

**The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike:
Media Manipulation and Censorship**

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2019 marks the 100th anniversary of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. The strike started on May 15 and continued for weeks, where around 30,000 workers walked off their jobs to protest for better wages and working conditions. Back in 1919, the only way for the locals to get news about the strike was by public announcements and the press. The mainstream press in Winnipeg at the time reported events through a specific lens; it presented information to the public in a way to make the strike seem like it was an attempt to overthrow the government at the time, similar to recent events of the by the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution. The purpose of this was to influence its readers to believe a certain idea about the Strike.¹ It is the press's responsibility to present the truth and represent a variety of voices in relation to what is going on around the world and to not show bias. At the time, the mainstream press in Winnipeg improperly presented the Winnipeg General Strike to the public by censoring portions of the story and by doing so they managed to manipulate the public's perspective on the events in a way that tried to influence the general public against the strike. The press continues to falsely publish the full story in current events. The rhetoric in the press made the public in Winnipeg at the time believe that it was a Soviet Revolution.

During the 1919 General Strike, there were a few newspapers that reported what is happening to the Winnipeg locals, like the *Manitoba Free Press* and *Toronto Daily Star*. These press sources were usually quite biased and manipulated the readers to see the strike as a bad thing because they were influenced by the Committee of 1000, who were against the strike.² In

¹ Dupuis, Michael. *Winnipeg's General Strike: Reports from the Front Lines*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014.

² Reilly, Nolan and Reilly, Sharon. *1919 Winnipeg General Strike*. Manitoba Federation of Labour, 1986

the *Manitoba Free Press*, the newspaper layout would be displayed for reading so that most news about the strike was either next to or merged with news about the Bolshevik Revolution.³ Other pages made direct claims that the strike is a Bolshevik overthrow of the government. However, the *Toronto Daily Star* would tell both sides of the story; that the purpose of the strike was an attempt to overthrow the government and that the strike was also an effort of the workers demanding their rights.⁴ Both the *Manitoba Free Press* and the *Toronto Daily Star's* powerful rhetoric made the readers believe most of what was published. They were the upper-class press that was being published in 1919, but there was also the working class.

During the events leading up to the strike, the workers had their own paper called the *Western Labour News*. The *Western Labour News* was led by the leading strike figure, William Ivens. He was appointed the editor, but also helped in organizing gatherings to announce news publicly about the strike. The strikers and strike supporters gathered regularly in Victoria Park and held organized numerous other small gatherings around Winnipeg to update workers as to current strike news. Although the anti-strike groups saw these gatherings as an opportunity to sometimes start violence, these were warning to the later events of Bloody Saturday.⁵ Even though the strikers did publish their side of the strike and spoke about why they were doing the strike it was never enough to spread the word to the other local Winnipeg public who still saw the strike as the Bolsheviks overthrowing the Government.

³ *Manitoba Free Press*. Microfilm 303, Millenium Library, 1919.

⁴ Dupuis, Michael. *Winnipeg's General Strike: Reports from the Front Lines*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014.

⁵ Reilly, Nolan and Reilly, Sharon. *1919 Winnipeg General Strike*. Manitoba Federation of Labour, 1986.

Currently, in 2019, the people who hold power like the government and corporations still censor issues that are important for everyone to be aware of. In China, the Chinese government are placing Chinese Muslims in concentration camps and making them do activities that are forbidden to their beliefs.⁶ There are also many oil spills around the world, including a massive spill off the U.S Gulf Coast,⁷ which the government keeps quiet about in order to save their reputation and money from a cleanup.⁸

There was, and still is a lot of censorship in the press and media. We may have so many more social networks to get news from, but it does not mean there is not censorship. Just how the 1919 General Strike was painted in a certain light by mainstream media and presented to the public, is the same as what is happening right now all around the world with reference to thousands of different issues. It is something that will always be a part of this world and can never stop. Although standing up for what you believe in is right and making yourself heard is one of the greatest lessons you can take away from the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, when you stand up for what you believe is right people will surprise you and support the cause. If the workers never went on strike and demanded better wages and rights, Canada would not be the same as it is today. Everything we decide to do now will determine our future, whether that is sharing about oil spills and finding a solution to save our environment from pollution, or making the world aware of the concentration camps from Chinese Muslims to help stop making people change into something they are not. Since 1919 and most likely before, censorship has always been a problem in the media because not everyone sees the whole story or knows about the story.

⁶ Sudworth, John. *China's Hidden Camps*. BBC News. October 24, 2018.

⁷ Minaj, Hasan. *Patriot Act: Season 1, Episode 4*. November 11, 2018.

⁸ Fears, Darryl. *This Hidden Oil Spill Has Been Going For 14 Years And Is About to Overtake The BP Disaster*. ScienceAlert. October 22, 2018

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