

Canadian Workers and the First World War: Lessons for Today

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[slide 1]: intro

Hello.

Thanks to each of you for coming here today and a special thank you to Eden and Alistair for arranging this important event.

INTRO

We meet at a tense time in world history.

Canadian troops are mired in a long war in Afghanistan, as western states vie to bring Central Asia within their sphere of influence.

Other Canadian troops have just landed in Haiti, six years after their comrades helped to overthrow the country's elected president. Confirming the "Shock Doctrine," the world's richest states are rushing troops to control one of the poorest in the wake of a natural disaster.

Imperialism is alive and well, as states deploy military force to control the world's resources, markets, and people.

But these developments are not determined solely in the corridors of power in Ottawa, Washington, and London.

Rather, the outcome is shaped in interaction with peoples' movements – in the streets of Ladysmith, Vancouver, and towns and cities in all the belligerent states – and across the world in the hills around Kandahar.

And the very process of waging war can have the effect of amplifying social tensions on the home front and exposing the contradictions of the system that feeds off of war and imperialism.

As history demonstrates, war has sowed the seeds of the most forceful challenges to Capitalism in world history.

When we think back to the First World War, the dominant narrative and imagery centres on the heroism of Canadian troops at Vimy Ridge, the Somme, Passchendaele.

But there is a whole other history we find through the method of “history from the bottom up”.

This is a story of a war that ended with the world aflame in revolution and labour revolt across BC and Canada.

To get a feel for this moment in time, we can look to a diary entry written by Canada’s Prime Minister, Conservative Robert Borden, who was travelling aboard the ocean liner *Mauritania* en route to peace talks in Europe:

On November 11, 1918, Borden wrote:

[SLIDE 2]: Borden *Mauritania* quote

“Revolt has spread all over Germany. The question is whether it will stop there. The world has drifted far from its old anchorage and no man can with certainty prophesy what the outcome will be.”

-Prime Minister Robert Borden, 11 November 1918

Now let’s fast forward six months, to the City of Winnipeg:

[SLIDE 3]: Breaking of Winnipeg strike

On 21 June 1919, a squadron of Royal North-West Mounted Police charged through a crowd of war veterans and workers on horseback, opening fire.

Fifty workers were injured and two died.
The Prairie capital fell under military occupation.

[SLIDE 4]: Military Occupation

What had happened in Winnipeg?

To answer this question, we need to look at changes in the Canadian working class during the First World War, a process of growing industrial militancy and ideological radicalisation that led to a break from employers and the state.

[SLIDE 5]: Context

Profiteering and the Cost of Living
Conscription
Russian Revolution and Allied Intervention
One Big Union

1. RISING COST OF LIVING AND PROFITEERING

Canada's labour revolt was strongly influenced by worsening living conditions on the home front during the war.

Industrial production was retooled from the manufacture of consumer goods to the manufacture of arms.

Clothing, boots and shoes were shipped from Canada to Allied soldiers on the Western Front.

Food and fuel were diverted from Canadian homes to the trenches of France and Flanders.

This mobilization for "total war" created widespread suffering in Canada.

Shortages drove up costs, while wages did not keep pace.

But hardship was not uniform – a minority made massive profits.

Some merchants obtained supplies wholesale – hoarding food like butter and bacon and then re-selling these goods at hugely inflated prices.

This phenomenon of hoarding and profiteering provoked outrage among workers.

In 1917, the issue was considered by the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.

Helena Gutteridge, a leader of the garment workers' union and the first woman officer on the Council, talked about hoarding in Vancouver: [quote]

[SLIDE 6]: Gutteridge quote

"The cold storage plants were groaning with piled-up food... One concern on Water Street has so much butter in storage it was necessary to brace the floors to hold it."

-Helena Gutteridge
speech to Vancouver Trades and Labor Council
September 1917

Working-class living standards were substandard prior to the war and the shortages of war only made matters worse:

[SLIDE 7]: Conditions in Winnipeg's "North End", c. 1914

Helena Gutteridge cast the global conflict in gendered and class terms.

[SLIDE 8] Gutteridge on “male statecraft”

“If the present conditions are the best that male statecraft can accomplish, then surely the time has come for woman to take her place in the councils of the nations... as an antidote to the present false conception of man, that places property and possessions at a higher value than human welfare and life.”

-Helena Gutteridge
officer of Vancouver Trades and Labor Council
British Columbia Federationist, 4 September 1914

2. CONSCRIPTION

Conscription was another key factor that drove a wedge between Canadian workers, farmers and the state.

In all countries, compulsory military service – the Draft – has been highly controversial.

To Canadian workers during the First World War, conscription graphically demonstrated how the burdens of the war were not being shared equally.

Labour demanded [quote] “the conscription of wealth before men.”

However, the bodies of men piled up rapidly along the Western Front – in the apocalyptic battles at Passchendaele Ridge and Ypres.

Here is how one soldier, a stretcher bear from Victoria named Frederick Carne, described conditions at the Somme River in a letter to his mother:

[SLIDE 9]: Frederick Carne quote re the Somme

“That hell hole called the Somme...an infernal war every minute of the day... That preliminary bombardment was something awful, the thousands of shell holes in around the village amply testify. And it is over similar obstacles that every foot of the way back to the Rhine will have to be fought.”

-Pte. Frederick Carne
letter to mother from the Somme, November 1916

In that one offensive in the autumn of 1916, 24,000 Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded – part of 600,000 Allied casualties that moved the line a scant six kilometres to the northeast.

The whole strategy of the Allies was based on this [quote] “a war of attrition” – believing victory would go to whichever side could sustain the greatest number of casualties.

In the French Army, this logic provoked massive mutinies in the spring of 1917 – when soldiers in a remarkable 54 divisions deserted from the front.

As voluntary enlistments dried up in Canada, the Borden government implemented first, a Registration Scheme, require all adult men to register with the state.

This was followed in June 1917 with the Military Service Act, which required men to fight against their will.

At the end of that year, the Borden government changed the Election law to allow the wives, mothers, and sisters of soldiers to vote – cynically extending the ballot to those women most likely to support the government’s Conscription policy, in order to bring relief to the soldiers serving on the front.

While Canada’s labour movement had been generally supportive of the war effort since 1914 –Registration and Conscription drove a wedge between workers and the state – and also within the labour movement itself.

In January 1917, a slate of leftwing socialists was elected to lead the BC Federation of Labour at the organization’s annual convention in Revelstoke.

[SLIDE 10]: BC Federation of Labour Convention, Revelstoke, 1917

All but one member of the new executive belonged to the Socialist Party of Canada, which was Marxist in orientation and had elected MLAs to the BC Legislature.

The new BC Fed officers included:

Joseph Naylor, a coal miner from Cumberland on Vancouver Island who was elected president.

Victor Midgley, a member of the Lather’s union and secretary of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council.

[SLIDE 11]: Ginger Goodwin

And Albert “Ginger” Goodwin, a coal miner from Yorkshire, England who was then working as business agent for the smelterworkers union in Trail, BC.

Goodwin had run in the 1916 provincial election as a candidate of the Socialist Patty of Canada.

Alongside this new Socialist executive, delegates at the BC Fed endorsed a referendum vote of affiliated workers:

[SLIDE 12]: BCFL referendum, February 1917

The referendum asked:

“Are you prepared to place in the hands of the executive of the British Columbia Federation of Labor the power to call a general strike in the event of conscription?”

Voting took place in the spring of 1917, and the outcome overwhelmingly favoured a [quote] “down tools” policy.

A total of **2,417** workers favoured the move, compared with **576** opposed.

The BC Fed initially refused to implement the [quote] “down tools” policy.

But then a high-profile labour leader was drafted.

In autumn 1917, Ginger Goodwin had discussed the connection between capitalism and war:

[SLIDE 13]: Ginger Goodwin letter

“War is simply a part of the process of capitalism.... Whether the capitalist system can survive this cataclysm remains to be seen. It is the hope of the writer that capitalism will fang itself to death, and out of its carcass spring the life of the new age with its blossoms of economic freedom, happiness and joy for the world’s workers.”

-Ginger Goodwin letter
2 November 1917

A week later, Goodwin led a large strike that shut the Consolidated Mining & Smelting Company smelter at Trail, disrupting the flow of zinc and magnesium for the Allied war effort.

Goodwin was recalled before the local draft board and re-classified as being [quote] “fit for military service,” despite a lung condition related to work in the mines.

He fled to the wooded hills of Vancouver Island, joining a colony of draft-resisters at the head of Comox Lake above Cumberland.

[SLIDE 14]: Comox Lake

On the night of 26/27 July 1918, Goodwin was shot dead by Dominion Police officer Dan Campbell. The policeman claimed to have fired in self-defence, but the labour movement cried murder.

Joe Naylor and others performed a death watch at the body awaiting the local coroner.

Meanwhile, the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council sent Socialist Bill Pritchard to Cumberland to investigate.

The Labour Council delegates also voted 117 to 1 to hold a 24-hour [quote] “general holiday” to protest the killing.

[SLIDE 15]: Ginger Goodwin funeral procession, Cumberland, 2 August 1918

The day of Goodwin’s funeral coal miners in the Comox Valley paralyzed the mines to attend the largest funeral in Cumberland’s history.

The eulogy was delivered by Pritchard, who would be jailed a year later during the Winnipeg General Strike.

In Vancouver, workers downed tools in Canada’s first city-wide general strike.

Workers in various industries struck – including the streetrailway workers, the longshore workers, construction workers, and service sector workers.

Civic and business leaders were outraged.

They riled up a crowd of war veterans, who marched in a column 300-strong to the Labour Temple on 411 Homer Street (now the 411 Senior’s Centre):

[SLIDE 15]: Vancouver Labour Temple

There, they forced the secretary of the labour council, Victor Midgley, onto the cornice of the building’s second floor:

[SLIDE 16]: Victor Midgley

When they finally laid hands on Midgley, they forced him to kiss the Union Jack before giving him a severe beating.

The labour council’s telephone operator, Ms. Frances Foxcroft, was roughed up defending Midgley.

This was the most high-profile labour protest in the summer of 1918, but unrest erupted from coast to coast.

In Quebec, workers and farmers rioted against conscription, burning down the local Registration office.

This prompted the Borden government to deploy 4,000 troops to re-establish order.

Five civilians were killed in the fighting.

In Black Lake, south of Quebec City, a farmer shot a Dominion Police man while resisting the Military Service Act.

In Toronto, veterans from the Western Front rioted at the end of July, prompting the deployment of active troops from the nearby Niagara Camp.

Social unrest erupted on the home front as Canada suffered the largest number of casualties of the war.

In September 1918, 2,800 Canadians died.

In October, the last month of the war, the number across 3,000 Canadian dead in the trenches of France and Flanders.

The war ended in Europe as class war erupted in Canada.

Ruling-class fears were apparent in a string of censorship orders and orders-in-council issued by the Canadian government in September and October 1918.

[SLIDE 17]: Publications banned in Canada, 1918

The banning of these publications coincided with a split within the Canadian labour movement, as delegates from Western Canada broke from moderate delegates at a conference in Quebec City – in a process that would culminate in the formation of the One Big Union the following spring:

Days after the labour split, the Canadian government banned 13 working-class organizations:

[SLIDE 18]: Organizations declared “Unlawful” by Government of Canada, September 1918

Two weeks later, the Government banned most labour strikes, in response to a strike of Calgary freight-handlers – amid talk of sympathy strikes.

The Order-in-Council included a [quote] “work or fight” clause, authorizing the conscription of strikers into the armed forces.

3. THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND ALLIED INTERVENTION

These domestic developments occurred against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution and Canada’s military intervention in the Russian Civil War that followed.

This is a huge topic I can only touch on today (the detailed version is appearing in my forthcoming book titled “From Victoria to Vladivostok,” being published this spring by UBC Press).

[SLIDE 19]: Map of Russia

Canada joined 13 other countries in a four-front war designed to encircle and isolate the renegade Bolshevik government in Moscow.

Canada deployed 600 troops to the “Syren Party,” which landed at Murmansk, Russia near Finland on the White Sea.

500 other Canadians landed at the nearby port of Archangelsk, part of the “Elope Party” that helped prop up an anti-Bolshevik administration called the Government of the North.

41 Canadians entered Russian territory from the South, alongside British troops .

This “Dunsterforce,” named after British commander Dunsterville, travelled from Baghdad, Iraq to Baku, the city in present-day Azerbaidjan on the oil rich shores of the Caspian Sea.

The largest Canadian contribution was saw 4,200 soldiers sail from Victoria to Vladivostok, Russia’s Pacific port.

This Siberian Expeditionary Force was mobilized from across Canada to the West Coast.

1/3 of the troops were conscripts, and in training at the Willows Camp in Victoria, the soldiers entered into a dialogue with the radical labour movement.

While Canadian businessmen feared the Bolshevik government that had taken power in Russia, Canadian workers looked to Russia as a source of inspiration. They saw an effective response to the two-fold scourges of war and capitalism.

Joe Naylor of Cumberland, President of the BC Federation of Labour, wrote an article in the *BC Federationist* newspaper after the Bolsheviks took power:

[SLIDE 21]: Joe Naylor on Bolshevism:

“Is it not high time that the workers of the western world take action similar to that of the Russian Bolsheviks and dispose of their masters and those brave Russians are now doing?”

-Joseph Naylor
December 1917

Canada’s decision to send troops to Russia inflamed labour feeling:

[SLIDE 23]: soldiers in downtown Victoria

Socialists organized large meetings in Victoria, which were attended by hundreds of members of the Siberian force:

[SLIDE 24]: Columbia Theatre meeting

At these meeting, labour speakers, including Labor MLA Jim Hawthornthwaite, invoked the demand “Hands Off Russia.”

The day that the main body of the force departed for Vladivostok, two companies of French Canadian conscripts mutinied in the streets of Victoria.

[SLIDE 25]: soldiers marching

Here is an officer’s description of the events at the corner of Fort Street and Quadra Street:

“The other two companies from Ontario were ordered to take off their belts and whip the poor devils into line, and they did it with a will, and we proceeded...

This company continued the march virtually at the point of the bayonet, they being far more closely guarded than any group of German prisoners I ever saw...”

[SLIDE 26]: *SS Teesta*

It took 23 hours to herd the troops aboard this ship, the *SS Teesta*, but then it sailed to Vladivostok, a three-week voyage.

The ringleaders who shackled in the ship’s hold for the duration of the crossing and prevented from bathing until their court martial at the Vladivostok barracks 35 days later.

Back in Canada, feeling against the Siberian Expedition was strong:

The labour councils of Canada’s four largest cities – Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal – went on record opposing Canada’s Intervention in the Russian Civil War.

So too did the United Farmers of Ontario and the business-oriented *Toronto Globe* and *Hamilton Herald* newspapers.

Opposition was widespread among organized farmers, organized workers, and throughout the Province of Quebec.

The Alberta Federation of Labour proposed a general strike to force the withdrawal of Canadian troops out of Russia
– A stance endorsed by the labour council in Victoria, BC.

The tension back in Canada is evident from a secret telegram written by BC Lieutenant Governor, shipyard owner Frank Barnard, to Prime Minister Borden, then in London for [quote] “peace” talks:

[SLIDE 27]: Barnard quote:

“[I] urge upon the Imperial Government the importance of keeping a few large Cruisers upon this Coast, if for no other reason, than for that of having a force to quell, if necessary, any rising upon the part of the IWW...

The personnel of such force would not be subjected to the insidious socialistic propaganda which reaches the soldier – in other words, would be more amenable to discipline, and not affected by local influences ...

In the event of labor strikes, with demonstrations leading to riots, a serious situation would arise if the soldiers were in sympathy with the strikers.”

-Frank Barnard, Lieutenant-Governor of BC

The state was no longer concerned with Kaiserism or [quote] “Hun Aggression.”

The enemy was radical labour.

4. ONE BIG UNION

In March, the One Big Union was founded at a Western Labour Conference in Calgary:

[SLIDE 28]: OBU ballot

230 delegates attended from Cumberland, BC to Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay).

The logic of the new organization was articulated by Vancouver longshoreworker and socialist Jack Kavanagh:

“A greater solidarity should be in existence than was here before...if we get action to such a scale that we can close down the entire industries of a particular point, they starve too, don’t you forget that, and they feel their starvation quicker than we do because we are used to it and they are not. The question is that the old organization does not serve the purpose now, a new form is needed.”

-Jack Kavanagh, Western Labor Conference, Calgary, March 1919

Delegates sent fraternal greetings to the Russian Bolsheviks and German Spartacists and elected an executive that included three BC Socialists – Joe Naylor, Vic Midgley and Bill Pritchard.

The Calgary convention also approved a referendum vote of all union members in Canada on the question:

“Are you in favour of severing ties with your existing organization joining One Big Union?”

Results came in from Vancouver Island to the Maritimes, with 24,000 ballots in favour and 6,000 opposed.

A second referendum question proposed a general strike beginning June 1st to win the six-hour work day.

However, as the referendum was taking place, events in Winnipeg took the spotlight.

Winnipeg workers voted to strike in sympathy with building trades and metal trades workers, in a contract dispute over the right to collective bargaining:

[SLIDE 29]: *Western Labor News*, 16 May 1919

On 15 May 1919, 30,000 Winnipeg workers downed tools in sympathy with striking building trades and metal trades workers, in a contract dispute over the right to collective bargaining.

The distribution of bread and milk in the city took place with trucks bearing the following card:

[SLIDE 30]: Strike permit card

The appearance of these notices, which were also sported by police officers who supported the strike, fueled accusations that the Strike Committee had [quote] assumed “constituted authority” and set up a parallel form of government that resembled the Russian Soviets.

The mood of solidarity already established through the OBU translated into widespread support for the Winnipeg strikers.

Canadian workers backed up their words of support with deeds.

A week into the strike, Calgary workers downed tools in sympathy with Winnipeg, followed by workers in Edmonton, Lethbridge, Regina, Saskatoon, Brandon, Toronto, and Montreal.

Vancouver workers walked out in early June followed by Victoria workers later that month.

The strike extended across the country to distant Amherst, Nova Scotia .

Business leaders and politicians were alarmed by the widening labour revolt.

They linked the strikes to the OBU:

[SLIDE 31] OBU poster, 1919

In Ottawa, the House of Commons and Senate met in emergency session and gave three readings and then Royal Assent to legislation authorizing the deportation of radicals without trial.

The Canadian militia was doubled from 5,000 to 10,000 troops.

Four regiments of troops were rushed to Winnipeg, waiting restlessly at the Osborne Barracks near downtown.

Across the Assiniboine River, along tony Wellington Crescent, the captains of Winnipeg industry such as the famous Eaton family pressured from an end to the strike:

[SLIDE 32]: Winnipeg mansion, Wellington Crescent

Business leaders formed a group called the Citizens' Committee of 1,000 – which worked closely with the Federal Dept. of Justice and organized anti-strike demonstrations:

[SLIDE 33]: Citizens' Committee demonstration, June 1919

Here is a demonstration organized by the Citizens' Committee of 1000:

“We will maintain constituted authority, law & order
 ...down with the high cost of living
 to hell with the alien enemy
 ...God save the King...

This message attempted to portray the strike as a foreign phenomenon – while in fact the strike was led by Anglo-Saxon labour leaders.

Meanwhile, the strikers continued to [quote] “do nothing,” demonstrating what contemporary observers described as a remarkable order and seriousness.

Every day, the strikers held their own mass meetings in Victoria Park:

[SLIDE 34]: Victoria Park meeting, Winnipeg, June 1919

However, tensions were rising.

On June 11, strikers and anti-strikers clashed.

[SLIDE 35]: specials armed with clubs

Winnipeg's mayor and the Citizen's Committee of 1000 had deputized hundreds of special constables, who were armed with wagon spokes and roamed the streets.

In the dead of night on 16 June 1919, police raided the homes of 11 leaders of the Winnipeg strike, spiriting the labour leaders to the Stoney Mountain Penitentiary outside Winnipeg:

[SLIDE 36]: jailed leaders of Winnipeg General Strike

In Winnipeg, JS Woodsworth assumed the Editorship of the *Western Labour News*.

The former Methodist minister and future parliamentarian published the following quote from the Biblical book *Isaiah*:

[SLIDE 37]: Woodsworth on Isaiah:

“And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree are the days of my people and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

Isaiah, II. (65: 21-221)

Woodsworth also published the following commentary on the looming conflict:

[SLIDE 38]: Woodsworth on violence

“Whether the radical changes that are inevitable may be brought about peaceably, largely depends upon the good sense of the Canadian businessmen who now largely control both the industry and the government of this country. We confess the prospects are not very bright.”

-JS Woodsworth, *Western Labor News*, June 1919

For these words, Woodsworth was arrested and charged with “seditious libel.”

On Saturday, 21 June 1919, the conflict in Winnipeg reached its peak.

2,000 war veterans marched down Main Street, in a “silent parade” to protest the jailing of the strike leaders:

[SLIDE 39]: crowd on 21 June 1919

The mayor had refused to issue a permit, and read the riot act.

In the chaotic events that followed, the Citizens Committee attempted to re-start street car operations.

The strikers overturned a streetcar near City Hall:

[SLIDE 40]: streetcar overturned

The state moved with a firm hand:

[SLIDE 41]: RNWMP charge

100 Mounted Police, on horseback, charged through the crowd of veterans and strikers, armed with wagon spokes and revolvers:

[SLIDE 42]: “Bloody Saturday,” 21 June 1919

They made three charges down the street.

Observers later insisted that soldiers had participated in the charges, clad in khaki uniforms.

The police and the army ruthlessly cleared the streets.

50 strikers and veteran were injured.

2 strikers – Mike Sokolowski and Steve Szeberzones – were killed.

(“Here is the body of Mike Sokolowski, lying on the sidewalk near the curb)

The army declared Martial Law and occupied the city of Winnipeg, installing machine guards and guards at major intersections:

[SLIDE 43]: military occupation

Five days later, the Winnipeg Strike Committee called off the strike.

The Winnipeg General Strike – the highwater mark in Canadian workers’ postwar revolt –was broken.

Workers in Vancouver held on until June 4, but then ended the strike as workers drifted back to work.

Female telephone operators at the BC Telephone Company were the last to return to work. Many lost their jobs.

A police dragnet descended on labour radicals across the country.

From Victoria to Montreal, plainclothes officers from the Dominion Police and Royal North West Mounted Police raided the homes and offices of socialists and union leaders.

They kicked down the front door of the BC Federation of Labour office and the *BC Federationist* – seizing the entire records of the BC Fed since its inception a decade earlier.

A few months later, JS Woodsworth told a labour meeting in Esquimalt, near Victoria:

[SLIDE 44]: Woodsworth on RNWMP shooting down workers

“There is going to be a lot of unemployment and unrest this winter and because of this the government were rushing in Royal North West Mounted Police. Since they are no more Indians left to shoot, they must be coming over the mountains to shoot down the workers of this country.”

J.S. Woodsworth to Federated Labor Party meeting
Esquimalt, BC, October 1919

In 1920, the RNWMP was rebranded the RCMP, reflecting the national contours of labour radicalism.

The agency opened security files on 5000 Canadians in its first decade of operation While strikes continued to percolate – among British Columbia loggers and Alberta coal miners who mobilized behind the OBU – the Canadian Labour Revolt was on the decline.

Capitalism re-consolidated hegemony in Canada.

The country returned to a more orderly pattern of labour relations and economic power – based on the primacy of capital over labour.

AFTERMATH

Workers responded to the consolidation of capitalism in distinct ways.

One layer gravitated closer to the Soviet Union – affiliating to the Communist Third International, formed by Lenin in March 1919:

[SLIDE 45]: Hammer and Sichel/Lenin slide

They saw how force had been used to crush the Canadian working-class, and believed force was needed to effect social change and seize state power.

This debate split the old Socialist Party of Canada and led to the creation of the clandestine Communist Party of Canada in a barn outside Guelph, Ontario in May 1921.

Another layer of workers responded to the defeat of 1919 by organizing intensely on the political field.

These workers believed that state power had been exercised to the detriment of workers and therefore sought to [quote] “Strike at the Ballot Box” and elect workers to write better laws.

This upsurge translated into the election of:

[SLIDE 46]: postwar political change

Farmer-Labour government in Ontario in 1919
United Farmers government in Alberta in 1920

Which held power for the next 15 years

Labour and Farmer wins extended from New Brunswick to BC, where three candidates of the Federated Labor Party were elected to the BC Legislature in 1920.

In Manitoba, voters elected 12 Farmer candidates, 9 Labour candidates, 3 independents, 1 Socialist, and 1 Social Democrat.

Three of these new Manitoba MLAs were jailed leaders of the Winnipeg strike, elected while still in prison serving sentences for “seditious conspiracy.”

Winnipeg workers struck again at the ballot box in 1921:

[SLIDE 47]: Woodsworth in Parliament

They elected JS Woodsworth as Member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre. He was joined by another Labour MP, Calgary journalist William Irvine.

In that election, the upstart Progressive Party took 58 seats, forming the official opposition.

The Conservatives, which had governed for a decade and oversaw the war effort, were reduced to third-place standing, one of the most unpopular governments in Canadian history up to that time.

The election laid the groundwork for Canada’s parliamentary socialist tradition.

TO CONCLUDE

The First World War shook Canada to its roots and left it a different country.

The war sharpened the divide between workers, employers and the state and created the most profound industrial crisis in the twentieth century.

So what lessons can we draw? I will open that question to you in the discussion.

But the basic point to note is that War, however horrific, exposes existing social cleavages and has the potential to provide an opening for radical and militant movements.

The strongest challenge to capitalism and the state in Canada's history occurred at the wake of the First World War.

Circumstances are certainly different 91 years later – with the state much more savvy and sophisticated, and its apparatus of repression and surveillance – not to mention its military technology – far advanced.

But these basic antagonisms, exposed during war time, endure.

Thank you.