



### Trouble on the Line

**Film Summary:** A Historical look at female telephone operators in British Columbia and some of their early activism with specific reference to the first strike in the Canadian telephone industry.

#### Curriculum Application

Social Studies 9  
(Social Studies 10 as a prelude to women's role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century work force)

#### The Essential Questions:

What role did the women operators play in the success of the 1902 Telephone strike? How was the role of women in the workforce changing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century?

### Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provide a short lesson option (15 minutes)
2. Reading exercise of supplementary materials (Lesson Activity 1 and Lesson Activity 2)
3. Activity questions that go with the supplementary materials that are suitable for either individual or group approaches
4. Extended activities that go with the supplementary materials that are suitable for either individual or group approaches

### Learning Standards

1. To demonstrate a basic knowledge of the lives of working people in the telephone industry, their working conditions and the efforts they made to improvement them through the union movement. **(Continuity and Change)**
2. To demonstrate an understanding of the impact that the introduction of the telephone had on both economic and social life of British Columbia in the late 19th and early 20th century. **(Historical Significance)**
3. To demonstrate an understanding of the role that women played in the early unionization of the telephone industry within a conservative society. **(Continuity and Change)**
4. To demonstrate an understanding of the attitudes toward women in 1902 and the challenges they faced in entering the workforce. **(Perspective)**

### Materials and Resources Provided

- [Trouble on the Line-Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- A class set of “History and Chronology Leading to the 1902 Strikes of the Telephone Workers” (*Lesson Activity 1*)
- A class set of “A Glimpse Into The Life of Mary McIntyre” (*Lesson Activity 2*)
- Appendix 1 Key Teaching Points
- Extension Activity 1 Further Studies
- Lesson Activity 3: The Changing role of Women

### Additional Suggested Materials

- [The Labour Movement in British Columbia 1840-1914](#)
- [Labour Heritage Centre- Revolution in a Wire](#)
- [Lilies and Fireweed: Chapter 8 Women at Work](#) (knowbc.com password required from library)
- [On The Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour Movement. Page 20](#)
- [The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union Chapter 1: 43-59 Bernard, Elaine. Doctoral thesis SFU](#)

### Vignette Questions

1. Why were women hired instead of men to be telephone operators?
2. What benefits did women receive in becoming operators? What were some of the restrictions faced women in entering the labour market? (Consider: restrictions related to types of jobs, rates of pay, age, and marital status)
3. Why didn't the unionized linesmen working for the New Westminster and Burrard Telephone Company want to represent women operators?
4. Discuss the reasons as to why the women operators were so important to the success of the strike.
5. Why were jobs of linesmen and operator so important in the early telephone system?
6. Suggest some possible reasons as to why the company was prepared to settle the strike so quickly by conceding to the demands of the workers.

### Lesson Activities

1. This lesson is designed to be taught in conjunction with a Grade 9 unit on the development of BC and its history in the late Victorian period. Previous teaching on this subject is advised. The lesson may also be used as an introduction to the changing roles of women in the early 20th century as part of the Social Studies 10 curriculum.
2. Handout Lesson Activity 1 **History and Chronology Leading to the 1902 Strikes of the Telephone Workers**. Have the students read the *first* page and provide the vignette questions before showing the vignette.
3. Following the viewing of the vignette, students can review individually or in small groups the remainder of the notes in Lesson Activity 1 that detail the events and outcomes of the strike and then answer the vignette questions. (Above)
4. Appendix 1 provides a list of teaching points and suggested responses for the key questions of the activity.
5. Extension Activity 1: Provides for further Studies related to the Telephone Workers Strike.
6. For additional activities on the topic proceed to Lesson Activity 2- A Glimpse into the Life of Mary McIntyre—A Member of the Telephone Operators Auxiliary. Use Lesson Activity 3 to examine the changing role of men and women in this time period.

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Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Al Cornes