



### The 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike

#### Curriculum Application:

Social Studies 10

Social Justice 12

**The Essential Question:** To what extent do women have greater challenges organizing themselves as unionized labour in comparison to men? To what degree have these circumstances changed over time?

### Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Reading and group activity using provided background materials and guided questions on a topic related to the Home Front in World War and the impact of the Spanish Influenza epidemic on domestic labour relations.
2. Group activity using provided primary documents.
3. Essay writing assignment on the life of working women in Vancouver, past and present.
4. Extended activities for further research on strikes and the nature of work for diverse groups in early British Columbia.

### Learning Standards

1. Students engage in local history about working people and social justice issues in a period of social upheaval, the First World War and Spanish Flu. **Significance** –
2. Inquiries include newspapers, coroner's report, an oral history, photographs, videos, websites and a city council document. **Evidence**
3. Students examine conditions for working women a century ago and compare with today. **Continuity and Change** –
4. Students study trade union organizing, past and present and discover reasons workers organize as well as the benefits and hardships. **Cause and Consequences**
5. Students gain an understanding of the historical prejudices and challenges of working women (and men) and systemic racism. **Perspective**
6. Students look at biases in “mainstream” versus “labour” newspapers, consider the ideas of “fair treatment” in employer-employee relations and the impact of government and private sector decisions on peoples’ lives. **Ethical Judgment**

### Materials and Resources Provided

- Lesson Strategies: The 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike
- Backgrounder: Steam Laundries vs Hand Laundries
- Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike of 1918 timeline
- Biographies of Female Strike Participants
- Laundry Strike: Primary Documents
- Document Activity Questions

### Additional Suggested Materials

- 'Girl strikers' and the 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Dispute  
<https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/article/view/190428>

## Lesson Activities

***This lesson is divided into Part A, B and C and can be taught separately or as a unit.***

### **Part A - Reading and Group Activity**

Students will read the provided handouts on the Vancouver Laundry Strike of 1918 and answer the guiding questions to gain an understanding of the dispute and reflect on the gender and ethnic issues that fuelled the conflict.

The second portion of the lesson guides students through a selection of primary resources on the strike with provided focus questions to further their understanding of the issues and causes of the strike. This is a small group activity with a summary exercise conducted in the larger group.

### **Part B- Key Union Definitions and Union Organizing today**

Students will explore the basic organizational elements of a union to better understand the principles of collective action of workers. The follow-up activity will explore the organization of a union at a McDonalds restaurant in Squamish in 1999 and the current struggle to improve minimum wages with the "Fight for \$15" campaigns.

### **Part C- Union Video Stories, Essay Assignment and Extended Activities**

Students will view 4 vignettes from the *Working People: A History of British Columbia* series that explore the struggles of working women to look for commonalities with the issues behind the Laundry Strike of 1918.

Students will use their understanding of the lesson materials to write an essay on workplace issues for women in the past and today.

Further suggestions for extended studies on the topic are provided to be used at the teacher's discretion.

This lesson unit is written by Janet Mary Nicol, based on: "*Girl Strikers" and the 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Dispute,*" Janet Mary Nicol **BC Studies**, Autumn 2019. Number 203.

### **Lesson Strategies: The 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike**

*This lesson is divided into Part A, B and C and can be taught separately or as a unit.*

#### **Part A - Reading and Group Activity and Learning with Primary Documents**

**Reading** - Distribute the four-page handout about the Vancouver steam laundries strike. Students read and discuss in groups and/or as a class. The hand-out includes:

- Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike of 1918 timeline (two pages)
- Biographies of Female Strike Participants (1 page)
- Backgrounder: Steam Laundries vs Hand Laundries (1 page)

#### **Guiding Questions:**

1. Women represented 13 percent of the Canadian workforce in the early 1900s. Today women make up 50 percent of the workforce. Why were fewer women in trade unions in the early 1900s?
2. Make a list of workplace issues for working women in 1918. Which issues have changed for working women today? Which issues have stayed the same?
3. In early Vancouver, owners of steam laundries were of British/European heritage, while most owners of hand laundries were Chinese. Why do you think this was so? What other prejudices did Chinese residents in the city confront?

#### **Group Activity - Primary Documents**

The class is divided into six groups. Each group is given one of six primary documents about the 1918 steam laundries strike and a sheet with document questions.

Students study one document and answer the three key questions for their assigned document. Each group reports out to the class. All students take notes when the reports are presented. (notes will be used if Option C, the essay assignment is used)

#### **Six Sets of Primary Documents:**

- (1) Excerpts from taped interviews with Ellen Goode, laundry worker
- (2) Archival photographs and website - steam laundry workers/hand laundries
- (3) Excerpt - Coroner's Inquest into the death of a laundry worker, 1919
- (4) Excerpt - Apology to Chinese community from Vancouver City Council, 2018
- (5) Clippings from Vancouver newspapers, 1918
- (6) BC Federationist, article and cartoon, 1918

## Lesson Strategies: The 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike

### Part B - Key Union Definitions and Union Organizing Today

Students copy the following ten **key terms** from the board:

*Union card, organizing drive, bargaining unit, union certification, strike vote, strike, picket line, strikebreaker, union contract, closed/open shop*

Students search the definitions using computer/iPhone. (This could also be a homework activity.) Go over the answers as a class.

### Young Workers Organize a Union

Students read a newspaper article on the McDonalds restaurant union drive in Squamish, BC in 1999 and answer guiding questions individually, in groups or as a class. (Note: The teacher can print the newspaper article and give as a handout or students can access on line.) Link at -

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/20-years-ago-employees-in-squamish-b-c-voted-to-disband-the-first-mcdonald-s-union-in-north-america-1.5195490>

### Guiding Questions:

1. Why did workers at McDonalds vote to organize a union?
2. What are the risks and benefits to organizing a union?
3. Why did workers vote to de-certify from the union at McDonalds a year later?

### “Fight for \$15”

Students conduct an internet search of one of the many “**Fight for \$15**” websites. (This could also be a homework activity.) In groups and/or as a class, discuss:

1. What is the “Fight for \$15” movement in North America about?
2. Where has the “fight” been successful?
3. What are the pros and cons of raising the minimum wage to \$15?
4. How does the campaign impact on female workers?

### Lesson Strategies: The 1918 Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike

#### PART C - Union Video Stories, Essay Assignment and Extended Activities

1. Students view four videos (about 3 minutes each) from *Working People: A History of Labour In BC* on the topic of union organizing. The videos are available as a DVD or freely accessed at the BC Labour Heritage website. <http://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/videogallery> The four videos are: *Trouble on the Line* (female telephone workers), *By Women, For Women* (female bank workers), *Farmworkers* (union organizing among Indo-Canadians) and *Helena Gutteridge* (a profile of the organizer of the 1918 strike)
2. Discuss the videos in groups or as a class: Consider themes around women and work, union organizing and women working 100 years ago compared to today.
3. Students write a two-page, double-spaced essay about the life of a working women in Vancouver, past and present.

Students will use evidence in their essay from the reading and document study of the steam laundries strike, the story on the McDonalds restaurant staff union and the four *Working People* videos.

Guiding ideas for students to consider in the essay:

- Workplace issues for women a hundred years ago—and today
- Hardships and benefits of organizing a union a hundred years ago—and today
- The status of working women a hundred years ago—and today

#### Extension Activities

1. Each group researches a strike in BC in the early 1900s. Prepare a brief report about the strike and compare to the 1918 laundry workers strike.
2. Each group researches a manual occupation in BC in the early 1900s. Prepare a brief report and compare these workers' conditions with the laundry workers.
3. Other ideas for research: (a) hand laundries in BC (b) an occupation in early BC performed by a specific group of people (considering gender, race, class) (d) an occupation that did not have a segregated hiring policy

### Further Resources

*Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia*, a documentary series, Vancouver, 2014. Each 3-minute video in the series is available at the BC Labour Heritage website, at no cost. Lesson plans are also at this site and at the BC Teachers' Federation's "TeachBC" site. <https://teachbc.bctf.ca/>

*On the Line: A History of the BC Labour Movement*, Rod Mickleburgh, Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2018.

*Their Own History: Women's Contribution to the Labour Movement of BC*, Betty Griffin and Susan Lockhart. New Westminster: United Fisherman and Allied Workers' Union/CAW Seniors Club, 2002.

*The Struggle for Social Justice in BC: Helena Gutteridge, the Unknown Reformer*, Irene Howard. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992.

*Drawn to Change: Graphic Histories of Working-Class Struggles*, by the Graphic History Collective. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016.

*Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver*, Paul Yee. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006.

# Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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## Background: Steam Laundries vs Hand Laundries

A century ago, women were expected to perform domestic tasks, including the family laundry. Women spent hours washing, starching, scrubbing and wringing out the clothing and linen, followed by drying and ironing. However, there was another option—the steam laundry. By the early 1900s, dozens of steam laundries existed in cities throughout North America, including Vancouver. Customers were homeowners, hotels, hospitals, soldiers' barracks and ships in port.

Steam laundries were highly profitable, offering fast service and home deliveries. Laundry plants, small and large, had mechanized machines to speed up the process, powered by a boiler in the engine room. Typically, the owners were white and so were the employees, most female. By the 1940s however, steam laundries were closing down as more homeowners purchased their own washing and drying machine.

### At the steam laundry...

A customer dropped off laundry at the front reception—or had their laundry picked up by a male delivery truck driver. The clothing was sorted and tagged by female workers and taken to the washing room in the basement. Male workers performed heavy work, loading and unloading items in belt-driven washing machines. Then the washed laundry was sent back upstairs.

Female laundry workers at the shaking table rinsed out the wet laundry. Sheets were run through a steam-driven mangle by girls as young as 15. They placed the item into a heated roller and girls at the receiving end took the sheet out to be folded. Other clothing was hung in a drying room, ironed and packaged by an assembly line of female workers. Finally, the cleaned laundry was delivered back to customers.

**Hand laundries** required less capital to operate and competed with steam laundries, offering lower prices. In Vancouver, most were owned by Chinese men, operating alone or with a few employees. Hand laundries were small, street-level shops, where the customer's laundry was hand washed, starched and dried. By 1912, there were 53 Chinese-run hand laundries in Vancouver.

Owners of steam laundries pushed the local and provincial governments for laws to hinder hand laundry businesses. During the 1918 strike the steam laundry owners complained they were losing customers to the hand laundries, causing Chinese businesses to become potential targets for mistreatment.

Editor's note: Janet Nicols' full story on the 'Girl Strikers' and the 1918 Vancouver Laundries Dispute is available to subscribers at

<https://bcstudies.com/issues/articles/> Also available on databases—at BC public and university libraries — at "Academic Search Ultimate."



# Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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## Vancouver Steam Laundries Strike of 1918 Timeline

**April 12, 1918** - Two male drivers at Cascade and Pioneer Steam laundries are fired for trying to organize a trade union, according to the *BC Federationist*.

**July 26** - About 200 laundry workers—most women—at seven laundry plants have signed union cards with the Laundry Workers Union (**LWU**).

**August 2** - About 300 war veterans storm the Labour Temple building, angry at the Vancouver Trade and Labour Council (**VTLC**) for calling a 24-hour general strike to protest the murder of union activist Ginger Goodwin. Helena Gutteridge, union organizer for the laundry workers, holds \$300 in union dues, but is unharmed.

**August 30** - Fifty more workers sign union cards. Workers' contract demands include a minimum wage of \$12.50 a week, paid overtime and a closed shop.

**September 3** - Owners deliver an ultimatum: withdraw from the union or quit.

**September 4** - Laundry workers stand by the union. The laundry owners refuse to meet with Helena and Herbert Shuttleworth, President of the LWU.

**September 8** - About 300 laundry workers vote in favour of a strike.

**September 9** - Workers set up picket lines outside seven steam laundry plants. They will receive strike pay from the VTLC during the strike.

**September 10** - Strikebreakers cross the picket line, working inside the laundries.

**September 11** - Unionized engineers walk out in sympathy with laundry workers.

**September 26** - The Mayor calls on the BC government to help resolve the strike.

**September 27** - The union holds a fundraising dance to help strikers. Two more dances will be organized by the LWU during the strike.

**October 1** - Laundry owners publish an open letter in the newspaper, warning customers that increasing wages will lead to increased prices for laundry services.

**October 3** - Picket lines are tense as strikers try to stop strikebreakers and customers from going inside. Many strikers are arrested during the dispute.



## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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**October 4** - The BC Deputy Minister of Labour is called in to help, stating the “closed shop” is the key issue preventing a settlement.

**October 9** - The VTLC council considers calling a general strike to support laundry workers, but after a week of debate, decides against it.

**October 21** - The Spanish flu is sweeping through the city and will cause 900 deaths by the new year. Laundry owners blame strikers for spreading the flu.

**October 22** - Laundries are still operating, but with “small forces” according to the newspapers. Helena reports “no desertions” among strikers.

**November 1** - The owner of Excelsior Laundry signs a contract with the union—agreeing to a closed shop.

**November 8** - The owner of Canadian Laundry signs a contract with the union—agreeing to a closed shop.

**November 11** - An Armistice is signed ending the First World War. Despite the threat of Spanish flu, Vancouver residents celebrate in the downtown streets.

**November 22** - The laundry workers’ strike continues at five laundries. Meanwhile, the Mayor and council lift the flu ban on public places in Vancouver.

**December 9** - About 500 union members and supporters gather outside Cascade Steam Laundry as strikebreakers leave work at 5pm. The manager of Cascade tells a newspaper reporter: “The trouble is I refuse to settle with the closed shop.”

**December 18** - Helena and other laundry workers present their demands before a government board in Victoria. The board will set a minimum wage for female laundry employees over 18 years of age, at \$13.50 a week but the training wage for laundry girls between 15 and 18 is low and the union will send a letter of protest.

**January 3, 1919** - The strike at the five remaining laundries is called off. No reason is documented by the VTLC. About 80 female strikers, and 20 male strikers are not re-hired at their laundry jobs. Over the upcoming weeks, the union will help them with financial support until they find work.

# Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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## Biographies of Female Strike Participants

### Ellen Goode

Ellen was 20 years old and working at Pioneer Laundry when she joined the union in 1918. Her family had immigrated from England when she was 12. "It was hot in those days," Ellen said about her job years later. "We didn't wear the loose clothing that we do now." Ellen worked ten hours a day, up to 60 hours a week for a weekly wage of \$7. "My mother used to say she'd come down and see me in jail," Ellen said about her time on strike. Ellen was never arrested, but had many picket line stories to tell later. After the strike, she worked at the unionized laundry, Excelsior Steam Laundry and was a shop steward.

### Josephine Wilson

Josephine was 24 years old and single when she immigrated to Canada from Ireland in 1911. She worked at three different laundries in the city—a "starcher" at one them—when she joined the union at Star Laundry in 1918. During the strike, Josephine volunteered at a fundraising dance. Afterwards, she was hired at the unionized laundry, Excelsior Steam Laundry where she worked for several years.

### Matilda Cruickshank

Matilda was 43 years old when she joined the union at Cascade Steam Laundry. She had immigrated from Scotland in 1911 with her sister's family and lived independently in the city. Matilda appeared with Helena and other laundry workers in front of a government board in Victoria. According to a newspaper report: "Miss Cruickshank representing laundry girls in Vancouver was instructed to ask for nothing less than \$14 a week." She returned to Cascade after the strike.

### Helena Gutteridge

Helena was 38 years old and the only woman on the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council when she was hired to organize laundry workers. She had arrived to Vancouver from England in 1911, working in the tailor trade and living independently. Helena signed up laundry workers, organized meetings and helped with contract demands. When owners refused to talk, she organized a strike vote. She was kept busy throughout the strike, paying fines, bail and lawyers' fees on behalf of arrested picketers. She continued supporting workers after the strike.

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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### Laundry Strike: Primary Documents

**Document #1 - Excerpt - Transcription of taped interviews with Ellen Goode, laundry worker, (married name, Ellen Barber) by social historians Howie Smith in 1977 and Sara Diamond in 1979, BC Provincial Archives.**

So this girl was doing a shirt (at the mangle)....and she's turning around and looking at somebody and her hand went in - and it burned all the flesh right off....

....So I immediately run up and of course the girl had fainted and that took the pressure off of it (her hand)...and when I get in there the superintendent (manager)...he was going to dress it....

...what he did was right but was wrong. He should have put a piece of gauze over top (of her hand) and then cotton batting but instead he put Carin oil which was treated for burns then and then stuck cotton batting on top of it and bound it up in a bath towel....

(Later at the doctor's office) 'Do you think you could stand with the chloroform and a mask?' (the doctor asked Ellen) 'Sure' — so I held it. He (the doctor) had to keep her under and he took a pair of tweezers and pulled it (the cotton batting) out. (He said) where's your first aid man?

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(At Star Laundry) there was about maybe a foot between the two buildings and they (the owners) used to take the strikebreakers in the house and they would go from that window (across to the other building) in to the laundry. And I remember once the owner of it (the wife who was co-owner) got up on the roof and she took the hose up there and used to play it on the strikers, the picketers, she used to play the hose down on them. Oh yes, she was dead against us.

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Another thing would be about October of 1918 the flu epidemic was beginning to break and the laundry men (owners) put in the paper that it was the laundry workers that was creating the flu epidemic and the union got together and decided that they'd put in a piece (in the newspaper) refuting this.... We volunteered to go in and operate the general hospital laundry 24 hours a day - no wages....

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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### Document #2 Archival Photographs - Steam Laundry workers



1. *Cascade Dominion Laundry Employees Annual Picnic*, Seaside Park, Sunshine Coast, BC June 29, 1918. **Source:** Stuart Thomson fonds, City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 99-5201.



## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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2. *Victoria Steam Laundry Company with wagons and drivers in front, Victoria, BC, early 1900s. Source: Royal BC Museum Archives, Item E-07970.*

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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3. *Girls working at a steam laundry mangle in Bonanno Laundry, Boston, Massachusetts, February 2, 1917. Source:* Lewis Wickes Hines (photographer), National Child Labor Committee collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

(Girls working at mangle in Bonanno Laundry, 12 Foster Wharf. All are 15 years old and go to continuation school. Location: Boston, Massachusetts / Lewis W. Hine.)

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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4. *Nelson Laundry employees folding linen, Vancouver, 1943. Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 1184-728.

**Photographs of Chinese hand laundries in Canada** — available on-line at: <http://countercultures.net/design/portfolio-item/the-hand-laundry-a-chinese-legacy-2/>



## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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**Document #3 - Excerpt - Coroner's Inquest into the workplace death of Mrs. Lily Phillips, laundry worker, May 5, 1919.**

**Dr. Baldwin, intern at Vancouver General Hospital:** I first saw Mrs. Phillips when she was brought in the hospital sometime after 3 o'clock on the afternoon of the 3rd (of May) and I dressed her burns then. I saw at that time there was no hope of her living, she was so badly burned.

**Police Constable Gill:** About 3 pm I answered a call to the Peerless Laundry, (at the) corner Third and Pine. I found the two (later) deceased girls suffering from severe burns and scalds. I at once rushed them to the General Hospital in a private automobile, the third one (injured female) being taken by the police ambulance.

**William L. David, Manager of Peerless Laundry:** On Saturday afternoon at the time of the accident I was standing somewhere about 30 feet from the mangle when I heard the noise getting a little louder and the engineer shouted to me to shut off the valve at the mangle and I rushed to the main valve and I got within 10 feet when it (the pressure from the steam) rushed me back and carried my hat into the washroom, where I found it afterward. Had I got to the steam valve; I would have got it just as it exploded. I got to it half a minute later. It was all over, (the explosion) inside half a minute.

**John W. Dean, Engineer:** I did not measure the crack (in the cast iron drum of the mangle) exactly whether it was two inches or not. There was not much steam coming out of it. It was not roaring. If it was roaring, I would soon have ordered it down.

**Jean C. Buntein, Laundry Worker:** I was on the shaking table (four or five feet from the mangle)...Well, the steam was leaking and then I heard it get louder and then the report (loud noise). ....About a second before it blew up I heard it get louder. ...It (the mangle) was leaking all Friday and Saturday.... Before that it was leaking a little.

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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### **Document #4 - Excerpt from the apology to the Chinese community issued by City of Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson on April 22, 2018 during a Special Council Meeting.**

From the first moments of our incorporation as a City, on April 6, 1886, Vancouver took away the legal right for the Chinese community to vote. The minutes of the first Council meeting had the following: “No Chinaman or Indian shall be entitled to vote in any municipal election for the election of a Mayor or Alderman.” Full voting rights, a cornerstone of our democracy, were not granted to Chinese-Canadians in Vancouver until 1949.

The City of Vancouver lobbied the Federal government to pass racially discriminatory immigration policies, including the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923 which formally excluded Chinese people from immigrating to Canada. For the next 25 years, fewer than 100 Chinese immigrants were legally allowed to enter Canada, splintering families and creating unspeakable suffering within Vancouver’s Chinese community.

Through its contracts and grants, the City of Vancouver excluded people of Chinese heritage from being employed by the City or by those doing business with the City. No Chinese person was employed by the City of Vancouver until 1952.

Numerous measures were taken to segregate the areas where Chinese residents were able to live and to earn a livelihood. City bylaws restricted where Chinese people could own and run businesses. Housing covenants were used to prohibit Chinese residents from purchasing property. Although these clauses are no longer legally enforceable, many remain even today on legal titles, a reminder of how racial segregation in housing and business shaped our city’s neighbourhoods and communities.

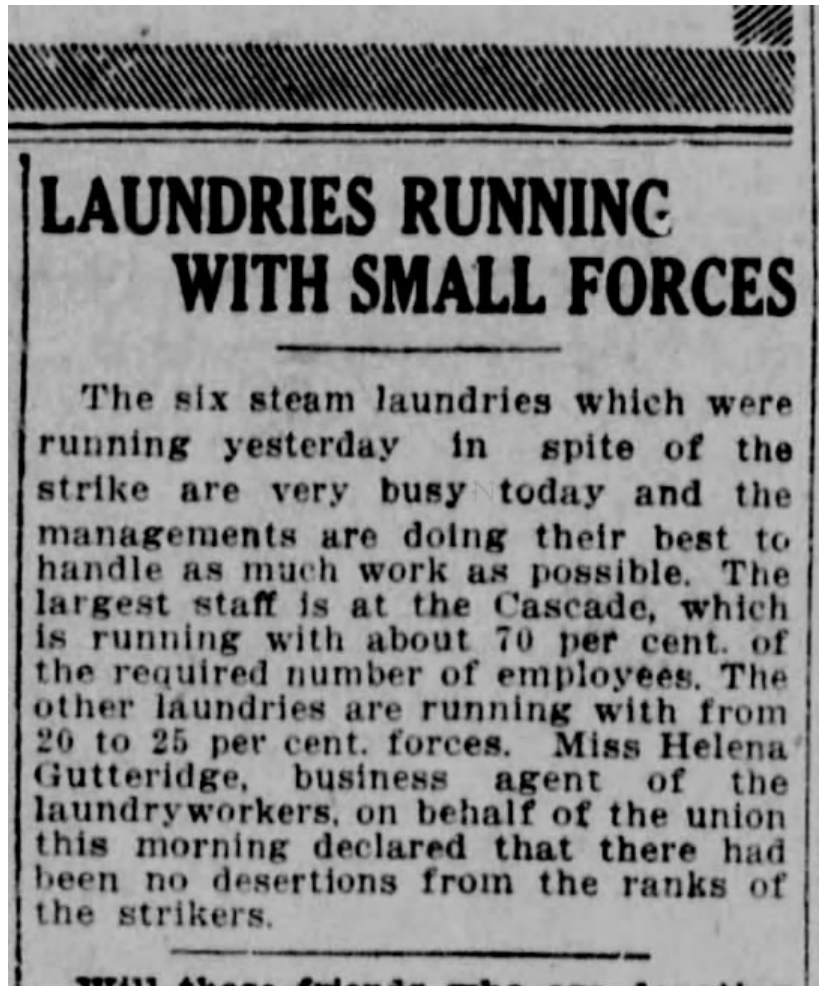
The elected officials of the City of Vancouver used their role as leaders to sow the seeds of intolerance that emboldened individuals and groups to act upon anti- Asian discrimination. Whether by explicitly encouraging anti-Chinese sentiments, or by silently allowing racial hatred and violence to continue, too many of our predecessors stood by – rather than stood up to – racism.

**The full apology is available on line at: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/18-112-06%20chinese-apology-media-english.pdf>**

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

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### Document 5 Clippings from Vancouver Newspapers, 1918- part 1

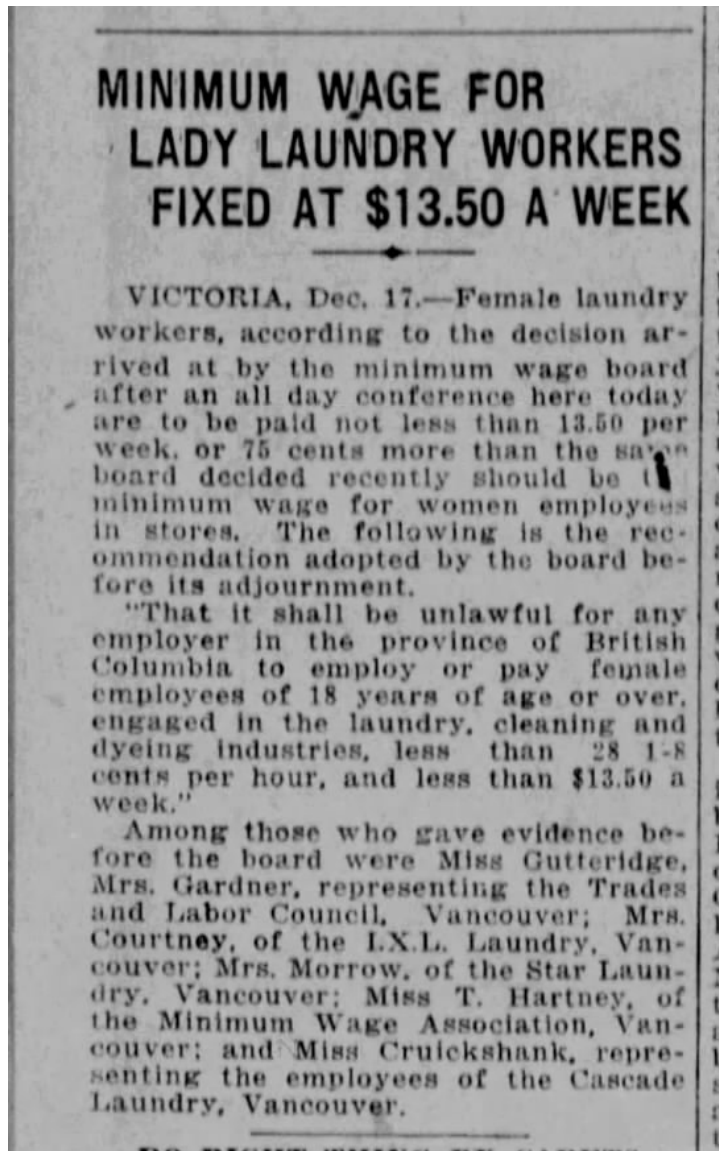


### Laundries Running With Small Forces

The six steam laundries which were running yesterday in spite of the strike are very busy today and the managements are doing their best to handle as much work as possible. The largest staff is at the Cascade which is running with about 70 per cent of the required number of employees. The other laundries are running with from 20 to 25 per cent forces. Miss Helena Gutteridge, business agent of the laundry workers, on behalf of the union, this morning declared that there had been no desertions from the ranks of the strikers.

Source: Newspapers.com (Laundries running with small forces) The Province, Oct. 22, 1918 - page 16

## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918



### Document 5 Clippings from Vancouver Newspapers, 1918 -part 2

#### Minimum Wage for Lady Laundry Workers

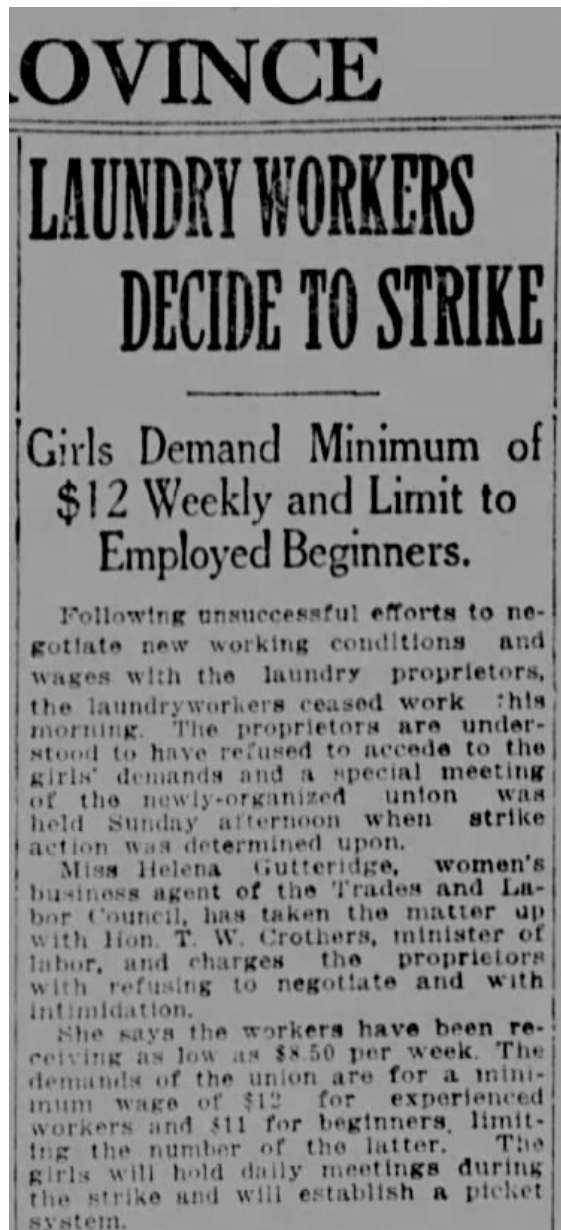
#### Fixed at \$13.50 A Week

**Victoria, Sept. 17** - Female laundry workers according to the decision arrived at by the minimum wage board after an all day conference here today are to be paid not less than 13.50 per week, or 75 cents more than the same board decided recently should be the minimum wage for women employees in stores. The following is the recommendation adopted by the board before its adjournment. "That it shall be unlawful for any employer in the province of British Columbia to employ or pay any female employees of 18 years of age or over, engaged in the laundry, cleaning and dyeing industries, less than 28 cents per hour and less than 13.50 a week.

Among those who gave evidence before the board were Miss Gutteridge, Mrs. Gardner, representing the Trades and Labour Council, Vancouver, Mrs. Courtney of the IXL Laundry, Vancouver, Mrs. Morrow of the Star Laundry, Vancouver, Miss T. Hartney of the Minimum Wage Association, Vancouver and Miss Cruickshank representing employees of Cascade Laundry, Vancouver.

Source: Newspapers.com (Headline - Minimum wage...etc) Vancouver Sun,

Dec. 19, 1918 - page 3



### Document 5 Clippings from Vancouver Newspapers, 1918 -part 3

#### **Laundry Workers Decide To Strike - Girls Demand Minimum of \$12 Weekly and Limit to Employed Beginners**

Following unsuccessful efforts to negotiate new working conditions and wages with the laundry proprietors, the laundry workers ceased work this morning. The proprietors are understood to have refused to accede to the girls' demands and a special meeting of the newly-organized union was held Sunday afternoon when strike action was determined upon.

Miss Helena Gutteridge, women's business agent of the Trades and Labour Council has taken the matter up with Hon. T.W. Crothers, minister of labour, and charges the proprietors with refusing to negotiate and with intimidation.

She says the workers have been receiving as low as \$8.50 per week. The demands of the union are for a minimum wage of \$12 for experienced workers and \$11 for beginners, limiting the number of the latter. The girls will hold daily meetings during the strike and will establish a picket system.

Source: newspapers.com (Laundry workers decide to strike) The Province, Sept. 9, 1918  
- page 16



## Laundry Workers Strike of 1918

VANCOUVER, B. C., FRIDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 13, 1918

### A Suggestion: Meantime the Workers Fight



## Laundry Workers On Strike For Recognition and Minimum Wage

Employers Still Refuse to Negotiate Wage Scale But Want to Leave It to Minimum Wage Board—Laundries Are in the Meantime Closed Down Tight—J. D. McNiven and Attorney-General Farris Are Trying to Break the Deadlock, But So Far There Are No Signs of a Settlement

### BC Federationist, article and cartoon 1918

Note: Alderman Thomas Kirk was an elected member of Vancouver city council (1915-1919 and 1934-1939) and had shares in Pioneer and Cascade Laundries. Sanford J. Crowe was an elected federal Member of Parliament (MP) for Vancouver's Burrard riding from 1917 to 1921. Crowe also had shares in the two laundries.

Source: <https://newspapers.lib.sfu.ca/bcf-1030/british-columbia-federationist?search=Laundry%2520Strike>

## Document Activity Questions

**Directions: Answer the 3 questions for the document you were assigned**

### Document #1 - Excerpt - Taped interviews with Ellen Goode

1. What are health and safety issues at steam laundries?
2. Unions have always pressured the government to ban the use of strikebreakers during labour disputes. Why?
3. Why did the owners blame laundry workers for the Spanish flu? How did the union fight this accusation?

### Document #2 - Archival Photographs

1. Describe the type of work males and females performed at steam laundries.
2. Make a list of other observations about steam laundries.
3. List three facts about Chinese hand laundries based on website photos.

### Document #3 - Coroner's Report (an excerpt)

1. What happened four months after the strike at Peerless Laundry ended?
2. Why did this happen?
3. The coroner only censured the engineer and owner but there were no other consequences. Would the outcome be different if a union had been formed?

### Document #4 - Excerpt - A formal apology to the Chinese community

1. List three reasons for the apology by Vancouver City Council.
2. How did discrimination impact on Chinese-owned businesses?
3. Do you think this apology is an important action? Why/why not?

### Document #5 - Clippings - Vancouver newspapers, 1918

1. What happened to some strikebreakers who crossed the picket lines?
2. What did the union offer to the public during the epidemic (Spanish flu)?
3. Name three other facts about the strike based on the clippings.

### Document #6 - BC Federationist, 1918

1. Why is this labour newspaper an important source of information?
2. What are the two men—shareholders and politicians—doing in the cartoon?
3. Unions always fight for “recognition” (a closed shop). Why is this difficult?