

Role-Play Cards — Winnipeg General Strike

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You are a 26-year-old man returning from the war. You thought you would be returning to take over your family's farm, but while you were away your dad got sick, the crops failed, and your family had to sell the farm. You have a minor injury from the war, so you receive a small pension that is not enough to support yourself. You are now working in Winnipeg as a police officer, trying to hide your limp so that you can keep the job. You are supporting your parents and your younger sister, who have moved off the farm to Winnipeg. The police have voted to join the strike, and you need to decide whether you will join them.



You are a 17-year-old girl working in a factory in Winnipeg. Your father died in the war, and your mother cannot support you and your younger siblings on a small pension. Your employer expects you to work six days a week, on long shifts without a break. You know that the wages of factory workers in Winnipeg are among the lowest in the country. This month, you may not have enough to pay your rent. Your co-workers are talking about joining a union or doing anything else to improve conditions and express unity with other workers throughout the city.



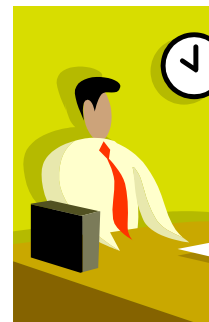
You are a 45-year-old war veteran who was injured in the first year of the war. You and your 20-year-old son, who has just returned from serving in the war, both work at Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works. Although you are hoping to make enough money to go back to the farm where your wife and younger son are holding it together, you think your son will probably stay with the MBIW. Most of the men you work with see this as a long-term job. Some union leaders have come to speak to workers at your company to persuade them to join in a strike for better wages and working conditions. Tomorrow they are holding a strike vote.



You are a 30-year-old Cree woman who married a white man before he went to war and was killed. Now you cannot live back on the reserve because you are no longer "Status Indian" since you married a non-Aboriginal. You work as a switchboard operator at Manitoba Telephone System. All of your co-workers are women, and tonight you are going to a meeting about the General Strike. You are one of very few Aboriginal women working at the company. You expect that one of your co-workers, Helen Armstrong, will speak, as she has been talking a lot about the strike and about creating a city-wide union over the last few weeks. You would like to support the men who work at the iron works, and you know that many people got working improvements from the strikes last year, but you can't afford to miss any work.



You are a 48-year-old man, a city councillor in Winnipeg, and you own a small metalworking business in the North End. Lately, the men who work for you have been restless and have complained a lot about working conditions. They want to form a large union with metal workers from other companies, but you want to deal with workers from your business only. Besides, the city workers are threatening to strike too, and you are getting a lot of messages and complaints from various citizens who are afraid that things are getting out of hand. At city council meetings, more and more of the talk is about keeping law and order. You just want to make sure that Winnipeg keeps working efficiently and safely, and your business continues to be profitable.



Adapted from B.C. Teachers' Federation Lesson Aids, The Winnipeg General Strike 1919:

Source: <http://www.bctf.ca/lessonaids/online/la2039/SS11_L1.pdf>