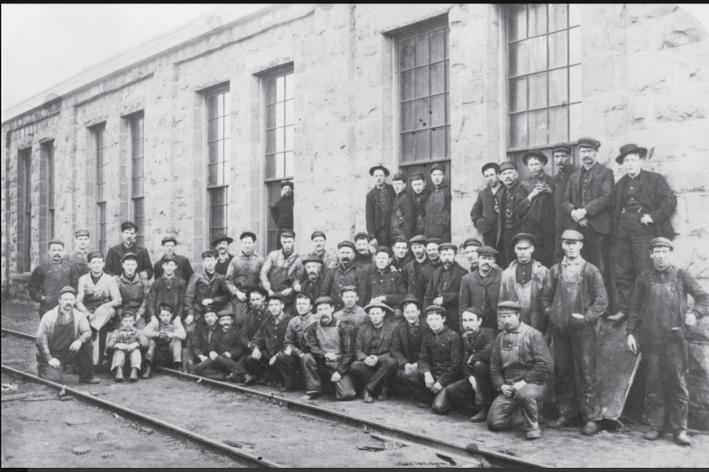


Prelude to Revolt and the Lessons of Solidarity

In 1918, Calgary workers proved willing to strike for collective bargaining rights and improved wages and conditions. Over the course of the spring and summer, hotel and restaurant employees, painters, carpenters, teamsters, letter carriers, postal clerks, retail clerks, telephone linemen, laundry workers, and civic employees all struck for higher wages.

The largest strike of the year was mounted by railway freight handlers in the fall after a union organizer was fired. When the company rebuffed a delegation of freight handlers protesting the decision, workers struck. Talk of a general sympathy strike soon started in the city.



"Canadian Pacific Railway employees leaving work at car shops, Calgary, Alberta," 1912. NA-644-18. Glenbow Museum.

On 5 October, Calgary machinists, pipefitters, blacksmiths, boilermakers, carmen, and electricians downed tools in solidarity with striking freight handlers. Other unions awaited the call to join them, and labour councils in other cities promised support.

The federal government responded to worker solidarity with threats and repression. On 16 October, five strike leaders were arrested.

The strike committee then escalated the strike by calling out the city employees and street railwaymen. On 19 October, streetcars were returned to the depot, shutting down a vital part of public transportation. The *Calgary Herald* denounced labour's "Kaiser-like tactics." Foreshadowing the events of 1919, the *Herald* called for the formation of a "citizens' committee" to break the strike and obstruct the "volcano of class reign."

To prevent the strike from spreading further, the arrested strikers were released and the Railway Board granted wage increases.

By 23 October, the strike was over. It was a victory for the freight handlers, and worker solidarity was a key contributing factor.



"Workers at Canadian Pacific Railway west end shops, Calgary, Alberta," circa 1910s. NA-4976-1. Glenbow Museum.