



Gregory S. Kealey, Reg Whitaker, eds.. *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935*. St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1995. 728 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-9695835-3-0.

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Published on H-Canada (January, 1996)

R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935 is a timely reminder that, historically, the fixation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on the colour red related to something other than their Disney-copyrighted uniforms. This volume, the fifth in a series with three more to come, is 652 pages of primary documents, specifically RCMP weekly security bulletins for 1935. The RCMP-produced bulletins were a weekly summary of radical activities in Canada, intended for the eyes of the nation's governing elite.

These documents are not, however, an intact collection for the year in question. The federal Access to Information Act, under which this material was acquired, allows for deletions under three criteria: information of a personal nature related to someone living or deceased for under twenty years; information received from a body outside of Canada; and information that could be injurious to the national security of Canada. In most cases the sections snipped out involve the names of individuals. (Researchers take note: often such names are readily available from contemporary newspaper accounts covering the same events as the RCMP bulletins.) The editors helpfully list each deletion and the criteria for its elimination. Something even more useful in a book of this size is a detailed index. In addition, the RCMP of 1935 offered assistance to the researcher by breaking

down the contents of each bulletin along provincial lines.

The documents in their entirety leave little doubt of the RCMP's obsession with the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). Not a single bulletin appears in this volume that does not in some way relate to the Mounted Police's arch-nemesis (this at time when fascist and Nazi organizations paraded around Canada praising Hitler). In many ways, however, the RCMP's concentration on the CPC was understandable. The year 1935 was the year of the "party of Lenin": numerous strikes organized by the Workers' Unity League (WUL); CPC-inspired hunger marches; and the CPC-organized and -led "On to Ottawa Trek," which culminated on July 1, 1935, in the Regina Riot.

Not surprisingly, the bulletins offer very detailed information on the activities of the CPC in 1935. The force called on a variety of sources, including informants, secret agents, regular members, and newspaper accounts, to provide material such as transcripts of speeches, lists of prominent activists present at meetings and rallies, attendance totals at these gatherings, and even the amount of change dropped in collection plates. (All of the Mountie resources remain unlisted in the actual bulletins; little of the nature of the force, aside from its obsession with communists, comes through in these records.) Mountie officials and members of the government of Prime Minister R. B. Bennett considered all of these variables

as significant indicators of declining or increasing levels of support for the CPC.

The value of these bulletins to the government in this context is debatable. The contents of each are completely descriptive, with little in the way of advice offered to the politicians of the day. In at least one case the government missed the signs of brewing trouble: several bulletins (January 1935) make reference to the growing discontent in relief camps in British Columbia. Eventually the members of these camps abandoned them en masse and proceeded to Vancouver (April 1935). At the beginning of June, 1,200 relief camp strikers and unemployed men set off for Ottawa on the tops of rail cars; even then, and despite RCMP reports, the government of Prime Minister Bennett failed to act. Only several days after the "On to Ottawa Trek" began, and when it became clear that the movement would not dissolve of its own accord, did Ottawa order the RCMP to halt the trekkers in Regina, Saskatchewan.

The significance to researchers of the bulletins, as historian John Manley notes in his introduction, is the insight they provide on the activities of the CPC and its affiliated organizations: the WUL, the Canadian Labour Defence League, the Relief Camp Workers' Union, and the Farmers' Unity League. He argues that "[o]ne is struck again and again by their [the bulletins'] matter-of-fact realism. One must remember that these documents were tailored to suit an audience of ministers and officials who would not have appreciated being the recipients of misinformation" (p. 11).

One note of caution, however. Manley does not take into consideration the possibility that both the Canadian communists and the RCMP may have exaggerated the strength of the CPC: the CPC in order to convince listeners of its potential as a revolutionary movement; and the RCMP to help justify the Mounties' ever increasing security role, not to mention a bigger budget. Nevertheless, these bulletins have one additional strength. Even for the non-specialist, they supply a contem-

porary perspective, albeit an ideologically prejudiced one, on a very tumultuous year in Canadian history.

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Citation: Steve Hewitt. Review of Kealey, Gregory S.; Whitaker, Reg, eds. *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. January, 1996.

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