

# Discontent

## Labour Unrest

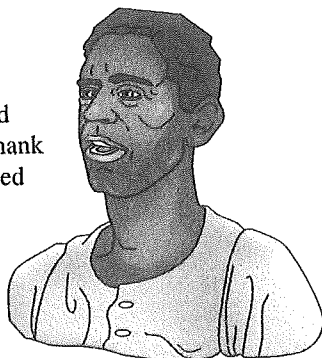


Government failure to deal with labour issues after the war was one cause of the labour unrest that resulted. The speakers below express their concerns.

### Charlie

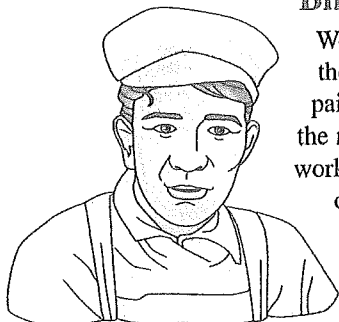
Where would Canada's 1500 factories have been without us? During the war, our manufactured exports increased enormously. Thank goodness for the women who filled in for the men who were at war!

Now that the war is over, Canada is no longer primarily a producer of raw materials. Our manufacturing and service industries produce a greater value of goods and employ more people. Politicians and businessmen need to realize that the well-being of Canada depends on its workers!



### Bill

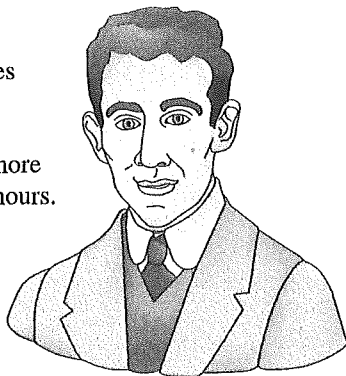
We would like to see laws that set the minimum wage that we can be paid. We also need laws that limit the number of hours we have to work each week. And there was talk of making a law about **collective bargaining**. If the government had made those laws, we might not have had the Winnipeg General Strike.



### Marcel

Those of us who own businesses are very worried by the labour movement. It will be very expensive to pay our workers more and have them working fewer hours.

Some people are afraid that workers will start a revolution. There are some business owners who think that we must stop the labour unions before they get any stronger. Business owners think it is time for the government to step in and stop the workers' demands.



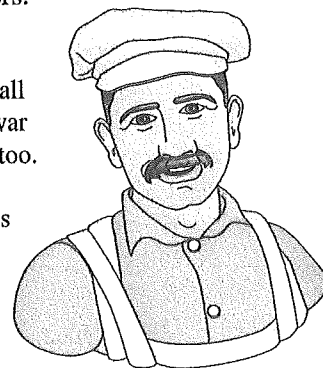
**Collective bargaining**—workers in a similar trade negotiating with employers as a group, seeking an agreement on wages and working conditions that would apply to all of them

## Growth of Labour Unions

During World War I there was an increased demand for the products of Canadian industry. Many workers were serving overseas. This led to a shortage of workers. It put workers in a good position to demand better wages and working conditions. The next few pages will examine labour unions. Labour unions are workers' organizations that bargain for better wages or working conditions for their members.

### Olaf

Canadian industry grew with all the new factories during the war years. The labour force grew too. But few employers have been willing to increase our salaries or improve our working conditions. This has led more of us to join labour unions.





### Mary

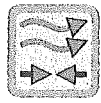
Labour unions had a number of successes during and just after the war. Most of us worked fewer hours each week. On average, our wages rose by 18% during the war. However, the costs of food, fuel, rent, and clothing have risen even faster than our wages. Because our wages do not rise as fast as the cost of living, workers are actually becoming poorer. We think it is time for the government to step in and force business owners to pay us better wages.



## Exploring Further

1.  Prepare a speech or write a newspaper editorial explaining the need for trade unions. Focus especially on the effect trade unions had on working conditions.
2. Write a slogan for either Bill or Mary (shown on this page), who support trade unions. Create posters using this slogan and listing their demands.
3.  Why do we celebrate Labour Day? Find out more about labour unions in Canada today.

## Focus On: The Winnipeg General Strike



The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 was one of the most important events in Canada's history. The strike seriously affected the city of Winnipeg, where unions were strong. As the strike spread, it affected other Canadian cities. Many Canadians even feared that a workers' revolution threatened the country's government.

The Winnipeg General Strike had its beginning outside Canada. The International Workers of the World believed the threat of a general strike would result in major gains for workers.

At the Western Labour Congress, held in Calgary in March 1919, labour delegates approved a Canadian One Big Union, OBU.

On May 1, before OBU could be established, the Building and Metal Trades Councils of Winnipeg voted to go on strike. They demanded a minimum wage of \$0.85 an hour, a 48 hour work week, and collective bargaining (the right to bargain together for one agreement covering them all). Their employers rejected this.

The Building and Metal Trades Councils called on other Winnipeg workers to join them in a general sympathy strike. The strike was to begin on May 15. That day, over 27 000 workers left their jobs.

The city of Winnipeg, with a population of over 170 000, was brought to a standstill. Buses and street cars and the railways stopped. Mail, milk, and bread were not delivered. Newspapers were not published. Some city officials, including some firefighters and police officers, refused to work.

Soon the strike spread to other parts of Canada. A large number of workers in Toronto and Vancouver also left their jobs in support of the Winnipeg workers.

At first, the demonstrations in Winnipeg were peaceful. However, on June 4 a march by strike supporters was met by a march of anti-strike demonstrators organized by a group of citizens. The potential for violence caused the mayor to ban marches.

In mid-June, a riot broke out when special constables and Mounted Police attempted to stop

a march. Shots were fired. Two men were killed and a number of others were injured.

On June 25, the Trades and Labour Council of Winnipeg announced the end of the Winnipeg General Strike. Strike leaders faced trials and a number were convicted and sentenced to jail terms.

The Winnipeg General Strike frightened most Canadians. Fewer workers chose to become members of unions. The powers of the unions were temporarily reduced.

Claris (Brownie) Freedman, ten years old at the time, witnessed the climax of the Bloody Saturday strike on June 21.

My father had a men's clothing store at the corner of Rupert and Main. We were standing, looking through the door window. I guess we must have been told something was happening. I remember seeing the streetcar overturned and a crowd of people. It turned over and then went on fire. I don't recall what happened after that.

When I look back on it, I think it was a pretty horrifying sight for young people to witness. Everybody was obviously very angry.

I was only 10 and I don't remember anything about the politics of the time. I know now that there were people out of work, that they didn't have enough to eat. I think the general strike created a strong labour movement here. I knew Gloria Queen, whose father, John Queen, was later mayor of Winnipeg. He went to jail because he was very active in the strike. So we heard a lot about that later on, about various people who went to jail. But I don't think we heard anything about the general strike in our schools or discussed it. Even in our history classes, I don't think we talked about it at all.



June 21, 1919: Bloody Saturday in Winnipeg

## Agrarian Discontent



During the war, farmers made much greater profits than ever before.

They were feeding not only their own country, but Great Britain as well, so exports were high. By 1916, their profits began to diminish, as the price of goods and farm equipment began to increase. Many farmers became dissatisfied and asked the government to take action to reduce tariffs on imports.

The growth of urban centres after the war was of concern to farmers. The political influence of farmers was reduced as cities became larger and more important. By 1920, rural and urban populations were evenly divided. Farmers were also dismayed by the fact that their sons and daughters often left for the city, where some were able to quickly gain employment. Many farmers viewed the cities as challenging rural values, traditions, and ways of life. Open distrust was building between the rural and urban populations.

The discontent of farmers resulted in distrust of traditional political parties—the Conservatives and the Liberals. Farmers throughout Canada felt they lacked the political power to force the government to address their concerns.

## New Political Parties

During and after World War I, Canadians were often divided politically. Labourers and owners of businesses were suspicious of each other. Farmers also began to organize politically. They wanted reduced taxes on farm machinery and reduced freight rates when they sent their products to markets. These issues were not a concern to urban dwellers.

Many farmers chose to become politically active. Farmers' groups called for free trade in agricultural machinery and certain other goods to reduce their costs. They also wanted **nationalization** of railway companies so that freight rates could be reduced on grain shipments. Strict controls over resource development and changes to government were two other demands.

Labour and farm interests developed new political parties to try to get their goals met. In October 1919, the United Farmers of Ontario won the largest number of seats in the provincial election. With the support of elected labour movement representatives, they formed Ontario's provincial government.

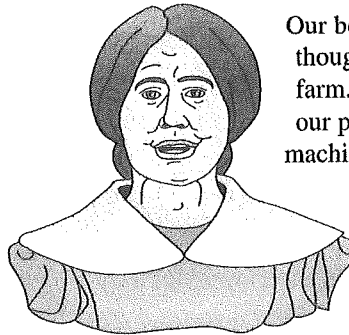
Farm and labour interests were now established as significant new voices in Canadian politics. In the early 1920s, these farm movements and labour movements developed into political parties, both provincially and federally. They experienced considerable success.

### Pierre



They say that an army moves on its stomach. Well, they couldn't have fought the war without the contributions of the farmers. Our wheat and flour were particularly in demand, as well as meat and dairy products. We worked hard during the war, increasing our production by 73%. We did what was needed then. Now we want the government to listen to us and address *our* needs!

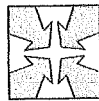
### Sarah



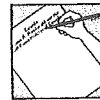
Our boys served in the war even though we needed them on the farm. We still managed to increase our production. We had to buy farm machinery to increase production when farm workers were hard to find, and we paid high tariffs on it. Sometimes we feel that the tax laws are made for city people, not for us. Now we have to pay

heavy freight rates to ship our products to market. Farm people need somebody who will speak for us in parliament. Farm people need to get some laws changed. It's no wonder that farmers are becoming politically active. I hear that the United Farmers of Ontario have actually formed the provincial government in Ontario. The new Ontario premier, Ernest Drury, is a farmer from Barrie. Now maybe our voices will be heard.

## For Your Notebook

1. In what way was the Winnipeg General Strike an example of labour unrest?
2.  What did the farmers and labour leaders have in common that led them to cooperate to achieve political change?

## Exploring Further

3.  Prepare a speech, write a newspaper editorial, or write a slogan for either Pierre or Sarah (shown above) on issues that the farmers believe need changing.

**Nationalization**—putting a business that is considered necessary for the public good under the ownership and control of the government



Examining Perspectives  
Pages 330–335

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## POLITICAL ACTION

Read pages 33 –335. Identify the issues workers or farmers had, check off who raised the issue, and describe what action was taken to resolve the problem.

Concern/Issue	Raised By		Action Taken (if any)
	Farmers	Labour	
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			