

## Political and Social Conditions of Post War Canada : Spotlight Canada

Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper using your textbook.

①

### **PROHIBITION**

- 1.a) What is prohibition? Bootlegging? Speakeasies? (page 135)
- b) Describe the positive and negative effects of prohibition? (136)

### **SPANISH FLU**

②

2. Describe the epidemic of the "Spanish flu". (136)
3. What was the total number of casualties from the flu? How did this compare to the casualties from the war? (136)
4. Why did the Canadian government and employers react with alarm to the 1917 Russian Revolution? (139)

### **WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE**

③

5. What were the three demands of workers during the Winnipeg General Strike? (139)
6. Who was on this "general strike"? (139)
7. What happened on "Bloody Saturday"? (140)
8. List 2 negative and 2 positive effects of the Winnipeg General Strike. (141)
9. How did strike leader J.S. Woodsworth become more involved in politics? (141)

### **NATIONAL PROGRESSIVES**

④

10. In which part of Canada was the National Progressive Party formed? (143)
11. What were the demands of the Progressives? (143)
12. How successful were the Progressives in the 1921 election? (143)

### **ABORIGINALS**

⑤

13. Outline how Aboriginals were affected by:
  - a) Indian Act (145)
  - b) Residential Schools (145)
  - c) League of Indians (146)

### **IMMIGRATION**

⑥

14. What was "xenophobia"? How did this impact the Immigration Act in 1919? (147)
15. What was the "Chinese Exclusion Act" of 1923? (148)
16. What did the government do to Asian immigrants in 1928? (148)

### **THE PERSON'S CASE**

⑦

17. What first did Emily Murphy achieve for women? (171)
18. How was Murphy treated in her courtroom? (171)
19. What did a group of women petition the Prime Minister for in 1927? (172)
20. What was this group of women known as? (172)
21. Who eventually became the first female Senator in Canada? (172)

# Times of Turmoil

## Bloody Saturday

In June 1919, thousands of workers in the city of Winnipeg went on strike. On Saturday, 21 June, tensions reached the boiling point and violence broke out in the streets. This account by D.C. Masters is based on eyewitness reports of the events.

*The crowd in front of the City Hall became more and more dense. There were soldiers in uniform and civilians in working clothes and holiday attire. Some had come to parade and others to see the excitement. People were moving up and down Main Street in large groups. Soldiers had begun to line up the silent parade in the square ...*

*Before long the Mounties, immaculate in red or khaki coats, clattered along Portage and wheeled down Main. Armed with baseball bats, they galloped into the crowd. Soon they were slowed to a walk in the seething mass of people, but still they pressed on, vigorously flailing out with their bats. They passed the City Hall, turned south and fought their way toward*



*Portage amid a shower of tin cans, stones, bricks, and lumps of concrete. ...*

*Amid wild confusion the mayor emerged on the front platform of the City Hall and read the Riot Act. His voice was drowned in bedlam. Again the Mounties came north and, as they did so, each transferred his club to the left hand and drew 'an ugly-looking black revolver.' They swung left on William Avenue and fired a volley into the crowd. They rounded the City Hall and slowed to a walk at the corner of Market and Main streets. Again they drove into the crowd which was surging around a streetcar, beleaguered and on*

*fire, in front of the City Hall. This the crowd was attempting to upset. The Mounties fired their second volley and Mike Sokolowski,*

*who stood in front of the Manitoba Hotel, was shot in the heart and killed instantly. Other figures lay on the street and road.*

1. What do you think would cause a riot like Bloody Saturday in Winnipeg in 1919?
2. a) How do you think workers across the country will react to this strike?  
b) How might employers and government officials react? Explain.



## Post-War Problems

World War I ended in November 1918. But the devastating effects of the war did not go away quickly. The social problems that workers, women, Aboriginal nations, immigrants, and the poor had faced before the war also resurfaced. The war had only pushed issues such as poverty, unsafe working conditions, and inadequate health care into the background for a time. The years immediately after World War I in Canada were a period of turmoil and unrest.

### Prohibition

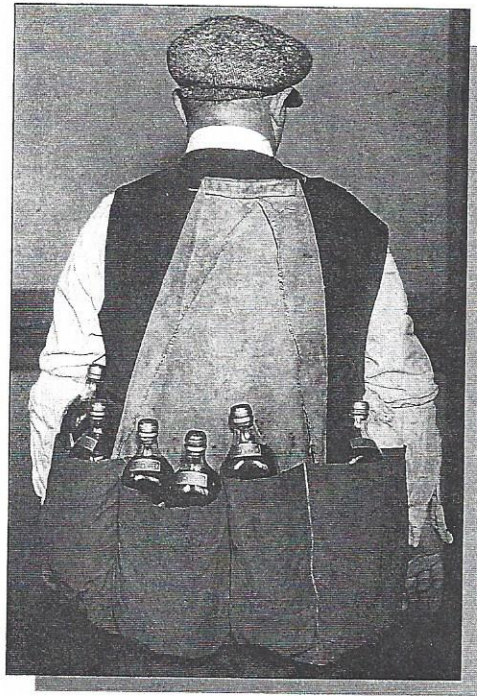
Some battles against social problems were won during the war. Women's groups, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, had campaigned for a ban on liquor since before the turn of the century. The women's groups were supported by farm, church, lodge, and merchant associations. During the war, their campaign **gained** momentum. It was pointed out that grain should be used to feed soldiers and civilians, rather than to make alcohol. **Also**, the production of liquor did nothing to support the war effort. Workers were **needed** to produce necessary war sup-

plies. During the war, every provincial government except Quebec banned the sale of liquor. In 1918, the federal government introduced **Prohibition**, banning the production, import, and transportation of liquor across the country.

But a complete ban on alcohol created a new kind of crime. People bought "bootleg booze"—illegal liquor made and sold by organized bootleggers and other small-time operators. Elegant private clubs called "speakeasies" sprang up. Customers were approved through a peephole in the front door. Inside the surroundings were fashionable and drinks were readily available. Some druggists did a roaring business by filling prescriptions of alcohol as a tonic.

The United States was also officially "dry" from 1919 to 1933. Some Canadians made fortunes smuggling Canadian liquor south of the border. Under the cover of dense woods, smugglers known as rum-runners used horse-drawn sleighs and snowshoes to get booze across the Quebec border into Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. From ports along the shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, fast boats ran cargoes of rum to the American shores. Estimates suggest that almost \$1 million of liquor also crossed from Windsor to Detroit each month.

*During the Prohibition era, smugglers sometimes carried liquor bottles in hidden pockets under their coats as they crossed the border into the United States.*



Prohibition had some positive social effects. The crime rate dropped, and arrests for drunkenness decreased dramatically. More workers took their pay cheques home instead of to the tavern. Industrial efficiency improved because fewer work days were missed. However, it became obvious during the 1920s that Prohibition was impossible to enforce. Underworld characters on both sides of the border were making fortunes in illegal liquor.

Provincial governments realized that they were losing millions of dollars in potential taxes on liquor sales. Prohibition was also unpopular with many citizens. Pressures increased for a more moderate liquor policy. People argued that legalizing liquor under strict government controls would be easier to enforce than total Prohibition. Gradually, individual provinces dropped Prohibition throughout the 1920s. Prince Edward Island was the last province to eliminate the law in 1948. Since then, Canadian governments have

generally chosen to tax bad habits rather than forbid them.

## **Influenza Epidemic**

As soldiers returned home from the war, the country was struck with a terrible epidemic—"Spanish flu." Soldiers carried the virus with them from overseas. The epidemic ravaged countries around the world. People weakened from the virus often got pneumonia. In these days before the discovery of penicillin and sulpha drugs, thousands of people died from pneumonia.

To stop the spread of the flu, schools, theatres, and churches closed their doors. Some communities tried to set up a total quarantine, allowing no one to travel in or out. Public health departments and clinics across the country were flooded with the numbers of sick and dying. In all, about 50 000 Canadians died during the epidemic. This was only 10 000 fewer than the number of people killed during the war. Death had come to the home front.

The epidemic pressed the government into action. A federal Department of Health was created in 1919. Before this time, responsibility for public health had been divided among the three levels of government. Planning and action on health concerns were haphazard. The new federal Department of Health took control over national concerns such as border quarantines. It also co-operated with the provinces and volunteer organizations on campaigns such as child welfare. In addition, the federal and provincial governments began collecting vital statistics such as birth and death rates, and infant mortality rates. It took some years for the Department of Health to have a real impact, but it signalled that Canadians were becoming more aware of public health concerns.

## Labour Unrest

The end of the war caused problems for workers as well. Wartime industries, such as military supply factories, geared down. Women, who had played such an important role in wartime factories, now found themselves under pressure to take up household duties once more so that returning soldiers could have jobs. Thousands of veterans were flooding the job market looking for work.

But jobs were hard to find. Many war veterans found their old jobs had disappeared. Some resented the fact that while they were in Europe fighting, a few industrialists at home had become enormously wealthy producing war materials. Veterans felt they were at least entitled to a job and a chance to make an honest living.

Those lucky enough to have jobs in 1919 were not much better off. One problem was inflation. During the war, prices of food and clothing had increased dramatically. Wages had also gone up, but they had not kept pace with rising prices. Between 1914 and 1919, the cost of living

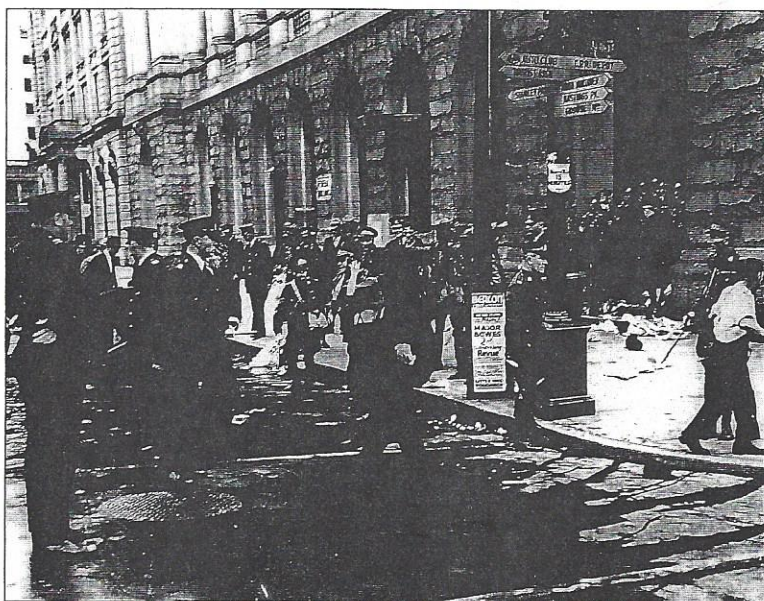
more than doubled. Housing was scarce and costly, and rents were high. Workers and returning soldiers had been told that the war was fought to create a better world. Now they expected to receive a larger share of economic benefits and more control over their own lives.

In 1919, workers had no unemployment insurance, compensation for injuries on the job, or pensions. Thousands had joined unions to fight for better working conditions. But the law was weighted against employees and their organizations. Labour law did not compel employers to bargain with employee representatives (a process we call collective bargaining today).

In many cases, there was only one way for workers to make their demands heard—strike. However, employers could easily get injunctions against strikers. Injunctions are orders from the court that forbid a strike and send workers back to their jobs. Employers also brought in strikebreakers (non-union labour) and crushed the strikers financially. The strikers were left without their jobs and their wages.

In 1918-1919, union membership climbed and a wave of labour unrest swept across Canada. Miners and steelworkers in Cape Breton, machinists in Toronto, loggers in West Coast lumber camps, and streetcar drivers in Windsor, Ontario, were just a few of the groups that walked off the job.

*RCMP and Vancouver police clear out the Post Office after a sit-down strike in 1938. Strikes by workers continued through the 1930s.*



### Strikes and Lockouts in Canada, 1917 - 1919

Year	Number of Strikes
1917	160
1918	230
1919	326

### One Big Union (OBU)

In 1917, a small group of radicals in Russia called Bolsheviks overthrew the government in a violent revolution. The Bolsheviks called for a revolution by working people around the world. They believed that everyone in a community should own and control the way goods are produced and distributed. Some union leaders and working people in Canada were influenced by these ideas.

The Canadian government and employers reacted with alarm. They believed the revolution in Russia was an example of what could happen if worker unrest got out of hand. Some employers and government officials feared that workers in Canada were planning a revolution. They were particularly suspicious of "foreign" workers, who they believed brought dangerous ideas about political and social change into Canada.

When western Canadian trade unionists met in Calgary in 1919, the government made sure that police agents were there to monitor events. At that meeting in Calgary, labour leaders decided that to improve conditions, workers had to join together in one general union. These western union leaders were dissatisfied with the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC), which was mainly a large union for craft workers (carpenters, stonecutters, masons, shoemakers, etc.). Many unskilled and semi-skilled workers in Canada's growing industries were not represented in the TLC. The western unionists resolved to establish **One Big Union (OBU)**, which united skilled and unskilled workers. They believed that by standing together, workers could force employers to pay higher wages and establish shorter working hours.

### The Winnipeg General Strike

Worker unrest came to a head in Winnipeg in 1919. Winnipeg was a growing econom-

ic centre. A large number of immigrant workers had settled in the city, especially in a neighbourhood called "the North End." They wanted to improve working and living conditions. Such ideas for change drew suspicion from wealthier citizens, many of them British-Canadians. Some strongly opposed the demands of people they saw as "radical foreigners." Tensions were high in the city.

On 1 May, the Building and Metal Trades Councils in Winnipeg voted to go on strike. They were asking for three things:

1. decent wages (85 cents per hour)
2. an eight-hour day
3. the right to bargain collectively for better working conditions.

The Building and Metal Trades Councils asked for the support of other workers in Winnipeg. On 15 May, 30 000 additional workers in the city walked off the job. Workers in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal went on sympathy strikes to show their support.

In Winnipeg, the strike spread from industry to industry. It quickly escalated into a general strike, in which almost all industries and key services were shut down. Stores and factories closed. Dairies and bakeries stopped deliveries. Streetcar operators, garbage collectors, postal workers, telephone operators, firefighters, and hydro workers refused to work. Even the police expressed their support for the strike, but agreed to remain on duty when the strike leaders asked them to.

Winnipeg was split into two hostile camps. On one side were the strikers, their families, and their supporters. The strike was under the direction of the Central Strike Committee. In the interests of public health and safety, the Central Strike Committee allowed some bakers, dairy workers, and electric power operators to work.

On the other side were the owners, the employers, and leading citizens of Winnipeg. They called themselves the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand and were strongly opposed to the strike. Many were convinced that this was the beginning of the revolution they had been fearing.

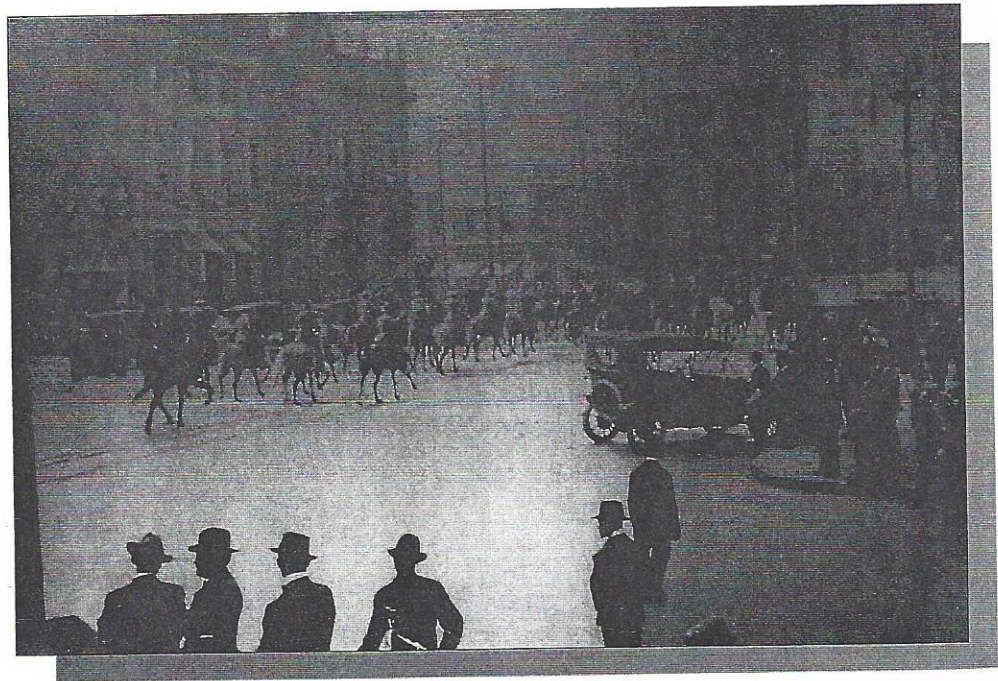
Winnipeg officials and the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand were determined to crush the strike. All parades and demonstrations were banned. Newspapers across the country were generally hostile toward the strikers. The *Winnipeg Citizen* accused the strikers of trying to bring about a revolution. The Canadian government became increasingly alarmed by events in Winnipeg and quickly made changes to the Criminal Code. Any foreign-born person who was suspected of trying to cause a revolution could be arrested and deported without a hearing or a trial. Meanwhile, Ottawa sent troops and machine guns to Winnipeg.

As the strike dragged on into June, the families of many strikers experienced real

hardship. There was no strike pay. Some became so discouraged that they gave up and drifted back to their jobs. Then on 17 June, in the early morning hours, Mounties raided the homes of the union leaders and labour headquarters. Documents were seized and 10 strike leaders were arrested.

The general strike dragged on for 37 days. On 21 June, a day that became known as **Bloody Saturday**, violence erupted. A huge crowd gathered to watch a parade protesting the arrest of the strike leaders. Parades had been banned. The Mayor, fearing trouble, read the Riot Act and called in the Royal North-West Mounted Police. Not long afterward, the crowd overturned a streetcar and set it on fire. The Mounted Police charged the crowd. Shots were fired. One man was killed and 30 were injured. Hundreds were arrested. The crowds dispersed in panic. Five days later, the Central Strike Committee ordered the workers back to their jobs. The general strike was over.

*Workers and police clash on the streets of Winnipeg during the General Strike.*



### The Riot Act

His Majesty the King charges and commands all persons being assembled immediately to disperse and peaceably to depart to their habitation or their lawful business upon pain of being guilty of an offence for which upon conviction they may be sentenced to imprisonment for life.

### Results of the Strike

To many workers, the Winnipeg General Strike looked like a complete failure. Their leaders were arrested and sentenced to jail terms. Many families, their savings gone, would never recover from their financial losses. When strikers went back to work, some were forced to sign "yellow-dog contracts." These contracts stated that they would not join a union or take part in union activities.

Others found they had no jobs to go back to. Employers branded them as troublemakers and fired them on the spot. With the collapse of the strike, the attempt to create One Big Union was doomed. The dream of a strong united Canadian labour movement was buried for the next 30 years. The bitterness between employees and employers, and between strikers and non-strikers, would last for a long time in Winnipeg.

In July 1919, the federal government changed the Criminal Code once again. Persons proposing violence to bring about political or economic changes could be searched without a warrant. Their property could be seized, and they could be sentenced to jail for up to 20 years. A person could be charged with being a member of an illegal organization for attending a strike meeting or handing out strike literature. This legislation was not changed until 1936.

But the Winnipeg General Strike had some positive effects. Thinking citizens began to appreciate how important work-

ers were to the community. The superintendent of nurses in a Winnipeg hospital wrote, "The General Strike . . . made the people of Winnipeg realize that no modern community can function without the workers to carry on the humble and monotonous tasks which make a city safe and healthy to live in."

The strike drew attention to the social and economic problems faced by many working people. A Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the causes and the conduct of the strike. H. A. Robson, who headed the Royal Commission, concluded that the strike was caused by the high cost of living, poor-working conditions, and the low wages paid to workers. Robson also determined that the Winnipeg strike was not an attempt to start a violent revolution.

### Labour Leaders in Government

After the Winnipeg General Strike, labour leaders became more involved in politics. They decided that the way to solve unemployment and economic problems was to have a say in government. Many strike leaders went on to play important roles in government. In the Manitoba provincial election of 1920, four strike leaders (Ivens, Queen, Armstrong, and Dickson) were elected to the provincial government while still in prison. Other strike leaders served in city government as councillors or school trustees.

In the federal election of 1921, J. S. Woodsworth became MP for Winnipeg North Centre. He held this post until his death in 1941. Later, Woodsworth became the first leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a pro-worker political party. Another strike leader, A. A. Heaps, was elected to Parliament in 1925. In years to come, both Woodsworth and Heaps were tireless champions of labour and social reform.