

## The Response of the *Toronto Daily Star* to the “On-to-Ottawa” Trek and Regina Riot

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### Abstract

During the Great Depression the *Toronto Daily Star* became Canada’s highest circulation English-language daily newspaper. One of the main reasons for this remarkable achievement was the paper’s outstanding coverage of newsworthy events between 1919 and 1939. When a major story happened, the *Star* would immediately assemble and send a team of reporters to provide readers with first-hand and comprehensive information of the event. Reporters’ dispatches would quickly become front-page news with eye-catching headlines and photographs. Moreover, should the event be of national importance, the paper’s reportorial coverage would be supplemented by editorial commentary. One of the best examples of this type of journalism was the paper’s response to the June/July 1935 “On-to-Ottawa” trek and Dominion Day riot in Regina. The purpose of this article is to examine the news coverage by *Star* reporters James Kingsbury and Frederick Griffin, and to explain the editorial position on events taken by *Star* proprietor-publisher Joseph Atkinson.

### Introduction

Rain beat down in torrents and lightning streaked across the June sky as young *Toronto Daily Star* reporter James Kingsbury clung to the tender of the rocking Medicine Hat bound freight train. <sup>1</sup> It was hurtling along the tracks and past level crossings at high speed. Looking back down the “drag” (freight train) he could barely make out the forms of the human cargo grasping the tops of fifty boxcars. <sup>2</sup> However, he knew that on each was a determined group of British Columbia relief camp workers, almost all single and many barely out of their teens. They were huddled closely together in an attempt to keep warm in the heavy rain and biting wind of the open prairie.

Only those with strike cards verified by unit captains had been allowed to board the “On-To-Ottawa” train, though there had been a handful of exceptions. Kingsbury noted that a few dogs and cats had been carried on board as mascots, and on one of the cars were the pretty West coast O’Brien sisters; Catharine was twenty-two and Yvonne nineteen. 3 When Kingsbury had last seen the women they were attired in their mannish best: slacks, windbreakers and tams. Now he knew their clothes were soaked and their faces blackened with soot. Teased by the men as a “scenery hog” (green transient), Kingsbury was glad he was wearing the pair of blue jumpers he had purchased in Kamloops. 4 However, they offered no safeguard against the nightmarish coal dust and flying cinders from the speeding locomotive.

When the train had left “Cow Town” earlier in the day for the 180 mile ride to Medicine Hat, trek marshal, thirty-five year old Calgarian, and Great War veteran Jack Cosgrove had invited Kingsbury to forsake the windy catwalk and join him, Glasgow-born George Black, and other trek leaders in the coal-and-water tender. 5 Cosgrove wore goggles for protection from the hunks of coal that were periodically whipped back off the top of the locomotive’s coal heap. The husky Kingsbury didn’t and his eyes and ears were soon filled with cinders. He also looked enviously at the piece of canvas rolled around Cosgrove and his buddy, Thomas. 6 Kingsbury was amazed that the two men were actually sleeping against the tender’s toolbox. Suddenly the train slowed to one of its infrequent stops and the majority of the 1,600 soaked rod-riders alertly climbed down the boxcars’ ladder rungs. Many stamped their feet and several lit cigarettes. Meanwhile

others relieved themselves. Kingsbury observed that a few from the lead box car ran up past the tender and warmed their numbed hands on the piston casing of the big locomotive. 7 Then it was time to scramble back aboard the speedy freight.

### **The Trek Begins**

The trekkers had left Vancouver, twenty-four to a car, just after 10:00 p.m. on June 3, 1935 and spent three days enduring the hardships of crossing the Rockies, where severe frost could persist as long as the end of June. The first night the self-proclaimed “rod-riding tourists” had clung tenaciously to the swaying cars as they careened around the sharp curves of the rock cuttings and trestle bridges between Yale and Kamloops. Many had no blankets and only light clothing and were quickly numb with cold. Luckily at Coquitlam the provincial police opened four empty boxcars allowing a number of riders inside. Over 150 were packed like sardines into one car. When the men reached Kamloops the next day, the mayor refused them sleeping accommodations and a “tag” day (canvassing for money). So, according to Kingsbury, after a wash in the frigid North Thompson River and a late meal of bully beef sandwiches, cold beans and coffee, 400 slept in box cars and the remainder bedded down under the trees in Riverside Park. 8

After passing through Revelstoke and Golden the trekkers approached Field. After this community was a daunting challenge: the long, slow haul by three 150-ton locomotives up through the figure-eight tunnels of the Kicking Horse Pass. Beneath a pair of pointed Selkirk giants, Mount Ogden and Cathedral Mountain, the CPR had bored

two 3,000-foot spiral tunnels. Finished on September 1, 1909, their construction had taken 10,000 workers over two years to complete. With curves over 225 degrees in both tunnels it was actually possible for a train's locomotive and caboose to be going in opposite directions. At Field, two RCMP officers informed Cosgrove and Black to warn the men about "the perils of Spiral Tunnel." <sup>9</sup> Though the riders held dampened handkerchiefs and towels over their mouths and noses to combat the stifling heat, gritty smoke and acrid coal gas fumes in the half-hour ascent of the infamous "Big Hill", the dark, noisy ride was still a terrifying and dangerous experience. <sup>10</sup> As the train emerged from the second corkscrew tunnel, almost all of the men were choking and sputtering. Their faces were as grimy as their clothes, and first aid squads had to attend to several overcome trekkers.

### **Why Was The Trek Undertaken?**

What had forced hundreds of homeless men to undertake such a hazardous and impossible journey? Ultimately it had been caused by an event occurring almost six years earlier. The collapse of the New York stock market on "Black Tuesday" October 29, 1929 had triggered Canada's descent into the worst economic downturn in the country's history. Compounded by a lack of protective social-security measures, the Great Depression jettisoned thousands of farm and urban workers onto the charity of private and public institutions. The prairies were hardest hit, initially by market declines for wheat prices, and later by crop failure from drought, wind and grasshoppers.

By the summer of 1930 almost 400,000 were jobless. Three years later the figure for Canada's unemployed, excluding agricultural labour, was twenty-six per cent. Many men took to riding the rails, crisscrossing the country in a fruitless and frustrating search for work and food. In an effort to control the thousands of roving and restless "rail riders", the federal government of Richard Bedford Bennett established work camps in the fall of 1932 for single, unemployed men. 11 The media and business groups hailed the camps as innovative. However, men who left them were blacklisted from further relief and could be jailed for vagrancy. In February 1934 *Vancouver Sun* publisher Robert Cromie assigned popular *Sun* columnist Bob Bouchette to visit and report on several of British Columbia's camps. Following his investigation Bouchette wrote a critical six-part expose on what the inhabitants called "slave" camps. 12 By early 1935 the number of jobless Canadians topped a million. The men in the unemployment relief camps had reached the breaking point. They agreed it was time to take action against their conditions.

In April 1935 some 1,800 B.C. camp strikers led by Workers' Unity League organizer Arthur Herbert "Slim" Evans descended upon Vancouver. The Toronto-born Evans, a former member of the Industrial Workers of the World and the One Big Union, was forty-two, lean, lanky, and a dedicated communist. 13 For two months he led the men as they staged a series of military-like protests in the West coast city to voice dissatisfaction, lift spirits, and force the government into providing work and wages programs. For example, on April 23 some 100 strikers occupied the Hudson's Bay store. Three weeks later another large group accomplished a dramatic seizure and sit-in of the city's museum and library. 14 Finally, with the help of various Vancouver civic, labour,

ethnic and political groups, the camp workers organized a May Day parade in Stanley Park of over 20,000 strikers and supporters. 15

### **The *Toronto Star's* Reasons For Covering the Trek**

If the trekkers were insistent upon reaching Ottawa, Kingsbury's paper was equally determined to report their journey. Why? First, there was a political motive. The *Star's* powerful proprietor/publisher, Joseph Atkinson, was a firm backer of the Liberal party and a very close friend of its leader, Mackenzie King. Atkinson was no ally of Prime Minister Bennett, a large, stern, and bombastic Methodist bachelor who railed against real and imagined radicals. By 1935 his Conservative government was in the fifth year of its mandate and about to face the electorate. The Prime Minister was unpopular and the target of several epithets: Bennett buggies (a car which had engine and windows removed and was pulled by a horse), Bennett boroughs (urban shack towns for the jobless), and Bennett barnyards (abandoned prairie farms). By publicizing the On-To-Ottawa trek through reportorial and editorial coverage, Atkinson could potentially embarrass Bennett's administration and help pave the way for King to become Prime Minister again.

Second, there was a social consideration. By June 1935 the *Star* had a paid circulation in excess of 250,000 and its Saturday supplement, the *Star Weekly*, 310,000. In 1931 Atkinson's paper had become Canada's largest circulation English-language daily due largely to thousands of working, immigrant and middle class readers. During

Bennett's reign the paper continued to defend the civil rights of the dispossessed and those accused of radical dissent, including communists. For example, in August 1931 the *Star* was the only Toronto paper which refused to support the arrest of Communist Party leader Tim Buck and seven other "commies".<sup>16</sup> This refusal earned the *Star* the title of the "little brother of the reds" from the rival *Evening Telegram*. The On-to-Ottawa trek, a crusade by homeless, disenfranchised, and unemployed Canadians to gain work and social justice, was therefore an event tailor made for Atkinson's backing.

Finally, there was a financial reason. Ongoing front-page stories of the marchers, complete with a two-column picture on June 10 of the attractive O'Brien sisters, created a major human-interest story. Readers eagerly bought the *Star* to read Kingsbury's front-page accounts of the men clinging white-knuckled on freight trains through the darkened void of Rocky Mountain tunnels. As the train riders moved in increasing numbers eastward and received increasing material and moral support from sympathetic Canadians, Atkinson knew that a media sensation was building around the trekker story. Also, if the protest turned violent, as it eventually did in Regina on July 1, then, following the well-known news room adage of "if it bleeds, it leads", even more editions of the two cent *Star* could be sold.

Given all of these considerations Atkinson turned to two veterans of the paper's "flying squad" to get the trek story.<sup>17</sup> The members of this team were known for their razzle-dazzle tactics in obtaining the news – anywhere and anytime. First Atkinson assigned thirty-two year-old Kingsbury to accompany the trekkers. In doing so Atkinson

hoped that Kingsbury would not only provide a unique story on the men but also scoop other press and wire service correspondents. 18 Then, after the Dominion Day riot, forty-six year old Frederick Griffin was sent to Regina to interview the principals in the event and report on its aftermath. At the same time Atkinson ensured Kingsbury and Griffin's reports would be given sensational headlines and supported with a series of strong editorials. With this saturation coverage, including a June 24 banner headline of "Relief Strikers' Trek May Delay Election", Atkinson kept the trekkers' story alive on the *Star's* front and editorial pages from June 3 until July 6.

### **James Kingsbury's News Coverage**

Before the trekkers left Vancouver, Kingsbury approached Evans and other trek leaders, showed them his *Star* credentials and asked to join the march. When they asked what kind of reporter he was Kingsbury replied, "A reporter period. A reporter who reports what he sees without any attempt to slant the news one way or another." Then he added, "I am not a columnist. I don't mould opinion. I report news truthfully as it happens." 19 They accepted him and according to Liversedge: "He kept the faith with us, and he kept faith with the public." 20

Like a modern day embedded correspondent, Kingsbury rode the rails and shadowed the trekkers, wiring dispatches as the men and trains moved relentlessly eastward. In his first by-lined story, datelined Kamloops June 5 and headlined "O'Brien Sisters Join Strikers In Box Cars", he quoted Kamloops' police chief Charles Anderson:

“ the men have given no trouble and have been very orderly.” 21 The next day Kingsbury wrote, “ Provincial Police Cheer Rod-Riders At B.C. Border. “ In this account he reported how twenty-four British Columbia provincial police “ gave the boys a big cheer and a wave of their hands as the train passed the boundary. “ 22 On June 10 from Calgary he wired, “ \$600 Worth Of Meals Is Given To Strikers “, in which he commented: “ Struck by the youthfulness of the great majority of the strikers, citizens invited several to their homes for dinner. “ 23

On Friday June 14, eleven days after leaving Vancouver, the trekkers arrived in Regina on an eastbound cattle train. On board were 1,350 strikers, one undercover Mountie, and a second secret operative with the CPR. As the strikers stepped off the train and lined up with military precision, Kingsbury reported “ cheering and singing “ and men wearing “ shirts plastered with signs “ On to Ottawa “ and “ Cheer the Boys on Their Way. “ 24 Carrying “ rucksacks, potato bags and blankets “ they were greeted by “ more than 200 people, many of them women and children. “ 25 Among the welcome party was twenty-seven year veteran Chief Inspector Fred Toop of the city’s police force who “ walked among the men and exchanged jokes with them good-naturedly. “ 26 The next day at a meeting attended by 6,000 citizens, the trekkers approved protest resolutions to Prime Minister Bennet, Opposition Leader Mackenzie King, C.C. F. Leader J.S. Woodsworth, and F.W. Turnbull, M.P. for Regina. After the gathering Kingsbury quoted boyish-looking and sandy-haired Matt Shaw. A member of the men’s publicity committee, the twenty-four year-old trekker declared: “ We will not be trampled on any more. “ 27

On the same day the men reached the Saskatchewan capital, Prime Minister Bennett decreed that all CPR and CNR trains would carry them no further. To enforce the order the authorities marshaled 240 RCMP and 85 railway police in Regina. 28 However, in an apparent conciliatory gesture, Bennett also sent his Minister of Railways R.J. Manion and Minister of Agriculture Robert Weir to negotiate with the men. The result was an invitation by the cabinet ministers accepted by Evans and seven other strike leaders to come to Ottawa. Ironically, this time the trekkers would ride the train on cushions in first class passenger cars paid for by the federal government. Meanwhile, the rest of the strikers remained in Regina with thirty-six year-old George Black in charge. They would be provided three meals a day at twenty cents a meal in city restaurants and housed in the Exhibition Grounds and additional quarters. 29

In his last *Star* report on June 18 headlined, “Eight To ‘ Ride Cushions ‘ To Ottawa, Trekkers Remain Regina Guests “, Kingsbury interviewed an elated Arthur Evans, who three days earlier had referred to the Prime Minister as “ Mr. Bombastic Bennett. “ “ This is a tremendous victory for us, “ the steely-eyed Evans stated. “ It is proof of the power of organization. But our success is largely due to the great amount of public support we have gained.” 30 Then Kingsbury followed Evans and the other trek leaders - Cosgrove, Robert “ Doc “ Savage, James “ Red “ Walsh, Stewart “ Paddy “ O’Neill, Mike McCauley, Pete Neilson, and Tony Martin - to the CPR station. Kingsbury described their sendoff by Regina’s citizens: “ Hysterical women called out encouragement to the strikers, others marched by their sides, children and girls and

youths formed up behind them. There was a sprinkling of middle-aged men and women. Some of the girls broke into the ranks to trot at the sides of seemingly happy, youthful rod-riders. “ 31

### **The *Star's* Editorial Response To The Trek**

While the strike leaders were in the nation's capital the *Star's* proprietor-publisher Joseph Atkinson kept the On-To-Ottawa story alive on the paper's editorial page. On June 21 in a commentary titled Canada's Relief Work Camps, the paper asked: “ How are the young men of Canada in our relief camps faring? Everybody should know, but information about them is scarce...The men are well fed in most cases...But provision for social recreation, educational improvement, technical training and religious services seem to be woefully inadequate and a discredit to the country, the government, the churches, and welfare organizations generally. “ 32

The next morning at 11:30 a.m. Evans and the seven other trek leaders met Bennett and eleven cabinet ministers in the Prime Minister's imposing East Block office. Soon a confrontation developed between Evans and Bennett and sparks began to fly. At one point the Prime Minister accused the trek leader of being an embezzler; Evans shot back calling the Prime Minister a liar and telling him he was unfit “ to be premier of a Hottentot village “. 33 The meeting ended with the trek leaders leaving Ottawa empty handed.

On June 25 in *What's Coming Up Now*, the *Star's* lead editorial commented on the failed meeting: " He [Bennett] pointed out to the eight men that seven of them were not Canadian-born and that the one who was Canadian-born had a prison record. There was nothing the men asked that could be granted. They must go back to their camps... This large and increasing body of unemployed men, whose delegates were brought by government money to Ottawa, gets back from Ottawa no message except one couched in the language of power and force. " 34

The next day another lead editorial titled *Two Points of View* stated: " There are questionings. Young men who can get nothing to do in the world, who are asked to accept food and be thankful to get it, ask themselves how does it happen that they have gone into the pariah class of the unemployed. They were not born to it like the untouchables of India. They come, most of them, from a hard-working stock. They feel they cannot be blamed, but ought to be admired, for making every possible demonstration and struggle against a fate that is excluding them from a normal life. " 35

### **The Regina Riot**

When the trek leaders returned to Regina from Ottawa they knew the march was over. On July 1 they made several proposals to end the excursion. First they approached the federal government and then, when Ottawa refused, they turned to Saskatchewan's Liberal Premier James " Jimmy " Garfield Gardiner. They asked to be returned to their respective camps in British Columbia and have individuals sent back to their homes. They also requested to be dispensed under direction of their own organization, but failing

this to be dispersed by the Saskatchewan government. Finally, with the exception of Evans, the men wanted to be exempt from prosecution for their activities up to June 30. The one thing they rejected was being sent to a federal holding camp at Lumsden, twenty miles north of Regina. 36

As dusk was descending on the warm Dominion Day evening, the 5'4 " barrel-chested Gardiner and his ministers gathered to consider the men's offer. Shortly after 8:00 p.m. the Premier was called out of the cabinet meeting to take the phone. 37 The caller informed him that trouble had just started downtown and a city policeman was dead. What had happened in the Market Square and what would follow in the city of Regina for several hours was certainly not the proudest moment in Canadian history. 38 According to dozens of eyewitnesses, at 8:00 p.m. the shriek of a whistle caused over 30 city police to form a flying wedge and converge on a makeshift stage in the middle of the open square. Meanwhile a larger force of Mounties surrounded the square. On the back of a truck Arthur Evans and George Black were addressing about 400 trekkers, 1000 holidaying citizens, including many women and children, and several undercover constables. The local police quickly cleared a path and plainclothes men arrested Evans and Black. However, the authorities' action triggered pandemonium, and within five minutes fighting ensued in the square. In the confusion uniformed officers fought with trekkers, bystanders and even some of their own undercover agents. City Detective Charles Millar, who was on duty in the nearby police station, impulsively joined the fray in the square and the fifteen-year veteran was fatally bludgeoned.

Soon violence spread to the downtown. On one side of the pitched battle were blue clad city police and steel-helmeted RCMP officers on foot and horseback. Against them were angry rock-throwing trekkers aided at times by local citizens including women and young teenage boys. The confrontation lasted until after 11:00 p.m. and resulted in Millar's death, injuries to scores of locals, police and trekkers, arrests of over 100 individuals, and extensive damage to public and private property. By the end of a night filled with hand-to-hand fighting, tear gas grenades, overturned cars, horseback charges, and shooting by police, many downtown storefronts were in shambles. Over 200 plate glass windows were broken. By midnight some 1,500 trekkers were penned in by rifle carrying Mounties at Exhibition Stadium. 39

### **Frederick Griffin's Initial News Reports On The Riot**

On July 3 veteran *Star* reporter and feature writer Frederick Griffin arrived in Regina to investigate the Dominion Day riot. 40 Griffin remained in the Saskatchewan capital for four days interviewing relief camp workers and trek leaders, Premier Jimmy Gardiner, Saskatchewan's Attorney-General, Tommy C. Davis, the Dominion government's representative Cyril P. Burgess, and RCMP Assistant Commissioner Colonel Stuart Wood, the forty-six year old Mountie in charge of the arrests, riot control and internment of the trekkers.

In his first *Star* report headlined "Censor's Camp Hems Strikers In Regina", Griffin observed: "The strikers have been some 20 days in Regina. The [seven] leaders

could have been arrested at any time during that period. They could have each been picked up by a couple of Mounties quietly...Why did the police choose a mass meeting on Dominion Day evening when a majority of the strikers were gathered in demonstration to make their move? ...Did they not know that there was a chance of resistance – in fact, did they not expect it when they came in droves? “ 41

The next day in “Gardiner Says Ottawa Long-Distance Control Caused Regina Trouble “Griffin reported his candid conversation with Colonel Wood:

“Why,” I asked him, “did you wait 20 days to discover that Evans and the other [six] leaders might be arrested under section 98 as members of an unlawful organization and then choose the time you did for action?” “The lawyers of the department decided that. “ “You mean that you received instructions on Dominion Day to make the arrests?” “Yes. Yes. “Why did you not make them when Evans and five other leaders were conferring with you and C.P. Burgess (federal relief representative) in the latter’s office between 2:30 and 4 that afternoon?” “The warrants were not issued then. The men left Burgess’ office after a deadlock. “ “Why did you not arrest them later, when they were at Premier Gardiner’s office in the parliament buildings? You could have taken them quietly. “ “What time was that? I did not know they were there [between 5 and 6]. “ ...Why Col. Wood did you choose to arrest them at a big public meeting in Market Sq., instead of quietly elsewhere? “ “We went where we knew we would find them...” “Did you require scores of mounted police and

the aid of the whole city police force to arrest a half a dozen men? “ “ Our first plan I said was to arrest them at Unity Centre [a small office used by the strikers off Market Square]. Only a dozen were used in that plan. If that plan failed we were prepared to use the second plan. That was the plan we had to use. “ 42

### **The *Star*'s Editorial Response To The Riot**

While Griffin reported from Regina, Atkinson attacked Prime Minister Bennett on the editorial page. On July 3 in a lead commentary titled *The Riot at Regina*, the *Star* insisted: “ No one can read the dispatches from Regina without being impressed by the singular lack of tact which has been exhibited; by the arrogance and intolerance which has made it a crime even to give food to hungry men. It is particularly unfortunate that at a time like this the government of Canada should be in the hands of a man who holds such views, whose arbitrary and non-conciliatory actions in the face of a grave crisis are those of a dictator rather than the head of a great and a free people. “ 43

The next day the *Star* followed up with This “ Master Mind “ Is Mr. Bennett's Own. The editorial warned: “ But if there is a master mind which threatens the well-being of this dominion it is, in fact, Mr. Bennett's own. That his intentions are good did not alter this in the slightest. A man with the best of intentions may be the country's most dangerous enemy. And a government leader who, in a time of crisis sets out to make war upon a section of the population, comes close to being in that category. “ 44 The *Star*'s final commentary on the Dominion Day confrontation was *The Riot Could Have Been*

Avoided. This July 5 editorial scorned “ the government’s defiant policy of attempting to ride roughshod over all opposition to its wishes. When such a tendency is continually manifested at the headquarters of the government, it is not surprising to find it reflected in the actions of subordinates. “ 45

### **Frederick Griffin’s Final News Reports**

On the day the *Star* published its final editorial on the riot, the paper also printed portions of Griffin’s July 4 interview with Jimmy Gardiner, a premier still fuming over the federal government’s unilateral and costly intervention in his province. After Gardiner had explained to Griffin how he considered the strikers “ fine chaps “, he admitted that during the riot some of the trekkers actually policed the city.

“ What do you mean by that amazing statement, Mr. Premier? “ asked Griffin. “ I mean that strikers took over the protection of citizens and property. They established pickets between the parliament buildings and the zone of strife, for example, and stopped cars, warning them of the trouble. One of our own cars was stopped at the corner of Hamilton and 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> and the occupants advised that they had better not go on. ‘ Why not? ‘ was the natural question. ‘ We won’t hurt you, but the police may ‘ was the answer, ‘ said Premier Gardiner. “ 46

The next day Griffin persuaded Saskatchewan's Attorney General Tommy Davis to also go on the record. Griffin questioned Davis as the trekkers marched to the train station to leave Regina:

“ Mr. Davis, what do you think of them? “ I said. “ You can't beat them as a bunch of boys, “ he said. “ I wouldn't want to meet better. “ “ Are they hoodlums and foreigners, as has been alleged? “ I went on. “ What do you think? “ he countered. “ You've seen them. “ “ There are no figures available, “ I went on, “ but you've been in close contact with them for days. How many foreign born are there among them? “ “ I have not spoken to more than four or five. I should say that five percent foreign born would be the height of it. The majority of them, as you can see, are clean-cut Canadian boys; predominantly of Anglo-Saxon stock. There are quite a few Irish. “ 47

Griffin's final comment in the same dispatch poignantly linked the relief camp workers' departure with the solemn funeral procession, three hours later, for Detective Charles Millar. The long cortege passed by both of Regina's main streets, which were lined with thousands of citizens braving the heat. First came Millar's body. Then there was a Salvation Army band playing slow music. Behind the band came Dutch-born Mayor Cornelius Rink and Regina Chief Constable Martin Bruton. Finally, squads of firemen, freemasons, city, railroad and mounted police in red coats, marched solemnly. Griffin observed: “ There was irony in the march of the mourning police. For this man need not have died. The riot need not have happened. The strikers who moved out would

have moved out four days earlier if their suggestions of last Monday had been accepted as they were finally accepted. But, unfortunately, Detective Millar died. That was a tragedy that might have never occurred. “ 48

### Conclusion

The *Toronto Daily Star's* comprehensive newsgathering and first-hand accounts of the 1935 On-to-Ottawa trek and Dominion Day riot by reporters James Kingsbury and Frederick Griffin together with the strong editorial coverage of these events by proprietor-publisher Joseph Atkinson exemplifies the type of journalism employed by the *Star* to become Canada's highest circulation English-language daily newspaper during the Depression. A review of the *Star's* reportorial and editorial response to the trek and ensuing riot clearly demonstrates the paper's sympathy and support for the trekkers, condemnation of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, and criticism of the role of the RCMP in Regina.

### Endnotes

1. *Toronto Daily Star* (henceforth *Star*) June 11, 1935. Born in 1903 Kingsbury had a lengthy career at the *Star*. After graduating from Shaw's Business College he joined the paper in 1928. His first job was private secretary to the paper's managing editor Harry Hindmarsh. For the next fifty years Kingsbury then held a series of positions including reporter /photographer, telegraph editor, city editor, managing editor, and executive editor. In 1967 he was appointed assistant to publisher Beland Honderich. Kingsbury retired from the paper in 1980 and died on March 8, 1983.

2. See Hobo Vocabulary after Works Cited. The normal crew for a string of thirty to seventy freight cars consisted of an engineer, fireman, two brakemen and a conductor. See the *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 7, 1935.
3. *Star*, June 11, 1935.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. According to trekker Ron Liversedge, Kingsbury approached the trekkers in Vancouver “ a day or so before we started on the trek [either June 1 or 2]...and asked if he could travel with us and report the trek from the inside...We told him OK, come with us and report our trek. “ Ron Liversedge, *Recollections Of The On To Ottawa Trek*, 86. A review of the *Star*'s news coverage of the trek shows that between June 4 and 18 Kingsbury wrote nine dispatches and over 10,000 words on the event. The first two stories, though probably written by Kingsbury, were by-lined “ Special to the Star “ and the remaining seven were by-lined “ By James Kingsbury. “ It is not certain whether Kingsbury continuously rode the trains with the trekkers from the time they left Vancouver until their arrival nearly two weeks later in Regina. According to Liversedge, Kingsbury was with the trekkers for “ five days. “ Liversedge, *Recollections*, 86. However, another trek historian claimed Kingsbury “ ...rode with the trekkers from Vancouver to Regina. “ Victor Howard, “ *We Were The Salt Of The Earth “ The On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot*, 88. The only occasion Kingsbury stated that he actually rode the rails with the men was on June 10 and 11 between Calgary and Medicine Hat. See his by-lined story “ Spent All Night In Rain Riding On Roofs Of Cars “, *Star*, June 11, 1935. Regardless of his actual presence on board the train with the trekkers, Kingsbury's dispatches clearly demonstrate that he was among the men during their stays in Kamloops, Calgary, Medicine Hat and Regina.
6. *Star*, June 11, 1935.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 90.
10. See Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot*, 62, Liversedge, *Recollections*, 93-94, and Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 90-91. According to one newspaper report, from April to December 1934 CNR and CPR railway police removed 44,646 transients. See the *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 7, 1935.

11. Waiser, *All Hell*, 31.
12. Bouchette, a World War 1 army veteran and former merchant mariner, wrote a regular *Sun* column called Lend Me Your Ears. During the Depression he often used this column to harangue politicians about poverty, joblessness and the relief camps. Bouchette never lived to see the end of the Depression for he died on June 12, 1938 by drowning off Second Beach in Vancouver.
13. Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 22.
14. See Waiser, *All Hell*, 49-50, Liversedge, *Recollections*, 74-83 and Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 49-51 and 74-77.
15. Liversedge, *Recollections*, 71.
16. Ross Harkness, *J.E. Atkinson of the Star*, 293.
17. A review of *Variety Show* by *Star* reporter Fred Griffin, *J.E. Atkinson of the Star* by Ross Harkness and the March 11, 1983 *Star* obituary of Kingsbury reveals that during the 1920's and 1930's the members of the *Star's* "flying squad" included reporters Griffin, Kingsbury, Gordon Sinclair, Matthew Halton, Ron Greenway, Gregory Clark and photographer Fred Davis.
18. Kingsbury was not the only reporter who took the initiative to ride with the trekkers. Disguised as a transient *Winnipeg Tribune* editorial writer Charles J. Woodsworth (son of CCF founder James S. Woodsworth) joined the trekkers when they arrived in Moose Jaw on June 12 and traveled incognito with the men until they reached Regina on June 15. During this time Woodsworth would slip away from the trekkers and secretly wire his dispatches to *Winnipeg*. See his reports in the *Winnipeg Tribune* on June 13, 14 and 15.
19. Liversedge. *Recollections*, 86.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Star*, June 5, 1935.
22. *Star*, June 6, 1935.
23. *Star*, June 10, 1935.
24. *Star*, June 14, 1935.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. *Star*, June 15, 1935.
28. Waiser, *All Hell*, 75-76.
29. Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 117, Liversedge, *Recollections*, 109, and Waiser, *All Hell*, 119 and 126. See also *Star*, June 18, 1935.
30. *Star*, June 18, 1935.
31. Ibid.
32. *Star*, June 21, 1935.
33. Liversedge, *Recollections*, 111 and Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 125.
34. *Star*, June 25, 1935.
35. *Star*, June 26, 1935.
36. Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 132.
37. Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 161.
38. The best descriptions of the Dominion Day riot can be found in Howard, *We Were The Salt*, 135-159, Liversedge, *Recollections*, 112-117 and Waiser, *All Hell*, 171-212. See also the excellent summative report provided by *Star* reporter Frederick Griffin in his July 3 dispatch headlined "Censor's Clamp Hems Strikers In Regina".
39. Waiser, *All Hell*, 211.
40. Born in Ireland on March 5, 1880, Griffin came to Canada in July 1912. He joined the *Star* in February 1913 as a library messenger boy and filing clerk and within a year became a reporter. Over a career that spanned thirty-three years he reported several big stories including the December 1917 Halifax explosion, the Prince of Wales's 1919 Canadian tour, the October 1922 Haileybury fire, the landing in April 1928 of the transatlantic airplane Bremen on Greenley Island, the 1935 Regina Riot, the Spanish Civil War and World War 2. As a feature writer he interviewed Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, Alexander Kerensky, Eamon de Valera, Joseph Stalin, Mackenzie King, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir Robert Borden, Charles Lindbergh, Joe Louis, Rudy Vallee,

Agnes McPhail, Emma Goldman, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Arthur Ellis – Canada’s official executioner. Griffin died unexpectedly of a heart attack while shoveling snow in Toronto on January 16, 1946.

41. *Star*, July 3, 1935.

42. *Star*, July 4, 1935.

43. *Star*, July 3, 1935.

44. *Star*, July 4, 1935.

45. *Star*, July 5, 1935.

46. Ibid.

47. *Star*, July 6, 1935.

48. Ibid.

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### Hobo Vocabulary

stiffs or bundle stiffs – transient men

drag – freight train

ding dong beggar – transient who asked for food at front door

lump bandit – transient who asked for food at back door

tin canning – begging for money with a tin can

jungle buzzard – a scrounger

town clown – a village policeman

harness bull – city policeman

bull –railroad policeman

winter Christian – anyone who took refuge in a Salvation Army hostel for the cold season  
and professed a sudden belief in Jesus Christ

Jerusalem Slim – Jesus Christ

gay cat – happy young innocent

scenery hog – green transient

tap – sucker

john – any body riding the boxcars

McGoof hound – someone who drank fortified wine

Wolf – older man

gazooney or prushun – male lover

dino – a daredevil

tag day – canvassing door-to-door for money