Toronto Workers’ Theatre Group
presents

Toronto 1919

Written by Craig Heron
Directed by Aida 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
“Bloody Saturday” in Winnipeg: police violently break up a march of veterans in support of the general strike there

Winnipeg general strike officially declared over

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, Craig Heron
Toronto Employers’ Association
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!

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Toronto Workers’ Theatre Group is part of the
Toronto Workers’ History Project.
For more information on membership and events,
check our website: twhp.ca