

1919 Winnipeg General Strike

Past Present Future

There are numerous books, articles and even movies and musicals regarding the history of this iconic event of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, but what about a different perspective. We can read the history behind the General Strike and what it did for the working class of today, but what will this mean for our future generations? Will they know what those men and women fought for so long ago and what the outcome did for their future and the future generations beyond that? Why not look at this historic event from an individual who participated in the Solidarity Parade on May 25, 2019?

I decided to participate in the Solidarity Parade, not just to represent my union, AESES, but also to give myself a sense of pride and make history on this 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike.

As we began decorating the float on the Friday evening, the momentum started to build and yes, it was exciting, being a part of history, and that only continued into Saturday morning. Up early with the sun shining (at least the rain had stopped), to complete the final touches on the float and the truck to pull it. Excitement was building all around as other unions gathered; there was comradery, laughter and many photo opportunities. One could only imagine what it would have been like 100 years ago, was there excitement, tension or a sense of foreboding?

As the truck engines roared to life and the bands began to play, floats, horse drawn carriages, and many walkers slowly began to move towards the start of the route. As our float rounded the corner of Market Ave. and Lily St., it was almost an eerie feeling as two members played music for the union songs, you heard the strong union of the Manitoba Teacher Society, cheering, shouting and singing the song "Solidarity Forever" as the two members of our float played the music and we sang along raising our

fists in the air! Rounding the famous corner of Market Ave. and Main St., you could almost hear the horses from 1919 clapping along the cobblestone as they headed towards the unknown. Today, people of all ages lined the street along the route, many with young children and others standing alone, many taking pictures as this was once again history in the making.

As we continued our route up Main St. towards Broadway, many shop owners came from behind their doors to support those walking and sing along the songs of the Union: "Solidarity Forever"¹; and "Which Side are you on"². Just as we came to turn onto Broadway, an image of three women, cooks from VJ's restaurant, will forever be imbedded in my mind. These women, from immigrant families, stood side by side waving and clapping, and tears ran down their faces as we passed. By fighting for social inequality, working conditions, low wages, and immigrant discrimination, those men and women from 1919 gave these women hope for a future in a new country that might not have been otherwise possible.

As we turned onto Broadway to make our way to Memorial Park, the crowds along the route increased and the ages of the people lining the street ranged from a baby in a carriage to an older man in a wheel chair. Yes, it was a parade, but it was more than that. It was a show of solidarity to all unions past, present and future. Nearing the end of the parade route our voices and the voices of those along the parade route were even stronger. We wanted to be heard! We wanted to be seen! Truly, we wanted to celebrate what those women and men did 100 years ago for us, the unions of today, and what we will continue to do for the futures of our children and their children - fight for fair wages, better working conditions, and the continued hope of achieving greater economic security.

I was proud to be a part of this historic event, and I'm proud to be part of a union.

¹"Solidarity Forever", written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915, is a popular union anthem. It is sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic".

²"Which Side Are You ON?" is a song written in 1931 by Florence Reece, the wife of Sam Reece, a union organizer for the United Mine Workers in Harlan County, Kentucky.