

Differing Viewpoints on the Winnipeg General Strike

Name: _____

Date: _____

Viewpoint #1 – The Western Labour News, May 17, 1919. (This paper was published by the strike committee)

“There is good reason for congratulating both the strike committee and the citizen’s committee for their conduct up to now during the strike. Both sides have been more orderly than a crowd at a baseball game. The strike will succeed as long as the strikers remain orderly.”

Viewpoint #2 - The Winnipeg Citizen, May 17, 1919 (This was the major daily newspaper at the time)

“We wish to say to the general public of Winnipeg that quite clearly this is not a strike at all as we know it but a revolution. There is an attempt in all this effort by the strike leaders to destroy our system of government and replace it with a communist system of government as in Russia.”

Viewpoint #3 - A concerned Winnipeg citizen, Rev. Dr. John MacLean, Methodist minister, writing in his diary, May 20, 1919.

“We are under the control of communists in Winnipeg, [during the general strikes]. Everything is quiet but there are some ugly rumours floating around. The Home Defence Guards must be ready for action at a given signal.”

Viewpoint #4 - A Winnipeg housewife, whose husband belongs to a union.

“Last Monday, when the new postman arrived at my home on Portage Street in Winnipeg to deliver a letter, I asked him to wait for a moment and went inside. I brought a box of ointment from the house with me, and presented it to him. He asked, “What is this for?”, and I replied, “Oh that is very fine ointment for a scab [strikebreaker].”

Viewpoint #5 - One description of ‘Bloody Saturday’ when violence broke out between strikers and police at a major Winnipeg intersection, Portage Street and Main Street.

“The Mounties were called out, and moving down Main Street, tried to disperse the crowd. Violence occurred at once, leading the mayor to read the Riot Act and call out the army. Violence had occurred, a streetcar that was passing down the track was destroyed and other objects were thrown at the Mounties, shots were also fired at them. The result was casualties. The commander in charge of the Mounties, thus felt that it was necessary to fire on the crowd in self-defence. The Mounties did this and the result was casualties. There were, in fact, 34 casualties of which 16 were Mounties. The mob was broken up within one and a half hours with the help of the army. But let me repeat, the first shots were fired by the demonstrators, not the Mounties.”

Viewpoint #6 – A second account of ‘Bloody Saturday’.

“On Saturday, just as the demonstration of war veterans was to begin, 50 Mounties swinging baseball bats rode into the demonstrators. The crowd let them pass through without any violence on their part. But they turned and charged at the crowd again. But all they met with were boos and catcalls. However, orders were given that revolvers be drawn and they charged the crowd, firing as they proceeded. One man was killed during this charge because he thought the Mounties were only shooting blanks. Some people who were opposed to the strike cheered as the Mountie man-killers rode by. There is no exact list of casualties for this event but certainly it was more than 30.”

Study of Bias in the Reporting of Events:

-Bias results when one allows his or her personal feeling to affect interpretation of events

Use the accounts given on the reverse of this sheet re. the Winnipeg General Strike to complete this exercise:

Account #	For OR Against OR Impartial to Strike?	List Clue Words and Phrases that Reflect Bias
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

Your Conclusion:

How accurate are eye-witness accounts of historical events? (Explain using your findings in this exercise.)
