

MAY 15, 2019 CAUT NEWS ARTICLE

CAUT Statement on the 100th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike

(Ottawa – May 15, 2019) Today marks 100 years since the commencement of the Winnipeg general strike, when most of the city’s workers — about 30,000 private and public sector employees — walked off the job in an organized but unprecedented protest over dismal working conditions, low wages and the lack of a right to a collective voice.

Six weeks later it was over, but not before the federal government had ordered the arrest of eight strike leaders, and riots on June 19, “Bloody Saturday”, resulted in the death of two strikers and injuries for many others when mounted police rode into crowds gathered at Market Square and used clubs and guns to quell the unrest.

“The Canadian Association of University Teachers stands with other unions in Canada to honour the memory of this ground-breaking strike and of the people who fought for rights we often take for granted today,” says CAUT executive director David Robinson. “Today, workers are facing a resurgence of anti-unionism that threatens to erode or eliminate the power of collective action which was so hard-won by those before us — a threat we must stand together to guard against, just as workers did 100 years ago, despite the precarity of their situation.”

The strike was a defining event in the history of Canada’s modern union movement and served to highlight the plight of the working class, and drive growing solidarity. It spawned the birth of the first mandated minimum wage, leading the way for unionization of workers, improvements in employment and social conditions, and ultimately to recognition by the Supreme Court of Canada of the right to strike as essential to a meaningful process of collective bargaining protected by Canada’s Constitution.