

1919 WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE CENTENARY CONFERENCE

BUILDING A BETTER WORLD: 1919-2019

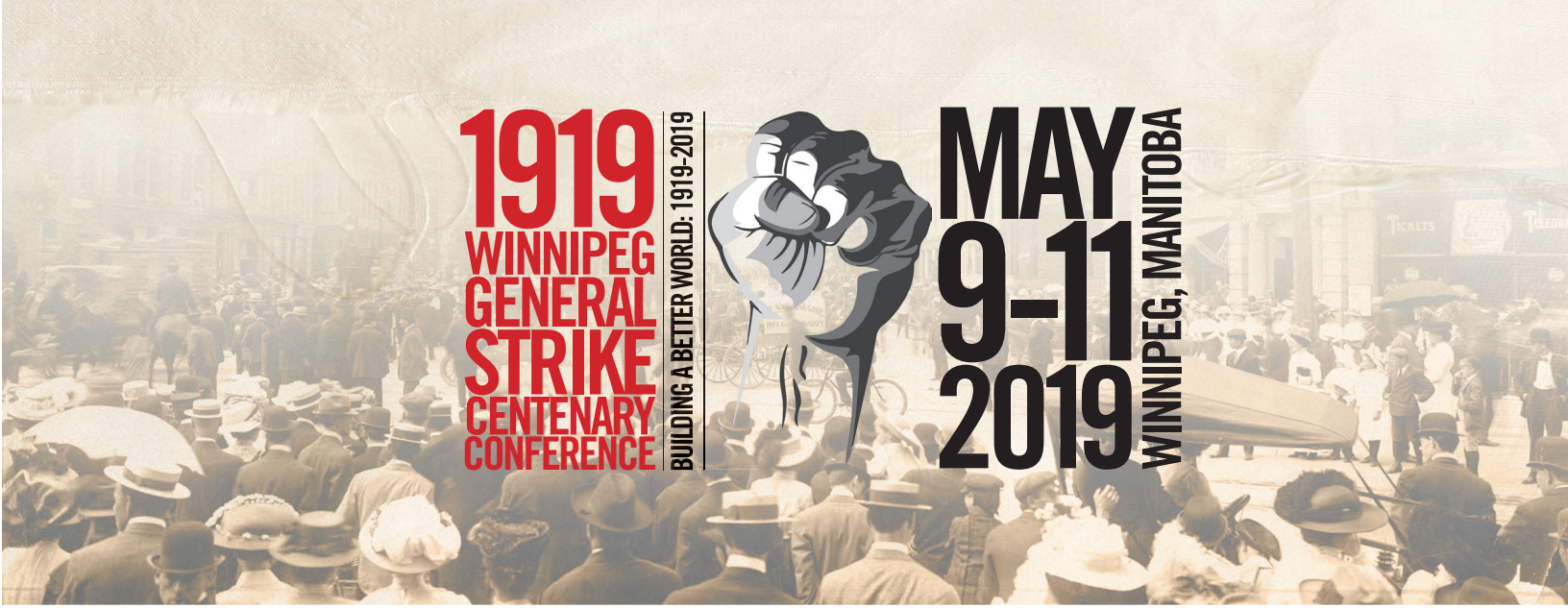
MAY
9-11
2019

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA



1919-2019.com





GREETINGS, JOHN CLARKE!

I write to you on behalf of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike Centenary Conference Committee, which proudly hosts **THE 1919 WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE CENTENARY CONFERENCE (WGSCC): BUILDING A BETTER WORLD from May 9-11, 2019 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.**

As you know, the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 was a landmark moment in North American working-class history. In May and June that year, over 30,000 workers ceased work for six weeks. Provoked by the inequities of industrial capitalism, the authoritarianism of their workplaces, the brutal experiences of the First World War, rising prices and stagnating wages, an insecure economic outlook, intransigent employers, and a federal state that responded to their demands with growing repression, the city's workers stood together in an astounding display of unity. This was also an era filled with hope; the horrors of industrialization and militarism encouraged many to think of ways of constructing a better world. The combination of anger and hope was infectious. In 1919, Winnipeg workers displayed an inspiring unity, facing hunger, threats of permanent dismissal and blacklisting, and violence at the hands of authorities, most notably in the vicious assault they unleashed on "Bloody Saturday," killing two workers and injuring many more.

A century later, the WGSCC Committee seeks to commemorate, honour and better understand these events by way of this historical conference gathering of approximately 200 activists, organizers, scholars, trade unionists and social justice and labour rights advocates from across Canada and beyond.

Over the course of three themed days (May 9-11, 2019), WGSCC delegates will participate in concurrent sessions led by several invited conference paper presenters — **with each day concluding with a PLENARY/ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION led by three-to-five solicited speakers, whose experiences, expertise and prolific work in the area of labour rights and related social justice movements and scholarship remains significant.**

To that end, the WGSCC Committee invites you to participate as a WGSCC ROUNDTABLE SPEAKER in one of three plenary sessions planned within our conference's program schedule, which is arranged under the following themes:

- 1. Poverty and the Fight for a Material Existence: The Fight for a Better Life**
- 2. Building an Inclusive Labour Movement: Solidarity Across Boundaries**
- 3. Making Labour as a Social Force & Political Leader: Building a Working-Class Alternative**

Specifically, we invite you, John, to participate as a WGSCC ROUNDTABLE SPEAKER on:

1. Poverty and the Fight for a Material Existence: The Fight for a Better Life

While the WGSCC Committee recognizes that our event takes place more than a year from this initial writing, **your quick and positive response to this invitation will certainly help in our overall logistical conference planning and the arrangement of your needs as a WGSCC ROUNDTABLE SPEAKER.**

What's more, please note that our fundraising efforts and other supports and partnerships will more-than-likely allow for your full travel and accommodation expenses, although we do ask that you request funding from your representative organizations where applicable and possible.

Together with the assistance from organizations and public institutions like the **Canadian Committee on Labour History (CCLH); the Canadian Association for Work and Labour Studies (CAWLS); Faculties of Arts at Brandon University, the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg; the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL); and the Winnipeg Labour Council (WLC)** we hope to receive you as a WGSCC ROUNDTABLE SPEAKER in respect of this unique and critical event in the history of Canadian labour rights activism and human rights and anti-poverty advocacy.

Note, too, that the WGSCC Committee is actively securing the participation of one or more renowned and prominent keynote speakers, which, together with a host of other conference activities, promises to make our 1919 commemorative efforts a fantastic draw for the whole of Winnipeg and Canada, altogether!

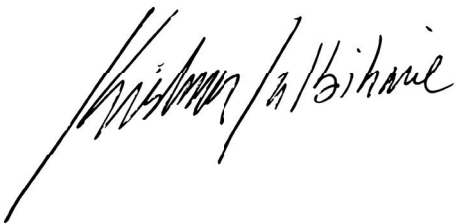
Again, the WGSCC Committee looks forward to your positive and quick response to this request and is available to answer any questions you may have! To this end, please do not hesitate to connect with myself as you like or:

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WGSCC Committee Chair
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Please do survey our current WGSCC website for further information: **1919-2019.com**

Follow us on Facebook, too: **facebook.com/1919WinnipegGeneralStrikeConference/**

In Solidarity!



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WGSCC ROUNDTABLE THEMES

1. Poverty and the Fight for a Material Existence: The Fight for a Better Life

Just as workers in 1919 sought to lift themselves and their communities out of poverty and win a fairer share of the fruits of economic growth, 21st-century workers are facing worsening material conditions: stagnating wages and increasing precarious employment, along with cuts to social services that increase demands upon working-class families. The “Fight for 15,” struggles for family supports such as child care, and the rise of antipoverty movements are at the forefront of today’s organizing, reflecting the ways in which neoliberalism has forced the fight for a living wage and a working-class economic security onto centre stage.

2. Building an Inclusive Labour Movement: Solidarity Across Boundaries

A century ago, Winnipeg was a divided city – not only along the lines of class, but workers were, themselves, divided along lines of race and ethnicity. A capitalist labour market pitted “British Canadian” and “immigrant” workers against each other; the First World War heightened fears of the “foreigners,” and the economic insecurity that faced returning soldiers at the end of the war led, on occasion, to confrontations on the streets of Winnipeg. Amazingly, attempts by employers to use bigotry to divide the city’s strikers failed. Today, governments and businesses use international borders, an exclusionary “citizenship” which often denies workers from abroad a range of social and labour rights, and post 9/11 xenophobia, to ensure their control over labour. The lessons of overcoming these divisions and fighting for common, expanded rights, are as central today as they were then, and include a growing understanding of the rights of Indigenous people as First Peoples and as workers.

3. Making Labour a Social Force & Political Leader: Building A Working-Class Alternative

The Winnipeg General Strike was part of a continent-wide, even an international, labour revolt that saw unions, mass strikes and working-class parties act in their own name. In Winnipeg, despite the defeat of the strike, socialist and labour parties continued the fight by other means. This was an era in which labour was the voice of the dispossessed; if there was a solution to the problems that capitalism brought, it was represented by labour. In the 21st century, a wide range of social movements address issues that were often unimagined a century ago. Building an effective response to a wide range of assaults on the environment, and in defence of Indigenous rights, gender rights, on the rights of the disabled, and so much more, requires education, organizing, and mobilization. To what extent are these class issues that labour needs to centrally address? Can labour lead in building a better world in which all forms of oppression and exploitation are fought?



1919 WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE CENTENARY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

JAMES NAYLOR (CHAIR) is Professor of History at Brandon University and author of *The Fate of Labour Socialism: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Dream of a Working-Class Future*.

BASIA SOKAL is President of the Winnipeg Labour Council and a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

PAUL MOIST is the former President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 500, representing Winnipeg civic workers, and has also been President of the Winnipeg Labour Council and National President of CUPE.

JULIE GUARD is Professor of History and Labour Studies and the University of Winnipeg and the author of *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth Century Canada*.

JEFF TAYLOR is Dean of Arts at the University of Manitoba and author of *Union Learning: Canadian Labour Education in the Twentieth Century*.

RHONDA HINTHER is the author of *Perogies and Politics: Canada's Ukrainian Left, 1891-1991* and teaches History at Brandon University.

DAVID CAMFIELD teaches labour studies and sociology at the University of Manitoba and is the author of *Canadian Labour in Crisis: Reinventing the Labour Movement*.

SHARON REILLY curated *Winnipeg 1919: A 75th Anniversary Exhibition of the Winnipeg General Strike* at the Manitoba Museum and is Co-Chair of the History and Education Sub-Committee of the 100th Anniversary Planning Committee.

JIM MOCHORUK teaches History at the University of North Dakota and is the author of *The People's Co-op: The Life and Times of a North End Institution*.

JANIS THIESSEN teaches History at the University of Winnipeg and is the author of *Not Talking Union: An Oral History of North American Mennonites and Labour*.

GREG McFARLANE is a staff member of the Manitoba Federation of Labour and a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

JODI GIESBRECHT is Manager of Research and Curation at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, where she oversees exhibition content development and the CMHR's oral history program.

SCOTT PRICE is an oral historian researching the history of the United Food and Commercial Workers in Manitoba.

ESYLLT JONES is Professor of History at the University of Manitoba and author of *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg*.

GORDON GOLDSBOROUGH, an aquatic ecologist teaching at the University of Manitoba, is head researcher, webmaster, and a past president of the Manitoba Historical Society.

VICTOR DOBCHUK is a member of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians and Canadian Society for Ukrainian Labour Research.

TIM GORDIENKO is a member of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians.

YAZA SHAPATA is a Labour Studies student at the University of Manitoba.

SHANNON WINTERS is a Labour Studies student at the University of Manitoba.

KRISHNA LALBIHARIE is a Winnipeg-based communications consultant and community organizer.

