

THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE

# 1919 COMMEMORATION PROJECT

The Winnipeg General Strike was part of a general strike wave that broke out across Canada in 1919.

We want to tell the story of Alberta workers who took part in the 1919 Labour Revolt by producing:

- Pull-up displays graphically illustrating 1919 strikes and actions across Alberta
- Promotional material for use across Alberta
- More interviews for our oral history collection
- A number of files (electronic and 'hard' copy) for use by future researchers
- A booklet telling the story of the 1919 Labour Revolt in Alberta
- At least one 20-minute video using interviews and material collected in this Project
- News, graphic material and stories about the 1919 Labour Revolt on our Website
- A major Alberta Labour History Workshop and related Cultural Event modeled on past ALHI Labour History Conferences
- Research to assist researchers and projects engaging in related work
- A song or 'video ballad' about the 1919 Labour Revolt composed by Maria Dunn

We look forward to working with trade unions, friends and supporters in centres across Alberta where events occurred during the 1919 Labour Revolt.

The Alberta Labour History Institute is a provincial organization dedicated to the collection, preservation and dissemination of worker history in Alberta. It was formed over twenty years ago by trade unionists, academic historians and community activists who were committed to correcting a general lack of attention to working class history. Since then, ALHI has conducted hundreds of interviews with workers, trade union leaders and others, and has produced numerous labour history publications, videos and displays, as well as assisting unions, labour councils and the Federation of Labour with their history projects.

**Please contact us.**

We would like to discuss this Project with your labour council, union or other organization.

Phone ALHI at (780) 732-0320

E-mail [office@albertalabourhistory.org](mailto:office@albertalabourhistory.org)

Or visit [www.albertalabourhistory.org](http://www.albertalabourhistory.org)



JOIN US FOR A  
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

# ALBERTA WORKERS & THE 1919 LABOUR REVOLT

A PROJECT OF THE ALBERTA  
LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE

# REMEMBERING THE LABOUR REVOLT OF 1919

World War One radicalized workers around the world. While workers and farmers in uniform perished and workers and farmers on the home front worked long hours for pay reduced by inflation, munitions manufacturers and food processors made huge profits. At the same time, the federal government used special war-time powers to repress any and all outbreaks of worker resistance and to persecute minority groups in the population.

After the war, governments led by industrialists and aristocrats rejected both the conversion of wartime industry to peacetime purposes and the provision of social programs to tide workers over until they could find employment. There were worker uprisings almost everywhere to protest ruling class callousness and to demand workers' governments and socialist programs. Many of these protests were met with draconian government action, often directed at immigrants and minority groups.



## CANADIAN WORKERS RESORT TO GENERAL SYMPATHY STRIKES

In Canada, workers used general sympathy strikes on various occasions during World War I to force employers to provide some social justice to workers. In September 1918, for example, after the federal government announced back-to-work legislation for Calgary freight handlers, half the city's unionized workers obeyed a call for a sympathy strike from the Trades and Labour Council. The federal government quickly made concessions to the freight handlers. In October, Edmonton's Trades and Labour Council ensured a settlement for Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees' members by endorsing a sympathy strike. Workers thus discovered that the general strike could be an effective weapon, and would resort to it on more and more occasions.

After the war, faced with employer intransigence, Canadian workers joined the worldwide revolt against unreformed capitalism by making the general strike a weapon in the effort to create better conditions for working people in the short term, often with a vision of the long term in which workers would become their own employers and a separate employing class would no longer exist. The One Big Union, which the Western Labour Conference of March 1919 decided to create, was a union movement devoted to such root-and-branch opposition to the subordination of workers to profiteers.

## ALBERTA WORKERS SUPPORT WINNIPEG STRIKERS

Employer resistance to dealing with unions led to metal and construction trades in Winnipeg announcing a strike and asking other unions and non-unionized workers to join them. On May 15, about 35,000 Winnipeg working women and men, two thirds of them non-unionized, stopped work in the hope that worker solidarity would produce the right to unionize for all workers.

Workers across Canada supported the Winnipeg strikers, who faced serious military intervention and jailings during their six week strike. In some cities unionized workers joined the Winnipeg workers on strike in hopes of strengthening the union cause in their city. Calgary and Edmonton had month-long strikes. Meanwhile miners in 42 mines across Alberta struck for two months in sympathy with BC miners who were getting short hours. While general strikes were defeated by state repression, state and employer fears of more worker rebellion resulted in at least some reforms and workers' memories of the great labour revolt fueled labour resistance in later years when it became clear that the capitalist system remained unreformed and unresponsive to workers' needs.

## EDMONTON GENERAL STRIKE VOTE RESULTS AS PRINTED IN THE EDMONTON JOURNAL MAY 28, 1919

FOR	YES	NO
Machinists 559/817	145	14
Edmonton Police Association	57	2
UMWA 4084/4070	105	2
Cdn. Br. of Railway Empl. 99/7	194	12
Railway Carmen 448/398/570	184	29
Teamsters 514	92	60
Street Railway Employees	105	27
Civic Employees Union 30	16	13
Carpenters	18	6
Journeymen Barbers	21	2
Bricklayers and Masons	6	0
Boilermakers 279	82	14
Cooks and Waiters	59	24
Electrical Workers	17	4
Federal Local Workers	189	0
Fireman Local 29	62	15
Plumbers 488/685	40	1
Painters and Decorators 1016	17	0
Moving Picture Operators	18	0
Civic Service 52	84	82
Steam Shovel and Dredgmen	14	0
Bookbinders 138	11	7
Dawson Miners Local	44	0
Blacksmith's 146	23	0
<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Federation of Postal Workers	8	43
Garment Workers 120	52	91
Musicians Association	66	44
Sheet Metal Workers	4	10