

# 1919 Winnipeg General Strike: Lessons for Creating a Better World in 2019

4 guests assess the legacy of the Winnipeg General Strike and its meaning for today

By [Michael Welch](#), [John Clarke](#), and [Leo Panitch](#)

Global Research, May 19, 2019

Region: [Canada](#), [World](#)

Theme: [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#),  
[History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty](#)  
& [Social Inequality](#)

*"The worker must get a more equitable share of the wealth of the world. And this Strike has already demonstrated the ability of the workers to get his if he consolidated their forces. Withdraw your labour power from the machine, said he, at once profits cease."* – published in Western Labor News, Strike Buletin (May 20, 1919). [1]

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The period following the end of the first World War was one of considerable labour unrest in North America and around the world. [2]

Revolutions had sprung up in Russia, Germany and Hungary. One in five wage labourers in the United States went on strike in 1919, including a general strike in Seattle, 300,000 striking steel workers, 400,000 striking coal miners, 120,000 striking textile workers, and 50,000 striking men's clothing workers. General or near general strikes took hold in twenty Canadian cities from Victoria, British Columbia to Amherst, Nova Scotia. [3]

Winnipeg had the distinction of hosting what is now recognized as the [largest labour action in Canadian history](#). More than 35,000 workers in a city of 180,000 walked off the job on May 15, 2019. This included workers in the metal, building, sewing, and manufacturing trades, along with telephone operators, carpenters, electricians, city and government employees, postal workers, and domestic workers. Restaurants were shut down. Print outlets stopped functioning as pressmen left their workplaces. Even city police and firefighters supported the Strike, although they stayed on the job, at the request of the Central Strike Committee to preserve public safety. Soldiers returning from the War demonstrated in support of the Strike as well. The city effectively ground to a halt. [4]

After six weeks, the strike ended following the events of June 21st when the Royal North West Mounted Police together with hired 'Special Police' violently attacked a crowd near Portage and Main, leaving two men killed and many others injured. Strike leaders were jailed, some workers were deported, and strike action demands generally unfulfilled. [5][6]

Given this apparent defeat, what significance does the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike have

historically, and what instructive lessons are available for today's organizers? On a week, marking the centenary of the start of the Strike, the Global Research News Hour attempts to address these questions with four special guest analysts.

We start the show with **Professor Leo Panitch**. In a discussion convened at host radio station [CKUW 95.9FM in Winnipeg](#), **Professor Panitch** places the Strike in an historical and international context, he discusses how the rise of the populist xenophobic right is connected to reformist approaches favoured by social democrats as opposed to more transformative struggles rooted in a class analysis, and he speculates on the possibility of social gains being achieved in Canada and around the world in an era of austerity and neoliberalism.

We continue this discussion in our second half hour with three guests: Winnipeg-based academic and author **Julie Guard**, Winnipeg-based anti-poverty and welfare advocate **Harold Dyck**, and Toronto-based anti-poverty organizer and crusader **John Clarke**. In this 'round table' conversation, we address the legacy of the 1919 Strike, useful bonds of solidarity beyond the trade unions, some of the failures of labour organizers in recent years, and the prospects for a similar mobilization of the working class in 2019.

Winnipeg-based listeners take note, a number of 1919 Strike commemorations are taking place locally throughout May and June. A complete list, including a May 25th "Solidarity Forever" parade and concert can be found on the Mayworks calendar of events at [mayworks.org](http://mayworks.org).

**Professor Leo Victor Panitch** is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a distinguished research professor and Canada Research Chair in Comparative Political Economy at York University and editor of the *Socialist Register*. He has authored a number of books including [\*The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire\*](#), co-authored by **Sam Gindin**.

**Julie Guard** is Professor of Labour Studies and History at the University of Manitoba. She has authored numerous academic articles and chapters in books. Her research focuses on Canadian labour history, social movement history, history of dissent and repression, history of the Canadian left, women's history, consumer and food history. She is the author most recently of the 2019 book *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid 20th Century Canada*.

**Harold Dyck** is a long time anti-poverty and welfare advocate based in Winnipeg. He has played prominent roles with a number of Winnipeg-based anti-poverty organizations including the Manitoba Committee for Economic Justice, the National Anti poverty Organization and the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. He is also the long-time director of the Low Income Intermediary Project which conducts advocacy work for people on social assistance.

**John Clarke** is a long time organizer with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, a grassroots antipoverty organization based mostly in Toronto that combines collective struggles on behalf of individuals fighting for tenant rights, welfare access, and those threatened with eviction and deportation, with larger political campaigns geared toward policy changes in support of the most marginalized in our society.

**(Global Research News Hour Episode 260)**

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The [Global Research News Hour](#) airs every Friday at 1pm CT on [CKUW 95.9FM](#) in Winnipeg. The programme is also podcast at [globalresearch.ca](#) . Excerpts of the show have begun airing on [Rabble Radio](#) and appear as podcasts at [rabble.ca](#).

The Global Research News Hour now airs Fridays at 6pm PST, 8pm CST and 9pm EST on Alternative Current Radio ([alternativecurrentradio.com](#))

Community Radio Stations carrying the Global Research News Hour:

CHLY 101.7fm in Nanaimo, B.C – Thursdays at 1pm PT

Boston College Radio [WZBC 90.3FM NEWTONS](#) during the Truth and Justice Radio Programming slot - Sundays at 7am ET.

[Port Perry Radio](#) in Port Perry, Ontario –1 Thursdays at 1pm ET

[Burnaby Radio Station CJSF out of Simon Fraser University](#). 90.1FM to most of Greater Vancouver, from Langley to Point Grey and from the North Shore to the US Border.

It is also available on 93.9 FM cable in the communities of SFU, Burnaby, New Westminister, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Surrey and Delta, in British Columbia, Canada. – Tune in at its new time – Wednesdays at 4pm PT.

Radio station [CFUV 101.9FM](#) based at the University of Victoria airs the Global Research News Hour every Sunday from 7 to 8am PT.

[CORTES COMMUNITY RADIO CKTZ 89.5](#) out of Manson's Landing, B.C airs the show Tuesday mornings at 10am Pacific time.

[Cowichan Valley Community Radio CICV 98.7 FM](#) serving the [Cowichan Lake](#) area of Vancouver Island, BC airs the program Thursdays at 6am pacific time.

Campus and community radio [CFMH 107.3fm](#) in Saint John, N.B. airs the Global Research News Hour Fridays at 10am.

Caper Radio CJBW 107.3FM in Sydney, [Cape Breton](#), Nova Scotia airs the Global Research News Hour starting Wednesday Morning from 8:00 to 9:00am. Find more details at [www.caperradio.ca](#)

RIOT RADIO, the visual radio station based out of [Durham College](#) in Oshawa, Ontario has begun airing the Global Research News Hour on an occasional basis. Tune in at [dcstudentsinc.ca/services/riot-radio/](#)

Radio Fanshawe: [Fanshawe's 106.9 The X \(CIXX-FM\)](#) out of London, Ontario airs the Global Research News Hour Sundays at 6am with an encore at 4pm.

Los Angeles, California based [Thepowerofvoices.com](#) airs the Global Research News Hour every Monday from 6-7pm Pacific time.

### Notes:

1. Dennis Lewycky (2019) Magnificent Fight: The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, p. 37, published by Fernwood Publishing
2. <http://newsocialist.org/the-winnipeg-general-strike/>
3. ibid
4. Lewycky op. cit., pg ix, 2, 3, 14
5. Lewycky op. cit., pg 43-45
6. Lewycky op. cit., pg 153, 154

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