Ginger Goodwin Protests

Longshoremen against Returned Soldiers
during the Vancouver General Strike of 1918

Chris Madsen, Canadian Forces College
2 August 1918, first general strike by labor in Vancouver and Western Canada

Historians typically view event as precursor or antecedent to large-scale general strikes a year later in 1919 - Seattle, Winnipeg and Vancouver should instead see on own terms as distinct wartime event

Clash between strong anti-war, pacifist and economically-motivated feelings and hyper-patriotic pro-war vesting of militarized element

Pitted longshoremen against returned soldiers

Protest invoked counter-protest, with great potential for public violence
The Longshore Union

International Longshoremen’s Association Vancouver Local 38-52 and Local 38-52 Auxiliary

hiring and dispatch hall – waterfront “shape-up”

Union leadership:
Ernest Winch
(socialist, anti-war)
William Pritchard
Jack Kavanagh

June 1918 collective agreement signed with Shipping Federation of British Columbia

war conditions detrimental to shipping, longshore work

Ernest Winch
English trained bricklayer,
longshore business agent,
later social democrat (CCF)
Provincial politician, son Harold
Winch also entered provincial politics for CCF
Goodwin’s Death and the Decision to Strike

Military Service Act – compulsory call-up military draft evaders, defaulters and deserters

go into forests Vancouver Island, logging camps

27 July 1918: Albert "Ginger" Goodwin, prominent labor leader shot and killed – unionized labor outraged

general strike being prepared in Vancouver in support federal postal workers – switch to protest

unions and workers declare 24 hours off for day of Goodwin’s funeral – general strike is on

961 longshoremen walk off waterfront docks, noon 2 August 1918, streetcars stop
 Returned Soldiers and Veterans Organize

by 1918, Vancouver major reception and discharge center for wounded, disabled and psychologically broken soldiers from war fronts

Hastings Park Military Depot, Shaughnessy Military Convalescent Hospital

large numbers uniformed men awaiting release or recently demobilized

ex-soldiers accustomed and inclined toward collective action and violence

difficult transition back to civilian society and own grievances against uncaring government bureaucracy – the fight continues
Demonstrations in the Streets

soldiers besieged Vancouver Trades and Labor Council labor temple

mob seized secretary of longshoremen’s union and forced him to kiss Union Jack flag

call made to Shaughnessy Military Hospital talking about pay back

next morning, Private Augustus Devereaux led group of convalescents to ILWU Local 38-52 hall with intent to shame longshoremen as the strike ended at noon and return to work

longshoremen outnumber returned soldiers 6 to 1

Vancouver Daily World, 3 August 1918
A Mayor Intervenes

Vancouver’s mayor, R.H. Gale, professed neutral, though sympathies clearly with military veterans attended public displays denouncing general strike
direct involvement in talks at union hall between representatives longshoremen and returned soldiers
recently unionized Vancouver police declined to choose sides, much sympathy for labor
mayor raised possibility of military solution, invoking of martial law by aid to civil power request to district military authorities
possible use soldiers as replacement workers docks

Robert Henry Gale, originally from Quebec, won a landslide victory in the 1918 mayoralty race and stayed in office until 1921. He, along with Liberal member of parliament Henry Herbert Stevens, promoted port development in Vancouver and increased international trade.
1918 Vancouver general strike singular event

less about assumed conflict between labor and capital - in fact federal mediators observed almost no economic rationale behind

sequence of protests and condoned violent demonstrations over compressed period of time

labor expressed indignation at Goodwin’s untimely death through public action, returned soldiers reacted strongly with equal indignation about their perceptions of the situation

different world views and perspectives, one anti-war - other unabashedly pro-war

neither stereotypical labor radicals nor dupes of the business community

manifestation of late war tiredness and increased sense of collective labor power