

# CHC2P Unit 1: 1914-1919: Forming Identity

## Activity 6: The Year 1919

---

### Overview

This activity focuses on important events that occurred in 1919.

### Lesson

#### *The Treaty of Versailles*



The Great War had ended on November 11th, 1918 with the surrender of Germany. In the year 1919, there were decisions made about the new face of Europe and the world. The victorious nations met in Paris, France to make the peace treaty at the end of World War I. Since the treaty was signed at the magnificent palace of Versailles, it is also known as the Versailles Peace Treaty or the Treaty of Versailles.

At the negotiations, Canada was represented as an independent nation rather than as a member of the British Empire. Noting that Canada had lost 60,000 soldiers in World War I, Prime Minister Borden insisted that Canada have an independent voice at Versailles.

At Versailles, Germany had to accept full responsibility for causing the war and was ordered to permanently disarm its military and pay strict reparation payments for the damage it had caused. Germany had to also surrender all of its colonies to the League of Nations.

#### *The League of Nations*

The Versailles Peace Treaty also provided for the creation of a new world organization called The League of Nations. At its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the nations of the world would meet to discuss problems and to attempt to avoid war in the future.

It is estimated that between 10 and 20 million people lost their lives in World War I, and the leaders of the world did not wish for this horrible type of war to happen again. Canada joined the League of Nations as an independent country. The leaders of the League of Nations had high hopes for the future, however, the League of Nations did not work very well. Some countries, such as the United States, did not join the League. The organization was not able to enforce its own rules. In the end, the League of Nations was unable to stop the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

## ***The Winnipeg General Strike***



As the men who had fought in the war returned to Canada in 1919, they often found that the jobs they had left behind had been taken over by others. They also found that prices on goods were increasing rapidly. This condition is known as inflation.

Workers in many parts of Canada also wanted the right to a union and the right to collective bargaining. A union is an organization formed by working people for their own protection. One of the purposes of a union is to obtain the right of collective bargaining. Rather than each worker individually “bargaining” with the employer for wages and benefits, the union wishes to speak for the entire “collection” of workers, when bargaining for wages and benefits.

There is power in numbers. If one worker is not satisfied with her/his wages and refuses to work or goes on strike, no one takes much notice. However, if all the workers in an industry are not satisfied and go on strike, much notice is taken.

In 1919, worker frustrations boiled over in the city of Winnipeg. The workers in the city’s metal industries wanted the right to collective bargaining and a wage increase to \$1.00 per hour. When the owners refused these requests, the workers went on strike. Then the workers in other industries went on strike to back up the metal workers. Soon the firefighters, the postal workers, the delivery people, and even the police in Winnipeg went on strike to back the metal workers. When all the workers are on strike, it is called a general strike.

The strikers formed a special committee to make certain that essential services were kept and to organize the strikers. The employers and the people who opposed the strike believed that the strikers were trying to overthrow the government of Winnipeg. They accused the strikers of being Communists. Government officials hired new people to replace the striking postal workers and policemen. These replacement workers were called "scabs" by the strikers.

After the strike was six weeks old, the opponents of the strike convinced the federal government to send in the army and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to end the strike and to arrest its leaders. In the process, one man was killed and dozens wounded.

The workers did not receive what they had asked for, but they had demonstrated the power of united action. 35,000 workers had stayed off the job for six weeks in Winnipeg. The government of Canada did take notice, and in the next decades, laws were passed that would protect the rights of workers.

## ***THE 1919 FLU PANDEMIC***



Many soldiers had contracted influenza, or “flu”, in the trenches in Europe, and brought this highly contagious disease home to the various countries that they came from. The prefix “pan” on a word means “wide”. A “panorama” is a picture with a wide view. A “pandemic” is a disease that spreads over a wide area. The flu pandemic of 1919 eventually killed over 20 million people, including 35,000 Canadians.

## Assignment

1. In your opinion, was Germany alone responsible for WWI? Do you think it was dealt with fairly by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919?
2. What was the League of Nations? What was the purpose of this organization? What problems did it experience?
3. What is meant by collective bargaining?
4. What is meant by a general strike?
5. How long did the Winnipeg General Strike last?
6. How did the Winnipeg General Strike end?
7. What is a “scab”?
8. Give two examples in the world today where workers are attempting to form unions.
9. Give an example of collective bargaining in Canada today.
10. The flu pandemic of 1919 eventually killed over 20 million people, including 35,000 Canadians. Name a 21st century pandemic disease.