

Toronto Workers' Theatre Group
presents

Toronto 1919



Written by Craig Heron

Directed by Aída Jordão

THE TORONTO GENERAL STRIKE

In the spring of 1919, thousands of workers were raising a clenched fist of defiance to bosses and politicians all across Canada. The most famous event was the general strike in Winnipeg. But there were dramatic moments of class confrontation in many other towns and cities too. Here in Toronto, the labour movement was rapidly signing up thousands of new members, but showing deepening signs of a divide between visionary radicals and cautious labour bureaucrats. That tension was played out in a five-day general strike in Toronto, which began on May 30th but had petered out well before the violence erupted in Winnipeg in June. It is a little-known story of determination and political struggle.

TIMELINE

Thursday May 1	Toronto Metal Trades Council strike begins
Tuesday May 13	Metal Trades Council asks the Toronto Trades and Labor Council to call a general strike. Decision to hold a special convention
Thursday May 15	Winnipeg general strike begins
Saturday May 17	Rally of 5,000 in Queen's Park in support of an eight-hour day and a general strike
Monday May 19	Mayor Tommy Church attempts to mediate between employers and Metal Trades Council
Tuesday May 20	General strike convention meets, but adjourns because talks between the parties are ongoing HumberSide students strike for shorter school hours
Monday May 26	General strike convention reconvenes and elects a Committee of Fifteen to run the strike
Wednesday May 28	Delegation of unionists and bosses travel to Ottawa to meet Prime Minister Borden, who hopes to head off the general strike. Despite hours of meeting, no settlement results
Friday May 30	Toronto general strike is declared
Saturday May 31	General strike convention meets again. Same night, street car workers decide not to participate
Tuesday June 3	Metal Trades Council requests that the general strike be called off because of weak support. General strike convention agrees
Wednesday June 4	Garment workers return to work
Tuesday June 17	Winnipeg strike leaders are arrested

Saturday June 21

“Bloody Saturday” in Winnipeg: police violently break up a march of veterans in support of the general strike there

Thursday June 26

Winnipeg general strike officially declared over

Thursday July 17

Socialists supporters of the Toronto general strike win all the executive positions in the Trades and Labor Council elections

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Arnie Blake, newsboy	Lev Jaeger/Aida Jordao
Eleanor Brown, housewife	Holly Kirkconnell
Ethel Inkster, housewife	Nadia Geith
Isabelle Martin, reporter	Hailu Grant
James P. Merrick, Secretary, Toronto Employers' Association	Craig Heron
Arthur O'Leary, President, Toronto Trades and Labour Council	Paul Bilodeau
William J. (Bill) Hevey, Secretary, Toronto Trades and Labor Council	Ester Reiter
William D. (Willy) Robbins, Financial Secretary, Amalgamated Transit Union and City Controller	Merv King
Richard C. (Dick) Brown, President, Metal Trades Council	Mike Phillips
John Duggett, President, Building Trades League	Ed Dunsworth
Rose Barnes, housewife	Janet Lewis
Bert Wallace, veteran	Marilyn Tate/Doug Croker
Maria Agostino, housewife	Vanessa Omana
Francesca Luciano, housewife	Ester Reiter
Tommy Church, Mayor of Toronto	Ginny Thomson
Woman garment worker	Janet Lewis
Woman telephone operator	Marilyn Tate
Luigi Agostino, musician	Hartley Wynberg
Bystanders, protesters, neighbours	Cast
Stage Manager	Holly Kirkconnell
Props and Costumes	Craig Heron and Ginny Thomson



Avanti popolo, alla riscossa
Bandiera rossa, bandiera rossa
Avanti popolo, alla riscossa
Bandiera rossa trionferà.

Bandiera rossa la trionferà
Bandiera rossa la trionferà
Bandiera rossa la trionferà
Evviva il socialismo e la libertà!

Thanks to:

Jim Naylor (for the original research)

Merv King, Michelle Irving, and Nuno Cristo (for props)

Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge (for costumes)

Steelworkers' Toronto Area Council and Abdul Samad (for rehearsal space)

Toronto Workers' Theatre Group is part of the
Toronto Workers' History Project.

For more information on membership and events,
check our website: twhp.ca