



THE GREAT STRIKE 1917

PRESS KIT

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Short Tagline(29 words)

It is a story involving murder, censorship and political manipulation which lay dormant in archival vaults for decades. It was Sydney, 1917 and to this day, Australia's largest industrial upheaval.

Antenna Documentary Film Festival Synopsis

A century ago, a seemingly innocuous management decision in a Sydney tram depot and railyard was to spark an industrial dispute that would have longstanding and profound effects on the nation: a card system to record work times and output in a drive for greater efficiencies. 100,000 workers around Australia walked off the job to protest the changing workplace conditions. A striker was shot and killed, a filmmaker had his film censored and within six weeks it was over. The Great Strike 1917 retells this largely forgotten story, which shaped Australian society and the labor movement for a century and beyond.

Tagline(71 words)

At the height of World War I, the introduction of American management techniques sparked Australia's greatest industrial dispute. A striker was shot and killed, a filmmaker had his film censored and within six weeks it was over. Bitter repercussions were metered out to striking workers. Thousands stopped worked, the government recruited volunteers to break the strike some of whom carried arms, unions were deregistered and union leaders charged with conspiracy; a time of violent emotions, state violence and individual acts of violence by and against strikers - it was Sydney, 1917 and to this day, Australia's largest industrial upheaval.

Short Synopsis(150 words)

Australia's largest industrial upheaval occurred over one hundred years ago. It was Sydney, 1917. Thousands had joined protest marches through the streets, the government recruited volunteers to break the strike, issuing some of them with guns; unions were deregistered and union leaders charged with conspiracy. It was a time of violent emotions, state violence and individual acts of violence by and against strikers. A striker, Mervyn Flanagan was shot and killed.

With the introduction of a new 'timecard' system, which became known as Taylorism, originating from the United States, transport workers stopped work, triggering the strike.

The documentary examines the industrial, social and political context of a struggle that had lasting consequences for the labour movement in Australia. Personal stories and legacies filtered through generations of families for years to come, reflecting on the fight for decent conditions and fair treatment in the workplace, which still strongly resonate today.

Synopsis(250 words)

Thousands had stopped work, the government recruited volunteers to break the strike, issuing some with guns; unions were deregistered and union leaders charged with conspiracy. It was a time of violent emotions, state violence and individual acts of violence by and against strikers. A striker, Mervyn Flanagan was shot and killed. It was Sydney, 1917.

The world was in the grip of "The Great War" and the Bolshevik Revolution was stirring in Russia. Australia was divided over the great Conscription debate.

Rail and tram employees had been forced to work longer hours, with reduced wages and conditions. With the introduction of a new 'timecard' system known as Taylorism, which originated from the United States, workers at the Randwick Tramways and Eveleigh Locomotive Workshops walked off the job in protest, triggering the strike.

Within two weeks the stoppage turned into the biggest industrial upheaval Australia has seen before or since. At its height the strike stopped coastal shipping, mining, stevedoring and transport on the eastern coast of Australia, and involved tens of thousands of workers in NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

Interwoven with the historic photographs, and a series of oral history interviews recorded in the late 1980's, are the rare black and white silent clips. City of Sydney historians and National Film and Sound Archive staff uncover the story behind the rare archival footage of the strikers and a seminal story of censorship.

The Centenary of the Great Strike was celebrated by unions groups, local council and arts organisations - Unions NSW, the City of Sydney Council and Carriageworks - in 2017. Five contemporary artists were commissioned to produce works for the exhibition, *1917: The Great Strike*. The artworks invite younger audiences to consider history as an on-going source of inspiration and analysis. During the exhibition, audience members were asked about their reactions to the exhibition.

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consequences for the labor movement in Australia. It was over 100 years ago, but personal stories and legacies filtered through generations of families for years to come, reflecting on the fight for decent conditions and fair treatment on the job, which still strongly resonate today.

Director's Statement

Amanda King

We began researching the story behind the 6 week strike that occurred in Sydney in 1917 at the time of the 100 year anniversary in 2017. It quickly became apparent that this was a powerful confluence of events that challenged all the stereotypes.

Industrial action occurring at the height of an intense period of nationalistic fervour – World War I was unbelievable enough. Yet the more details came to light, the more remarkable the story.

The story explores three elements to the strike – the reasons behind it, the murder of a striker and an early and compelling case of film censorship.

Australia's largest industrial action occurred because workers rejected the integrity of their work being compromised by the introduction of American based efficiency techniques, known as Taylorism or Scientific Management. The ever changing nature of the work environment is nothing new to contemporary society as we grapple with the impacts of AI.

This is a film to remind audiences today that the confluence of new technology, power and politics is occurring in very much the same way as it did all those years ago.

Cast

Professor Lucy Taksa
Centre for Workforce Futures
Macquarie University

Sally McManus
Secretary, ACTU

Frances Morgan
Writer The Folded Lie

John Graham
Labor MLC NSW Parliament

Laila Ellmoos
Historian City of Sydney Council

Simon Drake
National Film & Sound Archive

Key Personnel

Director/Editor: Amanda King
Co-Producers: Fabio Cavadini
Screenwriter: Amanda King

Director of Photography: Fabio Cavadini
Graphic Designer: Miriana Marusic
Sound Designer: Anthony Marsh

Donors

Unions NSW
Slater & Gordon Lawyers
Workcover Australia
Turner Freeman Lawyers

Reviews

Reviewed by Barnaby Smith in Metro Magazine 205, 2020

<https://www.metromagazine.com.au/magazine/index.html>

Remembering Resistance Class Politics and Amanda King's *The Great Strike 1917*

Depicting a historical moment of working-class protest, Amanda King's documentary brings together analysis and copious archival material with artistic responses to the 1917 strike a century on. As **Barnaby Smith** describes, the film serves – despite some limitations in scope – as not only an essential record of Australian trade unionism, but also a timely call for political reunification.

ON LINE PRESS

SCREEN NSW

<https://www.screen.nsw.gov.au/news/the-great-strike-1917>

INNER WEST COURIER

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/inner-west/amanda-king-brings-the-story-of-the-great-strike-1917-to-life-on-the-big-screen/news-story/82564432c3a611a56c69c05c7f61633f?fbclid=IwAR1R7FKmUNnK1RQmbJBQD7nSYtcSoi4W1dNhHdjYPm2ira-SkS9zcbz2TGY>

GREEN LEFT WEEKLY

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/great-strike-1917-state-power-against-organised-workers>

RADIO INTERVIEWS

89.7 EASTSIDE FM

EPISODE: Monday Drive – 4:00pm 21st Oct 2019 presented by Ruth Hessey

55minutes in

<https://eastsidefm.org/episodes/monday-drive-400pm-21st-oct-2019/>

RADIO SKID ROW 88.9 FM

interview with presenter Colin Hesse

<https://soundcloud.com/radio-skid-row/documentary-makers-fabio-cavadini-and-mandy-king-discuss-their-film-the-great-strike>

Trailer/Short video links

The Great Strike 1917 TRAILER - public

<https://vimeo.com/284663444>

<http://www.frontyardfilms.com.au/thegreatstrike1917/>

Technical Information

Shot on Canon200C

Master: ProRes422

Duration: 70 minutes

Contact Details

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