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**100 YEARS**  
1919-2019  
A CENTURY OF SOLIDARITY

**The Manitoba  
Teachers'  
Society**

# A CENTURY OF SOLIDARITY

ISSUE 1

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Find all of your Winnipeg General Strike centennial information at:  
**MFL.CA/1919**



# CELEBRATING THE LEGACY OF THE STRIKE

2019 marks the 100th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike, a crucially important event in the history of our labour movement and our country. For over six weeks, Winnipeg was the site of one of the longest general strikes in Canadian history, which would have a profound impact on the development of the modern labour movement and Canadian politics for decades to come.

Winnipeg in 1919 was a city rife with class conflict. Factories were shutting down, and many soldiers returning from World War One were unable to find decent work. Working families resented the huge profits made during the war at the expense of workers and soldiers. Inflation was out of control and the working class was unable to keep up. The cost of living had risen 64 per cent since 1913. Workers demanded the right to collective bargaining and a decent, living wage – rights we continue to defend today.

Over the course of the six weeks-long strike, business and industry ground to a halt, with the central strike committee coordinating only essential services (like milk deliveries). Many peaceful protests and marches were held, even in the face of violence carried out by the so-called 'specials', replacement police officers hired by the Citizens' Committee of 1000 (Winnipeg's business elite) and provided with wagon spokes as weapons to use against the strikers, after the regular city police force stood in solidarity with other striking workers.

The aftermath of the strike saw the institution of a minimum wage, improved workplace health and safety laws, employment standards, and eventually many of the labour rights we have today. It was also a catalyst for strengthened labour-oriented political parties, first with the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and then with the New Democratic Party (NDP).

Today, Manitoba's labour movement is hard at work preparing to celebrate the legacy of the Winnipeg General Strike 100 years on. Over the coming months, we will be holding many special events and presenting many commemorative projects to celebrate this special anniversary. Winnipeg will also host a large number of union conferences in 2019, as

labour organizations across the country mark this important milestone.

That is why we have developed this guide, to help conference organizers and attendees plan out their stays in Winnipeg this year.

We cannot stress enough how overwhelming the support for the centennial celebration has been from the labour movement here in Manitoba and across Canada. Without the dedication of all of the unions recognized on the back page of this newsletter, none of these events would happen.

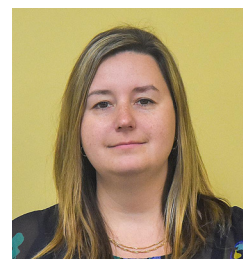
We have developed this newsletter to provide important information about the events and legacy pieces that will mark the exciting year ahead, but also to provide readers will intriguing content to bring the history and importance of the strike alive. We hope that you continue to turn to the pages of upcoming newsletters to find out more information about the exciting things that are in the works for 2019 here in Manitoba.

In solidarity,

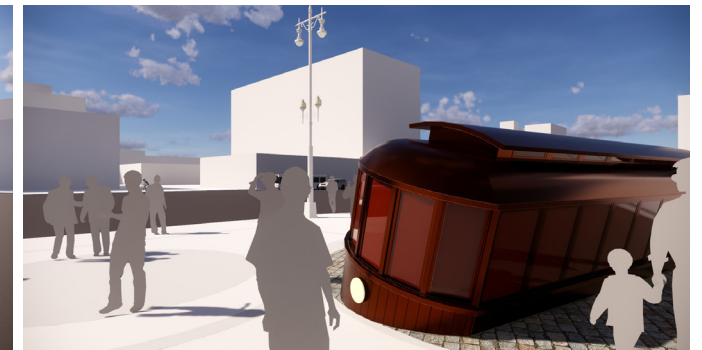
Kevin Rebeck and Basia Sokal  
Co-chairs of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike Centennial Committee



**Kevin Rebeck**  
President, Manitoba  
Federation of Labour



**Basia Sokal**  
President, Winnipeg  
Labour Council



## STREETCAR TO SERVE AS PERMANENT MONUMENT TO WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE

By Noam Gonick

The countdown to the 100th Anniversary of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike is well underway.

The strike was an important catalyst for the development of Canada's modern-day labour movement. One of the concrete takeaways from this seminal event in Canadian history is the most famous image of the tipped streetcar surrounded by onlookers photographed by L.B. Foote.

Until last year, the only acknowledgment of this historical moment was a plaque hidden in the underground walkway beneath City Hall. The Winnipeg Arts Council is overseeing this project with help from Heritage Canada. Sculptor Bernie Miller and I set out to create a memorial streetcar in bronze adjacent to the site of Bloody Saturday on the present-day Pantages Playhouse Plaza at Market and Main Street, one of the city's busiest intersections.

We wanted a visually impactful work illuminated at night, its angular profile sinking into the plaza's surface, connecting us back across the century to L.B. Foote's famous photo.

DMS Industrial Contractors - a unionized shop - are preparing to weld the sub-frame for a replica of the Brill streetcar that was tipped off its tracks and set ablaze.

The overturned streetcar is one of the most enduring images from the six week-long strike. During this time, trolley car service was one of many services halted by the strike, as the city came to a near standstill, with only essential services continuing through coordination of the Strike Committee.

Then, on June 21, in the midst of a 30,000 strong peaceful rally at City Hall, a streetcar appeared on Main Street, in provocative defiance of the strike. The tipping of the streetcar, and the violent response by mounted police, which included shooting and killing Mike Sokowolski and Mike Schezerbanowicz (who died later of gangrene), is widely considered to have been the inevitable result of an economic elite bent on inciting anger and chaos to bring about an end to the strike.

With construction of the replica streetcar now well underway, we expect the art piece will be on display by next summer, serving as a permanent site to honour the legacy of the strike, to celebrate the important gains of the last century, and to organize for the debates and struggles still to come.





# 100 Years WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE 1919-2019

## 2019 Events Presented by Manitoba's Unions

### 1919 SOCIAL

**Presented by Myers LLP**

May 11 // 8:00 pm - 1:00 am // Ukrainian Labour Temple (we regret this venue is not accessible)

### WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE CENTENNIAL GALA DINNER

**Presented by Manitoba Building Trades**

May 15 // Cocktails at 5:30 pm, Program starts at 6:30 pm // RBC Convention Centre

### SOLIDARITY FOREVER PARADE & COMMUNITY CONCERT (FREE)

**Presented by UFCW Local 832 and CUPE Manitoba**

May 25 // Parade will run from the Exchange District to Memorial Park // 11:00 am - Noon  
Concert in Memorial Park // 12:30 - 6:00 pm

### RISE UP 100: SONGS FOR THE NEXT CENTURY CONCERT (FREE)

**Presented by MGEU**

June 8 // Old Market Square // 2:00 pm - 11:00 pm

**\*For tickets to the 1919 Social and the Centennial Gala Dinner, call 204-947-1400**

Find all of your Winnipeg General Strike centennial information at:

**MFL.CA/1919**

## WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE FOUGHT FOR MANY OF THE RIGHTS WORKERS ENJOY TODAY

**By Sharon Reilly**

On 15 May 1919, some 35,000 Winnipeg workers joined together to launch what would become known as the Winnipeg General Strike to demand better wages and the right to collective bargaining.

The high unemployment and poor working and living conditions that led to the strike had their roots in the growth of the city itself. Campaigns by civic and commercial leaders to attract immigrants for agriculture and industry resulted in the dramatic growth of Winnipeg's population from 26,000, in 1891, to 162,000 in 1916.

Thousands of immigrants settled in Winnipeg's North End, where factories and warehouses bordered the rail yards that stretched across the city. These neighbourhoods supported vibrant German, Ukrainian, Jewish, Polish, British and other working-class communities with their own political, educational, religious and cultural institutions.

These neighbourhoods were noisy, crowded and sooty. Houses were often cheaply made and subdivided so landlords could rent more rooms. Sanitation was poor, and these areas were hit especially hard by outbreaks of typhoid, tuberculosis, and pneumonia.

Many residents became active in labour unions and socialist politics to improve their living conditions. The solidarity of Winnipeg workers in 1919 was rooted in labour activism that began decades before. By the 1900s, a powerful craft union movement had emerged and many strikes were fought before the First World War.

During the war workers experienced low wages, cutbacks in some trades, and speed-ups in others. Many workers faced dangerous and unhealthy work. Child labour was common. Inflation meant a decline in real income, and after the war ended many industries closed. Lay-offs and the return of unemployed soldiers increased unemployment significantly.

Strike activity rose sharply across Canada during and after the war. In May 1918, a general strike of civic workers was averted through last minute negotiations.

From 1894 - 1918, workers' concerns were discussed in The (People's) Voice, published by the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council. In 1918, this paper was succeeded by the Western Labor News.

Articles here and in the socialist-oriented publications of non-English speaking groups reflected the intense debate among socialists and labourists over labour's involvement in politics. Winnipeg became a centre for political activism in Canada and supported influential locals of the Socialist Party of Canada, Social Democratic Party, Independent Labor Party, and other organizations.

Mutual benefit societies also flourished in Winnipeg in these years. These groups reflected their members' belief that economic security and social improvement for the poor could only come from collective association.

Events during the war brought socialists and labourists together to search for new strategies to fight for workers' rights. By 1918, labour meetings in Winnipeg increasingly heard the call for a One Big Union (OBU) and general strike.

The Winnipeg General Strike sought to achieve collective bargaining and a living wage for all workers. Many strikers shared a vision of a new society created through democratic processes. As they wrote in 1919, "workers want control of industry in their own hands as soon as possible so they can get the full product of their toil and eliminate production for profit. But they will wait until this is accomplished through constitutional processes."



1918

DECEMBER 22  
Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC) meeting at Walker Theater protests the anti-labour War Measures Act.

# WINNIPEG 1918 - 1921

## GENERAL STRIKE

### TIMELINE

1919

JANUARY 10  
Socialist Party of Canada meeting at Majestic Theatre calls for end of capitalism.

MARCH 13  
At the Western Labour Conference in Calgary, delegates vote to form the revolutionary One Big Union.

MAY 1  
After months of negotiations, all unions belonging to the Building Trades Council go on strike.

MAY 2  
Metal Trades Council workers call a strike.

MAY 6  
In light of the refusal of employers to bargain with the Building Trades Council and the Metal Trades Council, the WTLC resolves to poll affiliates on a general sympathetic strike.

MAY 13  
Results of the WTLC general strike vote were overwhelming supportive: 8,667 for, 645 against. A general Strike Committee is formed with representation from every union.

MAY 15  
The Winnipeg General Strike begins. The first to walk out were the 'Hello Girls' - Winnipeg's telephone operators. By 11 a.m., 30,000 union and non-union workers had walked off the job.

MAY 16  
Winnipeg's business community forms the Citizens' Committee of 1000 to oppose the strike.

MAY 17  
The Strike Committee requests meeting with City to discuss maintenance of essential services. The Strike Committee goes on to issue authorization cards for essential services such as milk deliveries.

MAY 22  
Arthur Meighen, Acting Minister of Justice, and Senator Gideon Robertson, Minister of Labour, arrive in Winnipeg.

MAY 25  
Senator Robertson orders postal employees to return to work. The province and city issue similar orders to their employees. A meeting of 5,000 strikers at Victoria Park rejects these ultimatums.

MAY 30  
City police are ordered to sign anti-union pledge. They refuse but promise to uphold law and order.

MAY 31, JUNE 1, AND JUNE 3  
Thousands of returned soldiers take part in a march in solidarity with the strike.

JUNE 3  
The Citizens' Committee of 1000 calls for deportation of "aliens," claiming that the General Strike is the result of agitation from immigrants - ads are run in Winnipeg daily papers calling for "alien" deportation.

Sympathetic strikes are held in Brandon, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto and Amherst, Nova Scotia.

JUNE 4 AND 5  
Anti-strike Veterans parade.

JUNE 6  
The federal government amends The Immigration Act to allow for the deportation, without trial, of anyone not born in Canada accused of sedition.

JUNE 8  
J.S. Woodsworth returns to Winnipeg and addresses 10,000 workers.

JUNE 9  
Winnipeg's Mayor Charles Gray fires the entire city police force for refusing the City's demand to renounce the union and strike, and hires 'Specials' to replace them. The 'Specials' were recruited and paid for by the Citizens' Committee of 1000 and were armed with baseball bats.

JUNE 16-17  
Metal-trades employers propose a settlement to the strike. At the same time, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) raid labour halls and strike leaders' homes, arresting ten leaders of the Central Strike Committee.

JUNE 18  
It's announced that arrested strike leaders will be held for deportation proceedings and will also be denied bail.

JUNE 21  
In what would come to be known as "Bloody Saturday," a silent protest of the arrest of the strike leaders is attacked by Mounted Police and 'Specials', resulting in the wounding of 34 people, two deaths, and 84 arrests.

JUNE 25  
The Strike Committee announces the end of strike and calls upon workers to continue the struggle in the political arena.

JUNE 26  
The Winnipeg General Strike ends at 11 a.m.

JULY AND AUGUST  
The Strike Committee reorganizes as the Defence Committee to support the strike leaders facing trial.

SEPTEMBER 2  
A parade of 8,000 workers walks in support of the arrested strike leaders. A national campaign is launched to raise funds for their defence.

DECEMBER 23  
R.B Russell sentenced to two years at Stony Mountain Penitentiary for seditious conspiracy.

1920

JANUARY - FEBRUARY  
Strike leader Fred Dixon is acquitted.

JANUARY - APRIL  
Strike leader A.A. Heaps is acquitted but leader R.E. Bray is sentenced to six months in prison. Leaders John Queen, Bill Pritchard, William Ivens, Richard Johns, and George Armstrong all receive one-year jail terms.

SEPTEMBER  
One Big Union Headquarters moved to Winnipeg from Vancouver, under attack from governments, businesses, and conservative trade unionists.

OCTOBER 5  
In the Manitoba provincial election, Fred Dixon, John Queen, George Armstrong, and William Ivens are elected to seats in the Legislature on a united slate of Independent Labour Party and Socialist Party candidates.

NOVEMBER 20  
Winnipeg Civic Election: Three Independent Labor Party members elected to City Council and three to School Board.

1921

J.S. Woodsworth is elected to the House of Commons as a member of the Independent Labour Party.

1925

A.A. Heaps is elected to the House of Commons as a member of the Independent Labour Party.

