On 13 March 1919, union delegates from across Western Canada met in Calgary at the Labor Temple to devise strategies for increasing worker power.

The idea to establish the One Big Union, “irrespective of nationality, sex or craft” was proposed. The One Big Union (OBU) came into being at a founding convention in Calgary on 4 June 1919.

Coal miners were enthusiastic about the OBU, but Alberta’s city-based unions were largely opposed. Only 34 of Calgary’s 58 unions voted on the OBU question and 14 reported unanimous opposition. Calgary delegates to the Western Labor Conference believed it was important to win power through electoral politics. As machinist-delegate and city councillor Andrew Broatch put it, “Bringing all workers within the fold of [the OBU] will not eliminate the fact that laws will still exist, and the chambers where the law is made will still be a part of our social life. When we call a general strike under this form of organization we leave the other man holding the strings of the bag.”

The Western Labor Conference was an important convergence of unionists. Attending the conference that year were a number of delegates from Winnipeg who went on to play central roles in the Winnipeg General Strike.