

**All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot.** BILL WAISER. Calgary: Fifth House Limited, 2003. 316 p. ISBN 1-894004-88-4.

The title of the book succinctly states the subject of this non-fiction account of an important event in Canada's history. The 1930s saw thousands of people, mostly single men, without work. In an attempt to keep the unemployed away from Communist influences, the Conservative government instituted relief camps where men worked, often performing hard labour, for a payment of twenty cents per day. Fed up with their situation, the men organized a union in an attempt to receive fair wages and better working conditions. When the government refused to improve the relief camp situation, more than a thousand men decided to take their case directly to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett. These men formed the On-to-Ottawa Trek and left Vancouver in early June 1935, headed for the capital. Riding on the tops of railcars, they were gathering members and momentum as they travelled across the Prairies. But the Trek came to an end in Regina on 1 July 1935 when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and local police clashed with the Trekkers at what had been a peaceful evening rally. When the Regina Riot, called "The Bloodiest Day in the Depression," ended in the early hours of the following day, the official record showed one man dead, dozens injured, and thousands of dollars in property damage. This book explores these events in precise detail and utilizes a plethora of archival sources, some never before published, to educate the reader about this incident in Canadian history.

The author of *All Hell Can't Stop Us* is Bill Waiser, a history professor at the University of Saskatchewan. He is a specialist in western and northern Canadian history and has previously written or co-written seven books as well as a series for CBC Radio. Waiser is no stranger to archives and sets the preface of this book at the Saskatchewan Archives, where he examines a bullet fired during the Regina Riot. Throughout the book, archival material from a diversity of archives, mainly the Saskatchewan Archives as well as Archives of Ontario, and the former National Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada), among others, are drawn upon at length to illuminate the story of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, Regina Riot, and subsequent trials and inquiry. Included in the book are thirty-two glossy pages of archival photographs, sketches, political cartoons, and posters, some in print for the first time. Consulting voluminous records, including new material, leads Waiser to assert that there were actually two men killed in the Riot, one more man than previously believed. Showing his experience as a researcher utilizing archival sources, he provides extensive endnotes and references the archives, *fonds*, or collection, and record numbers.

After the preface, there is a seven page introduction which gives a quick-and-dirty overview of the events leading up to the Riot, covering the reasons for the implementation of the relief camps and formation of the Trek. In the

introduction, Waiser takes the reader as far as the Trekkers arriving in Regina and foreshadows the trouble ahead. The main characters of the Trek are identified here, and this early mention of the men involved helps the reader recognize the lead characters when they are mentioned again. He then starts the first of twelve chapters, each beginning with a one page summary of what the reader is about to discover. This nicely segments the book and is good for hooking the reader's interest by briefly describing the upcoming action.

The book moves quickly, with Waiser setting the scene and then diving right into the action. By the third chapter the Trek has left Vancouver; however, it takes a few informative chapters to get to the climax of the journey, the Regina Riot. But when the Riot begins in Chapter Nine, Waiser paints a vivid picture of the actions of that fateful day, moving back and forth between various characters as the fighting spreads through downtown Regina. A city map at the front of the book proves useful at this point, as it allows the reader to better visualize the action of that day, described in two chapters. The previous chapters provide a suspenseful yet informative lead up to the Riot, while the subsequent chapters describe the aftermath, including generous detail of both the provincially appointed Regina Riot Inquiry Commission and the trials of several Trekkers. Although the city police and RCMP were cleared of any wrongdoing and the Trek movement faded away, the reader can feel some satisfaction that the story of the Trekkers, a group of young men facing a life of hopelessness, has finally been told.

*All Hell Can't Stop Us* is an excellent piece of Canadian non-fiction. It is thoroughly researched using an assortment of archival sources which Waiser meticulously references. He manages to present highly detailed information in a way that creates suspense and therefore makes the reader want to keep reading. The desperate situation for unemployed men in Canada is presented in a frank and honest manner, only occasionally resorting to emotionally manipulative tactics. *All Hell Can't Stop Us* details a classic example of an authority-provoked altercation and although it occurred almost seventy years ago, a reader can easily find similarities in contemporary situations. The importance of archival material as evidence of past events is clear from reading this book. These sources have been used to both capture the attention of readers, which shows the broad value of archives, as well as to highlight and clarify a little-known incident in Prairie history.

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