

Winnipeg General Strike

1. **When/where** did the strike happen?

2. **Who** was involved in the “mass” strike?

3. **Why** did the workers strike? (what did want to change)

4. **How** did the government react to the strike?

5. **What** were some things that happened?

Winnipeg General Strike 1919

In the years following the first World War there was much labor unrest in Canada. The wartime economy had caused the cost of living to increase but wages had been kept low. Although there were no significant groups in Canada who were committed to violent revolution, there were many laborers and union leaders in western Canada who wanted to peacefully revolutionize Canada by radically increasing the political power of the working class.

The preferred method of increasing the political clout of the working class in western Canada was called the One Big Union (OBU). The idea was to organize all the workers in each province into one big union. This union would have tremendous bargaining power and could use this power to better the lot of working people. In March 1919, at Calgary, the Western Labor Conference was held. The delegates at this conference agreed that Ottawa was not doing enough for the worker in western Canada.

These leaders wished to demand that the government recognize the legal right of collective bargaining for the workers of Canada. They agreed in principle on using the ultimate bargaining tool available to labor; the general strike. In May, a union organization called the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC) was trying to act as a bargaining agent for the striking metal workers of the city. The owners refused to recognize the WTLC. On May 15, 1919 the WTLC called for a general strike to shut down the city of Winnipeg. The strike was fought as much to establish the principle of collective bargaining as to gain better wages and working conditions.

More than 30 000 union and non-union workers joined in the strike. It included city and government workers. Even the police were sympathetic to the strike, they remained on duty only at the request of the strike committee. A week into the strike it became apparent that certain essential services, like food delivery, needed to be maintained for the welfare of the city despite the strike. The strike committee ordered the men who performed these jobs back to work. Many began to ask the

basic question of who was running the city, the elected government or the strike committee.

In addition to the illegal power of the strike committee, many Canadians feared the general strike on openly racist grounds. At the time there was a large population of recent immigrants from eastern Europe working in Winnipeg. Because of the revolutions in Russia and eastern Europe, many English Canadians feared that these poor immigrant laborers were revolutionary operatives trying to rally good Canadian workers to the side of Communism. In response to these racist suspicions the government passed a law allowing the police and immigration officials sweeping new powers of deportation. Any naturalized immigrant could be deported if they were even suspected of seditious activity.

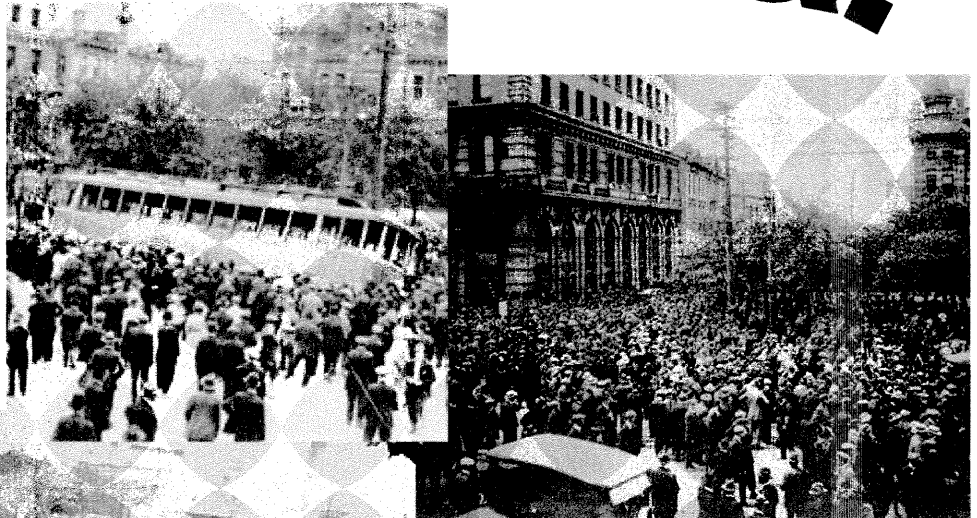
After five weeks of the General strike the government had enough. They fired striking government workers and hired a group of war vets to act as "special constables" to break the strike. Before sunrise on Saturday June 21st 1919, police arrested ten strike leaders including R. B. Russell and future CCF founder J.S. Woodsworth.

Later that day a peaceful demonstration began down Main Street to protest the arrests. The demonstration began to get out of hand when the protesters set fire to an empty streetcar. In response to this act of violence the police charged into the crowd with baseball bats. The crowd fought back with their fists and by throwing stones. The police then charged the crowd twice more, this time firing guns. This ended the demonstration and the crowd dispersed in fear. Two people died and dozens were injured on the day that came to be known as Bloody Saturday. After Bloody Saturday, things changed. The police and special constables patrolled the streets in cars fitted with machine guns and additional strike leaders were arrested. By June 25 the workers of Winnipeg gave up their peaceful attempt to gain recognition of their right to collective bargaining because of the threat of more government sanctioned violence. The Winnipeg General Strike ended without the workers achieving their ends.

Since the event their "demands" have been achieved however.

Extra! Extra!

Who?
What?
When?
Where?
Why?
How?



“Bloody Saturday in Winnipeg”

Write a news article about the events on June 21st in Winnipeg on Main Street (A.K.A. Bloody Saturday).

- 1. Start with the 5 W's and How...**
- 2. Give more details about what happened**
- 3. Give some background on why this ended up happening**
- 4. Include a picture**
- 5. Create a catchy title**

Bonus!