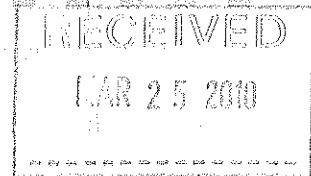
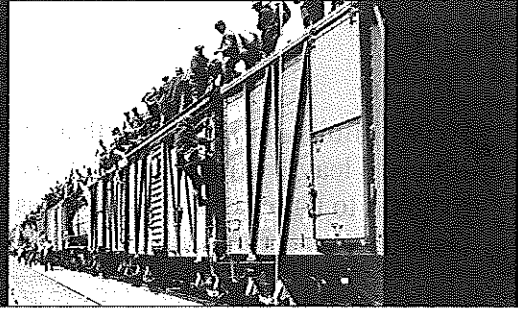


75th ANNIVERSARY
**ON TO
OTTAWA
TREK**
1935 ~ 2010



Lori Mayhew
New Westminster & District Labour Council
105 - 3920 Norland Ave.
Burnaby, BC
V5G 4K7

March 20, 2010

Dear Sister Mayhew:

Re: On to Ottawa Trek 75th Anniversary

You may know that we are commemorating the 75th anniversary of the historic On to Ottawa Trek this June. We are requesting your donation to help support our efforts to mark this special anniversary, and to link the issues of 1935 to contemporary struggles.

The major event will be on June 6th at CRAB Park at the North foot of Main St., Vancouver.

The park is next to the railway lines where the Trek began on June 3, 1935 when over 1,000 young unemployed men climbed atop boxcars to take their plea for work and wages to the federal government.

The 75th anniversary celebration will include major speakers, music and a modern day soup kitchen.

It will also include the dedication of a bronze historical marker at the Trek site, giving permanent recognition of this significant moment in our labour history. We will also launch a longer term campaign to commission a major art installation or monument to illustrate the story of the trek for years to come.

ON TO OTTAWA 75th COMMITTEE

256 N. Gamma Avenue, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 1X9 • dtyorke@telus.net • www.ontoottawa.ca



We will finish on June 6th with a send-off for the 2010 Homelessness Relay delegation, who will leave by train later that day to take their demands for a national housing program to Ottawa. We hope to assist with the costs of sending three representatives of the homeless community to participate in this contemporary event.

Our total fundraising objective is \$44,500. The costs are estimated as follows:

- June 6 celebration (sound, music, travel, permits etc.) \$5,000
- Bronze plaque design, production, installation and insurance \$7,000
- 2010 Homelessness Relay to Ottawa (3 at \$2,500 each) \$7,500
- Seed money for major art installation (total cost \$100,000 plus) \$25,000

To date, the On to Ottawa 75th Committee is endorsed by the BC Federation of Labour, the Vancouver & District Labour Council, the New Westminster & District Labour Council, the Fraser Valley Labour Council, the CUPE Fraser Valley District Council, CUPE BC Division, the Impact on Communities Coalition, the On to Ottawa Historical Society, and the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association.

Several donations have been received, ranging from \$200 and \$1,000.

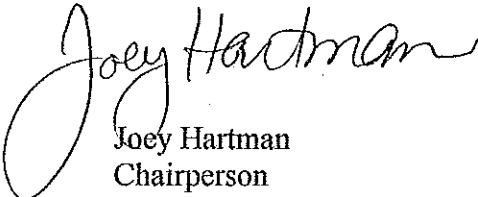
We very much hope that you will be able to make a significant contribution to assist us in reaching our goal of \$44,500. It will go a long way to keeping alive the story and spirit of the Trek, and example of activism that continues to inspire the labour movement and community social justice groups alike.

All donations will be acknowledged. Please make your cheque payable to the "On to Ottawa 75th Committee".

We invite you and your members to join us on June 6th, and to visit the website at www.ontoottawa.ca for more information. We can also provide an article about the Trek for your publications, and enclose one recently published in *Trade Talk* as an example.

If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to contact us, and thank you very much for considering this funding request.

In solidarity,


Joey Hartman
Chairperson

On to Ottawa Trek Common issues in 1935 & 2010

By Joe Barrett

The photo of angry and frustrated unemployed men hopping aboard boxcars in Vancouver to make their case in Ottawa is etched into the Canadian psyche. This image captures the desperation of the Great Depression, the plight of the unemployed and the activist spirit of the time.

The On to Ottawa Trek happened 75 years ago and labour organizations and community groups are planning to recreate the event. They want to draw attention to some of the issues that exist even now, in one of the richest countries in the world.

In the spring of 1935, unemployed workers were pushed to the edge. Forced for months into decrepit relief camps, they faced iron discipline and exploitation by ex-army commanders. They worked six and a half days a week for twenty cents a day.

In B.C., hundreds of single, unemployed men finally couldn't take it anymore and walked out of the camps to protest in Vancouver. On April 4, 1935 and on the orders of Vancouver Mayor Gerry McGeer, they were beaten by the city police. The protesters decided to take their demands for work, wages and the end of relief camps to Ottawa.

On June 3 and 4, roughly 1,000

trekkers met at the train yard at the foot of Gore Street and began climbing onto boxcars heading east. More joined in cities along the rail route. Now assembled in Regina, the ragtag group had grown to over 3,000 with thousands more waiting to join in Winnipeg, Thunder Bay and Toronto.

The federal government was getting nervous. Conniving Prime Minister R.B. Bennett invited just the On to Ottawa leaders to a meeting in Ottawa. Eight of the men accepted the invitation.

However, rather than hear the leaders' concerns, Bennett used the meeting to hurl abuse at them. But that wasn't the worst of it.

On July 1, about 1,500 members of the public and 300 trekkers met at 8 p.m. at Market Square to find out what was happening. At the sound of a whistle, RCMP officers, under orders from Bennett, and city police charged in, beating people at random and instigating a riot. Hundreds of people were beaten to a pulp, the trek leaders were arrested and one police officer was killed.

The trek was stopped but opposition to R.B. Bennett intensified. The



Famous image from the National Library and Archives of Canada showing unemployed men climbing aboard boxcars at the start of the On to Ottawa Trek.

Conservative government was defeated three months later in a general election.

The new Liberal government was compelled to disassemble the camps and establish unemployment insurance and other government social safety nets.

The ideals, courage and sacrifices of the On to Ottawa trekkers have inspired generations of Canadian labour and social activists.

This June, the On to Ottawa Historical Society and community and labour activists will use the 75th anniversary of the trek to draw attention to the problems of poverty and homelessness.

A soup kitchen will be set up in CRAB Park followed by a symbolic send-off of homeless and anti-poverty activists who are beginning a journey to Ottawa. A national conference will highlight issues of unemployment, homelessness and poverty.