

CALL FOR PAPERS

1919 WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE CENTENARY CONFERENCE

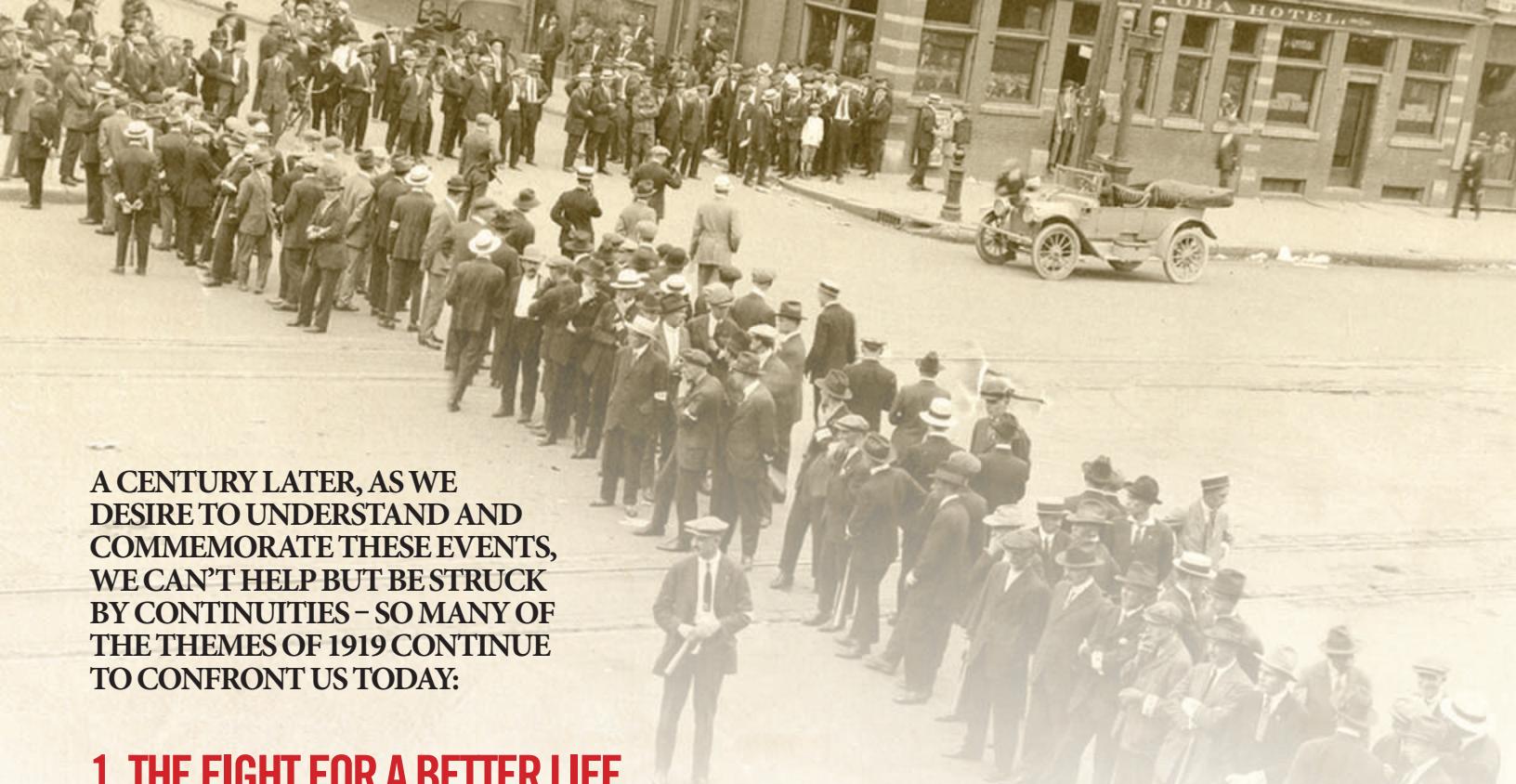


WINNIPEG, MANITOBA **BUILDING A BETTER WORLD: 1919-2019**

**MAY
9-11
2019**

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, AS WE DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND AND COMMEMORATE THESE EVENTS, WE CAN'T HELP BUT BE STRUCK BY CONTINUITIES – SO MANY OF THE THEMES OF 1919 CONTINUE TO CONFRONT US TODAY:

1. 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. 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. 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?

These are all broad themes, but the Winnipeg General Strike, although provoked by specific issues of collective bargaining, exploded into a broader revolt because it spoke to much broader issues, provided a voice to the dispossessed, and raised the question of whether labour had the answers. This conference hopes to tie the past and the present together by examining these three themes in their historical and contemporary context.

We invite a range of scholars, trade unionists, and social activists to share their knowledge and experiences. We envisage presentations and discussions by historians, labour studies scholars, and unionists about the General Strike, the subsequent history of labour's attempts to address these themes, as well as contemporary struggles. We invite public historians to engage in discussions of the manner in which this history has been shared, how to best engage with a wider audience. What part can teachers play in including an understanding of workers' history, including the Strike, at all levels of education? Finally, the conference will include roundtable discussions, led by activists, of the three themes listed above.

We call, then, for proposals for individual presentations, panels, and roundtables that address the themes of the conference. The organizers are presently exploring funding opportunities to help offset travel costs and other costs associated with conference attendance. It is hoped – though not guaranteed – that some of the costs of participation may be covered.





ALL PROPOSALS MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FOR EACH PERSON INVOLVED:

1. Presentation Title
2. A 100-150-word outline of the presentation.
3. A 100-150-word biography. These must include (if applicable) a list of publications, activities, and a list of positions (paid and/or voluntary) relevant to this event. This information is essential to assisting the organizers in soliciting funding to support travel and other workshop costs.

PROPOSALS FOR INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS, PANELS, OR ROUNDTABLES ARE DUE FEBRUARY 28, 2018.

Please email these materials as an attachment in **Word format** to the program committee at:

1919strikeconference@brandonu.ca

For more information about conference themes and to keep up with our ongoing plans, please visit:

1919-2019.com

