



The Labour History Project

Teaching and Learning Activities to accompany the DVD “These were the reasons....”

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Curriculum Application: Social Studies 9/Social Studies 10/Law 12

The Learning Objectives of the Series

1. To answer the question; Why have a union?
2. To make history “come alive” through first hand stories
3. To link early union struggles with today’s issues.
4. To show how unions have been involved in social change.
5. To challenge the myth that unions have become irrelevant.

Teaching and learning strategies to accompany the video series.

Before viewing the DVD or selected chapter, consider using these pre-viewing questions:

- Do we need unions? Why/why not?
- What were the reasons in the past for reasons? Are those reasons the same or different from today?
- Are you in a union? Which one?
- Are your parents in a union? Which one? How about other family members? Do they ever talk about what it means to be in a union?
- What do unions do?

Introduction: The introduction poses the question: What do you think of unions? Are they good or bad? This section includes interviews with people on the street interspersed with oral histories on the question of unions. Each chapter in the rest of the film essentially provide some of the answers to those questions. Why unions? These were the reasons...

Chapter 1: Early Stories: Working without a union

With archival photographs and interviews, this chapter looks at some of the issues facing workers in the early years of BC labour including child labour in the canneries, coal mine explosions and deaths and other workplace hazards. Vignettes from **Working People: a History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [First Economies](#), [Bows and Arrows](#), [Children at Work](#), [Miners vs. Dunsmuirs](#)

Focus questions

1. What dangers did early workers without unions face, and who protected them? How about today?
2. What does acting collectively mean? What can collective action achieve?
3. Did the law effectively protect workers from dangers on the job?

Chapter 2: The Big Strike: Vancouver Island 1912-1914

This segment examines the Vancouver Island strike 1912-1914 in the coal mines through oral histories, photographs, songs, and other primary sources. The segment includes children's recollections of the strike that resulted in evictions of families, school closures, replacement workers, military intimidation, jail sentences, and a blacklist of striking workers. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Miners vs. Dunsmuir's](#), [Vancouver Island War](#)

Focus questions

1. Why did the workers in the mines go on strike? What was their goal?
2. How did government and the employers respond?
3. What was life like for the strikers and their families?
4. What were the results of this strike?

Chapter 3: Ginger Goodwin

Friends and coworkers recall the story of labour leader Ginger Goodwin, from his work to his conscription, death, and funeral. This section emphasizes the reaction among the community. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Vancouver Island War](#) and [Ginger Goodwin](#)

Focus questions

1. Describe Ginger Goodwin.
2. Why was he pursued by police?
3. What were the circumstances of his arrest and death, according to the oral history provided?
4. What was the effect of his death on his community?

Chapter 4: Police and Picket Lines

This chapter looks at the role of the militia and the police to break strikes in the interwar period. Despite the fact that laws were changed to prohibit the use of the militia to intimidate striking workers, oral histories describe violations of those laws in BC. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Vancouver Island War](#) and [Ginger Goodwin](#)

Focus questions

1. How were police and militia used in dealing with strikes in the interwar period?

Chapter 5: Unemployed Get a Union - Stories from the relief camps

This chapter recounts the story of the On-to-Ottawa Trek of 1935 that began in the relief camps of BC during the Great Depression. Oral histories recall the conditions of the work camps, the role of the army, and the decision to strike the camps and head to Ottawa to demand wages for the workers. The section ends with images and memories of the Regina riot that ended the Trek. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [On to Ottawa](#) and [Bloody Sunday](#)

Focus questions

1. How does Red Walsh describe conditions working in the camps.
2. Why did these workers form the Relief Camp Workers Union?
3. What was the government's response to the On-to-Ottawa Trek?

Chapter 6: BC Lumber Workers' Story

This section describes working conditions for lumber workers in BC's forests and the incredible dangers so many of them faced. The growth of a union movement in forestry emerged in this time period. This chapter also looks at the role that lumber workers played in the establishment of the 40 hour work week for the first time in Canada. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Where the Fraser River Flows](#), [Ocean Falls](#), [Mayo Singh](#), [Wilmer Gold](#)

Focus questions

1. What was the major concern for workers in the lumber industry?
2. What was the significance of the lumber workers story for all workers?

Chapter 7: Fighting for Equity: The '30s, The War years and A Shoreworkers' story

This three-part chapter examines women's organizing from the Hunger Marches of the 1930s for unemployment insurance, to the work of women in munitions factories during the Second World War, and the fight in the canneries for enforcement of the Equal Pay Act. Includes an interesting oral history of the way owners used women's labour to drive down wages in the canneries.

Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Helena Gutteridge](#), [Home Front Work Front](#), [By Women, for Women](#), [The Professionals](#), [Trouble on the Line](#) and [Connie Jervis](#)

Focus questions

1. What were the different labour issues facing women in these three stories?
2. How did social expectations of women define the struggle for women worker's rights?
3. What victories and setbacks were achieved for women as workers, and to what extent was the progression of obtaining these rights hindered by gender?
4. Did the law treat women fairly and equally? Does it today?

Chapter 8: Taking on Government: Wage Controls, the Health Workers' story and the teachers' story.

This three part section looks at the experience of public servants and government policy, beginning with wage control programs in the 1970s to health workers and teachers in BC. The sections on the health workers strike in 2004 and the teachers' strike of 2005 include interviews on the picket lines, speeches and footage from rallies, and news footage from those strikes. The chapter also looks at the role of the courts in determining the government had violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in its treatment of both health workers and teachers. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Connie Jervis](#)

Focus questions

1. What are wage controls? Are there cases when wage controls are acceptable?
2. Is it okay to have wage controls without price controls? Rent controls?
3. Why did workers in the '70s and their supporters object to wage controls?
4. What did Bill 29 do? Why did the Hospital Employees Union go on strike over this issue?
5. What kinds of work do members of the HEU do?
6. From the film, what groups of people seemed to be affected by this bill?
7. Who supported the HEU in this struggle with government? Why do you think they did so?
8. How did the courts end up protecting collective bargaining in this case?
9. Examine a copy of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, especially S2, Fundamental Freedoms. Which section of the Charter was violated by Bill 29?
10. Why did teachers go on strike in 2005? Was that legal?
11. What were the results of that action?
12. Is it ever okay to break the law?

Chapter 9: Union and Community- Peace and Solidarity

This section looks at the role the labour movement played by working in solidarity with faith groups, peace groups, and other community organizations to work for peace, health care, aboriginal rights, and other public issues. The film includes footage of the massive Vancouver peace marches in the 1980s. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Solidarity](#)

Focus questions

1. How have unions connected with other groups in the struggle for peace and social justice?

Chapter 10: The Struggle Continues

This concluding chapter includes more interviews with folks on the street, highlighting current issues facing workers in BC, including the rights of farmworkers, women, domestic workers, bank tellers, and more. Vignettes from **Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia** related to this topic: [Farmworkers](#)

Focus questions

1. After viewing the whole documentary, what are your final thoughts about unions?
2. So according to this documentary, what *are* the reasons for unions?

- “These Were the Reasons on the Labour Heritage Centre’s Website. [Video link](#)
- Keep up to date on the latest work of the Labour History Project by checking in with the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre for the latest information, teaching materials and upcoming workshops and events. <https://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/>
- For further ideas and information on the teaching of the Labour History of British Columbia check out the lessons created by the Labour History Project to accompany each of the Vignettes in the Knowledge Network Series Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia. They are found on the TeachBC Website <https://teachbcdb.bctf.ca/login>
- Search the TeachBC site with the filter “Labour History” for all of our materials.
- Additional lesson materials and video resources on B.C.’s Labour History are found on the BC Labour Heritage Centre’s website. [Link](#)
- For information on the Day of Mourning project for schools with print and video resources go [_domschools.ca](https://domschools.ca)
- The lessons for “These were the reason...” with embedded links to the on-line videos can be found on [TeachBC](#)