

WINNIPEG ON STRIKE!

WHEN WORKERS STOOD TOGETHER IN 1919, PEOPLE ACROSS THE COUNTRY SUPPORTED THEM. AND EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE BEATEN BACK, THEY CHANGED CANADA FOREVER.

MAY 1

After three months of asking employers for a 44-hour work week and a raise, about 1,400 metal and construction workers in Winnipeg go on strike.

**67 LABOR UNIONS JOIN
IN GENERAL WALK-OUT;
INDUSTRY PARALYZED**

ALL NEGOTIATIONS ARE BROKEN OFF—ROBERTSON WIRES OTTAWA
APPARENTLY CAN DO NOTHING, BECAUSE DISPUTANTS REFUSE TO ARBITRATE.

MAY 11

Members of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTL) start voting on whether to walk off their jobs in support of the striking workers. Eventually the total will be about 11,000 in favour of a strike and about 500 against it.

MAY 15

The general strike is supposed to start at 11:00 in the morning, but it gets underway earlier when 500 women who work as telephone operators don't show up for the 7:00 a.m. shift. There are no streetcars running, no mail being delivered, no phone calls getting through. Factories, offices and stores fall silent and shut down as employees join the strike. More than 30,000 workers walk off the job, affecting more than half of the city's families. That's like everyone who lives in Lloydminster, Sask., Stratford, Ont., or Sydney, Nova Scotia being on strike. Winnipeg's mayor, Charles Gray, warns on the front page of the Winnipeg Free Press, "Citizens, go about your business quietly. Do not congregate in crowds."

Soldiers back from the First World War wanted a better life than the one they'd had. There weren't enough jobs to go around, and few workers had unions to fight for their rights. Canadian workers were starting to say that if the country could find money for war, it could find money to pay them better and reduce the hours they had to work. And in Winnipeg in the spring of 1919, it all boiled over into the biggest strike Canada has ever seen.



MAY 16

A group of the city's business leaders forms The Citizens' Committee of 1,000 to oppose the strike and to uphold "proper respect for the law." They work to keep some city services running.

MAY 25

The federal minister of labour says he will fire postal workers if they don't return to work. Five thousand strikers rally in downtown Victoria Park saying they won't accept this or any other such order, such as the one given to the telephone operators.



MAY 29

The city's police officers are told they have until 1:00 the next afternoon to sign a statement saying they will not take part in the strike. They refuse but promise to uphold the law.

JUNE 1

Ten thousand men who served in the First World War march to the Manitoba government building in support of the strike.



PROCLAMATION

By virtue of the authority vested in me I do hereby order that all persons do refrain from forming or taking part in any parades or congregating in crowds in or upon any of the streets of the City of Winnipeg, and do hereby request of all law abiding citizens the full compliance with this proclamation.

Dated at the City of Winnipeg, this 5th day of June, A.D. 1919.

CHARLES F. GRAY, Mayor.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

JUNE 9

Nearly every member of the Winnipeg police force is fired. The Citizens' Committee starts hiring replacements known as "special police" or "specials."

JUNE 16-17

During the night the North West Mounted Police and specials arrest 10 men who are supposedly leaders of the strike and take them to Stony Mountain jail north of the city. Complaints about the arrests pour in from all across Canada.





JUNE 21 BLOODY SATURDAY

Marchers start gathering downtown around 1:30 in the afternoon for a silent parade to protest the arrests. A streetcar running through the crowd is pulled off its tracks and set on fire. Specials and the North West Mounted Police start to move in. At about 2:30, the mayor orders the crowd to go home within half an hour. A gunshot sounds, likely from one of the mounted police firing a warning. The crowd breaks loose. The specials and mounted police attack, beating marchers with clubs and firing shots. People in the crowd throw stones. Around 2:45, the mayor calls for the military to bring more mounted officers and motorized machine guns to get rid of the crowd. Dozens of marchers have been injured, and one killed. A second man dies later when gunshot wounds to his legs become infected.



JUNE 26

At 11:00 a.m., the Winnipeg General Strike is over. More than one hundred people will be arrested in the days to come.

The strike may not have been seen as a clear success at the time, but it brought change that shapes Canada to this day. Canadian workers and those who had come from Britain stood beside those from other countries who had often been looked down on. Strikes took place all over the country in support of the Winnipeg workers, bringing their ideas and demands more respect. When the men who had been arrested went on trial, most were convicted, their fates decided by juries who had been chosen ahead of time to ensure they were not sympathetic to the strikers. But the convictions backfired when several of the men were voted into office in provincial, federal and city elections, even while some were still in jail. Many leaders of the strike helped form the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, which eventually became the New Democratic Party of today.