference. (John Silverlight, *The Victors' Dilemma: Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War*, London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1970), 148)

³⁶¹ Silverlight, 143.

³⁶² Silverlight, 144-5.

³⁶³ Silverlight, 144-5.

³⁶⁴ Silverlight, 146-7.

³⁶⁵ Silverlight, 146-7.

³⁶⁶ Silverlight, 146-7.

home front. On February 13, Borden wrote to Lloyd George from Paris informing him that Canadian troops would be withdrawn from Siberia.³⁶⁷ He wired Mewburn in Ottawa the same day instructing him to withdraw the troops in early spring.³⁶⁸ On 17 February 1918, a meeting of the British Empire Delegation to the peace talks discussed intervention in Russia, but as Borden wrote, “I adhered absolutely to my determination to withdraw our troops from Siberia in April.”³⁶⁹ An army had been mobilized to Siberia but in a strange twist of irony, it was never given authorization to fight.

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The end of 1918 was marked by a frenzy of telegrams between General Elmsley in Vladivostok, the Chief of Canadian General Staff in Ottawa, and the British War Office, on the question of whether troops could be deployed inland to help the forces of Admiral Kolchak in Omsk. On 7 December 1918, Elmsley had deployed his deputy, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas S. Morrissey from Montreal, to lead a group of 52 men on the 3800-mile train ride to Omsk to serve as headquarters staff for the Britain’s Middlesex and Hampshire regiments.³⁷⁰ The Canadian troops arrived in Omsk just as the Bolsheviks of the city attempted to unseat the Kolchak government. According to the *Federationist*,

Twelve men were shot by courtmartial orders after an armed uprising by Bolsheviks at Omsk on the night of December 22... The Bolsheviks succeeded in freeing prisoners in the Omsk prison, but a detachment of government soldiers quickly arrested twelve men who had participated in the outbreak. They were promptly tried and executed...³⁷¹

As soldiers were being prodded at bayonet point onto the *Teesta* in Victoria, Bolsheviks attempted to overthrow the ‘All-Russian’ dictator Kolchak in his seat of power. But no

³⁶⁷ Borden, II, 188.

³⁶⁸ Borden, II, 188.

³⁶⁹ Borden, II, 189-90.

³⁷⁰ MacLaren, 165-6.

³⁷¹ *BC Federationist*, 3 January 1919, 8.

more than a trickle of Canadian troops would leave Vladivostok for Omsk. The day the Bolsheviks tried to seize control of the city, the Canadian cabinet sent a message to the War Office. In the view of Canada, the message stated, the situation had

everywhere changed since Canada undertook to furnish Contingent; policy of allied and associated Powers not defined; and public opinion strongly opposed to further participation. Therefore, although despatch of Canadian troops will for present continue, they must all return to Canada next spring.

Meanwhile Dominion Government cannot permit them to engage in military operations nor, without its express consent, to move up country.³⁷²

The *Teesta* arrived in Vladivostok on 13 January 1919 after a turbulent trip across the Pacific, where two passengers died and several others were injured.³⁷³ The instigators of the near-mutiny were court marshaled and sentenced to between ninety days and two years of additional service.³⁷⁴ Meanwhile, a day after leaving Victoria, the *Protesilaus* encountered a storm and private Harold Butler was killed and another soldier injured when a large ice-box broke loose from its mounting and crushed them.³⁷⁵ The ship lost a propeller at sea and got stuck in the ice about 30 miles outside Vladivostok.³⁷⁶ It took two icebreakers to free the ship and tow the troops to Vladivostok.³⁷⁷

The Canadian contingent in Vladivostok now numbered nearly 4000 men, with a small number left to be deployed from Vancouver.³⁷⁸ One group made the arduous march

³⁷² MacLaren, 166-7.

³⁷³ A rifleman fell down a coal chute and a Chinese crewman died in another accident. (MacLaren, 176)

³⁷⁴ MacLaren, 175. Elmsley had these sentences remitted in May as the force prepared to return to Victoria.

³⁷⁵ MacLaren, 177.

³⁷⁶ University of Victoria Archives and Special Collections (hereafter UVACS), Military Oral History collection, SC 141, 170. "Elkington, Eric Henry William." Interview with Eric Henry William Elkington, June 1984.

³⁷⁷ MacLaren, 177.

³⁷⁸ The advanced party of 680 men arrived in Vladivostok aboard the *Empress of Japan* on 25 October 1918, over 900 troops on the *Teesta* arrived 13 January 1918, while 2200 soldiers aboard the *Protesilaus* arrived 15 January 1918. On 3 February 1919, a final detachment of men arrived aboard the *Madras* from

from the Canadian Ordnance Dock to the East Barracks, while another endured a 20-mile train ride in sub-zero degree boxcars to the barracks at Second River.³⁷⁹ While workers in Canada were rallying to the side of the Russian Bolsheviks, these Canadian boys had been deployed to Siberia to fight them. And yet as winter turned to spring, these two positions, apparently in opposition to one another, came together with the burgeoning of dissent among the Canadian force. But first, a brief digression into the experience of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force is necessary to understand the environment in which once-loyal men came to sympathize with the mutinous.

The situation in Vladivostok was far from pleasant at the time. As Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Henry William Elkington – a member of the force’s 16th Field Ambulance from the Vancouver Island town of Duncan – would recount seven decades later, “there was very little snow in Vladivostok, but it was damn cold, and very dusty”:

The Trans-Siberian railway station in Vladivostok was full of thousands of starving refugees. Literally starving. They had a little area on the floor and they all had fled from the Bolsheviks. Well, we did what we could. We took some supplies, what we could. I can always remember having a loaf of bread, and a woman came rushing up, and I gave it to her, and she had the most starving looking baby you ever saw in your life.³⁸⁰

Elkington’s recollections are heavy on humorous anecdotes and light on concrete detail, but he does provide some potent insight into the state of affairs in Vladivostok at the time and into the experience of the Canadian men who were sent to Siberia to fight the Bolsheviks. “That was a tough place, Vladivostok,” he recalls.³⁸¹ “It was wintertime, and

Vancouver. By mid-January, there were nearly 3800 troops in Siberia, with a fewer than 100 in Omsk and the rest in Vladivostok. (MacLaren, 151 and 175)

³⁷⁹ MacLaren, 177.

³⁸⁰ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169. Interview with Eric Henry William Elkington, 16 and 23 June 1980 and 2 July 1980. Elkington earned his medical degree during the war and, after two decades as a doctor with the British Army, opened a medical practice in Duncan.

³⁸¹ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

there were always people getting shot or killed in the streets.”³⁸² Elkington remembers walking down the main street in Vladivostok one evening when he stumbled across a bank robbery in progress. The culprit ran into the street and was shot through the head by a gendarme:

He was piled up with the rest of the bodies, which was bigger than this room of dead bodies, frozen stiff. They couldn’t bury them. Hundreds of dead bodies in this place....³⁸³

He remembers that along with the refugees in the train station, there were others scattered throughout town:

a lot of these Russian refugees were of the aristocracy, a great many of them. There were an old general and his wife, living in this used railway carriage. And they were selling what things they’d managed to escape with their life, which was a tea and coffee service, all in gold. And they’d sell a cup, and then a plate. And I said to this old general, “What’s going to happen when you’ve sold all that?” “We will just die.” “We will just die.” I suppose that was the most tragic scene. I’ve seen a great many tragic scenes in various parts of the world, but that – Vladivostok – was the worst. Awful.³⁸⁴

Elkington describes Vladivostok as “lawless,” and he says he tried to provide assistance, but that the Canadian force’s provisions were limited: “We tried to supply these wretched people with what we could, but of course we hadn’t got vast quantities at all. I think even our own pickings weren’t...” his voice trickles off.³⁸⁵

But Elkington’s recollections aren’t entirely negative: “one of the streams outside Vladivostok, you’d pick up little bits of gold.”³⁸⁶ While in the Siberian port, he remembers visiting the local bazaar and attending dances for the members of the force. The YMCA and Knights of Columbus, both of which had assigned representatives to the

³⁸² UVACS, “Elkington,” 170.

³⁸³ UVACS, “Elkington,” 170.

³⁸⁴ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

³⁸⁵ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

³⁸⁶ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

Canadian contingent, organized canteen huts and movie theatres at the Canadian barracks, and held concerts, lectures, boxing matches, and church services.³⁸⁷ An eight-team hockey league was started up as were two brigade newspapers, *The Siberian Bugle* and *Canadian Sapper*.³⁸⁸ At least once a week, the men marched to a central-bathhouse for a hot shower.³⁸⁹ But Vladivostok had less innocent diversions as well:

There was an awful place, known as the ‘bucket of blood’... where the troops would go in and there were just these sort of cubicles, and you could see the action which you liked best. Oh, that was the devil, trying to keep these lads away from that place. You could buy condoms in the streets. Syphilis... Asiatic syphilis is a dreadful thing. When we came back from Vladivostok, two lads were sent home, and they both died from syphilis, despite 606 and everything else.³⁹⁰

As both a sentry officer charged with keeping the Canadian boys out of the local brothels, and as a doctor trying to cure those infected with venereal disease, Elkington witnessed the darker side of Vladivostok first hand. One day he stumbled across two troops lying in the snow who had annihilated themselves on alcohol in a ‘house of ill fame’: “we had to carry them about two miles home to save them.”³⁹¹ He also recalls the prevalence of smallpox among the force and the local population.

Elkington suggests that the citizens of Vladivostok were hostile to the presence of the Allied troops in the city: “It wasn’t a pleasant life, I can tell you... They were not at all hospitable...the majority.”³⁹² The discontent appears to have bubbled beneath the surface, only rarely manifesting itself in open confrontation:

There were no pitched battles. There were just odd casualties here and there, because the Bolsheviks were not there in force. It was more or less held by the White Russians. But the whole of Vladivostok was infiltrated with Bolsheviks.³⁹³

³⁸⁷ MacLaren, 198. The cinema at the Second River Barracks was called British Columbia Hall.

³⁸⁸ MacLaren, 198.

³⁸⁹ MacLaren, 198.

³⁹⁰ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

³⁹¹ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

³⁹² UVACS, “Elkington,” 170.

³⁹³ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

Elkington remembers walking on the outskirts of the city one night with Ragasan, a former Czarist officer and one of the Russians in the Canadian force, when they encountered three Bolsheviks. Ragasan shot one of them, and Elkington says he shot another: “‘Bang!’ he got one of them. I went ‘bang!’ and I helped got one.”³⁹⁴ When rumours of an impending Bolshevik uprising in Vladivostok surfaced in March 1919, the Allied generals declared publicly that they would maintain order in the city, but the insurrection failed to materialize.³⁹⁵ While Allied aims in Siberia may never have been fully hashed out for the public, Elkington’s purpose in Russia was clear: “to try to defeat the Bolsheviks.”³⁹⁶

But according to the Privy Council order of 22 December 1918, the bulk of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force was not to be moved toward Omsk and the front to the west where White forces were engaged in open warfare with the Red Army. The one operation in which Canadian troops were involved occurred in mid-April 1919. The town Shkotova, located 30 miles north of Vladivostok on the branch railway line leading from the Suchan mines to the Trans-Siberian Railroad, was surrounded by Bolshevik forces on 12 April 1919.³⁹⁷ A small local garrison had Bolshevik prisoners in captivity. Japanese General Otani, head of the Allied forces in eastern Siberia, called upon the Allies to provide detachments to defend the town.³⁹⁸ Elmsley deployed 192 troops from the 259th Battalion’s “B” Company, some of the same men from Toronto who had whipped the deserters the day they left Victoria, but by the time the force was assembled,

³⁹⁴ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169. Ragasan served as the translator with the 16th Field Ambulance. Elkington says he was a regular member of the Canadian Army.

³⁹⁵ MacLaren, 196.

³⁹⁶ UVACS, “Elkington,” 170.

³⁹⁷ Swettenham, 177.

³⁹⁸ Swettenham, 177.

transported, and ready to attack Shkotova on 19 April 1919, the Bolsheviks had evacuated the area.³⁹⁹ While Elkington does not name the town explicitly, the sole military engagement he describes appears to situate him as part of the force:

We were going forth to attack some villages, which were being held by the Bolsheviks. We got into a train, and off we went... We went to attack this village. The force marching towards this village was led by a little Italian officer on horseback, who I don't think knew anything about horses. He ran away and attacked the village! Far ahead of anybody else, because he couldn't stop his horse. And when we got to the village it had been evacuated.⁴⁰⁰

The Canadian company returned to Vladivostok on 19 April 1919, and General Otani rewarded their efforts by issuing them 96 bottles of wine, 18 bottles of whiskey, and three cases of sake.⁴⁰¹

It is not clear when Elkington left Siberia. The bulk of the force returned to Canada by June, though some men volunteered to remain with other Allied units. "We were there very nearly a year," he said in one interview, and in another, "Very nearly a year in Vladivostok."⁴⁰² Having arrived aboard the *Protesilaus* in January 1918, a year would have him leaving in the middle of winter, yet he says, "We left in the spring."⁴⁰³ The Canadians who volunteered to remain in Siberia after the main body returned to Canada were attached to British regiments that withdrew in the autumn of 1919, but perhaps as a doctor Elkington remained with the American forces into the spring of 1920. "If I remember right I came back individually," he said. But this is contradicted by his comments on smallpox that suggest he may have been aboard the *Empress of Russia* when the troops fell prey to the disease. Elkington was an old man, many decades distant

³⁹⁹ MacLaren, 197, and Swettenham, 177.

⁴⁰⁰ UVACS, "Elkington," 170.

⁴⁰¹ Swettenham, 177.

⁴⁰² UVACS, "Elkington," 169 and 170.

⁴⁰³ UVACS, "Elkington," 169.

from Siberia, when he recounted his journey, and he served as a military doctor for over 20 years, so his recollections are invariably cloudy. But some of his comments, although only brief, provide powerful insight into the forces that confronted the Siberian Expedition.

Elkington says a group of troops boarded the Trans-Siberian Railroad in Vladivostok for the 1000-mile journey to Lake Baikal, “the deepest lake in the world,” as he described it: “I can’t remember what the strategic thing was. It wasn’t my job to be a strategist.”⁴⁰⁴ He continues:

We had hoped to go as far as Lake Baikal. But we had a Russian train, and Russian drivers. And eventually they refused to go any further. Despite being prodded in the backside with bayonets. So we never got any further. Which was probably a good thing, because we wouldn’t have soon come back again, I don’t think... The White Russians weren’t doing very well... So we went back to Vladivostok after staying out for about two or three weeks. They wouldn’t drive the train any more.⁴⁰⁵

There is no mention of this incident in any of the existing histories of Canadian invention in Siberia, but there is evidence of strike activity along the Trans-Siberian. In January 1919, Kolchak sent British Colonel Ward “to undertake a mission along the Trans-Siberian Railway to pacify striking railwaymen.”⁴⁰⁶ And from June to August 1919, a “huge” strike movement gripped Vladivostok, uniting railwaymen, dockers and factory workers with waiters and ushers in the local theatres.⁴⁰⁷ Regardless of the specific timing of Elkington’s ill-fated journey, it is clear that despite Allied claims to the contrary, significant opposition existed to the White war effort, with the local populations in many instances given tacit and even explicit support to the Red forces of the Bolsheviks.

⁴⁰⁴ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169 and 170.

⁴⁰⁵ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169 and 170.

⁴⁰⁶ Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 340.

⁴⁰⁷ Smele, *Civil war in Siberia*, 557.

And Russians were not the only ones opposed to the Siberian intervention.

Evidence suggests that unrest was brewing within the ranks of the Canadian force in Vladivostok: “Letters sent by men show discontent,” the force’s mail censor noted in the unit’s war diary.⁴⁰⁸ This is confirmed in a March 1919 diary entry by Lance-Corporal Erskine Ireland, a future Toronto lawyer who fought with the 259th Battalion:

I have come to the conclusion now that it should rest with the Russians to settle their own internal affairs... If it has been decided that the outside Powers should intervene, then intervention should be on a large scale... But such an effort to suppress Bolshevism and establish stable government in Russia would involve tremendous casualties for the Allies, and sacrifices which I cannot conscientiously feel that we should bear. Therefore, I maintain that our policy should be one of non-intervention. The colossal population of Russia, consisting of people of diverse nationalities, cannot be moulded into a sane and democratic nation in a day. It is something that must be created by the inhabitants of Russia by themselves....⁴⁰⁹

Ireland was responding to a lecture he had attended in Vladivostok’s Casino Theatre a few nights previous, where Sir Bernard Peres, a British student of Russian history, made the statement, “We are here for the building up of democratic Russia.”⁴¹⁰ Ireland had come to the conclusion that the development of democracy in Russia was a task best left to the Russians, and that Canada therefore had no business intervening in Siberia.

Colonel John Ward, commander of the Middlesex regiment at Omsk, wrote a more pointed criticism of the Canadian contingent in his diary on 3 February 1919:

I heard news of general insubordination among the Canadian troops that had just arrived at Vladivostok. If all the information received could be relied upon, the sooner they were shipped back to Canada the better. There is enough anarchy here now without the British government dumping more on us....⁴¹¹

Decades later, Elkington conceded the troops in Siberia had grown restless:

⁴⁰⁸ MacLaren, 184.

⁴⁰⁹ MacLaren, 202.

⁴¹⁰ MacLaren, 202.

⁴¹¹ MacLaren, 183.

We realized it was a hopeless state of affairs really... The Bolsheviks had taken over all the rest of the country... We realized we weren't going to do any good unless they had a huge force there and rushed right through Siberia and into Russia.⁴¹²

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But this was not to be. Back on the home front labour continued to rail against the Siberian force. Days after the departure of the troops from Victoria, Charles Lestor addressed a crowd in the Columbia Theatre. According to the *Federationist*, “there was a marked difference in the personnel of the audience, as the khaki clad boys of the Siberian Expeditionary Force were absent, most of them having departed on the expedition.”⁴¹³ Lestor told the audience “Allied guns or bayonets could never resuscitate capitalism in Russia.”⁴¹⁴ In early January 1919, the *Federationist* asked:

Why is the Canadian government so bent on sending troops to Russia that unwilling men were forced to embark for Siberia at Victoria on December 23-24⁴¹⁵ after leading protestators (sic.) were put under arrest? Surely the answer is not in the announcement of the birth of the Canadian-Siberian Development Company, which we are told “has good ground for hoping to get valuable concessions.” From whom? From Kolchak? And is it his party our troops are being sent to support? Kolchak is the Siberian Denikin, was an intimate of the Czar and is the present hope of the Romanoffs.⁴¹⁶

At their first meeting in 1919, the Victoria labour council discussed an upcoming mass meeting to protest censorship, the jailing of workers under the Military Service Act, and the Siberian expedition.⁴¹⁷ Joe Taylor asked delegates to take lots of leaflets for distribution in the shops and yards of the city. At the same meeting, a letter was received from the deputy minister of Militia and Defense,

⁴¹² UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

⁴¹³ *BC Federationist*, 3 January 1919, 8.

⁴¹⁴ *BC Federationist*, 3 January 1919, 8.

⁴¹⁵ The *Federationist* reported 23-24 December as the date of the *Teesta*'s departure, though a body of sources suggest this took place on 21-22 December 1918, including the lieutenant's letter.

⁴¹⁶ *BC Federationist*, 10 January 1919, 4.

⁴¹⁷ UVACS, Victoria Labour Council fonds, 80-59, Box 3, “Minutes,” 8 January 1919.

acknowledging a letter from the Council opposing the Siberian expedition. Stating that the Department does not consider Canada at war with the Russian people, but that they, the Government of Canada, are supporting certain governments in Russia, such as that organized at Omsk and Archangel, which governments are, by the way, quite socialistic. At any rate no aggression is meant by the Dom. Govnt, rather an economic development.⁴¹⁸

The letter is evidence of the lack of transparency surrounding the Canadian government's aims in Siberia. While the writer attempts to paint the Siberian Expedition as a benign initiative, assuring Victoria labour that Canada is not at war with the Russian people and that only "an economic development" is intended, the letter unintentionally betrays the ideological motives underpinning Canadian intervention in Siberia. In pleading that the White governments at Omsk and Archangel "are, by the way, quite socialistic," the writer is conceding that the rising tide of socialism is central to the Allies' campaign in Russia, and that the radical socialism of the Bolsheviks has forced Canada to bolster the more moderate socialist government of Admiral Kolchak in Omsk. Whether there was anything socialist about Kolchak is highly debatable, but this brief correspondence recorded in the minutes of the Victoria labour council provides compelling evidence that the suppression of Bolshevism, along with expanded trade interest, were the main forces behind the deployment of Canadian troops to Siberia.

On 12 January 1919, as the *Teesta* and *Protesilaus* made the final approach to Vladivostok, W.A. Pritchard, a socialist leader who would be jailed during the Winnipeg strike that June, addressed the mass meeting in Victoria's Columbia Theatre. The labour council's previous protest meeting had been disrupted by officers of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force, and the day Pritchard addressed the Victoria crowd,

⁴¹⁸ UVACS, "Minutes," 8 January 1919.

reports were surfacing that British and American troops were to be withdrawn from Russia.⁴¹⁹ Even so, the *Times* reported that,

“Hands off Russia” was the speaker’s demand. The Soviet regime had maintained itself against the intrigue of diplomats from France and Britain and the few rich land barons, who had now found it necessary to work. The Soviets had struggled valiantly to re-organize broken industry, and yet all the Democratic countries had failed to recognize their government. But, he continued, they would recognize a government at Archangel.... Any government would do, however, so long as it preserved the spirit which would permit the retention of imperialistic debt collecting agencies.

Mr. Pritchard said that no matter how many millions of gallons of Allied blood were to be spilt in combating the Soviet regime, and no matter how successful it might be in subduing it, nothing could overthrow the conditions which had brought the Soviets into existence.⁴²⁰

Pritchard concluded his speech with fiery words for his audience:

We are more concerned about the position labor is to occupy in the period of reconstruction rather than in the collection of French debts through the Siberian expedition. All power to the Workingmen’s and Soldiers’ Councils. This is where Democracy is in the making, and when you see the same thing in this country you will know that democracy is in the making here.⁴²¹

While the *Times* made no mention of it, according to the *Federationist* a series of resolutions were passed, and

the chairman called on the meeting to show where they stood by giving three cheers for the ‘Bolsheviki’ and the Spartacans, a request which met with a ready and enthusiastic response... the local Socialists took advantage of the occasion to sell literature, over 400 copies of ‘Red Flag’ being disposed of.⁴²²

That same night, on the other side of the Strait of Georgia, the future founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation spoke to a capacity crowd in Vancouver’s

⁴¹⁹ *BC Federationist*, 17 January 1919, 8.

⁴²⁰ *Daily Times*, 13 January 1919, 20.

⁴²¹ *Daily Times*, 13 January 1919, 20.

⁴²² *BC Federationist*, 17 January 1919, 1.

Rex Theatre.⁴²³ Hundreds were turned away at the door for a speech by James Shiver Woodsworth, who had recently resigned from the ministry of the Methodist church and was working as a longshoreman in Vancouver. Woodsworth said that

some disgraceful scenes were reported to have taken place when certain Canadian troops were only recently shipped at Victoria for Siberia. We had grown accustomed to hear of German and in the past of Russian troops being driven by force to the fighting front, but it was something new for Canada, and...for the British Empire itself, to have troops driven aboard ship by bayonet and revolver.⁴²⁴

Woodworth called for the complete overthrow of the present system of production in Canada, and said it must be done so well that there will be no danger of a counter-revolution.⁴²⁵ The presence of Canadian troops in Siberia was being directly tied to the struggle against capitalism in Canada. The Dominion government's efforts to wage war on Bolshevism in Russia was converting Canadian workers to the radical philosophy and intensifying the class war on the home front.

In early February 1919, the management of the Columbia Theatre in Victoria refused to rent the venue to the Federated Labour Party, so on 2 February 1919, 500 Victorians piled into the main hall of the Labour Temple on North Park Street.⁴²⁶ The meeting began when a veteran of the Western Front, in full uniform, hobbled into the hall on two crutches and demanded that the Union Jack on the speaker's pedestal be replaced with the Red Flag.⁴²⁷ He said he had gone to France to fight for the Union Jack, but that conditions he had witnessed in Canada since his return had led him to the conclusion that there was only one flag today: the Red Flag. Despite a chorus of assent from the crowd,

⁴²³ *BC Federationist*, 17 January 1919, 8.

⁴²⁴ *BC Federationist*, 17 January 1919, 8.

⁴²⁵ *BC Federationist*, 17 January 1919, 8.

⁴²⁶ *Daily Times*, 3 February 1919, 9.

⁴²⁷ *Daily Times*, 3 February 1919, 9.

Chairman Robert Donnachie flatly refused the veteran's request, and the meeting proceeded.⁴²⁸

The speaker of the evening was T.A. Barnard, a prominent member of the Great War Veterans' Association from New Westminster who in the autumn of 1919 narrowly lost a federal by-election in the Victoria riding.⁴²⁹ In his speech, Barnard railed against wartime profiteering and lambasted local alderman Joseph Patrick for his comments about "red" meetings in the city.⁴³⁰ Barnard then proceeded to slash "the capitalistic financially saturated press" and suggest that all the foreign dispatches regarding Russia were "conceived" or "doctored" in Vancouver. "If it were Bolshevism to talk this way, then he was a Bolshevik," the *Times* quoted.⁴³¹

At the end of February 1919, the Victoria labour council made what was perhaps its most explicit statement on Canadian intervention in Russia. After what the minutes describe as a "protracted and interesting discussion" the council voted 17 to two in endorsing

The aims and purposes of the Russian Revolution and Germany also giving the executive authority to call general strikes, should the Allies continue to oppose same or oppose a Soviet government that may be formed elsewhere.⁴³²

The resolution had been received from W. Smith, secretary of the Alberta Federation of Labour, and efforts by the conservative secretary of the Victoria council to water down

⁴²⁸ *Daily Times*, 3 February 1919, 9.

⁴²⁹ Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 56: 4 (1920), 369-70. Barnard lost to incumbent MP Simon Fraser Tolmie by a margin of 5085 votes to 7219 amid allegations of grave irregularities. (*BC Federationist*, 31 October 1919, 1 and 8)

⁴³⁰ *Daily Times*, 3 February 1919, 9.

⁴³¹ *Daily Times*, 3 February 1919, 9.

⁴³² UVACS, "Minutes," 24 February 1919.

the motion was defeated.⁴³³ The full text of the motion, passed at the Alberta federation's annual convention, read:

RESOLVED, that this body places itself on record as being in full accord with the aims and purposes of the Russian and German socialist revolutions, and be it further

RESOLVED, that this body gives the executive full power to call a general strike should the Allied powers persist in their attempt to overthrow the Soviet administration in Russia or Germany or in any other country in which a Soviet form of government is or may be established.⁴³⁴

Canada's Siberian Expedition had thrown large sections of Canadian labour into open sympathy with the Bolsheviks in Russia. The general strike weapon, wielded by workers in Seattle in early February and poised to manifest itself in both Winnipeg and Victoria in the months ahead, was endorsed as a mechanism to force Canadian troops out of Siberia. The Victoria council instructed delegates to support any similar resolutions that arose at the upcoming convention of the BC Federation of Labour.⁴³⁵

Held in Calgary in March immediately prior to the Western Labour Conference, the BC Federation of Labour's 1919 convention heartily endorsed the formation of a One Big Union, an initiative approved at the Alberta federation's convention in January.⁴³⁶ The Calgary Conference, bringing together 252 delegates from Victoria to Port William, opened by calling "for the abolition of the present system of production for profit" and sent "fraternal greetings to the Russian Soviet government, the Spartacans in Germany

⁴³³ Secretary-Treasurer Christian Sivertz divided the motions in half, then moved in amendment that "This Council is in full sympathy with the process of socializing of the means of production, now in progress in Russia and Germany." The amendment was defeated and both halves of the original motion were approved by a vote of 17 to 2. Sivertz and delegate Dooley voted together in opposing the resolution. (UVACS, "Minutes," 24 February 1919)

⁴³⁴ Buck, *Canada and the Russian Revolution*, 45-6, as quoted in Lackenbauer, "Why Siberia? Canadian Foreign Policy and Siberian Intervention, 1918-19."

⁴³⁵ *BC Federationist*, 28 February 1919, 1.

⁴³⁶ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919*. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 157.

and all definite working class movements in Europe and the world.”⁴³⁷ Delegates opened a new page in Canadian labour history in voting to secede from the Trades and Labour Council of Canada and join the proposed One Big Union. They also called for an end to censorship, the release of political prisoners, a six-hour workday, and the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Siberia, setting a date of 1 June 1919 for general strike action if their demands were not met.⁴³⁸

Up until the meeting of Western labour met in Calgary, Britain’s minister of war Sir Winston Churchill pressured Prime Minister Borden to abandon his plans to withdraw the Canadian force.⁴³⁹ But the Prime Minister stuck by his decision. Labour had given him no other choice.

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On 21 April 1919, 1076 Canadians boarded the *Monteagle* in Vladivostok for the journey across the Pacific to Vancouver.⁴⁴⁰ On 9 May 1919, an additional 766 troops sailed for Vancouver aboard the *Empress of Japan*.⁴⁴¹ According to the British embarkation officer, some of the departing troops, members of the 260th Battalion, had stashed Communist propaganda (in English) into their kit bags for distribution upon their return home.⁴⁴² It was clear where their sympathies lay. A little over a week later, on 19 May 1919, 1,524 men boarded the *Empress of Russia*. “The hillsides were covered with little

⁴³⁷ Anon., *The Origin of the One Big Union: A Verbatim Report of the Calgary Conference*, (Winnipeg: n.d.) 10-11, 31, as quoted in McCormick, 158, and *BC Federationist*, 18 April 1919, 1. Unfortunately, the three issues of the *Federationist* encompassing the Calgary Conference (14, 21, and 28 March 1919) are missing from the holdings of the BC Archives.

⁴³⁸ McCormack, 158, and *BC Federationist*, 14 November 1919, 6.

⁴³⁹ On 17 March 1919, Churchill finally accepted Borden’s decision to withdraw, writing that “in view of the very decided attitude taken up by Canada, the War Office have no option but to acquiesce, as they have felt it impossible to continue to urge the Dominion Government to share, against its will, in a task of much difficulty and anxiety.” (Swettenham, 182, and MacLaren, 194)

⁴⁴⁰ MacLaren, 207.

⁴⁴¹ MacLaren, 207.

⁴⁴² MacLaren, 208.

low-growing rhododendrons, and they were just coming out when we left,” Eric Elkington remembers.⁴⁴³ While he claims to have spent “very nearly a year” in Siberia and to have left individually, there is one piece of evidence tying him to the sailing of the *Empress of Russia*: smallpox. “When we came back we had smallpox on the ship,” Elkington said.⁴⁴⁴ While at sea, the disease spread like wildfire aboard the *Empress* and the troops were quarantined for a fortnight when they arrived in Vancouver.⁴⁴⁵ On 5 June 1919, Major-General Elmsley and the remaining 747 Canadian soldiers boarded the *Monteagle* and left Vladivostok for Victoria.⁴⁴⁶

Nineteen members of the Siberian Expeditionary Force did not return to Canada. Two died in accidents, 16 died of diseases such as typhus, influenza, and spinal meningitis, and one soldier, a lieutenant from the 260th Battalion, committed suicide.⁴⁴⁷

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The Russian revolution has everywhere heartened the foes of present-day society. It has given them a territorial focus, a base of operations, and if the ‘Reds’ overthrow the provisional government of Russia and replace the liberal leaders, Miliukov, Lvov, etc. by chiefs of really crimson hue, we shall see a wave of syndicalist unrest sweep over the whole earth.⁴⁴⁸

BC Federationist, 8 June 1917

The Bolshevik, extremist or Maximalist programme can never succeed in Canada. Force, threatening the basic governmental institutions of the country only begets crushing, superior force on the other side. Those institutions are not perfect, far from it. But... they are a thousand times more perfect than the products of anarchy and chaos.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴³ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

⁴⁴⁴ UVACS, “Elkington,” 169.

⁴⁴⁵ MacLaren, 207.

⁴⁴⁶ MacLaren, 207, and *Daily Times*, 19 June 1919, 19. MacLaren’s figure of 653 men is contradicted in a *Daily Times* story announcing the *Monteagle*’s arrival in Victoria. I chose to adhere to the contemporary source.

⁴⁴⁷ MacLaren, 208.

⁴⁴⁸ *BC Federationist*, 8 June 1917, 4.

⁴⁴⁹ *Daily Times*, 25 June 1919, 4.

Daily Times, 25 June 1919

While “a wave of syndicalist unrest” was little more than a vague prophecy in the pages of the *Federationist* in the spring of 1917, two years later the *Daily Times* warned of the threat of the Bolshevik programme in Canada, and countenanced the use of force to suppress it. In the wake of the Calgary Convention, the One Big Union exploded in the West, organizing tens of thousands of workers.⁴⁵⁰ As cities from Toronto and Montreal, to Amherst and Halifax, to Calgary and Edmonton and even Vancouver were paralysed in June 1919 by sympathy strikes for 30,000 workers in Winnipeg, the *Federationist*'s prophecy came to fruition. Two years after predicting a strike wave if leaders “of really crimson hue” came to power in Russia, the last Canadian troops boarded the *Monteagle* in Vladivostok to return to Canada. They arrived in Victoria on 19 June 1919, and the next day the local metal trades council voted in favour of sympathy strike action to protest the arrest of seven leaders of the Winnipeg strike.⁴⁵¹

On Saturday, 21 June 1919, 5000 workers in Victoria downed tools in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the Prairie capital.⁴⁵² That same day in Winnipeg, 2000 returned soldiers violated a ban on public assemblies and paraded along Main Street to protest the leaders' arrests. Mayor Gray read the riot act, and 70 Royal North West Mounted Police officers, armed with rifles, made three consecutive charges on horseback through the procession of veterans.⁴⁵³ A man by the name of Mike Sokolwoki was shot in

⁴⁵⁰ *BC Federationist*, 14 November 1919, 6.

⁴⁵¹ *Daily Times*, 21 June 1919, 1.

⁴⁵² *Daily Times*, 21 June 1919, 1.

⁴⁵³ *Daily Times*, 23 June 1919, 15.

the head and died.⁴⁵⁴ Fifty others were injured, 13 with gunshot wounds, and nearly 100 arrested.⁴⁵⁵ Canadian troops, recently returned from Europe and dispatched from Quebec, were deployed into the streets of Winnipeg and wheeled out machine guns as a show of force. The Winnipeg strike had been broken.

On board the *Monteagle* were eight Russian stowaways. “Bolsheviks,” the *Times* warned.⁴⁵⁶ One of them, a young Russian named Nicholai Demotrovich, was adopted by Sergeant Charleston of Brandon, Manitoba, who had helped him hide aboard the *Monteagle*, and Demotrovich ended up becoming the director of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer property department in Hollywood, California.⁴⁵⁷ But the *Times* saw Red: “Stowaways Believe to Be Bolshevik Agents,” the 20 June 1919 headline proclaimed.

Disguised as Canadian soldiers, the eight Russian stowaways who succeeded in boarding the transport *Monteagle* at Vladivostok are believed to be Bolshevik emissaries sent out to this country with the object of spreading Bolshevik propaganda.⁴⁵⁸

The stowaways claimed to be Russian Jews fleeing oppression, but the *Times* would have none of it. They provided too potent a scapegoat for the Bolshevism that was wreaking havoc from Winnipeg to Victoria. It was inconceivable that Canadians could harbour Bolshevik sympathies. “The Russians will be kept under guard and deported by the liner on the next outward voyage to the Far East,” the *Times* declared.⁴⁵⁹

With the departure of the Canadian troops from Vladivostok, the bulk of the British force was soon withdrawn from Siberia. The Middlesex and Hampshire regiments

⁴⁵⁴ *Daily Times*, 23 June 1919, 15.

⁴⁵⁵ *Daily Times*, 23 June 1919, 15.

⁴⁵⁶ *Daily Times*, 20 June 1919, 17.

⁴⁵⁷ MacLaren, 208.

⁴⁵⁸ *Daily Times*, 20 June 1919, 17.

⁴⁵⁹ *Daily Times*, 20 June 1919, 17.

retreated from Omsk to Vladivostok, sailing home by early November.⁴⁶⁰ Omsk itself fell to the Reds in November 1919, and the Kolchak government fled eastward, with what was left of the Imperial Gold Reserve in a sealed railcar in the Admiral's train.⁴⁶¹ But when Kolchak arrived in Irkutsk hoping to re-establish his base of power, he was confronted by a Czech Army that had grown tired of fighting a war for Western capitalism and wanted desperately to return to the new homeland.⁴⁶² French General Maurice Janin broke an agreement between the Admiral and the Allies, and handed Kolchak over to the Czechs, who in turn surrendered him to the Bolshevik-controlled Irkutsk Political Centre, which by then controlled the town.⁴⁶³ On 7 February 1920, the former dictator of All Russia and close ally of Britain and her partners in Siberia was summarily tried and shot.⁴⁶⁴ The Gold Reserve was loaded into a train car and routed to Moscow. Before leaving Irkutsk, the workers affixed a banner reading: "To Dear Vladimir Ilyich, from the city of Irkutsk."⁴⁶⁵

That spring the armies of Colonel Denikin collapsed in southern Russia. In May the bulk of the Czech legion left Vladivostok for Victoria, then Vancouver.⁴⁶⁶ They celebrated Canada Day 1920 in Valcartier, Quebec, before sailing from Halifax for their

⁴⁶⁰ Swettenham, 186. The Middlesex regiment left Vladivostok on 8 September 1919, while the Hampshires pulled out on 1 November 1919. From March 1917 to March 1919, Britain gave 184,000,000 pounds to various White Russian governments. (*BC Federationist*, 31 October 1919, 1)

⁴⁶¹ Pereira, 142 and 146-59.

⁴⁶² By September 1919 there was a real threat of a general mutiny within the Czech army, and on 29 September 1919 the Czechs were allowed to proceed to Vladivostok. But Kolchak, afraid to lose his one dependable force in Siberia, threatened to blow up bridges along the Trans-Siberian near Lake Baikal if the Czechs didn't halt their retreat. (Connaughton, 147, and Bruce Muirden, *The Diggers who signed on for more: Australia's part in the Russian Wars of Intervention, 1918-1919*, (Kent Town, Australia: Wakefiled, 1990), 27)

⁴⁶³ Pereira, 148-50.

⁴⁶⁴ Pereira, 150.

⁴⁶⁵ Smele, *Civil war in Siberia*, 667.

⁴⁶⁶ Swettenham, 246.

newly minted homeland.⁴⁶⁷ The last Americans left Siberia on 1 April 1920, while Japan lingered on the Sakhalin Island until January 1925.⁴⁶⁸ The Red Army rolled into Irkutsk in March 1920, and occupied Vladivostok on 25 October 1922.⁴⁶⁹ While White resistance still existed on Russia's western frontier, Siberia was undeniably Red.

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The Soviet victory over the Allied-backed White armies was ambiguous. While the Allies did not succeed in their attempt to replace Bolshevism with a more traditional class system, civil war inflicted deep – some would argue unhealable – wounds on the Russian people and the nascent Bolshevik government. State repression, employed in the persecution of war and the silencing of opposition, would forever undermine the egalitarian rhetoric of Lenin and Trotsky. Mutinous sailors in the port of Kronstadt – at one time valiant defenders of the Bolshevik revolution – were shot en masse by government forces as the Red victory was consolidated in the spring of 1920. Peasant risings would challenge Bolshevik power in Siberia for years to come, as the Moscow government drew heavily on the region's grain to feed the cities and industrial centres of western Russia.⁴⁷⁰ Nearly a decade of perpetual violence and destruction had debilitated Russia's economy and society. In his New Economic Policy, Lenin made significant concessions to capitalism in order to revive the economy and alleviate mass starvation. "All Power to the Soviets," Lenin had proclaimed in April 1917, and the workers rallied under the Bolshevik banner. But in the wake of the October seizure of power, authentic

⁴⁶⁷ MacLaren, 212.

⁴⁶⁸ Pereira, 153 and 156.

⁴⁶⁹ Pereira, 156.

⁴⁷⁰ James Hughes, *Stalin, Siberia, and the Crisis of the New Economic Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21-23. In 1922, Soviet grain procurements from Siberia accounted for 27% of the Russian total.

workers' councils were systematically disempowered, as the Bolshevik party imposed itself as the new means of socio-economic organization in Russia.

While Communism may have survived in Russia in name, its form had been irrevocably corrupted, stripped of its vision and compassion, and, it could be argued, propelled down the road toward Fascism. Class rule remained, although feudal lords and capitalists had been replaced with state managers and party officials. Communism and participatory democracy are in many ways inseparable, and it could therefore be argued that as an ideology and an economic system, communism never existed in Russia. In this respect, the Allied Intervention in Russia's civil war – and Canada's intervention in Siberia in particular – can be interpreted as imminently successful. For while the West failed to unseat Lenin and the Bolsheviks from power, the Allied-sponsored Civil War inflicted such significant damage on the new regime and the population that the construction of a socialist society in Russia was deemed impossible. The ideological war against working-class power in both Russia and the West – the primary motivation of the Allied effort, I would argue – had been won, with the Russian model of the new democracy forever tainted.

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On the home front, the war against Bolshevism did not end with the suppression of the Winnipeg strike. At 7 p.m. on the morning of 30 June 1919, officers of the Royal North West Mounted Police raided the Vancouver homes of labour leaders Jack Kavanagh, J.G. Smith, A.S. Wells, Albert Hill, Bill Pritchard, Victor Midgley, W.H. Cottrell, George Thomas, and P. McDonneill.⁴⁷¹ At the same time, the door to the office of the *BC Federationist* was smashed in and a number of documents, including

⁴⁷¹ *BC Federationist*, 4 July 1919, 1.

submissions and letters for the next issue and new subscriptions to the paper, were seized. Mounties also raided the offices of the Socialist Party of Canada and the publications *Camp Worker* and *Red Flag*.⁴⁷² From the home of A.S Wells, secretary of the BC Federation of Labour, the Mounties seized the entire records of the Federation since its inception in 1911.⁴⁷³ But four days later the *Federationist* came out on schedule, reporting that “While Vancouver homes and offices were raided, the same procedure has been carried out in all parts of the country, from Cumberland in the North, to Montreal in the East.”⁴⁷⁴ The day before, the Vancouver sympathy strike had been called off.

The war against radical labour in Canada would drag on for years. In the next decade, the Royal North West Mounted Police and its successors the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would open files on 4806 Canadians.⁴⁷⁵ In a barn outside Guelph the Communist Party of Canada would be born from the ashes of the post-war labour revolt. In a meeting of the Federated Labour Party held in the Greater Victoria municipality of Esquimalt on 22 October 1919, J.S. Woodsworth said

There would be a lot of unemployment and unrest this winter and because of this the government were rushing in Royal North West Mounted Police. There are no Indians here for them to shoot, so they must be coming over the mountains to shoot down the workers of this country.⁴⁷⁶

At a meeting of the OBU in Nanaimo on 24 November 1919, Thomas Barnard – who had been recently defeated in a Victoria by-election amid allegations by the Chief Returning Officer of voting irregularities – expressed the radical tactics to which Canadian labour

⁴⁷² *BC Federationist*, 4 July 1919, 1.

⁴⁷³ *BC Federationist*, 4 July 1919, 1.

⁴⁷⁴ *BC Federationist*, 4 July 1919, 1.

⁴⁷⁵ Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Early Years, 1919-1929*, (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1994), 451.

⁴⁷⁶ Kealey and Whitaker, 679.

was turning.⁴⁷⁷ “Until we revolt we will not get our freedom,” Barnard told the audience, likening Canada to a volcano that was ready for an eruption.⁴⁷⁸ He predicted that in a few months there would be “revolution and bloodshed.”⁴⁷⁹ The next spring, an RNWMP agent in Cumberland would be told over a beer in the Vendome Bar that “the present system of Government should be overthrown and a Soviet Government established, for this form of Government was the only kind for the working man and he was ready anytime to do all in his power to assist in this movement.”⁴⁸⁰ In Calgary, George Palmer said that Bloody revolution was the only way and was near at hand, and that the capitalist class was forcing such an outcome upon the workers of Canada: “I would take up arms tomorrow under the Red Flag,” he said.⁴⁸¹ Rather than silence and moderate the demands of labour, intervention in Siberia and repression at home had only further antagonized Canadian workers and mobilized a working-class army for armed revolt. How capitalism survived in Canada must be left to another paper.

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When the true history of the machinations of the Allied countries in their efforts to overthrow the Soviet regime is written, it will disclose such an amazing story of intrigue and duplicity as to make honest people shudder.... Not half of the story has been told, and never will be told if the ruling class of the Allied nations can prevent it. But they will not be able to cover up the tracks; the workers of the world are moving forward, and it will be the function of that class to uncover how secret diplomacy has functioned against the new democracy.⁴⁸²

BC Federationist, 17 October 1919

⁴⁷⁷ See *BC Federationist*, 31 October 1919, 2, for information on the questionable by-election.

⁴⁷⁸ Kealey and Whitaker, 693.

⁴⁷⁹ Kealey and Whitaker, 693.

⁴⁸⁰ Kealey and Whitaker, 708-9.

⁴⁸¹ Kealey and Whitaker, 706.

⁴⁸² *BC Federationist*, 17 October 1919, 4.

The history of revolution in Russia and the response it elicited from Canadian labour is difficult to reconstruct. It is often said that history is written by the victors, and in Canada this has meant a whitewashed mythology centred around Vimy Ridge and Armistice Day, intrinsically distant from the Bolsheviks of Vladivostok and the bayonets in the streets of Victoria. But the events that unfolded in Russia in 1917 had a far more profound effect on workers in Canada than the glorious battles in France and Flanders. Without wishing to defame the dead of the Western Front, I would argue that revolution in Russia came to shape in a very real way the history of Canada at the end of the First World War. The overthrow of the Czar and the ascent of the Soviets provided a framework through which Canadian workers came to understand their position in society, the material conditions of war, and the possibility of achieving fundamental change. A Canadian experience and a radical tradition organic to Canada pre-dated the revolutions of 1917, but the struggle for working-class emancipation in Canada would forever be informed by the events that unfolded in Petrograd and Russia in the midst of war. Bolshevism emerged as a symbol of peace and came to represent an end to profiteering and mass privation. Revolution in Russia inspired workers in Canada and across the globe, and would affect radical politics internationally for the duration of the twentieth century.

Vested interests in Canada were well aware of the threat posed by the Soviet model of government, unleashing the full forces of state power in both Russia and Canada to suppress the revolutionary movement. On both fronts, Canadian government policy proved to be a success. Allied armies and capital prolonged and escalated the Russian Civil War, forever tainting the Bolshevik model, while war against radical labour in Canada staved off a fundamental change in the domestic economic and political order.

The Siberian Intervention, however brief, indicated the Borden government's commitment to stamp out Bolshevism, and the withdrawal of troops allowed for the commitment of resources to the class war in Canada. The menace of Bolshevism persevered in Canada for decades, but the emerging security apparatus proved capable of containing the threat. However, that said, neither the Siberian Expedition nor mass repression on the home front could stifle the dreams of labour. With the Russian model tainted and their organizations besieged, Canadian workers carried on the struggle toward a new democracy. Capitalism would survive in Canada, but the ideals and conditions that drove Canadian workers into open sympathy with the Bolsheviks would endure to this day.

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