In 1919, workers across Canada revolted. Strikes protested issues such as low wages, long hours, and a lack of collective bargaining rights. In some cities, like Winnipeg, general strikes were called in solidarity with local strikers. In other cities, like Calgary (Treaty 7 territory), a general sympathy strike was organized to support the Winnipeg General Strike. All told, workers in Canada spent 3.4 million days on strike in 1919.

CALGARY STRIKE BULLETIN
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE
No. 3  JUNE 2, 1919  Price Five Cents

WORKERS, AWEAKE!

Public Utilities Refused the Right to Strike—Postal Workers Lose Their Jobs Forever

Fellow workers! Do you realize by the Government's action in dismissing the Postal Workers from the service, that what it has taken Trades Unions years to obtain, without warning, has been taken from them and lost for years to come. The Amalgamated Postal Workers, with branches in every city in the West, are affiliated with the Trade Councils in their respective cities. This organization is one that is recognized by the Post Office Department and by the Government itself.

Now then, Trades Unionists, are you prepared to see the strike weapon taken from you forever, or are you prepared to take immediate steps to see that the Postal Workers are reinstated?

There is no middle course, boys—there is no standing on the fence. This is a clear-cut issue for the people to decide.

The strike started on Thursday, June 2nd. The Calgary Strike Bulletin No. 3 (2 June 1919).

Railroadmen Solid

Winnipeg, May 30—All points standing firm and ignoring ultimatum. Whole Canadian Brotherhood is behind us.—Canadian National Railway Employees.

Edmonton, June 1.—At a mass meeting of the C.P., G.T.P., C.N., E.B. & B.C. Federated Railways voted unanimously to stay out until Winnipeg's demands are settled. Have advised all points. Position firm here. Will advise later.

(Special to the Calgary Herald)

Thief River Falls, May 30.—One thousand returned veterans called at the Parliament buildings at noon and pressed their views on Premier Norris and his cabinet. They claimed that the Provincial Government should not ignore this right of labor unions to administer their own affairs. The move made to secure legislation to make collective bargaining between employer and employee compulsory is what the unions protest against.


The Calgary strike, between 26 May and 25 June, was part of this strike wave and involved 1,500 workers.

William Irvine, Calgary's Unitarian minister and editor of the Alberta Non-Partisan, wrote at the time:

"We are witnessing today perhaps the greatest uprising of the common people in Canadian history."

The strike was opposed by a “Citizens’ Committee” of Calgary elites and by different branches of the state. As Prime Minister Robert Borden wrote later, “it became necessary in some communities to repress revolutionary methods with a stern hand and from this I did not shrink.”

The 1919 strikes were a sign that working people in Canada, including Alberta, were not afraid to organize and strike in solidarity to build a better world. The workers’ revolt of 1919 holds many lessons for those carrying on this fight today.